



Design Guidelines for the Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan



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Completed: 08/30/12

Staff Recommendation

- Approve the Design Guidelines for the *Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan*
-

Attached is the final document of the Design Guidelines for the *Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan*. This document was originally scheduled for the Board's review on July 23, 2012, but was postponed due to a scheduling conflict. Staff initially presented the draft Design Guidelines to the Planning Board on July 14, 2011, followed by a draft of the document on October 13, 2011. Staff has refined the draft Guidelines by incorporating relevant feedback from the Board, the public, and the County Council work sessions as part of its review and approval of the *Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan*. The final Guidelines are now ready for approval by the Board.

As stated in previous presentations to the Planning Board, the purpose of the Design Guidelines is to illustrate how key recommendations of the Sector Plan might be met. They will also serve to clarify general design expectations and most importantly, to provide applicants and staff with a framework for project review and a tool for obtaining enhanced design and related amenities.

Organization

The Guidelines continue to be organized in four sections:

- Section 1: Introduction – Purpose;
- Section 2: Context - Relationship to Sector Plan, description of issues;
- Section 3: Guidelines - Goals and strategies to achieve them;
- Section 4: Resources - Relevant information for applicants.

Revisions

The document includes the following refinements since it was last reviewed by the Planning Board:

Guidelines

- A prototypical Boulevard Section was added to clarify the issues that should be covered in conversations between staff and owners of properties being redeveloped along Wheaton's Boulevards.
- Boulevard diagrams have been refined for clarity, and associated legends have been expanded to include cross-references to additional information included in the Guidelines or in the Sector Plan.
- Individual guidelines were expanded for clarity, and to include expanded text and captioned illustratives.
- A guideline was added at the request of Green Wheaton to encourage environmentally responsible outdoor lighting practices in general building and public realm illumination. For additional information, a link to the International Dark Sky Association was added to the Implementation Resources section.
- Edits to the text based on input from the Kensington View Civic Association (see attached).

Objectives

- Captions have been provided for all illustrations.

Transitions

- Discussion was expanded to include all areas discussed in the Sector Plan, and to add captioned illustrations for each area, for clarity.

Implementation Resources

- Items have been added to the list, in response to feedback received.

Format

- The document has been reformatted to follow the Planning Department's current publication standards.

LEC:ha: N:\Area2\Estrada\Wheaton UDG Cover Final

Attachments

1. Email from Kensington View Civic Association dated July 25, 2012
2. Email response from M-NCPPC dated August 18, 2012
3. Wheaton CBD & Vicinity Sector Plan Design Guidelines

ATTACHMENT 1

RECEIVED
0593
JUL 25 2012

Tacconelli, Gail

From: mrsweegee@aol.com
Sent: Wednesday, July 25, 2012 3:15 PM
To: MCP-Chair; Estrada, Luis
Cc: eleanorduckett@comcast.net; boots3303@aol.com
Subject: Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan Guidelines ~ Kensington View Civic Association
Attachments: Wheaton_Design_Guidelines_July_2012_FINAL.doc

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL
PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Hello, Chair Carrier and Mr. Estrada,
Thank you for postponing the originally scheduled Planning Board discussion of July 23rd on the Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Design Guidelines. As we committed to working with the Planning Staff on any issue involving our community, attached is our assessment of the revised guidelines. We thank you for the changes that were made from the draft and offer a few more for your consideration.
Thank you again, and I look forward to hearing from you.
Judy Higgins

**Kensington View Civic Association
Land Use and Zoning Committee
Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Guidelines**

July 25, 2012

The October 13, 2011 Planning Board Power Point presentation on "A Template for Design Guidelines" states "Standards established in the code reflect precise intended outcomes. They do not however describe complex interactions or contain explanations of desired character. This is more usefully done in guidelines that should be complimentary to standards."

A November 10, 2011 Memorandum from Marlene Michaelson to the County Council states:
"Committee Recommendation: Recommend that the Planning Board consider the comments of the Kensington View Civic Association before finalizing guidelines and asked Council staff to monitor progress on design guidelines. The Planning Department should develop county wide design guidelines for design guidelines not specific to a particular location within the County." (page 3)

"Standards or any recommendation that should **not** be considered discretionary during the regulatory process **should be in master plans or the zoning ordinance**, not in design guidelines." (page 3)

"Recommendations should be included in master plans only when it is assumed that they are not expected to change over the approximately 20 year life of a master plan (e.g., maximum heights). Recommendations that are likely to change over time should be included in design guidelines." (page 3)

While we appreciate the work that the Planning Staff has done, we believe there are further necessary revisions to the July 2012 Wheaton CBD & Vicinity Sector Plan Design Guidelines. Since we do not have the printed version of the Wheaton CBD & Vicinity Sector Plan, the following suggested changes are based on our understanding of prior Planning Board and County Council submissions and/or discussions. We will submit any additional comments after the final Wheaton Sector Plan is available.

Page 5 - Please change first statement to read: "The Wheaton Design Guidelines represent the County's and the community's design aspirations for the future of downtown Wheaton and vicinity."

Page 5 (picture) **University Boulevard, between East Avenue and Valley View Avenue, is not defined as a buffer area due to the lack of tan/brown coloring used in the picture. We request that area also be noted as a transition area.**

**Kensington View Civic Association
Land Use and Zoning Committee
Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Guidelines**

Page 6 - "Guidelines do not set architectural styles, are only applicable during discretionary reviews, and will be revised and updated as necessary."

We request that this statement be changed to "Guidelines do not set architectural themes, are intended to guide the development of areas based on the applicable Master Plan and zone, and will be revised and updated as necessary."

We base this request on:

- **The Code Studio April 12, 2010 Report , page 35, states: "One important note - building types are not intended to define an architectural "theme" such as Mediterranean, or Shaker Victorian."**
- **The October 13, 2011 Design Guidelines Power Point states: "Standards established in the code reflect precise intended outcomes. *They do not however describe complex interactions or contain explanations of desired character. This is more usefully done in guidelines that should be complimentary to standards.*"**
- **Marlene Michaelson's November 10, 2011 Memorandum states: "Standards or any recommendation that should *not* be considered discretionary during the regulatory process *should be in master plans or the zoning ordinance, not in design guidelines.*"**
- **KVCA was told, by the Planning Board, that the "form" to the CRN "form based code" will come some time later. If this is truly the case, then the language in the Sector Plan and the "form" in the zone should apply whether there is discretionary review or not.**
- **Specific language has been added to the Sector Plan to guide the development of our area in a manner that will protect the character of our neighborhood.**

Page 25 - Goal 2: Create Appropriate Transitions

Please change (bold, italics, underscored) "Nevertheless, new development in transition areas should be appropriately placed and scaled to be compatible with existing residential structures, and should:

- Provide adequate transitions through appropriate building heights, design, and setbacks on properties adjacent to or across the street from single-family structures.
- **Place special importance on the role played by buildings - their placement along sidewalks and intersections, their massing distribution, and their relationship to the character of existing neighborhoods** (this language is similar to the language on page 10 of Design Guidelines and reinforces the language in paragraph one on page 9 of Marlene Michaelson's November 10 Memorandum)
- **Implement building corner articulation that allows visibility across intersections, if necessary** (this language is similar to picture on page 18 and is important to various streets in our neighborhood)
- Concentrate the tallest component of mixed-use structures along major avenues or important intersections."

**Kensington View Civic Association
Land Use and Zoning Committee
Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Guidelines**

Page 28 - Please replace the left hand picture, it is too similar to the MYK picture in the previous draft. We had requested removal of the MYK picture because we did not believe that this design, with oversized windows and flat roofs, reinforces the residential character of our older neighborhood, may harm the economic value of the adjacent homes, and does not implement the language on page 52 of the Sector Plan Draft - "Residential or professional office townhouses would be more compatible with the adjoining single-family properties on all of these transitional sites." In it's place, we request that the following language be added:

Properties along the neighborhood's University Boulevard edge should:

- **Consider transitional building types and uses when redevelopment is located adjacent to the existing single-family community.** (similar to Blueridge District language on page 26)
- **Existing townhouses along Grandview Avenue are a good example of an appropriate transitional building type and scale.** (identical to East Avenue language on page 27)
- **Implement the recommendations of the approved and adopted Master or Sector Plans** (similar to language on page 6 Introduction, third paragraph)

Page 33 - Replace the words "inexpensive improvements" with "**creative** improvements". Often times, people must be creative to come up with "inexpensive" solutions, the word "inexpensive" may not be practical in 5 or 10 years and may be inflammatory to some residents - "Oh, yeah, Bethesda gets *creative* and Wheaton gets *inexpensive*!"

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you on this most important document.
Judy Higgins

ATTACHMENT 2

From: Estrada, Luis
Sent: Wednesday, August 15, 2012 9:22 AM
To: mrsweegee@aol.com
Cc: Afzal, Khalid; Kreger, Glenn
Subject: FW: CTRACK #2012-0593 - Higgins/Wheaton
Attachments: 2012-0593-Incoming.pdf; KVCA response_Wheaton UDG_Attachment A.pdf

Ms. Judy Higgins
Kensington View Civic Association
Land Use and Zoning Committee
Kensington, MD

Subject: Wheaton CBD and Vicinity Sector Plan Design Guidelines

Dear Ms. Higgins:

We have received and reviewed the comments submitted on behalf of the Kensington View Civic Association (KVCA), dated July 25, 2012 to the Planning Board Chair's office. Following are our comments, in response to your concerns (underlined text indicates additions / revisions):

Page 5 – We will revise the following sentence to read as follows:

The Wheaton Design Guidelines represent the County's and the community's design aspirations for the future of downtown Wheaton and vicinity.

Page 6 - The sketch on this page is clearly labeled a "preliminary concept diagram". Preliminary sketches are included to illustrate how our thoughts evolve as a result of doing our due diligence through conversations with community groups and various stakeholders. The final diagram, including all the transition areas described in both the Sector Plan and the Design Guidelines is included on page 10. There is also a more specific discussion on transitions, which includes the edges of your neighborhood along University Boulevard, and East Avenue, starting on page 25.

Page 6 – We will revise the following sentence to read as follows:

Guidelines do not set architectural styles, are only applicable during discretionary reviews to provide development guidance in accordance with the applicable Master Plan and Zone, and will be revised and updated as necessary.

Note we did not replace the term *styles* with *themes*, as suggested in your letter. Although guidelines could set themes, the Wheaton Design Guidelines do not do this. Themes are broader concepts which could represent, for example, festive, ethnic, or regional culture elements that can be incorporated in various ways into different architectural styles. The Wheaton Guidelines use architectural images to illustrate a variety of solutions that could fit the zoning recommendations in the Sector Plan, without imposing a stylistic preference. During the plan review process, Staff might offer suggestions to applicants based on their knowledge of the planning area in question, but it is ultimately up to the property owner to establish development direction for their property in conformance with the applicable zone.

Page 25 – We will revise the bullets near the bottom of the page to read as follows:

- Provide adequate transitions through appropriate building design that carefully considers building heights and setbacks on properties adjacent to or across the street from single-family structures.

- Special importance should be placed on the role played by buildings in creating appropriate transitions - their placement along sidewalks and intersections, their massing distribution, and their relationship to the character of existing neighborhoods.
- Improve pedestrian and vehicular safety by considering building corner articulation that maintains or improves visibility across intersections, where appropriate.
- Concentrate the tallest component of mixed-use structures along major avenues or important intersections.

Page 28 – The images selected are appropriate examples of alternatives that could fit the parameters of the recommended CRN Zone. We understand that KVCA has a clear preference for a particular type of architectural solution along the edges of its neighborhood. In reflection of that, we included an image of the townhouses along Grandview Avenue in Wheaton as a “good example of an appropriate transitional building type and scale” (page 27, lower left hand corner). However, in their review of previous design guidelines the Planning Board has instructed staff to be pluralistic when selecting illustrative examples, to avoid appearing to favor specific architectural styles or solutions. For this reason we sometimes rely on paired images to illustrate contrasting but appropriate solutions for the same location.

The image selected to replace the previous placeholder (referred to as the “MYK building” because of a sign with these initials in the photo – see attachment), is of a two story structure with small retail on the ground floor and residential units on the upper floor. The building aligns its density with the street, and articulates its façade in vertical bays resembling individual structures, similar to the scale of a “main street” type of organization. It’s contemporary without being outlandish, so we considered it an appropriate alternative (and good companion image) to the Grandview Avenue Townhouses. In addition, the townhouse solution has been used in Wheaton along secondary, mostly residential streets. Some of the properties now zoned CRN face directly onto a major road (e.g., along University Boulevard, directly across from the Westfield Wheaton Mall) where as long as the scale of the community beyond is carefully considered, a less residential solution could also be appropriate.

Page 33 – We will revise the following sentence to read as follows:

The Plan recommends creating interim open spaces on publicly-owned properties through creative temporary improvements to enliven Wheaton until permanent open spaces are created through redevelopment and/or public/private partnerships (p. 21).

We appreciate the opportunity to address your concerns and look forward to continue working with your community in the future.

Regards,

Luis R. Estrada Cepero

Planner Coordinator | Urban Designer | Area 2 Division | East County Team

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

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From: Kreger, Glenn

Sent: Thursday, July 26, 2012 4:57 PM

To: Afzal, Khalid; Estrada, Luis

Subject: FW: CTRACK #2012-0593 - Higgins/Wheaton

ATTACHMENT A



Placeholder Image (from draft design guidelines - MYK building - replaced)



Replacement Image (with companion Grandview Avenue Townhouses image)