



Bethesda Downtown Plan Design Guidelines, Planning Board Work Session #1

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Description

SUMMARY

This work session will focus on how Planning Board and stakeholder feedback has been incorporated into the working draft of the Bethesda Downtown Plan Design Guidelines. The primary topic for discussion will be alternatives to the guidelines for constrained sites and buildings with moderate height.

SCHEDULE

After the June 1 Planning board briefing, staff continued stakeholder working groups in June with CBAR and NAIOP designers. This stakeholder input along with direction from the Planning Board was incorporated into the working draft. The Planning Board will hold a second work session on July 27th where revisions to the draft will be presented, any outstanding issues will be discussed and it is anticipated that the Board will vote on the Guidelines document.

- **June 2017:** Continued Stakeholder Working Groups
- **July 2017:** Release of the Working Draft
- **July 13, 2017:** Planning Board Work Session #1
- **July 27, 2017:** Planning Board Work Session #2 and Board Vote

DISCUSSION

Planning Board Direction

During the June 1 briefing, the Planning Board provided direction for the development of the working draft. Overall, the board recommended that the document have clear intent statements, provide guidelines for how to appropriately meet the intent and indicate that alternatives may also be approved if they meet the guidelines intent or other major goals in the sector plan. Where recommended dimensions are included, the guidelines provide a range that is not a rigid standard but a framework for review discussions with staff and the Board. This guidance was incorporated into *Section 1.2 How to Use the Guidelines*. Additional specific comments were also included throughout the document.

Stakeholder Discussions

The following table outlines the major issues that emerged from discussion with stakeholder groups and how these issues were addressed in the Design Guidelines Working Draft:

	Comment	Working Draft July 2017
CBAR	Ensure sufficient sidewalk width/pedestrian through zone and prevent encroachments such as outdoor dining conflicts.	See <i>Section 2.1.1: Street Types Overview: Sidewalk Zones</i> for recommended zones and limitations on encroachments.
CBAR	Emphasize the importance of street tree planting/maintenance and canopy corridors.	See <i>Section 2.1.1: Street Types Overview: Sidewalk Zones</i> and <i>Section 2.1.10 Canopy Corridors</i> . The planting/furnishing zone description states the importance of street trees for pedestrian comfort. Canopy corridors were added as a street type.
CBAR	Limit servicing, access and parking conflicts with pedestrians, through-traffic and the Eastern Greenway.	See <i>Section 2.3.3 Servicing Access and Parking</i> and <i>Section 3.4.1 Eastern Greenway Guideline E</i> . Guidelines recommend several ways to limit these conflicts.
CBAR	Design buildings and landscape to respect experience along trails and provide buffering.	See <i>Section 2.1.9 Public Through-block Connections and Trails</i> for recommended landscape and building design along trails.
CBAR	Ensure compatibility of new development with surrounding residential neighborhoods.	See <i>Section 2.4.1 Compatibility</i> and <i>Section 3.4.1 Eastern Greenway</i> for general guidelines for transitions to surrounding neighborhoods with detached homes.
CBAR	Define minimum sidewalk zone dimensions and standards for bases and step-backs.	See <i>Section 2.1: Street Types</i> for recommended ranges of dimensions provided by street type.
NAIOP, Chamber, WTAG	Allow guidelines flexibility by including goals vs. prescriptive dimensions and standards.	See <i>Section 1.2 How to Use the Guidelines</i> for language on guidelines flexibility.
NAIOP, Chamber, WTAG	Step-backs, tower separation and other methods to reduce bulk such as limited floorplate too restrictive.	See <i>Sections 2.4.6 Tower: Separation Distance</i> and <i>2.4.7 Tower: Step-back</i> for alternative treatments to the guidelines. <i>Section 2.4.8 Tower: Methods to Reduce Bulk</i> outlines several methods in addition to limiting tower floor plate that can be used to reduce perceived bulk.
NAIOP	Allow variety to make the public domain richer, with each district having its own identity. Step-backs could be one of the tools but many other valid options.	See <i>Section 2.1.1 Street Types Overview</i> . Each of the different street types reflects the character of the surrounding district and recommended land uses. Alternatives to step-backs are outlined in <i>Section 2.4.7 Tower: Step-back</i>
NAIOP	Adjust guidelines for constrained sites less than 0.75 acres. Ensure minimum dimensions for buildings to function properly internally (65 ft residential, 110/120 ft office).	See <i>Sections 2.4.6 Tower: Separation Distance</i> and <i>2.4.7 Tower: Step-back</i> for alternative treatments to the guidelines particularly for sites with limited frontage width for separation or depth for step-backs.
NAIOP	Step-backs should not be required for buildings lower than 150 feet.	See <i>Section 2.1: Street Types</i> for recommendations on alternative treatments. The preferred heights to consider alternative treatments are designated by street type.

NAIOP	Encourage active uses on the roof, beyond the maximum height to create meaningful and expressive tops.	See <i>Section 2.4.9 Top: Tower Top Guideline F</i> where this recommendation is included in the guidelines.
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Alternative Treatments for Constrained Sites

The Planning Board may approve alternative design approaches that better meet the intent of the design guidelines. Guidelines that include recommended dimensions also outline opportunities for alternative design solutions to meet the intent of the guidelines. These alternatives address constrained sites and buildings of moderate height. Staff will present examples of these alternative treatments for discussion with the board.

Parks and Open Space

The Sector Plan includes detailed guidance for the development of parks in Downtown Bethesda – their location, type, function, and preliminary programs. The Design Guidelines will supplement the Plan with further detail on each park type and each individual park recommended in the Plan area. The Guidelines build upon the Design Guidelines for Urban Park Types contained in the *Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan Public Hearing Draft* of June 22, 2017, (71-82) with additional context and appropriate photos for each park that is recommended.

The Parks and Open Space pages, under development, will be presented at the first work session and will generally represent what the Board reviewed at the June 1, 2017 item #4 briefing on the BDP Guidelines work session, with changes to reflect the discussion with the Board:

1. Remove all reference to the word “buffer” in reference to parks.
2. Emphasize that Civic Greens are regional destinations and the community should expect large gatherings of people for special events, here and there.
3. Areas with children’s activities should be separated from busy roads.
4. Show more active recreation and specific examples of what recreation activities may fit in different park types.
5. Include language about improving the connections and pathways to and between parks in addition to trails

Comments that are not related to design guidelines, per se, but are important and will addressed in the staff presentation included:

6. Add language about partnerships to maintain parks
7. Note potential improvements to activate Norwood Park because it is the largest park that serves the plan

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Bethesda Downtown Plan Design Guidelines Working Draft
- B. Stakeholder and Community Correspondence