

CBAR
Draft Comments on Design Guidelines
For the Bethesda Downtown Plan
July 14, 2017

Thank you for the careful and thoughtful work that has gone into the development of these design guidelines. We are confident that development required to follow these guidelines will be consistent with the goals of the Bethesda Downtown Plan. We also appreciate the substantial incorporation of the comments that CBAR has previously submitted on the outline for these guidelines that had been distributed to stakeholders. What follows are our comments on this text.

Major Comments:

Importance of Compatibility

We recommend that the Introduction (pp 2 and 3) include another element: Compatibility of new development with existing residential neighborhoods including residential townhouse communities, both within and around the Plan area. This element is alluded to in the discussion of some of the other goals, but we believe this objective deserves to be highlighted. We suggest you consider the following language:

These guidelines will ensure compatibility of new development with neighboring communities and enhance the quality of life for all residents in the area, including those inside and outside the downtown. The surrounding communities are not separate from downtown Bethesda, but closely connected to it. Therefore, the guidelines should maintain and enhance the urban to residential connections in a compatible way that will be successful for downtown Bethesda and the surrounding communities.

Purpose: Controlling Density

We have accepted the essential premise articulated by Chairman Anderson: that the control of density at a site will be set by the combination of height limits and the application of these design guidelines. We are therefore pleased to see this concept stated in this section (p 4) and trust that this will be maintained in the final version.

Street type: Neighborhood Local Streets

We are concerned that an inadequate depth of open space is recommended on these streets. These are small narrow streets that transition between the Bethesda core and single-family homes. Specifically: The guidelines do not show a frontage zone between the building façade and the Pedestrian through way. We believe that a frontage provides the kind of compatible

connection to residential neighborhoods that the Plan promotes. A frontage zone will allow bike racks, benches, and/or landscaping along a building façade, which should be considered important elements for buildings transitioning into a single-family neighborhood. Further, a total distance from curb to building in the range of 15 – 18 feet will allow the growth of canopy trees, an important feature for such a street.

Street type: Neighborhood Residential Streets (2.1.8)

Figure 2.01 on p. 11 shows a yellow dotted line as an extension of Strathmore from Bradley Blvd. to Chevy Chase Dr. It should be clarified that this stretch is to be pedestrian and cycling path, not a street.

We recommend that a statement be added to note that some of the properties in the Plan area that front on Neighborhood Residential streets are designated for Greenways, and the minimum Greenway width is 35 feet.

Street type: Trails, page 28

The compatibility requirements should be referenced here, as they are for the Neighborhood Residential and Local street types.

Farm Woman's Market Civic Green, Figure 3.03

We are very pleased that this drawing shows the transformation of the entire area of parking lot #24 into park! One minor point: We recommend that the figure show the surface Capital Crescent Trail along the south side of Willow Lane.

Eastern Greenway, page 82

Our understanding is that Greenways are supposed to be open spaces, entirely dedicated to public use and maintained by the County park system. We recommend that this concept be clearly stated.

We also recommend clarity in the use of the term “setback.” If a developer believes that a Greenway is only a setback, he may conclude that allowances typically permitted with setbacks, such as steps and porches, may be permitted to extend into the Greenway. We therefore recommend a clear statement that as public space, a Greenway should be a “no build zone,” without the risk of being compromised.

Consistency with Other Guidelines

We are aware that BUP is working with the County on a new Bethesda Streetscape Plan and that DPS is developing Outdoor Restaurant Seating Guidelines. We believe consistency among these different sets of guidelines is vital, and in general, we would expect that these Design Guidelines should provide the overall standard.

Other Comments

- Page 10: We want to note our agreement with the following note at the bottom of the page: “Developments that front multiple street types on a corner or through-block site should follow the guidelines for each street frontage and provide transitions in the design to mediate between different street types.”
- Street types. There are some inconsistencies between some of the descriptions and numbers provided in the Street Type section of the document and later sections dealing with Building Form.
- Downtown Mixed-Use Streets. (Table 2.02.) Build-to line is shown as 15-20 feet but should be 16-20 because the minimum Pedestrian through zone and the Planting/Furnishing zone widths are both 8 feet ($8 + 8 = 16$).
- We suggest that more of the attributes stated for Neighborhood Main Streets (the Bethesda Row quad appears to be the only such designated streets) should also be listed for Downtown Mixed-Use Streets, since most streets in the Plan area have received this designation. Specifically, we suggest: “Building and sidewalk design along Downtown Mixed-Use Streets should create a human-scaled environment with fine-grained design detail to add visual interest along the street.” Sidewalks should “accommodate activities, vending and seating, while also ensuring a clear passageway for pedestrians.”
- Shared streets should still have a planting/furnishing zone separate from the vehicle area and the pedestrian through zone.
- Canopy Streets (p. 33) Figure 2.07. On the map, one block of Leland Street and one block of Willow Lane inside the Town of Chevy Chase have been drawn in green. We request that this designation be removed, as the Town has its own tree canopy program. However, we appreciate this designation continuing into streets in East Bethesda.
- 2.4.2 Building Base page 51. This paragraph states that the build to line for buildings 200+ feet should be 20-25 feet. We believe that this should be changed to 20-30 feet, because the build-to line on Urban Boulevards, where the tallest buildings are to be located, is shown as 25-30 feet.

- Farm Women's market (p. 74). We suggest the clarification that the building design guidelines listed here apply to new development adjacent to the south side of the Farm Women's market, not to development on the Farm Women's Market site.

From: Amanda Farber
To: [Kronenberg, Robert](#); [Wright, Gwen](#); [Anderson, Casey](#); [Fari-Gonzalez, Natali](#); [Howerton, Leslye](#); [Shigman, Laura](#); [Brown, Michael](#)
Subject: Design guidelines - "Single file sidewalks" and consistency with Streetscape
Date: Thursday, July 13, 2017 8:20:51 AM
Attachments: [Image1.PNG](#);
[Image2.PNG](#)

Hi All -

I wanted to chime in this morning before the design guidelines meeting about two related things.

1) I was walking the other evening and thought of a new term for some of the sidewalks in Bethesda. Along the 7770 Norfolk building it literally became a "single file sidewalk." (I semi joked the sidewalk by the trail has become a "slalom sidewalk" for bikers.)

This is understandable and may be unavoidable with older buildings, but shouldn't have to be the case with new buildings. (And it shouldn't be the street trees or their growing zones to have to take the hit as they are needed to make the sidewalk more walkable and outdoor seating cooler and more attractive.)

Along those lines I am very concerned what will happen with the new Marriott building if they are not required to significantly increase the width of the sidewalk along Norfolk (and bury the powerlines along the whole block). There is a "single file" corner there that is already busy. We could end up with one of the tallest buildings in the County with one of the smallest corners.

2) I spoke to Jeff Burton from BUP yesterday at length (about some tree issues but then the conversation turned to the streetscape in general). As you all had mentioned and he mentioned there are new Bethesda Streetscape Plans coming out. He said BUP is in the process of working to work on the new Bethesda Streetscape Plan. He then referred to 5-6 ft sidewalk clearance in the Plan for streets downtown and I brought up the fact that it is proposed to be 8 feet clearance for many streets in the guidelines (which most people seems to agree should be the *minimum* on higher density urban streets).

But this conversation brought up the issue that there needs to be coordination and clear consistency between what is in the Bethesda Design Guidelines and what is in the new Bethesda Streetscape Plan --- and also what is in the DPS Outdoor Cafe Seating Guidelines. I haven't seen the draft Streetscape Plan but we both concluded that there are potentially other parts that might be inconsistent with each other.

I am concerned developers will simply pick and choose the guidelines out of the three documents that requires the least in terms of sidewalk width or other features.

Thanks again all!
Amanda







Sent from my iPhone
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July 19, 2017

Via E-mail and U.S. Mail

Montgomery County Planning Board Chairman
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Re: Bethesda Downtown Plan Design Guidelines - Comments to Working Draft July 2017

Dear Montgomery County Planning Board Members:

On behalf of The Donohoe Companies ("Donohoe"), we appreciate Staff's work on the Bethesda Downtown Plan Design Guidelines (the "Guidelines"), and hope that as the Board discussed at its July 13 worksession, if/when complications or difficulties arise in their implementation, the Board will be open to considering alternative methods of achieving the ultimate goals that we all agree are important to Bethesda and its future. However, we would offer the following specific comments and requested modifications to help with practical implementation:

1) **Guidelines Flexibility** (pg. 4) - Although this language has been modified slightly since the original worksession, we would still suggest that use of the word "compelling" establishes a very high bar which should be reconsidered, as well as the replacement of "public realm" with "public interest," as follows:

"The Planning Board may approve alternative design approaches that better meet the intent of the design guidelines or make such an important ~~a compelling~~ contribution to the public interest ~~realm~~ as to justify departure from the guidelines."

2) **Street Types** (Figure 2.01, page 11) - The proposed street type map shows East Lane, between Hampden and Montgomery Lanes as a "Neighborhood Local Street." Because this street is in the heart of the downtown area and a block from Metro, we believe that designation as a "Downtown Mixed-Use Street" would be more appropriate and consistent with development goals for the area. Further, the intent of the Neighborhood Local Street is to provide access from the urban core to neighborhoods of low-scale buildings and detached homes, and this street is in the center of the urban core and does not provide any such access, but is an integral part of the downtown district.

3) **Tower: Separation Distance**, Section 2.4.6 (pg.56) - As we understand it, the intent of these guidelines is to allow more natural light and air between buildings, however, we would suggest a few

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changes to help smaller properties redevelop, allow flexibility for buildings up to 145 feet, and provide variety with infill projects.

"Alternative Treatments:

Buildings below 145 ~~120~~ feet or with limited property size/width/depth may reduce tower separation or consider party walls. . . .

Where existing neighboring buildings towers are built to or close to the property line, new development should aim to achieve the total tower separation where possible. However, at a minimum, the new building tower levels should provide the separation distance indicated in Guideline 2.4.6A from the side and rear property lines, except where building to the lot line could better address an existing blank wall condition."

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Emily J. Vaia

EJV/am

cc: Laura Shipman
Robert Kronenberg
Leslye Howerton
James "Jad" Donohoe IV
Peter G. Gartlan

Shipman, Laura

From: Naomi Spinrad <nspinrad@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, July 13, 2017 3:09 PM
To: Shipman, Laura
Cc: Anderson, Casey; MCP-PlanningBoardDNR; Howerton, Leslye; Wright, Gwen; Kronenberg, Robert
Subject: Bethesda design guidelines

Hi Laura,

Following up on Barney Rush's comments at the work session today on how the Strathmore extension is portrayed in Figure 2.01 of the design guidelines, I just want to reiterate that for the area from Bradley Boulevard south to Chevy Chase Drive, any "extension" of Strathmore is meant to be for pedestrians and cyclists, and not for cars. In other words, I think it's more accurately described as a future path rather than as a future street, as the symbology on the figure suggests.

The communities south of Bradley would appreciate a revision to this figure that makes it clear this would not be a street, but a potential pedestrian/bicyclist path.

Thanks very much,

Naomi

Naomi Spinrad
Vice President, Chevy Chase West Neighborhood Association

Shipman, Laura

From: Sears, Barbara A. - BAS <BSears@linowes-law.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 12, 2017 3:06 PM
To: MCP-Chair; Wright, Gwen; Shipman, Laura; Brown, Michael
Cc: arismardirossian@comcast.net; ed hutchins; 'Herb Patterson'; Sears, Barbara A. - BAS
Subject: Design Guidelines for the Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan, 7/13/17 Agenda Item 4 – MPDU Language

As you may recall, the owners of adjacent properties with frontage on Wisconsin Avenue and Fairmont Avenue (see Maps #63 and #64) have been working together to construct a building that provides 25% MPDUs. At yesterday's County Council worksession on the BOZ, it was determined that projects with 25% MPDUs would be subject to a specified number of public benefit points in the categories of Extraordinary Design and Energy Conservation and Generation as set forth in the Draft BOZ. Also, Councilmembers raised the design review process for such projects with Chairman Anderson and Planning Staff.

In reviewing the draft Design Guidelines to be discussed by the Board tomorrow and on July 27, we respectfully request that language be added that would extend the "Guideline Flexibility" discussion in Chapter 1.2, pp. 4-5, to projects that provide an extraordinary number of MPDUs. The current language is limited by references to alternative designs that "better meet" the intent of the Guidelines or "make such a compelling contribution to the public realm as to justify the departure from the Guidelines." Given the importance of affordable housing and good design, we believe that flexibility for alternate design approaches should also be shown to sites that contain an extraordinary number of MPDUs if they address the intent of the Guidelines. We also believe that specified "Alternative Treatments" should apply to such sites. Finally, we hope the Staff and Board will include language in the Guidelines that acknowledge that it is the intent of the Board to review and process such applications on an expedited basis using the "Green Tape" as other similar processes.

If these concepts are acceptable, we would be happy to work with Staff on language that accomplishes our request in a mutually satisfactory manner. Thank you for your attention to our request.

Barbara Sears

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Shipman, Laura

To: Wright, Gwen
Subject: RE: Design and Urban Planning for a Revitalized Downtown Bethesda

-----Original Message-----

From: a.p.bruhn [mailto:a.p.bruhn@verizon.net]

Sent: Tuesday, July 11, 2017 12:07 PM

To: Anderson, Casey <Casey.Anderson@mncppc-mc.org>; Wright, Gwen <gwen.wright@montgomeryplanning.org>;

Kronenberg, Robert <robert.kronenberg@montgomeryplanning.org>

Subject: Design and Urban Planning for a Revitalized Downtown Bethesda

Dear Mr. Anderson, Ms. Wright and Mr. Kronenberg —

This morning I forwarded the email below to members of the County Council. I am sending it to you as it applies to your endeavors to revitalize Bethesda. You have the opportunity to make Bethesda beautiful. I hope you will chose wisely.

Thanks,

Arlene Bruhn

Dear President Berliner and Members of the Council:

I write in support of CBAR's recommendations for downtown Bethesda and specifically for absolute height limits as advocated by

CBAR and by those who live in this community. I also support more housing for lower income households.

I applaud your revitalization goals, and share with you a vision of a vibrant Bethesda, a community with beautiful buildings, inviting shops, and excellent restaurants. We all seek a living space that accommodates residents, together with the people who work here. We also seek a community that is attractive to the many tourists who visit our area.

As part of this process, we need to know exactly what we are dealing with as high rise buildings are envisioned. That is, we need a specific design envelope. We don't want figures that are so buried in a list of exceptions that the figures themselves begin to blur and morph into unknowns. Over time, information presented to us as factual has sounded famously like "alternative facts." We don't want promises/references to green spaces or canopy streets that are not defined, that are for all intents and purposes fantasies, that can mean anything the listener imagines them to be, and later dismissed. In short, we want absolute height and space limits. We don't want a process where words and numbers are drained of meaning, a process that has become, in all too many instances, crazy-making.

Secondly, in listening to advocates for a vibrant Bethesda, I sense a fundamental assumption — namely, that great buildings and high end shops, together with better transportation, will suffice to bring success to this endeavor.

May I observe, however, that a community is far more than a collection of buildings. There are the so-called "positive" design elements, e.g., buildings, and "negative" elements, i.e., unbuilt space. There is a relationship between these elements that must be considered in any urban planning and design work. If ignored or shoved aside, the result is ugliness. That unfortunate outcome has happened in too many pockets of our community because the focus

traditionally has been only on the buildings, not how the buildings are sited in relation to each other or the space that surrounds them. It is design that brings a memorable sense of place.

Therefore, I urge you to include streets and walkways, even parks, in the design and planning process. The process is important. If we can afford tall buildings, we can afford parks and trees. The sidewalks, especially near tall buildings, need to be wide and inviting. The streets need to be shaded in summer and lined with trees. As I have long opined, trees are good for business. Skillful landscape architects can design attractive streetscapes. Too long we have treated landscape as an afterthought. It is up to you to demand that qualified landscape design be part of the process.

Finally, we need adequate MPDUs and apartments, shops, restaurants for the just-starting-out and the recently retired. If you look closely, you will observe that urban renewal currently carries with it gentrification, displacing many persons with single incomes or below a certain income threshold. I support innovative design solutions such as the Mariposa community in Denver, a community designed with vegetable plots and gardens. There are many other cutting edge experiments throughout the nation. Hopefully, we can add Montgomery County to the list of ground-breaking communities.

It has long been said that you can tell much about a person by the way he treats the help, i.e., the persons with less status than he or she. Are they welcome in our community? The choices are up to you. You are the decision-makers and what you chose to do will be remembered.

Make Bethesda beautiful!

Respectfully submitted,

Arlene Bruhn
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