

BETHESDA DOWNTOWN PLAN

DESIGN ADVISORY PANEL APPOINTMENT

Description

The Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel (DAP) is a volunteer body that provides design critique of Optional Method Development projects in Downtown Bethesda during monthly meetings open to the public. The DAP advises Applicants, Staff, and the Planning Board on the number of Design Excellence Public Benefit points merited for a project. DAP Rules of Procedure limit panel membership to two consecutive terms. The DAP member representing Landscape Architecture has moved away and can no longer serve on the Panel, and Staff recommends the Planning Board appoint Sandeep Walia to serve the remainder of the term to December 2025. At that time, Ms. Walia may renew for two additional three year terms.

COMPLETED: 3/27/2025

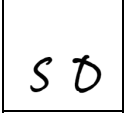
PLANNING BOARD HEARING DATE: 4/3/2025

MCPB ITEM NO. 1.c Preliminary Matters

Planning Staff



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MASTER PLAN

2017 Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan

Summary:

- Staff recommends the Planning Board appoint to the Bethesda DAP one new member, a Landscape Architect, to serve for the remainder of the previous member's tenure until December 2025.

Attachments:

- A. Sandeep Walia CV
- B. DAP Rules of Procedure

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

The Bethesda Downtown Design Advisory Panel (DAP) is an integral part of the Bethesda Overlay Zone. The role of the DAP is to provide advice and recommendations that will heighten design excellence and improve the quality of architecture, urban design and landscape architecture in downtown Bethesda.

The DAP is composed of five volunteer members and an ex-officio member representing the Planning Director's Office. Per the DAP's Rules of Procedures (Attachment B) the panel includes a registered architect, landscape architect, community member with a professional interest in architecture and/or urban design, developer, and a member of academia.

The Planning Board appointed the original DAP members in 2017 to serve initial terms of two, three and four years to ensure membership would remain staggered. In December of 2022, the Board appointed Jonathan Fitch representing Landscape Architecture for a three-year term, which expires this coming December (2025). Unfortunately, Mr. Fitch has relocated from the area and can no longer serve on the DAP. The Rules of Procedure state that "If a DAP member's term is ended early, a new member may be approved by the Planning Board to serve the remainder of the term. If approved, the new panel member may renew for two additional terms."

SECTION 2: METHOD OF SELECTION & PROFILE OF RECOMMENDED APPOINTMENT

For the open panel seat, Staff sent requests for nominations to several organizations in Bethesda and the landscape architecture community including the Bethesda Implementation Advisory Committee (IAC), East Bethesda Citizens Association, and the local and national chapters of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Staff recommends the Planning Board appoint Sandeep Walia, a Senior Associate Landscape Architect with MKSK Studios located in Washington, DC. Ms. Walia will bring two decades of experience with a diverse range of projects both in the US and internationally. Her education in both architecture and landscape architecture is strengthened by her experience in site design, placemaking, and the development of Design Guidelines for communities in California.

We are pleased to bring Sandeep on board and look forward to having her fresh perspective in the coming meetings.



BETHESDA DOWNTOWN DESIGN ADVISORY PANEL

Name of Applicant
Sandeep Walia

Principal Occupation
Landscape Architect

Place of Employment
MKSK, Inc.

Position/Title
Senior Associate

Years of Experience
21 years

Office Location
714 7th Street SE
Washington, DC 20003

Phone
714.614.4049

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614.621.3604

Email
swalia@mkskstudios.com

Submittal Date
December 31, 2024

mkskstudios.com

SANDEEP WALIA

ASLA, PLA, LEED AP

Sandeep's passion lies in curating holistic human experiences that are built upon history and culture; foster happiness through social, emotional and environmental well-being; and utilize storytelling in design to promote strong community connections.

Sandeep has over 21 years of experience in landscape architecture and master planning, working on a diverse range of projects in the US and internationally. She integrates compelling project narratives that curate a vision for a balanced ecosystem, unique placemaking and enriching human experiences. Driven by a passion for design, Sandeep believes that successful landscapes emerge when designers respect the land, acknowledge the site's history, and build upon the cultural preferences of its users. Community and environmental well-being are central to her approach, with a focus on open space connectivity, walkability, and sustainability. With training as an architect and a master's degree in landscape architecture, she brings valuable problem-solving skills that help transform project goals into meaningful solutions for both the environment and its users.

Professional Experience

MKSK, Inc. (September 2024 - Present)
Senior Associate

BrightView Design Group (March 2014 - April 2024)
Associate Lead

Cornerstone Studios, Inc. (November 2011 - March 2014)
Project Manager

SWA Group (June 2006 - April 2011)
Planner & Landscape Designer

Environmental Planning & Design (June 2001 - March 2006)
Landscape Designer

Education

Pennsylvania State University
Master of Science in Landscape Architecture, 2001

Chandigarh College of Architecture
Bachelor of Architecture, 1998

Professional Affiliations

Lambda Alpha International
George Washington Chapter, Member

American Society of Landscape Architects
Potomac Chapter, Member

Professional Registrations

Registered Landscape Architect
California (#6539)

United States Green Business Council
LEED Accredited Professional (LEED AP)



Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan – Design Advisory Panel

Rules of Procedure Revised September 23, 2020

PURPOSE

The Design Advisory Panel (DAP) is an integral part of the Bethesda Overlay Zone. The primary goal of the DAP is to provide advice and recommendations that will heighten design excellence and improve the quality of architecture, urban design and landscape architecture in Bethesda. The DAP will be guided by the Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan and the related Design Guidelines. To remain competitive within the greater Washington, DC region and to attract the best and brightest to the Bethesda community, it is essential to design great places in which people of all ages, ethnic and economic backgrounds will want to live, work and play. The DAP will help to achieve this outcome.

RELATIONSHIP TO CR ZONES

The Commercial – Residential Zones (CR Zones) were created and adopted with an emphasis on creating great mixed-use, walkable places. Development proposals under the CR Zones are required to provide public amenities and need to focus on design intent to make sure quality is paramount to the applications and that an attractive public realm will be the outcome.

The Bethesda Overlay Zone creates a system for density allocation above and beyond the CR Zone density mapped in the 1994 Bethesda CBD Sector Plan. The requirements for getting additional density from the Bethesda Overlay Zone pool of density include review by the DAP. The additional “BOZ” density should only be allocated if a high degree of design excellence is achieved and the DAP will advise the staff and the Planning Board on this issue.

MAKE UP OF THE DESIGN ADVISORY PANEL

The Design Advisory Panel will have five members. According to the Bethesda Overlay Zone, the DAP must be “composed of relevant independent professionals including at least one resident of the Bethesda community.”

Nominations for members will be solicited from the community and from organizations including but not limited to: CBAR, NAIOP, the Bethesda Chamber of Commerce, AIA, and ULI.

The DAP should, at a minimum, have the following expertise:

1. One registered architect representing academia and/or other jurisdictions in the region with a design review panel.
2. One registered architect from the greater Montgomery County community.
3. One member of the development community. This person may be a developer, real estate professional or involved in real estate investment.
4. One Bethesda community member who has a professional interest in urban design, architecture, and/or landscape architecture.

Members of the DAP will act in a professional manner, provide comments to Planning Department staff and the Planning Board, and be mindful of any conflicts of interest from associations with development teams, property owners or associations. The DAP should include the Planning Department’s Senior

Urban Designer as an ex-officio member, and another Planning Department staff member will serve as a liaison to the panel. If conflicts of interest arise, the specific panel members will recuse themselves from the discussion and recommendations. For reviews of Site Plan application projects that require an official vote on the number of Design Excellence Public Benefit points, if the quorum of voting members results in a split vote, the Senior Urban Designer may cast the deciding vote.

DAP members must be approved by the Planning Board and will serve three-year staggered terms. At initial appointment, two members will serve for two years, two members will serve for three years, and one member will serve for four years. The terms of membership will be staggered from this point onward.

Upon official acceptance of an appointment, each voting member may serve two consecutive three-year terms. After serving two terms, DAP members must take a one-year absence at a minimum from service before being considered for an additional term. Prior to completion of their first term, DAP members interested in remaining on the panel must submit a letter requesting to renew their term to the Planning Board for approval. If a DAP member's term is ended early, a new member may be approved by the Planning Board to serve the remainder of the term. If approved, the new panel member may renew for two additional terms.

Members of the DAP may vote to make minor revisions to the Rules of Procedure as necessary to improve the panel review process and logistics. These revisions are subject to Planning Director approval, but do not require approval from the Planning Board. The Planning Board will be updated on minor revisions at the next major change update.

ROLE OF THE DESIGN ADVISORY PANEL IN THE REGULATORY PROCESS

The DAP will review:

- **All Optional Method Development Projects** – All optional method projects in Bethesda will be presented to the DAP. Although the optional method typically begins with Sketch Plan submission, applicants are strongly encouraged to go through the Concept Plan process and meet with the DAP at this Concept Plan stage. If the applicant does not wish to file a Concept Plan, they must meet with the DAP to review their project early in the Sketch Plan process.
- **Projects Seeking Additional Density through the BOZ, Bonus Points through the CR Amenity Guidelines, and/or Height as a MPDU Bonus** – In order for projects to be considered for additional density or height, the applicant must meet with the DAP early on to review point allocations and to assess urban and architectural design implications.

The DAP will be guided by the Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan, the Bethesda Downtown Design Guidelines, the Bethesda Overlay Zone and the CR Zone criteria for granting density incentives for exceptional design.

The DAP will meet regularly once a month and more often as development applications are submitted and in need of review. This is a significant time commitment and panel members will need to respond within the timelines set forth by our zoning ordinance and development application schedules. The DAP will receive all the review drawings and/or access to the drawings one week in advance of the review meeting.

Written comments from the panel will be provided to Planning Department staff at Concept, Sketch and Site Plan stages. The assigned staff liaison will assist with the comments as needed.

DESIGN ADVISORY PANEL MEETINGS

While DAP meetings are primarily for panel members to consider and comment on proposed developments, meetings should be collaborative, and input from developers, their consultants, and members of the public is encouraged. Because panel members are volunteers, however, the DAP is not expected to meet for more than one hour on any single project.

Members of the public who wish to participate in a DAP meeting should notify the DAP's staff liaison before the meeting. Those who have not notified the staff liaison in advance may sign up to participate the day of the meeting. Citizens will be invited to participate in the order in which they sign up. In certain cases, there may not be sufficient time for all interested citizens to participate. Members of the public who wish to ensure their comments are considered by the DAP should submit them in writing to the DAP's staff liaison no later than twenty-four hours before the DAP meeting. Any written comments submitted to the DAP will also be sent to the Planning Board before the Board meets to consider the proposed development.

Although DAP meetings are intended to be informal, it may be necessary in certain cases, such as meetings with many interested citizens, for the DAP to impose equitable time limits on public comments or other reasonable rules of order. When possible, the staff liaison will announce time limits at the start of the DAP meeting.

RECONSIDERATION REQUESTS

The DAP will only entertain requests to reconsider votes from the Planning Board.