

Downtown Buildings Committee

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Presentation to Council May 24, 2016

Why we were appointed

- New downtown development surprised residents, as well as some PTC commissioners and council members
- Buildings do not reflect community standards
- City was not prepared for the impact of commercial development

DBC Charter

- Review new downtown buildings in context of
 - Zoning regulations
 - Downtown Design Plan
 - Downtown Design Guidelines
 - Downtown surveys: 2012 and 2014-15
- Determine steps to ensure new downtown buildings meet community expectations

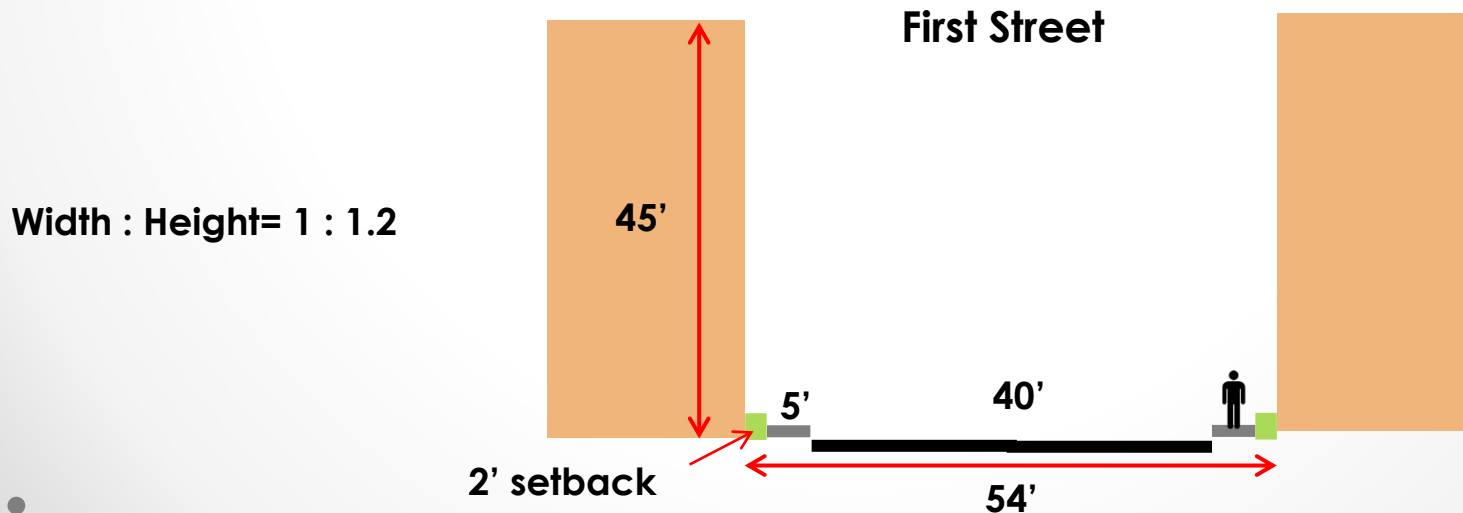
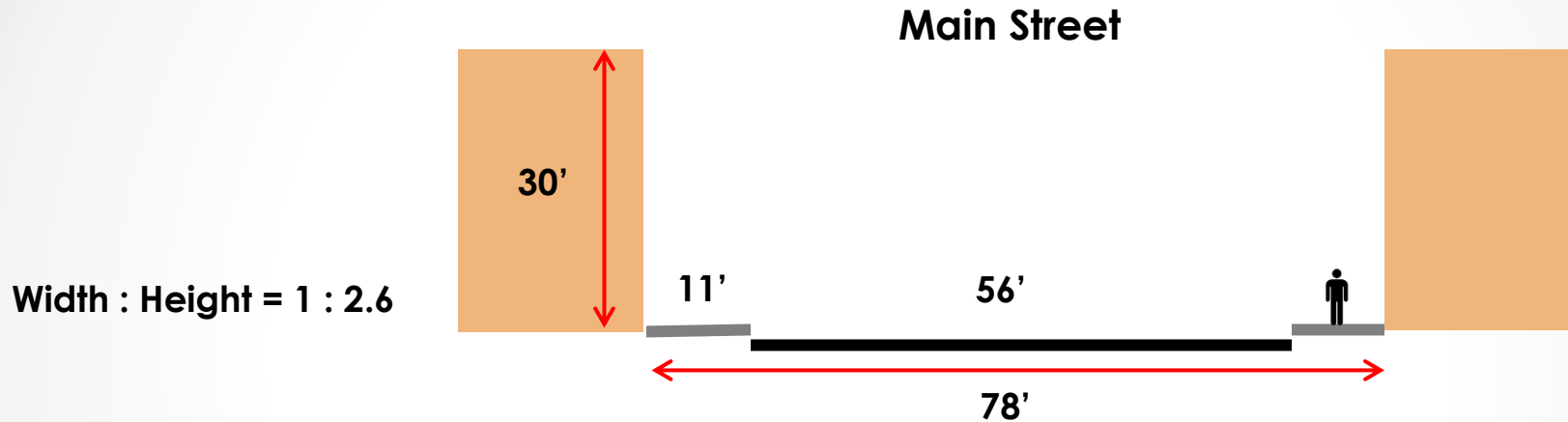
Committee Goals

- Recommend zoning and other requirements to improve predictability: no more surprises
- Make commercial development smoother and more transparent for all
- Expedite the process by clearly defining community standards
- Get the quality development we deserve

Findings: Height, Bulk, Mass

- 2010 zoning change to 45-foot height increased max building envelope 200 – 300%
- Resulting height, bulk & mass are not human scale and diminish pedestrian experience on First Street
- Tall buildings, minimum setbacks, 5-foot sidewalks, narrow street create dark canyon

Height to Street Width



Recommendations

- Amend height limits for CD and CD/R3 zones
 - 30-foot max for commercial & mixed-use
 - 35-foot max for multi-family residential
- Retain form-based zoning
- Outcome
 - Allows larger buildings than those prior to 2010
 - Reduces adverse impacts on other factors
 - Retains design flexibility within acceptable limits

Findings: Pedestrian Experience

- Pedestrian experience diminished by
 - Narrow sidewalks with signage, poles & other barriers
 - Dark canyon effect
 - Meager landscaping
 - Lack of building articulation
 - Poor-quality materials
 - Loss of key views
- Pleasant pedestrian experience brings more people downtown and increases vibrancy

Sidewalks

THIS ...



NOT THIS ...



Recommendations

- Create safe pedestrian walkways
 - 6-foot minimum width, clear of impediments
 - Prohibit walls, obstructions within first 2 feet of setback
- Provide lush landscaping
 - Clarify and enforce requirements and maintenance
 - Require 3 – 5 feet next to buildings for plants
 - Have experts create plant list and review submitted plans
- Consider views: important to residents

Lost Views

Here today...



Gone tomorrow

Findings: Development Process

- Documents lack consistency and coherence
- Codes/guidelines not enforced
- Access/transparency compromised by
 - Non-uniform staff reports
 - Plans & schedules on Granicus, separate from city website
- Limited expertise in commercial development results in design thrash, costing time and money

Recommendations (1)

- Simplify and clarify documents: make them interactive online
- Provide precise checklists at every step
- Standardize staff reports: attach checklists
- Enforce community standards in codes and guidelines

Recommendations (2)

- Require specific design review for commercial projects
 - More design-centered than PTC reviews
 - Early focus on quality design forestalls design thrash
 - Shifts conversation from legislating taste to following community standards
 - Consulting experts serve as advisory resource to staff
 - Architects & developers expect it: saves time and money
 - No cost to city: developer pays

Findings: Technology

- Existing planning tools and project submittal requirements lag current technology
- Decision-makers – and residents – lack visualization tools
- Build-out models under different zoning scenarios improve predictability

Recommendations

- Identify 3D modeling software
- Develop digital and physical models of downtown triangle
- Require developers to provide data for the digital system selected

Expected Outcomes

- Improved transparency & predictability: no more surprises
- Smoother commercial development process
- Built-in enforcement and accountability
- Quality development aligned with community standards

We Urge Council to

- Expedite implementation of recommendations
- Act NOW on zoning changes
- We support downtown visioning process but
 - Currently there is no plan or schedule
 - Process could take years to conclude
 - Meanwhile, adverse effects of piecemeal development would impact the city for 20 – 50 years