



**CITY OF SOUTH PASADENA
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2022 AT 5:30 P.M.

**CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
1424 MISSION STREET, SOUTH PASADENA, CA 91030**

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Samantha Hill called the Special Meeting of the South Pasadena Design Review Board to order on Thursday, September 1, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. The meeting was conducted as an in-person/hybrid meeting with City Staff and Commissioners attending in person from the Council Chambers located at 1424 Mission Street, South Pasadena, California as well as on ZOOM for Covid safety purposes. Pursuant to executive orders, the public could attend from the Council Chambers or via ZOOM.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Samantha Hill, Chair
Melissa Hon Tsai, Vice-Chair
Brian Nichols, Board Member
Joe Carlson, Board Member

STAFF

PRESENT:

Matt Chang, Planning Manager
Ben Jarvis, Interim Senior Planner
Sandra Robles, Associate Planner
Lillian Estrada, Administrative Secretary

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Majority vote of the Board to proceed with Board business.

The Agenda was approved as submitted.

DISCUSSION

1. Objective Development Standards (ODS) Project

Recommendation:

Receive a presentation from AECOM (project consultant) regarding the Objective Development Standards project and provide feedback to City staff and the project consultant.

Presentation:

Planning Manager, Matt Chang, attended the meeting via Zoom and provided background information on the Objective Development Standards workshop. Mr. Chang stated that the City of South Pasadena had received a grant from SCAG (Southern California Association of Governments) to develop this project for objective design standards for multi-family and mixed-use projects. He introduced the team working on the Objective Development Standards, including: Interim Senior Planner, Ben Jarvis; Associate Planner, Sandra Robles; and, Project Manager, Ashley Hoang, and Project Director, Susan Ambrosini, both from AECOM (consulting firm). Mr. Chang stated that the purpose of the meeting was to get thoughts and comments from the Design Review Board on the standards.

Ms. Ambrosini presented.

The presentation portion of the public hearing concluded and Chair Hill opened the meeting for public comments.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Administrative Assistant, Lillian Estrada, announced that there were no general public comments.

DISCUSSION

Board Member Discussion:

Chair Hill asked if there were certain questions that needed to be answered; Ms. Ambrosini presented a slide with a list of items for discussion. Chair Hill read the first item, which dealt with application forms, or portions of an application, that they have found challenging.

Chair Hill mentioned that it is always a challenge going through the application process and that it helps if the application shows step-by-step how applicants can work with other departments.

Vice-Chair Tsai added that other cities have provided “road maps” for applicants on their website and were helpful in providing clients with a timeline for the entitlement process.

Chair Hill moved on to the next question, which included examples of applications used by other public agencies that they found easy to use. Chair Hill stated that they had addressed the item with the previous question and moved on to the next question, which was about the City of South Pasadena’s Virtual Planning Desk and how it can be improved upon.

Chair Hill and Vice-Chair Tsai stated they were not aware of the City’s Virtual Planning Desk and would look into it after the meeting. Chair Hill added that she usually locates City applications via Google.

Chair Hill moved onto the next question: Is there anything else we should consider to inform a housing development permit application?

Board Member Carlson stated that he does not have experience with Building Permits but he does with Filming Permits, and that process has been streamlined in the City of Los Angeles with one person acting as a liaison and coordinating with various departments for the applicants. Board Member Carlson stated that it would be helpful if the Building Permitting process worked the same way.

Chair Hill stated that she heard that the City might be looking to hire someone to act as a liaison with developers and applicants and she thought it was a great suggestion.

Board Member Nichols commented that there is often miscommunication between departments and agreed a liaison would help navigate those types of situations.

Vice-Chair Tsai stated that in the City of Los Angeles provides an option for a case manager, which she found helpful because the process with the City of Los Angeles can be complicated.

Chair Hill stated that the answers for the permit application should suffice and moved to the next set of questions for the Object Development Standards. The first question: What design features are important to multi-unit and mixed-use development?

Board Member Carlson mentioned that many multi-unit projects were “cookie-cutter” construction—they have different materials, but similar feel. He added that he would encourage the City to look at encouraging more eclectic styles and use different types of styles.

Board Member Nichols concurred and said that this cookie-cutter construction looked soulless.

Vice Chair Tsai said that in her opinion, it comes down to construction. She stated that there is usually cement block on the first level, then wood framing above it and projects may appear similar because this method is the cheapest way to build these multi-use developments and that makes all of the mixed-use developments appear the same, because they are constructed the same.

Chair Hill said that she agreed with Vice-Chair Tsai's comments and added that open space is critical and the massing is something they can look at, as well. She added that the open space features are important with decks and balconies. She felt it was also important to consider the interface of the public open spaces with the private open spaces, such as public plazas, that are integrated especially for mixed-use developments.

Vice-Chair Tsai stated that if the development is on a busier street, she recommends having some type of outdoor seating, such as a restaurant or café, to bring that feel of people onto the street.

Chair Hill added that not having parking visible from the street would be important and recommends underground parking or parking behind a structure.

Board Member Nichols added that landscaping was very important for projects and stated that a City can still be green and water-wise.

Board Member Carlson asked if there was some type of regulation that required landscaping per square foot for developments.

Chair Hill responded in the affirmative.

Board Member Carlson stated that he would agree that those types of regulations would be extremely important and added that it would be valuable if any of those open spaces can also be accessed by the public—particularly in the denser areas along Mission Street.

Ms. Abrosini asked the Board if in recent development processes or in the review of the Downtown Specific Plan, the City has incorporated thresholds where the developer is required to have publicly accessible open space.

Chair Hill said she worked on a mixed-use project and there were public space requirements for the Mission Street Specific Plan, which were incorporated into that project.

Planning Manager, Matt Chang, said that the City was in the process of updating the Mission Street Specific Plan. He added that the City would be evaluating public and private open space requirements as part of that update.

Ms. Ambrosini, asked Chair Hill additional questions regarding the project she had mentioned. She asked if there were design requirements or recommendations on the project to improve the quality of the public space.

Chair Hill responded that there were only landscaping requirements and that there were no requirements for seating or materiality of the outdoor public space. She added that requiring shading devices in public open space is energy efficient and could be something that the City can consider. She further noted that the Objective Design Standards should address climate aspects.

Ms. Ambrosini said some cities, including Pasadena, have required shade devices on the ground floor of new developments to make streets more comfortable and walkable. She asked if that would be something the City would consider turning into a standard.

Chair Hill, Vice-Chair Tsai, Board Member Carlson, agreed it would be something they would consider.

Ms. Ambrosini, asked Board Members how they felt about certain building materials they want to see since they had mentioned a concern regarding cookie-cutter designs. She suggested incorporating one or two high-quality materials and they can provide a list of what those materials might be.

Vice-Chair Tsai said in the case of a wall of a certain height, she suggests requiring two or three different materials. She also suggests that instead of saying high-quality materials to say a variety of materials, so that one big wall is not all stucco.

Chair Hill agreed with Vice-Chair Tsai though she was reluctant to require specific materials because “high-quality” can be subjective and hard to define or make into an objective standard.

Board Member Nichols said it is hard to set objective guidelines since architects are often faced with very specific circumstances that dictate flexibility. He added that some standards, like massing and size, have to be required.

Chair Hill agreed and felt quality is something you know when you see but is hard to make into an objective standard. She added that she thought size and massing requirements can go a bit overboard and stated that massing needs to be defined. She also added that some stepback requirements are good, but not too many.

Ms. Ambrosini asked how the Board felt about modulation standards. She added that they are not something every city has done but Santa Monica is starting to do it—after a certain horizontal dimension—and Pasadena is starting to do it, as well.

She added that one-foot modulations should be avoided and that one can be very prescriptive in the way a building is required to modulate or be more flexible. She asked if the Board Members had worked on any projects that were good examples of modulation or any that were the opposite. She added that when working with multi-family structures, working with structural grids can get complicated.

Board Member Nichols stated that he agreed that modulation should be intentional, but he does not recall of a project to would serve as an example.

Chair Hill stated that she knows that when designing multi-family with structural grids, and the designer starts to get patterns, then the designer gets into structural complications, which can make things challenging. She added that there would be a benefit to breaking down the requirements by a specific size, but also taking into account how the building is constructed and how they go together. She added that it is arbitrary to state that a building should be stepped back by one foot, and the purpose should be defined; for example, adding a shadow line.

Vice-Chair Tsai stated that there is a project in her neighborhood, where there is a one-foot stepback and, in her opinion, was poorly done. She added that it was less than two feet wide and it appears like a window with a small shadow line.

Ms. Ambrosini, stated that it was a good point about horizontal dimensions and added that the City would have to settle on a number that is achieving the goal of having variation in the façade. Ms. Ambrosini elaborated that if it is a two-foot modulation, it is difficult having a minimum horizontal dimension. Ms. Ambrosini added that the City can opt for a percentage of required modulation of overall area to give flexibility but also having a minimum horizontal dimension so that they do not come up with something that does not meet the intent. She added that Santa Monica requires a five-foot modulation, but could impact feasibility and asked if the Board had thoughts about that.

Board Member Nichols stated that the modulation impacts the floor plan and added that the designer has to plan in relation to what is happening on the exterior because the shift is so large. He added that it makes it more intentional and would force it to be a real thing.

Vice-Chair Tsai said that it could be a percentage of the horizontal length from the corner. The more length you have from the front façade or from the corner, a percentage of that would have to set back. She added that it would force it to be proportionally correct.

Chair Hill agreed with Vice-Chair Tsai's comments. She commented that they were almost at 6:30pm and asked Ms. Ambrosini if she had any specific questions that she would like the Board to address.

Ms. Ambrosini, said she felt that modulation was one of the big ones so she appreciated that they could cover that in detail. She hoped that these thoughts

could ruminate with the Board. She encouraged everyone to reach out to Matt Chang if there were follow-up thoughts. She stated that they would happy to integrate all thoughts into the project.

Chair Hill asked Ms. Ambrosini if there would be a draft report issued to the Board prior to approval.

Ms. Ambrosini, responded that the Board will receive a draft report. She explained that they are creating recommendations and emphasized that these were approach ideas of what the City can do, but that does not mean that they would be adopted into the zoning code. She stated that that this process is meant to help the City adopt standards and provide graphics that the City can just slot right in or make minor refinements. Ultimately, the City will have to go through the formal review process of adopting new standards to go into the zones. She added that there will be ample opportunity for further comment.

Chair Hill reopened the public hearing for public comments.

Public Comments

Josh Albrektson participated via Zoom and said one of the biggest problems South Pasadena was having with the Housing Element was proving that it was feasible to develop housing in South Pasadena. He added that anything that is factored into these objective design standards would have an effect on how feasible it will be to develop housing. Mr. Albrektson further stated that if the City was to add in excessive design standards, building may no longer be feasible and if the City were to get a compliant Housing Element, HCD (California Department of Housing and Community Development) could make the City uncompliant if it was no longer feasible to build.

Chair Hill asked for any more public comment and hearing none, closed the public hearing portion of the meeting.

Mr. Chang thanked the Board for their assistance in developing the Objective Design Standards and encouraged them to contact him directly if they have additional feedback.

ADJOURNMENT

- 2. Adjourn to the regular Design Review Board meeting scheduled for September 1, 2022 at 6:30 p.m.**

There being no further matters, Chair, Samantha Hill, adjourned the Special Design Review Board meeting at 6:31p.m.

APPROVED,



Samantha Hill, Chair – Design Review Board

9/7/2023

Date