

September 30, 2019
Charlottesville City Council Special Meeting
Joint City Council – Planning Commission Worksession
Standards and Design Manual (SADM) Update

A special meeting of the Charlottesville City Council was held on Monday, September 30, 2019, at 5:00 p.m. at CitySpace Large Conference Room, 100 5th Street NE, Charlottesville, Virginia, to discuss the Charlottesville Standards and Design Manual update.

In addition to City Council, the following groups were invited to participate in the meeting: Charlottesville Area Development Round Table (CADRe), Tree Commission, PLACE Design Task Force, Code Audit/Streets That Work Advisory Committee, ADA Advisory Committee, Board of Architectural Review, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Charlottesville Albemarle Affordable Housing Coalition, Charlottesville Low-Income Housing Coalition, Habitat for Humanity, Area Consultants, Attorneys, Neighborhood Development Services, Public Utilities, Public Works, Toole Design, RK&K.

Mayor Walker called the City Council meeting to order at 5:12 p.m. with the following members present: Mayor Nikuyah Walker, Vice Mayor Heather Hill, Mr. Mike Signer, and Ms. Kathy Galvin; Absent: Dr. Bellamy (arrived at 5:32 p.m.).

Chair Hosea Mitchell called the Planning Commission Meeting to order at 5:12 p.m.

Mr. Marty Silman, Interim Director for Public Works, gave an introduction of the meeting and introduced SADM consultants. He advised that this would be the final workshop before the manual goes back to City Council for approval. He advised that the City Code references the SADM.

Mr. Anquenze Owe, consultant, introduce his colleague Melanie Britt reviewed the meeting agenda. He gave an overview of the manual update process to date, adding that the proposed manual includes changes made as a result of public engagement, and he advised that the manual is a guide for designing anything that touches the public right-of-way. Mr. Owe reviewed next steps for the SADM update process:

- City Council Approval
- Final Manual Production
- Appendices: Details, Checklists, Specifications

He reviewed the purpose of the Manual, explaining that the primary focus is to inform design and construction. He also explained the relationship between the SADM and other documents such as the City Code, Streets that Work, State/Federal standards and planning documents. The manual covers items that were not addressed in the previous manual.

A few of the big ticket feedback items from the stakeholder workshop in June were:

- Block length
- Mid-block crossings
- Shared streets and yield streets
- Encouraging innovative design approaches

Ms. Walker asked how the City could ensure not to incur costs associated with innovative design for which the City does not have the expertise. City Attorney John Blair advised that the responsibility is on City staff to vet the design before presenting to Council. He advised that some maintenance costs cannot be avoided.

Ms. Galvin asked how innovative designs are referenced for future “projects”. Mr. Owe advised that the typology is not lost, but becomes part of the document for future use.

- The desire for incentives for environmental sustainability

Mr. Silman opened up the floor for questions from City Council and Planning Commission.

Commissioners and Councilors asked questions about feedback, alleys, roundabouts, soil volumes, sidewalks, stormwater facilities, utilities, block length, and other details of the Manual.

Dr. Bellamy left the meeting at 6:38 p.m.

Ms. Walker opened the meeting for public comment.

Ms. Peggy van Yahres, representing the Tree Commission, spoke about treescape in various aspects: trees and plants needing a separate section in the SADM apart from lighting; the definition of “soil volume”; whether soil volumes would be prohibitive for trees on the Downtown Mall or other places; the health of the soil being used; and protecting existing trees.

Mr. Steven Johnson, Planning Manager at JAUNT asked about density requirements for bus shelters.

Mr. Charlie Armstrong, representing CADRe, commended staff for their work on the SADM. He asked that the City guard against catering to engineering preferences. He mentioned that another cost consideration would be the amount of funds subsidizing affordable housing, advising that installing more expensive materials causes prices to rise for residents. He also mentioned utility separation easements. He spoke about roll top curbs being disallowed, and the requirement of chain link fence in several areas, and the need for a consistent inspection process for building roads and recordkeeping to help with accountability.

Mr. Carl Schwarters, representing several groups including IMPACT and CADRe, spoke about the definition of a public street, and the need to decouple from fire accessible streets. He spoke of encroachments to the right of way.

Ms. Mina Seville, member of Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee and PLACE Design Task Force, spoke about minimums and maximums for intersection spacing on blocks in relation to pedestrian and bicycle pathways, and the need to be mindful of building size.

Mr. Dan Rosensweig from Habitat for Humanity spoke of the origins of the SADM and commended staff for their work. He asked the Planning Commission to beware of other designs that inadvertently push street lanes wider. He described challenges with fire engine access and sight distance.

Mr. Ryan Stoner with Milestone Partners, representing CADRe, spoke about public alleys and the ability to impact affordable housing; BMPs (Best Management Practices) and the right of way; sight distance standards; and innovative short streets.

Ms. Walker closed public comment.

Ms. Hill asked about next steps.

Ms. Melanie Britt asked for final comments within one week.

Staff from the Utilities Department, in response to a question from Ms. Galvin, gave additional input that some utilities will need to go under the sidewalk versus under street pavement. He advised of the desire to keep future maintenance costs as low as possible.

Mr. Silman summarized the process and thanked everyone who contributed to this living document. To date there have been over 1000 comments. Staff will meet with the Arborist of the Tree Commission and the City Attorney's Office before bringing the SADM back to Council.

Ms. Walker adjourned the meeting at 7:38 p.m.