

PLACE Design Task Force Minutes
March 9, 2017- 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.
Neighborhood Development Services Conference Room

Members Present

Mike Stoneking, Chairman, Fred Wolf, Vice Chairman, Paul Josey, Gennie Keller, Chris Henry, Andrew Mondschein, Andres Pacheco, Tim Mohr

Members Absent: Scott Paisley

Staff Present: Carrie Rainey, Amanda Poncy, Alex Ikefuna, Carolyn McCray (Clerk)

Call to Order

Chairman Stoneking called the PLACE Design Task Force Meeting to order at 12:00pm.

Agenda

1. City Architect Discussion (90 minutes)

Chairman Stoneking posed a question to the committee: What is the position? Does the position encourage public land use or overlap of that roll? What is urban?

Mr. Wolf said the Comprehension Plan is quantitative, and qualitative in the visioning.

Ms. Keller said we certainly need that visionary component so that we can move towards being proactive rather than reactive, because with the rare exception of things like Small Area Plans and the Comprehensive Plan you are always waiting for the private sector to give something to us. We then react to it, and might try to fix it or tweak it. We may not necessarily have the right tools to achieve a visionary strategic design that physical thinking needs to have.

Mr. Mohr said the City Architect position should not bogged down with the daily operations. The whole objective of the position is to focus on the future, not to answer zoning questions. That would be the role of NDS.

Ms. Keller said it is not necessarily about the numbers.

Mr. Wolf said he likes the fact that Ms. Keller mentioned being in a certain reactive position. He said during his time serving on the BAR for 8½ years, the problem was often that by the time a project appeared before the BAR, regardless of the regulatory nature of the review, there is limited opportunity to help shape or guide the process or the project in certain ways, because lot of work has already done prior to the involvement of the BAR. If there could be a way to give guidance that precedes the approval process, the process could become streamlined. The level of discourse during the approval process could be elevated, all type of things could happen to be more proactive about providing guidance and the direction for development.

Chair Stoneking said our current version of that is the development review team –representatives from all of the major departments review a project when it comes before the City. While this takes place as early as possible it is still after a submittal.

Mr. Ikefuna said sometimes it's impossible to meet and provide guidance before a submittal. There may be issues with scoping and availability. Only a select number of people meet with the developer once he has submitted the application, the full development team meeting takes place later.

Chair Stoneking said there is a representative on the development review team from all of the departments that have some sort of effect on Placemaking, including NDS, Engineering, Parks and Recreation, Economics, and Facilities. There still feels to be a gap for long range

strategic thinking that perhaps this meeting isn't happening early enough.

Mr. Mohr said that process is still pre-reactive.

Ms. Keller said the Planning Commission and the BAR is not there (at the development review team meeting), it might be months before either group is involved. We might not ever know what was considered for those projects that die on the vine for whatever reason.

Mr. Henry said the whole process is extremely reactionary, it's the only way it can be because that is the way and the process has been set. The whole idea of having a City architect is to get in front of the ball from the City perspective. Talking with stakeholders in the City, it seems there is general frustration with a lack of vision for the City, perhaps because we are missing a position that is supposed to create a vision rather than wait for somebody to come along with a proposal that meets the zoning ordinance or the Comprehensive Plan, which are often different.

Mr. Mohr said there will still be BAR guidelines, so it's still highly subjective as well. Things tend to go based on what happens to be what's in the air at the time of review.

Mr. Henry said given the City's budget for capital improvements and planning initiatives already in progress, such as the many hundreds of dollars for the SIA, and \ how many additional millions of dollars come behind that from the private sector, it would behoove them to have somebody to guide that and manage it.

Chair Stoneking asked if anybody knows Justin Flalingo; he is a planning professional in Arlington County who described their planning department as having three sections. They have the Current Plan Review, the Comp Plan Long Range Group and all they do is think about the future and they don't count trees, curbs or parking spaces, and the

third group is called Urban Design and Research, which has a couple of landscape architects and a couple of development people. They do data research as well as design research and act as the bridge between the other two sections. There is dedicated staff outside of review within the planning department to take on the future.

Mr. Mohr said it is also important to have somebody from NDS who is meeting with neighborhoods proactively, showing what can happen in your neighborhood. For instance, a big surprise shows up on your doorstep like the big building near Locust Avenue near the hospital. I don't think anybody really caught on they could build something that big there. I think 3-D modeling will help neighborhoods understand what is allowed in the neighborhood and what isn't. Somewhere we will need to start putting in transition zones. It would cross over with NDS in terms of research and community engagement, but having someone ahead of it would make a great deal of sense.

Ms. Bennis said she knows there is a position being considered, and asked if there is overlap with the SIA and Formed Based Code consultant, is this the same role or two different role?

Chair Stoneking said every town (which has a form based code) has a form based code administrator.

Ms. Keller asked if there is an RFP for that.

Ms. Bennis said there is an RFP out for a consultant to not be in-house not this role.

Mr. Stoneking said it could be the preamble to this role.

Ms. Keller said this role would be citywide, not just for the SIA.

Chair Stoneking said it is similar; the SIA is kind of an experiment of what we are talking about in a global way. So that person might be replaced by a permanent position. Maybe we should quit thinking about it as a position, it could be a department or a group or an attitude. The City Architect moniker is awful in a way because it congers up an eccentric guy in a cape running around with a sharpie telling everyone what to do.

Mr. Josey said it would be nice if there was someone who is not totally entrenched in one department but is looking out for the entirety of the City; not just this utility corridor or this new development, but how do you get that grand vision a little higher.

Chair Stoneking asked where does this group of people fit in. He spoke with Maurice Jones, City Manager and Mike Murphy, Assistant City Manager, and they see this person as a component of NDS, an assistant to Mr. Ikefuna who would look at those things but it's not every department. It is not Parks and Recreation or Public Works. He said maybe it is a position at an Assistant Manager level, which many towns have done. Perhaps there is an assistant manager position solely devoted to this type of thinking, or perhaps this is a subset of a greater set of duties for an assistant manager. Some people have actually offered to buy it.

Mr. Josey said this person could be focused on community engagement, with some overlap with the arts, and many of the other components discussed. That would make their job busier, they would not be trying to fill up their day with things to do. Someone should be actively doing that for all of the departments.

Mr. Henry said it seems to me it would be a wasted opportunity to bury that further down in the organization. The lower down you put a role like that, the less effective they are.

Ms. Bennis said they need to have authority to make decisions, support, and funding.

Mr. Mohr said that person's office might have some people down the food chain whose sole purpose through this division is to put a work shop together with these people, so there is oversight and ability to synergize in the various departments for people.

Mr. Wolf said at one point we had a community design center that at one point there was at least an inkling of an idea that there could be synergy between that as a grass roots group that started in the city in terms of guidance to what the city hope to see and how it would work.

Ms. Keller said this whole thing makes her very nervous; a lot of it is going to depend on either the person in the position or who is heading the department if that is the case. She said from what she see in the community, we need a larger conversation, because there is are conflicts between those who want us to grow aggressively in a certain way and, particularly in the neighborhoods, those who do not want a lot of change. If by definition we call this the City Architect that is implying that we are moving forward aggressively attracting new development and re-development, unless we put some parameter on that or have a conversation first. She said if she put on her historic preservation hat, it scares the something out of her.

Ms. Bennis said a friend of hers lives in Seattle, and it is at the point now that she has to leave, it got to the turning point where there was no fore-thought. She said to her friend that she thought Seattle was like Portland but Portland thirty years ago had a vision and they put in infrastructure. We want to have great public transportation, great biking so when she is thinking of this role she is thinking of somebody who is thinking about the future. We want to go Portland's route and we don't want to end up like all of these cities that get to the tipping point and nobody wants to live there, can't afford to live there, and everyone

is moving. She sees the position as the person who is going to hold that vision and be able to work backwards from there.

Ms. Keller said maybe it's like what Mike (Stoneking) said, that maybe it's an attitude, because the first day she walked into this Task Force she thought that this is a place where we can promote design excellence. As a person in the design profession, it really worries her because we now have an anti-design, anti-beauty, anti-aesthetic thing going on in the City. People say if it is beautiful, then it is not affordable. She said if we are dealing with equity issues, then we should have good designs and good communities. There is a lot of stuff going on right now that this position will be involved in if we don't resolve those issues or come to some meeting of the minds, but we haven't done anything.

Mr. Henry said we need someone who can manage growth smartly; we don't need to synergize growth; we have growth and 2,000 people are moving here every year in just the City. If we can guide those people into the right places, provide the right quality and mixed income and all of that.

Mr. Mondschein said it would be interesting to have that idea that you could sharpen the code and adjust it as needed, but not have this every 15 years where we have to blow it up and start over. There is someone who is saying "here is your red flag, how do we resolve this?"

Ms. Keller said if you look at what City Council does on a weekly basis, on a usual night, maybe more than half of it relates to the physical world somehow and maybe upper administration should have a background in design or physical planning and that kind of thinking.

PLACE identified numerous principles and guiding values for consideration by the City Manager and Council presented by Chairman Stoneking:

1. The informal name currently being used is both misleading and not altogether representative of the issues at hand. Rather than suggesting that a sole individual in the form of an architect is the correct path forward we advise being more open about the potential decision. There might be a new department, or individuals added to several departments. Skill sets might be better found among planners or urban designers. The entire issue might be best resolved in the form of a commonly held, City-wide attitude about design, zoning and architecture where no new positions are created. Thus we think of the “title” more broadly and have begun to use terms such as; “Strategic Planning”, or “Long Range Visioning” and so forth. We find it is crucial to focus on a city that is Human Centered and Place Based.

2. The presumption is we have a need to be filled not currently served by the City’s structure or approach, that the several departments tasked with our planning objectives are not presently taking on the work of long range planning and design, that they are all but consumed with the work of reviewing plans and maintaining services, that we are reactive rather than proactive, that we are not taking a critical view of what lays ahead nor laying out objectives and methods to create a desirable future for our built environment. Recommendation #27 from the Efficiency Study Report describes the need for a new leadership position addressing these concerns.

3. This presumption is made alongside recognition of the work of the Comprehensive Plan. Whereas that effort is critical to our success it is often viewed as not fully suitable to capture the potential in how we realize the physical space of our public places. More can be done to focus on qualitative assessments, translating the goals of the Comprehensive Plan into “roadmaps” for a successful built environment. The new position or department can be charged with fleshing out the Comprehensive Plan, thinking of it as a living document for the entire City.

4. Emphasis is placed on taking a visionary approach to planning and design. We should establish a way to hold on to this vision and ensure all development adheres to and furthers the desired outcomes. This might involve additional oversight or review on the part of the new position or department.

5. As the City conducts its code audit and considers adoption of a From Based Code it is recognized that most cities with FBC's have a Code Administrator responsible for its application and interpretation. The considered position should be viewed as the curator of this code.

6. There are numerous departments already engaged in the work the city that deal with physical reality. These include, but might not be limited to, Neighborhood Development Services, Engineering, Economic Development, Parks & Recreation, Public Works and the Housing Authority. There are commissions and committees at work as well such as the Planning Commission, Board of Architectural Review, Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Tree Commission, Bike Ped Advisory Committee and PLACE. These groups conduct important work and perform well and coordinate in the form of the Development Review Team and Lead Team Meetings. It is viewed that these ties could be strengthened and the City might enjoy improved outcomes with more emphasis on interdisciplinary objectives.

7. Fitting a new position within our current City structure presents many questions. It might be best to create a position vision within NDS answering to the department head. It might be preferred to create a new Assistant City Manager role where over-site of the various departments resolves in one place of some authority. Another structure involves placing representatives within each department who are responsible for cross-group coordination and reporting. It might be necessary that the department has a direct line to City Council.

8. Engaging the community is paramount to success. Any new position or department must work with neighborhood representatives, developers and design professionals on an ongoing basis. Getting ahead of development is of the highest importance to ensure economic drivers and urban design goals are aligned. Looking at the City as series of neighborhoods with distinct issues and identifying important nodes of opportunity can be an important part of implementation.

Research supplemental to our discussions included discussion with:
Geoff Farrell - Form Based Codes Institute (FBCI) and principal at Farrell Madden

Justin Filango - Planner, Arlington County

Alice Raucher- University Architect, UVa

Connie Warnock – Assistant University Architect, UVa

Chris Zimmerman – Smart Growth America

Andrew Gast-Bray- Albemarle County Director of Planning

Alex Ikefuna – Charlottesville Director of NDS

Maurice Jones – Charlottesville City Manager

Mike Murphy – Charlottesville Assistant Manager

Lisa Robertson – Charlottesville City Attorney

Additional discussions are planned with:

Marin Kouhry – Duane Plater Zyberk, Form Based Code Administrator for Kentlands

Marta Goldsmith – Form Based Code Institute (FBCI)

Karyn Gilvarg – Planning New Haven, Connecticut