



DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES AD HOC ADVISORY GROUP MEETING SUMMARY

January 19, 2018, 8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.
Benicia City Hall, Commission Room

1. Welcome & Introductions

In Attendance: Brandon Marshall, Rod Sherry, Trevor Macenski, Ben Jong, Toni Haughey (representing HPRC)
Staff: Shawna Brekke-Read, Suzanne Thorsen, Adrian Lopez
Consultant: Nore Winter, Marcia Klopf
Public: Brian Harkins

2. Facilitated Discussion

Quality/Character of Development in the Historic District

- Recent mixed-use development in the downtown received positive comments; Phil Joy properties near First Street and West C Street also had positive comments.
- Treasury Commons, near First Street and East D Street, has a compatible appearance and the open patio out front is very nice for the public interface with First Street.
- Perceptions about historic preservation requirements make people reticent to purchase a historic home. There are dilapidated houses in the historic district with deferred maintenance; renovation is very costly.
- There is a need to educate the community on “how to” and what can be done without any design review requirement. Permitting for a new foundation is easier than with some other types of work due to design review exemption for repair.
- The downtown is a walkable, attractive area; even homes in need of repair are purchased. Sometimes even with multiple offers.
- Guidance needed with frontage improvements (handrails, concrete restoration, ADA).

Accessory Dwelling Units

- There is strong demand for ADU's on lots with alley access, but few accessory dwellings actually being built.
- Some of the older ADU's are above garages; is this allowed? Need for controlling lead exposure was noted.

Good Examples in Peer Communities

- Healdsburg – it is challenging to adhere to design guidelines but recent project turned out great.

- Windsor – does not have a historic area but has created a historic feel in the town through their guidelines. Emphasis on scale, pedestrian movement.
- Alameda - regulations allowed changes and maintain compatibility of design; no comment on ease of use.
- Nashville, TN – interesting approach that allows for contemporary infill that looks good and also accommodating restoration. Compliance (i.e., strict adherence) is stepped down outside of key focal area (i.e., Broadway).

Areas where Clarity is Needed

- More authority should be delegated to staff; some things don't need to go to a commission.
- Design guidelines should and give clear direction.
- Address technology application to energy efficiency and city's sustainability goals– e.g., solar roof that is indistinguishable from regular roof.
- Treatment of non-contributing buildings.
- Definition of "in kind"

Illustration of Guidelines

- There should be illustrations and text, sketch renderings, before and after photos and representation of what guidelines are trying to achieve.
- Signage: barber pole restriction is inconsistent with historical character.
- Allow for signs that add character (e.g., French horn outside of music store). Shingle signs are desired.
- Window signs should not prevent the ability to see into the building. Individual letters are preferred to paper or large decals applied to the window.

Historic Preservation in Benicia

- Benicia HPRC has poor reputation. Preservation feels complex and underwhelming for people who are inexperienced with older buildings.
- The process takes several months to get through.
- There should be some PR/education of the public to increase interest/knowledge of preservation. Help newcomers to town; interact with staff.
- There should be a flow chart for general public illustrating the process, requirements.
- Educate residents of the financial incentive opportunities available such as tax credits

3. Public Comments – Comments given during discussion are reflected in summary.

4. Adjourn