

**AGENDA ITEM**  
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW COMMISSION**  
**MEETING DATE – FEBRUARY 22, 2018**  
**BUSINESS ITEMS**

**TO** : Historic Preservation Review Commission

**FROM** : Suzanne Thorsen, Principal Planner

**SUBJECT** : **DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The City has been awarded a Certified Local Government (CLG) grant from the State Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) to partially fund an update to the Design Guidelines within the Downtown Historic Conservation Plan (DHCP). The objective of the project is to provide user-friendly guidelines for the treatment of historic properties, alterations to non-historic buildings, and the design of new infill structures within the historic district, as well as to update design review procedures.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Review status update, discuss, and provide feedback to staff.

**BACKGROUND:**

The design guidelines for the Downtown Historic District were established in 1990 with the adoption of the DHCP. Opportunities to improve the downtown design guidelines have been identified by staff, the HPRC, and community members. The updated design guidelines will ensure consistency in the design review process, reinforce the character of the historic district, and provide the basis for clear and fair decision-making in the district. This project is expected to bring Benicia into alignment with historic preservation “best practices” and streamline design review procedures.

Monthly updates on the progress of the design guidelines will be agendaized for HPRC discussion. Up-to-date information about the project can additionally be found online at [www.ci.benicia.ca.us/downtowndesign](http://www.ci.benicia.ca.us/downtowndesign).

**GENERAL PLAN:**

Goal 3.1: Maintain and enhance Benicia’s historic character

- Policy 3.1.4 Promote the preservation and enhancement of historic neighborhoods, commercial areas and governmental districts.
- Policy 3.1.5 Permit new development, remodeling and building renovation in historic districts when consistent with the policies of the applicable Historic Conservation Plan.

## **INFORMATION**

### *Project Schedule*

In accordance with the grant agreement for this project, the design guidelines must be adopted by September, 2018. Progress toward the adoption remains on schedule; the first round of public workshops was completed in January, 2018 with feedback received from a range of community participants as reflected in the attached meeting summaries. A public review draft of the guidelines is expected in late March, 2018, and a community open house is tentatively scheduled for the week of April 23, 2018.

### *Ad Hoc Advisory Group*

The Ad Hoc Advisory Group, which was established to provide focused feedback from the design community, did not meet in February. The next meeting of the group is scheduled for March 16, 2018. Through the spring, the advisory group is expected to discuss procedures, public information, and the public review draft of the guidelines. The agendas for these meetings have not yet been set.

### *Public Information*

Information relating to the Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines is available to the public on the project webpage, [www.ci.benicia.ca.us/downtowndesign](http://www.ci.benicia.ca.us/downtowndesign). The webpage is updated on a regular basis as progress continues on this project.

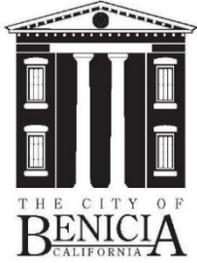
## **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Meeting Summaries, January 18-19, 2018

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# DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES HPRC SPECIAL MEETING SUMMARY

January 18, 2018, 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.  
Benicia City Hall, Commission Room

## 1. Welcome & Introductions

Noré Winter, Winter & Company, provided an overview of the project and introduced the activities for the meeting.

Commissioners von Studnitz, Maccoun, Van Landschoot, Haughey and Chair Reynolds were in attendance.

## 2. Facilitated Discussion

*Quality and compatibility of development, in terms of design, throughout the district*

- Concerns regarding clarity of information provided to the public to educate them on the value and purpose of preservation, technical language and appearance of guidelines document.
- The design expectations aren't clearly expressed; difficult to know what is expected and too many opportunities for interpretation on case-by-case basis.
- Overall quality of recent new development is good, but the process needs improvement. There is inadequate information/assistance to property owners looking to remodel.

*Successes in new construction and areas for improvement:*

- Positive comments for rehabilitation of 134 West H Street and homes on the 200 block of West K Street. Commissioners noted that sometimes remodels can take longer than expected.
- There is a need for adequate guidelines to review rear additions, new foundations, roof dormers etc. The guidelines also need to reference Preservation Briefs. Comments were made about the unpredictability and cost of the design review process.
- Often, the success of new construction and rehabilitations is more due to the motivations of the property owner than the HPRC's actions.
- Incompatibilities were identified for buildings that had been constructed as "commercial" and then converted to residential shortly afterwards; as well as newer residences that appear out of scale with the surrounding area.
- Though the city has made strides in the past 20 years there is more that needs to be implemented.

*Improvement of Guidelines*

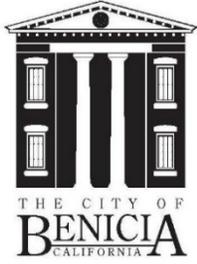
- There should be a sub-committee of commissioners to help residents in the planning stage.

- Guidelines should be clear and show what can or cannot be done.
- There should be meetings and handouts, outreach within the district, to contractors, architects and new residents.
- Teaching the value of preservation and why preservation is important, in addition to city requirements.
- Address landscaping standards, fences, hardscape, and ADU mobility issues

*Final Thoughts*

- Community members present commented that it should be easier for homeowners to understand what they can/cannot do before they get too deep into designs, instead of design by trial and error.
- The dynamic between the city and residents should change so that the city is viewed as a resource to help people through the process, rather than an adversary.

**3. Adjourn**



# DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSION SUMMARY

January 18, 2018, 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.  
Benicia Camel Barn, 2060 Camel Road

## 1. Welcome & Introductions

In Attendance: Jerry Hayes (Benicia Main Street), Lionel Largaespada (Downtown Business Alliance/Economic Development Board), Leann Taagepera (Historic District), Bonnie Silveria (Benicia Historical Society), Mike Caplin (State Parks Association), Donnell Rubay (Historic District), Elizabeth D'Huart (Benicia Historical Museum)

Staff: Suzanne Thorsen, Adrian Lopez, Shawna Brekke-Read

Consultant: Nore Winter, Marcia Klopf – Benicia Historical Museum

## 2. Facilitated Discussion

Participants discussed goals for historic preservation in Benicia, identifying the need for:

- Education, communication and historical branding of the uniqueness of Benicia so that both residents and visitors can immediately connect with the story behind Benicia.
- Revealing the economic benefits of historic preservation
- Educating residents that the value of preserving Benicia's structural history is not just to save everything old, but to keep Benicia's story that is still living on in the historic buildings of the city.

Priorities associated with the design guidelines include:

- Clear, simply stated information that defines each step in the rehabilitation or restoration process and that builds understanding for the purpose and goal of the process.
- Clearing up inconsistent information and eliminating the need for interpretation in order to help people to do the project the right way.
- Help people to see historic preservation and their buildings in a whole new way.
- Help staff to offer greater assistance to residents; create guidelines that allow some review authority to be directed to staff and direct people to the appropriate resources.

- Not only address design and materials concerns but also maintain the ability to be cost effective.
- Guidelines must address compatibility, what types of changes appropriate on a historic building, and creating a visually unified appearance.

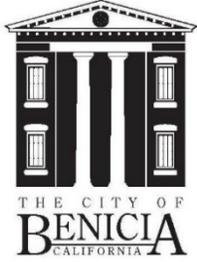
Preservation success stories in Benicia include:

- Preservation and adaptive reuse of the Camel Barn and Commanding Officers Quarters
- Downtown residential and commercial buildings including the Camellia Tea Room, Crooks Mansion, Roseanna's Bakery, Plein Air Gallery, Jurgensen Building (moved to current location at West E and 1<sup>st</sup> Street)

Additional comments:

- As people are attracted to Benicia because of its historic ambiance, they begin to see the value of preservation both aesthetically and economically. This is a motivator to maintain and rehabilitate historic buildings.
- Closing discussion covered downtown considerations regarding signage, public art, parking, and areas where current design guidelines failed.

### **3. Adjourn**



## DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES PUBLIC WORKSHOP SUMMARY

January 18, 2018, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.  
Benicia Public Library, Dona Benicia Room

### 1. Welcome & Introductions

Suzanne Thorsen, Principal Planner, welcomed those in attendance.

Noré Winter, Winter & Company, provided an overview of the project and introduced the activities for the meeting.

Seven community members were in attendance.

### 2. Individual Exercise

Participants were invited to complete individual worksheets for discussion. The participants' feedback is summarized in 3., below.

### 3. Facilitated Discussion

*Preservation Goals for the Downtown Historic District.* Participants discussed goals for the downtown district, including commercial and residential areas, and made the following key comments.

- Preserve the integrity of historic architecture. Historic buildings should be restored or preserve their original look.
- The integrity of the district should be preserved while allowing for practical use, energy efficiency and environmental sustainability
- The character and style of non-contributing buildings should be recognized; they should not be forced to be something that they aren't.
- Work with what is there and recognize the character/style of non-contributing buildings. Changes should be compatible.
- Present information to the public in such a way that people are inspired to take on preservation/restoration projects.

*Character Areas.* Participants discussed geographic areas of the historic district which may have a unique character. Several areas were discussed, but there was not strong consensus on a distinct architectural character.

- Upper First Street has more offices and less pedestrian traffic.
- J Street to D Street has more pedestrian usage.
- West J - West K – East H have lots and alleys

*Identifying Successes and Issues.* Participants identified recent successes and issues with renovation and new construction projects.

- New house at corner of West I Street and West Second Street. Some participants felt that it is in keeping with the style of the neighborhood

- particularly on the front facade; while others commented that the length/mass of the house is out of proportion with the area.
- The challenge of encourage creative/contemporary design versus compatibility with historic homes was discussed.

#### 4. Visual Preference Activity

##### *Commercial*

Styles identified as compatible with the First Street commercial district were generally two stores in height with a scale and form that complements the surrounding area.

Architectural styles identified as compatible were suggestive of a historic style and invited pedestrian activity from the street. Features noted as appropriate included traditional materials (stucco, lap siding), clear customer entries and storefront awnings; simple overall detailing; windows along the lower and upper story facades facing the street; framing around windows; and “modules” reflecting traditional storefront width.

Modern and single story buildings were identified as incompatible. Features identified as out of place in the downtown include: Deep overhanging eaves that are inconsistent with the downtown; buildings that emphasize vertical elements or exceed two stories; contemporary louvered awnings or flat canopies; lack of windows, particularly at the street level;

##### *Multi-Family Residential and Live/Work*

The participants were asked to evaluate transitional buildings for multi-family use or live/work. These types of buildings would typically be located immediately to the east or west of First Street.

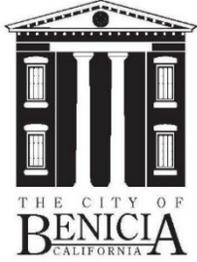
Styles that employ traditional rooflines, scale and residential features (such as porches and balconies) were preferred. While simple detailing was viewed favorably, bland and repetitive facades received a negative response. Landscaped setback areas were preferred. As with commercial buildings, participants commented that contemporary buildings and buildings with a vertical emphasis were out of character with the district.

##### *Single-Family Residential*

The participants were asked to evaluate single family/duplex buildings that would be located in the residential area of the historic district. These types of buildings would typically be located immediately to the east or west of First Street.

Styles that employ techniques to reduce the appearance of mass (building modulation, covered porches, recessed garages and gable or hip roofs) were identified as appropriate. Simple architectural design and variation in materials and form were identified as appropriate. A strong vertical emphasis, street-facing garages and height exceeding two stories were identified as incompatible.

#### 5. Adjourn



# 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**