

# Memorandum

**TO:** COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Rosalynn Hughey

**SUBJECT: COUNCIL PRIORITY #20:  
UPDATE URBAN DESIGN  
GUIDELINES**

**DATE:** October 9, 2018

Approved



Date

10/15/18

**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** Citywide

## RECOMMENDATION

Accept staff's update on the Urban Design Guidelines, including the approach, schedule and outreach strategy for the Downtown Design Guidelines.

## OUTCOME

Receive committee input on the Design Guidelines Update process.

## BACKGROUND

In August 2017, the City received a \$198,984 grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to begin the process of updating the City's design guidelines. This funding, along with City matching funds, provided a new Planner IV position on the Citywide Planning team to focus on urban design. The position was filled in January 2018 with the promotion of a staff member.

### *Grant Objectives*

The Knight Foundation grant lists the following objectives for the Design Guidelines Update:

- Consistency – The General Plan's vibrant neighborhoods and community design sections will be the basis for all design guidelines updates, focusing on San Jose's transition from its suburban past to a more urban and engaged future. This will result in tangible benefits to San Jose's residents and workers, including improved physical health, connectivity, sense of community, sustainability, and identity.
- Responsiveness – Updated design guidelines will be more responsive to current and anticipated building types. The result will create higher quality places that provide a mix

of uses, amenities and connectivity. The updated guidelines also respond to the Knight grantee's recommendations as well as recommendations from SPUR, the Downtown Association and other stakeholders.

- Better Outcomes – Planning staff will have improved tools to review project proposals. New design guidelines will result in higher quality architecture, an enhanced public realm, and more vibrant public spaces across San Jose.

## **ANALYSIS**

### ***Existing Guidelines***

The City has many different sets of design guidelines, some dating back to the 1990s, listed in categories below.

- Downtown/Historic:
  - Downtown Design Guidelines, July 2004
  - San José Downtown Historic Design Guidelines, Draft May 2004
  - Downtown San José Historic District Design Guidelines, November 2003
  - Saint James Square Historic District Design Guidelines, October 1989
  - Your Old House: Guide for Preserving San José Homes, August 2003
- Residential:
  - Residential Design Guidelines, February 1997
  - Single-Family Design Guidelines, December 1999
- Nonresidential:
  - Commercial Design Guidelines, May 1990
  - Industrial Design Guidelines, August 1992
- North San José Design Guidelines, September 2014

Additionally, other Council-adopted policy documents, such as the Diridon Station Area Plan, Guadalupe River Park Master Plan and Urban Village Plans, as well as area plans prepared by the former Redevelopment Agency, also contain design guidelines for specific areas. As a result, a development project may be expected to conform to multiple sets of guidelines depending on its location and use. For example, a high-rise residential project with ground-floor retail located in the Downtown in or within 100 feet of the Downtown Historic District is expected to comply with the Downtown, Downtown Historic District, Residential and Commercial Guidelines, which may contain conflicting guidance. This results in uncertainty for both applicants and the development review team.

### ***Phasing Strategy***

Due to the large number of guidelines to be updated and limited resources, staff is pursuing a phased approach for the guidelines update.

1. **Downtown Guidelines.** An integrated set of guidelines for the Downtown and Diridon Station Area, the focus of the City's most intense development activity, is the first phase of the update process. A Master Service Agreement and Task Order were executed with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) and work began in April 2018, led by the City Design team.
2. **Citywide Residential and Commercial Guidelines.** In April 2018, the City was awarded a \$200,000 MTC Priority Development Area Staffing Grant to provide in-kind consultant support for the second phase of the guidelines update: the Citywide Residential and Commercial Guidelines. In August 2018, a contract for work was executed between MTC and Urban Planning Partners with Van Meter Williams Pollack architects as a subconsultant. The City Design team is also leading this work.
3. **Berryessa BART Urban Village Guidelines.** The urban design guidelines for the Berryessa BART Urban Village will be prepared as part of this area's Urban Village planning process, which was initiated in fall 2018. A Master Service Agreement and Task Order were executed with SOM for the Urban Village Plan.
4. **Historic District Guidelines.** This fall, the City's Historic Preservation Officer is initiating historic survey work, beginning with the Downtown and Diridon Station Area. Updating the Historic District Guidelines will commence after the Downtown historic survey is completed.

#### ***Downtown Guidelines Update – Approach***

The Downtown Guidelines, which will serve as a model for later phases, are being organized with chapters that address three broad topics and track with the typical building design process.

- 1) The Site chapter has rules on the arrangement of activities on the site, particularly as they relate to and interact with adjacent public space.
- 2) The Building chapter discusses building architecture, including massing at the lower and upper levels and the design of facades.
- 3) The Pedestrian Level chapter discusses the building's interaction with the sidewalk, paseo, or open space beside it. Issues such as building transparency, different types of access, and service are important to this topic, primarily appropriate in approximately the lowest 20 feet of the building. Within each of these chapters, guidelines and standards are provided to address individual topics.

A typical guideline page contains three written sections:

- 1) The Rationale describes the issue addressed in the guideline and gives the reasoning for its importance, with references to applicable General Plan policies.

- 2) The Guideline section gives design guidance describing the ideal outcome. The Guidelines are aspirational and serve as overall guidance for improving project quality., and are thus typically qualitative.
- 3) The Standards section gives design guidance that is more specific, numeric and enforceable. Coupled with the creativity of an applicant design team, the standards are intended to ensure high architectural quality and public realm.

#### ***Downtown Guidelines Update – Public Outreach/Interest***

The first of two community workshops was held on April 19, 2018. Approximately 40 residents and stakeholders attended and participated in a brainstorming exercise to develop values and guiding principles for Downtown's design and public realm. In May and August, staff conducted focus group meetings to obtain additional feedback. Staff have engaged Downtown residents, San Jose State University, Downtown Association, SPUR, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, development and construction community and design professionals. The second community workshop to review the revised draft document will be scheduled in December 2018.

#### ***Downtown Guidelines Update – Schedule***

Staff anticipates finalizing the Downtown Design Guidelines document in January 2019. The Planning Commission public hearing is anticipated in February 2019, with final City Council action in March 2019.

### **COORDINATION**

This memorandum was coordinated with the Office of Economic Development.

### **CEQA**

Not a Project, File No. PP17-009. Staff Reports, Assessments, Annual Reports, and Informational Memos that involve no approvals of any City action.

/s/  
ROSALYNN HUGHEY, Director  
Planning, Building and Code Enforcement

For questions, please contact Tim Rood, Principal City Designer, at (408) 535-8122.