

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE
MINUTES

April 14, 2011

PRESENT: Mr. Alan Parish, Chair
Mr. William Hyde
Mr. Ramzi Kawar
Ms. Anne Sinclair
Mr. Nick Pryce
Mr. Roy McBride
Ms. Sue Sirrs
Ms. Suzanne Saul
Mr. Cesar Saleh

REGRETS: Mr. Jeff Pinhey
Ms. Angela Dean
Mr. Terry Smith-Lamothe, Vice Chair

STAFF: Ms. Kelly Denty, Supervisor, Planning Applications
Mr. Andy Fillmore, Urban Design Project Manager
Mr. Richard Harvey, Senior Planner
Mr. Andrew Faulkner, Development Officer
Ms. Julie Vandervoort, Legislative Support

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m. in Halifax Hall, 2nd Floor City Hall.

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

MOVED by Mr. Saleh, seconded by Mr. Pryce, that the minutes of March 10, 2011, as presented, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

The Chair advised the Committee that he had been asked to add two information items to the agenda: a notice of a public open house meeting on a development proposal; and an update on the process to appoint committee members or renew the terms of current members.

MOVED by Mr. Saleh, seconded by Mr. Pryce, that the Order of Business, as amended, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES/STAFF UPDATES - None

5. CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS - None

6. DELEGATIONS/PRESENTATIONS

6.1 Committee Workshop – Design Review Guidelines

Mr. Andy Fillmore, Urban Design Project Manager, provided the staff presentation on the Downtown Halifax Plan and the policy response to those challenges and opportunities.

He noted that 70 per cent of the jobs in HRM are located within five kilometres of City Hall; nonetheless, the population is declining in the urban core and the office vacancy rate is growing while the opposite is true for the suburban areas. He explained the HRMbyDesign plan of creating a single mixed-use zone and the second phase of the plan: the Neighbourhood Greenprint that encourages increased density in existing neighbourhoods that can benefit from it while preserving the character of those neighbourhoods.

Mr. Fillmore then discussed the Strategic Urban Partnership involving the three levels of government and also major stakeholders such as Capital Health, the Port Authority, and the universities. He stated that, to date, 33 representatives have accepted the invitation to work together on sustainable initiatives.

He then focussed on the Design Review Manual, explaining how the Downtown Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy, the Land Use Bylaw, and the Design Manual work together. He discussed discretionary and prescriptive authority in interpreting the Manual and emphasized that the key role of the Design Review Committee is to interpret the intent of the Manual, and to keep the larger picture in mind in terms of what the Manual is meant to achieve. He also informed the Committee that a five-year review of the Regional Plan is coming up; the review will be undertaken both by staff and through a number of studies tendered out.

In response to questions from Committee members, Mr. Fillmore, Mr. Harvey, Ms. Denty, and Mr. Faulkner clarified the following points:

- Canopies should aid in pedestrian comfort but the intent is not to have complete canopy coverage or frontage along Spring Garden Road and Barrington Street.
- There is no legislative authority for mandating living green roofs but staff strongly encourage as much roof landscaping as possible and emphasize to applicants not to use the term “visual amenity” to minimize landscaping.
- Downtown corner sites have been mapped and identified by staff with the intent to distinguish between what is mandated (for example, “civic character” sites that must meet certain criteria) and corner sites where variances are permissible. In the latter case, it is the applicant’s choice to provide a “corner treatment” or not; the Design Review Committee’s authority is limited.
- Requests for variances should be weighed with a view to avoiding a rigid interpretation of the guidelines if such an interpretation would compromise the quality of the design.
- The potential exists for the Manual’s design policies to be amended, especially as the staff are not looking for legalistic interpretations and wish to encourage the Committee’s use of its expertise.

The Committee entered into a discussion on the option of approving an application with conditions. Some members pointed out that the composition of the Committee, designed to include experience in a number of areas, was sufficient to ensure that applicants would not be put in an unreasonable position in terms of structural or design changes.

Mr. Fillmore stated that approval with conditions is a last resort, due to timelines, and it was the staff’s job to educate applicants on important design elements. Nonetheless, he added, ultimately the discretion on many points was the Committee’s. He expressed his thanks to the members for the work they had done to date and encouraged those whose terms were expiring to reapply. In response to a request from members, he agreed to provide them with a copy of his presentation.

The Chair thanked Mr. Fillmore and HRM staff for their assistance.

Ms. Sinclair retired from the meeting at 7:20 p.m., citing a previous commitment.

7. REPORTS/DISCUSSION – None

ADDED ITEMS

8.1 Public Open House

The Chair informed the Committee that there will be a public open house held Monday, April 25, 2011 at 7 p.m. at the Second Cup, 5425 Spring Garden Road ,Halifax, for the applicant to present information on a development proposal for 1580 Queen Street, Halifax.

8.2 Membership Terms/Renewals

The Chair noted that some membership terms were coming due for renewal and that he had been informed by HRM staff that this process should be complete by the end of May 2011. Some members expressed confusion as to whether a written confirmation of interest to continue on the Committee was sufficient or whether a full re-application was required.

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next regularly scheduled meeting is May 12, 2011. However, Ms. Denty informed the members that no applications were anticipated to be ready to come before the Design Review Committee in May.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

Julie Vandervoort
Legislative Support