

Memorandum

City of Lawrence-Douglas County Planning & Development Services

TO: Historic Resources Commission
Planning Commission

FROM: Michelle Leininger, AICP, Planner II

CC: Scott McCullough, Planning and Development Services Director
Sheila Stogsdill, Assistant Planning Director
Lynne Zollner, Historic Resources Administrator

Date: June 20, 2013

RE: Downtown Redevelopment Memo Follow-up

The Planning Commission and the Historic Resources Commission met on March 13th and April 10th regarding the memo about Downtown Redevelopment Issues and Opportunities. This memo is a follow-up to the two meetings with options for recommendations for the items in the memo.

Issues

Item 1: The level and location of density and height in the Downtown area.

One main discussion point is how buildings' height, mass and scale on Vermont and New Hampshire Streets relate to Massachusetts Street on the one hand, and the residential neighborhoods to their other side on the other hand.

Density is usually implemented through building height and massing. Under the currently adopted guidelines, Massachusetts Street would be taller, overall, than Vermont and New Hampshire Streets; however, as this report reflects, the overwhelming majority of parcels poised for development are on Vermont and New Hampshire Streets. If Downtown's density is to increase, then it must do so on Vermont and New Hampshire Streets since Massachusetts Street is predominantly built-out at a height of 2-3 stories.

The Downtown Design Guidelines state the following about the height of Massachusetts Street:

"By historic development, dense rows of two and three story commercial storefront buildings, anchored by larger structures on the block corners, make up the single most identifying characteristic of downtown Lawrence's primary corridor."

The Guidelines also state the following about where density, and thus height, should occur in Downtown:

“Densities are expected to be greater along Massachusetts Street and less dense along peripheral streets. Massachusetts Street blocks should be anchored with significant structures at the corners, with an emphasis on retail uses at the street level.”

The Guidelines state the following about the height of new development:

“The height of new buildings and additions shall relate to the prevailing heights of nearby buildings. New construction that greatly varies in height from adjacent buildings shall not be permitted.”

Options:

1. Find that the current guidelines and process has and will produce appropriate results and maintain the current regulations and guidelines which reviews projects within context of the specific property.
2. Find that there is a discrepancy between the code and guideline. Change the code to reduce the height of the CD District down from the current 90' and revise the guidelines to speak more directly to transition and/or height limits.

Item 2: Do the Downtown Design Guidelines appropriately address the nature of parking (angled and parallel) in the Downtown area and would intersection improvements, such as traffic circles, be appropriate to serve the multi-modal demands in the Downtown area?

The Downtown Design Guidelines include a standard that requires on-street parking on Massachusetts Street be angled and parking on Vermont and New Hampshire Streets to be parallel. The Guidelines are silent on intersection improvements such as roundabouts.

Options

1. Adhere to the existing policies in the Downtown Design Guidelines.
2. Review and determine actions on proposals on case-by-case basis, recognizing that it may be appropriate to veer from the guidelines in specific instances.
3. Complete a comprehensive study of parking and intersections downtown and revise current policies as appropriate.

Item 3: The establishment of policies that address the use of city surface parking lots as development demand increases.

There are 11 city-owned surface parking lots and 4 private vacant lots that have potential to develop. The city-owned parking lots have received some attention recently for their development opportunities. As long as these parcels maintain their function as public parking in some capacity, it is feasible that they may also be built up for a mixed use project.

Options

Option 1: Establish the following policies:

1. Any development on a city-owned lot should maintain the same number of, or more, public parking spaces as existing at time of development, as well as accommodate all of the code-identified demand generated by the proposed uses, even though there is no requirement to provide parking in the CD district. This is so parking is not reduced in a relative manner due to the increased demand of any new development.
2. Any city-owned lot should undergo a public process for consideration for development. One process option, for example, would be to issue a Request for Proposals so that all development options are considered as the lot is converted.
3. All development should adhere to the development standards of the Downtown Design Guidelines, any historic review, and any other codes, policies, and processes adopted at the time of development.

Option 2: Respond to development proposals as they are presented to the city.

Action Requested

Provide comments/recommendations on the issues and report the recommendations back to the City Commission.