

## Implementation Strategies

### Introduction

Design guidelines function to guide construction, expansion, and renovation of new and existing structures. They assist the city in reviewing development proposals. They allow development to occur in a way that is consistent with the community vision. In general, design guidelines serve three primary functions:

- They serve to preserve, protect, and enhance the physical character of a community, or sections of a community, in the public realm.
- They serve to guide owners, developers, and designers who undertake to redevelop and renovate existing properties or to develop new properties.
- They serve to assist communities in reviewing development or redevelopment proposals.

In order for design guidelines to function in the capacity outlined above some approach to implementation needs to be adopted. This section will explore various approaches to implementation. First, however, it will be useful to explore some concepts.

### Administration

Design standards and guidelines contained in the Belle Plaine Design Manual shall be administered primarily by the Design Committee in support of the City Council, Economic Development Authority, and Planning and Zoning Commission.

Under City Code the Design Committee reviews all development projects within commercial and industrial districts. The Design Committee also reviews certain signs, loan/grant requests, and public projects. The Council, EDA, or PZ Commission may request input from the Design Committee on any manner of projects.

When Design Committee review is specifically required under Code, the entity proposing a development project shall submit an application on a form approved by the City for Design Committee review.

Substantial projects shall address the following design principles:

#### 1. **REGIONALISM:**

*The Design Committee expects architecture (a) will be regionally appropriate, (b) will make sense for Minnesota's climate, (c) will be considerate of available local and sustainable materials; and (d) will respect local history.*

- Applicants will consider and communicate to the Committee how historic building materials traditionally used in the Belle Plaine area influenced the design (brick, wood, stone) and how significant or historic building types in Belle Plaine should and did influence the design.

## 2. **CONTEXT:**

*The Design Committee expects the architect will look beyond the building site and take in the larger picture, including: adjacent buildings, pedestrian access, roads, regional issues, and environmental effects to building sustainability and how the building will age over time.*

- Applicants will consider and communicate to the Committee how traffic affected the design – noise, car lights, access, pollution, congestion.
- Applicants will consider and communicate to the Committee if/how topography and/or water influences the site and design; tell us how those factors are accommodated in the design.
- Applicants will identify what positive features/clues are being borrowed from neighboring buildings and why those are important. Applicants will inform the Committee of what, if any, surrounding features can be ignored and why.
- Applicants will consider and communicate to the Committee any significant views from the site and how the design acknowledges those views. Applicants will identify whether or not the proposed building is blocking views from other buildings.

## 3. **SCALE & MASS:**

*The Design Committee expects the architect will consider the physical relationship of the proposed structure(s) to pedestrians and nearby buildings. The Design Committee expects the architect will consider how the proposed building scale compares with the surrounding buildings (higher, longer, shorter). The Design Committee expects architects proposing scales substantially different from surrounding buildings will employ strategies to reduce the impact (color, massing, composition). The Design Committee expects architects designing isolated object buildings (big box, high rise, etc) will employ massing strategies (carving) to affect scale at the pedestrian level and the distant view.*

- Applicants will consider, illustrate visually, and communicate to the Commission how/why the proposed design scale and mass works in respect to adjacent buildings, pedestrians at the street level, and the distant panoramic view.

## 4. **COMPOSITION:**

*The Design Committee expects the architect will thoughtfully consider arrangement of surfaces and shapes. The Design Committee expects sensible and clear, confident composition of the building's base, middle, and top. The Design Committee values simplicity and common sense in building elements (columns, arches, canopies, roof forms, dormers, banding, striping, brick patterns, windows, awnings, balconies, etc). Alignment of elements should be logical (not random) and proportionally correct.*

- If the building is abstract, the Applicant will inform the Committee of what

## Implementation Strategies

informed the decision to create an abstract building design. The Applicant will share with the Committee why certain forms and materials (description and number) were chosen.

- If the building is symmetrical the Applicant will share with the Committee what steps have been taken to ensure the design doesn't appear too rigid or massive.

### 5. **HIERARCHY:**

*The Design Committee expects the architect will purposefully place appropriate visual emphasis on specific building elements. The Design Committee expects the architect will consider what elements are intended to dominate and why. The Design Committee expects main entries to be carefully designed. The Design Committee expects sign sizing to be appropriate. The Design Committee expects large blank surfaces to recede rather than dominate the design.*

- The Applicant will tell the Design Committee why/how elements that dominate the design were chosen and why those dominant elements are appropriate.
- The Applicant will tell the Committee how sign sizing decisions were made and why the proposed signage is appropriate and not too small or too dominant.

### 6. **COLOR:**

*The Design Committee expects colors will be carefully chosen based on regional characteristics, how colors affect adjacent buildings, Belle Plaine's historic building palettes, and the fact dark colors recede and bright colors dominate. The Design Committee highly values classic or traditional color palettes to trendy palettes. The Design Committee expects the paint scheme will compliment and not confuse the design.*

- The Applicant will tell the Design Committee why a particular palette of colors was chosen for the project.
- Consideration of using bright colors as accents versus dominating the design is expected. If the color palette is aggressive or multi colored the Applicant is expected to inform the Committee of why that is appropriate.

### 7. **TRANSFORMATION:**

*The Design Committee expects the architect will consider the building's next life including how well the building will adapt to changing tenants, how durable building materials will be, and if it is a 'brand' building what impact the brand design will have on its intended lifespan.*

- Applicants are to share with the Design Committee measures taken to ensure the building will be sustainable and timeless in occupancy.

### 8. **SIMPLICITY:**

*The Design Committee highly values clear, confident, and calm design. The Design*

*Committee highly discourages multiple shapes and forms resulting in a chaotic visual presentation. The Design Committee discourages random decorations and faux elements.*

- Applicants shall inform the Design Committee of ideas and/or concepts on which the design is based. The Applicant shall inform the Committee of how the architecture reinforces said concepts and/or ideas.
- If proposed designs employ random decorations or faux elements the Applicant will tell the Committee why/how the building will suffer without random decorations or faux features.
- If proposed designs employ multiple shapes or forms the Applicant will explain how clarity in the complexity has been provided and how visual chaos has been discouraged.

### Implementation Strategies

The City of Belle Plaine desires to maintain and enhance its rural small town character while, at the same time, fostering opportunities for redevelopment in the City's core and opportunities for economic development and commercial expansion along the US Highway 169 corridor. To accomplish these goals it is recommended that the City:

- Adopt the Belle Plaine Commercial Boulevard as a mechanism to integrate a common, cohesive identity for all commercial districts in the city.
- Adopt a 'district' approach to planning, public sector investment, and application of design guidelines to recognize unique character, capitalize on divergent opportunities, and prioritize public sector investments.
- Adopt design guidelines that provide opportunity for flexibility and creativity in the design of redevelopment and new development.
- Formalize the design guidelines in regulations that encourages adherence for both redevelopment and new development.
- Formalize a design review process, through a design review committee, that supports a collaborative and iterative approach to review to maximize communication and minimize misunderstanding between the development team and the design review committee.
- Formalize an incentive program to encourage and reward compliance with the design guidelines.
- Amend the Belle Plaine City Code Section 1103.07 Site Plan Review, 1107.17 Highway and Industrial Design Standards and Section 1107.22 Preservation of Belle Plaine's Character Design Standards to reference the Belle Plaine Commercial Boulevard, Downtown, US Highway 169 Corridor, and Gateways Design Districts as areas where these sections of the City Code directly apply in addition to the other areas identified.
- Amend the Belle Plaine City Code Section 1103.07 Site Plan Review, 1107.17 Highway and Industrial Design Standards and Section 1107.22 Preservation of

## Implementation Strategies

Belle Plaine's Character Design Standards to reference the Belle Plaine Design Manual as an additional recommended reference for design guidelines within the identified Design Districts.

- Include Section 1103.07 Site Plan Review, 1107.17 Highway and Industrial Design Standards and Section 1107.22 Preservation of Belle Plaine's Character Design Standards of the Belle Plaine City Code within the Belle Plaine Design Manual, as edited below, to identify the site plan review process and pre-existing design standards.

Proposed edits to Section 1103.07 Site Plan Review, 1107.17 Highway and Industrial Design Standards and Section 1107.22 Preservation of Belle Plaine's Character Design Standards of the Belle Plaine City Code are indicated at the end of the section. Words that are bold and strike-through are proposed deletions. Words that are bold and underline are proposed additions.

### Design Guidelines vs. Design Standards

The terms 'guidelines' and 'standards' are frequently used interchangeably. For instance, in their Smart Growth program, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency offers this definition of design guidelines:

**Design Guidelines** — a set of standards that aims to maintain a certain level of quality and architectural or historic character, addressing features such as building facades, public spaces, or landscaping.

However, there is a significant functional difference in the meaning of the terms and their application.

**Guideline:** "a principle by which to determine a course of action" (Webster); and in this case, "principle" means a law explaining a thing's action. For purposes of this document, principle refers to and is defined as design intent.

**Standard:** "something established for use as a rule or basis of comparison in measuring quantity, quality, value, etc." (Webster)

Standards can be specific, detailed, and prescriptive rules for development actions. An advantage of their specificity is that they can be clearly interpreted by the owner, developer, or designer and their application clearly evaluated by the design review committee. However, due to their specificity, standards often discourage design creativity and impose serious, sometimes unintended constraints on development form or function.

On the other hand, guidelines can set forth an overall design intent which may have numerous and varied means of accomplishing the intent, and therefore may be less prescriptive and specific than standards. Fundamentally, design guidelines are performance-based. Some significant advantages of performance-based guidelines

are that they allow creativity and innovation in the design of development and tend to avoid unintended constraints while still outlining the intended outcome. However, since they lack specificity, they are more difficult to interpret and evaluate by the development team and the design review committee. Successful implementation of design guidelines requires a collaborative and, often, an iterative design review process. (Adopted from Silverdale Design Guidelines: Design Workshop 1, March 2005)

### **Mandatory vs. Interpretive Guidelines/ Standards**

Mandatory refers to obligatory application of design standards/guidelines. This approach involves formalizing the guidelines/standards in regulations that control development. Many cities in Minnesota establish design guidelines/standards for areas of interest through their zoning ordinances. These design standards are generally rooted in the city's authority to protect the general welfare and safety of the public.

Interpretive refers to an explanation or translation of a design intent, where a variety of conceptualizations is possible and may require more flexibility in implementation. This approach does not formalize the guidelines/standards in regulations that control development. While adherence to the guidelines/standards may be encouraged through incentive programs, this approach is fundamentally voluntary.

(Adopted from Silverdale Design Guidelines: Design Workshop 1, March 2005)

The concepts of 'guideline vs. standard's and 'mandatory vs. interpretive' are key to this document. They imply a set of trade-offs in implementation that must be considered:

- Flexibility vs. predictability: Is the guideline/standard intended as a rule of law or a rule of individuals? Should the area for negotiation be wide or narrow? To what extent should this be determined by the Code or by practice?
- Flexibility vs. administrative cost: What are the costs to the applicant, to opponents, and to the City's tolerance for hearings?
- Development cost vs. quality: Guidelines/standards should be written with an understanding of their effect on developers' and consumers' costs and on the quality of the environment for both user and community at large.
- Preservation vs. development: Will a particular regulation stimulate or dampen change in uses, users, or appearance?
- Under regulation vs. over-regulation: How does the community find the least number of rules that will do the job?

### **Incentive Programs**

Communities can utilize a number of incentive programs to encourage compliance with the objectives embodied in the design guidelines/standards:

- To a certain degree, public sector spending, through a community's Capital Improvement Program, for example, can be directed toward public realm improvement projects in priority areas where development or redevelopment

## Implementation Strategies

projects that comply with the community's adopted design guidelines have been proposed.

- Proposed projects that comply with the community's adopted design guidelines can receive special consideration on other issues requiring a variance such as density, bulk, parking, etc.
- The community's fee structure for applications, permits, and reviews can be reduced on a sliding scale based on compliance with the design guidelines/ standards.
- The community can collaborate to seek funding for, and/or directly invest in, programs to support private sector development/redevelopment that enhances the public realm.

### Example Approaches to Design Guideline Implementation

Two example approaches to implementing design guidance as a mechanism to maintain a certain preferred physical character are outlined below. The communities, Wayzata and Stillwater, are local but the approaches represent the wide variation discussed above.

The City of Wayzata wanted to direct the physical character of development in several portions of the city and chose to accomplish this goal by implementing a set of prescriptive design standards tailored to each area of concern. The design standards are intended to influence architectural character specifically. Master planning, spatial relationships, and connections to the public realm are guided by the City's comprehensive plan. The City outlines a specific design review process that is separate from review of the technical/engineering requirements. The standards are embedded within the City's code and zoning ordinances and, therefore, enforceable as law. Violation is a misdemeanor.

The City of Stillwater had a more focused area of concern and developed a design manual intended specifically for its commercial historic district. The core of the design manual is a set of design guidelines that represent recommendations for appropriate character of new development or redevelopment within the district. The guidelines were intentionally meant to be flexible, allowing a greater range of design creativity, accommodating unique solutions for unique situations, and avoiding the danger of 'sameness'. The City enacted an ordinance establishing a Design Review Committee and Design Permit Requirements. The review process integrates architectural design with site and off-site spatial relationships. Recommendation for approval is based on the perception of the design review committee that the proposed design meets the intent of the guidelines. The Committee's report is reviewed by the Planning Commission which makes final recommendations to the City Council which, in turn, grants final approval. The design guidelines are separate from the City's zoning ordinance and represent an additional consideration to the project approval process in the commercial historic district.

The approach that the City of Belle Plaine implements, as recommended in this document, falls in between the approaches of Wayzata and Stillwater. The design guidelines identify the character the City wishes to maintain and enhance while providing flexibility to owners, developers, and designers in achieving that character. Although not prescriptive in nature, they are embedded within the City Code and therefore enforceable. Finally, the design review process, also embedded in City Code, supports a collaborative approach between the private sector and the City.

### Wayzata, Minnesota

The City of Wayzata, Minnesota, has created design standards that allow the city to grow while maintaining its unique small town character. The standards guide the architectural character and scale for new buildings in certain areas of the city. The primary functions of Wayzata's design standards, as quoted from the city's 2004 Design Standards are as follows:

- To guide applicants wishing to expand, renovate existing structures or construct new buildings or parking within the commercial districts of the City;
- To assist the City and the public in reviewing development proposals;
- To improve the City's public realm — its streets, sidewalks, walkways, and its streetscape and landscape treatments.

Wayzata established three design districts that have their own respective design standards. The Lake Street District embodies design standards that foster a "Main Street" character. The Bluff District addresses an area with diverse issues, and is designed to protect the aesthetics of the bluff slope and ridge. The Wayzata Boulevard District addresses a commercial strip leading into the town.

Wayzata's design standards are embedded into the zoning ordinance of the city. "For the purpose of protecting the general welfare, the public, and safety of the City and also to ensure the physical, aesthetic, and economic viability for the city of Wayzata, the Design Standards have been created and are hereby established" –Wayzata Zoning Ordinance

The ordinance directs all non-residential and multi-family residential developments that occur in the established design districts consult and comply with the design standards for that district.

The design standards work in a method similar to the site plan review process. A party interested in substantial exterior renovating or constructing a new building within a design district would consult the design standards to create a design that conforms to the standards. The party then submits their designs to city staff for review. City staff makes recommendations for approval or denial to the planning commission, who then decides whether to issue a building permit for the project. Plans that do not conform to design standards can be approved through a process similar to variance procedures. The city can issue a "stop work" order if construction does not follow the approved plans.

## Implementation Strategies

Wayzata's design standards are effective because they are embedded in the zoning ordinance. The city established a clear link between design standards and the need to protect the general welfare, the public, and safety of the city. This makes design standards legally enforceable because cities have a right to regulate for the general welfare, the public, and safety.

### **Stillwater, Minnesota**

The City of Stillwater, Minnesota, has developed a design manual composed of an accumulation of design guidelines that apply in two specific situations:

- For site or building alteration permits issued by the heritage preservation commission.
- For specific types of projects within the downtown plan district and the west business park plan district.

Quoting from the Design Manual, the design guidelines are intended as “recommendations created to direct and lead Stillwater in its endeavor to conserve and enhance its appearance, preserve its historical and/or architectural assets, protect and encourage areas of existing or potential scenic value, and assist its property owners. They encourage the community to effectively work together as new construction, renovation, and restoration is proposed.”

“The design criteria and associated guidelines form the core of the design manual. Each guideline or criteria will contain a background paragraph that describes the history of that criterion. Hopefully this will help to explain why this criterion is important in preserving the character of Stillwater. The guidelines are not formulas or specific solutions, but are meant to be flexible recommendations to develop compatibility within the building, its neighbors, and the area. The guidelines are intentionally flexible, thus avoiding the danger of sameness. They are meant to encourage rather than insist, and discourage rather than prohibit. They guide, but they cannot design. Hopefully, the inherent flexibility of the process will allow for creative, imaginative design while preserving the historic attributes and maintaining the pedestrian character of downtown Stillwater.”

While the design guidelines themselves are not embedded in the City Code, the existence of the Design Review Committee and the design permit and review process is. Upon application by an owner, the design review committee reviews the design plans for both architectural character and site/off-site spatial relationships. The committee then recommends to the planning commission which may impose conditions for approval. The planning commission makes recommendation to the city council which makes final decision for approval.