

III. Designations

Reports & Recommendations by Preservation Staff

A. Preliminary Review of a proposal to rescind designation of a portion of the Lower Downtown Historic District

Introduction by E. Shigeta:

Treat this as an introduction. To do this we'd have to reverse the designation process. The Lower Downtown Board has seen this and they say it's probably appropriate to remove. This is important because of timelines. You could set August 16th for the Public Hearing. They'll present the full application to the full Commission, or to the subcommittee.

Comments by Tyler Gibbs:

We want it clear there are public policy issues. But the model and how it illustrates the project would be good for Mr. Tryba to discuss.

Presentation by David Tryba:

Our site is 14th and Larimer. We're here to talk about the concept we've been looking at. Most of you will remember the old city hall. There's a view ordinance that precludes development. Doing zoning analysis we found that the height limit was 55' and we were required to build to the property line. The current zoning is B-5 with a LoDo overlay. The other section of the property is R-5. We'd rezone that. R-5 doesn't have an overlay.

E. Schlosser: R-5 doesn't allow residential?

K. Buckley: It's institutional, college dormitories, that kind of thing.

D. Cohen: Overlay?

K. Buckley: The overlay on the B-5 allows 220' maximum.

D. Tryba: But it's in the Historic District and that limits it to 55'. We ran the numbers on the project and it would fit in 220,000 square feet of the F.A.R. It would be an interesting project, great views, interesting shape. Mr. Geller asked us to think outside the box. This proposal didn't seem inspiring to him. He wanted us to dream big.

D. Cohen: What's the square footage of the site?

D. Tryba: I don't know.

R. Geller: 60,000 square feet with 30,000 square feet in the creek.

D. Tryba: We came up with a couple of ideas. Would Mr. Geller be open to a reduction in square footage, increasing the view plane, and leaving part of the site open space? We looked at the site as a blank slate on the edge of LoDo. It's easy to do if the site was removed but the guidelines extend the district to our property. This building caused the edge of the district to be less clearly defined. We thought of leaving the north site open and allow access to the creek. The open space would go down to the creek. Putting the density over the south portion was problematic. We thought of another approach, to reduce the footprint, increase the view plane, and reduce the square footage to approximately 175,000 square feet.

In the larger plan looking at a green space between Auraria and LoDo there are other green spaces that could be tied together. We had a meeting with Peter Park and his Staff. I'll let Mr. Gibbs speak to that. With their support we went before the LoDo Board. It was they who suggested secession from the district. They support this and asked us not to come back to them. So this is the first step.

D. Cohen: What's the footprint?

D. Tryba: It's a very small floor plate, 5,000 to 7,500 square feet. The upper floors, the first two form a very small lobby, occupiable floors are raised 20'. The darker footprint on the drawing is 7,500 square feet. We want to give ourselves flexibility. We might have as many as three units per floor.

D. Cohen: Parking is below grade?

D. Tryba: Yes. Visitors will access parking off Speer, turning right into a lower level garage. The height of the building is, as yet, undetermined, but with the reduction in square footage height is an issue. We thought no higher than the D&F Tower. That's reasonable, 370'.

D. Cohen: how many stories?

D. Tryba: This is residential. We're trying to work within about 30 residential floors. The model is 350' tall

D. Cohen: How tall is the new Four Seasons?

D. Tryba: It's 735', and it sits on a hill.

T. Gibbs: It approaches the height of the three tallest buildings in the City.

D. Tryba: It exceeds them.

Presentation by Tyler Gibbs:

This is initially startling, but when you see the massing, we're used to those views Looking at the planning documents, it's interesting. Blueprint talks about:

1. Scale,
2. Orientation,
3. Alignment, Transition

These are exemplified in the current regulations, respect for buildings and significant views. This project recognizes the edge of the district, views of public spaces, and the creation of open space. The 1986 Downtown plan noted this as access to Cherry Creek. There's a very worthwhile decision to be made, questions to be asked.

E. Schlosser: Any conclusions?

T. Gibbs: We're working on our staff recommendations. We explain this as open space. We understand the historic edge. So there's value in asking if this is a worthy character to maintain.

D. Tryba: I brought the model. I remember a conversation regarding Coors Field. I wanted to look at scale and I remember both sides of the conversation. These kinds of changes are worth talking about. Ten years later what have we learned.

D. Cohen: Why is the City selling this property?

K. Buckey: It's part of the deal for the new Justice Center. The City isn't a parking lot operator. The City could have made this open space.

D. Cohen: Will the other space remain open?

K. Buckey: No decision has been made on that parcel.

D. Cohen: That's key to what's happening to that property.

K. Buckey: One discussion was to remove the whole section. But we didn't want to do that yet.

D. Cohen: You've given us half the puzzle. If the other parcel could be developed then we haven't gained anything.

K. Buckey: The problem is the perfect solution takes too much time. We want to keep protection.

D. Cohen: Who supervises what happens?

T. Bishop: There are guidelines. Are we being asked to give carte-blanc?

T. Gibbs: We talked about easements.

D. Cohen: Do a PUD.

YB There could be some control.

D. Humphries: Before we start putting constraints on this, why was it included in the district in the first place?

D. Tryba: That question was raised at the LoDo meeting. It was recalled that it was for the protection of the district. It was also part of a swap with Denver Union Station.

T. Gibbs: By creating a buffer it set up this conversation.

D. Tryba: It's B-5 on one side, R-5 was there before.

E. Schlosser: Is there a precedent?

K. Buckey: in '02, for Elitch's.

E. Schlosser: Are you concerned over the process?

K. Buckey: No. It'll go through the process

E. Schlosser: Could we go against the guidelines?

S. Leonard: You could create a special review district.

K. Buckey: But LoDo didn't want to deal with it. Their big concern was open space and a smaller building.

T. Bishop: Today's task is to either set a public Hearing or send this to the designations subcommittee. Our role is simply to forward this to City Council. Theirs' is the final decision.

K. Buckey: I'd point out that we could work out a development agreement.

T. Bishop: That's what happened with Elitch's. The zoning has to be resolved.

S. Leonard: I'd like to see the first piece.

T. Gibbs: The zoning?

S. Leonard: The other section of property.

T. Gibbs: We can move those forward.

S. Leonard: With the other piece?

T. Gibbs: No.

S. Leonard: I'd like to see what's going to be down there.

T. Gibbs: That could be in five years. Nothing can happen there.

S. Leonard: You'll come back to us in five years.

T. Gibbs: It will come to you.

D. Humphries: If we vote against the Public Hearing?

E. Schlosser: It stops the project.

E. Shigeta: It's important to set the Public Hearing. We have a slot on the 16th. The whole process will come to you.

T. Bishop: But we don't have to set a Public Hearing today. Sometimes we do two reviews before setting the Public Hearing. We don't always act the first time we see it. It's hard to review the merits of Public Hearing. Is the application complete?

S. Leonard: Don't we first send it to the designation subcommittee?

T. Bishop: We can.

S. Leonard: Why not move this to the subcommittee?

T. Bishop: It needs to stay with the full Commission.

S. Leonard: I agree but, not to a setting a Public Hearing.

T. Bishop: I'd like to know if there are issues.

D. Cohen: Yes, easements, development agreements, envelopes, etc.

S. Leonard: And other options.

T. Bishop: Add it to the Larimer Square district and apply the guidelines.

E. Schlosser: Do we want to go forward?

J. Bershof: It's too fast.

E. Schlosser: This is a departure from what we want to do.

E. Shigeta: Setting the Public Hearing doesn't cause you to loose control.

T. Bishop: We believe you...

S. Leonard: I don't.

D. Cohen: There is n issue. It's been a landmark.

J. Bershof: LoDo wants us to get rid of it.

T. Bishop: Set the Public Hearing and decide if we want to go forward.

E. Schlosser: Who'll make the motion?

E. Shigeta: You will get an application.

D. Humphries: I'm not willing to set a Public Hearing on this.

E. Schlosser: Nor am I.

J. Bershof: I feel pressure from City Staff. This will set a precedent. I'm nervous. We're being pressured because of the new jail.

D. Tryba: If we provide your information needs...

T. Bishop: The big concern is that this is a buffer, but we don't hear; "This is what we're going to do." This has gone wrong before. Tell us what controls will be in place.

D. Tryba: We were clear. There will be an easement.

T. Bishop: We're looking for the real thing, something solid, written down. We're asking to see the application before we set a Public Hearing. We're saying that we often loose control once the Public Hearing is set.

S. Leonard: I think we should allow redesignation rather than letting them rescind the current designation.

D. Cohen: Are you suggesting that they detach from LoDo and attach to another district?

D. Humphries: This is on Speer Blvd.

T. Bishop: Designation may not be the right planning tool.

- D. Cohen: Is the triangle between the lines of Speer part of the district?
- K. Buckey: It could be.
- D. Cohen: If the City starts selling off public spaces... Maybe it would be better to add it to Speer Blvd.
- D. Tryba: There are a series of landmarks with different scale to Speer all along here. We're on the same side as that long procession of buildings.
- D. Cohen: As big and ugly as those buildings are, they're not tall.
- T. Bishop: We want an application and a discussion of alternatives that would allow this to go forward and provide protection.
- S. Leonard: we could establish a special subcommittee.
- T. Bishop: No.
- D. Tryba: Ms Bishop, the conversation today has been a process. We wanted your feelings on the concept.
- D. Humphries: Focus has been on the entry to LoDo. But this project doesn't address urban design along Speer and the Cherry Creek. It seems too isolated in context. It's an isolated piece without a context. It's almost an obelisk. Where's the interest, the excitement, the pedestrian connection?
- D. Tryba: It's a ¼ block from Larimer Square. Don't you think people will walk there?
- D. Humphries: No. Not in Denver.
- T. Bishop: That's a critical point. It needs to connect LoDo. It needs to tie back to downtown.
- D. Humphries: Right.
- D. Tryba: So another piece? We thought that might be too much.
- T. Bishop: It might solve the scale issue and increase pedestrian connectivity. It wants a pedestrian feel along that street through the site.
- D. Tryba: That is a pedestrian area. Cars could be on it but just pick up/drop off.
- T. Bishop: If you look at what ties in, completing the edge, and maintaining the visual connection.
- R. Geller: What are you asking?
- T. Bishop: I was suggesting another building.
- R. Geller: Retail, mixed use?
- T. Bishop: I'm not good with use.
- R. Geller: LoDo said nothing about that.
- T. Bishop: LoDo approved it.
- R. Geller: As long as we didn't develop that space.
- T. Bishop: Oh. We didn't know that.
- R. Geller: I've been committed to making that open space and connecting to Larimer. We could go back to them. We need consistent direction.
- E. Shigeta: You're going in circles. You talked to LoDo. This Commission needs an idea of what's going to happen and why.
- T. Bishop: Yes.
- D. Tryba: We could make that part of the development agreement.
- K. Buckey: There is a precedent for the LPC having design review of undesignated structures; Union Station.
- S. Leonard: the Commission does have power her and should have some control.
- T. Gibbs: Get back to principles. This may have been prompted by the Justice center but the question is what's going to happen here? We probably need to discuss changing tools.
- T. Bishop: You can't change an application at a Public Hearing. So we want to reach a tentative agreement so we can go to the Public Hearing. Maybe you can respond to our concerns in your application.
- S. Leonard: And include the adjacent piece, maybe all that should be looked at.
- T. Bishop: Can we ask for an application before we set a Public Hearing?
- D. Cohen: Yes. Like hilltop.
- J. Bershof: This is a major issue. We haven't had time to think about this.
- T. Bishop: Provide us with an application to keep this conversation going.
- T. Gibbs: We will.
- D. Tryba: In order to respond we want to focus on the point we have to answer. Articulate what it is you want.
- T. Bishop: It's:
1. An Application, including:
 - a. Your rationale for changing the boundaries of the district, and
 - b. The controls that will insure it develops as proposed, with regard to zoning, easements, guidelines, etc.
- S. Leonard: Include options, like a new district.

