

Director's Report and Recommendation

Neighborhood Design Guidelines for the Uptown Urban Center

December 6, 2018

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

This proposal is a legislative action to amend Section 23.41.010.B of the Seattle Municipal Code, approving revised neighborhood design guidelines for the Uptown Urban Center.

The purpose of these design guidelines is to provide supplemental guidance to the overarching citywide design guidelines. Neighborhood design guidelines are an important tool for the Design Review Boards in their review of proposed new development. The design guidelines provide direction with the goal of fostering urban design excellence in new multi-family and commercial projects.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

The Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) worked with other City Departments (Departments/Offices of Construction and Inspections, Housing, Parks, Transportation, Economic Development, Police, Arts & Culture, Neighborhoods) and community stakeholders to complete a planning initiative that resulted in development of an Urban Design Framework in 2016, and a rezone to allow new building types in 2017. At the time the rezone was adopted, a companion resolution (#31772) was also adopted that recommended that their respective design guidelines be revised to reflect new development standards. This proposal submitted for City Council review and action includes revised Uptown Neighborhood Design Guidelines.

Neighborhood design guidelines for the Uptown Urban Center were originally adopted in 2009, ten years after its designation as an Urban Center in 1999. While design guidelines for Uptown were reformatted in 2013 as part of an effort to standardize all neighborhood design guidelines, the 2013 amendments did not offer additional guidance for application of new development standards in project design.

Through this recent planning process, residents, businesses, and property owners in the neighborhood outlined a vision to guide the future development of the Uptown neighborhood as a mixed-use, pedestrian environment, accessible by efficient public transit, and a center for arts and culture.

In 2017, the City Council adopted new zoning standards for the Uptown Urban Center that greatly increased building height limits, included new standards to improve livability at the

ground level and provided incentives for arts uses and the preservation of unreinforced masonry buildings. These updated design guidelines for Uptown are intended to promote new development that is compatible with the existing built context and that enhances the neighborhood's pedestrian environment and unique character. These updated design guidelines carry forward ideas from the Uptown Urban Design Framework that informed the 2017 zoning code amendments.

As noted above, the Uptown Neighborhood Design Guidelines update is the final product of a multi-year planning process that also resulted in the update of the Uptown Neighborhood Plan, the Uptown Urban Design Framework, the Uptown Height and Density Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and changes to development regulations in the neighborhood.

In developing these design guidelines, the City continued its partnership with the Uptown Alliance to ensure the proposed design guidelines reflect the community's vision for development. Many of the ideas and concepts were based on earlier outreach efforts for the Urban Design Framework, Rezone Recommendation and EIS which included creation of stakeholder groups, convening of six design charrettes, and four open house events. In preparing updates to the design guidelines, the City worked with the Uptown Alliance Land Use Review Committee to assess current guidelines, review changes, and support community outreach. City staff held briefings for the Uptown Alliance and the Uptown Arts Coalition and participated in the What's New in North Downtown Community Open House to solicit comment on the draft design guidelines. Community involvement also included online engagement with over 480 individuals who subscribed to the project email list. City staff also worked with King County Metro to ensure that the design guidelines provide appropriate guidance on the potential for establishment of a co-development bus layover facility in the future. During the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) process, notice emails announcing the availability of the draft design guidelines update and the opportunity to review and comment were sent to Uptown contact list of 484 community stakeholders. No comments were received.

OPCD Proposal and Analysis

The character of the Uptown Urban Center has changed significantly since the adoption of the existing neighborhood design guidelines in 2009. The new zoning and development standards adopted in 2017 allow for high-rise development, a design issue not addressed in the existing design guidelines. The proposed design guidelines offer additional guidance in several areas:

- development standards for tall building design;
- additional guidance about the relationship between new development and the "heart of Uptown," gateways, green streets and class 1 and 2 pedestrian streets;
- eliminated duplication with the updated Seattle Design Guidelines; and
- eliminated references to character areas that are inconsistent with the community's vision of a dense, highly pedestrian-oriented, mixed use community.

Comprehensive Plan and Neighborhood Plan Consistency

The Uptown Neighborhood Design Guidelines are consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan (2017) and the Uptown Urban Design Framework Plan (2016).

RECOMMENDATION

OPCD recommends approval of the Uptown Neighborhood Design Guidelines. This action will provide the Design Review Program with clearer direction to implement the community's vision for the built and natural environments. The design guidelines reflect the values and expectations held by the community for multi-family and commercial building design excellence. In making the proposed recommendations to amend the provisions of the City's Land Use Code and in preparing the proposed design guidelines, OPCD has considered comments from citizens, affected departments, and other agencies and interests. These comments, as well as all environmental documentation that was prepared relevant to the proposed amendments, are available upon request.