

## MEETING MINUTES

**WASHBURN-FAIR OAKS HISTORIC DISTRICT  
DESIGN GUIDELINES UPDATE**

ENGAGEMENT: Focus Group 2

March 13, 2023

Location: City of Lakes Waldorf School

## Attendees:

Pigeon: Tamara Halvorsen

TEN x TEN: Maura Rockcastle, Rachel Salmela

City: John Smoley, Erin Que

MCAD: Brock Rasmussen

Mia: John Cook, HGA

Mia: Joan Soranno, HGA

Mia: Michael Sanders COO

Mia: Virajita Singh

MPRB: Colleen O'Dell

*The following minutes constitute TEN x TEN's understanding of the meeting. Please report any discrepancies to the author within seven (7) calendar days.*

---

**1. Introduction**

- a. Tamara provided an overview of how Washburn-Fair Oaks received its Historic District designations, why the period of significance is defined as 1863-1939, and what implications that has on how the Design Guidelines affect the future of different structures.
  - i. Generally, historic buildings and character are what draw folks to a neighborhood – design guidelines responsibly manage change. Keeps things operating at a scale appropriate for the neighborhood.
- b. Acknowledging the different needs of district owners made sense to the group.

**2. Discussion:**

- a. Q: What is the link between “contributing” and “period of significance”? For example at Mia the Tange addition vs McKim, Mead and White buildings – how should each part of the building be treated?
  - i. John S. answered – if you retain historic integrity and were constructed within the period of significance, you remain a contributing property.
  - ii. Morrison Building for example – falls within the period of significance, but the library does not.
  - iii. The city monitors building permit activity at the tax parcel level and district maps reflect this. It is possible that there are both contributing and non-contributing buildings on a single parcel.)
  - iv. City still reviews all buildings in the district – even if it isn't contributing, might need to be considered a bit differently.
- b. This is a Certified Local District, meaning there is a historic tax credit program available to some property owners.
  - i. Historic Tax credit program – National - 20% matching credit. Generally, a property needs to be listed in or eligible for the National Register to qualify. However, Washburn Fair Oaks is a certified local district ) – which means that is possible for owners of income-producing properties to participate in the program without National Register designation – need design guidelines that align with this program to qualify for 20%. Eligible applicants who want to participate need to both meet City

and Guideline requirements. Public-facing properties also have access to historic preservation grant opportunities that would require adherence to preservation standards.

1. In order to qualify for certified local district – you need to be contributing property within the parcel. Anything constructed through 1939 contributes.
  2. If property in its entirety contributes to the local district, then it is eligible for the tax credit – clearer than larger parcels with several buildings.
  3. Stated definition for “income-producing property” – do you have tax liabilities? There is a definition – from the IRS. Tamara can share.  
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/tax-credit-basics.htm>
- c. MCAD asked if the period of significance could change with these design guidelines? Tamara confirmed the answer is no.
- d. We don't want to create tension between opportunities. Design guidelines have a long shelf-life, think of them as 40-year documents.
- i. These live beyond 2040 plan. Joan asked how to resolve conflict between guidelines and other city planning documents?
    1. Any property reserves the right to apply for variances. City will help property owners navigate that process. For example – MCAD came to the City for a new student housing building and went through a Conceptual review with HPC, early feedback on design.
- e. What is missing from the current design guidelines?
- i. The current guidelines treat everything the same. Example conflict: why can MCAD build a 6-story building, but I cannot build a 3-story ADU.
  - ii. Sustainability limitations. Climate resilience not well defined or prioritized for approval.
  - iii. Infill construction – no guidance for new construction
  - iv. Lack of resources to support homeowners in upgrading/restoring their homes.
  - v. Brock noted that one thing clarity would provide – administrative approvals can be expedited. Also, boundaries between characters – fuzzy boundaries create challenges for how to improve different properties.
    1. From staff perspective, that is also a challenge for us too at the City. We have some outstanding postmodern architecture in the district as well.
- f. What pressures does your organization face (parking, event queuing, access, universal accessibility, growth/expansion opportunities)?
- i. We have so many (Mia)! Main building and additions. External properties that are need in TLC or completely redone. Parking is an issue. Growing organization, collecting org – need to maximize our space. How to we maximize and stay true to the historic district? Guidelines will be helpful.
  - ii. MCAD – running into similar things. We've done a lot of research with historic tax credits, none of which are viable for us. On the non-profits backs to fund this. We have contributing structures that are worthy of investing in, but others that aren't affordable to salvage/rehabilitate but are contributing. We see being in HD as an asset, Morrison for example, as opposed to other buildings.
  - iii. Accessibility (ADA) – big issue, also a place where creativity/advocacy seems to be able to support design ambition.
    1. Standards are ambiguous about this often. They blanket say “don't do it in a way that detracts from the building” which is often understood as “do not put the ramp on the front” – this is problematic in terms of what kinds of experiences you prioritize for different users.
    2. Joan asked whether this conversation is happening at a national level? Not really, as the NPS really looks to design teams to come up with creative solutions that work with each building

3. Building code also provides some challenges. 1:20 ramp with access to accessible spaces. The code review department is one of the first places the city turns to when reviewing applications.
- iv. Bringing together institutions and homeowners for Focus Group 3 will allow us to revisit some of these questions to see what concerns might emerge.
- v. Neighborhood MPRB plans – active vs passive uses can be determined in the guidelines. What other improvements long term could interface with the DG where we should anticipate
  1. Water, native planting, biodiversity, climate futures that will require reduction of lawn surfaces.
  2. Lawn vs. native planting for example
  3. Security fencing at parks vs. decorative fencing at homes
  4. MPRB currently unsure how the Design Guidelines could affect their future projects.
- vi. Does HPC have an attitude about how these guidelines are intended to address equity? For example – people like their lawns, are the guidelines pushing/advocating climate resilience?
  1. Climate resilience is important – but we need to hold the needs/goals of each institution. How are we preserving historic features and materials on contributing properties, and can we do that in a way that respects diversity and accessibility?
  2. Understanding your goals will help us cater/guide these guidelines to support those goals (diversity, equity, resilience, etc).
  3. We need flexibility – not sure how to translate that into the guidelines, but what we are seeing institutionally (Mia) is that we need to respond to the moment. For Mia – many people feel that the existing building doesn't represent them or call them in. Question needs to be asked – does it need to be preserved in the same way or can it have more flexibility?
- g. What unique opportunities does your organization bring to the Historic District that we should consider in crafting the “institutional character area” design guidelines.”
  - i. Windows for example- restoration of a wood window is expensive, but an aluminum window with same profile/color – what about those. We've had to postpone capital improvement projects due to the high cost of meeting the requirements for the period of significance. Tamara noted that the institutions are eligible for grant programs that could offset some of these costs.
  - ii. WI has a homeowner tax credit, MN does not. Homeowners don't have as much access to grant funding as institutions do. You are arts organizations – how to we guide you and still accommodate your unique identities?
  - iii. Mia- has a need for flexibility. For example, one of the goals of the institution is to be welcoming and accessible to a diverse group of users and the historic building façade (McKim) is somewhat of a barrier to certain users feeling welcomed – how can the guidelines allow for some modifications to be made to the building to support the museum's mission?
  - iv. There was a brief discussion around murals and more public art in the district since it houses two large arts-based institutions. John Smoley confirmed the City has already allowed this to happen but there may be other considerations the Design Guidelines could include to make sure there is ample room for “creativity” in the district.
- h. Did you hear anything about Mia or MCAD? They want to know that institutions have sufficient parking. We intend to draw as many people to Mia as possible. What is the neighborhood and City's take on that?
  - i. John said we have gone from off-street parking minimums to variances, to less than minimum parking, and now we have zero parking minimums what so ever.

- ii. One thing your orgs can rely on – you get a sense for what will be allowed and can plan around that. If Mia wanted to bulldoze MMW building – would have done that a long time ago. Not going to happen, but other parts of campus where programs are more flexible – guidelines are like that too.
  - iii. Safety? Homeowners did mention feeling nervous around some developments – like programming/retail on ground floor. No hiding spaces – eyes on the street.
  - iv. Will design guidelines impact underground parking? No.
- 3. **Next Steps** – Focus Group #3
  - a. Summary – parking, access, and sustainability are the main concerns for the institutions present.
  - b. Do the guidelines apply to landscape – stormwater, solar, public art, planting, topography?
  - c. Green team at Mia – bees and native gardens are desirable so making sure that is allowed and possibly prompted in the guidelines would be appreciated.
  - d. Can guidelines signal a shift – prompting climate resilience for example.
    - i. Federal level did include sustainability, there is room for this in these guidelines?