

# Staff Memorandum

Public Hearing – 01/24/2018



**Subject:** Potential Text Amendments supporting the Blue Hill District Design Guidelines

**Overview:** The Community Design Commission and Planning Commission would like to ensure that the Design Guidelines are applied to projects in a meaningful way, rather than serving simply as best practices. Staff has identified several text amendments that can meet these interests, along with other amendments to the Form-Based Code that would complement the Design Guidelines. Before developing recommended text amendment language, staff is interested in receiving Council feedback.

**Decision Point:** Gauge interest and opportunity for several associated amendments to the Ephesus/Fordham Form-Based Code (LUMO Section 3.11).

**Specific Design Topics:** The following design topics have generated substantial attention in conversations with the Commissions and with the public. They have expressed support for the guidance provided in the draft Design Guidelines, along with an interest in updating the Form-Based Code to ensure that the guidelines are applied to projects in a meaningful way.

- **Building Massing**

The Design Guidelines call for variation in building height as a way to add visual interest and reduce the scale of a building. Techniques such as upper-story setbacks or dividing a building into modules of different height can meet this objective. A text amendment could refine the dimensional requirements of a building (depth of setback, floor plate size, etc.) in a way that ensures the usage of such techniques.

- **Building Pass-Throughs**

The Design Guidelines call for building pass-throughs to be inviting and in proportion to the associated building. A text amendment would better define the necessary sizing of pass-through dimensions (width and height) in proportion with the building (building height, façade size).

**Other Potential Text Amendments to Support the Design Guidelines:** Commission members have suggested a number of other text amendments as ways for the Form-Based Code to reinforce the design vision presented in the Design Guidelines. In comparison to massing and pass-throughs, the categories and examples below would involve more minor changes.

- **Variation from Code that Maintains Design Intent**

The Form-Based Code recognizes various special circumstances that may warrant a Design Alternative, with approval from the Community Design Commission (CDC). Consider new opportunities for Design Alternatives, where the Design Guidelines provide guidance on meeting the intent of the Code.

*Examples:     Sizing of Outdoor Amenity Space  
                  Approval of Phased Redevelopment*

- **Topics Covered by Design Guidelines but not by Code**

Amend the Form-Based Code to address certain conditions that would give the Design Guidelines more authority by linking guidance with new Code requirements.

*Examples:     Appropriate transitions to adjoining neighborhoods*

# Staff Memorandum

Public Hearing – 01/24/2018



## *Building frontages along Booker Creek*

- **Stronger Link between Design Guidelines and CDC Review**  
Using references to the Design Guidelines, update the list of design elements that the Community Design Commission reviews when evaluating a project for a Certificate of Appropriateness. Add language as necessary to clarify which sections of the Design Guidelines inform which aspects of the CDC's review.
- **Update Process for the Design Guidelines**  
Establish a procedure in the Form-Based Code for periodic updates to the Design Guidelines, potentially allowing administrative approval. Acknowledge that it will be a living document that may evolve as new best practices emerge for urban design.

**Additional Text Amendments:** Apart from the Design Guidelines, this discussion of text amendment provides an opportunity to improve the Form-Based Code in the following ways:

- **Address Street Type Assignments**  
Develop standards for staff to assign a street type (Local, Collector, Non-vehicular, etc) and determine the appropriate right-of-way boundary when an applicant proposes a new street as part of a development. This update would synchronize the Form-Based Code with the Ephesus/Fordham Walkability and Open Space Standards, as well as the recently adopted Mobility Plan.
- **Name Update**  
Substitute 'Blue Hill District' for 'Ephesus Fordham District' in all instances where it appears in the Form-Based Code (consistent with the name change adopted in September 2017).
- **Technical Corrections**  
Miscellaneous correction of typos, update of cross-references, added language to improve clarity, etc.

**Next Steps:** Based on Council feedback received tonight, staff will work with the project consultant to draft text amendment language in the coming weeks. Proposed amendments should be available for public review starting in late February. The text amendment review process will then run concurrently with final review and adoption of the Blue Hill Design Guidelines.