
MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 17, 2021

TO: City of Spokane Plan Commission

FROM: Greg Francis, Todd Beyreuther, and Michael Baker, Plan Commissioners; and Chuck Horgan, Design Review Board Member

RE: Plan Commission Downtown Plan Subcommittee Report
for Proposed Downtown Spokane Plan Update

A. OVERVIEW

A subcommittee of the Plan Commission participated in discussions about the Downtown Plan Update. This memorandum summarizes the Plan Commission subcommittee's process, discussion about issues of interest, and recommendations regarding suggested action by the Plan Commission on the proposed Spokane Downtown Plan Update.

B. PROCESS

On January 21, 2021, the City Plan Commission formed the Downtown Plan Update subcommittee and designated five Commissioners to participate in the subcommittee.¹ The subcommittee was convened to allow extra time to prepare and inform interested members of the Plan Commission, along with members of the Design Review Board and others, leading into workshops and a public hearing with the full Commission in spring 2021. Three Design Review Board members and a City Council member, who had participated in the draft plan's steering committee discussions in 2020, were also invited to participate in the subcommittee. Meetings were noticed as special meetings of the Plan Commission, conducted virtually via Webex teleconference, and open to the public. Only subcommittee members and City of Spokane and Downtown Spokane Partnership staff identified themselves in attending the meetings. The subcommittee meetings were recorded and minutes were taken as meeting notes.²

¹ Plan Commission Meeting Minutes, January 21, 2021

² See attached meeting notes.

The Plan Commission subcommittee's virtual meetings were held February 17, 2021 and March 3, 2021 to identify and exchange dialogue regarding issues of interest.

- **Meeting #1:** The first meeting, on February 17, provided a general overview of the Spokane Downtown Plan draft and allowed the subcommittee members to identify and discuss topics of interest, as well as the focus of text and illustrations in various areas of the draft.
- **Meeting #2:** The second meeting, on March 3, continued discussion of two subject areas in the draft in particular: social services-related policies, and ground floor and public realm street environment.
- **Recommendation:** By email, the subcommittee members reviewed this memo and voted to forward its recommendation to the Plan Commission.

A Plan Commission workshop on the proposed Spokane Downtown Plan Update is scheduled for March 24, 2021. Following the workshop, staff will request scheduling a public hearing on the proposal, and the Plan Commission will conduct the hearing and make a recommendation to City Council.

C. ISSUES OF INTEREST – DISCUSSION

Social Services-Related Strategies and Housing Development – The draft strategies coordinate with existing adopted City of Spokane and regional policies, and introduce responses that respond to the significant concerns, expressed in input during the public process, about people experiencing homelessness and other recipients of social services Downtown. These responses address residential development, public-private partnerships, and design and management of public spaces.

- **Affordable Housing for Different Income Levels:** The Spokane Downtown Plan draft encourages development of housing for all of the differing income levels. Subcommittee members discussed whether the Plan should address the amount of housing for different income levels, and the role of other past and ongoing related efforts. They discussed whether the Plan should assign numbers of homes for low-income housing units, for example. With supporting policies to conduct necessary studies, the draft encourages identification of the amount of housing for different income levels through additional analyses of economic demand. As such, the draft supports subsequent actions to implement adequate provision of housing for all segments of the population, identifying support for housing for both low- and moderate-income residents Downtown in particular. The Measures of Success section should more clearly define the first measure of “New Affordable Housing Units” on page 116 of the draft to align with those income levels.

- Related Comprehensive Plan Definitions: Affordable Housing; Income Levels - Moderate-Income Family (80 percent of AMI); Low Income Household
- **Housing Type:** Subcommittee members also discussed whether the Plan should address the urban form of housing, and the role of other past and ongoing related efforts. They discussed whether the Plan should speak to what types of housing, such as townhomes, podium, or mid-rise. The North Bank and South University District subarea plan processes explored the urban design component particularly at the street level, and adjacent residences' relationship to the street. The draft Spokane Downtown Plan Update encourages variety in housing types.

Spokane Downtown Plan Update draft sections discussed included the following:

- LWP1.3 “Action: Build site-based partnerships with affordable housing developers and transitional housing providers into public projects and infill development and engage these organizations in economic analyses of how an affordable housing program can be implemented in Spokane’s real estate and development market” (p. 75).
- PS2.8 “Action: Consider Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) in future public and private development Downtown and implement CPTED principles as a partnership between the City and DSP” (p. 93).
- WO1.1 “Strategy: Cultivate Leadership, strengthen community partnerships, and expand organizational capacity for Downtown management” (p. 95).

Street Right-of-Way Features – Graphics in the draft are intended to represent energized streets—depicting pedestrians, bicycles, and people located in public spaces near the street edge. Rather than showing a finished appearance reflecting a long-term vision, they tend to show incremental approaches toward a transformative street design with features that provide additional public space and facilities for bicycles, separated from traffic. The subcommittee discussed weaknesses of using such an incremental approach being possibly mistaken for the long-term goal, and effectively dated or not signaling a sufficient level of commitment. Then again, strengths of using these photos are allowing people who are hesitant or resistant toward the idea of bike lanes and other alternatives, instead of preserving space for autos, to question or think about opportunities that may arise. The incremental depictions demonstrate what improvements could be made without a permanent change, or at a lower cost, while future funding is secured for a permanent change. The draft photos signal a process committed to testing, pilots, and incorporating those in lessons learned, allowing their inclusion in the 6-year street program with cutting-edge designs. Spokane Downtown Plan Update draft sections discussed included the following:

- CW1.1 “Action: Transform low traffic streets that are oversized for projected traffic by converting vehicle travel lanes to other uses in target locations such as high-quality bike facilities, expanded public spaces, and on-street parking” (p. 43).

- CW1.2 “Action: Develop a transportation plan specific to Downtown that considers multiple modes and addresses facility designs, locations, priorities, and funding” (p. 45).
- CW1.3 “Action: Make sidewalks active and vibrant places through continued efforts to streamline design requirements, and developing new pilot projects in partnership with local businesses downtown” (p. 45).

Ground Floor and Public Realm Street Environment – The text provides strong guidance for formulating revised design guidelines and standards for street frontages Downtown. For residential uses, the term physical separation is thought to refer to grade separation, but residential development on the ground floor should still maintain flexibility for future use, as well as engagement and visibility, or “eyes on the street.” Considerations for future changes of use in design of the ground floor, where located on specific corridors where the pedestrian environment is a priority, would build in the needed flexibility for use of that space to succeed in getting the brick-and-mortar shopper and office worker back Downtown. The document should be readable to a general population, so the term “plinth” should be better defined or replaced.

- **Ceiling Height:** Subcommittee members agreed that considerations should be included for a minimum ground-floor ceiling height to allow flexible use of space over time, subject to refinement, based on the level of expected pedestrian-land use interaction along the frontage by designated Downtown street typology: for example, Neighborhood Street, Community Activity Street, etc. The examples shown of 13- to 15-foot ceiling height are completely reasonable.
 - Related Comprehensive Plan Policies: DP 4.1 Downtown Residents and Workers (“Encourage investments and create opportunities that increase the number of residents and workers in downtown Spokane”); DP 4.2 Street Life (“Promote actions designed to increase pedestrian use of streets, especially downtown, thereby creating a healthy street life in commercial areas”).
- **Diagrams to Illustrate Active Street Edges:** The subcommittee reviewed the attached two modified diagrams from the [South University District Subarea Plan Draft](#) (Figure V – Shopfront Streets, 2020, p. 28), and the [Sidewalk Design](#) as part of the Urban Street Design Guide by the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), which was referenced in the Boston Complete Streets Design Guidelines, cited in the Best Practices section of the Existing Conditions Report for the Downtown Plan Update. Subcommittee members found the attached diagrams with their modifications, consisting of annotations and colors corresponding to areas defined under the City’s adopted standards, showed form very effectively using resources referenced in supporting efforts. The subcommittee will include the diagrams for discussion with the Plan Commission. The diagrams provide a very visual way to convey what is needed to achieve an active ground-floor use and inform intent for revisions to design guidelines and standards. For suggested height, the numbers give context to allow for flexible uses.

- **Downtown Core-100 (DTC-100):** Text should imply performance-based design specific to each parcel, as an alternative to, and in addition to, the prescriptive elements named within the Plan Commission's 2018 recommendation of building massing to minimize shadows on the nearby park, active ground floor uses, and high-quality materials.
 - Related Comprehensive Plan Policies: LU 2.2 Performance Standards ("Employ performance and design standards with sufficient flexibility and appropriate incentives to ensure that development is compatible with surrounding land uses"); DP 2.8 Design Review Process ("...achieve design performance that meets or exceeds citizens' quality of life expectations").

Spokane Downtown Plan Update draft sections discussed included the following:

- LWP2.1 "Action: Develop ground floor standards for residential, retail, office, live/work, and civic uses" (p. 77).
- LWP3.4 "Action: Pursue redevelopment of the existing surface parking lots in the DTC-100 Zone along Spokane Falls Boulevard" (p. 80).

D. RECOMMENDATION

The draft plan is well-organized and has made use of significant resources in its development. If there is support for the proposal, the subcommittee advises the Plan Commission to review and recommend including the following.

1. Ground Floor Active Street Edge Diagrams.

The document text helps frame the policy for design standards and guidelines. The subcommittee believes the attached additional graphics will illustrate and support the text, and should be inserted into the draft following **Action LWP2.1** on page 77.

Attachments:

- a. "Active Ground Floor Recommendations" (adapted from South University District Subarea Plan Figure V – Shopfront Streets, 2020, p. 28, as modified and with additional annotations).
- b. "Active Street Edge Recommendations" (adapted from Sidewalk Design as part of the *Urban Street Design Guide* by the National Association of City Transportation Officials, as modified and with additional annotations).

2. Performance-Based Design Alternatives for Downtown Core-100.

In the case of reconsidering the Plan Commission's 2018 recommended code amendments for the Downtown Core-100 (DTC-100) zone, the subcommittee believes performance-based criteria, that define the desired quality of the public realm and are specific to each parcel, should be suggested as a potential alternative to building massing,

active ground floor uses, and high-quality materials. At the end of the second paragraph of **Action LWP3.4** in the draft, following the sentence ending with “...code amendments have not been adopted” (p. 80), insert the following text: “The City could explore performance-based design solutions that enhance the public realm, as alternatives specific to each parcel, if the 2018 recommendations are reconsidered.”

3. Technical Clarifications.

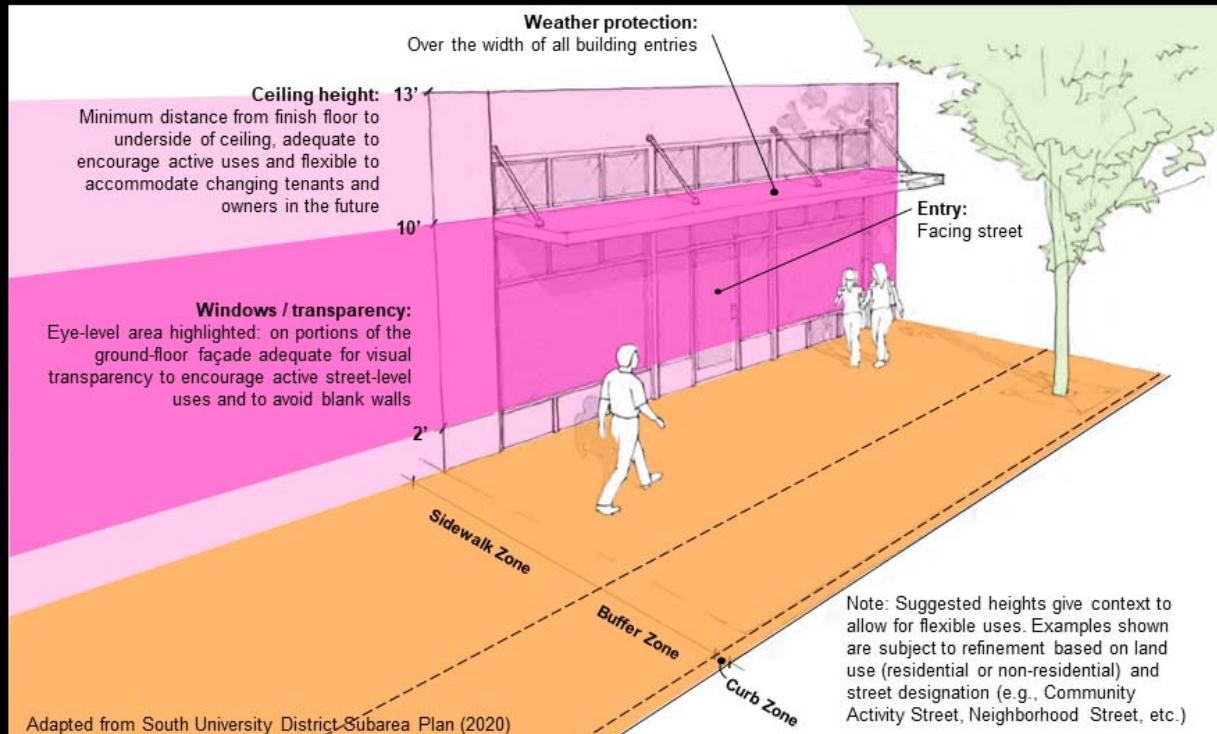
The subcommittee recommends the following technical clarifications:

LWP2.1 – In the first paragraph, substitute “ground-floor retail sales and service uses” for “a retail plinth” (p. 77). As amended, the full sentence would read: “Design of the ground floor can reflect the human scale and contribute to a vibrant public realm, but it is unreasonable to expect ground-floor retail sales and service uses to be successful in every location Downtown.”

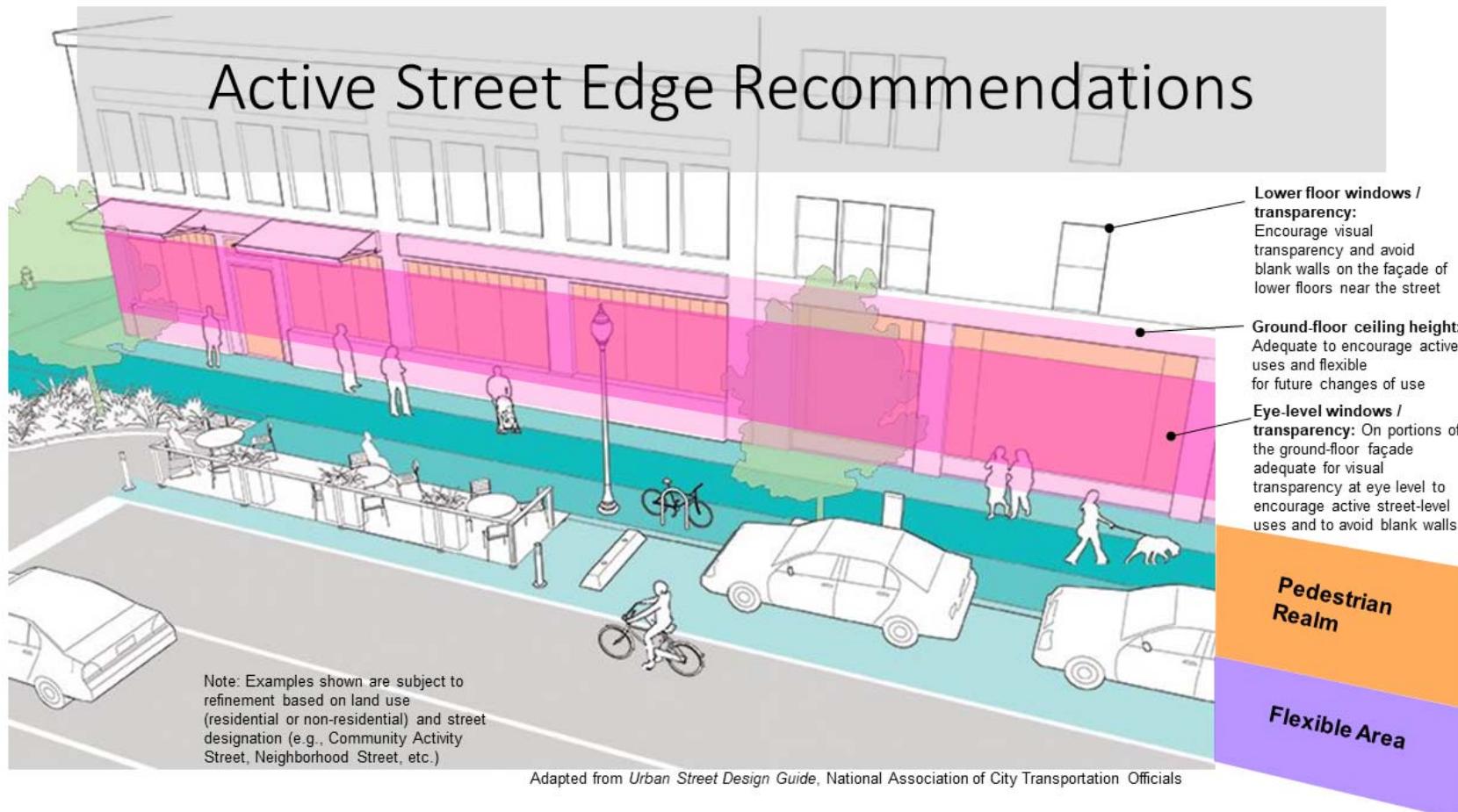
LWP3.4 – In the second paragraph, include the date (2018) when the Plan Commission’s recommendation for the Downtown Core-100 (DTC-100) occurred (p. 80).

Measures of Success – Change the Measure “# of New Affordable Housing Units” to apply to Low- and Moderate-Income Households, 80 percent of area median income (p. 116).

Active Ground Floor Recommendations



Active Street Edge Recommendations



Special Meeting of the Downtown Plan Subcommittee - Draft Notes

February 17, 2021

Webex Teleconference

Meeting Notes: Meeting called to order at 5:00 PM by Greg Francis

Attendance:

- Subcommittee Members Present: Todd Beyreuther, Greg Francis, Chuck Horgan,
- Board Members Not Present: Thomas Sanderson, Carole Shook, Michael Baker, Lori Kinnear, Ted Teske, Kathy Lang
- *Quorum Present: no*
- Staff Members Present: Dean Gunderson, Nate Gwinn, Jackie Churchill, Amanda Beck

Public Comment: None

Agenda:

1) Spokane Downtown Plan Overview

- a) Downtown Plan [Draft Plan](#)
 - Presentation provided by Nathan Gwinn
 - Questions asked and answered
 - Discussion ensued
- b) [Downtown Plan Update Project web page](#)
 - Presentation provided by Nathan Gwinn
 - Questions asked and answered
 - Discussion ensued

2) Plan next meeting (if necessary)

Next Downtown Plan Subcommittee Meeting scheduled for March 3rd at 5-6:30.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:30 PM

Special Meeting of the Downtown Plan Subcommittee - Draft Notes

March 3, 2021

Webex Teleconference

Meeting Notes: Meeting called to order at 5:00 PM by Greg Francis

Attendance:

- Subcommittee Members Present: Todd Beyreuther, Greg Francis, Chuck Horgan, Michael Baker
- Board Members Not Present: Thomas Sanderson, Carole Shook, Lori Kinnear, Ted Teske, Kathy Lang
- *Quorum Present: no*
- Staff Members Present: Dean Gunderson, Nate Gwinn, Jackie Churchill, Amanda Beck, Shea Blackwell

Meeting Objectives:

- Continue discussion of items of interest in draft plan
- Determine whether there is a need for additional subcommittee meetings

Public Comment: None

Agenda:

- 1) Draft 2/17/2021 Meeting Notes
- 2) Social services-related policies: housing, public spaces, and organized Downtown
- 3) Ground floor and public realm street environment
- 4) Next meeting (if needed)

Next Downtown Plan Subcommittee Meeting scheduled for -

Meeting Adjourned at 7:00 PM