MEETING: Project Advisory Group
PRESENTERS: Mesa Sherriff, Senior Planner, Planning and Development Services
Keith Walzak. VIA Architecture
Michael Cannon, VIA Architecture
SUBJECT: Urban Design Studio
DATE: February 18, 2020

PRESENTATION TYPE:
Informational presentations followed by group discussions

SUMMARY:
At the meeting on February 18, 2020 the Project Advisory Group (PAG) reviewed and provided feedback on massing + scale, modulation, and articulation as they relate to existing and proposed code changes and design review.

DISCUSSION:
The following topics were presented to the PAG for review

- Focus, goal, and target of Phase II
- Project Updates
  - Project Schedule / Key Deliverables
  - Interim Report Update
- LURC Organizational Structure
- Study Area Maps
- Part 2: Workshop
- Design Guidelines + Standards
  - Massing + Scale
  - Modulation
  - Articulation
- Key Questions / Discussion / Direction

NOTES:
- General consensus that the code is confusing.
- Will top-middle-base help define better design outcomes – which is the overarching goal?
- Flexibility is a main driver.
- ‘Addressing’ the topic - as a guidance – not a standard – may be best.
- 3 story buildings may not require a top-middle-base approach. Base is about the pedestrian scale–got to get this right first.
- ‘It’s about educating the community on design.’
- Rents and parking will dictate ground floorplate size.
- Instead of 25k sq. ft. for max floorplate, go to percentage of lot
- Define ‘large parcel’
- For upper floor setbacks, be clear as to the outcome. What is the intent. (daylight, shadowing impacts, viewsheds (?), residential transitions)
- Upper level setbacks may not be necessary as they are one method to mitigate adjacency issues but not the only one – materials, transparency, etc.
- 8’ as is currently defined by code is too much for upper level setback, 5’ would be better.
- Ped corridors - Blank walls are an issue.
- After 3rd floor – lots of negotiations (i.e. upper level stepback)
- More concern w/ground plane - blank walls, w/podiums.
- For maximum façade widths, the ‘how’ is as important as the ‘why’
- Could consider an accelerated administrative review process for 100% affordable developments.
- Affordable projects have thin margins. Any delays could result in loss of funding.
- For affordable projects – single form w/higher quality materials may be acceptable.
- The public plaza option is one that may not always work in front of a building so developers locate it in the rear, not connected to public space.
- Agree with concept of max floorplate but may not want to be specific?
- Side yard setback is restrictive on smaller residential lot sizes
- Setback on 3rd Floor would be most effective for privacy concerns in SF zones.
- Agree that affordable housing should have some kind of design review but should not be overly prescriptive / expensive.
- Would be nice to see apartments work with this ground floor townhouse model in a lower income setting.

ADDITIONAL NOTES RECEIVED AFTER MEETING:

- I fully understand the intent of design guidelines but am concerned about the impacts the added process will have on the feasibility of 100% affordable housing projects being developed. Affordable housing projects have long lead times 2-3 years or more in some cases. For projects currently in the predevelopment and funding application phase the initial implementation of these guidelines would be a severe disruption and possibly cause a project to fall through. There are many layers to financing and developing affordable housing projects, especially projects in which all units are affordable and may serve special populations like seniors, youth mentally ill and chronically homeless. The effects of an added review process on a completely affordable project can be substantial and have negative impacts ranging from costly delays in the projects timeline, loss of funding, and additional administrative costs that may cause a projects budget to no longer work and the project not moving forward. At the same time a project with a small percentage of units set aside for affordable housing may be able to absorb the added costs and time associated with the additional process. 100% affordable housing projects juggle many regulations at the local, state, and federal levels. Each layer of these regulations already include tight timelines and expensive administrative processes to which a design review would add to.
- I like that the City is willing to find a creative solution to mitigate negative impacts an additional review process would have on affordable housing projects. I think it is still best that the broader affordable housing community have a chance to weigh in prior to a decision being made. This way there is a clear picture of the issues and if a full exemption is not possible the affordable housing community can be confident that the solution that is settled upon adequately mitigates the negative impacts the additional process would have on them being able to develop affordable housing in the City. Without sufficiently understanding the impacts the resulting solution could result in causing the same effects it was intended to help projects avoid. The process you described below would be a start, but wouldn’t necessarily be a viable solution because the
amount of information and design related details that would be available at the inception of a project is so minimal I doubt there would be enough to make recommendations on. Having the review during the permit process when plans have been finalized would be too late; making changes to the design that late would add substantial costs and delays to a project which could bust the budget or the timeline.

- Another thing that will greatly inform this review’s impact on a project will be the actual level of review and associated review timeline that would apply to an affordable housing project if it is not exempt, a 4-6 week process would have a much different impact than a 1-2 week process.

- Affordable housing projects that meet the minimum threshold for Design Review should participate in the process and not be exempt. There are many examples of great design of public housing including David Baker Architects and Landon Bone Baker Architects that navigate these funding and design challenges.