

Downtown Historic Preservation Task Force Meeting Minutes

January 28, 2015

8:30 AM

South Side on Lamar Leasing Office Conference Room
1409 South Lamar St.
Dallas TX, 75215

Task Force Members Present:

Jack Matthews, Matthews Southwest; Mitch Paradise, Paradise Development Partners; Connie Cooper, Cooper Consulting; David Preziosi, Preservation Dallas; Brian Keith, JHP Architecture/Urban Design; Brian Adams, Callison; Larry Hamilton, Hamilton Properties; Scott Remphrey, Brytar; Katherine D. Seale, Task Force Chair

Task Force Members Absent:

Robert Meckfessel, DSGN; Todd Watson, Hunt Consolidated

City Staff Present:

Mark Doty, Sr. Historic Preservation Planner; Casey Burgess, City Attorney

Katherine Seale called the meeting to order at 8:36 am with a quorum present.

Overview – Katherine Seale

Katherine briefly reviewed the topics discussed at the January 21 Task Force meeting, and introduced the topic for the current meeting: what is good public policy for historic preservation and development in downtown.

Preservation Status in the Downtown National Register District – Mark Doty

Mark briefly reviewed the content of a presentation which was originally given at the briefing to City Council on November 18, 2014. A copy of the presentation was provided to Task Force members. Mark noted that approximately 60% of the buildings in the Downtown National Register Historic District have no local protection and could be demolished.

Mark noted that the establishment of the Downtown National Register District in 2006 (and the later expansion of the district) was initiated by the Office of Economic Development as an economic development tool. Since 2006, sixteen properties have taken advantage of Federal Tax Credits.

Within the Downtown National Register District, there are 90 contributing structures; 39 are locally designated landmarks and have local protection. Since 2006, 13 structures identified as contributing structures to the National Register District have been demolished or altered. Some of these buildings were demolished for the re-development of the Mercantile project, and some were demolished by the city for Main Street Gardens.

Brian Adams stated that two- and three-story buildings help create a network through the city, and asked if the City has done anything to protect the smaller buildings.

Larry Hamilton noted that the City has been involved in the demolition of some of the smaller buildings, particularly at Main Street Gardens, and the buildings that were on the site could have been reused or incorporated into the site.

Scott Remphrey stated that the City at one time had a program for buying buildings to hold for redevelopment, creating a recycling program for buildings, such as was done for the Harlan Building in the Farmers Market neighborhood.

Preservation: Its Movement from Strategy to Objective and Finding the Way Back – Robin McCaffrey

Katherine introduced Robin McCaffrey, AIA, FAICP; MESA-Planning

Robin described how the City's Historic Preservation program began not as a singular effort, but as a holistic Urban Design and Planning strategy that included a broad range of disciplines. Over time, the program has become its own, separate entity that is focused designation. The people involved (Landmark members) have gone from being a committee to a commission, moving the focus from professional membership to political appointment. Advocacy has been replaced with the isolated designation process, with no one to argue for better design. Preservation is a way to influence change and allows for continuity, cooperation, and facilitation; whereas designation is a separation, a regulatory intervention that prevents change.

Robin used Swiss Avenue, the City's first historic district, to show the power of preservation to revitalize an area. In that case, preservation was used as a tool for redevelopment where depreciation threatened the urban fabric. However, preservation's effectiveness has not been proven where the urban fabric is threatened by appreciation, like it is today. Swiss Avenue became an area where speculative renovation and restoration captured the trend of inflation, and the market was able to respond to changes in land value versus improvement value, resulting in value capture transfer.

Robin described how organic form within design and preservation has been lost in favor of categorical zoning. A return to strategic planning is needed to prevent conflict between value and investment. Historic preservation was conceived as an advance initiative in areas such as State Thomas, Oak Lawn, the Arts District, and the West End, helping to influence the direction of urban design. It also helped redirect the trend of out-migration where residents, then commerce, then employment leave an area. The process of revitalization is aided by preservation, and results in the reversal of migration trends.

Robin then described how preservation has become less about continuity and design standards and more about architectural style, and that this has damaged the role of preservation. With the focus being redirected from outcome to process, along with a lack of advocacy, the historic preservation department has moved from being integrated within city planning to being isolated. It has become a curator of earlier efforts. *Advocacy mechanisms should be re-established and there should be wider participation of historic preservation staff in the broader planning efforts of the city. The landmark program should be an active partner in planning and more about the city fabric than simply about preservation of isolated buildings. Preservation should be reconnected with urban design and other planning efforts to create a preservation consciousness. There should be a preservation planning team within a true planning office that is not mired in process.*

Robin stated that the City is in the era of infill. *Preservation is now more important than ever to give form to the speculative efforts and assure that value is transferred for further investment.*

Discussion

Larry Hamilton stated that there is now a lack of connectivity Downtown that was once aided by historic low-rise buildings. The buildings that have been lost were insular. He gave the example of small buildings on McKinney where the streetscape is lively, versus a large-scale development where the street is ignored.

David Preziosi described how historic buildings provide a human scale that large buildings, with largely blank facades, do not.

Mitch Paradise stated that there is a conflict between property rights of individuals and historic preservation; historic preservation should be made to empower and promote, and to incentivize good behavior, not penalize.

David Preziosi explained that preservation has moved toward regulation across the country. There used to be fewer historic districts, so that the historic preservation department had time to look holistically; now there are so many districts that there is no time to be visionary, only regulatory. David stated that there should be an increase in historic preservation staff at the city.

Brian Keith stated that the process at the city is now reactionary, and asked how the mindset can be changed; the issue is more fundamental than just hiring more staff.

Jack Matthews explained that the city needs a “stick” at this time, because “no one is tending the garden to provide the carrots.”

Larry Hamilton suggested that as a carrot, grants could be tied to the Tax Increment Finance District.

Jack Matthews stated that there is currently an incentive for developers to misuse their power and asked how a carrot that will not be misused could be given. There would need to be a societal shift.

Connie Cooper noted that the Task Force’s task is to create the points to move forward, not solve the entire solution.

Jack Matthews suggested that there be a historic preservation component to the City Design Studio to encourage broader thinking for city planning.

Mark Doty noted that at this time, there is little time to think about planning on a larger scale, as time is spent doing Certificates of Appropriateness; he suggested that change has to come from the top down, and that is why the City Design Studio has been so successful.

Robin McCaffrey described how the Downtown National Register District was meant to be a preventative initiative. He also cautioned that Dallas shouldn’t run lockstep with other types of preservation programs.

Larry Hamilton noted the example of Denver’s LODO neighborhood. In that area, historic warehouses were reused as condos. Because it was a residential use and not able to qualify for Federal Tax Credits, and in order to allow for development and provide a streetlife, balconies were added. Had the preservation criteria not allowed for balconies, the redevelopment may not have been as successful.

Robin McCaffrey asked what we want to achieve. Buildings as well as streetlife are appropriate.

Scott Remphrey questioned how other cities are doing this successfully. Large buildings do not lend themselves to walkability. Katherine Seale responded that next week we will discuss how other cities are achieving their goals.

Jack Matthews stated that we need a “North Star,” an ultimate goal, as well as steps for immediate action in order to get there, while integrating the practices that are currently working.

Katherine Seale stated that one possibility is to integrate historic preservation into the City Design Studio. Jack Matthews responded that historic preservation is applicable to every department.

Katherine Seale suggested that there could be a new type of ordinance that looks at the greater picture; it could address infill and look at a larger goal, working with other departments to achieve it. Connie Cooper stated that an overlay could be used to create a “historic culture,” and could be done in partnership with the development community.

Brian Adams asked about whether there was a vision for Downtown, and Katherine Seale responded that the 360 Plan was the most current document.

Larry Hamilton noted that the City’s answer to revitalization has been slum clearance. He gave the example of the buildings that were demolished for Main Street Garden.

Connie Cooper stated that the term “preservation” casts a die in the wrong direction for many. Another word may be needed to describe the goals.

Larry Hamilton stated that parks can often interrupt the urban fabric, and are not always better.

Scott Remphrey suggested that there be a definition of actions at the expiration of the Federal Tax Credit period for properties, since at that time, the land value tends to go up.

Larry Hamilton noted that from the new Omni Hotel there is a lack of connectivity to downtown, particularly to the West End. Parks and parking interrupt the connectivity of Downtown.

Scott Remphrey stated that several parks are not maintained, and are often dark due to lack of pruning and lighting.

Brian Adams noted that parks like Klyde Warren Park are successful because they are a complete design, and are not one-dimensional green space.

Katherine returned to the topic of value transfer. She asked what the role of preservation should be in Downtown, and where is it revitalizing. Katherine noted that smaller commercial buildings add value and connectivity, and asked how more value can be added. Connie Cooper responded that in most small buildings, the land is worth two to three times the improvement value.

Robin McCaffrey noted that the inflation of land value over improvement value, while profitable, is unstable. Preservation can effect and stabilize through the quality and endurance of the historic improvements.

Katherine asked the Task Force to think about things that can be done to preserve the urban fabric that don’t discourage development in Downtown and come back next week with ideas.

Approval of January 21 Minutes

Mitch Paradise moved to approve the minutes from the January 21 meeting. Jack Matthews seconded the motion. The motion passed with no opposition.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 am.

Minutes by Nicky DeFreece Emery