Meeting Objectives:
- Review draft zoning code language and graphics (building form standards and alternatives)
- Review key agreements-in-principle already made by the task force
- Review, discuss and provide input on key design standards and guidelines (DSG) topics, including building massing and structured parking design
- Revisit and discuss previous agreement on upper story setback dimension

Task Force Members in Attendance: Brad Boyle, Councilman Albus Brooks, John Desmond, Dick Farley, Patrick Guinness, Amy Harmon, Jynx Messacar, Joel Noble, Chris Smith, Craig Supplee, Tracy Winchester, Bill Windsor, Howard Witkin; Not in Attendance: Joe Lear, Judy Schneider

CPD Staff: Sarah Showalter, Brad Buchanan, Abe Barge, Analiese Hock, Andy Rutz, Samantha Suter

Facilitator: Mike Hughes

Observers: Hugh Brown, Luke Davidson, Jesse Golumb (Trammel Crow Residential), Kenneth Ho (Lennar), Mike LaMair, and Rachel Prestige (CRL)

I. Review of Draft Building Form Standards for Zoning

Presentation/Q&A

Staff summarized the draft building form requirements for Arapahoe Square and explained how the requirements relate to key task force agreements/recommendations. Questions included the following:

• Q: What is the relationship between height expressed in stories and height expressed in feet?
  • A: There is no height limit in stories for the General 2 or Point Tower building forms, but height limits in feet generally correspond to 12, 20 or 30 stories depending on the building form or district (note that buildings could be taller in stories if the height of individual floors was limited)

• Q: What was the assumption regarding the average floor-to-floor height of buildings?
  • A: About 12’, with a greater allowance for the ground story

• Q: How will the zone districts be mapped?
  • A: We will discuss the specific mapping at the next task force meeting on October 22.

• Q: Why aren’t Row House and Apartment listed as allowed building forms?
  • A: In Denver’s higher-density zone districts, it’s possible to build lower building forms within the envelope of a large “General” form. Row House and Apartment forms could be built within the envelope of a General or General 2 building form.

• Q: Did we previously discuss Point Tower heights and floor plate square footage?
  • A: Yes - The Northeast Downtown Neighborhoods Plan includes Point Tower height. Staff previously tested a range of floor plate limitations for Point Towers and discussed the results with the task force.
Task Force Discussion included the following:

- Being able to build a 10,000 square foot point tower on a piece of property may not be enough of an incentive
- Staff response: You can build multiple Point Towers on a larger property; the DSG address the spacing of towers
- Once mechanical systems, etc. are considered, it may be too limiting for builders to go through the extra expense of building a tower
- Entrance standards - Sometimes pedestrian entrances required by zoning are always locked, and rear or parking entries are used as the main entrance (note instances on Colfax)
- Need to find a way in Arapahoe Square to discourage this from happening; this is an enforcement issue
- Building design should reflect the use of the building
- One size requirements don’t fit all, for example, residential buildings should often be elevated a little above the street level, while retail storefronts should generally be at the street level
- In some cases, new buildings aren’t meeting the intent of the city’s transparency requirements

Q: Can staff produce a table of the existing DSG and where are they are being covered in the new system (updated zoning or DSG)?

A: Staff agreed to produce a summary table

II. Review of Key Design Standards and Guidelines (DSG) Concepts

Staff summarized the draft DSG for building mass and scale and structured parking design

Discussion on DSG for Structured Parking:

- Concern that the DSG are trying to make parking structures seem like something else
- Revealing parking structures for what they are may help create buildings with variety
- Putting a regular rhythm of windows on structured parking may not be honest design
- On the other hand, it is important to maintain a human scale and structured parking often takes on the dimension of the car
- Encouraging enclosure of structured parking may just result in noisy ventilation equipment

Discussion on DSG for Building Mass & Scale:

- Desire to ensure that zoning allows for flexibility and does not encourage similar or repetitive styles which would be counter to the basic goals of the project
- Desire to ensure that the design review process encourages creativity while promoting design that is sensitive to the context
  - The Design Advisory Board will use the DSG to guide a case-by-case review of projects
  - In every standard, there is an opportunity for creativity
- Draft zoning requirements shouldn’t be inconsistent with citywide requirements in circumstances where Arapahoe Square may not be unique
- DSG shouldn’t encourage more upper level setbacks than the base zoning entitlement, or require a setback in areas where they are not required by zoning such as on 20th or Broadway
- The draft DSG say that similar building materials should be used above and below the required setback - may not always be appropriate
III. Upper Story Setback Dimension

Presentation and Q&A

Staff summarized previous task force discussion regarding reducing the proposed minimum upper story setback dimension from 15' to 10'. They then indicated that Brad Buchanan and other architects/urban designers on City staff felt that it is not necessary to reduce the setback dimension to allow for efficient location of structural columns and that the difference between 15' and 10' would be visible from the street. Staff asked the task force to revisit the decision to reduce the proposed setback and introduced an alternative that would include a 15' minimum upper story setback in the zoning code but provide a flexible design review alternative for creative design that provide a minimum 10’ average upper story setback.

Q: If staff think the setback must be 15’, why didn’t they indicate that earlier?
A: Staff felt that the task force consensus was difficult to reach and determined that it could be helpful to have a more in depth review with architects and designers

Q: Have we determined what projections would be allowed into the setback area?
A: We haven’t specifically discussed this yet. In other zone districts, balconies are allowed to encroach into the setback by specific dimensions. It may also be possible to address the number and character of projections/balconies in the DSG to ensure that the intent of the upper story setback is maintained.

Discussion on the Upper Story Setback Dimension:

• Several task force members spoke up in favor of a minimum 10’ upper story setback
• Task force members discussed whether the a minimum 10’ or a minimum 15’ setback with a design review alternative allowing for an average of 10’ would produce more diverse designs
• Some task members felt that a minimum of 10’ in zoning would produce more diverse designs because some developments would still do 15’, while others would do the minimum of 10’. Some task force members also expressed concern that requiring a greater setback would increase building costs and could be especially difficult for office construction.
• Others felt that a minimum 15’ setback requirement would produce more diversity because many applicants would seek flexibility through the design review option that allows for more creative setback arrangements as long as the total setback area is the same square footage as a continuous 10’ setback for the full frontage. A task force member also voiced concern that most applicants would build to the maximum (meaning that they would only provide a 10’ setback if that was the requirement).
• Staff clarified that the design alternative to allow for creative application of a 10’ setback (as long as the total setback area is the same square footage as a continuous 10’ setback for the full frontage) would be available regardless of whether the minimum requirement was 15’ or 10’.

In the absence of an agreement to change its earlier decision, the agreement to recommend 10’ remains.

IV. Design Review & Design Advisory Board

Staff presented a draft option for a design review process guided by a new Design Advisory Board composed primarily of design professionals with additional representation from property owners and the neighborhood. Staff also described the current design review and notification process in Arapahoe Square and indicated a desire to move towards a more consistent process for using design review in the City.

Discussion on the Design Review Process & Design Advisory Board:
- General support for the draft design review process presented by staff
- Concern that the advisory board would not follow staff recommendations
- One task force indicated that he had gone through the current design review process and had one good experience and one bad.
- Interest in ensuring that the process includes an early check-in with the advisory board to assure that design does not get too far along prior to discussion
- Staff indicated that checklists or other forms could be used to help streamline the design review process
- Interest in requiring or allowing a pre-submittal conference where applicants can discuss general ideas with the advisory board and learn more about the process
- Some task force members felt that the pre-submittal conference should be voluntary to respect the time of volunteer advisory board members
- Task force members indicated that the workload of the advisory board, and number of potential pre-submittal conferences, would vary depending on the threshold for design review (do small exterior renovation projects need to go through design review?)
- Staff indicated that it might be good to screen requests for pre-application conferences to ensure that advisory board attendance would be necessary at the meeting (in some cases, pre-application conferences focus on basic questions for staff or development concepts that would not meet basic zoning requirements)
- Staff also indicated that pre-submittal conferences for design review could be coordinated with zoning
- Concern that “value engineering” could occur after design review approval
- Staff indicated that permit must match approved site plan
- Concern with the draft proposal to require one RNO and City Council notification at the time of original SDP submittal
- Some task force members felt that notification of the final hearing should be provided

V. Next Meeting

October 22, 2015 - 3:30-6:30
Stout Street Clinic