Meeting Summary - Meeting 3 - Phase 2

Meeting Objectives:
- Provide the Task Force with Information on Pedestrian Base of the building, Zoning Incentives, Upper Story Stepback/Datum Approach
- Discussion that Produces Clear Direction (and Agreements-in-Principle when possible) on Pedestrian Base of the building, Zoning Incentives, Upper Story Stepback/Datum Approach

Task Force Members in Attendance: John Desmond, Dick Farley, Patrick Guinness, Amy Harmon, Joe Lear, Joel Noble, Judy Schneider, Craig Supplee, Tracy Winchester, and Howard Witkin; Not Present: Brad Boyle, Albus Brooks-District 8, Jynx Messacar, Judy Montero-District 9, Chris Smith, Brent Snyder, Bill Windsor

Facilitator: Mike Hughes

CPD Staff: Sarah Showalter, Abe Barge, Analiese Hock, Samantha Suter, and Sara White

Observers: Kuhl Brown; Rachele DiFebbo; Sarah Kunikowski; Besdart Lumi; JB Desselle; Larry Bell; Trina Robino; Kim Easton

I. Staff Presentation: Pedestrian Base of the building, Zoning Incentives, Upper Story Stepback/Datum Approach

See presentation from Meeting 3 for information presented by staff

II. Discussion

A. Upper Story Stepback Percentage

- Staff presentation is an accurate reflection of the discussion from meeting 2
- Park Avenue - stepback for 100% of frontage makes sense for that portion where Park is adjacent to Curtis Park; the other side of Broadway, closer to Downtown - no upper story stepback is needed
- Agree that no stepback required is needed on Park Avenue on that side of Broadway
- We started out before with the 50%, I’m not opposed to 80%, but there may be a better number - we should continue to fine-tune it
- We wanted to add variety; 80% may not give us that variety since the 20% that is not stepped back is so small that many may choose not to do it. A smaller % - like 2/3rds - could be more effective
- Design standards and guidelines needed to help make each of the new projects work together
- Could be a range of 60-70%
- Need a specific number: it has to be a number, not a range
- The approach that staff presented is workable
- Less than 80% would be an improvement
- 65% gives you enough variety, but 80% makes the portion that is not stepped back too small, so I am concerned many people would just do 100%, which would not provide variety
- More flexibility needed
- We agreed that 150’ of façade frontage that is not stepped back is way too much, so what about adding a maximum façade frontage too, combined with a smaller percentage like 65%?
- The 80% is a minimum
- For a 400’ building, that would get to a 140’ façade that is not stepped back at all, which may be too long
- What we are trying to break is the long unbroken façade

**Agreement-in-principle** - staff will examine a 65-70% range for draft code and explore combining this with a maximum, no-stepped-back façade length (in feet)

### B. Different Stepback Depth Depending on Building Height

- At the last meeting, the task force suggested an approach where the minimum depth of the stepback increases if the building is taller - proposal from staff in response to this is 15’ min stepback for buildings 6-12 stories tall and 20’ min stepback for buildings 13-20 stories tall
- A 20’ foot setback could compromise the column spacing and the ability to build efficient parking garages in the tallest buildings
- No additional stepback is needed on the taller building
- The additional 5 feet doesn’t accomplish anything meaningful
- Even 15 feet might present problems - allowing a different depth may accomplish what we need and be more effective

**Agreement-in-principle** - Minimum stepback 15’ for all building heights

### C. Proposed Design Alternative for Upper Story Stepback

- A design alternative for the upper story stepback should be part of the approach
- Yes, allow for the possibility of an innovative design - something that does not follow the letter of the law, but it captures the spirit
- Allow for a really special circumstance through the design alternative
- We have the standard, but then if it doesn’t work, we would go to higher expectation of the designer through the design alternative
- Linked to our discussion later about design standards and guidelines - how and who will do design review
- Should not be allowed without review - from a design review board - not just an option that the developer can act on - a mechanical change with no design review
- For this type of design alternative staff would propose a design review board to do the design review, with specific parameters in the design standards and guidelines to provide guidance
- We should have humans in this, it cannot be a fully mechanical process, particularly due to the angled lots; design review is necessary
- Consider the unintended consequence - Larimer Place example - two stories of parking with a very large stepback for the tower - for the pedestrian, it feels like it’s only parking
- We should also think about how much parking would be needed in a 20-story building and how the stepback requirement at 5 story max works
- Four stories of parking for a 20-story residential building is likely, so a stepback at 5 story max should be fine for 20 stories
- For a 20-story office building you might need 7 or 8 stories of parking - depending on how much parking the office developer wants to provide
Office buildings could use one of the many tools in the zoning that allow for a flexible approach to parking so that they do not need to provide all of the parking on site.

**Agreement-in-principle - Allow for a design alternative to the standard upper story stepback requirement through a design review alternative**

**Summary of all Upper Story Stepback Topics:**
- Move forward with a new iteration with a 65-70% range, and do testing to see if it needs to be further refined, potentially combined with a max façade length that is not stepped back. We will not pursue a stepback deeper than 15’ for the buildings greater than 12 stories; we will allow for a design alternative to the standard stepback requirement that has a design review process through the DSG. The upper story stepback (and any other agreements-in-principle) need to be tested before the code is finalized.

**C. Build-to - Variation for Light-Rail**
- The wider street next to the light rail is a nice concept, but not something to impose or require.
- We should assume that most of the time, the developers are going to build right to the property line even if there is a build-to range.
- That is not always true; sometimes developers will choose to set the building back for successful retail access.
- In downtown context, we want development at the lot line.
- Along Welton, we could have a five-foot setback only on the ground floor, and then only 0’ setback on all other floors, essentially getting an arcade, just on the train side.
- It’s uncomfortable on Welton with a 10’ sidewalk when the train passes.
- Developers on Welton will want to build to the property line with no setback.
- An additional three feet may really make a difference.
- It is only really useful to require the additional setback if the extra room is used to expand the sidewalk.
- We should find out what other cities with light rail are doing.
- How do other cities approach it?
- The configuration of the light rail here, where it feels like it is part of the sidewalk, is very rare.
- A setback for the first floor would help the retail customer experience.
- Why dictate the building form based on the current light rail design if it is going to change in the future?
- Allowing people to build 10’ back throughout Arapahoe Square may not make sense; maybe we should require a tighter build-to range.
- Mile High United way is set back at 10 feet for a majority of the building, and this building generally seems a success.
- The 0-10’ is totally workable.
- The issue is still with Welton.

**Agreement-in-principle - The recommended approach of 70% of the street frontage with a 0-10’ build-to range works as the general approach; No consensus on how to approach Welton on the light rail side**
D. Private Open Space

- Private open spaces should be allowed above the ground level, as private porches or roofs
- If the open space is at the street level and open to the public we would not get the uses we intend
- We can mitigate, and things are changing, but at present, there are real problems with publically accessible open spaces
- We need to advance the commitment to more open space in Arapahoe Square
- All types of open spaces are important - public parks and private open spaces, opportunity for respite
- There has to be a relationship with active uses - there has to be ownership, and ownership occurs in all forms
- Managing the access is important. We don’t want is a lot of random, mandated open spaces that are not coordinated or well thought-through
- We need more district amenities, like private open spaces, that are thoughtfully designed, maintained and have ownership.
- As a community, we ought to integrate open space better into development planning
- Important to be able to close the open space at night
- The more that you develop and the more people that are around to activate the space, the fewer problems that we will have; if kids are using a park, if people with dogs are coming to the park, that makes the difference
- An incentive for open space in the code makes sense
- If there is an incentive, what should it be?
- For some projects, increased height would be an incentive - for every bit of open space that you build, the square footage can be added to the top of your building (even if that means going above the max heights called for in the plan)
- Manhattan has successful examples of small, open spaces. We should do more research as to how those spaces were created and if they are related to zoning incentives- Paley Park, Gramercy Park
- Generally the FAR bonuses that created plazas in NYC were not seen as successful since the open spaces were not used by people.
- We used to have FAR bonuses for private open spaces in the downtown zoning but we took them out since they were not creating vibrant, successful places

Agreement-in-principle - private, publicly accessible open space should definitely be enabled by the zoning. An incentive is desirable to some, if we can sort out how to do it effectively.

E. Parking

Parking - thoughts from Brad Buchanan, Executive Director of CPD
  o Parking is an expensive utility
  o The ideal depth of a parking floor plate 125’ deep, this allows for the most efficient layout
  o Wrapping parking garages with active uses can have a significant impact on the efficient parking layout, and therefore significant economic impacts for the developer
Because the old code’s FAR calculation excluded parking from the calculations and had no height limitations, there was no incentive to do anything but above-grade parking.

The current zoning approach, which does not require a high-quality skin for parking garages - affects the pedestrian realm. It does not result in the design that would make the buildings successful contributors to the community.

Task force discussion:

- We need to look to what the parking structures will become; how buildings are built is critical to their value in the future.
- Height of the parking floor will determine whether they can be repurposed for another use in the future.
- The architectural screening and design makes sense - it is worth the effort.
- Wrapping - and incentive for wrapping makes sense.
- With 125-foot typical lot depth, there will not be much of an effort since there is no room to wrap.
- If we require wrapping, then we are essentially requiring the purchase of the entire block and it may get to a scale that is not desirable.
- More than screening - integrated design is what we want to require.
- For small projects on small parcels - at-grade parking is necessary, with no active use wrapping it, to make the project work.
- Requiring wrapping or requiring ground-floor retail for the whole first floor would make smaller projects unworkable - we would be favoring large developments.
- For the large parcels, we don’t want parking at the ground level, but for smaller lots we can create an exception - design review that allows for parking to occur at the lower level.
- We could squeeze out a lot of small scale development if we are requiring active uses on the ground floor.
- We should not overlook shared parking opportunities.
- The active use at the ground story only has to be 15’ deep in other areas of the code. Could that work even for smaller developments?
- For affordable housing - keeping parking costs low is essential - wrapping parking, eliminating parking from the ground floor - these are expensive.
- The perception and reality of safety - active ground floor uses create eyes on the street.
- Generally you want ground floor active uses in order to have eyes on the street, it is essential in this neighborhood.
- Benedict Fountain Park is now safe because of the eyes watching it.
- Integrated design and an incentive to wrap - we need both.
- Incentives to wrap, incentive for a conversion plan to give people a way to look ahead, both of these make sense.
- Design standards and guidelines could address the parking conversion potential, as they do today.
- Perhaps we want to find a percentage of allowable parking that is not wrapped.
- If you have an entire block of parking, it kills the street, so use a percentage that requires some of it to be wrapped.
- Good design breaks up the parking.
- I would think that a good design would be to break it up.
- Need to think about the sustainability of landscaping materials.
- For integration and wrapping - the corner of the building is the most important - need strong design at the corners
- Perhaps an incentive for wrapping a garage could focus on the corner as a way of strengthen the street design

Agreement-in-principle - For above-grade parking garages, required integrated architectural design and explore an incentive to wrap with active uses, similar to what the code is currently being amended to do citywide; specifics of ground-floor uses will be a topic for the next meeting

F. Additional questions/comments

- Q: Will signs be part of the code - A: The sign code is part of the zoning code and can be part of design standards and guidelines; the staff is hoping not to make changes in each area but to take up the whole code at a later time
- I would like to talk about curb cuts in one of our meetings

III. Next Steps

June 11 - Next Meeting (3-6pm at Mile High United Way)
July Meeting - July 16