Meeting Objectives:

• Obtain feedback and direction needed to prepare the public review draft of the zoning and design guidelines
• Touch base on outstanding questions from the last task force meeting
• Prepare for the public process

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

CPD Staff: Abe Barge, Analiese Hock, Sarah Showalter, Samantha Suter, Jason Whitlock; Facilitator: Mike Hughes

Observers: Larry Bell, Corey Rutz (Otten Johnson), Anne Lindsay (Golden Triangle Association) and Robert Schmid

I. Review Draft Streetscape Design Standards & Guidelines for Task Force Input

Presentation and Discussion
Staff summarized draft design standards and guidelines to address the character of improvements within the public right-of-way (the area between the property line and the street). Throughout the presentation, staff paused to ask the task force for feedback on key topics.

• The streetscape design guidelines are great looking, but we should be concerned about whether the Department of Public Works supports them
• Street trees are the most important element to encourage, especially considering the relative lack of greenery in Arapahoe Square; this is called out specifically in the Northeast Downtown Neighborhoods Plan
• Use of structural soil in tree pits is essential so that street trees can be well established
• Street tree spacing should be every 20 to 25 feet (Chicago makes this work) rather than 30 to 35 feet considering that very few trees reach maturity
• The task force discussed planting ideas for street trees, including:
  o Street trees planted in large cut outs, without raised beds or landscape curbs, which tend to cut down the width of the sidewalk (noticeable at Market and 24th).
  o Add crusher fines to cutouts
  o Avoid little shrubby plants that are hard to maintain
    -Alternative ideas -
  o Some task force members noted that planting areas without curbs do not protect trees from de-icing agents that have a history in Denver of killing young trees and landscape plantings.
  o Curb-less designs also should not contain crusher fines because they end up on the sidewalk
• Some task force members felt that it would be reasonable to strengthen streetscape/landscape requirements for private property because we are proposing to increase basic zoning entitlement
• Some suggested that dead trees should be replaced where they've been cut down with no requirement to replace them
• Others are worried that a requirement to replace them (if they are replanted in small holes and subject to de-icing agents) would be counterproductive because the new tree can’t survive
• Some task members expressed a desire to strengthen requirements for landscape and tree maintenance, with requirements similar to existing parking lot screening standards, while others were concerned about adding extra layers of regulation
• It’s more about tree form than species; relying on a single species is risky if disease impacts that one species
• Landscape irrigation is a concern - However, it is generally required in Denver’s building code
• Concern regarding issues with trees adjacent to the light rail on Welton Street; staff indicated that special design standards and guidelines apply to the light rail side of Welton (in Key Streets chapter)
• Staff indicated that enforcement of streetscape/landscape maintenance issues is beyond the scope of the project, but the messaging can be reinforced through this process
• Task force member discussed successful and unsuccessful planting schemes
  o Planted trees in 2009 a 5’x5’x5’ box on the south side of the street and they have not grown an inch; the ground cover is not contained; trees are exposed to mag chloride
  o Compare to trees planted at 14th street to California Street which have been successful; they were planted in structural soil or open planter beds and not tiny boxes
• Trees should be protected from damage by locked bicycles
• Bicycle corrals should be encouraged (they are great on South Pearl Street) using the Public Works program
• We should not allow café seating to claim all but 5 feet of the sidewalk
• Smaller lots should have flexibility regarding streetscape guidelines

II. Review Draft Key Streets Design Standards & Guidelines for Task Force Input

Presentation and Discussion
Staff summarized the draft design standards and guidelines for key streets, which promote context-sensitive design treatments for special streets throughout Arapahoe Square. Throughout the presentation, staff paused to ask the task force for feedback on key topics.

20th Street
• Concern with labeling the street as a “highly urban area”; that designation is about building massing and height; there should be more discussion about the pedestrian character and quality
• The “Gateway Corner” concept should be extended to include 20th and Curtis

21st Street
• The 21st Street Urban Design Plan team is moving towards calling 21st a “Signature Street” rather than a “Festival Street”
• Language regarding incorporation of the recommendations that come out of the 21st Street Urban Design Plan should be stronger in the DSG
• Consider 14th Street, and the requirements that are needed to accomplish the street; we need to make a strong statement
• We also need to consider that the 21st Street Urban Design Plan is not yet adopted and we could be making a commitment to specific requirements before being able to see what they are; the DSG may have to be amended at a later time to address the specific recommendations of the 21st Street Urban Design Plan
• Language should be stronger regarding pedestrian emphasis
• The “Gateway Corner” concept should be extended to include 21st and both Lawrence and Welton
Q: Do the draft DSG require active uses to be set back with open spaces or enhanced setbacks in front?  
A: No - The language may be confusing. It is meant to require adjacent active uses only if open spaces and enhanced setbacks are provided voluntarily.

Q: Will the Xcel substation stay forever?  
A: We don’t have control over that; it is also outside the boundaries of the Arapahoe Square project area

Q: Shouldn’t there be more about preserving sky exposure on 21st Street?  
A: The zoning requires an upper story setback for 100% of the frontage, which is meant to help preserve sky exposure

**Arapahoe Street**
- The task force discussed whether Arapahoe should be considered as a key street
- While Arapahoe does have a new protected bike lane and connects with Skyline Park, it doesn’t carry through in Curtis Park
- Champa Street is a more important connecting street than Arapahoe and is a better bikeway in Curtis Park

**Welton Street**
- We should speak with Paul Books, who has some fresh lessons about the light rail side of Welton, particularly in relation to Public Works requirements
- We should ensure that DSG for both Park Avenue and Welton are coordinated with the new DSG being drafted for the Five Points Cultural Historic District

Q: Is locating enhanced setback areas adjacent to the light rail a requirement?  
A: No. The zoning provides a greater build-to - this allows for greater setbacks, but they are not required

**All Streets**
- Concern about labeling too many streets as “key streets”

**Other Discussion**
- We need to ensure that there are exceptions for small lots (including standards for active uses adjacent to open spaces)

III. Review Draft Signs Design Standards & Guidelines for Task Force Input

**Presentation and Discussion**
Staff summarized the draft design standards and guidelines for signs, which build on current objectives and regulations for signs throughout downtown to provide additional detail regarding a variety of sign types. They also explained that the Design Advisory Board will use Chapter 2 of the DSG to review building design and ensure that the location of later signage has been considered. Throughout the presentation, staff paused to ask the task force for feedback on key topics:
- Interest in addressing traffic signs through the DSG
- Interest in special sign DSG on key streets.
- Concern that only allowing three dimensional projecting signs will result in the area looking like a theme park.
- Interest in allowing projecting signs without a comprehensive sign plan

Q: Do we really want to prohibit internal sign illumination? There are some nice illuminated signs around, including channel lit signs.  
A: The language regarding internal illumination may be too strong; staff will revise
Q: If we say that window signs shouldn’t block views inside, doesn’t that prohibit window signs?
A: The language is intended to encourage window signs that are located in a way that promotes active storefronts (preserves at least some views into active uses)
Q: Shouldn’t we address sign sizing?
A: Sizing is addressed in the zoning code
Q: Will the sign DSG supersede the zoning code?
A: No

IV. Review Recommended Updates to Draft Massing Design Standards & Guidelines

Presentation and Discussion
Staff summarized objectives for the massing standards and guidelines, which promote varied massing that helps create a sense of place and human scale. They described updates to the draft massing standards that seek to introduce quantifiable metrics for larger buildings. Finally, staff discussed the upper story setback alternative and said that further evaluation indicated that the alternative was not necessary to promote creative design, except on 21st Street and Park Avenue, where a 100% upper story setback would be required. Throughout the presentation, staff paused to ask the task force for feedback on key topics.

• Concern that it would take a sophisticated architect to understand that they can finesse standards and guidelines; what if everyone just meets the standards and doesn’t do anything creative?
• Desire to avoid a monolithic feel in new buildings
• Massing stimulation is more important on the lower floors than on upper stories; need to emphasize pedestrian priority
• Concern that the primary massing standard could tie the hands of an architect and lead to bad/patchy design
• Discussion regarding whether the 75’ massing interval makes sense (Bellevue Station doesn’t have this and still has human scale)
• Discussion regarding whether shorter or smaller buildings should be exempt from the primary massing standard
• The task force agreed that projects of about 3-4 stories, or on lots narrower than 125’ (dimension to the alley on a numbered street) or 150’ should be exempt. (Note: Earlier discussions omitted small or narrow lots from Street Level Active Use requirements.)
• Desire to illustrate creative interpretations of the upper story setback that does not just produce a “shelf” throughout the district
• Interest in encouraging a creative transition to Curtis Park
• Discussion regarding Curtis Park neighborhood desire to have open views down named streets toward downtown and not be presented with a wall
• Desire to see corner elements at intersections along Park Avenue
• Task Force agreement to allow the upper story setback alternative only on 21st Street and Park Avenue

V. Review Questions from Task Force Meeting #7 - Transition to Historic Districts

Presentation and Discussion
Staff revisited transitions to adjacent historic districts. They described draft DSG to address facades facing the historic districts (including rear facades) that nearly surround Arapahoe Square. Throughout the presentation, staff paused to ask for feedback on key topics.

• Four-sided design is important, especially near historic districts
• Interest in extending similar treatment to all historic transitions (especially to the alley transitions with Clements and Ballpark Historic Districts)
• Discussion on whether wrapped parking should be required above the level of adjacent historic districts or buildings
• Discussion on whether a height transition or an upper story setback should be required on rear facades facing a historic district
• The task force agreed that DSG should encourage high-quality design adjacent to historic districts, but that specific height transitions, setbacks or wrapping of upper story parking should not be required
• The task force agreed that the height map should not include a section with lower heights along the Ballpark Neighborhood, keeping the heights as specified in the NE Downtown Area Plan

VI. Next Steps

The next meeting:

January 27th, 2016
3:00-6:00
Blair Caldwell Library
2401 Welton Street

The January 27th meeting will focus on review of the complete package of zoning amendments and design standards/guidelines prior to posing of the official public review draft.