

**Slot Home Evaluation & Text Amendment Task Force
Summary – Meeting 1 – Tuesday, January 10, 2017**

Meeting Objectives:

- Clarify the charge to the task force
- Establish working relationships among the task force members
- Refine an initial problem statement to guide future discussion

Task Force Members in Attendance: Nathan Adams, Dave Berton, Enrico Cacciorini, Anna Cawrse, Scott Chomiak, Anne Cox, Jane Crisler, Councilman Rafael Espinoza, Christine Franck, Sarah Kaplan, Maggie Miller, Ty Mumford, Councilman Wayne New, Heather Noyes, Melissa Rummel; **Not in Attendance:** Don Elliot; **CPD Staff:** Abe Barge, Jeff Brasel, Kyle Dalton, Analiese Hock, Josh Palmeri, Andy Rutz; **Observers:** Afor Chavez [CPD], Josh Rogers [Denver resident], Amanda Sandoval [Council Aide, District 1], Melissa Horn [Council Aide, District 10]

I. Aspirations

The Task Force and staff identified their favorite multi-unit residential buildings and discussed some of the aspirations that each Task Force member has for the slot home evaluation project. Some of those aspirations are:

- Fostering design creativity and diversity in a way that respects Denver rather than freezing things in time
- Bringing better design and density to Denver in a way that uses the right forms in the zoning code
- Promoting a common-sense approach to maintaining density while addressing the needs of the market and affordability
- Establishing long-term stability and clarity in the code so that it is less subject to varied interpretations
- Addressing the need for density and affordability by producing a product that is attainable for buyers
- Ensuring zoning code consistency that respects the character of the neighborhood
- Giving CPD the ability to intervene when there is a conflict between the development form and the character of the neighborhood
- Producing a code that supports friendliness to the street
- Reflecting the existing intent statements of the zone districts within the code
- Encouraging consistency in the zoning code so that everyone knows what to expect
- Emphasizing the public realm and exploring the relationship between the public and private spaces
- Creating walkable places
- Creating building forms that will serve for the long-term, even as the market changes
- Creating a predictable flexibility that results in calculated variety
- Finding ways for the existing neighborhood fabric to inform new development
- Generating an architecture that ultimately creates a better and more urban, beautiful and active public realm
- Ensuring that our city looks like Denver and not just some other city
- Preserving use-by-right land-use while making zone code interpretation more consistent
- Addressing concerns from the public while developing a healthy amount of flexibility in a more clearly understandable code

II. How the Group Will Operate

- The best way to build consensus is to build trust; this process will work if the participants act in ways that are trustworthy and honorable
- Task Force members need to be forthright about what they care about and be comfortable with disagreeing – while not being disagreeable
- Respect opinions that are not your own, and build to something that everyone can work with; the final recommendation will not be what any single Task Force member would write on their own
- In communicating with the public or media, “I am on the task force and I think” is fine; “I am on the task force and s/he thinks” is not
- Mike Hughes, as facilitator, will aim to make the process as transparent as possible and to handle process questions between meetings so that these meetings can be as substantive as possible

III. Staff Presentation

Staff presented how this effort is defining slot homes, what the scope of the project is, and how the effort will be broken into phases for the next year of work. Staff also gave an introductory presentation on urban design and the relationship of the public and private realms. The presentation emphasized the transition from public to semi-public, semi-private and private spaces. This was followed by an introduction to the Denver Zoning Code. Staff concluded with a synopsis of the research and analysis that went into the draft Problem Identification Report, including information on historical and recent slot home development trends, geographic information on where most slot home construction is occurring, and a graphic summary of four typical configurations.

IV. Task Force Discussion/Activities on Problem Statement

Staff presented the problem identification approach as well as the five elements of the draft Problem Statement. Following that presentation, the Task Force participated in two activities to provide Staff with feedback. In the first activity, task force members used post-it notes to describe positive and negative attributes of the four slot home configurations. In the second activity, members used post-it notes to comment on each of the five elements of the draft Problem Statement – identifying opportunities to refine, strengthen or add to those elements, while also allowing for issues that were completely missing from the draft Problem Statement.

Task Force discussion during the first exercise included the following:

- It is important to be specific about what we mean by density; is it building mass or number of people?
- Massing is an important element of the problem; we should develop tools to manipulate a building's massing more than the code has in the past, particularly to respond to context
- Though massing is modified by the primary/front setbacks, we need to produce better outcomes
- There is a need for predictable flexibility
- Scale and massing don't fit the context, which may be a result of most of the designs being boxes that fully occupy the allowable envelope
- There is a lack of transition between the new and the old
- New buildings that don't fit the existing context interrupt the rhythm of the street
- It is important to keep in mind that even an apartment building next to a single-family home can make a good or a bad good transition; the issues are not necessarily slot home specific; perhaps studying ways to promote consistency in materials and architectural cues is a means to better align with the context, even if the scale is quite different
- Many of the slot homes don't have front porches, yet most homes traditionally have them
- The MX & MS districts enable building right up to the street, and so developers do just that; in MU districts, the allowance to encroach on the front setback can be taken advantage of to create front porches
- Creating effective transitions between the public and the private spaces makes a tremendous difference in the pedestrian experience; we should emphasize the pedestrian experience
- Of the four typical configurations of slot homes that were shown, the Center Court is the least successful for the public realm since it creates two access points from the street
- If developers were required to include and improve street trees, there would be a linear element that would connect the neighborhood in a way that is already established throughout the city; there should be way to require one tree for every 35' of frontage for all projects larger than one unit
- The work done in this Task Force should inform what happens in Public Works and vice versa
- ADA requirements make it difficult to build front porches
- In the last year, Forestry and Transportation have started to require street trees and right-of-way improvements
- Separate trash bin for each unit in multi-unit developments are overwhelming the alley
- One of the slot home configurations that seemed to have the most positive post-it notes is the Detached Parking configuration, but it is the least developed type; its relationship to the public realm is the strongest

- There are challenges in developing this type in the current market, because most buyers are unwilling to buy something with detached parking
- The most profitable slot home models have no transition from private to public
- We must reclaim that transition while still finding a way to develop units that make financial sense
- The composition of the façades is important; those that are disorderly and chaotic get negative reviews; those with more transparency and a more orderly façade were received more favorably
- All design decisions for this building type can be tied to construction costs; that is what drives the developer's decisions
- Land is expensive; windows are expensive; favored materials are expensive
- A fenestration requirement could compel a more orderly, consistent set of architectural details
- Transparency alternatives do not achieve the same positive outcomes that transparency itself does

The Task Force discussion on the second activity included the following:

- It will be important to avoid getting stuck in the current context if the area is targeted for fundamental change to its character; it isn't enough to say that it doesn't work simply because it does not respond to what is next to it today
- How are we able to tell what is an area of change vs. an area of stability? New design should be more in harmony with the existing context if it is an area of stability as opposed to an area of change; in an area of change, the context is less relevant or even completely irrelevant
- Looking at two different streets – Tennyson and W. 38th – each street might demand different requirements that address the context of the two different streets; it should be important to understand what the street is like and then respond accordingly
- There is not enough calibration and granularity of the forms themselves within many contexts, so there is a need to take into consideration separate solutions for separate contexts
- Street engagement should be more specifically about engagement with the public realm
- The names used for some forms convey something to the public that isn't reflected in code
- We need to think about what should apply city-wide and what should apply to individual neighborhoods through overlay districts (or some other technique)
- It may be worth exploring having a zoning code form that explicitly applies to the slot home; if that were the case, it would be important to consider what zone districts it would be allowed in

Staff will use this discussion to inform the final version of the Problem Statement.

V. February Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday, February 8th, 2017 2:00-5:00 at. The February 8th meeting will begin with a tour of slot home development in small groups followed by a discussion with the reconvened Task Force. The February meeting will provide an opportunity to:

- Identify slot home issues and may occur across a variety of contexts vs. issues particular to specific neighborhoods or lots
- Relate observed issues back to the draft problem statement
- Discuss criteria for successful solutions
- Provide feedback to City staff to revise the problem statement for public review