

**Planning Division**

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Memo

To: Community Development Committee Members**From:** Dana L. McDaniel, City Manager**Initiated by:** Megan O'Callaghan, Deputy City Manager/Chief Finance and Development Officer
Jennifer M. Rauch, AICP, Director of Planning**Date:** October 18, 2021**Re:** Architectural and Design Review and Support**Summary**

City Council has requested additional architectural expertise be provided to supplement staff reviews and to inform Board and Commission actions. At the June 14, 2021 meeting, staff provided an overview of options and a recommended approach to meet the need for ongoing professional architectural reviews and support. City Council expressed support of the recommended approach and referred the topic to the Community Development Committee for further discussion prior to implementation.

Background

The Planning Division has used consultant services, including architectural support on an as-needed basis to provide training and to conduct design reviews for a number of years. These support services are used for a variety of capacities, both to supplement internal staff reviews and for Board and Commission support. Initially firms such as Ford & Associates Architects (2018), Design Group (2015), F5 Design Architectural (all Tartan Ridge reviews), Jonathan Barnes Architectural Design (2013), and Meleca Architectural (2013) were used for a project specific purpose or review.

In addition to these consultants, the Planning Division has been under contract with three design consultants on an on-going basis to provide consistent support, which include Guide Studio (2014), Preservation Designs (2016), and LandPlan Studio (2017). Guide Studio, a graphic design firm, performs qualitative and quantitative reviews of all signs located within Bridge Park and Bridge Park West to ensure the intent of the district, which is to encourage creative, engaging, one-of-a-kind sign designs, is met. The consultants are graphic designers who provide sign review as part of the zoning review portion of the sign permit process. The contract value is \$4,500 on a yearly basis. Preservation Designs, a historic preservation firm, provides historic architectural services including historical analysis for existing structures and sites, and review of architectural appropriateness of exterior modifications and new construction for Historic Dublin and outlying historic properties. The consultant is a registered architect who provides detailed written reviews with graphics and extensive historic background for significant development applications for the Architectural Review Board. The contract value is \$14,000 on

a yearly basis. LandPlan Studios, a planning and urban design firm, provides professional services for design and technical review for larger development projects primarily focused on Bridge Street District and West Innovation District applications. The consultant is a certified planner and a registered landscape architect who provides written reviews and analysis with graphics for development applications for the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Administrative Review Team. The contract value is \$36,000 on a yearly basis.

Each of these consultant's review is integrated within the planning review process and appears seamless to an applicant. The review process is streamlined to the point where upon receipt of applications the materials are provided to the specific consultant for review and their review deadline is incorporated into the overall timeframe.

Staff also conducted benchmarking of peer communities in the Columbus area (such as, Worthington, Westerville, Hilliard, Grove City, Upper Arlington) and nationally (such as, Carmel, IN; Wilmette, IL; Castle Rock, CO; Brookfield, WI; Mount Lebanon, TX; Englewood, CO; Palo Alto, CA) to understand how architectural review is handled. The results yielded a variety of responses with a majority of communities with no architectural support through contractual services or represented on a Board or Commission. The smaller number of communities that did have architectural support was identified as either handled through a Board or Commission member with architectural or design background, a staff member, or hired consultant that provides expertise on a case-by-case basis.

Options

Potential solutions to meet the needs of City Board and Commission members to provide additional architectural support are summarized below. Each option could include training, support and design review for development applications. Staff recognizes a need to balance thoughtful architectural input with a user-friendly development review process. Additionally, Staff recognizes that it is imperative to select design professionals that can provide honest critiques of peers' work. The proposed budget to provide these professional services within the Planning Divisions operating budget is up to \$50,000.

1. Integrated Design Review (Subject Matter Experts)

The first option is to establish a formalized Integrated Design Review (IDR) within the existing development review process by consulting with multiple design professionals having experience in various specialties including: historic preservation, mixed-use development, office/institutional development, landscape architecture, and residential development. The design professional would be asked to make independent recommendations informed by their expertise in the form of a written report to City Boards and Commissions and they would participate in Board and Commission meetings. Additionally, specialists could provide on-going professional development for Board and Commission members.

The approach provides a seamless development review experience for our external customers. Additionally, the volume of proposals is distributed across consultant teams facilitating timely reviews. This approach aligns with the Planning Division's existing case coordination procedures and would not require significant additional staff resources to facilitate. Our current contracted architectural firms are largely utilized on projects within the Bridge Street, West Innovation and Historic Districts. With the formal IDR model,

contracted architectural support would also be utilized for projects outside these geographic areas. This approach would allow for a more robust method to engage architectural expertise and support, and more meaningful collaboration with the Board and Commission members.

Additionally, Planning will also engage the consultants to provide guidance and information about new building materials and products. Planning would consultant with the design professionals when new materials are included with individual applications, but also Planning would engage the consultant group at least one a year to proactively provide the Board and Commission members with information about recent trends in materials and identify materials that should be considered with future development proposals. This information would be presented and discussed with the Board and Commission members.

2. Design Review Committee

Option to establish a Design Review Committee (DRC) to review development proposals across the City. The DRC would be comprised of three members including two architects and one landscape architect. The Committee would meet regularly in accordance with a published schedule. Projects requiring design review would need to be submitted by a deadline, in advance of the Committee meeting, to afford the group adequate review time.

The establishment of a DRC would be a new process that would precede Board and Commission reviews. Staff would not make recommendations to the DRC, but rather the DRC would make independent recommendations to staff and the Boards and Commissions. Proposals reviewed by various professional expert would be forwarded to the DRC. The DRC would require additional staff support as a standing body. This process would also add time and additional steps in the review process, which would impact the developer and their timeline.

Recommended Approach

Planning recommends establishing a formalized Integrated Design Review process to ensure reviews are conducted in alignment with areas of professional expertise and continue to ensure a seamless user experience for applicants when interfacing with City Boards and Commissions. Establishing this formalized process would be consistent with the existing consultant review process and would not create additional steps or add more time to the overall development review process. In addition to the individual application review, a consultant could also provide support, information, and training to the Board and Commissions, as needed.

Following the Committee's review and Council's authorization, staff intends to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP), to solicit architectural support services in furtherance of the approved approach. The RFP would focus on a consultant's architectural field of expertise and background, representative body of work, prior work with communities, Boards and Commissions, and project scope and approach. Planning has requested funds within the proposed 2022 Operating Budget to implement this Council directive.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Community Development Committee consider and provide feedback on the proposed approach.

Held

June 14, 2021

Page 5 of 10

OTHER BUSINESS

- Abbey Theater Brand Refresh

Mr. Bishara stated that the Abbey Theater of Dublin has become a destination for theater companies and artists to produce diverse, inclusive regional and world premiere productions for audiences of all ages. He reported that staff has partnered with a wide variety of multi-cultural groups such as the Columbus Black Theatre Festival as well as Central Ohio’s only LGBTQ+ theatre company, Evolution Theatre Company, in an effort to bring diversity, equity and inclusion to the stage in Dublin. During the pandemic, the Abbey was at the forefront of virtual theatre initiatives, garnering a Greater Columbus Arts Council (GCAC) Community Arts Innovation nomination for **The Virtual Theatre Project**. Mr. Bishara shared that staff also revisited the Mission Statement and the Vision Stated for the Abbey Theater of Dublin. The new statements are:

Mission: *The Abbey Theater of Dublin creates dynamic programming for the stage, classroom and the community that captivates and inspires.*

Vision: *The Abbey Theater of Dublin lights the sparks of curiosity, empathy and humanity.*

These statements are centered around serving the community, arts and children. To align with this new direction, staff feels a logo refresh is well timed. The goal of this refresh is to establish and implement a dynamic Abbey Theater of Dublin production strategy that connects the theater with the community and to increase audience and community engagement. Staff identified several weaknesses surrounding the current logo:

- Branding confusion with DCRC = diminished community awareness
- Lack of clarity on what makes the Abbey Theater unique compared to other theaters
- Lack of Social Media presence
- Unique, tailored marketing that tells the Abbey Theater of Dublin’s story

Mr. Bishara stated that the objective was to build a unique and branded presence on Social Media Channels in order to further communicate our unique brand offerings and leveraging the optimal channel for the right program with the best brand-right message. The refreshed logo is designed in a vertical style to allow for more versatility in print, digital and other assets. This brand refresh maintains a visual connection to how the brand identity was seen before, but the new logo is up-to-date, vibrant and designed for today’s audiences. Ms. Weisenauer stated that no comments were received regarding this item. Council members responded favorably to the new mission and vision statement as well as the new branding.

Architectural Support Services

Ms. Rauch stated that City Council requested architectural expertise be provided to supplement staff reviews and to inform Board and Commission actions. Staff has evaluated options to meet the need for additional ongoing professional architectural reviews and support. Each option could include training, support and design review for development applications. Staff recognizes a need to balance thoughtful architectural input with a user-friendly development review process. Additionally, staff recognizes that it is imperative to select design professionals who can provide honest critiques of their peers’ work. The budget to provide these professional services within the Planning Division’s operating budget is up to \$50,000. She provided the following options for Council’s consideration:

Integrated Design Review (Subject Matter Experts) : establishing a formalized Integrated Design Review (IDR) within the existing development review process by consulting with multiple design professionals having experience in various specialties including: historic preservation, mixed-use development, office/institutional

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Held

June 14, 2021

Page 6 of 10

development, landscape architecture, and residential development. The design professional would be asked to make independent recommendations informed by their expertise in the form of a written report to City Boards and Commissions and they would participate in Board and Commission meetings. Additionally, specialists could provide on-going professional development for Board and Commission members.

The approach provides:

- a seamless development review experience for our external customers.
- a more robust method to engage architectural expertise and support, and more meaningful collaboration with the Board and Commission members.
- The opportunity to consult these professionals at least once a year to proactively provide the Board and Commission members with information about recent trends in materials and identify materials that should be considered with future development proposals.

Design Review Committee: establishing a new Design Review Committee (DRC) body and process to review development proposals across the City as an added component to the development review processes. The DRC would be comprised of three members including two architects and one landscape architect. The DRC would meet regularly in accordance with a published schedule. Projects requiring design review would need to be submitted by a deadline, in advance of the DRC meeting, to afford the group adequate review time.

This approach would:

- be a new process that would precede Board and Commission reviews.
- make independent recommendations to staff and the Boards and Commissions. Proposals reviewed by various professional experts would be forwarded to the DRC.
- require additional staff support as a standing body. This process would also add time and additional steps in the review process, which would impact the developer and their timeline.

Staff recommended establishing a formalized Integrated Design Review process to ensure reviews are conducted in alignment with areas of professional expertise and continue to ensure a seamless user experience for applicants when interfacing with City Boards and Commissions. Establishing this formalized process would not create additional steps or add more time to the overall development review process. In addition to the individual application review, a consultant could also provide support, information, and training to the Board and Commissions, as needed.

Staff recommended City Council refer this matter to the Community Development Committee for further discussion.

Ms. Weisenauer stated that no comments were received regarding this item.

Ms. Fox thanked staff for this work and stated that it will be a great benefit to our Boards and Commissions and the process that applicants must go through.

Vice Mayor De Rosa also thanked staff and stated that when she and Mayor Amorose Groomes spoke with Board and Commission members individually, this was the number one request they received.

Mayor Amorose Groomes moved to refer this topic to the Community Development Committee.

Ms. Alutto seconded.

Vote on the motion: Ms. Fox, yes; Vice Mayor De Rosa, yes; Mr. Keeler, yes; Mr. Reiner, yes; Ms. Alutto, yes; Mr. Peterson, yes; Mayor Amorose Groomes, yes.

TIRC Report

Mr. Stiffler stated that the Tax Incentive Review Council (TIRC) met on May 14. The City of Dublin was found to be in compliance with their TIF Districts. The Franklin County Auditor prefers City Council formally accept the minutes and reports of the TIRC so that there is a public record which reflects that Council has received the information.