

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES



Planning Division

m e m o r a n d u m

TO: The Urbana Historic Preservation Commission

FROM: Kevin Garcia, Planner II

DATE: May 29, 2015

SUBJECT: Letter to City Council Regarding the Downtown District

Introduction and Background

At the May meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission, a draft proclamation to encourage the City Council to expedite the creation of a design review board for Downtown Urbana was reviewed and discussed. Part of the discussion regarding the proclamation focused on what the proper format would be to convey the Commission's intentions to the City Council. The issue was left open for future discussion, with City Staff being asked to provide a recommendation at the next meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission on how best to proceed with this matter.

Discussion

Staff reviewed the options available and recommends that the Commission submit a letter to the City Council outlining the Commission's position. A draft letter is attached to this memo, which attempts to outline the issues and capture the spirit of the Commission's draft proclamation.

Urbana currently has two design review boards and two design review overlay districts. The Design Review Board reviews projects in the Lincoln-Busey Corridor and East Urbana Design Review Overlay Districts, while the MOR Design Review Board reviews projects in the MOR Zoning District.

Development of a design review overlay district for Downtown Urbana was recommended as one of seven of the most important implementation projects in the 2012 Downtown Urbana Plan. According to the plan, an overlay district would help to preserve the historic character of downtown and ensure that new development would respect and enhance the downtown core. The 2014-2017 City Council and Mayor Goals also direct City Staff to "*Prepare a design overlay district for downtown to ensure compatibility of new buildings and renovations*".¹ To date, several of the other key projects called for in the Downtown Plan list have been, or are in the process of, being completed as Staff time has permitted. In anticipation of being fully staffed and in a better position to complete this project, Planning Division Staff have held internal preparatory meetings to begin the process of creating a design review district for downtown. Staff are currently conducting a building design survey as the first step in that process, and will welcome input from the Historic Preservation Commission as the project moves forward.

¹ *Urbana City Council and Mayor Goals 2014-2017 (4.1.c)*

Recommendation

Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission review the attached letter and make any changes, then forward the letter to the Urbana City Council.

Attachments: Draft Letter to City Council

DRAFT Letter to City Council Regarding the Downtown District 5/29/15 DRAFT

Dear Urbana City Council Members and Mayor Prussing:

The member of the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission wish to state the following regarding Downtown Urbana:

- Section XII-3-B. Of the Zoning Ordinance of Urbana regarding the Historic Preservation Commission specifies that the purpose of the commission includes:
 1. Identifying such buildings, structures, sites, objects or historic districts within the City of Urbana that are historically significant in that they exemplify and/or reflect the cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history of the nation, state or City; and
 2. Advising the City Council on the designation of such buildings, structures, sites or objects as either landmarks or historic districts, as defined herein; and
 3. Protecting the historical characteristics of landmarks or districts by reviewing proposed changes to their exterior architectural appearances; and
 - The historic importance of the area of Downtown Urbana broadly defined as the blocks of Main Street from 200 West to 200 East and the blocks of Race and Broadway from 200 North to 200 South, cannot be over emphasized; and
 - Modifications to buildings in this area have compromised the historic character of this area; and
 - The Historic Preservation Commission wishes to support the work of Planning Division staff in prioritizing the preservation of Downtown; and
 - The City has a precedent of Design Review boards appointed to 3 other critical neighborhoods (MOR, Busey and Lincoln and East Urbana) of the City, yet no Design Review board overseeing development of the Downtown area as described above.

We the members of the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission signify the importance of and request that the Urbana City Council expedite the protection of Downtown Urbana through the creation of a Design Review Board.

Respectfully Submitted,

Urbana Historic Preservation Commission