

## **Cedar Falls Planning and Zoning Commission Work Session**

**March 03, 2021**

### **City Hall with Videoconference Cedar Falls, Iowa**

The Cedar Falls Planning and Zoning Commission met in special work session on March 03, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. by videoconference. The following Commission members were present: Holst, Larson, Leeper, Lynch, Saul, Schrad, and Sears. Hartley and Prideaux were absent. Code consultant, Mary Madden, was present. Karen Howard, Planning and Community Services Manager, Michelle Pezley, Planner III, Thom Weintraut, Planner III, Chris Sevy, Planner I, and Jaydevsinh Atodaria (JD), Planner I were also present.

Mr. Leeper opened the work session. Mary Madden, with Ferrell Madden joined the meeting by videoconference. Ms. Howard noted that the Architectural Standards section of the code was the primary topic for this work session, but that the Commission could also ask questions about other sections as well. Mr. Leeper asked if Ferrell Madden can provide a quick background or any potential questions that may have come up during similar code updates in other cities by her firm. Ms. Madden provided brief information about the Architectural Standards and mentioned that the questions are different with different communities. Ms. Madden noted that that the standards in this section do not dictate a particular architectural style and leaves a lot of latitude for architects and developers design within the parameters of the code. The focus is on using functional elements in design and to promote use of high quality building materials. She noted that sign standards are also included in this section. The current CBD Overlay zoning district includes specific sign standards for the downtown. The draft code builds on the standards that are in the code with the focus on signage that is appropriately scaled for a main street environment. One of the biggest differences from the current code is to exclude any new free standing signs.

Mr. Holst, in response stated that he likes the objective part being prioritized. Mr. Holst asked if sign standards vary in other parts of the study area that are not in the immediate downtown. Ms. Madden mentioned that most areas outside the central business district are residential in character, so residential signage standards would apply. However, there is a small commercial area near 18<sup>th</sup> Street. She stated that if desired they could consider the implications of some differences in sign standards for this area. She also noted that there is a bonus incentive for property owners that take down their freestanding signs. They would get additional sign allowance for other types of signs that meet the standards, such as wall signs. Mr. Larson, asked if there is an example of such scenario? Ms. Madden provided a brief example.

Ms. Howard added that the code provides an additional sign allowance for multi-story buildings along 1<sup>st</sup> Street, because it is along a highway. It allows a wall sign on the upper floor, instead of just on the storefront level.

Ms. Saul asked if there were any standards regarding color of the facades in the code. Ms. Madden noted that there are not, as these are often a matter of opinion and are hard to enforce.

Mr. Leeper asked if there opportunities to vary from the code. Is there a process for requesting exceptions to the rules? He noted that it is difficult to write standards that ensure good design. He asked if there is confidence that the standards will result in well-designed buildings. Ms. Madden in response stated that the code provides basic rules that focus on durability and functionality, that prioritize pedestrian scale vision of the adopted downtown plan.

Mr. Leeper asked if there will be any authority for this commission to weigh in on cases. Ms. Howard responded that the code standards are intended to be reviewed and approved administratively. The focus was on creating a fairly detailed set of clear and objective standards to replace standards that are currently vague. There is some ability to request minor adjustments to the standards for challenging sites or to address minor construction issues. However, any major variation from the code would require approval of a variance. She noted that during the vision planning effort, there was frustration on all sides regarding the current standards, which are fairly vague. Community members didn't know what to expect and developers did not have a clear set of standards to follow, which resulted in longer review times and negotiation through P&Z and Council process. There are more prescriptive and measurable standards in the proposed code so that projects can be approved administratively, so there is consistency and assurance for high quality buildings in the downtown area.

Mr. Leeper asked if someone could explain how "cottage" is defined in the code? Ms. Madden in response stated that it is a small residential building, one to one and half stories and used in "cottage courts," as defined and illustrated in the code. Based on the study and responses from the community, this may be a very desirable housing type for the city; small cottages clustered around a central green. There may be a market for cottage courts for retiring baby boomers, empty nesters, as well as providing affordable housing opportunities for singles and first time homebuyers.

Ms. Saul asked if aluminum and vinyl siding is allowed on the back side of the building? Ms. Madden confirmed that these siding types are not allowed on any side of the building. She noted that the code specifies a range of acceptable building materials with the higher quality materials concentrated on the street-facing facades and other materials. She noted the 75%-25% standards in the code, with primary façade material to be 75% and secondary façade material to be 25%. We have set the bar high in order to ensure durable high quality buildings in the downtown area. Ms. Saul asked if prohibition of corrugated metal roof is similar. Ms. Madden clarified that using corrugated metal, such as on a barn roof, would not be allowed, but higher quality standing seam metal roofs would be allowed.

Ms. Saul stated that she does agree with Karen, that these guidelines outlined in the code would help developers to streamline the development review process. Mr. Leeper asked if some level of design review through the Commission and Council would be a good idea for major projects. In response, Ms. Madden and Ms. Howard indicated that if a majority of the Commission would like to consider adding some sort of design review for certain projects, we could explore options and provide pros and cons for such a process.

Ms. Saul asked if there were any standards regarding color of the facades in downtown. Ms. Madden mentioned that the code is silent on color, as it is hard to enforce.

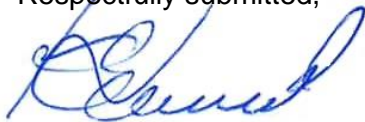
Mr. Leeper indicated his preference for some level of design review, but that he understands that that process just invites all sorts of requests for exceptions to the rules. Ms. Madden in response suggested that there are pros and cons to it. Based on nature of project, design review is certainly doable. Ms. Howard added that we have set up a staff zoning review committee that will work with the applicant and provide guidance through the administrative

review process. This committee will include zoning administrator, building official, some additional planning staff. Ms. Madden added that the idea with this code is to see high quality development in the city. Mr. Leeper stated that his comments are not a critique of the work that everyone has done to achieve this code, as we will be testing this code in near future to see what it lacks or what improvements can be made.

Ms. Howard asked the Commission to contact her if there is anything that they would like to focus on during the work sessions. She noted that the next work session will focus on Parking and Public Realm Standards which will take place after the items on regular agenda are completed next week. Ms. Howard encouraged the Commissioners to reach out in advance with any questions they have.

As there were no further comments, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Karen Howard  
Planning & Community Services Manager



Jaydevsinh Atodaria  
Planner I