

CBD DEVELOPMENT REVIEW FORUM COMMENTS

3/23/16

Comments received from attendees on comment cards

1. DEVELOPMENT REVIEW THRESHOLDS

Across all these tables I hear the same things: the process as far as UDO & existing levels is fine. It is more awareness & participation that is wanted. Nothing new – people want to be hear. Keep the levels the same! Thanks for this opportunity to engage.
Keep levels same. Developer public meetings should be more widely publicized – perhaps opt into e-mail notification for any Level II/III review. Let's do math- under 20% of eligible votes vote in council elections. No one elected by more than 40%. This is not a mandate for anything.
I would urge caution in changing the thresholds so that Council ends up reviewing more projects. Frequently nimbyism ends up thwarting big-picture goals that benefit the entire community. The current state of growth is not going to last forever. We need development that will continue to enhance the tax base which then allows the City to provide services and infrastructure. Please minimize politics in the process.
Pre- 2010 Levels, keep Master plan form based code.
Keep current controls & review process. Council <u>does not</u> need to review Level I or Level II. Notice of hearings to tenants (retail/Office, residential) as well property owners.
Increase public awareness & public input early in process for LI & L II projects. Not just property owners, but tenants, business owners, stakeholders & citizens.= use social media, e-mail, etc.
Keep the thresholds the way they are. We have a lot of Developable land in the CBD that will scare off investors. If they don't invest, we cannot grow---We need the tax for City services.
City should have link on website w/ listing of projects/details of Development and time/place for public comment. Website does <u>not</u> have to be interactive or have staff respond-just post info for public consumption.
Keep as they stand now. More Council review will politicize the process. Do increase more notification to the public so they are aware of new projects early on prior to their approval.

Level II should be lowered to a 100,000 sf threshold. Public meetings should be held/added at Level I, and all CBD stake holders notified, not just 200 sq. ft. radius.
Thresholds as already defined work well. Building code and financing requirements self -regulate building height. Developers feel that rules are generally fair. Process should be predictable.
Reconsider how the 40% is allocated above 75'. Can there be flexibility in how this is accomplished? For example, can the 40% rule be modified by using a solar envelope instead?
Reduce back to 100,000 ft? And 265' : Re-examine. City Council needs more ability to utilize Cond. Zoning, a part of that is reducing thresholds.
Recommended increased in communication regarding incoming projects and stages of review. Increased communication to adjacent/surrounding businesses. Keep 3 tiers, no suggestion for levels of tiers #s.
Move forward w/ council reviewing Level II. Maybe use "code for Asheville" or same web portal, At least if the public meetings are not possible right now. But really open to all public especially all downtown for Level II & III is important early on. Lower threshold for Council approval.
Our City does not need to politicize (Politics) with taking Level II projects to Level III with Council. Council needs to recognize that is why city staff is hired to review, check to box of current regulations. One reason we have P & Z in place. My fear is it will lead to this type concept all over the City, with Development controlled by elected folks. <u>Not a way to develop a City.</u> Do not need public meeting before TRC for Level II/III– that is what P & Z is for.
Level I – Under 25,000 sf and up to 75' tall. Level II – 25,000-125,000 sf. And between 75' – 125'Tall. Level 3-Over 125,000 sf or 125' tall. More input from city council review will limit the amount of unregulated infrastructure within the downtown region.
Really the problem is design- No consideration of buildings relationship to each other; Large scale + mass that is making an unfriendly pedestrian street wall.—We need better!!
The CUP standards are far too vague, particularly 1-4. More should be required of developers, particularly in the CDB, in terms of contribution to infrastructure-not just parking, but roads, parks, public landscape, etc. Also design guidelines need to be implemented guiding the use of materials, ratios of glass to solid materials, etc. The City Council should implement stricter HP standards regarding compatibility in the CDB.
I support high density development downtown, curtailing sprawl.
I'm concerned City Council will impeded smart development, in response to vocal opposition in the community who may not have full understanding of development impact.
I think during this time of rapid development , more City Council input and decision making is necessary. This brings the people back into decision-making, rather than just developers, staff and commissioners. If necessary, Master Plan needs to be amended. Fast growth isn't smart growth.

Asheville's fast development must take into consideration what can our infrastructure handle-water, storm sewer, sidewalks, traffic, public safety, etc. Where are parks and recreational facilities in all of this? I think the public is ignored while private interests have their ways. Thanks for opportunity to comment.

Need to ensure a streamlined process for development that can produce dollars for the City and prevent sprawl that could ultimately inhibit the viewsheds in the entire area.

Improve Communication w/ public on new construction.
Assess # of buildings that would be affected.
Reduce threshold to 1000,000 SF – No change to height.

City Council S/B involved in Level II projects as well.
Hotels are a huge problem downtown - Infrastructure does not support this additional traffic/volume of tourist staying downtown. Parking is insufficient. Design approval of hotels is poor.
West Asheville & River Arts Districts need Development Planning Standards as well.

Please don't over-complicate these processes 25 years ago downtown was boarded up. Bank of Scotland and Ted Prosee planted a seed @ Pack Square that grew into additional downtown investment and a thriving Retail, Office and Hotel district. We need to be thankful to those who invested in our City because without those people AVL might be just another impoverished mountain town. Let us encourage investment and not complicate it. Such investments radiate through the job market and for businesses which provide goods and services.
Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts.
Tables too loud to hear anything unless you are a lip reader!

City Council should be involved in building plans that involve

- a. Higher than 75' because residents and citizen opinions should be considered and Commission members don't visit sites to evaluate the impact of a building or the existing neighbors, nor are they "allowed" to consider anything that is outside of the UDO compliance criteria
- b. Large numbers of new residential units added to the same block or street, because of traffic impacts, parking impacts, infrastructure impacts such as green space, utilities, stormwater runoff, essential dialing living establishments, e.g. grocery stores, pharmacy, playgrounds, etc.

Public meeting integrate in @ most, no modification. Allowance should be made for repurpose of existing buildings.

Level III process should apply to Level II projects. With the high density of CBD, even "small" projects can have large impacts..

The height issue has by default become self regulating. By tying the 75' height limit for 100% coverage of the lot area with the low rise category in the building code, the ordinance in effect limits most new construction to that height limit. There will be exceptions; we are looking at one now, but it hasn't moved beyond feasibility study yet but most of what we are seeing from potential developers is a type III or V building; wood from over concrete podium.

The current Level 1, 2 and 3 project review criteria work well. The fact that level 3 projects have to go to City Council has also put downward pressure on building size and height. We also know that developers rely on a predictable approval process, particularly if they are paying architectural and civil engineering fees for the TRC and Downtown Commission submittals. This is also limiting projects to no larger than level 2.

2. TYPE OF REVIEW FOR LARGE PROJECTS (CZ VS. CUP)

Do not lower reviews by City Council to projects less than 175,000 S.F. (Level 3). It will make development more costly for citizens and will create a “circus” during election years.

C3 should be extended to all CBD. Gives Council ability to negotiate to fulfill the goals and visions of the Downtown Master Plan such as South Scope height/density. But CUP is too “automated” – focus on minimal compliance w/generalized ruckus.

Review process too passive. City needs to be pro-active in promoting CBD development. Capital Web (Infrastructure) needs to be articulated as organizing basis for development. Pedestrian movements and potential open spaces should be identified. Perhaps the Comprehensive Plan can address these needs.

Maintain current process. Add earlier public notification.

Businesses already find it difficult to do business in the City. Don’t make it more difficult. Instead, find ways to encourage good development that will build the tax base.

Stick with the work done on the Downtown Master Plan.

CZ!!!

CUP should be used because it gives more weight to public input and consideration of the impact on the surrounding neighborhood. A new # 8. Standard should be added that covers aesthetic concerns- the City Council should establish an Architectural Aesthetics Review Committee composed of City residents who have no conflict or interest, i.e., no developers, immediately involved architects, or who might benefit financially from the outcome of this Commission’s verdict on the same or any other projects to be reviewed by them.

Re: CUP hearing: Does the vote have to occur on that date?

Extend CZ process into current CUP areas.

How, why & when might the boundary between CZ & CUP be updated to perfect future development patterns?
Thinking about W. Patton Ave & Coxe Ave as development corridors.- Include in CZ boundary.

3. HOTEL DEVELOPMENT

The more community& design conditions we can place on that the better.

Hotel Development should not be subject to different standards then other projects. They bring tax value to the City and they provide the least impact on land (different traffic patterns for guests coming in/checking out) – put less stress on infrastructure. Also, per sq. ft., provide the most \$ of REVENUE for the City – which we NEED!

Require developers to provide 1 parking space per room, plus parking for convention/meeting space & retail space.
100 transient spaces per development in the CBD.
Keep Level III approval w/ City Council.

No additional requirements.
Need form based code.

The standards for hotel development should not be different from those standards applicable to other uses. The “control” is the set of standards. If we end up with too many hotels, the market will correct itself and some will not survive!

Hotel development –No additional review but form based code.

Businesses need the tourists that hotels house. Let the market work. Use the increased tax base to improve infrastructure and provide services.
Don't mess up a good thing! Other communities would kill for the development we have.

Hotels provide a strong property tax base. They can be lucrative for the City and enable a base of customers who support the variety and diversity of small businesses that make downtown Asheville so unique.

All review by Council..

Do NOT single out hotels for special requirements & review.

What has been the verify process for allowing hotels in the downtown area outside of Level III review?
Hotels offer strong revenue for density. Making this category jump through additional hoops could inhibit a valuable source of property tax revenue for the City. This category should be subject to the same level of review as other projects based on standards that are put in place or remain as is for the CBD.
How do you justify reviewing 1 building type differently from other types. Hotels should not be treated differently.
Living wage necessary Engages surrounding area commercially & aesthetically – Restaurant at Aloft does this well. Have hotels participate in infrastructure & transportation improvements for downtown and the tax base for the City.
Temporarily, there should be higher scrutiny on hotels. They should all be considered through a Level III review process. For a period of 3 years, then re-assess the requirement & either strengthen review or return to the previous process.
Not as many hotels as in 1920. Can't extort developers into giving to housing fund The developer's \$ is at risk, not ours, with hotel development. If fails – great source of affordable housing (See Vanderbilt, Altamont, Battery Park Apts.) Without strong econ. Development plan for downtown tourism wins. Should be more worried about getting more residents downtown, which will define character more than anything. Plus, density allows public transit options to grow, esp. as more residents live here. But note,- hotels and residents can develop simultaneously-one can benefit the other. -residential neighborhoods control type of businesses downtown - hotels (tourists) expand dining and advance retail options for residents.
It doesn't seem like hotels themselves are the problem. It is more an education problem. Have Urban 3 work on tax maps that also show tourism tax impacts. Not TDA... sales tax, jobs, people that work in service jobs and buy homes, pay for schools, etc. DATA +DATA +DATA +Education +Education +Education = happy community.
City Council should review all hotel building applications and consider traffic impact on the neighborhood, parking, amenities near the prospective hotels including public transit.
Need as many as we can get-huge increase in tax base to fund your wish list for infrastructure, green spaces, sidewalk – bike trails, malls to replace streets, etc, & replace Art Museum with great new performance center!
I don't think there should be any additional review process for special uses- sets a precedent for further scrutiny.
No special treatment.

Would prefer converted (conversions ?) hotel development in CBD because it has infrastructure-sidewalks, sewer & water. Also would help keep residential areas remain affordable.

Number & growth is fine. Let market proceed. We are a tourist town. Strong RE tax base in CBD Hotels.

I don't have an issue with the hotels. In fact, the hotels have helped restaurants and retail more than if there were the equivalent number of apartments or condo units. In our building, at most half the people are here, usually in the summer. The hotels will be working to achieve high occupancy rates which will bring more guests downtown to support retail, restaurants etc. Hotel developers are very cautious about overbuilding. They have been burned before.

4. MISCELLANEOUS

Public notice process could be improved for all development activities – including building permits that result in street closure. Perhaps increase noticing to 500'.

A driving circle around downtown with a mile radius & have City bus –or shuttle go around so people can get on & off the shuttle.

It's urgent to connect the north and south greenways to the CBD.

Asheville should require green roofs on all new projects & major renovations.
Solar/wind/Living,

So far as I can see, there is little to no standards for application of sustainable, non toxic, advanced tech or healthy environment for downtown projects. Looking at current project there is only high Co2 offgas systems & materials being applied. This is a condition in the most concentrated area of the community. There are new & economical & highly sustainable and advanced tech that can be applied if the City would direct it. I mentioned one- cross laminated timber.

Make all development have a 4-5 story minimum in the CBD.

When we all worked in the design guidelines, we discussed the need to separate recommendations from requirements. Requirements should only be based on things that can actually be measured; % window or glass area, setback in feet, percentage or floor area above a certain height. Recommendations can be non-measurable and should remain voluntary.

One more thing that I have heard, particularly from non-designers, is a feeling that some of the new downtown buildings feel like they belong in Charlotte...not Asheville.
I think this is due to a number of things...some of the buildings, such as hotels, have a corporate "standard" design that they tend to use. What I call "anywhere buildings".
Others may be the product of out-of-town designers who design the way they do back home and not for Asheville.

Some of the material choices look cheap and suburban - i.e. synthetic stucco (flat surfaces) and don't look urban - don't have weight/mass/a sense of permanence. We pride ourselves in Asheville on craft - some of these newer building have no craft about them...no spark of originality or something that will last awhile.

I think a lot of regular folk want Asheville's downtown buildings to be unique - we kind of pride ourselves on that in almost all things Asheville.

I think they want whatever we build in downtown to enhance Asheville's unique sense of place - not just fill in with buildings that one could find anywhere and in any town.

New buildings should also relate to what is around them...both new and old. We need to create great urban context which means interrelationships between buildings and the spaces between.

I have also mentioned to you the issue of creating canyons along some of the more narrow streets - dark, wind tunnels. Too late now on some of the streets but we should be considering that more - not all setbacks per the existing standards work to create a pedestrian friendly scale.

Other than this, I have no great suggestions on the fly here to tell you how this all might be achieved but I at least think we need a broader discussion related to design. Size may not be the real issue.
