

City of Brisbane

Agenda Report

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council via the City Manager

FROM: Community Development Director

SUBJECT: **Sierra Point Design Guidelines Update**

DATE: Meeting of November 9, 2009

City Council Goals:

To design infrastructure and public facilities to be efficient, cost effective and to contribute to the cohesion and character of the community. (Goal #2)

To promote economic development that stabilizes and diversifies the tax base.(Goal#4)

To develop recreational facilities and promote recreation, educational and cultural programs and passive uses related to parks. (Goal#6)

To preserve and enhance livability and diversity of neighborhoods. (Goal #14)

To encourage community involvement and participation. (Goal #15)

Purpose:

For the City Council to determine the future direction for the remaining buildout of Sierra Point.

Recommendation:

That the City Council approve the attached update of the Sierra Point Design Guidelines.

Background:

In 2005, the City sponsored a series of “Placemaking” workshops facilitated by Fred Kent of the Project for Public Spaces. Placemaking is an approach to improving public places by educating the community about the characteristics of highly successful public places and having community members apply these lessons to an analysis of places in their own community. Sierra Point was among the places in Brisbane that was analyzed in this manner. The analysis concluded that the public space and amenities were inadequate and that the public space lacked an organizational focus which contributed to a weak sense of identity. The City subsequently retained the services of urban design firm Freedman Tung and Sasaki (formerly FTB) to evaluate Sierra Point in light of the concerns stated

above, and to update the Design Guidelines as needed. Major objectives of the consultant's work program were to enhance the value of Sierra Point to the community by improving public spaces, providing more opportunities for community use, and developing a stronger sense of place for the project. Other objectives included evaluating the relationship of private development to the public spaces and determining if this relationship could be strengthened to the benefit of both the public and Sierra Point's employees and businesses.

FTS held stakeholder workshops with property owners at Sierra Point and study sessions with the Planning Commission and City Council in November, 2006 and June, 2007. While the basic character of Sierra Point as an automobile oriented suburban office park is fixed based upon existing development, FTS identified several opportunities to improve public spaces and increase the possible community benefit of Sierra Point. Major recommendations included strengthening the identity of Sierra Point Parkway as an entryway and creating a public focal point and gathering place for the project.

Based on the public input from the initial placemaking workshops and the consultant's professional experience, the consultant suggested two possible alternatives for creating a focal point for the public space at Sierra Point. The first alternative was a "Main Street" concept utilizing the last block of Sierra Point Parkway, at its eastern terminus near the Marina. The second alternative was to create a public park or plaza space in the same area, but on the north side of the last block of the eastern terminus of Sierra Point Parkway. Public workshops were again held with the Planning Commission and the City Council to seek input on the two alternatives and other improvements that would strengthen the identity of Sierra Point and enhance Sierra Point Parkway to act as the gateway.

The Design Guidelines have been updated to reflect the direction provided by Council, after consideration of the public input received throughout the process. The revisions were considered by the Planning Commission at several public hearings in late 2008. On November 13, 2008, the Planning Commission endorsed the proposed revisions to the design guidelines. Related Planning Commission reports and minutes are attached for information.

Discussion:

Since this update was initiated, there have been changes both in the Sierra Point area and the larger development environment that are relevant. Locally within Sierra Point, both the HCP biotech campus and Opus office project have been approved. The biotech project in particular was designed to complement a future public plaza by establishing a retail liner building along Sierra Point Parkway. From a larger perspective, the state of the economy overall has slowed the pace of development, and a proposal to establish a hotel/condominium project at Sierra Point has been withdrawn.

Irrespective of the present circumstances, the long term vision for Sierra Point remains an important policy question for the Council's consideration. The updated design guidelines

under consideration are consistent with the policy direction provided previously to enhance Sierra Park as a community asset and establish a public focal point.

Substantive changes to the Design Guidelines include the following:

- Refinement of the project objectives to address project identity, sense of place and public spaces;
- Modification of the Master Plan to incorporate an approximately 1 acre public plaza/green at the easterly terminus of Sierra Point Parkway at Marina Boulevard. This feature is intended as the public focal point for Sierra Point, serving as a community gathering space activated by public, visitor and employee usage, and supported by surrounding land uses.
- Establishment of parameters for any land exchange which might be considered to implement the plaza/green, including development standards to protect the existing linear park along the east and north boundaries;
- Establishment of a vehicular and pedestrian system surrounding the new plaza/green which recognizes and supports the design and function of this feature;
- Reconfiguration of buildings surrounding the plaza/green to address and support this focal point;
- Design guidelines for the plaza/green, the surrounding streetscape, and buildings which will frame the feature;
- Recognition of Sierra Point Parkway as the key gateway into Sierra Point, and design guidelines for streetscape and landscape improvements to upgrade the appearance of this roadway in recognition of its gateway function;
- Establishment of a wayfinding program, a consistent program of signage and interpretation to help the public more easily utilize Sierra Point.

The document has been reformatted in its entirety for organizational purposes and to incorporate enhanced graphics. The Table of Contents of the 2001 Master Plan and current draft are attached for comparison purposes. Changes to the setting are reflected in Chapter 2 of the current draft. Proposed substantive changes related to the creation of the plaza/green are found primarily in Chapters 3 and 6. Chapter 5 includes recommendations for wayfinding, and Chapter 6 addresses enhancements to Sierra Point Parkway as a gateway. Copies of both the adopted 2001 Master Plan and November 2009 draft are available for review and comparison purposes both at City Hall and on the Community Development Department page of the City of Brisbane website.

Issues of Concern:

There were several issues of concern identified as the design guidelines were updated and reviewed. The attached Planning Commission reports and minutes address these issues in detail, but they are also summarized below.

Proposed Public Park Location

While there has been some discussion about the location of a new public park space at the northeast corner of Sierra Point, in the parking area near the fishing pier, this location would fail to take full advantage of the proposed improvements along Sierra Point Parkway which will provide a strong sense of direction to a new public space near the

Marina. Drawing attention away from this area by locating a new public space to the northeast would further diffuse the identity of Sierra Point instead of strengthening it. A larger public space to the northeast would be open to the elements, less convenient to users, with little or no ability to support retail services that could enhance the experience of the users.

The Marina area is already a focus of activity for boat owners, the yacht club, the Bay Trail and the City Harbormaster. The intent of a new public space, at this location, is to enhance the synergy between the existing uses and the potential future uses that may occupy adjacent property (retail liner shops to the south and hotel to the north). One of primary lessons of successful place making is to create safe, attractive, comfortable and convenient places for the community to gather and socialize, thereby enhancing the sense of community. A new public space near the Marina could provide a sheltered “outdoor room” framed by surrounding buildings and dynamic Bay views that would provide a place for various community activities, including art exhibits and musical performances. This is in keeping with the ideas of successful place making.

Land Exchange

For all the previously stated reasons, it appears that the best location for a new public park space at Sierra Point would be on land that is not owned by the City. The recommended location for the public space is on the southern portion of the undeveloped hotel site (designated in the Master Plan) and also on a portion of City owned property to the east that is encumbered by a long term land lease for retail development held by OPUS. Consequently, acquiring the land for the public park outright would be an expense that the City would want to avoid. Simply taking the land is not a realistic legal option.

However, because the City owns land to the north of the hotel site, it is possible to negotiate a shift of the hotel site to the north, at the expense of some city parking lot in that area, in return for enough land (around an acre) to establish an adequate public space. Further, enough additional space would also be acquired from the hotel site, so that OPUS would be willing to exchange their long term leasehold for space, on the west side of the new public park space. This would ensure that the new public park had unobstructed views and access to the east, while OPUS could build a complimentary building that would serve to shelter the new park from the winds from the west. It is anticipated that a public space at this location would enhance all surrounding property values.

The potential exchange as shown in the guidelines is conceptual. The implementation of this concept would require a formal public process and City Council review and approval. That decision would be informed by a formal appraisal of the involved properties to demonstrate that the exchange was of equal value. While this transaction may seem a little complicated, and has been misconstrued by one or two people as inappropriate, such three-way real estate transactions are not at all that uncommon.

Impacts of Relocated Hotel Site

Concerns have been raised about many aspects of the potential future hotel development, particularly its potential impacts on the existing linear park along the north edge of Sierra Point. The overarching concern is that future development of the future hotel at the northward location not adversely impact the character of the linear park, or adversely alter the existing user experience or current public uses. This is an important consideration, and Chapter 7 of the design guidelines specifically requires that the scale, mass, setbacks, height, and shadowing of any future building be sensitive to the northerly shoreband. Also as noted previously, the design guidelines do not authorize a specific project, rather they provide a basis for analyzing subsequent projects. Future projects are subject to separate review and approval.

Fiscal Impact:

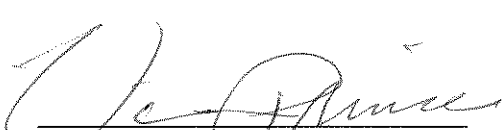
It is anticipated that private development will result in further implementation of the design guidelines over time. Funding sources for desired public improvements not associated with future private development would need to be identified.

Measures of Success:

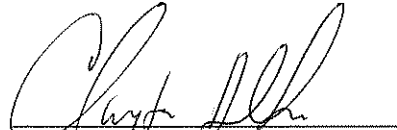
Adoption of design guidelines and their subsequent implementation over time are anticipated to improve the quality of Sierra Point and increase the amount and quality of public space available for community use.

Attachments:

Table of Contents- 2001 Master Plan and November 2009 Draft
Planning Commission reports and minutes- August 2, September 11, October 23 and November 13, 2008



Department Head



City Manager

2001 Sierra Point Design Guidelines

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