

Focus Groups

Overview

Two focus group meetings were held on Wednesday December 19, 2018 from 10am to 12pm and 1pm to 3pm at Bainbridge Island City Hall. The following people participated in the focus groups in addition to City staff and consultants from Framework:

Focus Group Meeting #1 – 10am to 12pm

Belinda Thornberg
Jeb Thornberg
Charlie Wenzlau
Jonathan Davis
Russ Hamlet
Brandon Hogg
Jane Rein
Peter Brachvogel
Charles Schmid
Kelsey Laughlin
Eric Dieffenbach
Jared Moravec
Brian Wilkinson
Tim Spenser

Focus Group Meeting #2 – 1pm to 3pm

Hank Teran
Rick Blumenthal
LT Yoson

Key Themes

- A. **Site Planning.** There was general consensus among participants that much of the concern related to the design of new development is related to site planning issues that are not adequately addressed in the current guidelines.
- B. **Sustainability.** Sustainability is a core goal in the City's Comprehensive Plan that is being implemented in a variety of ways. Sustainability must be supported and incentivized where feasible in the update to the design guidelines. There was discussion of other related efforts such as the upcoming green building code. There was also discussion of the Living Building Challenge as a standard to aspire to in the green building code and discussion about the importance of building enclosures for reducing energy use.
- C. **Regionalism and its Adaptation to Bainbridge.** There was discussion of the "Northwest Style" and its application to Bainbridge as important elements for the design guidelines update.

- D. **The Public Realm and Urban Design.** The design guidelines should focus on the public realm including the relationship between public spaces and private development such as along a street. The guidelines should focus on the human experience as a pedestrian within streets and public spaces.
- E. **Regulating Architectural Style.** In general, there was consensus that regulating specific architectural styles is less important as a focus for the design guidelines update. There was discussion of improving standards for building and site materials.
- F. **Density for Walkability and Human Scaled Design.** While participants acknowledged the design guidelines update will not change zoning or allowed density there was agreement among some that low-density development is contributing to some of the design challenges from larger house sizes and high land prices. Even if overall density doesn't change collocating sites and buildings allows for more sustainable and human scaled development.
- G. **Current Design Guidelines are Generally Acceptable.** Participants generally felt that the current design guidelines are acceptable and support the right intent. However, there was also agreement that the structure, formatting, and communication of the design guidelines and review process should be improved in the update.
- H. **Design must be Specific to Bainbridge.** The design guidelines and ultimately the design of new development should be unique to Bainbridge including the Island, the neighborhood, and the site. The design guidelines should prohibit or discourage stock designs for housing and architecture.
- I. **Design Principles are Important.** Design principles are important to guide community discussions during the review process. While specific guidelines are important the participants felt strongly that community discussions during the design review process must be guided by clear design principles that illustrate what is important for any new design or project such as sustainability, regionalism, high-quality materials, human scale, and walkability.
- J. **Neighborhood Centers are Unique.** The design guidelines should continue to include and expand the neighborhood specific design guidelines based on the understanding that each neighborhood center has a unique character and identity that all new development should contribute to.
- K. **Design Review should include Subdivisions.** The new subdivision design guidelines are under development and must be integrated with the other design guidelines and overall review process.
- L. **Public Art and Affordable Housing Opportunities.** Integrating public art and providing for more affordable housing should be supported in the design guidelines update. Opportunities to expand public art and affordable housing through incentives should be considered in the design guidelines update. Recent interactive public art projects have been highly used and regarded by the community such as in Lynwood Center.
- M. **Guidance for Public Projects.** Currently public projects are often not required to go through design review. Some projects have been brought to the DRB for an advisory review. The participants discussed whether public projects should go through design review and if so, what guidelines should be developed to support the review.

Meeting Notes

Focus Group #1

- Design guidelines as collectively authored by the City are generally acceptable. Economic growth and a boom in the community has resulted in a communal concern that growth and bad design are affecting us.
- Create a pattern book, more information on detailing.
- Don't dictate style, people have different perceptions.
- Regionalism is important. It must look like Bainbridge Island.
- More on site planning is needed in the design guidelines.
- A perception that recent design has not been great. Off-island architects tend to be associated with poorer quality projects. Planning issues, site planning, perhaps quality.
- Ashbury project - water jail, houses are too big (scale), detention ponds are in the space. Stock house plans from national developers, on 7500 sq ft lot.
- Updated design guidelines, green building program, new subdivision standards are all connected projects.
- Sustainability: No solar access code exists. Put more effort on the front-end process, small town urbanism, and understanding basic urbanism. Modern townhomes aren't allowed in many of the districts. Standards in mixed use areas don't apply to single use residential projects. Guidelines don't address the area by the ferry.
- Bigger problem is the size of new homes and low-density development that isn't sustainable.
- Had some good outcomes, but bad experiences working with the design review board. It was improved by the process, but I would like to know the qualifications to be on the DRB. Requires both parties to respect the professionals that have been practicing.
- Site plan review is a challenge.
- Frustrating that the DRB has to check boxes and that's not the right approach. Design principles are important to guide discussions.
- Need more vision and principles to guide the discussion.
- More good examples in the guidelines are needed.
- Fire dept: Try to be problem solvers and work with designers and developers.
- Public works and fire dept need to be consistent on street standards and fire access.
- Disappointed there is not enough infrastructure in Rolling Bay and Island Center.
- Does each center have a different character or scale?
- Neighborhood centers could help address affordable housing through increased density. Opposition in the community to density.
- Culture and heritage are important and in a way that allows for an inclusive community. Generation priced out is a book that is worth reading and was mentioned on KUOW.
- Density is important and needs to be addressed in the code.
- Incorporate public art into the design guidelines.

Focus Group #2

- Public projects aren't required to go through the DRB. Some projects like the Waterfront park were brought to the DRB voluntarily.
- 70% of calls are EMT calls with smaller vehicles.
- Interactive art features in Lynnwood Center are highly regarded.
- New designs are very homogenous, not much variety, can't tell the difference between the two projects.
- National scale developers are doing projects on Bainbridge Island and there is a perception that the projects could be more sustainable.
- 41 years on the island. Development has been extremely poor and doesn't reflect anything on the island.
- 100% of building is controlled by the enclosure for sustainability.
- Fire sprinkler every building will give more flexibility regarding access requirements and site and building design. Maintenance is important for fire sprinklers.
- Offset the costs upfront to claim value on the back end. 2% for the arts for public projects on Bainbridge.
- Partner with PSE on discussion around energy conservation through new development.
- Support good design that's also sustainable (Passive house)
- Fire Station: More prominent #21 in the design and the building shifted on the site. Community space was incorporated in the fire station. There is no charge for use of the space by non-profits.