



SUBJECT: Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel Update

TO: Community Planning, Regulation & Mobility Cttee.

FROM: Community Planning Department

Report Number: PL-23-21

Wards Affected: all

File Numbers: 155-03-10

Date to Committee: April 6, 2021

Date to Council: April 20, 2021

Recommendation:

Receive and file community planning department report PL-23-21 regarding an update on the Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council on the status and progress of the Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel and transmit the first term chair report.

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Increase economic prosperity and community responsive city growth
- Improve integrated city mobility
- Support sustainable infrastructure and a resilient environment
- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture
- Deliver customer centric services with a focus on efficiency and technology transformation

Background and Discussion:

Background

At the Regular Meeting of Council on November 13, 2017, a Council Information Package (dated October 27, 2017) was received that included a memo entitled

Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel, attached as Appendix A. This memo served to inform Council of the Community Planning Department's initiative for a new design program to establish an urban design advisory panel. The memo also included an overview of the program's goals and objectives, mandate, membership, and processes and procedures as contained in its Terms of Reference, attached as Appendix B.

On March 20, 2018, the Community Planning Department held the first Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel Meeting.

From the Panel's launch in 2018 to the time of writing this report, the City has hosted 23 meetings (including 9 virtual meetings), whereby 32 private sector projects and 5 capital projects have been reviewed.

Discussion

First Term Chair Report

The Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel Terms of Reference provides that:

"Every two years, the chair of (the Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel) BUD will provide the Manager of Urban Design with a brief report outlining the state of urban design in Burlington identifying any development trends that are influencing design excellence in the city."

A copy of this report, referenced herein as the First Term Chair Report, is attached as Appendix C.

A summary of the information provided includes:

By the Numbers

The first term ran from Mar. 2018 to Jan. 2020 consisting of:

- 13 meetings
- 27 applications
- > 650 volunteer hours

State of Urban Design / Development Trends

- Comments have been well received by applicants and have resulted in positive changes to development proposals;
- Burlington is experiencing pressure from the development industry for high density intensification;
- Many proposals far exceed current building height and setback requirements, which if approved will result in significant changes to the existing character of the areas they are proposed;

- In some cases, there is a lack of clear direction from the City for the evolving density of an area that may undermine its ability to provide for a high-quality public realm in the future; and
- There is an opportunity for the City to seek the Panel's design perspective and experience to provide more input on current policy development as well capital projects with significant public realm impacts.

Panel Recommendations

- That the City review and revise its design standards to improve coordination and collaboration with the private sector for better public realm design.

Through its first term the Urban Design Advisory Panel has already signaled to the development and design communities the City's expectation for a higher standard of design in Burlington; and, that quality design is a key ingredient to the City's pursuit of design excellence.

Status and Progress

The Panel is currently halfway through its second term and continues to meet monthly, as required, to review development proposals as a part of the development review process.

The current Panel is comprised of nine (9) members with the following multi-disciplinary breakdown:

- 4 Architects
- 3 Landscape Architects
- 2 Urban Designers / Urban Planners

Six (6) members are serving for a second consecutive term.

Recruitment for the third term of the Panel will begin later this year.

Role in the planning approvals process

The Urban Design Advisory Panel has been integrated early into the existing development application process by following the formal pre-consultation step.

The current practice is for City staff to identify the requirement to attend a Panel meeting through the formal pre-consultation process. A copy of the Panel's meeting minutes must be submitted with an application, among other things, to consider an application complete.

Changes to the program since inception

Since the City's response to COVID-19 pandemic to close all city facilities to the public, meetings have taken place online using the City approved platform for video

conferencing. This shift took place seamlessly, starting in April 2020, without the need to cancel any meetings or delay the review of submissions.

To ensure that virtual meetings run efficiently the meeting procedures have been adapted to respond to this new meeting environment. Changes have included limiting the total number of items on each agenda to two (2), while providing more time for each item to allow staff, panel members, proponents and their consultants to participate without interruption.

Several other changes have been made to improve the procedures of the Panel since inception including clarifying and enhancing submission requirements and meeting day protocols. These changes have been made to improve both the quality of submissions and meeting day proceedings so that staff and the Panel have adequate time to review and prepare for the meeting day to facilitate meaningful feedback and a success design review process.

Staff will continue to consult with all stakeholders to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of this design program.

Urban Design

Since the adoption of Burlington's Official Plan in 2018, the City has made considerable gains with respect to advancing the importance of urban design as a fundamental element of development. In addition to establishing the Urban Design Advisory Panel, the City has focused its efforts on the following Council directions as set out in the Chapter 7 – Design Excellence of the Official Plan:

- The integration of urban design into the full range of decision-making activities to assist in achieving the design objectives of the City;
- The development of design guidelines for certain types of building forms, land uses, streetscapes, and specific areas; and
- The establishment of an urban design award program to encourage creativity and celebrate design excellence in the city.

In this regard, six urban design guidelines have been approved by Council in recent years, including design guidelines for mid-rise and tall buildings; sustainable building and development; the downtown streetscape; and shadow and wind studies, all of which provide development proponents with a clear understanding of Council's expectations for urban design.

The Community Planning Department is working on the future establishment of an urban design awards program, with extensive background research and work completed through the Mohawk Future Ready Leadership Program.

In 2020, Council supported a new functional design and organizational structure for the Community Planning Department including the adaptation of an approach to create a new urban design team within the Development and Design Section of the Community Planning Department. Through the phased rollout of evolving the organization, including funding through this year's and future operating budgets, a multi-disciplinary and collaborative staff team of design professionals will be established to form part of the development review team to provide design review of every development application and lead other key responsibilities, initiatives and projects, which will make up the urban design work program and support the City's city-building objectives.

Financial Matters:

The Panel members serve on an unpaid, voluntary basis, however, travel, meals and incidental expenses incurred by the Panel members are reimbursed by the City. Funds are available from within the Community Planning Department's operating budget.

Climate Implications

Not applicable

Engagement Matters:

The Urban Design Advisory Panel acts as an independent advisory body comprised of design professionals with a mandate to provide urban design advice to the Community Planning Department on both private development and project projects, including advice on new initiatives and policy that contains public realm implications such as urban design guidelines. The Panels' advice is integrated early in the development review process to reinforce the City's expectation for a high standard of design excellence and a more effective and efficient development review process.

The role of the community, through public meetings (e.g. pre-application community consultation meetings and statutory public meetings), as well as the role of Council, through the development application process, remains unchanged.

The Halton Developers' Liaison Committee will be informed of this report. Additionally, staff will consult with the development community, and seek to collect feedback from applicants and their design consultants whose projects have been reviewed by the Panel, to review, improve and update the program's processes and procedures, as necessary.

For more information about the Panel, please visit: Burlington.ca/UDP

Conclusion:

The City of Burlington, staff, proponents and the development review process have all benefitted from the Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel. The Panel provides valuable design feedback for staff and proponents and the program provides greater predictability to the overall planning approvals process. Staff in collaboration with members of the Urban Design Advisory Panel and the private sector will continue to evaluate ways in which we can improve the current design program and its effectiveness as part of the development application process, as well as ways in which it can contribute to improving the quality of Burlington's built form and public realm.

Respectfully submitted,

Todd Evershed, MCIP RPP

Urban Designer

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Appendices:

- A. Urban Design Advisory Panel – CIP Memo [Item 2, Pages 4-5, of Council Information Package, Oct. 27, 2017]
- B. Urban Design Advisory Panel – Terms of Reference
- C. Urban Design Advisory Panel – 1st Term Chair Report

Notifications:

Ken Coit, Chair, Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel

Jana Kelemen, Vice Chair, Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.