

Docket Item #6

Planning Commission Meeting
February 7, 2006

CASE: ADOPTION OF EISENHOWER EAST DESIGN GUIDELINES

ISSUE: Public hearing and consideration of adoption of the Eisenhower East Design Guidelines for the purpose of establishing more detailed guidance for development within the Eisenhower East area.

Adoption of Eisenhower East Design Guidelines

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission, on its own motion, adopt the Eisenhower East Design Guidelines.

BACKGROUND

In April, 2003, City Council adopted the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan as a new chapter to the City's Master Plan. This new Small Area Plan resulted in a common vision for a vibrant, quality urban neighborhood to emerge from development surrounding and in the vicinity of the Eisenhower Avenue Metro Station.

Critical to this Plan's successful implementation is the adoption of design guidelines that will govern development elements such as building size and massing, setbacks, landscape standards, street characteristics, and other design components. Such guidelines will ensure that development is consistent with the Plan's vision for the area.

The Eisenhower East area provides a unique opportunity for the City of Alexandria. Containing 230 acres (including approximately 150 acres outside of the mostly-built Carlyle development), and a potential for millions of square feet of new development, the area is largely a clean slate where the City can create an urban neighborhood that reflects Alexandria's community priorities. The Eisenhower East planning process resulted in a vision for the area based on a wide-ranging public participation process that included property owners, neighborhood associations, interested citizens, as well as City departments and agencies.

The Plan's vision emerged with a strong preference for a well-planned series of developments creating a livable mixed-use neighborhood that emphasizes quality urban design. Building on this vision, the Eisenhower East Design Guidelines were crafted to translate the Small Area Plan's recommendations into urban design principles that will support this type of development. Such recommendations from the Plan include:

- Creating an urban development pattern;
- Maximizing transit use by concentrating a mix of uses and development around the Metro station;
- Establishing Eisenhower Avenue as an "urban boulevard" with a balance of pedestrian uses, vehicle uses, and urban open space;
- Ensuring a network of urban streetscapes and providing development blocks consistent with the size of Old Town blocks; and
- Providing public spaces, interconnected streets, and open space.

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In order to implement the vision for Eisenhower East as development occurs, the Small Area Plan recommends the adoption of detailed design guidelines for new construction that “reflect the stated architectural principles” of the Plan. Further, the Plan calls for the creation of a design review board to evaluate development proposals in accordance with the design guidelines. A text amendment to establish an Eisenhower East Design Review Board is being brought forth to the Planning Commission concurrently with this request; the review board will work to implement these design guidelines as development in the area progresses.

DISCUSSION

This request is to adopt the Eisenhower East Design Guidelines as a set of general design conditions for development proposals within the Eisenhower East area (incorporating Coordinated Development Districts 2 and 11). The adoption of such guidelines is recommended by the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan as a necessary component to implementing that Plan’s vision for the area.

The Design Guidelines outline policies and principles to ensure the implementation of the vision for Eisenhower East. Moreover, these Guidelines create a single document that elucidates the urban design and development goals set forth in the Plan, and provide clear, concise guidance on urban design issues to developers and property owners.

Integral to the Plan are principles for the design of the urban street network, the open space system, building height and massing, and architectural features. These design fundamentals are intended to generate a high quality appearance and to establish character, without dictating exact architectural form. This type of guidance will encourage the best possible public environment for the Eisenhower East area.

The Eisenhower East Design Guidelines manuscript is attached as a separate document.

The principal elements of the Eisenhower East Design Guidelines include: 1) Urban Design Elements; 2) Street Frontage Design Principles; 3) Architectural Concept Design; 4) Street Section Design Guidelines; and 5) Public Realm Concept Design. These elements are summarized in the following.

Urban Design Elements

To accomplish the vision for Eisenhower East, the Design Guidelines establish urban design elements to manage the general framework of development. These design elements are derived from the Small Area Plan and include:

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- Neighborhoods: Establishing two distinct neighborhoods (each a Coordinated Development District) and ordering the differences between the two, such as building heights and general types of development.
- Land Use Principles: Establishing on a general basis the distribution of residential, office and entertainment/hotel uses – providing for a quality mixed-use neighborhood.
- Retail Locations: Illustrating the locations within the Plan area where retail will be required on the ground level, as well as delineating general retail guidelines, including storefront and signage appearance.
- Boundary & Block Assignments: Reiterating the development controls (desired size, height, type of development) by block adopted in the Small Area Plan.
- Building Heights: Explaining how buildings will be tallest near the Metrorail station and then ‘step down’ for blocks that are further from the station.
- Building Setbacks: Establishing the optimal distance from which buildings will be set back from the sidewalk to create a desirable urban streetscape.
- Architectural Articulation: Indicating distinctive architectural features, such as prominent or innovative facades, that contribute noticeably to the architectural quality of the area.
- Street Tree Plan: Specifying species of trees that are indicated for use in various sections within the Eisenhower East area in order to create a visually appealing and verdant urban landscape.

Street Frontage Design Principles

The Guidelines identify a hierarchy of streets (A, B and C streets) within the planned area and formulate a street frontage plan, through which specific design requirements are indicated for both the buildings and the streets.

On ‘A’ streets, including Eisenhower Avenue and others where the pedestrian environment and visual quality are most important, the Guidelines call for the following characteristics:

- Buildings to front directly on the street – ‘active uses’ to face the street;
- Structured parking to be screened from view;
- A building’s main pedestrian entryways must be on these major streets in order to augment the pedestrian orientation of the area; and
- No curb cuts to interfere with the sidewalk.

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For more minor secondary streets ('B' streets), the Guidelines require a similar urban design, such as:

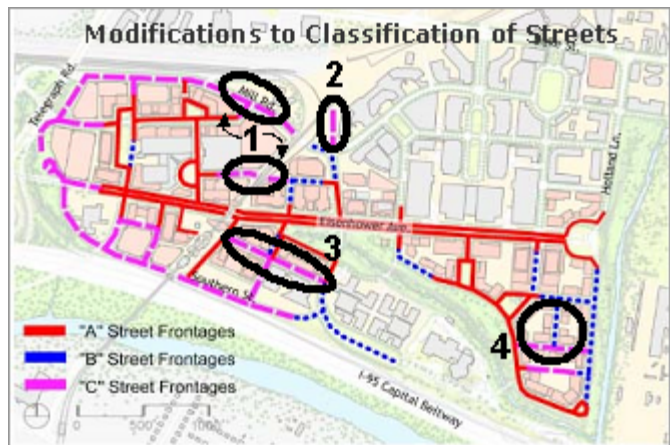
- Buildings to front directly on the street – 'active uses' to face the street, but with a slightly lesser proportion of the building facade required to be meet the build-to line than on more major streets;
- Structured parking to be screened from view, but may come to the facade above the ground floor if it is architecturally enhanced; and
- One curb cut permitted per block face.

Guidelines for the tertiary 'C' streets address some of the following issues:

- Parking garage and service entries are permitted if they meet quality urban design principles – such as facade integration, landscape improvements, etc.;
- Structured parking is permitted if architecturally enhanced;
- Main pedestrian entryways generally not permitted on 'C' streets; and
- Curb cuts are permitted on 'C' street sidewalks.

For buildings on all classifications of streets, high quality architectural materials are required, and detailed building setbacks specified. All building setbacks must meet applicable code and fire protection requirements.

A few modifications between the classification of streets in the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan and these Design Guidelines have been made to address challenges that have arisen in the implementation process. The following modifications have been made and are shown on the graphic to the right:



1. These two short road segments were changed from 'B' streets to 'C' streets to reflect the configuration of development that had been approved prior to the adoption of the Plan and is proceeding to construction;
2. This segment has been added and was not shown on the original Plan map, as it was a previously constructed service drive;

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3. The east-west segment and a portion of the north-south segment were changed from 'B' streets to 'C' streets to provide for adequate service and loading locations for the buildings; and
4. The classifications of the north-south and east-west segments were switched, with the north-south segment changed from 'C' to 'B' and the east-west segment from 'B' to 'C'. With the pending acquisition of the southern parcels by the Alexandria Sanitation Authority (ASA), the change will provide for the higher quality pedestrian neighborhood to be more contained, and the service and buffering adjoining the ASA facility.

Architectural Concept Design

The Guidelines address the understanding that to establish a high quality urban environment, construction and design attributes such as building materials, massing, facade articulation, and the proportion of streetfront glass space must combine to contribute to a desired effect.

These principles include characteristics such as:

- General design concepts stating that buildings will have vertical fenestration, will use simple geometric shapes in design, and will accentuate buildings with features such as a horizontal frieze;
- Integrating exterior mechanical equipment into overall building design;
- Incorporating interesting architectural elements such as courtyard entryways, bay windows, balconies, and 'active rooflines' to make buildings more visually appealing; and
- Using specific standards for retail frontage, such as pronounced entryways, awnings, 15-foot ceilings for retail space, and storefronts that are mostly glass to enhance the retail environment.

Drafted specifically for Eisenhower East, the Design Guidelines show examples of quality design elements for residential, retail, office, and hotel architecture, and provide direction for building design principles. In all cases, high quality construction materials are required.

Street Section Design Guidelines

In addition to design principles for buildings, the design of streets is equally important to creating a superior built environment. The Guidelines establish consistent standards for the design of streets in order to highlight the streets' roles as public places and to create a strong overall pedestrian environment.

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Some of the street section standards in the Design Guidelines reflect an enhancement over the standards expressed within the Small Area Plan, in order to improve the pedestrian friendliness of the streets and to magnify the visual salience of the Eisenhower Avenue median.

The Eisenhower East Small Area Plan provides a generalized blueprint for the configuration of Eisenhower Avenue to create a true boulevard with a park median. As more detailed engineering has been performed on the roadway, modifications have been made to achieve the goals established in the Plan.

The guidelines for Eisenhower Avenue include characteristics such as:

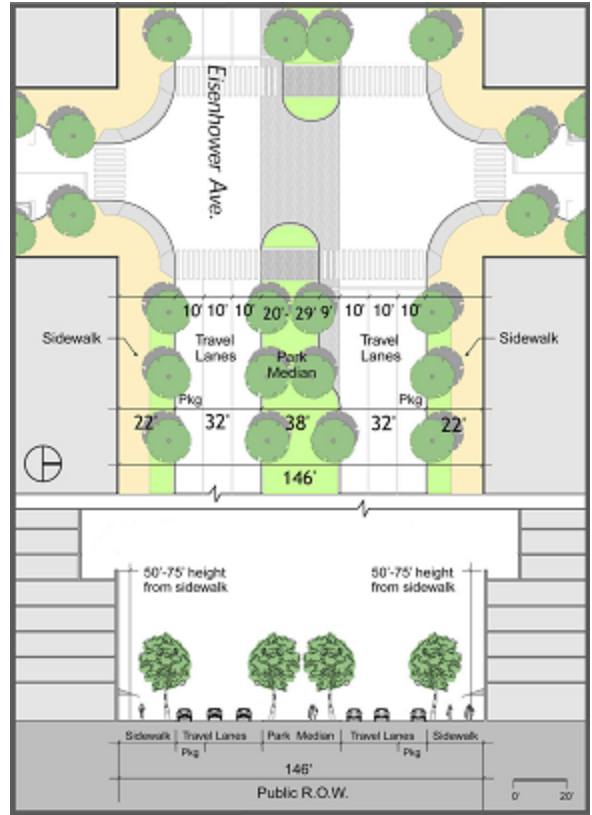
- 10-foot wide travel lanes and 9-foot wide left turn lanes;
- Varied median width:

- *West of the Metro lines*: 17-19 feet, reducing to 8 feet at location of left-turn lanes;
- *East of Metro lines to Mill Rd.*: 26 feet, reducing to 9-17 feet at location of left-turn lanes;
- *Mill Rd. to Holland Ln.*: 38-foot park median, reducing to 20 feet at Mill Rd. intersection, and 29 feet at other left-turn locations; and

- 22-foot wide pedestrian zone with a continuous row of street trees.

The typical two-lane street in the Eisenhower East area includes a 66-foot right-of-way with, among other features, provisions for:

- 14-foot sidewalks;
- Brick crosswalks;



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- ADA-accessible bulb-outs; and
- Trees planted at 25-foot intervals, with specific designs for tree wells based on whether a given street has a retail, non-retail or parkside designation.

Public Realm Concept Design

One of the most unique aspects of the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan is its focus on creating a usable system of urban open space through plazas, parks, and a Resource Protection Area. The Plan aims to integrate this open space with the built environment both visually and through encouraging active and passive recreational uses.

Various open spaces, comprising the area's "public realm" will contain an assortment of streetscape elements, each with specified design standards to bring them up to the standards of the Eisenhower East area. These elements include:

- Street Lighting: Luminaire-style streetlamps, similar to those used in the Carlyle area, are specified with a black finish. Streetlamps are to be placed according to a lighting plan that depends on the type of street.
- Sidewalks: All sidewalks will be red brick and of either running bond or herringbone bond patterns (depending on location). Sidewalks will have planter bed edges flush with the sidewalk surface.
- Benches: Two sidewalk benches will be provided per block – all benches will be of the same general type (wood slats with metal frames) and manufactured series. The exact bench type may be selected by individual property owners.
- Trash Containers: High quality receptacles will be black, powder-coated metal with side-door openings, similar to others in Alexandria.
- Bicycle Racks: Will be placed in groups at convenient locations and will be of a sturdy black metal construction.

These Guidelines (and others for bollards, tree wells, etc.) set up a general framework for street furniture and for the different types of planned open space – parks/squares, hardscape plazas, parkland, and the Eisenhower Avenue median – and are essential to creating a quality, well-designed public realm.

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The Eisenhower East Design Guidelines are an essential component to implementing the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan. These Guidelines will help to ensure that the neighborhood that is built within the Eisenhower East area closely reflects the community's vision for a high quality urban setting as expressed in the Plan.

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