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Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Sean D. Davis, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Chris Ryer
Director

March 28, 2019

REQUEST: Design Manual Update

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

STAFF: Christina Hartsfield

PETITIONER(S): Department of Planning

HISTORY:

On May 25, 2017, the Planning Commission adopted the Baltimore City Design Manual.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS:

The Baltimore City Design Manual is a codified document, supplemental to Title 4 of Baltimore City Code - Article 32 – Zoning (the Zoning Code), where design review is authorized.

ANALYSIS

Background: Since the adoption of the Baltimore City Design Manual in May 2017, design review staff have used the manual to steer and in many cases, improve the design of various commercial, residential, institutional, and industrial developments throughout the City. While implementing the manual, staff also realized instances where some design standards were outdated, too ambiguous, or did not address development trends that emerged after the manual was adopted.

For this reason, and as anticipated when the design standards were extracted from the Zoning Code to create a separate, living document, the Design Manual has undergone its first round of updates. The Planning Commission has the authority to approve substantive changes to the Design Manual so that enforcement of design review remains aligned with contemporary design trends. Through daily enforcement of the manual, a meeting with the general public, and 3 ½ weeks of online public review and commenting, staff was able to gather substantial feedback about the changes needed. Below is a list of the noticeable changes:

- New formatting, grammatical corrections, and more graphics
- Hyperlinks for easier online reading
- Clarification of ambiguous language, particularly related to setbacks of upper-level additions to rowhouses and façade transparency for ground-floor commercial uses
- Updates to the Sign chapter and omission of conflicting language
- New guidelines for roof terraces and gas stations.

The updated manual is inclusive of much of the feedback that was received from the public. In some cases, the suggestions conflicted with other policies or codes and were not incorporated. Responses to the public's comments were posted on Civic Comment for review.

Notification: The public was notified of the proposed updates and comment period by the Department's Compass newsletter and the Planning Commission's agenda, which had links to the Civic Comment webpage. The updated Design Manual and responses to the public's comments were posted on Civic Comment for review.



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