

Engagement Overview for the Urban Design Guidelines update

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**URBAN
DESIGN**
PLANNING DEPARTMENT

RESOLUTION NO.20210902-046

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission approved the draft framework for the Urban Design Guidelines update on its July 27, 2021 consent agenda; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The city manager is directed to initiate an inclusive and robust multi-phased stakeholder process for updating the Urban Design Guidelines as outlined in the Design Commission's document: "Urban Design Guidelines Update Draft Framework".

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The city manager shall provide the necessary support and resources to the Commission to achieve the multiple phases of the update, including preparation, creation and finalization of the guidelines and ensure appropriate review by relevant City departments and boards and commissions before returning to city council for approval upon completion of this work.

Draft Framework

PHASE 1 PREPARATION

1-3
Months

- Craft narrative
- Define core values
- Create Engagement Plan
- Form working groups
- Establish timeline

PHASE 2 CREATION

6-12
Months

- Share progress
- Formulate Design Pillars
- Draft Guidelines
- Engage stakeholders
- Test Guidelines

PHASE 3 FINALIZATION

6+
Months

- Finalize graphic design
- Create UDG website
- Prepare engagement strategy
- Compile recommendations
- Brief Council subcommittee
- Present to Council

Engagement Plan



Next Steps

Collaborate to finalize the narrative, core values, timeline and engagement plan. Identify roles & responsibilities

Engage with stakeholders as outlined in the Engagement Plan

Incorporate feedback into draft UDG update

Present final draft to Boards & Commissions identified in the Engagement Plan

Incorporate feedback into final UDG update

Present UDG to Council

Urban Design Guidelines Update - Engagement Plan

The Urban Design Guidelines (UDG) are a set of recommendations that strive to improve architecture and urban design. The guidelines are used by the Design Commission and City of Austin staff to review Downtown Density Bonus Projects. Compliance with the UDG is a gatekeeper requirement for participating in the Downtown Density Bonus Program. The guidelines were last updated in 2008. An update is needed to reflect the current goals of urban design, needs of Austinites, and alignment with City of Austin direction and policy. Engagement with people who are familiar with the UDG is necessary to understand how they have impacted the design of developments downtown, what works, what needs improvement, and what opportunities deserve more focus. The goal is to create a set of guidelines that improves the aesthetics, function, and feel of Austin while being easy to comprehend and implement. The framework for the goals of the Urban Design Guidelines update are encompassed in these five core values:

Sustainability Taking direction from the 2020 Austin Climate Equity Plan, the Urban Design Guidelines endorses the goal of equitably reaching net-zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. The goals outlined in the Sustainable Buildings section represent key guidance in the Urban Design Guidelines update.

Movement Movement refers to mobility and connectivity, from transportation links, as well as activities, from a land use and urban design lens. The Austin Strategic Mobility Plan provides a goal of 50% mode share by 2035 and includes strategies to reach that goal ranging from building active transportation infrastructure to maximizing residential displacement.

Equity Design inclusive and welcoming spaces that eliminate barriers, celebrate cultural diversity, and foster environments that empower everyone, regardless of age, ability, gender, race or ethnicity, or socioeconomic background.

Community Heritage This value aims to encourage the preservation of Austin's historic structures, buildings, sites, promote awareness of Austin's cultural and architectural heritage and help shape a more sustainable, equitable and livability.

Innovation Promote architectural designs that not only meet the functional needs of the occupants but also prioritize sustainability, leverage cutting edge materials and technologies, and set new standards for architectural excellence.

As outlined in the Draft Framework, the messaging and engagement focus will be tailored around these three groups of stakeholders:

Potential methods of engagement:

Timeline

Direct focus architects, urban planners, professional involved in downtown development

Austin Foundation for Architecture
AIA Austin (American Institute of Architects)
Austin Center of Architecture
APA Central Texas (American Planning Association)
ULI (Urban Land Institute)
Downtown Commission
UTSDA professors
ASLA (American Institute of Landscape Architects)
EDO Cultural Arts Division and Music & Entertainment staff

Meet them where they're at

Many of the identified stakeholders have standing meetings, i.e. Board meetings or Commission meetings. Reach out to these stakeholders to give a presentation at one of their regularly scheduled meetings.

Winter 2023

Create a working group that will:

- Participate in the finalization of the engagement plan
- Create a presentation to give to stakeholders
- Reach out to stakeholders and schedule the presentation
- Take notes at each presentation
- Give the presentation
- Document feedback
- Report back to the Design Commission
- Incorporate feedback into the Urban Design Guidelines
- Edit the drafts of the Urban Design Guidelines

November - January 2023

Technical focus staff from various departments and agencies, various Boards & Commissions

Pedestrian Advisory Council
Arts Commission
Austin Board of Realtors
Real Estate Council of Austin
Planning Commission
Austin Chamber of Commerce
Austin Energy staff
Economic Development staff
Parks and Recreation staff
ATP&D staff
Capital Metro staff
Sustainability Office staff
Historic Preservation staff
Urban Design staff
City Architect
Displacement Prevention staff
Affordable Housing staff
Project Connect staff

Host a workshop or focus group

Many of the identified stakeholders have experience or expertise in common. If they do not already meet as a body, consider hosting a workshop or focus group to dive into a specific set of topics.

Spring & Summer 2024

Focus on engagement. Present at stakeholder meetings, host workshops or focus groups, and continue editing and sharing the draft Urban Design Guidelines with technical experts.

January - July 2024

Interest groups downtown property owners, tenants, business owners

Downtown Austin Neighborhood Alliance (DNA)
Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARHC)
Homeless Outreach Street Team (HOUST)Austin
Housing Coalition
Downtown Austin Alliance (DAA)
Planet Texas (PT)
Austin LGBT Chamber of Commerce
Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
EDO Small Business staff
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities
Shoal Creek Conservancy
Waterloo Greenway
Travis Audubon Society
Austin Creative Alliance
Austin Convention Center
Dreiner Group
Armburst & Brown
Metcalfe, Wolff Stuart and Williams

Engagement Tools

Design Commission web page: This web page can serve as a landing page for several engagement tools, including an explanation of the update and process options, a survey or feedback form, presentation on the update, and draft documents.

Survey: The survey can ask participants about their experience with the UDG, what they think should happen in the update, and recommendations for streamlining or adding guidelines.

Small talk:

Create email address for public comments. This would be helpful to include in surveys or present draft UDG.

Presentation on UDG: This presentation can be given live and also uploaded online.

Press release

Equity analysis of participation:

Winter 2024

Present final Urban Design Guidelines document to Boards & Commissions and City Council for adoption.

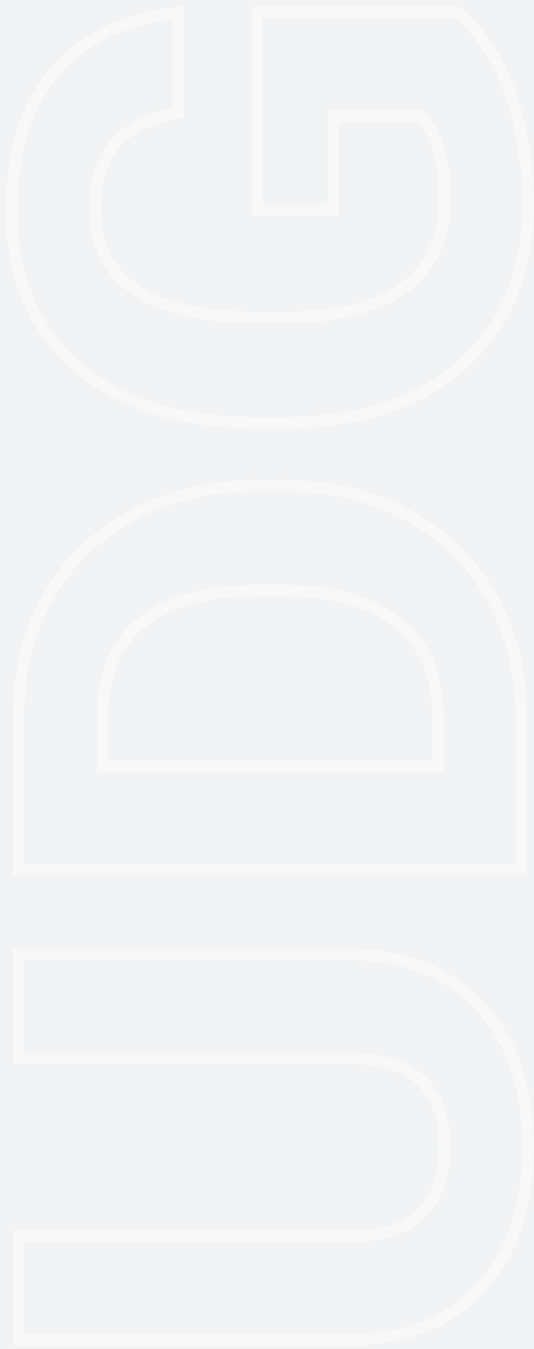
December - February 2025

URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES **UPDATE**

WITH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**City of Austin
Design Commission**

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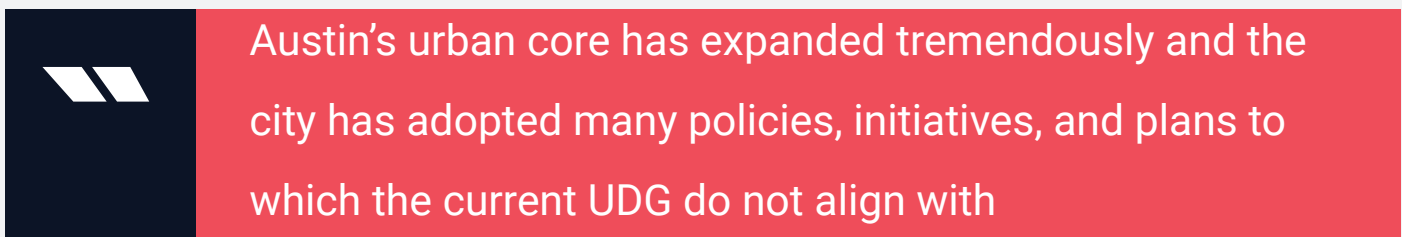
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Urban Design Guidelines are a set of recommendations that promote architectural and urban design standards reflective of Austin’s shared values. When first created as the Downtown Austin Design Guidelines in 2000, these recommendations focused exclusively on projects located in Austin’s downtown. Then in 2008, in response to Austin’s growing urban core, there was an effort to make the guidelines broader to help shape the urban environment throughout the city as it grows. While this effort did rename the guidelines to reflect this intent, it did little else to promote their use beyond the Central Business District. Since this time, Austin’s urban core has expanded tremendously and the city has adopted many policies, initiatives, and plans to which the current UDG do not align with. Therefore, the Design Commission believes it is time to update the Urban Design Guidelines once again.

The proposed update includes three main priorities. The first will focus on updating the UDG to have a broader applicability throughout Austin’s urban core, and therefore, the ability to serve a wider range of project types. Secondly, the update will better align the UDG with current community goals; including, but not limited to, adopted city polices related to affordability, connectivity, equity, environment, and mobility. Lastly, the update will seek to bring more clarity to the guidelines by creating a more inviting and user-friendly document that all Austinites can seek insight from, and resulting in a more predictable review process.”

It is proposed that the update be accomplished in three phases. Phase I is the preparation phase, it will consist of crafting a guiding narrative, defining the core values, creating a community engagement plan, forming Working Groups, selecting Community Ambassadors, and establishing the overall work timeline.



Austin’s urban core has expanded tremendously and the city has adopted many policies, initiatives, and plans to which the current UDG do not align with

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Phase II will be the creation phase, where the Community Ambassadors will begin outreach and reporting back and the Working Groups will begin drafting the guidelines. At the end of this phase, the first draft will be tested and the results will be used to inform the subsequent draft. The first draft will also be presented to the Design Commission for feedback.

Phase III is the final work phase, where the final draft will be crafted and graphic design and formatting will be added, an Urban Design Guidelines webpage will be created, and a Boards and Commission engagement plan will be created. After final community input and Board & Commission approval, the new UDG draft will be presented to City Council for consideration.



the update will seek to bring more clarity to the guidelines by creating a more inviting and user-friendly document that all Austinites can seek insight from, and resulting in a more predictable review process

BACKGROUND

What are the Urban Design Guidelines?

THE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES are a series of design recommendations for architecture, site design, and open space, for the purpose of cultivating design excellence in both private and public development, all contributing to the good of the public realm throughout the city.

How are they used, and by whom?

The UDGs are a resource during pre-application and application discussions between applicants and their Design Teams. Design teams use the guidelines in the preparation of clear and consistent design solutions that reflect the purpose of the Urban Design Guidelines. City staff, planning professionals and design commissioners use the guidelines to assess development proposals and evaluate whether or not they contribute to inspiring and lively streets and places.

THE UDGs HAVE EXPANDED IN SCOPE OVERTIME; WE NEED TO PUSH THIS FURTHER:

The Urban Design Guidelines have evolved over time to serve the projected needs of our community. This was most recently demonstrated in February of 2008 when the Design Commission recognized an opportunity to expand elements of urban design beyond the borders of downtown Austin with an apt rebranding from “Downtown Design Guidelines” to “Urban Design Guidelines”. Although the shift had introduced a desire for being more inclusive of projects throughout our city, the main beneficiaries of the revised guidance have disproportionately been downtown area developments.

ADVANCING STREET ACTIVATION: The Urban Design Guidelines have effectively promoted the implementation of Great Streets as not only a precursor (gatekeeper requirement) to achieving the Density Bonus but also as a means for advancing street activation. Developers have embraced solutions for going beyond mere aesthetics and walkability and have incorporated multimodal, human-scaled elements that advance the livability of our city. The UDGs have enabled the commission to make impactful recommendations that have led to tangible success. For example, [show examples of both private and public projects].

- Travis County Courthouse: Pedestrian amenities
- Waterloo Park
- The Republic Office Tower: Worked with them to program and expand the required public plaza. Incorporated art murals etc.

What are we trying to accomplish?

The guidelines set expectations and incentivize high quality design and placemaking. Developments that invest in quality placemaking within the public realm and economic prosperity.

In order to effectively reach a broader audience and have more clarity, the guidelines must evolve to become a clear and rigorous go-to resource for the Design Commission, developers, designers and planners. In order to achieve this, we need an easy to use document with a simple graphic format (including illustrations and photos) to visually communicate the desired (and undesired) outcomes, making the UDGs clear and accessible to all applicants.

We have strategic vision, as described in Imagine Austin and our Vision Zero plan, but the implementation tools precede the vision / are outdated, or are lacking entirely.

Why is an update needed?

When the Downtown Austin Design Guidelines were renamed the Urban Design Guidelines (UDG) in 2008, the guidelines did not change. So, the current guidelines remain focused on projects in the Central Business District (CBD) and do little to address design issues with projects in other areas of the urban core or the outlying urban hubs, like Imagine Austin Regional Centers or Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). One of the many reasons an update is needed is to create a broader range of guidelines that are more applicable to projects in the expanded urban areas of Austin. Good urban design should not be limited to the Central Business District (CBD). Safety, walkability, and active streetscapes should be a shared pedestrian experience throughout the new and growing urban core of Austin, to achieve the goals set in the Vision Zero plan.

The UDG are now 13 years old, and do not align with the policies that the Council has adopted during this time period. Since the current UDG were adopted, Council has enacted many new strategic documents and policies based on shared community goals and values. Therefore, a significant part of this proposed update would be to align the UDG with these policies. Many of these policy directions are aimed at affordable housing, connectivity, equity, and environmental initiatives including, but not limited to: the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, Downtown Austin Plan, Austin Core Transportation Plan (ACT), Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP), Project Connect, Strategic Housing Blueprint, Vision Zero, the soon to be adopted Climate Equity Plan, and the soon to be adopted Historic Design Standards.

In addition, the current UDG lack clarity in many areas leading to confusion and unpredictability. The proposed update will seek to bring clarity, predictability, and ease of use to the guidelines. It will not only make them more user-friendly for applicants, but will also provide for a simpler review process for both city staff and the Design Commission. Additionally, a simple graphic format will be used to make the UDG easier to use for a wider audience.

An update to the UDG is needed since the city core continues to rapidly change and grow and the current Guidelines have become outdated since being first introduced in 2009. Here are some items that should be prioritized in the update.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT:

The current Guidelines do not address environmental challenges. In fact, all that is mentioned is “Strive for environmental balance. All development should take into consideration the need to conserve energy and resources. It should also strive for a small carbon footprint.” We should address:

1. Climate Change- includes carbon emissions and heat islands
2. Watershed Protection- includes impervious cover and run-off mitigation
3. Water and Air Quality and Conservation- includes renewables, and carbon emissions.
4. Protection and Conservation of Natural Habitat- foliage and fauna.

ACTIVELY PROMOTE CIVIC ART.

Civic art promotes cultural tourism, a sense of place, international prestige and recognition, and an improved quality of life for a community. Art in a city reflects the way in which the city honors spirit and soul. Public art can create a civic message that expresses community identity, spirit and culture.

ENCOURAGE A VIBRANT CULTURAL ATMOSPHERE.

Arts, entertainment, and other cultural activities add richness and promotes community and social equity to our everyday lives. Such activity is an advantage to Austin because it enriches economic development, cultural tourism, downtown and neighborhood revitalization, international prestige and recognition, social service opportunities, and an improved quality of life for all citizens of Austin.

WE NEED A SYSTEM THAT HELPS GAUGE WHETHER GUIDELINES HAVE BEEN MET.

To bring clarity to the process and guide applicants to meet compliance, the guidelines will include recommendations on how projects can satisfy the intent of each guideline. These recommendations may include design elements that could be incorporated into the project as well as elements that should be avoided. All recommendations will be accompanied by graphic illustrations to help better convey the ideas.

MORE DETAIL TO DELINEATE DIFFERENT TYPES OF USES IN THE PROJECTS.

Due to their limited scope, the current UDG are not applicable to some project type and therefore the process of reviewing them is difficult and unpredictable. One of the major goals of the revision to the UDG is to provide guidance for different project types, including infrastructure projects, a component that is missing, and a critical initiative that the Council has already directed the Design Commission to create. By providing guidelines for a range of different project types, the UDG will be more usable and will better serve the applicants and the community. In addition to project types, the update will include provisions to better promote a mix of uses in one development. Mixed-use Developments activate the streetscape, the pedestrian experience, and should therefore be highly encouraged and supported in the revisions to the guidelines.

PROMOTE PUBLIC PUBLIC SPACES THAT DON'T REQUIRE AN ECONOMIC TRANSACTION

- Public Terrace, parks
- Public reading room
- Drink fountains, water filling stations
- Bike storage

Urban Design Guidelines Update

The update should also look into **requiring and promoting** community spaces with public access. This means more equitable areas that don't require someone to make a purchase in order to use the space, including, but not limited to: plazas, public terraces, parks, public reading rooms, drinking fountains, water bottle filling stations, bathrooms open to the public, and bike storage. These, among other community benefits, need better representation in the guidelines to provide more diverse options for new developments to include.

BARRIERS



1. **Coordinating with related policy:**
We will need to subsequently update Great Streets and Subchapter E in order for this effort to be successful. All of these policies work together. We can set this in motion by starting with the Urban Design Guidelines.
2. **Catering to varying contexts—cannot be too prescriptive:**
South Congress is an example of successful urban fabric: It is eclectic, chaotic, and an incredible experience--and it does not comply with Great Streets in any way. What makes sense in an urban context might not be relevant or desirable in another context. The physical nature of each place creates a different context. The guidelines need to accommodate the variety of these places. We need to focus on nature and character. Need to be weary of being prescriptive. One size will never fit all. The tools/programs that we use to enforce standards lack flexibility.
3. **Silos.**

HOW THE UPDATE WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED

The following work plan outlines a set of steps crucial to the success of an inclusive and robust process to address identified deficiencies in the guidelines. Each Phase considers specific deliverables and public engagement to receive feedback and inform the final update to the guidelines.





Preparation | 1-3 months

1. Creation of a draft narrative that explains the scope and purpose of the UDG and what success will look like with the update;
2. Defines the core values of the Commission and articulates Design Pillars - measurable and predictable elements that are critical to the success of an improved human experience at the intersection of public and private spaces; (Values to be based on adopted city policies, that the community already had ample input on)
3. Creation of an Engagement Plan. The Engagement Plan will build on narrative elements and craft stories at various levels and enlist the assistance of “community ambassadors” to champion the benefits and value of the UDG. Ambassadors will help to distribute information and collect comments in their community.

4. The messaging and engagement focus will be tailored around groups with a specific focus:
 - a. Technical subject matter experts, such as City Staff
 - b. Design teams - those who design and implement public and private projects using the UDG
 - c. Stakeholders representing interest groups
 - d. Outside agency representation:
 - i. TxDOT (Texas Department of Transportation)
 - ii. Cap Metro (Capital Metro)
 - iii. Waterloo Greenway
 - iv. DAA (Downtown Austin Alliance)
 - v. DANA (Downtown Austin Neighborhood Association)
 - vi. RECA (Real Estate Council of Austin)
 - vii. ULI (Urban Land Institute)
 - viii. AIA (American Institute of Architects)
 - ix. ASLA (American Institute of Landscape Architects)
 - x. APA (American Planning Association)
5. Working groups will be created to identify conflicts with policy direction, and defined core values/pillars, and identify specific goals and deliverables.
 - a. Imagine Austin
 - b. Downtown Austin Plan
 - c. Austin Core Transportation Plan (ACT)
 - d. Project Connect
6. Create a timeline for completion of each phase

PHASE 1 Needs

For Phase 1 to be successful, the following need to be addressed:

1. Consideration of an independent review expert to gauge the clarity, predictability, and usability of the document as it seeks to accomplish the vision of the UDG;
 - a. Who would this be? How much would it cost?
2. Strategic peer review from external subject matter experts to assist with specific guidelines; and
 - a. Who is this? Design Professionals? Cost?
3. Assistance from specific City Staff to collaborate at strategic times during the update to provide subject matter expertise on specific guidelines:
 - a. Housing and Planning
 - b. Transportation
 - c. Public Works
 - d. Economic Development
 - e. Watershed Protection
 - f. Parks and Recreation
 - g. Development Services
 - h. Equity Office
 - i. Office of Sustainability
 - j. Public Health
 - k. Austin Energy
 - l. Austin Water



Creation | 6-12 months

1. Building on work accomplished in Phase 1, share progress and alignment of Design Pillars
 - a. Stakeholder engagement
2. Re-calibrate design pillars based on engagement results
3. Formulate a final set of Design Pillars to be addressed by every project
4. Draft first set of the UDG
5. Review first draft:
 - a. Present to all working groups with targeted feedback goals
 - b. Each working group will outline specific feedback
 - c. Staff will assist with the compilation and gathering of comments out of engagement activities
6. Engage with stakeholders to get feedback on first draft
 - a. Outline specific goals/milestones for presenting first draft and

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- gathering feedback
 - b. Outline how feedback will be used and how it will influence the evolution of the UDG
 - c. Enumerate goals and outcomes to advance towards a second draft.
7. Draft second draft of UDG based on input received from first engagement process
8. Review second draft:
- a. Present to all working groups with targeted feedback goals
 - b. Each working group will outline specific feedback
 - c. Staff will assist with the compilation and gathering of comments out of engagement activities
9. Engage with stakeholders to get feedback on second draft
- a. Outline specific goals/milestones for presenting second draft and gathering feedback
 - b. Outline how feedback will be used and how it will influence the evolution of the UDG
 - c. Enumerate goals and outcomes to advance towards a final draft.
10. Draft third draft of UDG based on input received from second engagement process
11. Review third draft:
- a. Present to all working groups with targeted feedback goals
 - b. Each working group will outline specific feedback
 - c. Staff will assist with the compilation and gathering of comments out of engagement activities
12. Engage with stakeholders to get feedback on third draft Do we need to engage with stakeholders for the 3rd draft?

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- a. Outline specific goals/milestones for presenting first draft and gathering feedback
- b. Outline how final feedback will be used and how it will influence the evolution of the UDG
- c. Enumerate goals and outcomes to advance towards a final draft.

13. Test draft guidelines

- a. Craft design workshops to test validity of draft UDG
- b. Invite technical design teams, city staff, and specific stakeholders to collaborate in the review and application of the UDG to real places and projects
- c. Commission to review test project?
- d. Gather specific input and recommendations on how to improve the UDG for functionality, efficacy, predictability, and clarity
- e. Re-calibrate the UDG based on input and recommendations from testing workshop
- f. Re-test the updated UDG for functionality, efficacy, predictability, and clarity

14. Approval from Commission to proceed to Phase 3?

PHASE 2 Needs

For Phase 2 to be successful, the following need to be addressed:

1. Need City Staff assistance in the following areas:
 - a. Before working group meetings
 - i. Manage project
 - b. During working group meetings
 - i. Facilitate meetings
 - ii. Assist with action items from Working Group
 - iii. Communication and messaging
 - iv. Subject matter experts attend specific Working Group meetings scheduled with sufficient time to ensure availability
 - c. After working group meetings
 - i. Synthesize findings from reviews
 - ii. Make expert recommendations
 - iii. Formatting and Graphic Design



PHASE 3

Finalization | 6-12 months

Phase 3 envisions the finalization and creation of the UDG for consideration and presentation to city boards and commissions and City Council.

1. Prepare final version of UDG based on Phase 1 and 2 deliverables
2. Finalize graphic design elements
3. Create a website to house UDG
4. Prepare an engagement strategy for boards and commissions
5. Enumerate list of recommendations from boards and commissions
6. Schedule briefings to Council subcommittee
7. Present final version to Council for adoption

PHASE 3 Needs

- City Staff Assistance
- Prepare final document, graphic design
- Who creates, collects image content?

URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES **UPDATE**
WITH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY