

City of Brisbane

Planning Commission Agenda Report

TO: Planning Commission For the Meeting of September 11, 2008
FROM: John Swiecki, Principal Planner, via William Prince, Community Development Director
SUBJECT: **Sierra Point:** Design Guidelines Amendment DGA-1-08; Proposal by the City of Brisbane to update and amend the *Combined Site and Architectural Design Guidelines for Sierra Point* in their entirety.

Request:

The City of Brisbane is proposing to update the *Combined Site and Architectural Design Guidelines for Sierra Point* in their entirety. A copy of the draft Guidelines dated August 2008 was provided to the Commission under separate cover and is also available for review at the City of Brisbane Community Development Department. This update, focused on strengthening Sierra Point's identity and the creation and enhancement of public spaces at Sierra Point, was authorized by the City Council in 2006.

Recommendation:

That the Planning Commission continue the *Combined Site and Architectural Design Guidelines for Sierra Point* dated August, 2008 to allow for further revisions to the final document per this report.

Background:

This matter was the subject of extensive discussion at the August 28, Planning Commission hearing, and the August 28 staff report is attached for information. This report is intended to address a number of the substantive issues that were raised at the previous hearing. Given the limited time between the last hearing and the mailout for this meeting, it was not feasible to prepare a comprehensive update of the design guidelines incorporating the suggested changes. Rather, this report discusses recommended changes to the document and the document would subsequently be revised to incorporate these changes.. The final document would then be presented to Planning Commission for final approval.

As discussed in detail in the staff report, the focus of the Design Guidelines amendment was to enhance the public realm at Sierra Point for both the residents of Brisbane and Sierra Point employees and visitors. The City hired recognized Bay Area urban design firm FTB to undertake this update. FTB's analysis recognized that the public orientation of Sierra Point is geared toward the Bay Trail and linear green spaces. While this represents a wonderful public amenity, it does not provide a public focal or gathering point that might accommodate a wider range of public and visitor activity and further engage the existing and future employee base. FTB also recognized deficiencies in the Sierra Point entryway.

Based on their analysis and professional expertise, FTB made several design recommendations to strengthen the public realm at Sierra Point. These included strengthening the identity of Sierra Point

Parkway as an entryway, as well as the creation of public focal point for the project. The preferred location for this focal point was identified at the easterly terminus of Sierra Point Parkway near the bay. This site was chosen given existing site access, visibility, proximity to the bay and marina and easy accessibility from the whole of Sierra Point. FTB suggested two alternative approaches to creating a public realm at the preferred location- a "Main Street" concept for the easterly terminus of Sierra Point Parkway, and an approach to establish a public plaza. FTB's observations and recommendations were shared at workshops with the Planning Commission and City Council, and direction was provided to further explore the Sierra Point Plaza concept, along with other suggested improvements to strengthen the gateway experience along Sierra Point Parkway. The draft Guidelines dated August 2008 reflect the refinement of the Sierra Point Plaza concept, along with other recommendations related to streetscape enhancement and wayfinding, as well as a reorganization of the document to reflect existing conditions at Sierra Point.

The work scope approved by the City Council for the Design Guidelines update as approved by the City Council was focused on the public realm. It was not neither intended nor budgeted as a comprehensive rewrite of the Design Guidelines, and most of the guidelines and recommendations in this document were carried forward from the existing adopted Guidelines.

Discussion:

Purpose of the Sierra Point Design Guidelines:

Before addressing specific issues regarding the updated Guidelines, the purpose of the existing Guidelines should be clarified. The Guidelines are aspirational in nature, establishing a conceptual vision for the buildout of Sierra Point. The guidelines do not constitute formal land use regulations. As explicitly stated in the adopted Guidelines, "The Design Guidelines, because they are guidelines, only set direction for an integrated and cohesive development and are not themselves regulations." Since they are not regulatory, the Guidelines do not constitute approval of any given project. Nor do the Design Guidelines contain project-level detail for specific projects that might be proposed in the future. Rather, individual projects are subject to separate public review processes, including detailed environmental analysis and design review. The Guidelines include specific design recommendations which are considered when a project application is submitted and goes through the City's review process.

Sierra Point Plaza:

There was substantial discussion regarding the potential implementation of Sierra Point Plaza, particularly in regard to the prospective land swap and the design of the potential hotel project. As noted above, the purpose of the guidelines is to establish a vision, not to confer approval upon any given project. Any future land swap or subsequent project(s) to implement the vision set forth in the Design Guidelines will be subject to separate environmental and regulatory review.

The underlying premise behind the Sierra Point Plaza concept is that the establishment of a public plaza at Sierra Point creates a worthwhile amenity to the community as a whole, including Brisbane residents and Sierra Point employees and visitors. For the reasons discussed in the previous staff report and the Design Guidelines staff believes that establishment of Sierra Point Plaza is desirable and beneficial, and is worth pursuing. Staff also believes this is consistent with the direction previously provided to staff and the consultant team in previous workshops. In any event, this is fundamental to the work program and the proposed amendment.

If the Commission shares the vision that a public plaza would be a valuable amenity, a related question is the preferred location. As was discussed in the previous workshops and the August 28 staff report, both the consultant and staff support the location as proposed for a number of reasons. It is located at the

logical terminus of the main entry road into Sierra Point at a central location within Sierra Point. It also benefits from and contributes to synergy with nearby uses such as the Bay Trail, Marina, and retail liner shops to the south. It further provides the opportunity to provide an adaptable "outdoor room" for Sierra Point that can serve a variety of public purposes and is framed by surrounding buildings to focus activity. Lastly, it widens the range of public uses and activities available at Sierra Point by creating a different public space and experience from what currently exists in the form of the linear park along the bay and Bay Trail.

In regard to alternative locations, the function and character of the Plaza is closely tied to its location and setting. Changing the setting and context by relocating the plaza will alter its character and function. For example, there was discussion regarding the northeast corner of the site near the fishing pier. While a larger open space feature could be established in the existing public parking lot, the character and nature of an enlarged park would be similar to what is already available in this area, providing passive recreational opportunities with open bay exposure and views in a relatively remote location. It would not create a centrally located active gathering place for the public envisioned for Sierra Point Plaza. As such the question of location relates to the nature and character of the intended public space. As noted previously, FTB identified the proposed plaza location in previous workshops as the preferred site to establish a public focal point, and the proposed design guidelines reflect the feedback and policy direction that provided at those earlier workshops.

Land Swap:

Assuming that the Commission supports the concept of Sierra Point Plaza as a public focal point at the proposed location, the land swap is a relevant concern. As noted previously, the Guidelines establish the plaza concept and guidelines to implement the concept. They do not constitute approval of any land exchange, nor establish the precise limits or amount of acreage involved. A land swap proposal would be subject to separate City review, and would include specific details regarding the precise limits and acreage involved in the swap, along with appraisals and supporting financial information to ensure the financial equity of any such land exchange.

However, given that the graphic representation of the conceptual hotel and lack of information regarding the potential swap was a source of confusion, FTB has prepared the attached exhibits delineating the current limits of developable property and public property, and conceptually showing the changes envisioned to implement the plaza. These exhibits indicate that roughly similar amounts of property would be exchanged. It should be noted much of the information presented to date incorrectly characterized the exchange as a two-party exchange between UPC and the City. The exchange would be a three-party agreement involving the City, Opus, and UPC. The Opus land lease of the trapezoidal property is included in order to free up this "Gateway to the Bay" parcel for public use, including pavilion buildings.

Concerns were also raised regarding the potential disruption of the open space along the northerly boundary of Sierra Point resulting from a land swap. The attached graphic has been revised to clearly show the conceptual limits of the exchange do not encroach into this buffer area. It is further recommended that guideline language be added to reinforce that the property exchange will be limited to the City-owned areas now developed as parking lot. The easterly limits of the exchange area are also limited to the parking area. However, the precise limits along the easterly edge are subject to further refinement and study, as adequate parking must be retained in the easterly parking lot to accommodate public uses including recreation, the fishing pier and bay trail, as well as proximal parking to serve Marina berths extending to the north. It is recommended that the guidelines include a specific provision that adequate public parking be retained along the easterly boundary to support the uses noted above,

with the added provision that the regulatory review process for the exchange include a parking survey and needs assessment to determine the appropriate amount of public parking to be maintained.

Hotel Design:




While the Guidelines do not confer approval of any given project, the conceptual footprint of the proposed hotel was shown throughout the draft Design Guidelines for context. Given that the footprint appears to be source of confusion and potential misinterpretation of the Guidelines, the hotel footprint will be deleted from graphics throughout the document to make it clear there is no implied or explicit approval of a hotel design. As noted above, any proposed hotel project will be subject to a separate environmental and design review process. The Design Guidelines include a number of guidelines regarding the bulk, scale and massing of the hotel project, as well as guidelines for how the edge of the hotel should relate to adjoining public spaces of the plaza and northerly linear park. Lastly, the current design guidelines currently allow for a 12-story, 160 foot tall hotel, while the proposed design guidelines reflect UPC's stated request for a 14 story, 160-foot tower. It is suggested the 12-story, 160 foot height limit be retained. The applicant has the option of requesting an increase in the number of stories as part of any formal application for a specific project.

Other Issues:

A number of text changes to the Guidelines are also proposed as shown on the attached exhibit to address issues raised at the previous meeting. These include potential programming options for the plaza, and other uses and improvements that might be considered elsewhere within the open space/landscape matrix. Concerns were also expressed regarding the plant list, which is included in the currently adopted Guidelines. Staff believes it provides a useful starting point for the landscape design of any project for Sierra Point and would recommend it be retained. There is specific guidance regarding the use of native non-invasives materials with low water and maintenance demands. Other issues were raised regarding the road surface and settlement issues, and staff is consulting with the Public Works Department to determine if they have specific recommendations for incorporation into the guidelines. Concerns were raised regarding traffic flow around the plaza. The Public Works Department has reviewed the concept and expressed no objections given the low traffic volumes and speeds anticipated in this area. Nonetheless this issue will be addressed in more detail in the environmental document(s) prepared for any project which might be undertaken to implement these guidelines. Lastly, a letter was submitted at the last meeting asserting that the Design Guidelines update should be subject to full CEQA review. As noted earlier, this document is a planning document with no regulatory status, and the City Attorney concurs with the determination that this update is statutorily exempt from further review. Subsequent projects to implement these guidelines will be subject to CEQA review.

Attachments:

Existing Configuration-Sierra Point
Proposed Configuration-Sierra Point
Recommended Text Revisions

-  Privately Owned and Developable
-  Publicly Owned and Developable
(Long Term Lease)
-  Publicly Owned

Existing Configuration



Privately Owned and Developable

Publicly Owned



Linear Park

Fishing Pier

Marina Blvd.

Brisbane Marina

Sierra Point Pkwy.

Shoreline Ct.

Proposed Configuration



0 50 100 200

G.1.6

Recommended Text Revisions- Sierra Point Design Guidelines

Section 3.0 Conceptual Master Plan

1. In Section 3.1 change the story limit from fourteen to twelve, and eliminate references to conceptual hotel design.
2. In Section 3.2.1 **Focal Public Location: Sierra Point Plaza:** Potential open space uses of Children's Playground, Dog Park, extension of "par course" exercise facilities, Merry-Go-Round, and Waterfront Viewing Pavilion will be suggested for future consideration for Sierra Point Plaza and adjacent public open spaces in later programming.
3. In Section 3.2.1 **Focal Public Location: Sierra Point Plaza:** Potential plaza-fronting ground floor lease space uses such as museum, cultural facilities, exercise facilities, and day care facilities will be suggested for future consideration in later programming.

Section 6.0 Open Space/Landscape Matrix

1. In Section 6.4 **Bay Edge:** Text will be added to emphasize that existing landscaped parkland buffer areas at the northeast corner of Sierra Point will be maintained, and that the potential building and development footprint of a "land-swapped" hotel site will not extend north or east of the existing paved parking lot.

Also, text and guidelines will be added to recommend consideration of opportunities to enhance public access to recreational opportunities afforded by existing features such as the beach, the northern trail terminus, etc., if they are feasible relative to habitat protection requirements and other environmental considerations.

Section 8.0 Parking

1. In Section 8.1 Parking: Text will be added to the 1st paragraph on page 90 to note that adequate Marina parking of proper distribution shall be maintained.

Graphics

Modify as needed to eliminate conceptual hotel footprint from various maps.