Mr. Mike McMeekin, Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:08 p.m. with five voting members present. Mr. McMeekin introduced the Urban Design Review Board members as well as the Planning Department staff, and explained the UDRB’s public hearing and administrative meeting procedures.

**Public Case for Discussion:**

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<th>UD-10-001</th>
<th>REQUEST:</th>
<th>Re-design of the 16th Street Streetscape</th>
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<td>City of Omaha</td>
<td>LOCATION:</td>
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At the Urban Design Review Board meeting held on February 18, 2010, Doug Bisson, HDR, 8404 Indian Hills Drive, presented a visual overview including objective and subjective criteria for the 16th Street project. The process involved a steering committee, business owners, the city and other stakeholders. As part of the downtown Master Plan, a location at the intersection of Cass and 16th Street is identified for a new bus transfer center which will alleviate 16th Street of the majority of bus traffic. There will be direct ramifications for street parking with the addition of streetcars on 16th Street. The goal was to build support for the project with an opportunity for public involvement. The key stakeholders were interviewed one on one; a public envisioning workshop took place and was followed up with a design workshop where city staff, steering committee, stakeholders and the public was invited. Objective criteria were to create a framework for street level activity and redevelopment and safety. The objective criteria are: 1) corridor identity, 2) additional on street parking, 3) to accommodate future streetcar, and 4) utilize the 20’ city standard for sidewalk width. Subjective criteria includes street level transparency and the increase of life span of trees. Also, the public works department expressed interest in left turn lanes and maintaining a consistent street section to avoid weaving.

Mr. Bisson stated that the 16th corridor has diminished retail opportunities with the exception of one urban block. Adding 43 parking stalls between Douglas and Howard Street with a total of 98 parking stalls
would accomplish the additional on-street parking. 16th Street has been identified by the downtown Master Plan to accommodate future streetcars. The two standards for streetcars would be parallel parking and back in diagonal parking. The vast majority of the project stakeholders agreed that rear end diagonal parking is not an option and would create other issues. He stated a preferred solution met all subject and objective criteria with a center median, parallel parking, and a 20’ sidewalk standard. Regarding street level transparency and safety, the trees will be moved to the median. The requirements have been met to accommodate traffic flow by installing future left turn bays and eliminate the weaving of traffic. He stated a “Kit of Parts” was created and presented showing each block face. A festival plaza would be a focal point of the entire corridor near the Orpheum Theater. The northern two blocks could be the traditional section, the mid section of the corridor would be the plaza or the focal point and the southern three blocks could include native vegetation and/or vertical wind turbines, rain gardens, etc. Mr. Bisson stated that if the project moves forward, the cost estimate would be completed as well as a survey. The capital improvement program with the city and the private sector will be used for funding.

Joe Gudenrath, Executive Director, Downtown Improvement District (DID), explained that his organization was heavily involved in the project and was very interested in the improvement of 16th Street. The interest in the 16th Street corridor was evidenced by the diversity of citizens who attended the public meetings. The design study was presented and eagerly accepted by the DID board which consists of 23 members who represent the downtown stakeholders.

Joe Moise, DID Board member, 1403 Farnam at the Paxton, stated he recently sold a residential unit located at The Regis near 16th and Harney. He stated he fully supports the project.

Adrian Minks, OPPD, 444 South 16th Street, stated 16th Street is a problem and there is a need for short-term parking. She supports the concept of the plaza between OPPD and the Orpheum and the trees in the median. She personally dislikes the existing trees and indicated that it is hard to walk down the sidewalk with the trees, tree wells and bus stops.

Joan Squires, Omaha Performing Arts, 1200 Douglas Street, stated she participated as part of the steering committee and her organization supports the plan. The Orpheum Theater brings 250,000 people per year to the area. Patrons need a place to be dropped off and the plaza would be a great concept for the Orpheum. She stated her organization is in support of the plan presented.

Brenda Dooley, First National Bank, 1620 Dodge Street, which anchors the north end of the 16th Street corridor, stated her organization is in support of the design. The design process was commendable and very well received.

There were no opponents present.

Mr. Moulton commented that it is evident that something needs to be done as evidenced by the Master Plan process. The city is supportive of the project to rehabilitate the corridor and this project accomplished many goals including the subjective and objective criteria. The main point of question is whether or not the central median is the right solution and the right time for 16th Street. There are certain problems involving maneuverability, particularly freight and deliveries to property in the area. It is difficult for people to move around and park vehicles when there is a channelized thru lane with parking and a curb on either side. Another concern is that there has not been a good precedent set for the maintenance of large landscaped environments over the long term. Initially, there is a lot of enthusiasm and great possibilities presented but they require a significant amount of maintenance, money and energy to keep viable in the long term. He stated that a median may reduce visibility and affect the retail block by dividing the street and limiting pedestrians from easy access across the street. There are general concerns about the appropriateness of a boulevard in an urban setting. The staff report basically outlines the concern and questions whether or not to consider a conventional main street section by adding the diagonal parking and still provide landscaping on the sidewalks. There are concerns as to whether or not there will be enough pedestrians at the southern end of the corridor and will the proposed solution support more retail.

Mr. Peters questioned if any professionals or consultants, associated with Mr. Bisson’s team, looked at how to increase the viability of the retail opportunities along 16th Street and judge or weigh the likelihood
of success based upon this plan.

Mr. Bisson stated several members of the team concluded that the corridor needs traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular, in order for retail to succeed. Because of the blank faces along 16th Street, it is not likely for the potential of the corridor to be a true retail corridor. The “Kit of Parts” was developed to accommodate whatever the needs were for each block section. During the downtown planning process, S. P. Friedman agreed there is long-term potential for 16th Street but there were serious concerns regarding the structure of the street itself.

Mr. Peters questioned whether a median in the middle of the street is a dead end for retail if a consumer would want to cross from one side of the street to the other.

Mr. Bisson stated the median issue was based on what was discussed with the downtown planning process. In terms of a retail atmosphere, there would be a pedestrian conflict if people walk back and forth across the street. Mr. Peters commented that the best urban character would allow for people to jay walk as in any vibrant commercial district i.e. Benson, Old Market or Dundee. Mr. Bisson responded that there are cut thrus at some alley locations to allow for pedestrian traffic to cut across the street in the middle of the block. Mr. Peters stated that in absence of the Orpheum block, he has reservations because barriers are being created to many of the items that are trying to be accomplished.

Ms. Jacobson questioned the accommodation for bike lanes. Mr. Bisson stated that on the downtown plan, the true bike street through the corridor is listed as 15th Street but traffic should move at a slow enough speed to accommodate bike traffic.

Mr. Ferguson questioned whether there was consideration to expand the festival plaza concept. Mr. Bisson stated there was a fear that there could be too much of the festival plaza concept plus cost was a big factor. The committee wanted to keep the “decorating” to a minimum.

Mr. Moulton stated that Public Works will not require a center turn lane and questioned if that would weigh in on the final conclusion. Mr. Bisson stated that the absence of turn lanes would have an impact especially with regard to diagonal parking. Mr. Moulton suggested installing front-end diagonal parking before the streetcars and reverse the parking to back in diagonal parking to accommodate the streetcars.

Mr. Weaver questioned the standard for back in diagonal parking versus front-end diagonal parking. Mr. Bisson stated the streetcar is a multi-million dollar vehicle and the percentage for potential accidents increase when a person backs out of a diagonal parking space.

Mr. Ciaccio stated he was concerned about stimulating private reinvestment with regard to parking. He questioned the need for a 20’ wide sidewalk. Mr. Bisson stated a 20’ wide sidewalk is the city standard and would allow enough space for pedestrian traffic, street furniture and outdoor dining. Mr. Moulton stated the sidewalk minimum is 10’ with the balance allocated for landscaping and furnishings. Weaver stated the 20’ sidewalk is city typical but not city standard. Mr. Ciaccio suggested reducing the 20’ sidewalk and adding diagonal parking to accomplish a more concentrated pedestrian zone to give the perception of more life and activity on the street. Mr. McMeekin stated the elimination of the median would create more opportunities for a friendlier sidewalk environment.

Mr. Bisson questioned the seriousness of the standards or key criteria. The set of standards were accomplished but there is a need to know which standards or criteria are now subjective.

Mr. Peters agreed that an effort was made to increase parking stalls along 16th Street but questioned how the east/west streets could enhance parking. Mr. Bisson stated the parking stalls were increased from 0 to 98 on 16th Street but the downtown plan recommends converting the majority of downtown streets back to two-way streets.

In response to Ferguson, Mr. Bisson stated the trees or plantings would be in the median and other plantings could be in the form of baskets. Ferguson stated the view and access across the street would be compromised with larger sized trees in the median. Mr. Bisson stated there is an opportunity to introduce native plantings that would not be too large due to the shading of the “urban canyon”.
Ferguson questioned the concept of public art in the median. Mr. Bisson stated the art is purely an idea.

Mr. Peters stated he was concerned about the 20' sidewalk with light poles and flower baskets which is not conducive to business development unless activated everyday during the spring and summer months.

Mr. McMeekin questioned Mr. Bisson regarding the rain garden concept in the southern three blocks and why the northern three blocks would be different. Mr. Bisson stated one concept that arose from the public involvement process was a transition of spaces when moving to the south; traditional on the north, an art space or the plaza in the middle and the sustainable on the south side.

Mr. Peters stated there are several ideas with one great idea that could have greater application throughout the street and actually tie together the other diverse and separate physical concepts. Mr. Bisson expressed the cost issue for the plaza space and was not certain about the financial ability to make the plaza concept happen in each block.

Mr. Peters stated the concept has been designed to take small steps instead of focusing on the vision that needs to be accomplished. He stated that at this time, the vision does not seem cohesive.

Mr. Ciaccio agreed that this project has to happen to improve the viability in the business sector of downtown.

Mr. Bisson stated that in regard to parking, there is not a lack of parking in the downtown area but a lack of convenient parking. He suggested parking kiosks or demand pricing for parking so that there is always an available stall. Parking can be maximized to 30 parking stalls on the key block that is most appropriate for retail. The 30 parking stalls would break down to 8 parallel parking spaces on each side of the street with 14 diagonal parking spaces in the median area. There was concern for delivery trucks and vehicles that double park. Mr. Peters suggested zoning the center zipper of parking stalls to include no parking during certain morning hours for deliveries.

Mr. Holland questioned Mr. Bisson as to why bump outs were not included at the crosswalks. Mr. Bisson stated snow removal is an issue with the bump outs but there would be a safety zone in the median for pedestrians to cross the street.

In response to Mr. McMeekin, Mr. Bisson stated that 16th Street has always been a main street in Omaha and is the most central. The downtown plan indicates that the streetcars will eventually travel 15th Street and 16th Street.

Mr. Bisson stated the presentation is the preferred concept with the block-for-block scenarios. Mr. Peters stated there is great opportunity but there is some disconnect in relation to the 20' sidewalk being barren of any landscape feature to provide greater flexibility. Mr. Peters asked if the use of the sidewalk in a low pedestrian area is appropriate? Mr. Bisson stated there was concern with the addition of a non-median, non-parallel parking. A structural change would be more difficult to make at this time.

Mr. McMeekin stated the median concept appears to be a significant issue for the board. He asked the members of the steering committee to make any comments to the board. Mr. Gunderath stated there are different objectives to be achieved. There needs to be an atmosphere created where businesses can thrive. There are no trees co-existing on the sidewalk in the Old Market. The impression that the property is shaded and beautiful can be due to the use of canopies on the Mercer properties. Property owners have the flexibility to do what they need to do by keeping the green in the middle. It was in the interest of the steering committee to give the business owner the flexibility to do what they need to make it successful.

Mr. Weaver stated the Old Market area does not have the impediment down the middle of the street with regard to visibility and accessibility. Mr. Gunderath stated visibility can be addressed but accessibility will be an issue.

Mr. Bisson stated the median accomplishes the goals within the parameters of the project. The median
allows flexibility to do different things based on the different configurations of the buildings on each block.

Mr. Moulton stated all the requirements were met but now that the center turn lane is not necessary, do we include that aspect at this point?

Mr. Bisson stated that the process of this project achieved public consensus but at what point is the framework changed? Weaver agreed that there could have been more input in the process but that city boards review projects and are allowed to make changes at this stage of the process.

Mr. Moise questioned why the city and board members were not present at the public meetings when there was input and consensus among the public? Mr. McMeekin stated the board’s function is to review these types of public projects when there is something to review. Mr. Bisson agreed that there will always be changes but typically the details are smaller in scale.

Mr. McMeekin stated the thorough discussion is due to the fact that 16th Street is viewed as a mistake and the board does not want 16th Street to be another mistake. Mr. Peters agreed that it would have been beneficial for all parties to have more hands on approach during the review process.

Mr. Moulton commented that this is an exploration of ideas used to find a good solution for 16th Street. He stated he does not want to inhibit the creative process. Several good ideas were presented but now would be the time to ask the hard question - Is this the right solution for this street? Mr. Moulton proposed that a motion could merely add a new section to the “Kit of Parts” promoted by Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Ciaccio moved to APPROVE subject to a more detailed design review that would address increased parking, replacement of landscape median, review of the possibility of landscaping within the 20’ sidewalk, and consideration of presenting an alternative concept for the blocks from Harney to Douglas. Focus on enhanced opportunity for reinvestment, viability of existing businesses, and opportunities for public festivals. Review by the board prior to initiation of construction documents. Mr. Peters seconded the motion which carried 5-0.

| UD-10-003 | REQUEST: | Review and approval of the “Downtown Wayfinding System” |
| City of Omaha | LOCATION: | Downtown Omaha |

At the Urban Design Review Board meeting held on February 18, 2010, Mr. Moulton, introduced the schematic design of the downtown wayfinding system. The next phase of design development will complete the design in order to establish cost estimates. The project design was developed through a project committee including a steering committee representing different factions from downtown. Joel Katz, a nationally and internationally known consultant, was used. The steering committee has approved the design and requests input and feedback from the board.

Joe Gudenrath, Executive Director, Downtown Improvement District, stated the project was delayed for a few years and his organization is looking forward to making this a reality.

There were no opponents present.

Mr. Weaver, Assistant Planning Director, recommended approval could be subject to the inclusion of MAT, consideration of companion elimination of existing signage, consideration of the relation to the Qwest parking signage system, and flexibility to be adjustable over time as new and changing features become available, subject to established criteria.

Ms. Jacobson questioned how attractions were selected or added to the system. Mr. Cunningham expressed that the same process will be used that was used by the consultant. If it meets the criteria that have been consistently applied in this process, it will be in the system.

Mr. Peters questioned if the system looks at downtown for those destinations that shout out as downtown venues and are their sub districts. Mr. Moulton answered that the system currently recognizes...
destinations within a district. This will be discussed with the consultant regarding north downtown destinations.

Mr. Holland moved to APPROVE subject to the inclusion of MAT, consideration of companion elimination of existing signage, consideration of the relation to the Qwest parking signage system, and flexibility to be adjustable over time as new and changing features become available, subject to established criteria. Mr. Peters seconded the motion which carried 5-0.

DISCUSSION ITEM:

Rules of Procedure: Discuss and review proposed criteria for review, administrative disposition, and the review process (flow chart)

Mr. Holland moved to LAYOVER until ordinance is established by City Council. Mr. Ciaccio seconded the motion which carried 5-0.

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS:

Mr. Peters moved to APPROVE the meeting minutes of November 19, 2009 and December 17, 2009. Mr. Holland seconded the motion which carried 5-0.

ADJOURNMENT:

It was the consensus of the board to adjourn the meeting at 5:03 p.m.

Debbie Hightower, Planning Department
Recording Secretary
MPM1- who the “vast majority” referred to

Bisson: You can do head in diagonal but that is streetcar inappropriate or you can do back in diagonal and that is streetcar appropriate but what we heard from the “vast majority” and I think our stakeholders and steering committee members will talk, is that, no one and I can almost say that verbatim, wanted rear end diagonal parking along that corridor. They had a strong fear and thought that that would create a lot of issues.

MPM2- check tape to see if “decorating” was word used

Bisson: Well, our thought on it, the festival is great but you can do too much of it. I mean, that was the fear and then that went into cost became a big factor, doing that and you know using the pavings and some of those other things. We tried to, I didn’t get into the level of detail. We are trying to keep the “decorating” down to a minimum and really focus it on this block, use a lot of flatwork, basically that tool scored concrete…….

MPM3- check tape for correct wording

McMeekin: Given that, there’s this question about the amount of retail that would ultimately occur on 16th Street, what is it that drove the streetcar to be shown here as opposed to other?

Bisson: In the hope that it would continue to fill up, I mean the streetcar has the three block streetcar effect, so it has a (?) that gives you (?) blocks either side. This is about the most central and this always has been a main street in Omaha. We thought from kind of a celebratory perspective, it made a lot of sense.

MPM4 – doesn’t sound right

Peters: I think there is a great opportunity here but there is some disconnect that needs to be sorted out when you talk about the 20’ sidewalk being barren of any landscape feature to provide great flexibility. But, I think you either have to define how that can be used so you can convince us a 20’ sidewalk in a very low pedestrian area is something that is appropriate.

Bisson: If you feel that there needs to be trees within that…….