DT Code Update Subcommittee – White Paper #9

Meeting 05/09/2022 at 3p.m. SEED Lab Downtown

Please note that this meeting will be both in-person and online

Overview

At the April 25th, 2022 meeting, the working group discussed design standards and talked through ways to address height, wind, and solar access. A subset of the group worked further to develop standards for the three downtown zones.

DT Code Revisions Working Group meeting, April 25th, 2022.

Discussion continued on the topic of the building step backs and tower mass reductions. Some highlights from the conversation:

- The group preferred the tower mass reduction method proposed by the subcommittee over the universal 20' step back at the top of the street wall.
- The height at which the tower mass reductions would apply will vary per district.
- The calculation for percentage of reduction will be based on the floorplate with the highest Gross Floor Area that occurs under the height at which the tower mass reduction occurs.
- The percentage of reduction number will be based on the adjacent ROW classification. (Note: discussion during the meeting indicated that the larger percentage reduction would apply adjacent to the major street classification and the smaller percentage would apply adjacent to the minor classification. See AIA meeting notes for updated information on that application.)
- The mass reduction would occur only at street frontages but would be cumulative so that a building with multiple street frontages would have higher requirements for tower mass reductions.
- Graphics to accompany the proposed tower mass reduction proposal are in development. The draft versions presented at the meeting are attached.
- The group continued to discuss the importance of the tower mass reductions as a way of providing sky plane access at the street level and as protection from wind downwashing. The group determined that they needed more information on the importance of the wind protection. Bettisworth was tasked with reaching out to RWDI for more information.
- The subcommittee presented options for additional sky plane access methods that included applying an angled plane that would force a building "top" and increase sky plane access both when viewed from the street and horizontally through the skyline. The group did not come to any major conclusions on this topic. The subcommittee was tasked with exploring the issue further.

Additional discussion on other topics included the following:

- During the recent review of the proposed downtown master plan MOA Assembly Members asked if there might be a way to use the code to restrict the development of one-story buildings downtown, with the idea that if we are hoping for higher densities in the downtown district then maybe lower density buildings should be discouraged in favor of higher density development. The Working Group agreed with the idea in principle but ultimately decided that adding a two-story requirement at this point would be adding an additional barrier to development downtown. There are so many empty lots downtown that even one-story development would be welcome. The group believes that as demand for space downtown increases, more higher density development will happen naturally.
- The conversation about low density development then evolved into a discussion of the high number of surface parking lots downtown. The Working Group suggested that there might be a way to disincentivize surface parking by requiring taxes on each space, like the taxes business owners must pay on business property. Each space would be taxed as business property the same way a dentist's chair, for example, is taxed as business property. Kristine will explore the option internally with the appropriate MOA departments.

DT Code Working Group Subcommittee Meeting, May 2nd, 2022

Angled plane

The subcommittee met to refine the angled plane approach to providing additional sky plane access at the top of the building towers. Discussion during the April 25th Working Group meeting had indicated that measuring the plane from a fixed point at grade, 30' from the property boundary would be the best option. The subcommittee's task was to test the proposal with 3D models. The 3D model revealed some issues with that approach including the following.

- Due the varying Merrill Field height limits downtown, an angled plane applied consistently throughout the downtown area either had no impact on towers on the east end of downtown or an extreme impact on towers on the west end of downtown, depending on the chosen angle.
- The group discussed the reasons behind the additional reduction and concluded that the tower mass reduction may already be achieving the stated goals of stepping back the street wall for increased sky plane access. Creating a tower "top" with the angled plane might reduce and restrict the design flexibility provided by the tower mass reduction method. The subcommittee is still in the midst of discussion on this topic and will provide their final conclusions and recommendations at the next meeting.

Tower Mass Reduction

Further modeling of the tower mass reduction method is in-process and the subcommittee expects to have some additional recommendations to present to the working group at the next meeting.

Wind

The subcommittee is meeting with RWDI today, May 5th. Any information gathered from the meeting will be presented to the working group on the 9th.

AIA Design Assistance Team Visit

Some members of the Working Group were able to meet with the AIA DAT during their recent visit. Kristine, Jonny, Daniel and Mélisa presented the current code revision effort for downtown Anchorage. The AIA DAT had several suggestions directly applicable to recent Working Group discussions:

- They suggested that tower design, specifically concerns about wind, were less worrisome than all of the empty lots and surface parking lots downtown.
- Development downtown may not be at the point yet where wind is a major concern. Perhaps revisit it later as more development occurs.
- The team saw the tower mass reductions as valuable tool to create visual interest and a more psychologically comfortable user experience at the street level.
- The AIA DAT suggested that the tower mass reduction percentages should be based on adjacent street widths rather than street classifications, with the higher percentage reduction applied at the narrower street frontage. Most street ROWs downtown are either approximately 60' or 80' wide. The higher mass reduction percentage would be applied to the frontage on the 60' ROW and the lower mass reduction percentage would be applied to the frontage on the 80' ROW. This will help reduce the street wall "canyon effect," especially in the narrower streets.
- The supported the idea of figuring out a way to discourage surface parking downtown via taxes or code restrictions.
- They proposed finding a way to tax speculative land holdings as another way to discourage surface parking lots downtown.
- They suggested applying setback easements for additional sidewalk widths on streets where the ROW doesn't provide enough room for a good pedestrian experience. Where possible, make sure it is implemented across the whole block instead of a lot-by-lot basis.

Current Tasks

The next working group meeting will focus on the street level/ design topics including:

- Building articulation at the street level
- Building glazing at the street level and for the whole building
- Sidewalk design and minimum widths
- Landscaping

If there is enough time, we may also discuss open space requirements.

Please review the attached code (unchanged since 4/25) and be prepared to discuss the above topics. The sidewalk and landscaping sections can be found in the tracked changes as deleted code. The subcommittee will present findings on tower mass reductions, angled planes, and wind, but expect limited discussion on the findings due to time constraints.

The Downtown Plan can be found here: About, Documents, & FAQs | Our Downtown Anchorage
Questions: Kristine.bunnell@anchorageak.gov

ANC Downtown Code Working Group
Monday, May 9th, 2022 3:00 PM-4:30 PM
Anchorage SEED Lab: 111 W 6th Ave, Anchorage, AK 99501

If you prefer to join the meeting online, please use this link