

# Memorandum



Date: April 30, 20256

To: Downtown Design Review Committee

From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director

Subject: **Design Review Committee and the Unified Development Code (zoning ordinance) – Draft 1 of proposed changes**

## **Background**

During the April 1<sup>st</sup> meeting, staff briefly started the discussion regarding the changes needed to the Unified Development Code as it relates to the design review committee. Staff believe it is important to include standards for review within the Unified Development Code to eliminate any confusion of those looking for information.

## **History**

The City Commission adopted the Unified Development Code (UDC) in November 2025, and it became effective in December 2025. The UDC has elements of a form-based code which provides additional language for the design of buildings to help maintain built environment characteristics found in the different zoning districts. UDC documents can also include all regulations associated with the development of land including stormwater and engineering design standards, signage, subdivision regulations to name a few.

Language found in the 2003 zoning ordinance as amended is now superseded by the UDC adopted in 2025. Properties that were located in the C-3 Central Business District are now designated as D Downtown District in the UDC.

While the UDC is referenced in three locations, other sections provide development standards for properties located in the D Downtown District. The April 1<sup>st</sup> packet included an excerpt from the UDC as it relates to development in the D Downtown District which included:

- Article III – Section 71-14 Zoning districts – establishes zoning districts
- Figure 71-A – Zoning Map
- Section 71-16 – General Requirements
- Table 71-F Downtown D Standards – provides setback and glazing requirements
- Section 71-17 – Façade requirements – language pertaining to façade regulations
- Table 71-F Façade Types – provides information regarding Shopfronts, Awning or Canopy and Common Entry
- Article 4 – Administration – Section 71-33 Review and decision-making bodies. Section 71-33.E specifically references the Design Review Committee.

- Section 71-36 Specific standards for development approval includes Table 71-V Development Review Procedures and Section 71-36.H Downtown applications – provides language for staff review and approval

## **Discussion**

The Planning Commission is reviewing other sections of the UDC to address concerns that have arisen since its adoption. The intent is there will be several sections amended at one time with remaining sections reviewed later.

At this time, staff is requesting the Design Review Committee review language found in the UDC and determine if any changes are necessary. Staff have confirmed with the Planning Commission that the DRC should review the existing language and direct staff to draft changes that would improve the existing document. Once the DRC is supportive of the draft changes they will be forwarded to the Planning Commission for review and inclusion in the future a larger amendment to the UDC which will require City Commission approval after two readings of the adopting ordinance and public hearings.

Below is a summary of the proposed changes:

1. Sections 71-5.A.9 and 71-14.A and 71-16H.12 - Creation of the Downtown Design Review Overlay District. This includes intent language for the purpose of the district and will include a map of the Downtown district for clarity. In addition, there is a short list of exceptions for design review.
2. Section 71-33.E Review and decision-making bodies – Downtown Design Review expanded existing language to include powers and duties of the committee along with where appeals are sent.
3. Sections 71-34 and 71-36 added Downtown Design Review Overlay District to notice information for clarity and updated review procedures to include staff as a decision-making body, and the planning commission as the appellant body.
4. Section 71-36.H Downtown Design review expanded section to include: 1) reference to overlay district; 2) approval process with language regarding no building or sign permits may be issued associated with exterior alterations until approval has been granted; 3) modified administrative approval to include city manager review and deleted criteria b regarding previous interpretations; 4) provided process for downtown design review committee approvals; 5) established objectives and standards for eight items associated with the exterior of the building along with appeal process; and 6) added term Downtown Design Review Overlay District to definitions under Overlay District.

## **Next Steps**

Review and discuss the draft amendments proposed by staff. Direct staff make changes as needed.

New language is underlined and ~~language to be deleted is stricken~~ Disregard formatting.

Sec. 71-5 Zoning districts established

A. Zoning under this chapter is limited to the following district designations.

8. Short-term rental Overlay District allows short-term rental uses to be located in specific geographic areas.

9. Downtown Design Review Overlay District establishes specific geographic areas where exterior design review by the Downtown Design Review Committee.

Sec. 71-14 Zoning districts

A. Official zoning map – Figure 71-A (Zoning Map shall have the following language added under “Zoning Districts”)

Overlay District

Short-Term Rental Overlay District – see Sec. 71-16.H.11

Downtown Design Review Overlay District – see Sec. 71-16.H.12

Sec. 71-16 General requirements

Section 71-16.H Establishment of zoning districts and regulations

1. through 10 - intentionally left blank (in future Tables 71-C through 71-H will be retitled)

11. Short-Term Rental Overlay District (STROD)

a. Intent. The Short-Term Rental Overlay District is established and applies to the area shown on the map in Section 71-16.H.11.c. The intent of the Short-Term Rental Overlay District is:

i. Protect and promote the health, safety and welfare of the City’s residents, property owners, visitors, and neighborhoods by allowing short-term rentals (STR) within the City under certain conditions as found in Chapter 14 of the Code of Ordinances and in certain zoning districts.

ii. Recognizes that short-term rentals may potentially promote tourism, increase property values, and provide valuable business opportunities for property owners.

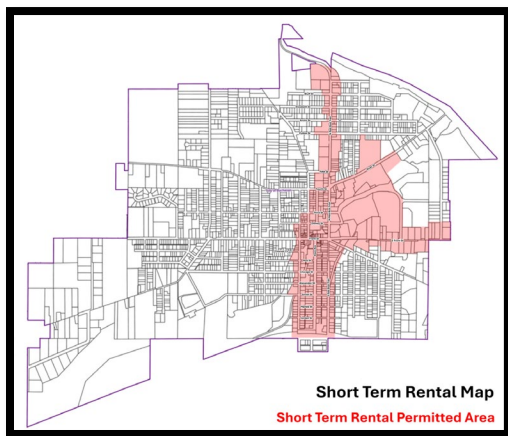
iii. Ensure that the operation of short-term rentals is done in a safe and beneficial manner for the well-being of all in the community. The character of residential zoning districts must also be protected and preserved.

iv. While short-term rentals can provide community benefits, their proliferation in residential neighborhoods can cause difficulties where character of the use takes on a more transitory and commercial character.

v. By creating the overlay district it will decrease potential conflicts with adjacent properties, limit impact on long-term housing availability and maintain the residential character of neighborhoods.

b. Basis for Regulations. Whereas in 2025, the City Commission adopted Ordinance 2025.09.443 establishing regulations that must be met for short-term rental in Chapter 14 of the Code of Ordinance which may be amended from time to time.

c. Short-term rental Areas. The Short-Term Rental Overlay Map as established in Chapter 14 of the Code of Ordinances.



d. Applicability, Exception

i. Properties located outside of the overlay district are prohibited from requesting use variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals for the establishment of a short-term rental unit.

12. Downtown Design Review Overlay District (DDROD)

a. Intent. The Downtown Design Review Overlay District is established and applies to the area shown on the map in Section 71-16.H.12.c. The intent of the Downtown Design Review Overlay District is:

i. Promote the historic and architectural qualities of the City and thereby preserve the distinctive character of the City. Various areas of the City, such as the area in the downtown business district, have special historical, cultural, and design significance. These areas contain historic or unique sites deserving protection. The preservation and appropriate development of these areas require

rules and regulations specifically addressing these distinctive characteristics.

ii. To effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement, perpetuation, and use of improvements and areas of special character or special historic and aesthetic interest or value which represent or reflect elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, and architectural history or distinction.

iii. To maintain the local, "small town" atmosphere of various residential and business areas within the City.

iv. To insure compatibility of new development with the existing characteristics of the area.

v. To protect sensitive areas of transition from one land use to another.

vi. To protect and enhance the City's attractiveness to visitors and the support and stimulus to local business provided thereby.

vii. To strengthen the economy and promote improvements in the City.

viii. To promote the use of areas within the Downtown Design Review Overlay District for the education, pleasure, and welfare of the residents of the Village.

b. Downtown Design Review Areas. The Downtown Design Review Overlay District will consist of properties located in the D Downtown District.

INSERT MAP OF THE D DISTRICT

c. Applicability, Exception

i. The placement of allowed items such as sandwich board signage, outdoor seating, planter boxes and other similar items in accordance with adopted regulations and policies shall be excluded from the Downtown Design Review Overlay District standards of review as found in \_\_\_\_\_.

**Sec. 71-33 Review and decision making bodies.**

E. Downtown Design Review Committee

1. Powers and duties. The Downtown Design Review Committee has the following powers and duties under this chapter:

a. Downtown Design Review Overlay District. To review, hear, consider and approve, approve with conditions or disapprove requests.

b. Appeals to administrative decisions. To hear, review, consider and affirm, modify or review and decision of the Zoning Ordinance as allowed under Sec \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Appeals. An appeal of a decision by the Downtown Design Review Committee must be filed with the City of Buchanan Planning Commission within 60 days after the decision in writing.

~~is the decision-making body for applications subject to downtown design standards unless the proposed work qualifies for administrative approval under Sec. 71-36.H Downtown applications.~~

~~2. The Design Review Committee meets on an as needed basis when discretionary review is required.~~

**Sec. 71-34 General provisions.**

G. Timing of notice. Unless otherwise provided in the Michigan statutes and laws or this chapter, notice will be provided as shown in [Table 71-U](#).

TABLE 71-U NOTICE TIMING		
Application	Notice Required	
	Written	Published
Text amendment	None	Planning Commission: Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing. City Commission: not less than 15 days prior to public hearing.
Zoning map amendment	Planning Commission: not less than 15 days prior to public hearing. City Commission: reasonable time prior to public hearing	Planning Commission: Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing. City Commission: not less than 15 days prior to public hearing.
Special use permits	Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing.	Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing
Variance	Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing	Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing
Appeal	Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing	Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing
<u>Downtown Design Review Overlay District</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>None</u>

K. Review of applications by decision-making bodies.

4. Downtown Design Review Overlay District. After submission of an application for downtown design review, the downtown design review committee will hearing comments on the application during a public meeting. The downtown design review committee will either

approve, approve with conditions, or disapprove the application based on the relevant review standards.

**Sec. 71-36 Specific standards for development approval.**

A. General. [Table 71-V](#) summarizes the development review procedures for all types of applications.

TABLE 71-V DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCEDURES						
Procedure	Authority					Notices
	Staff	PC	ZBA	CC	DRC	
Text amendments	R	[R]		[DM]		N
Zoning map amendment	R	[R]		[DM]		W, N
Special use permit	R	[DM]				W, N
Variance	R		[DM]			W
Appeals of administrative decision			[DM]			W
Administrative adjustments	DM		[A]			
Site plan review	DM					
Sign permit	DM		[A]			
Temporary use permit	DM		[A]			
Certificate of zoning compliance	DM					
Downtown <u>Design Review application</u>	R DM	A			DM	
Interpretations	DM		[A]			

TABLE 71-V DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCEDURES						
Procedure	Authority					Notices
	Staff	PC	ZBA	CC	DRC	

*Key*

- Planning Commission PC
- Zoning Board of Appeals ZBA
- City Commission CC
- Design Review Committee DRC
- Review & Recommendations R
- Decision Making Body DM
- Appellate Body A
- Public Hearing Required [ ]
- Published Notice N
- Written Notice W

H. ~~Downtown applications.~~ Downtown design review.

- ~~1. Applicability.~~ Purpose. Downtown design review is required for properties located within the Downtown Design Review Overlay District as established in Sec. 71-16.H.12.a. and applies to all proposed exterior work in the Downtown Design Review Overlay District associated with exterior alterations to existing buildings such as but

not limited to window and door replacement, awnings, signage, lighting, and changes to the façade such as new siding or paint and new construction.

2. Approval Process Options. No building or sign permit may be issued for work on the exterior of a building located within the Downtown Design Review Overlay District until either an Administrative approval has been issued by the zoning administrator or the Downtown Design Review Committee has approved a request.

~~a. This subsection applies to all proposed exterior work in the D Downtown District associated with exterior alterations to existing buildings such as but not limited to window and door replacement, awnings, signage, lighting, and changes to the façade such as new siding or paint and new construction. subject to the Downtown Design Standards, including new construction, façade alterations, cosmetic upgrades, and signage.~~

a. Administrative approvals. The ~~community development director~~ zoning administrator along with the city manager ~~may review, consider and approve, approve with condition or disapprove downtown design review permits~~ approve proposed work when all of the following criteria are met:

- i. The work does not involve the addition or removal or covering of architectural features that define the character of the building, including but not limited to cornices, transoms, storefront configurations, or decorative masonry.

~~b. The work is consistent with the City of Buchanan Downtown Design Standards, including any applicable design guidance or previously issued staff interpretations. The work is located on a non-primary façade or is minimally visible from the public right-of-way, unless the proposed materials and design match the existing conditions.~~

- ii. The work is limited to repainting, signage, awning replacement, lighting, window or door replacement of the same size and material, or similar minor treatments.

- iii. The proposal does not require interpretation of discretionary design guidance or involve requests for exceptions to adopted standards.

~~2. DRC referral. The community development director may refer any application to the DRC when the proposed work is unusual, precedent-setting, or~~

~~potentially inconsistent with the Downtown Design Standards.~~

~~b. Downtown Design Review Committee approvals. The downtown design review committee is authorized to review and approve, approve with conditions or disapprove an application for modifications or new construction for properties located in the Downtown Design Review Overlay District in accordance with Standards found in Sec. 71-36.H.~~

~~c. Objectives and Standards~~

~~The Downtown Design Review Committee shall review the following Objectives and Standards when reviewing requests within the Downtown Design Review Overlay District.~~

~~1. Building character, context and mass~~

~~a. Objective. Each new development or exterior renovation should relate and contribute towards a positive image in terms of details, placement, shape, scale, character, and materials, as well as relationship to adjacent buildings.~~

~~b. Standard: New development should maintain setbacks, building proportions, roof and cornice lines, façade divisions, rhythm and proportions of openings, building materials and colors that are consistent with or similar to surrounding commercial buildings, where present and shall with the established regulations found within this code pertaining to bulk standards and façade type requirements.~~

~~2. Architectural Style.~~

~~a. Objective. To ensure general consistency with historic architectural styles found in downtown Buchanan.~~

~~b. Standard. Historic architectural styles need not be replicated. The contemporary adaptation of elements of historic commercial architectural styles found in downtown Buchanan is encouraged. Elements should be based upon, and consistent with, an architectural inventory of the existing downtown district.~~

~~3. Roof Treatment.~~

~~a. Objective. Roof forms should provide visual interest that is consistent with the building adjacent rooflines and buildings.~~

~~b. Standard. Flat roofs are the most common traditional downtown roof form, and should be used on all new buildings. Detailed cornices or parapets are encouraged to emphasize the roofline.~~

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4. Corner Buildings.

- a. Objective. To emphasize the importance of corner locations for pedestrian circulation and visibility.
  
- b. Standard. New buildings on corner lots should be oriented to the corner and both public streets. Both street-facing facades should be built up to the established building façade line on each block. Corner entrances may be desirable but are not required. However, both street-facing facades should maintain similar articulation, detailing, and rhythm of window openings.

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Existing buildings on corner lots should maintain or create orientation on both public streets.

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5. Building Widths and Facades

- a. Objective. To reflect typical building widths found in downtown River Falls and to avoid long building facades with a monolithic or monotonous appearance.
  
- b. Standard. Buildings of more than 40 feet in width shall be divided into smaller increments (between 20 and 40 feet) through articulation of the facade. This can be achieved through combinations of the following techniques and others that may meet the objective: stepping back or extending forward a portion of the façade; using different textures or materials, the materials should be drawn from a common palette; dividing the storefronts, with separate display windows and entrances; varying the rooflines by alternating dormers, stepped roofs, gables, or other roof elements; using arcades, awnings, window bays, arched windows and balconies

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6. Materials – All elevations and roof

- a. Objective. To ensure that high-quality, durable and authentic materials typical of Buchanan’s traditional downtown continue to be used.
  
- b. Standard:
  - i. Primary materials: New buildings should be constructed of high-quality materials, including the following: Brick, Natural stone, Precast concrete units and decorative concrete block, provided that surfaces are molded, serrated or textured giving the wall surface a three-dimensional character, Stucco, Jumbo brick may be used on up to 30 percent of any façade, provided that it is used only on the lower third of the building wall, EIFS (exterior insulating finish system) may be used as an accent but not a primary material and Architectural metalwork
  
  - ii. The following materials are prohibited: Unadorned plain or painted concrete block, Tilt-up concrete panels, Pre-fabricated steel or sheet

metal panels, Reflective and darkly tinted glass, Aluminum, vinyl, fiberglass, asphalt or fiberboard siding, Pole buildings

- iii. Accent materials may be used on up to 15 percent of the building's façade. These may include metal, glass, block, painted wood panels, spandrel glass or similar materials as approved by the Design Review Committee (DRC).
- iv. Existing buildings should be rehabilitated using original materials, to the extent feasible. If original materials cannot be restored or replicated, the primary materials listed above may be used.
- v. Roofs, generally flat roofs should be used. Covering flat roofs with gravel ballast to reduce heat gain and glare is encouraged. Asphalt shingles are prohibited.

5. Architectural Details.

- a. Objective. Incorporate architectural details to serve as identifiable and visually interesting enhancements to building facades and help to establish a pedestrian supportive environment.
- b. Standard. Architectural design shall be sensitive to the massing and proportion of adjacent structures, and reflect or complement the detailing of surrounding buildings, with elements such as lintels, cornice lines, balconies and decorative brick or stone work.
  - i. The installation of exterior lighting, awnings or signage shall be installed without damaging the building or visually impairing distinctive architectural features.

6. Openings in Front – Windows and Doors.

- a. Objective. To establish the visual importance of the primary street entrance, and to ensure those entries contribute to the visual attractiveness of the building and are readily visible to the customer.
- b. Standard. The main entrance should always face the primary street, with secondary entrances to the side or rear. Entries to corner oriented buildings may face the corner rather than either primary street. The main entrance of commercial, office and mixed-use facilities should be placed at sidewalk grade to facilitate ease of access.
  - i. The removal of existing doors and windows with replacement of a solid wall is typically not supported unless the applicant can provide detailed information regarding why the removal is necessary.

- ii. The replacement of original doors and windows is recognized as necessary when the equipment is nonfunctioning, broken or energy efficiency is needed. The door and window openings shall not decrease in size. When it is proposed to increase the size of an existing opening or create a new opening clear and detailed information is necessary. Care must be given not to remove any existing architectural elements.

Replacement doors should be of similar design or one typical of the architecture of the building.

Replacement windows shall be of similar design. The replacement of wood windows with \_\_\_\_\_ windows is acceptable when the design remains the same (i.e., windows being double-hung or 6 over 6 shall be replaced with similar windows). NEED TO DISCUSS FAKE MULLINS/GRILLES

#### 7. Color and Use of Paint.

- a. Objective. To ensure that building colors are aesthetically pleasing and compatible with surrounding buildings.
- b. Standard. Principal building colors shall consist of subtle, neutral or muted colors, with low reflectance. Recommended colors include browns, grays, tans, beiges, and dark or muted greens, blues and reds as found in the Sherwin Williams – Victorian collection. No more than two principal colors may be used on a façade or storefront. Bright, white or primary colors shall be used only as accents, occupying a maximum of 15 percent of building facades. (This standard does not apply to murals or other works of public art).

- i. The use of paint on masonry is not advised as it cannot be easily removed without damaging the masonry. Building that currently have masonry painted may change paint color as stated above.

#### 8. Mechanical Equipment.

- a. Objective. To ensure that views of rooftop equipment and services areas from public streets or pedestrian ways are minimized.
- b. Standard. All rooftop equipment shall be screened from view from adjacent streets, public rights-of-way and adjacent properties. Preferably, rooftop equipment should be screened by the building parapet, or located out of view from the ground. If this is not feasible, the equipment shall be grouped within a single enclosure. This structure shall be set back a distance of 1 ½ times its height from any façade fronting a public street. Screens shall be of durable,

permanent materials (not including wood) that are compatible with the primary building materials.

If an outdoor storage, service or loading area faces adjacent residential uses or a public street, alley or walkway, it shall be screened from view by masonry walls or plant material. Screen walls shall be architecturally compatible with the primary structure. Loading docks and loading doors shall be located to the side or rear.

d. Appeal process.

a. Applications denied by the zoning administrator maybe appealed to the downtown design review committee, the applicant shall submit a complete application for such request to the planning commission on such forms provided by the city for that purpose and subject to the fees set by the city commission prior to the posted submittal deadline prior to the next regularly scheduled downtown design review committee meeting.

b. Appeals from a decision of the downtown design review committee shall be made to the planning commission on such forms provided by the city for that purpose and subject to such fees set by the city commission and within 30 days after the decision in writing, or within 21 days after the downtown design review committee approves the meeting minutes.

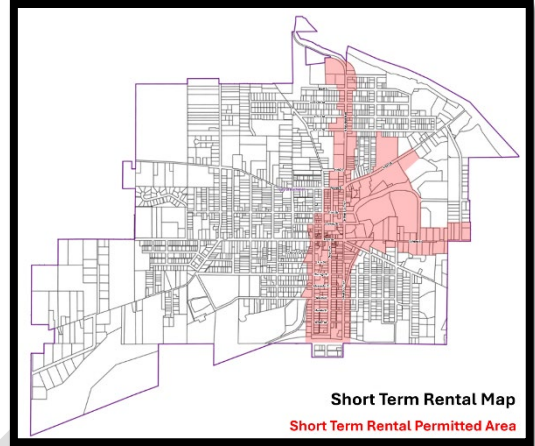
3. ~~Effect of noncompliance. Proposals determined not to comply with Downtown Design Standards may not proceed until amended to achieve compliance and receive approval from the appropriate review authority.~~

## Article V. DEFINITIONS

Overlay District: A zoning district which has definite boundaries and is superimposed over all existing zoning districts within those boundaries. The overlay district may establish additional regulations, reduce existing regulations, or extend or limit the permitted uses within the underlying zoning district. Where there is a conflict between standards in the Overlay district and the underlying Zoning district, the standards in the Overlay district shall be applied. The intent is to address particular issues that span a geographic area and may include more than one underlying zoning district or portions of underlying zoning districts.

Downtown Design Review Overlay District: Establishes design review process for properties located within the district.                      INSERT MAP OF THE DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

Short-Term Rental Overlay District: Allows short-term rental with stays of less than one month as a permitted use in accordance with regulations found in Chapter 14 of the Code of Ordinance.



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