

Memorandum



Date: August 6, 2026

To: Planning Commission Members

From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director

Subject: **Discussion #1 - Unified Development Code – Downtown Design Review**

Background

Earlier this year staff requested the Downtown Design Review Committee review portions of the recently adopted Unified Development Code. Staff explained the new code did not incorporate design standards to be used by the Committee when reviewing requests.

The Committee and staff have been working on drafting and reviewing proposed changes for several months. During the August 5, 2026 meeting, the Committee unanimously recommended that the Planning Commission move forward with the draft changes.

Currently the Committee relies on the 2007 Downtown Design Standards which include information regarding the Secretary of the Interior Standards associated with historic preservation. Since the City does not have an historic preservation commission, the standards drafted incorporate concepts while not calling out historic preservation.

It is believed relying on established standards within the Unified Development Code will help eliminate confusion for those owning property downtown. In addition, care was taken in drafting the standards that would not prohibit change to a building.

Summary of changes

While working through the changes, it was concluded the use of an overlay district would be appropriate. The overlay district consists of properties located in the D Downtown District. Other changes included:

1. Modification to Section 71-33 Review and decision-making bodies.
 - a. The Committee's name was changed to include "Downtown" to help eliminate confusion on what areas require review.
 - b. An appeal process was added. Applicant that do not receive the desired outcome may appeal to the Planning Commission.
2. Section 71-34 General provisions – Table 71-U Notice Timing

- a. Downtown Design Review was added and clearly states no written or published notice is required for review.
- b. Language added regarding applications by decision making bodies.
- 3. Section 71-36 Table 71-V Development Review Procedure and H – Downtown Design Review.
 - a. Included Downtown Design Review with reference to decision makers and appeal group.
 - b. Expanded language for administrative review.
 - c. established design objectives and standards that will be reviewed as part of a request.
 - d. incorporated the appeal process through the Planning Commission
- 4. Article V Definitions
 - a. defined the Downtown Design Review Overlay District.

Next Steps

Review and discuss the draft document. Direct staff to make changes as needed and to schedule for public hearing to take place during the September 8th meeting.

Existing language found in Unified Development Code to be deleted

Section 71-36 Specific standards for development approval.

~~H. Downtown applications:~~

~~1. Applicability:~~

~~a. This subsection applies to all proposed exterior work in the D
Downtown District subject to the Downtown Design Standards,
including new construction, façade alterations, cosmetic upgrades,
and signage.~~

~~2. Administrative approvals. The community development director may
approve proposed work when all of the following criteria are met:~~

~~a. The work does not involve the addition or removal 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.~~

~~c. 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.~~

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

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

~~3. 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.~~

~~4. 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.~~

PROPOSED DRAFT LANGUAGE. FORMATTING TO BE ADDRESSED

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 is required

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)

12. Downtown Design Review Overlay District (DDROD)

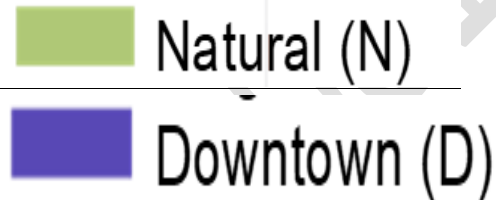
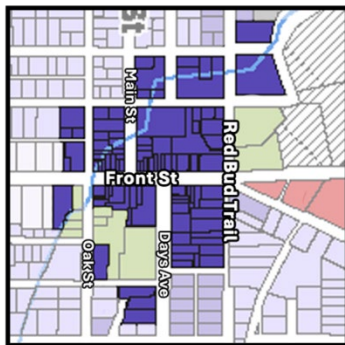
a. Intent. The Downtown Design Review Overlay District is established and applies to the area shown on the map in Section 71-16.H.12.c. The intent of the Downtown Design Review Overlay District is:

i. Preserve and promote the historic and architectural qualities of the downtown and thereby preserve the distinctive character of the City. The downtown business district has special historical, cultural, and design significance and contains historic or unique sites deserving protection. The preservation and appropriate development of these sites 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, and architectural history or distinction.

- iii. To maintain the local, "small town" atmosphere of and the downtown business area 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 downtown'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 City.

b. **Downtown Design Review Areas.** The Downtown Design Review Overlay District will consist of all properties located in the D Downtown District and those properties located in the N Natural District located between Days Avenue and South Oak Street between East Roe and East Front Streets in addition to parcels abutting the west side of South Oak Street between Charles Court and West Front Street.



c. **Applicability, Exception**

i. The placement of allowed non-permanent 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 applications .

b. Appeals to administrative decisions. To hear, review, consider and affirm, modify, or review decisions of the Zoning Administrator 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 in writing within 60 days after the decision is made or within 21 days after the Downtown Design Review Committee approves the meeting minutes, whichever comes first.

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
Downtown Design Review Overlay District	None	None

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 hear 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 actual conditions and 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 design review	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 design review.

4. 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 related but not limited to windows, doors, awnings, signage, lighting; 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 the request.

a. Administrative approvals. The Zoning Administrator along with the City Manager considers and may approve, approve with condition or disapprove downtown design review applications for proposed work when all of the following criteria are met:

- i. The work does not involve the addition, 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.
- ii. The work is limited to repainting, signage replacement, awning replacement, lighting, window or door replacement with units of the identical size, material, and construction, or similar minor treatments.
- iii. The repair or replacement of a roof surface when not visible from the street and retaining the original roof design.
- iv. The proposal does not require interpretation of discretionary design guidance or involve requests for exceptions to adopted standards.
- v. The Zoning Administrator or City Manager may choose not to review a request and instead send it to the Downtown Design Review Committee for action.

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 Objectives and Standards found in Sec. 71-36.c.____

c. Objectives and Standards

The Downtown Design Review Committee shall review the following Objectives and Standards when reviewing applications for exterior work 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 architectural style and details, placement, shape, scale, character, and materials, as well as relationship to

adjacent buildings.

- b. Standard: New development must maintain setbacks, and should maintain 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 adhere to 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. For new construction, 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. Elements of multiple architectural styles should not, however, be mixed in a single building. For renovations of or additions to existing buildings, the architectural style of the existing building will inform the design of the new work, which will be consistent and harmonious with the existing building.

3. Roof Treatment.

- a. Objective. Roof forms should provide visual interest that is consistent with the roof forms of adjacent buildings.
- b. Standard. Flat roofs and low-pitch (no more than 2:12) 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 and conceal the roof.

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

5. Building Widths and Facades

- a. Objective. To reflect typical existing building widths found in the downtown 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 each) through articulation of the facade. This can be achieved through combinations of the following techniques and others that may meet the objective, as long as they all conform to a single architectural style: stepping back or extending forward a portion of the façade; using different textures or materials drawn from a common palette; dividing the storefronts with separate display windows and entrances; varying the rooflines by alternating parapets, stepped roofs, or other roof elements; using arcades, awnings, window bays, arched windows, and balconies as focal points or defining elements.
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 but not limited to 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 (which 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, which may be used as an accent but not a primary material), architectural metalwork.
 - ii. The following materials are prohibited: unadorned plain or painted concrete block, tilt-up concrete panels, reflective or darkly tinted glass, or 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 Downtown Design Review Committee (DDRC).
 - iv. Existing buildings should be rehabilitated using original materials to the extent feasible. If original features or materials cannot be restored or replicated, the primary materials listed above may be used.
 - v. Roofs, generally flat or low pitch (2:12 or less). Asphalt shingles and asphalt roll roofing are prohibited on flat or low-pitch roofs. New roofing

material may not be terminated on the fascia or the wall below the roof, that is, the existing fascia must be retained or replaced in kind and may not be covered by the roofing material.

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 stonework. Exterior lighting, awnings and signage shall be installed without damaging the building or visually impairing distinctive architectural features. Fasteners will be placed in mortar joints and not into masonry units.

6. Openings in Front

- 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.

7. Windows and Doors

- a. Objective. Preservation of the historic character of the building and downtown.
- b. Standard. Historic windows and doors should be rehabilitated or repaired if possible. Replacement of historical windows or doors will either replicate or simulate the appearance of the historical unit.
 - i. The removal of existing doors and windows and replacement by a solid wall is typically not allowed unless the applicant can provide detailed information regarding why the removal is necessary.
 - ii. Original or historic windows and doors should be rehabilitated or repaired whenever possible. Options for dual glazing (storm panels) is the preferred method to improve energy efficiency. When rehabilitation or repair is not possible, replacement is allowed.

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 must be provided in the application. Care must be given not to damage or remove any existing architectural elements.

When original or historic doors are to be replaced, the new units must be of a similar style, have the same number and placement of panels, lights, etc., and have similar molding profiles. Historic pattern or decorative glass (glue-chip, etched, beveled, etc.) must be replaced with identical materials. When non-historic doors are to be replaced, the new doors should be of a style appropriate to the architectural style of the building.

When original or historic windows are to be replaced, the new units must be of a similar style (i.e. double-hung, casement, fixed, etc.), have the same number and placement of lights (i.e. 6 over 6, 3 over 1, etc.), and have similar muntin widths (with no more than 1/8" variation from the original). Historic pattern or decorative glass (prism, reeded, glue-chip, etched, beveled, etc.) must be replaced with identical materials. If the window sash are not true divided light, grilles simulating muntin's must be permanently installed on both the inner and outer sides of the glass.

When non-historic windows are to be replaced, the new windows should be of a style appropriate to the architectural style of the building and should otherwise follow the standards for replacement of historic windows above.

Triple-track storm units are not allowed.

8. 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. Allowed colors include browns, grays, tans, beiges, and muted greens, blues and reds. 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 a building's facades. This standard does not apply to murals or other works of public art.
 - i. Buildings that currently have painted masonry may change paint color as stated above.

- ii. Painting masonry surfaces is strongly discouraged as it cannot be easily removed without damaging the masonry, often creates conditions that lead to the accelerated deterioration of the masonry, and turns a maintenance-free surface into a maintenance-required surface. Any application to paint an unpainted masonry building must include clear, detailed, and persuasive reasons as to why painting the masonry is necessary. Simple aesthetic preference is not a sufficient reason.
- iii. Removing the paint from historically painted masonry surfaces is also strongly discouraged. Any application to remove paint in such situations must clearly demonstrate why the removal of the paint is necessary, what methods and materials are to be used in the removal, the plan for repairing or replacing deterioration, which is revealed, and the planned material to be used to treat or finish the newly exposed brick.

9. Mechanical Equipment and Service Areas.

- 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 six feet above by an adult standing at ground level on adjacent streets, public rights-of-way, or 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 ground mounted outdoor mechanical units or storage, service, or loading areas face adjacent residential uses or are visible from a public street, alley or walkway, they 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 of the building.

d. Appeal process.

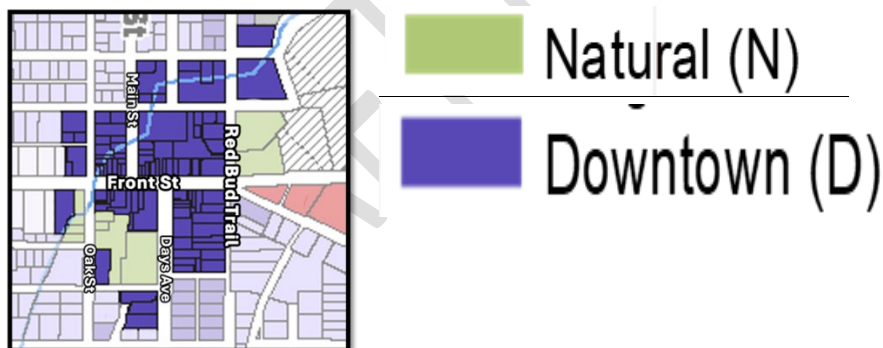
- a. A decision by the Zoning Administrator may be appealed to the Downtown Design Review Committee. The applicant shall submit a complete application for such request to the Downtown Design Review Committee on such forms provided by the City for that purpose and subject to the fees set by the City Commission prior to the posted submittal deadline prior to the next regularly scheduled Downtown Design Review Committee meeting.

- b. Appeals of 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 60 days after the decision or within 21 days after the Downtown Design Review Committee approves the meeting minutes, whichever comes first.
- c. A building permit may shall not be issued for proposed exterior work unless the Downtown Design Review Application has been approved or approved with conditions. An occupancy permit will not be issued until the Zoning Administrator has inspected the work and finds it is in compliance with the plans approved by the Zoning Administrator or the Downtown Design Review Committee.

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 issues that span a geographic area and may include more than one underlying zoning district or portions of underlying zoning districts.

Downtown Design Review Areas. The Downtown Design Review Overlay District will consist of all properties located in the D Downtown District and those properties located in the N Natural District located between Days Avenue and South Oak Street between East Roe and East Front Streets in addition to parcels abutting the west side of South Oak Street between Charles Court and West Front Street.



Final draft 08052026 DDRC changes