

# VILLAGE OF HOMEWOOD



## MEMORANDUM

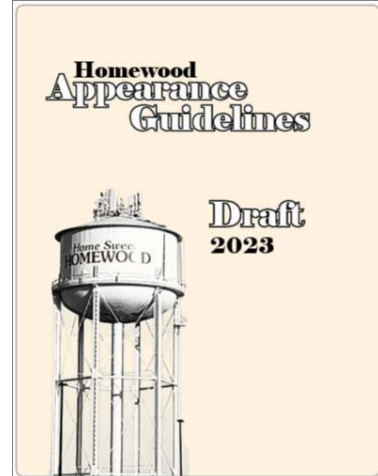
DATE OF MEETING: November 2, 2023

**To:** Appearance Commission

**From:** Noah Schumerth, Assistant Director of Economic and Community Development

**Through:** Angela Mesaros, Director of Economic and Community Development

**Topic:** Appearance Plan Update



## DOCUMENTS FOR REVIEW

Title	Pages	Prepared by	Date
Appearance Plan Copy	9	Village of Homewood VMO	5/18/1998
Draft Proposed Timeline	3	Asst. Director of Econ/Comm. Dev.	10/25/2023

## BACKGROUND

The Village of Homewood Appearance Plan is the Village's set of comprehensive design standards, used in the evaluation of development projects in the Village, including commercial, industrial, and multi-family projects. This Plan is regularly used by the Appearance Plan to consider cases related to the design of sites, buildings, landscaping improvements, and other projects. This Plan is also used as a tool for evaluating project proposals and negotiating improved design outcomes with developers and development partners on projects throughout the Village.

The Appearance Plan was last updated in 1998, establishing the authority of the Appearance Commission and adopting a broad set of design standards to apply for all developments. In the 25 years since the last adoption of a Village Appearance Plan, changes have occurred in suburban development markets, land use demands on the Village have evolved, and a growing understanding of the impacts of low-quality urban design on the function and form of American municipalities has emerged. As such, updates are necessary to provide a successful roadmap for new development in the Village.

The Village began the process of updating the Appearance Plan (and the sign code in Chapter 30 of Village Ordinances) in late 2021. Village staff completed public engagement strategies throughout 2022-2023, and began efforts to draw up recommendations for the new plan. However, Village staff has identified areas requiring additional attention in the plan development process, including a closer examination of the proposed scope of the plan, greater data collection on existing community architecture, and the construction of modernized plan templates and designs. With staff capacity

increases in late 2023, staff has restarted work on the Appearance Plan and will continue to develop the plan through early 2024.

This update has been provided to inform members of the Appearance Commission about the ongoing updates to the plan, and provide an approximate timeline for the delivery of an updated plan draft for review and discussion. There are currently no approvals required by Commission members, and this memo will serve as an informative document for Commissioners and members of the public.

**DISCUSSION**

Previous Work Completed

Staff began updating the Appearance Plan in early 2022, and has made significant progress in the development of a new Appearance Plan over the past 18 months. This work focused on public engagement and early development of the Appearance Plan document. This work was completed through June 2023 before staff work on the plan was paused.

Progress on the development of the Appearance Plan prior to June 2023 is detailed below:

Public Engagement
Completed public engagement session with interactive materials at Fall Fest 2022
Completed Appearance Plan workshop with survey questions and interactive materials in March 2023
Completed survey questions with two questions in conjunction with March 2023 workshop
Plan Support Work
Completed two photo analyses of existing design conditions in the community in March/May 2023
Plan Drafting
Completed sample branding graphics and cover/back page design template
Completed outline of plan draft and some introductory sections of text
Early development of recommendations for specific design guidelines

## Future Work Plan

In resuming progress in the development of the Appearance Plan, staff has identified several tasks to be completed prior to the creation of a final draft of the plan document. These tasks respond to areas where more research or staff work shall be completed to ensure a modernized, high-quality design standards document. These areas of focus include:

1. Establishing Goals
2. Organizing Plan Outcomes
3. Continuing Public Engagement
4. Developing Recommendations
5. Integrating with Other Plans
6. Continuing Sign Code Revisions
7. Designing a Plan Template

### **Establishing Goals**

The existing Appearance Plan identifies three goals that the Appearance Plan must accomplish:

1. Coordinate design outcomes with the Zoning Ordinance.
2. Provide community design guidance with clear recommendations.
3. Base recommended design guidelines in community input.

These goals were presented to the Appearance Commission in early 2023 as goal statements to be integrated into the new Appearance Plan. These goals represent critical functions of the Appearance Plan in guiding development in the Village. However, staff has noted that a full modernization of the Appearance Plan will require a more in-depth exploration of how the Appearance Plan will respond to the current needs of the Village of Homewood. A more detailed set of goals will be developed by staff for review by the Appearance Commission with the draft plan document.

### **Organizing Plan Outcomes**

The existing Appearance Plan provides a single set of design guidelines, which guide development broadly for all projects across the Village. Staff is currently investigating opportunities for strategically organizing design guidelines within the new document, including tailoring recommendations to specific geographic areas, existing plan areas, building typologies, or other methods of organizing the plan document. Staff will continue to work with the Appearance Commission and other planning stakeholders to identify a recommended method of plan organization.

### **Continuing Public Engagement**

One critical component of the revised work plan for the Appearance Plan is the inclusion of an expanded suite of public engagement opportunities. This is crucial for the success of the plan as a document that is responsive to the public, which has been a goal of this project since its inception. Staff has identified groups who are affected by design and development outcomes in the community, and has begun to prepare methods to engage these groups to gather Appearance Plan input. These groups include:

Group	Proposed Engagement Strategies
Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establishing a Youth Steering Committee (may become a more permanent engagement opportunity for youth)</li> <li>- Completing a student community engagement event with younger students/children</li> </ul>
Business Owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Input workshop with members of the Homewood Business Association</li> </ul>
Developers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Survey or similar strategy to engage with members of the development community</li> </ul>
Other Community Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide future engagement opportunities with the arts council and other interested community groups</li> </ul>

A report of preliminary findings from previous public engagement efforts has been attached to this memo for review by Appearance Commission members. Staff may look to additional opportunities to gather input from the general public prior to the completion of the public engagement period. Staff is seeking to complete public engagement efforts by the end of January 2024.

**Develop Recommendations**

Based on community feedback, existing community conditions, best planning/design practices and previously collected information from the Appearance Plan development process, Village staff will create a set of recommended design guidelines for review by members of the Appearance Commission. Staff seeks to develop more prescriptive guidance for design in the new plan document, increasing objectivity in design review and promoting constructive site-specific dialogue on design for new projects in the Village. These recommendations will be drafted as public engagement ends in early 2024.

**Integrating with Other Plans**

Staff has numerous other plans which will share planning authority with the Appearance Plan, including the Village Comprehensive Plan, the upcoming Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Downtown Master Plan, the Halsted Corridor Improvement Plan and other plans which provide granular planning recommendations for specific areas of the Village. Staff will be working to establish the role of the Appearance Plan alongside these plans (generally providing practical design guidelines to use for

fulfilling the goals of other current and future plans), and prepare recommendations which work in harmony with existing plans.

### **Continuing Sign Code Revisions**

An essential component of regulating community design and promoting a high-quality built environment is the regulation of the design of signage throughout the Village. In addition to updating the Appearance Plan, staff has been tasked with the revision of the sign code to provide greater design regulation of signage and improve the administrative quality of sign regulations. Village staff will continue to develop sound signage standards which work in harmony with design recommendations within the new Appearance Plan document.

### **Designing a Plan Template**

Document design is critical to modern municipal plans, and ensuring that the document is attractive, easy to identify, and clearly legible is critical for the successful use of the plan by its stakeholders, including members of the public, developers, public officials, and Village staff. Staff has determined the need to move away from a plan structure and visual design which emphasizes the plan's codification in the Village Code of Ordinances. Instead, Village staff will seek to create a plan template which uses modern document design to create a plan more reflective of best practices in planning. This effort will allow the document to take on a more visual quality which is essential to legibility for all stakeholders of the plan.

## **FUTURE TIMELINE**

A revised copy of the proposed timeline for the Appearance Plan update has been attached to this memorandum. Staff currently plans to complete work for a hearing before the Appearance Commission in April/May 2024.

## **STAFF COMMENTS**

1. Staff is resuming updates to the Appearance Plan document; these updates were initiated in early 2022 by the Appearance Commission and Village staff.
2. Public engagement and preliminary work on plan writing were completed by June 2023, when work on the new plan document was paused.
3. Staff is resuming public engagement to collect additional targeted input on design needs in the Village; Staff is targeting business and community groups, youth, and members of the development community; additional input may be sought from other members of the public.
4. Staff will resume work on developing recommended design guidelines to populate the Appearance Plan in December 2023.
5. Staff will continue to develop a plan template and document design "in-house," preparing a modernized version of the Appearance Plan.
6. Staff will continue to work on revisions to the Sign Code beginning in December 2023, in tandem with the development of new recommended design guidelines in the Appearance Plan.
7. Staff plans to present a final draft of the new Appearance Plan and accompanying Sign Code revisions by April/May 2024.

**RECOMMENDED APPEARANCE COMMISSION ACTION**

No motion is required. This agenda item serves as an update on an ongoing project initiated by public officials and being carried out by Village staff. Please contact the Village Manager's Office for more information.

No motion required.