

VILLAGE OF HOMEWOOD



MEMORANDUM

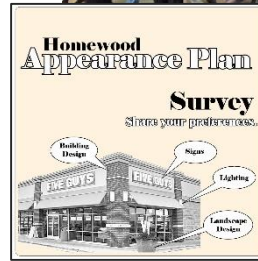
DATE OF MEETING: March 7, 2024

To: Appearance Commission

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

Through: Angela Mesaros, Director of Economic and Community Development

Topic: Case 23-07 - Appearance Plan Public Comment Updates



DOCUMENTS FOR REVIEW

Title	Pages	Prepared by	Date
Appearance Plan Survey Copy	1	Asst. Director of Econ/Comm. Dev.	12/1/2023
Draft Revised Timeline	5	Asst. Director of Econ/Comm. Dev.	2/29/2023

APPEARANCE PLAN 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.

UPDATE INTRODUCTION

This memo provides information for members of the Appearance Commission on the completion of public engagement efforts related to ongoing revisions of the Appearance Plan and Sign Code. This memo is designed to provide visuals and summaries of the information received from the public during the planning process since the last update to the Appearance Commission in November 2023. This agenda item at the March 14, 2024 Appearance Commission hearing is reserved to spur discussion about key points to draw from the public engagement information to strengthen the effectiveness, quality, and transparency of the Appearance Plan document that is being drafted.

DISCUSSION

Previous Work Completed

The following table summarizes public engagement activities which have provided direct feedback to Village staff on how to best revise the new Appearance Plan and Sign Code to serve the public interest.

2022
September 2022 - Completed public engagement session with interactive materials at Fall Fest 2022
2023
March 2023 - Completed Appearance Plan charrette and workshop with survey questions and interactive materials
December 2023 - Completed public engagement at Holiday Lights with interactive materials and access to surveys.
2024
January 2024 - Completed community survey with questions about building preferences and priorities for the new Appearance Plan, receiving 200+ responses.
January 2024 - Completed business community survey with questions about how to construct design guidelines which are coherent with the needs of the business community, receiving 3 responses.

The remainder of this memo is dedicated to the review of the results from our primary engagement opportunities held since December 2023.

Community-wide Appearance Plan Survey (December 2023 – January 2024)

Following the 2023 Holiday Lights celebration in Downtown Homewood and additional public comment opportunities at the event, Village staff launched a survey to generate feedback about top priorities for new design standards from the public. The survey asked three questions:

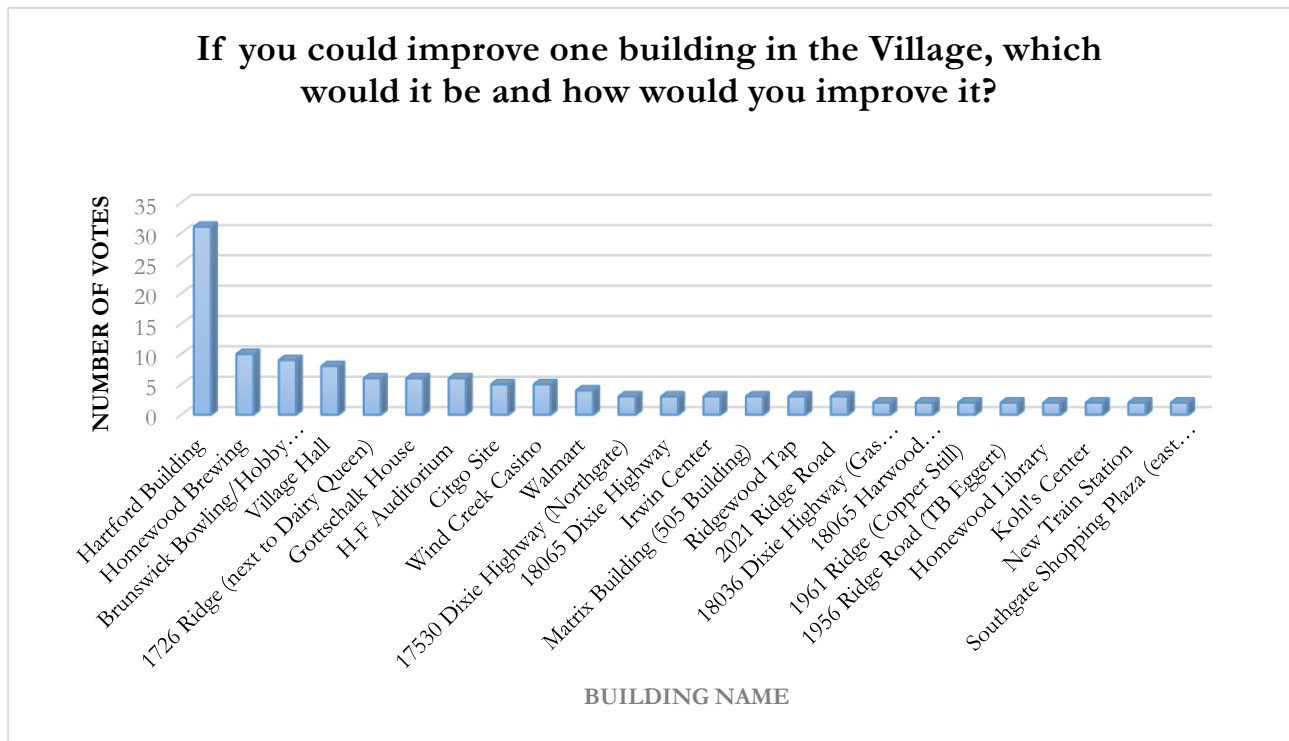
- a. **If you could improve one building in the Village, which would it be and how would you improve it?**
- b. **In your opinion, what makes a beautiful building?**
- c. **Based on suggestions form past public feedback, what are the top priorities for improving architecture and building design in Homewood?**

The survey generated 193 responses by the original closing date of January 20, and has been left open to provide additional opportunities for public feedback throughout the plan development process. As of February 29, the survey has generated over 200 responses.

The following was gathered from the survey:

1. If you could improve one building in the Village, which would it be and how would you improve it?

The question included an opportunity to provide feedback on how to improve specific buildings in the Village of Homewood. The question revealed 24 buildings which garnered more than one vote as the building residents would most want to change. This question illustrates priorities regarding what the Appearance Plan should address in its recommendations for new developments.



The survey identified the Hartford Building (completed 2023) as the building residents would focus on first to improve the architectural character of the Village. Residents cited the following areas for improvement of the building:

- Height – avoid excessive height on buildings, especially close to the street
- Materials – use natural materials, avoid vinyl/plastic sidings, use similar materials
- Cohesiveness – integrate materials from neighboring buildings into the new building.

2. In your opinion, what makes a beautiful building?

The question provides an opportunity to focus on positive elements of architecture in the Village, identifying the elements which they look for in a building with excellent design. The question received 160+ different responses, which could be distilled into the following essential areas to focus on to produce an excellent building:

- Quality Materials
- Proper Scale and Proportion
- Compatibility and Continuity
- Use of Light and Transparency
- Inviting Open Areas and Landscaping
- Professional and Well-Designed Signage
- Excellent Building Form and Use of Details
- Prioritized Maintenance
- Clear Character/Style
- Good Placement of Building Uses and Activities
- Focus on Adaptive Reuse/Preservation
- Clear Relation to Streets and Surroundings

A sample of frequent comments in each theme is included below:

<u>Area of Focus</u>	<u>Key Responses</u>
Quality Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brick as a preferred material, with other timeless materials focused on in design (brick, stone, wood, etc.) • A mixture of similar materials • Traditional materials applied on modern design (i.e. brick paired with metal) • Materials with patina/detailed finish • Continuity of materials between neighboring buildings

<p>Proper Scale and Proportion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorter buildings which preserve views of the sky and other buildings • Building scale appropriate with the site and neighboring buildings • Human-scale building design for a person walking, even from parking lots
<p>Compatibility and Continuity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings with a high degree of detail from material but blended with neighboring buildings • Avoid overly eclectic design, using the surrounding landscape for design queues • “Compatibility, not conformity.” • Environmentally responsive building features that show a building belongs in its environment
<p>Use of Light and Transparency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings with exterior lighting that helps people feel safe • Buildings which are transparent and allow you to see life inside • Bright and welcoming colors with lighting/large windows to invite people inside, add liveliness • Walkways and clear entrances that invite you into the space/development • Ability to see people using a building • Accessible buildings for all people • High ceilings and outdoor space
<p>Inviting Open Areas and Careful Landscaping</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings with small open spaces and nooks that you can explore • Landscaping needed to make traditional design work • Street planters, trees, native plants, and foundation landscaping on good buildings • Water features • New age urban with plants and greenery • Friendly open spaces that invite people in • Landscaping with native species

<p>Professional and Well-Designed Signage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No gaudy signage • Awnings in good condition are a wonderful feature • Signage that is professional and not a dominant feature on a building • Façade maintenance is key to a good building – keep things fixed up! • Consistent signage between storefronts with similar colors, fonts and designs • Signage that is not obvious or defining the view of a neighborhood
<p>Excellent Building Form and Use of Details</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varying roof lines are important for buildings • Attention to detail in design with smaller architectural features (less important which features – just needs detail) • Clean modern lines • Special exterior touches such as murals, lighting, awnings, etc. – building set apart in small ways • Maintains old-fashioned principles of design – faces street, no parking, etc. • Detailed architecture • Successfully integrating traditional design with modern features • Simple structure design • Brick and unique details – think UChicago • Craftsmanship present across building, especially with curves, pillars, and colored details
<p>Prioritized Maintenance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well maintained • Character elements well maintained • Upkept with good maintenance • Cleanliness with maintained building details • Clean buildings that are washed regularly and don't look cheap • No broken windows, material care • Exteriors that are maintained and clean • Maintained landscaping

<p>Clear Character/Style</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic architecture – natural materials with nature around them • Originality and uniqueness in design • Victorian era details were the peak of beauty in Homewood • Small-town feel to buildings, especially pre-1940. • Buildings which “grow” into the community and give the impression they have aged with the community itself • Thoughtful and functional design – you can see how the building works • Art Deco and Rococo are great design styles • True to the era it is built in – today, that is traditional and modern blended • Genuine character and clever design • Draws the eye rather than only serving utility or money • Focus on standards for construction
<p>Good Placement of Building Uses/Activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third places/buildings which bring people together • Buildings with stores/activities for people at ground level and residents above • Buildings that are useful are beautiful – they define us • Thriving small businesses in buildings making them unique, and community-based places around them
<p>Focus on Adaptive Reuse/Preservation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic preservation in buildings that nods to the original building but modernizes • Buildings that add up over time – this is how you make variety. Design buildings to make this happen. • Buildings reused and remaining useful over time is beautiful • Modern buildings which nod back to original buildings – evolving but traditional • Restored buildings over rebuilt buildings

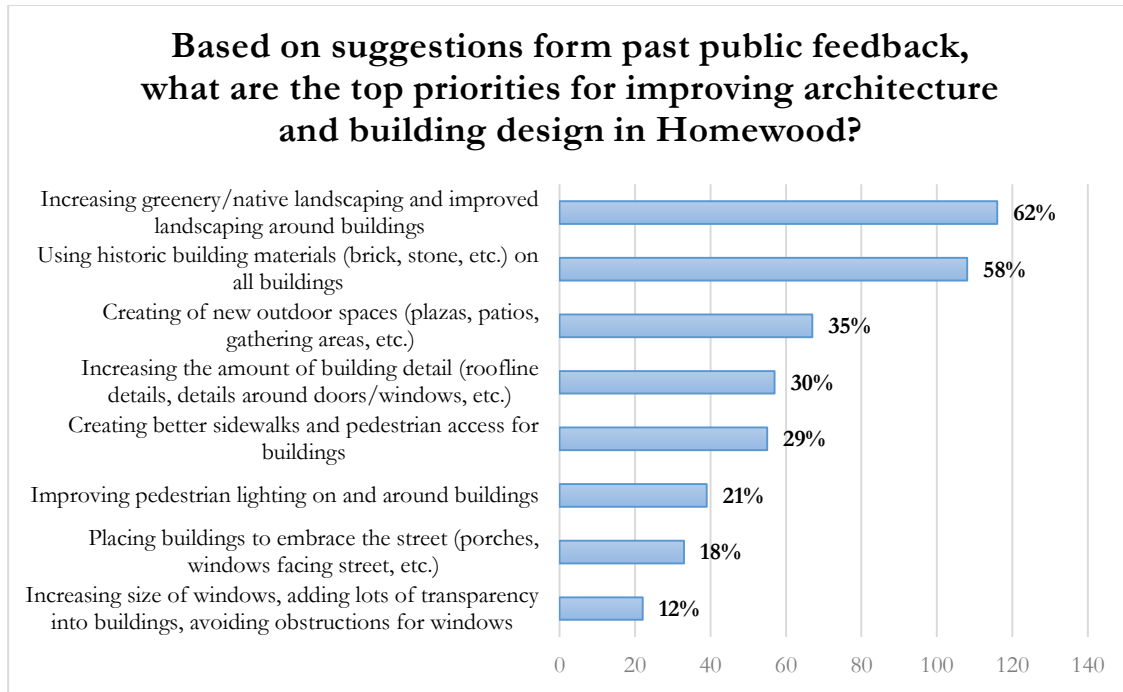
<p>Clear Relation to Streets and Surroundings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings that embrace streets and the spaces we are in. • Well maintained streets make for beautiful buildings • Community spaces near buildings, especially walkable sidewalks and other things that make buildings part of our lives • Better organized site planning, especially keeping parking lots organized and beautified. • Ease of access on foot, human scale design of site
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Based on a review of responses, there was a great deal of consistency between responses. Throughout survey responses, Homewood residents expressed the following broad ideas for the future of building design in Homewood:

1. Maintenance was repeatedly as an essential component in creating excellent buildings.
2. There was a clear stylistic preference for some modern design elements mixed with natural materials (brick, stone, etc.).
3. There were many responses citing a desire to see landscaping elements take a more prominent role in the design of new sites and buildings in the Village.
4. A clear response was that buildings need to be more responsive – to their environment and ecology surrounding them (with landscaping/open space), their neighboring structures (through materials and form), and to their surroundings (by showing others the activity and life taking place in them).
5. There was an emphasis on the liveliness and clear use of buildings as a sign of a beautiful building, and stressed the need for the use of the building to be apparent, uses to draw many community residents into common areas, open spaces which are clearly meant for use, and an ease of accessing the building on foot without a vehicle.
6. Responses showed a strong interest in historic preservation and adaptive reuse, seeing the most beautiful structures as ones which are added onto and evolving over long periods of time.

3. Based on suggestions from past public feedback, what are the top priorities for improving architecture and building design in Homewood?

The final question of the survey tested building preferences stated in past surveys and workshops developed to guide the Appearance Plan. The survey allowed respondents to choose their top priorities for what the new Appearance Plan should accomplish across the Village. The chart below describes responses to this question.



Based on the results of this survey, Homewood residents expressed that increasing the presence of landscaping/native greenery and elevating the use of historic building materials were clear priorities for the new Appearance Plan for the Village.

Holiday Lights Event (December 2023)

Village staff hosted a public engagement activity as part of the Holiday Lights festival on December 1, 2023. Staff set up a booth with posters allowing residents to select buildings they preferred based on different scenarios, such as a developer proposing an industrial development or a new building in Downtown Homewood. Residents used dots to select buildings that reflected their preferences for new structures.

Staff used the following four scenarios:

- a. **If a developer proposed a new building in Downtown Homewood, what would you want the building to look like?**
- b. **If a developer proposed a new townhouse complex in Homewood, what would you want the buildings to look like?**
- c. **If a developer proposed an industrial building in Homewood, what would you want to the building to look like?**
- d. **If a developer proposed a new shopping center on Halsted Street in Homewood, what would you want the building to look like?**







The activity allowed 74 participants to provide feedback on preferences for buildings in Homewood, and give direct feedback to planning staff on concerns about the appearance and design of the Village.

A summary of responses and input gathered from participants is included below.

1. If a developer proposed a new building in Downtown Homewood, what would you want the building to look like?

Question 1

What types of buildings would you like to see in Downtown Homewood?







	Total Votes	Comments Summary	5	10	15	20	25
	8	Respondents liked the use of brick, the subtle storefronts, and scale of building. Some residents had concerns about plain design and lack of clear building activity.					
	9	Respondents were positive about the use of brick and identified symmetry/ rhythmic pattern. Respondents liked blend of traditional and modern materials.					
	24	Respondants appreciated balconies and private open space, integrating outdoor dining and plazas into buildings, and use of brick.					
	4	Respondants were positive about balconies and storefronts. Respondants were concerns about the use of stucco and busy façade.					
	2	Respondants noted color scheme is too modern. No cornice. Colors should blend well with the existing color palate in Homewood.					
	0	Respondents liked the corner retail component. Respondents were not positive about the materials and lack of detail on buildings.					

Participants stated a strong preference for buildings with private open spaces for residential units, including balconies, patios, and outdoor plazas and terraces. Participants cited that such features add life to buildings and give additional architectural detail that is also useful to residents. Participants noted a preference for brick buildings and those which employ traditional design features in the downtown, citing symmetry, cornices, and simple building massing as essential to good design. A number of participants expressed concerns about the use of stucco and other modern cladding materials, as well as the loss of building details on structures which have embraced more modern design styles. Participants also noted the need for more public open spaces and cited a lack of such spaces in any new development in Homewood, pointing to spaces found in the most popular building image featuring a sidewalk café area.

2. If a developer proposed a new building in Downtown Homewood, what would you want the building to look like?

Question 2

If a developer proposed townhomes/condominiums in Homewood, what would you want them to look like?







	Total Votes	Comments Summary	5	10	15	20	25	30
	31	Respondents liked the use of brick, the subtle storefronts, and scale of building. Some residents had concerns about plain design and lack of clear building activity.						
	9	Respondents were positive about the use of brick and identified symmetry/ rhythmic pattern. Respondents liked blend of traditional and modern materials.						
	8	Respondants appreciated balconies and private open space, integrating outdoor dining and plazas into buildings, and use of brick.						
	4	Respondants were positive about balconies and storefronts. Respondants were concerns about the use of stucco and busy façade.						
	5	Respondants noted color scheme is too modern. No cornice. Colors should blend well with the existing color palate in Homewood.						
	1	Respondents liked the corner retail component. Respondents were not positive about the materials and lack of detail on buildings.						

Participants overwhelmingly noted the need for residential buildings, especially multi-family residential buildings, to have a high amount of landscaping and employ the use of outdoor open spaces. Preference was given for open spaces which are accessible and useful to the public, provide semi-public access, or are at least visible from the street. Residents also cited a desire for mixed-use developments which ensure multi-family residential buildings are both attractive and provide useful features for the community at large. Participants cited concerns about common design practices used on many mixed-use buildings under construction in the Chicago area, including overreliance on stucco, metal paneling, or vinyl cladding. Participants also expressed concern at the scale of many residential units, noting that aversion to multi-family buildings is often due to their scale over other concerns. Residents stated that residential buildings need to do a better job of being designed at a human-scale with useful and comfortable places for both residents and visitors. Open space and site design were heavily emphasized over building design with these townhome examples.

3. If a developer proposed an industrial building in Homewood, what would you want the building to look like?

Question 3

If a developer proposed an industrial building in Homewood, what would you want the building to look most like?







	Total Votes	Comments Summary	5	10	15	20	25
	15	Respondants noted that the building has a "clean" look. Other respondents noted the welcoming outdoor entry space, mix of colors, and cornice.					
	4	Respondants liked the brick finish and "professional" look for industrial buildings. Some respondents said that "not all buildings need traditional design" and discouraged this design for industrial uses.					
	3	Respondants liked the large windows. Respondants expressed concerns about building detail not extended to the whole building, and buildings feeling too "corporate" with stucco/metal.					
	1	Respondents largely lamented the lack of unique visual interest. One respondent stated, "you can just tell it is a tip-up building."					
	12	Respondants liked the large windows and sense of transparency. Respondants also liked the mix of brick and metal and the use of lighting on the exterior of the building.					
	5	Respondants liked the use of building interior light to serve as outdoor passive lighting, and the awning at the entrance. Some respondents did not like metal cladding.					

Participants expressed a clear preference for the use of large window areas and clear entrances in the design of industrial buildings. Participants generally did not have concerns about modern design for industrial buildings, but cast aversion toward “standard” warehouse designed relying exclusively on stucco, EIFS, or metal cladding. Participants expressed positive responses toward buildings which use lighting as a design feature, whether in the design and presence of fixtures or in the careful design of how light illuminates buildings at night and provides a warm and inviting posture toward the rest of the Village. Residents communicated that traditional design is less important for industrial buildings, and that cohesion with neighboring buildings is more important than just mirroring traditional design in these districts. Participants had heavy aversion to parking and industrial loading areas being visible from the street frontage, and cited a need for welcoming open spaces/landscaping or entryways to ensure the building is “still designed for people,” even when activities are predominantly industrial. Participants cited a desire to see more effort placed into the development of more attractive industrial signage, citing a desire to see sign placement become more responsive to the design of the building.

4. If a developer proposed a new shopping center on Halsted Street in Homewood, what would you want the building to look like?

Question 4

If a developer proposed a new shopping center on Halsted Street in Homewood, what would you want the building to look like?

	Total Votes	Comments Summary	5	10	15	20	25
	2	Respondants liked the front awning and large windows near the front door. Other respondents felt the design was too plain and monochromatic.					
	1	Respondants did not like the stark colors, and noted that the design was too closely linked with a major corporate brand.					
	20	Respondants liked the visual variation of the façade, and the modern design that felt unique. Respondants liked the large windows and gathering areas outside of the store.					
	7	Respondants liked the mix of materials and awnings. Other respondents did not like the lack of visual detail, metal paneling, and flat roofline.					
	3	Respondants did not like the lack of clear front entrance. Respondants also noted that the front entry feature was not integrated into the building and felt "tacked on."					
	9	Respondants like the brick finish and use of large awnings/arcades. Some respondents expressed they felt the design was too traditional for Halsted stores.					

Participants showed a preference for unique design in more traditional commercial center buildings. The use of clear entryways that draw shoppers/site users in was the primary feature sought after by participants. Participants wished to see less “faux” design features that mimic traditional designs, instead opting for variation of the building form, unique signage elements (i.e. blade signs, etc.) and other design features which are not directly tied to brand identities. Participants offered ideas for using more landscaping to buffer the “necessary” large expanses of buildings, and worried about flooding and other impacts on the Village caused by having pavement “with no landscaping or places for the water to go.” Participants again expressed a preference for less traditional designs on Halsted Street, citing the need for buildings to instead focus on being compatible with one another and well-maintained rather than “trying to be downtown Homewood.” Participants cited concerns about the current state of maintenance on the Halsted corridor, and noted that there needed to be more pedestrian areas in parking lots and near store to ensure that there are “people around who care” and place pressure on businesses to maintain meaningful spaces.

Past Public Engagement (Prior to November 2023)

There were several additional public engagement efforts conducted in 2022 and 2023 which provided additional information and guidance for the Appearance Commission and staff crafting the new Appearance Plan. These engagement efforts have been previously summarized for the Appearance Commission and are not summarized in this memo.

Continuing Public Engagement

The Village will continue to provide public engagement opportunities for Village residents beyond this report. Many of these opportunities are designed to provide continuous public engagement on multiple projects. Feedback will continue to be summarized for the Appearance Commission as necessary.

Group	Proposed Engagement Strategies
Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing a Youth Steering Committee (may become a more permanent engagement opportunity for youth)
Business Owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey for members of the Homewood Business Association to be left open until the completion of the draft Appearance Plan document.
General Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey for members of the Homewood Business Association to be left open until the completion of the draft Appearance Plan document.
Developers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunity to be provided for direct feedback from developers to ensure successful implementation of Appearance Plan.

FUTURE TIMELINE

A revised copy of the proposed timeline for the Appearance Plan and Sign Code updates has been attached to this memorandum. Staff currently plans to complete work on the new Appearance Plan and Sign Codes through the end of 2024.



STAFF COMMENTS

1. Staff is continuing updates to the Appearance Plan document; these updates were initiated in early 2022 by the Appearance Commission and Village staff.
2. Public engagement has been ongoing for the Appearance Plan since late 2022, and has been mostly concluded as of February 2024. Some public engagement and comment opportunities will remain through the end of the process of drafting the Appearance Plan and Sign Code.
3. Staff has revised the timeline for the completion of the Appearance Plan, allowing for time to discuss and revise recommendations to the Appearance Plan and create a new structure for the Appearance Plan document.
4. Staff will continue to develop a plan template and document design “in-house,” preparing a modernized version of the Appearance Plan by the end of 2024.
5. Staff will continue to work on revisions to the Sign Code in tandem with the development of new recommended design guidelines in the Appearance Plan. Public engagement efforts have also allowed for dialogue on the preferences around signage.
6. Staff will continue to workshop recommendations and final language for the Appearance Plan between March and August 2024.

RECOMMENDED APPEARANCE COMMISSION ACTION

No action required.