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To: Tree Commission <TreeCommission@cityofdavis.org>

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Subject: Davis Downtown Plan has a Tree Gap in it.

To Davis Tree Commission & other random Loraxes:

I went to the “training” on how to use the new Form Based code for the Downtown Plan.

It’s a GREAT step forward to get more investment in downtown...and part a vision for improvements there.

I don’t want my comments below to diminish from the great effort it shows and the general direction it takes us.

The idea of this new type of “form Based Code is the city and public spec results up front...and this avoid micro-management of details when specific plan comes forward. i.e. city planners and esp. our city arborist does not get to 2nd guess land scape designers on details of what trees, where and how they are planted after the fact. It removed Political Risk for developer, cutting their costs and encourage investment.

But, the Devils in the Details, i.e. if we want good stuff in our downtown, it’s gotta be written into the form based code NOW.

I am concern as Trees seem to be neglected. Not just in content of plan, but in the staff mindset as to their importance.

(not surprising as architects, planners and consultant mostly focus on buildings, not the “accessory” items like Trees they assume just happen.)

Tree are almost invisible to most folks...until you notice their shade, crown height and foliage density are more significant in the look and feel of our downtown streetscapes that the 2 or 4 story building behind them, or the sign in the window the plan so carefully defines!

IN TODAY’S MEETING, when I first asked about Trees, I was told there was no stuff on Tree in the code (by both consultant and then Ashley Feeney...).

I was told in the coming “Street standard document” for downtown.....or will be covered in the new Tree Ordinance that is yet to be OK’ed

BUT....after looking at document for 1 hour, I discovered that is not right. In table 40.14.050 D it in effect specifies 24” box tree 6-8 ft tall...but ignores any watering/care/or structural soil spec, and also seems to override Tree Tech manual that will be part of a new “system” with the new tree ordinance. And design for parking lot tree planters seem inadequate, And of course enforcement of tree maintenance requirement or any accountability if the trees are neglected.

I was concerned the consultant said “this is the first I heard of tree concerns”. I know I made comment on Trees in early public process, over 18 months ago. I admit, I have not been following it. Maybe other more junior consultants hear the concern and city staff also did not seem to hear or remember.

I was also told that trees in public sidewalk space in front of building would be address in new “Street Standard” a separate document which will be part of implementation of this code. But unless developer is required to upgrading the public tree planters in front of their new building in the code, it won’t happen. I suggest a developer who put in a new building should be required to put in new sidewalks with structural/ suspended soil as well as new trees as appropriate. (Maybe this is a “springing” requirement once the existing mature tree dies). Tree are as an important a part of the façade of the building as signs, and other minutiae that the code specifies.

I Urge the Tree Commission

- 1) To make robust comments about both incorrect spec for Tree Planting, lack of sufficient trees planning requirements in courtyard and setback, and omission of building responsibility to upgrade public trees to stand of the art standards in the proposed Downtown code.
- 2) And make a strong statement the Tree Commission want to get a full briefing on the Street Standards where trees for downtown will be covered too.
- 3) Ask for clear articulation how all these new reg and plans will work together so things don’t fall through the cracks and become “deregulated”. i.e. how a new Urban Forestry Plan, Tree Ordinance, Street Standards document, yet to be written Tree Technical manual, work together. Work together. This should be explicitly documented in a staff memo. It should be reviewed by both Tree (and NRC) Commission AND then sent to City Council when the Tree Ordinance is presented to them so the big picture is clear.

Again I want to emphasis the new form based code is a great thing. but lets spend the details right for the trees. This is a once in a generation opportunity.
(and might actually make Rob Cain’s life easier).

I hope this is helpful.

Alan Hirsch
Part Time Lorax