DESIGN AND NAVIGATING ENTITLEMENTS

John Arnold, Partner
KFA Architecture

Monica Rodriguez, Senior Project Architect
House & Robertson Architects

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Public officials (and architects!) are in the middle of a tug o’ war between constituents’ quality of life issues on one side, and the need for low cost, affordable housing on the other, both of which are in the public interest.
Design
In an environment of State mandated densities with increasing availability of incentives and waivers, thoughtful design can help mitigate adverse affects on city planning efforts and neighborhood character.

These include affects on height, setbacks, parking, design review, open space, and floor-area ratio (FAR), etc. Most of these things are sensitive to existing residents.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify key areas of opportunities for design input by public officials in the development of affordable housing projects in their districts and neighborhoods.

- Understand the design process during conceptual design and entitlements, and the importance of these phases in project cost trajectory.

- Become familiar with basic design tools that do not diminish density, avoid unnecessary costs, and help projects meet community standards and design goals.

- Learn how prescriptive design guidelines can be made more flexible and still meet their intent and be good design.
The Design Process

The Phases of the Design Process

- Site Identification, Vision and Pro Forma Design Analysis – “What fits,” “Due Diligence,” “Yield Study,” “Site Analysis” and entitlements path exploration
- Site and Program commitment from owner/developer
- Entitlements and Funding Submittals/Approvals – Conceptual Design, including program/architectural development, entitlements path and execution, sustainability approach, and budgeting. Funding pipelines locked in. Start of community outreach.
- Schematic Design “SD” (including MEP, Structural and Civil design, and early costing)
- Design Development “DD” (including continuing costing, coordination, and early “VE”)
- Construction Documents “CDs” – Part I (including plan check submittal, advanced costing and VE, advanced coordination)
- Construction Documents – Part II (including permitting, final bidding, funding, and contracting)
PHASES OF DESIGN PROCESS

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*Early stages are best time to effect positive change and to avoid delays and backtracking*
SITE ANALYSIS AND CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

PLANNING AND ZONING CONSIDERATIONS

• Base Zone guidelines, including density, height, setbacks, etc.
• Specific Plans and Overlays – e.g. the SNAP, HPOZs, Central City West, Long Beach Downtown Plan.
• Adjacencies to Other Zones – adjacent single family zones and open space can affect basic assumptions about a site.
• Development Conditions – similar to Specific Plans and Overlays, these are zone changes that can impose severe restrictions on a parcel – in LA, mind your “Ds” and “Qs”
• Incentive Areas and Programs – e.g. TOC (Transit Oriented Communities), Downtown Housing Incentive Area, QPSH, CPIOs.
• Historic Designations – actual or possible
• And….the State Density Bonus law with all of its additions from recent years
NON-ZONING SITE ANALYSIS

- **Slope and soils** - both can be variably expensive to work with; flat and sandy are best
- **Lot Shape** - rectangular is always easier - an otherwise adequate size can be severely compromised by irregular shape
- **Wires and Utilities** - DWP, Edison and CalOSHA issues can be costly and complex
- **Fire Department Access** - avoid deep lots with limited access at sides and rear
  
  *LA County Fire Department requirements can severely limit site feasibility*
- **Easements and Highway Dedications**
- **Faults** and other geologic, environmental or hydrologic site issues

*Site visits and observations are always enlightening to things you may not notice on Google Maps.*
The most efficient housing project has only two stairs, a double loaded corridor, stacking units, and one elevator bank, and every square foot of built space has a use. Anything beyond that – even if they are improvements to the design - will raise costs and be subject to value engineering.

The most common places where design/cost efficiency is lost in the early phases:

- Unstacked units/floors requiring structural and MEP transitions
- Agency requirements for style, articulation, materials, massing and height
- Design concepts that require additional steel and concrete
- Single loaded corridors (despite their benefits!)
- Bridges, cantilevers, long spans
- Design concepts that require excess glazing and doors, or increased floor heights
- Missed program during concept design: transformers, trash handling, accessibility, complete exit systems, fire access, LID, EV parking, solar panels, workable/livable units
EARLY DESIGN DECISIONS TO CONSIDER

MAKE THE MOST OF “FREE” THINGS TO SERVE THE DESIGN:

• Light and air: don’t miss opportunities to allow it in
• Space: use your envelope and your land wisely and artfully
• Massing and Proportion: the building’s basic shape and the relative scale of its pieces
• Color: all buildings will have color – use it to its best affect
• Lines and angles: judicious use of lines and angles can enhance the simplest buildings without significant added cost
• Configuration: arrangement of materials and adjacencies in plan and elevation
• Highlight a building’s assets, e.g. courtyards exposed to the public way are better than hidden courtyards; locate massing relief where it will have the greatest visual and spatial impact; provide stylistic flair only in places with high visibility from the public way.

Affordable housing can be beautiful, functional, and livable without employing expensive materials and elaborate structure. Take advantage of the “free” things!
CASE STUDY: CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT
CASE STUDY: CONCEPT AND DESIGN DEVELOPMENT
CASE STUDY: CONCEPT AND DESIGN DEVELOPMENT
BUT LET’S TALK DESIGN..... AND AVOIDING THE BOX
DESIGN – MASSING, PROPORTION
DESIGN – MASSING, OPEN SPACE, STEPBACKS
DESIGN – STEPBACK, COLOR, FORM, LINES AND ANGLES
DESIGN – OPEN SPACE, SCALE
DESIGN – MASSING, ARTICULATION, COLOR
DESIGN – COLOR, MASSING, ARTICULATION, ANGLES
DESIGN – MASSING, OPEN SPACE, STYLE, CONTEXT
DESIGN – STYLE, DETAIL, MASSING
DESIGN – SCALE, MASSING, COLOR, OPEN SPACE
DESIGN – SCALE, MASSING, COLOR
THANK YOU!

John Arnold, Partner
KFA Architecture, john@kfalosangles.com

Monica Rodriguez, Senior Project Architect
House & Robertson Architects, monicar@hrarch.com

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