



# **Agenda**

## **City Council Study Session**

Monday, April 20, 2026 - 7:00 PM  
Council Chambers

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- I. Call to Order**
- II. Attendance**
- III. Topics of Discussion**
  - A. Downtown Design Guidelines
- IV. Summary**
- V. Adjournment**



## **MEMORANDUM**

To: Mayor, City Council, and Historic District Review Commission  
From: Katherine Sharp, Director of Planning & Development  
Date: April 14, 2026  
Subject: Downtown Design Guidelines - Summary for April 20, 2026 Study Session

### **INTRODUCTION:**

This memorandum summarizes the Draft Downtown Design Guidelines which will be presented during the joint study session with the Historic District Review Commission (HDRC) and City Council on April 20, 2026. The guidelines establish a comprehensive framework to guide new development, redevelopment, and improvements within the downtown area.

### **DISCUSSION:**

Downtown Liberty serves as the historic and civic heart of the community. With increasing interest in infill development and reinvestment, the City has prepared these guidelines to ensure that growth reinforces the physical character, architectural quality, and sense of place that define downtown.

The guidelines:

- Provide direction for architectural design and site development
- Ensure compatibility with historic districts and landmarks
- Complement, but do not replace, existing Historic Preservation Guidelines

They align with prior planning efforts, including the Historic Preservation Plan (2021), Leading Liberty Forward Comprehensive Plan (2023), and the Downtown Infill Concept Plan (2025).

### **Geographic Framework**

The guidelines apply to the core downtown area, including portions of the Liberty Square, Lightburne, and Jewell Historic Districts.

Three subareas are established to address varying contexts:

- Mixed-Use / Commercial Area: Downtown core focused on active street life
- 4-Story Area: Locations appropriate for increased height and intensity
- Sensitive Area: Transitional edges adjacent to single-family neighborhood

## Core Design Framework

### Massing and Scale

- Emphasizes human-scaled design, proportional relationships, and cohesive street walls
- Encourages base–middle–top façade organization
- Supports step-backs and transitions to reduce perceived building height
- Establishes street enclosure ratios (generally 1:3 to 1:2) to create comfortable, walkable environments

### Architectural “Kit of Parts”

- Identifies recurring architectural elements that define Liberty’s character
- Includes storefront bases, vertical window proportions, cornices, and durable masonry materials
- Encourages compatibility across styles rather than replication of historic buildings

### Building Frontage and Public Realm

- Defines frontage types such as storefronts, stoops, terraces, galleries, and arcades
- Prioritizes active ground floors, transparency, and pedestrian engagement
- Reinforces a continuous, walkable street edge

### Composition and Fenestration-Window and Doors

- Establishes a masonry-dominant character with balanced window-to-wall ratios
- Typical Liberty Square façade composition averages 28% glass / 72% solid wall
- Requires:
  - Organized window patterns
  - Recessed openings for depth and shadow
  - Transparent storefronts with clear pedestrian connections

### Site and Streetscape Design

- Encourages rear or structured parking and alley access
- Requires screening of mechanical equipment
- Supports street trees, landscaping, and pedestrian buffers
- Promotes urban open spaces with defined amenities and pedestrian pathways

## Area-Specific Approach

### *Mixed-Use / Commercial Area*

- Reinforces the traditional downtown street wall and storefront rhythm
- Requires active ground-floor uses and pedestrian-oriented design
- Aligns closely with historic courthouse square character

### *4-Story Area*

- Allows greater building height and intensity (up to four stories)
- Requires upper-story setbacks to maintain human scale
- Emphasizes public realm enhancements, including plazas and outdoor activity spaces

### *Sensitive Area*

- Provides transition to adjacent residential neighborhoods
- Limits height (generally up to three stories)
- Requires:
  - Step-down massing
  - Increased setbacks and buffering
  - Residential-scaled design and materials
- Focuses on compatibility and neighborhood protection

### **Relationship to Historic Districts**

Where properties fall within both the Downtown Design Guidelines boundary and a Historic District:

- Projects must comply with both sets of standards
- HDRC review and approval is required
- The guidelines are intended to reinforce preservation goals while guiding new development

### Implementation and Incentives

The guidelines are integrated with the City’s Economic Development Incentives Policy (2026):

- Compliance with the guidelines is the trigger for incentive eligibility
- A tiered system determines incentive levels or duration
- Tools include:
  - Tax abatement
  - Sales tax reimbursement
  - Historic tax credits
  - C-PACE financing
  - Density bonuses

This structure links design quality to financial support, encouraging high-quality development outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

The Downtown Design Guidelines provide a comprehensive, context-sensitive framework to guide Liberty’s continued growth. By emphasizing architectural quality, pedestrian-oriented design, and compatibility with historic character, the guidelines aim to ensure that future development strengthens downtown’s identity as a vibrant, walkable, and enduring civic center.

## **FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS:**

- Presentation and discussion with consultants Freese and Nichols on April 20, 2026 with solicitation of feedback from HDRC and City Council
- Refinement of the draft guidelines by staff and consultants
- Consideration of formal adoption and public meetings:
  - HDRC on May 5th, 5:30 pm
  - Planning & Zoning Commission on May 12, 7 pm
  - City Council on May 18, 7 pm

**Attachment:** City of Liberty Downtown Design Guidelines (Draft, April 15, 2026)

<https://www.libertymissouri.gov/898/Master-Plans>