

# Mock Design Review Reveal Authentic Design Standards: Engaging the Public to Create a Downtown District

*Kim Bauer, Historic Preservation Coordinator for the City of Brighton*



In the early 1900s and 1910s, L.C. McClure took photographs all across Colorado. One of McClure's photography stops included the Brighton, a city not yet 20 years old. As McClure travelled up Main Street, he pulled aside his carriage and got out to take a photo. The picture depicts a bustling city with shops and stores lining both sides of the street and people captured going about their day. Nearly 100 years later, this same section of Main Street is still one of the most vibrant areas of our downtown and makes up a portion of our newly established Downtown Historic District.



While city staff and the Brighton Historic Preservation Commission (BHPC) had hoped for a historic district in Brighton for a number of years, the idea was often met with great resistance by property owners. With great distrust of additional regulation, projects initiated by city staff were often challenged and had little support. But, late in 2014, a group of business owners known as the Downtown Business Partnership (DBP) inquired city staff about forming a historic district along the city's main street corridor. Staff offered to provide any support needed by the group if they could find support with a majority of the property owners within the potential historic district. Two community leaders within DBP emerged as vocal champions of the designation effort while staff simultaneously developed informational booklets and signature forms to use in the process.

Staff met with the DBP on two separate occasions and received regular updates at partnership meetings throughout the process. A short video was created to help inform the general public about historic districts, which was shared on a local station and social media sites. Rather than initiating a district with basic design criteria already set in place, staff worked with business and property owners to develop design standards addressing the issues that were most pressing for stakeholders.



Initially, staff gathered general feedback on the types of items typically addressed in historic district guidelines. After establishing an idea of DBP's priorities, staff started drafting regulations using the Secretary of the Interior Standards as a guiding tool while specifically applying them to Brighton's downtown architectural styles and history. Staff additionally used innovative practices during the draft standard review process by inviting stakeholders to participate in a mock design review. The stakeholders then were able to use the draft regulations to review fictitious

modifications to the historic district. This engaging method helped bridge the gap between the reviewing authority (the BHPC and city staff) and those being regulated (the business and property owners), by hypothetically switching their roles to encourage empathy and understanding of the regulations and their role.

In the end, with the feedback collected throughout the interactive mock review process, as well as in previous meetings, the staff created a draft of design standards that were not only community-oriented but oriented directly by community members. The City of Brighton is grateful for this honor and we look forward to sharing it with the community that helped make it happen.

