

**METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT  
OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY**

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**To:** Chairman Adkins and Planning Commissioners

**From:** Greg Claxton, Community Plans & Engagement Manager  
Marty Sewell, Multimodal Transportation Manager, Dickerson South project lead

**Re:** Interpretation of heights in the Dickerson South Study

**Date:** June 5, 2020

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This memo is intended to review and clarify the function of the Subdistricts identified within the Dickerson South Study. The first section of the memo presents the overall policy intent of the Dickerson South Study, as well as background on how that intent was established by the planning process. The second section of the memo analyses the 829 Dickerson SP as an example of the kind of case-by-case analysis that should be done when proposals do not fit squarely within the Study's guidance.

Neighborhood and corridor studies provide an opportunity for community members to work with one another to create a shared vision for the future of an area. No study will ever strike the perfect balance between (1) flexibility for developers and neighbors to find creative solutions that work for the many interests involved in land use decisions and (2) the certainty that clear rules provide both developers and neighbors.

Seeking such balance in Dickerson South requires both careful analysis of proposals on a case by case basis, as well as demonstrations of broad-based community support.

Overall intent of the Dickerson South Study

The vision of the Dickerson South Study is to create a safe, beautiful, mixed use corridor. Key themes were tree-lined streets, with a cohesive, authentic design. The plan also calls for transit-supportive density achieved through taller buildings in appropriate locations, with adjacent neighborhoods protected from intrusive heights.

The core policy direction from the Study is created through a series of subdistricts that guide development intensity. A key element shaping the Study's subdistricts is the corridor's location within the County and its relationship to a larger parallel route (I-65). Dickerson South is a low intensity pike adjacent to Downtown, the East Bank, and River North, all of which are recommended as intense mixed use centers. Moreover, Dickerson South is parallel to I-65, with the space between the two predominantly used for industrial purposes. Finally, on the other side of I-65, another recently adopted plan, the Haynes Trinity Small Area Plan, also recommends an intense mixed use center. However, east of Dickerson Pike are well-established neighborhoods, including McFerrin Park, Cleveland Park, and Highland Heights.

Because of this, the Dickerson South Study sought to increase intensity primarily west of Dickerson Pike, stepping down in height from west to east until reaching neighborhood interiors that should be maintained.

During the Dickerson South charrette, Planning staff created small-group exercises to allow stakeholders to determine appropriate heights for broad areas. This created a clear consensus for the heights on the west side and a general intent to step that height down from west to east. However, the exercise did not allow for fine tuning the exact way in which that step down should be accomplished. At the work-in-progress meeting that concluded the charrette, Planning staff presented a detailed set of heights that would accomplish the goals developed earlier in the charrette.

At that meeting and in the subsequent opportunities to review the plan, the step down was generally welcomed but not discussed in detail. There was no discussion of partial floors, height in feet, mezzanines, competing uses, or the disjunct between the six-story policy on the west side of Dickerson stepping down and the four-story policy on the east side of Dickerson.

Finally, the recommended height along the east side of Dickerson was based, in part, on staff's expectation that structured parking was not feasible given lot characteristics, and that surface parking would naturally limit heights to four stories.

Because of this, the height limits specified by Dickerson South subdistricts should be used as a general guide for community expectations. The Study contains guidance on appropriate base zoning districts to use within each subdistrict. Applicants seeking flexibility in the plan's specific recommendations must use a Specific Plan zoning district with a site plan to demonstrate how their project performs in achieving the outcomes sought by the community in total. This can only be done on a case-by-case basis, examining the specifics of the proposal and surrounding policy context.

### 829 Dickerson

829 Dickerson presents an example of the kind of case-by-case analysis that should be done. The proposed SP achieves the overall policy intent of this subdistrict. Further review highlights the following factors:

- The proposed SP creates a high-quality, tree-lined streetscape and mix of uses sought by the neighborhood, while not introducing short-term rentals. While the Dickerson South Study does not comment on short-term rentals, staff recognizes that they are of concern to the neighborhood.
- While tuck-under surface parking is often disfavored because it can be incompatible with active street-front uses, the proposed SP appropriately addresses these concerns.
- Limiting the building to four stories would still allow for rooftop uses, recognizing Dickerson South's views of downtown (an asset highlighted in the Study). Including the fifth story provides relief from noise and unwanted views from rooftop visitors. While not a focus of the policy, this supports the transition from Dickerson to the neighborhood interior.
- The partial fifth floor helps keep the overall bulk of the building closer to Dickerson Pike. An alternative building design, limited to the four stories but bringing the bulk of the building closer to the rear property line, would be more intrusive to the neighborhood and less in keeping with the overall policy intent of the stepping height down from west to east. Further, it adds minimally to the bulk of the building as viewed from Joseph Avenue.
- The fifth floor provides for improved urban design along Dickerson Pike, as it creates a less severe step down between properties facing the corridor.

- Finally, properties to the rear of the site have a Neighborhood Evolving policy. Though the Dickerson South subdistricts identify three stories along the length of Joseph Avenue, only the portion south of Cleveland Street has Evolving policy. The potential for these properties to redevelop more intensely will help the transition along these blocks of Dickerson.

Therefore, staff finds that the proposed SP meets the overall intent of the Dickerson South Study. Future development proposals seeking flexibility in achieving the Dickerson South Study's overall goals will require a similar level of detailed analysis.