

Rationale for Proposed Amendment to Comprehensive Plan Regarding Design Review

Proposed Amendment:

PL6.1 Establish and periodically update a design review process and design criteria consistent with the goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan for:.....

Rationale:

In Design Review (Hinshaw/ APA Planning Advisory Service/ Report Number 454) the author provides excerpts from the decision of the Washington Supreme Court in the case: Anderson v. Issaquah.

With reference to design standards, the Court found:

“Whenever a community adopts such standards they can and must be drafted to give clear guidance to all parties concerned.”

With reference to ambiguous design standards, viz.

“appropriate proportions”

“harmonious” colors

landscaping that is “attractive....transition” to adjoining properties

the Court found that such terms “do not give effective or meaningful guidance to applicants, to design professionals, or to the public officials of Issaquah who are responsible for enforcing the code....” (Hinshaw, p. 9).

The Requirements and Guidelines in the Olympia Code (Chapter 18.100) appear more specific than those cited above. Moreover, it is recognized that design standards cannot be so specific as to eliminate creative work or to create a bland and uniform physical environment.

It is inevitable that individuals will vary in their determination of what constitutes appropriate design. However, it is useful to periodically review

the current design procedures and standards in the context of problems and conflicts experienced in the administration of these procedures and standards to determine if the procedures and standards can be revised to provide improved guidance to all concerned parties.

Such periodic reviews should be conducted with full public participation and should include graphic materials accessible to the City residents with no professional training in design.

Proposed Amendment to Comprehensive Plan Regarding Design Review

(Proposed Amendment is in red.)

(Provisions in the Comprehensive Plan regarding design review are provided for context.)

General Land Use and Design

The Plan envisions new development that will reinforce the community's identity, urban design preferences, and historic form. Selected major streets will gradually transform into attractive, higher density, mixed residential and commercial "urban corridors" with frequent transit service.

The purpose of the goals and policies below is to direct land use patterns, densities, and design standards which:

- Reflect the community's urban design vision
- Maintain or improve the character of established neighborhoods
- Preserve the historic features of Olympia.....

Urban Design, Historic Structures and Built Form

Olympia's [Urban Design Vision and Strategy of 1991](#) identified the design and architectural preferences of community residents. This study continues to provide guidance for this Comprehensive Plan and future development. It identified the types of development that citizens feel are appropriate and inappropriate for our community. Study participants particularly valued Olympia's waterfront, downtown, the Capitol Campus, the older established neighborhoods, and views of the Olympic Mountains and the Black Hills. They favored streets that provide an attractive, safe, and inviting place for pedestrians, as well as provide for efficient traffic flow. Specifically, they

liked the portions of downtown where buildings form a continuous edge along the street, where it is interesting to walk, and where awnings protect people from the rain.

Much of our community is already built. Many of our neighborhoods are more than 50 years old and our downtown is older still. These established neighborhoods provide the 'sense of place' and character of Olympia. To preserve this character, new buildings incorporated into the existing fabric must reflect both their own time-period and what's come before. We will acknowledge the importance of historic preservation by protecting buildings and districts and celebrating the people and events that shaped our community. We will conserve natural resources by keeping historic buildings properly maintained and in continuous use, thereby avoiding decay and demolition which would waste resources used to create these structures.

GL6: Community beauty is combined with unique neighborhood identities.

PL6.1 Establish and periodically update a design review process and design criteria consistent with the goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan for:

- Commercial and mixed use development adjacent to freeways and public streets
- Other highly-visible, non-residential development, such as the Port of Olympia, campus developments, and master planned developments
- Multifamily residential development and manufactured housing parks
- Detached homes on smaller lots (less than 5,000 square feet) and in older neighborhoods (pre-1940)
- Properties listed on a Historic Register or located within a designated historic district

PL6.2 The design review process should recognize differences in the city with the objective of maintaining or improving the character and livability of each area or neighborhood.

PL6.3 Require commercial and residential buildings to face the street or a courtyard or other common area.

PL6.4 Require multi-family housing to incorporate architectural forms and features common to nearby housing; to include porches, balconies, bay

windows and similar details; to have entries oriented to streets or a courtyard, and include accessible open space; and to be reduced in size near lower density residential districts.

PL6.5 Ensure that parking areas do not dominate street frontages or interrupt pedestrian routes, and that they are screened from single-family housing.

PL6.6 Prohibit fences and walls that inhibit walking or isolate neighborhoods from streets, except to reduce noise, provide buffers, or create private rear yards.

PL6.7 Create attractive entry corridors to the community and neighborhoods, especially downtown and along urban corridors; to include adopting design standards and installing significant special landscaping along community-entry corridors.

PL6.8 Enhance neighborhood identity by encouraging interested groups to beautify open spaces, streets and private property.

PL6.9 Require that buildings complement and enhance their surroundings, appeal to and support pedestrian activities, and facilitate transit use.

PL6.10 Preserve and enhance water vistas by retaining public rights-of-way that abut or are within one block of water bodies and by not siting public buildings within associated view corridors.

GL 12: Commercial areas are attractive, functional and appealing.

PL12.2 Establish maximum building heights that are proportional to streets, retain scenic views and result in compatibility with adjoining development.

PL12.3 Seek opportunities to create or enhance town squares framed by commercial or civic buildings, pocket parks, plazas and other small public or private spaces in downtown or other high-density areas.

PL12.4 Ensure that commercial uses are compatible with adjoining residential districts. This might include prohibiting reflective surfaces, screening solid waste and parking areas, regulating emissions, building size reductions and increased setbacks near residential districts, screening parking areas, and requiring facades with architectural features that reduce the appearance of a commercial building's size, such as stepbacks and tiering above three stories.

PL12.5 Require site designs for commercial and public buildings that will complement nearby development and either maintain or improve the appearance of the area. This may include building designs with a defined bottom, middle, and top; appealing architectural elements such as windows, wall detailing; fountains, vendor stations; and the use of balconies, stepped back stories and pitched roofs that reduce the perceived size of the building.

PL12.6 Create visual continuity along arterial streets through coordinated site planning, landscaping, building designs, signage and streetscapes.

PL12.7 Require screening of unattractive site features such as mechanical equipment and large solid waste receptacles, while maintaining good access for collection and maintenance.

PL12.8 Use design standards to ensure pedestrians and bicyclists have direct, convenient access to commercial and public buildings.

PL12.9 Require a form of parking that retains aesthetics and minimizes pedestrian barriers and inconvenience by including screening along streets and residential areas; limits parking lots to one contiguous acre; and locates them at the rear of buildings, or, if the rear is not possible, then on the side, but with minimal street frontage.

PL12.10 Ensure that business signs identify the business but do not create visual clutter or dominate the character of the area; require the use of low or façade-mounted signs where possible.

GL 18: Downtown designs express Olympia's heritage and future in a compact and pedestrian-oriented manner.

PL18.1 Regulate the design of downtown development with specific but flexible guidelines that allow for creativity and innovation, enhance historic architecture and recognize distinct areas of downtown, and do not discourage development.

PL18.5 Design streets with landscaping, wide sidewalks, underground utilities and a coordinated pattern of unifying details.

PL18.6 Designate 'pedestrian streets' where most of the frontage will have 'people-oriented' activities and street-level buildings will have a high proportion of glass. Prohibit parking lots along these streets, except when preserving scenic views and instead provide surface parking along other streets.

PL18.9 Limit building heights to accentuate, and retain selected public views of, the Capitol dome.

GL 19: Downtown's historic character and significant historic buildings, structures, and sites are preserved and enhanced.

PL19.1 Promote the Downtown Historic District to provide a focal point of historic interest, maintain the economic vitality of downtown, and enhance the richness and diversity of Olympia.

PL19.2 Minimize damage to significant historic features or character during rehabilitation projects.

PL19.3 Design new development and renovations so they are compatible and harmonious with the established pattern, alignment, size and shape of existing downtown area.

PL19.4 Incorporate historic buildings into redevelopment projects and restore historic facades.

GL 20: Development maintains and improves neighborhood character and livability.

PL20.1 Require development in established neighborhoods to be of a type, scale, orientation, and design that maintains or improves the character, aesthetic quality, and livability of the neighborhood.