DRB REVIEW OF OPEN SPACE GUIDELINES FOR MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING
Discussion draft – October 30, 2019

Background

Section 18.170.040 of Olympia's municipal code requires new multi-family housing developments to:

"(p)rovide usable open space for use by residents of the development that is not occupied by buildings, streets, driveways or parking areas. Usable open space shall include a minimum dimension of 10 feet with an overall grade of less than ten percent (refer to each zoning district for specific open space requirement)."

Beyond that, there are just two guidelines:

1. Situate playground areas in locations visible from residential buildings.

2. Provide a mix of passive and active recreation areas. Active recreation areas may include facilities such as sport courts or swimming pools.

The illustrations that accompany that section depict a large grassy area with trees and playground equipment.

And that's it.

This does not provide much guidance to either developers or City staff. It leaves a great deal open to interpretation. Does the "10 feet" refer to "10 *square* feet"? What amenities, materials, safety features and other factors should be included in open space design? At design review, we have seen plans for multi-family housing developments of more that 50 units in which the "open space" consists of a concrete slab barely large enough for a picnic table or two. This does not conform with the illustrations accompanying our guidelines or the prevailing standards for multi-family residential open space in other cities.

Olympia's open space guidelines for multi-family residential should be rewritten in order to provide clear direction to both the development community and City staff. They should reflect the City's commitment to optimizing every possible opportunity to provide residents with access to open space. And they should help the Design Review Board fulfill its mandated mission to:
*   foster the attractiveness and functional utility of the community as a place to live and work
*   raise the level of community expectations for the quality of the built environment
*   encourage originality and creativity in site planning and architecture
*   communicate these purposes to applicants and assist applicants in achieving these purposes
*   preserve and enhance property value
*   ensure that new developments maintain or improve neighborhood character and livability

Approach

Two DRB members, Bassim Kreem and Virginia Sorrells, reviewed multi-family open space guidelines for Lacey, Spokane, and Portland, and the draft guidelines for downtown Olympia. (Copies have been provided for your reference.) They assembled a list of interesting elements including size, amenities, materials, location, and safety. This is by no means a comprehensive review: it's intended to start a conversation within the DRB. As we proceed, we will also need to ensure that our recommendations conform with the Urban Design and Land Use chapters in the Comprehensive Plan.

After our kick-off discussion at the November 16 retreat, we suggest reconvening in a month or so to allow members time to do their own research and develop their own ideas.

Multi-family Open Space Guideline Review Highlights

Lacey 14.23.088 – Open Space

Open space must be:

- Physically visible and accessible from adjacent street or major internal pedestrian route.
- In locations users can easily access and use, not just left-over or undevelopable space in locations where little pedestrian traffic is anticipated.
- Inviting…featuring amenities and activities that encourage pedestrians to use and explore the space (*several examples provided).*
- Safe…incorporating Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles.
- Made of materials that are easy to maintain.
- Considering the needs and interests of potential users – a range of age groups.
- Designed and placed in consideration of open space on adjacent parcels.
- In general, not near major streets or intersections.
- Easily accessible to a majority of lots or units.
- Arranged so that children have sidewalk access and don't have to cross streets.
- Not in corners where visibility is limited.
- Built to accommodate one or more of an array of possible activities.

Spokane 17C.110.420 – Residential Zones: Outdoor Spaces

- Minimum of 48 square feet/unit of housing: private outdoor spaces can count toward the common space total.
- Provides guidelines for ground-level units.
- Balconies can also be counted toward total requirement.
- Specifies types of uses, materials and amenities.
- Must include at least 3 of 8 listed amenities.
- Must be visible and accessible to all residents.
- Guidelines include lighting, fencing and landscaping standards.
- Can't be located in buffer areas.

Portland 33.120.240 – Multi-family Zones: Required Outdoor Areas

- Minimum of 48 square feet/dwelling unit.
- Can be individual space, common space or a combination.
- Individual areas must be big enough for a 6'x 6' square to fit inside and must be directly adjacent to the units.
- Common areas must be at least 500 square feet and big enough for a 15'x15' square to fit inside.
- Combinations must meet each of the above space criteria.
- Details of materials, amenities, and enclosures are provided.

Portland 33.120.265 – Density bonuses are offered for particular kinds of outdoor recreation facilities.

Olympia Downtown (Draft) 18.120.270 - Multi-family Open Space

- 100 square feet per dwelling unit or 10% of residential floor area minus common areas
- Recommends types of amenities
- Includes "15-foot minimum dimension"
- Includes access and landscaping language similar to other cities' guidelines
- Qualifying balconies or patios must be at least 35 square feet with a 5-foot minimum horizontal dimension.
- Spells out standards for rooftop decks and terraces
- Indoor recreational facilities can be counted toward requirement under certain circumstances.
- Nicely clarifies applicable Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles

Questions Bassim raised:

- Is it better not to define square footage but to focus on use instead?
- Could too specific a menu limit creativity?