

HEIGHTS IN URBAN CORRIDORS EAST OF PLUM STREET

Regarding whether to further restrict building heights in urban corridor land use designation in area along 4th and State Avenues east of Plum Street, adjacent to the Bigelow Historic District.

Summary of Comments

Three commenters specifically called for lower building height limits in urban corridor designation in this area – either to the equivalent of that in adjacent residential areas, or to two stories. Two other commenters generally spoke to densities in urban corridors being reduced. One commenter specifically called for densities in urban corridors not to be reduced.

Staff Analysis

Urban corridors have been included in Olympia's comprehensive plan since 1994. Implementing zoning within these corridors is through four High-Density Corridor zoning districts (HDC-1, -2, -3, and -4). Specific regulations vary slightly among these four zoning categories. In the area immediately east of Plum Street, the HDC-1 zoning district currently applies, and allows building heights up to 60', with an additional story allowed if it is devoted to residential uses. In the past year, Council adopted additional development regulations that require buildings in HDC zones within 100' of adjacent lower-density zoning to be no more than 35' (the height in most residential zones). This regulation will continue to carry out Policy PL12.4 in the Draft Plan, which directs commercial buildings be made more compatible with adjacent residential districts through stepbacks or tiering above three stories.

Development proposals received in the urban corridors over the past few years have been at heights much less than the maximum allowed by the existing regulations. This seems to indicate the market is not currently calling for maximum-height buildings in the corridors outside of downtown and the other high-density neighborhoods (HDN) where the Draft Plan would focus most new growth. This counters some public testimony on the comprehensive plan that expressed concern that allowing taller buildings in the corridors would make them more attractive to development than downtown or HDN areas.

Other comments expressed concerns about potential loss of existing views from the State and 4th Avenue rights of way across existing vacant parcels or low buildings. Council has discussed and affirmed at a separate work session the view protection policies in the Draft Plan (primarily Goal GL8 and associated policies). These policies direct a public process to identify landmark views and observation points, rather than attempting to protect views from entire corridors.

In the Public Hearing Draft

The land use designation description of urban corridors does not directly address building heights. The Future Land Use Designation Table shows building heights in the urban corridor designation as "three to six stories". The table includes this footnote:

Building Heights is the approximate size of the taller buildings anticipated in each category. Specific height or stories limits should be established by development regulations.

Policy PL13.7 is the only policy to specifically address building heights in urban corridor designations. The pertinent portion of that policy reads:

PL13.7 Designate different categories of corridors generally as follows:

- *Areas nearest downtown along Harrison Avenue east of Division Street and the upper portions of the State Street/Fourth Avenue corridor to the intersection of Fourth Avenue and Pacific Avenue should blend travel modes with priority for pedestrian, bicycle and transit systems. These areas should provide for a mix of low-intensity professional offices, commercial uses and multifamily buildings forming a continuous and pedestrian-oriented edge along the arterial streets. **There will be a 35 feet height limit if any portion of the building is within 100' from a single-family residential zone, provided that the City may establish an additional height bonus for residential development.** [emphasis added]*

Options

Change the portion of Policy PL13.7 shown in bold type above as follows:

There will be a 35 feet height limit if any portion of the building is within 100' from a single-family residential zone, provided that the City may establish an additional height bonus for residential development except in areas adjacent to a designated historic district.