

CHAPTER 12

URBAN DESIGN

Introduction

Urban design deals with the physical elements of our communities: the streets, parks, buildings, open space and neighborhoods that determine the way our cities look and feel. It is a blending of both city planning, architecture, landscape architecture, and critical land protection. Urban design looks at the way in which buildings, streets, public spaces, natural features and other development relate to one another and the people who use them. Through urban design, individual city improvements such as street construction, park development, land use regulations and new development can be effectively coordinated with each other to promote a unified city image.

Issues and Background

Urban Design

While the regulation of development appearance and design is often a basic component of urban regulatory systems, it is also one of the most controversial. Many people feel that such regulation is inherently subjective and hence inappropriate for government. However, such regulation is capable of making a substantial difference in the character of a community and its quality of life.

Studies of recent land use issues indicate that poorly designed development can hinder the development of desired land uses. Poorly sited and designed industrial uses can adversely affect the ability to attract the most desirable kinds of industry. Analysis of commercial development indicates poor separation of various types of commercial uses tends to create clutter along commercial strips. The reaction of neighborhood groups to the appearance of some new multiple family dwellings prevents new proposals. Neighborhood groups have urged that the regulation of the visual impact of new development be elevated in priority.

In addition, basic aspects of site design such as setbacks and sidewalk location can play a significant role in an individual's decision to utilize an

automobile or to walk or bike to a given development. Since a goal of this comprehensive plan is to encourage the use of non-motorized modes of transportation, the review of a project's design for pedestrian/bicycle "friendliness" can assist in accomplishing this goal.

GOAL 22

URBAN DESIGN

To ensure a high quality visual environment through appropriate design standards and procedures which encourage high quality architectural and landscape design in all development and through the placement of artwork in public places. The City recognizes the linkages between transportation, land use and site design and encourages development which eases access by pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users.

Objective 22.1.

To promote urban design which utilizes significant natural features to enhance the identity of the City.

Policies:

UD-1 The City shall encourage development which maintains and improves the existing aesthetic character of the community.

UD-2 Development on each of the hill areas of the community should seek to conserve and enhance the visual distinction and uniqueness of each.

UD-3 Suitable natural and cultural features should be utilized to buffer surrounding land uses from industry and commercial uses.

UD-4 The design of new development along the Green and Stuck Rivers shall be sensitive to the unique character of each as a visual resource of the entire community.

UD-5 Development along the Interurban bike trail shall be compatible with the trail and buffering measures shall be used where appropriate.

UD-6 Storm drainage facilities shall incorporate high standards of design to enhance the appearance of a site, preclude the need for security fencing, and serve as an amenity. The design of above ground storage and conveyance facilities should address or incorporate landscaping utilizing native vegetation, minimal side slopes, safety, maintenance needs, and function. The facilities should be located within rear or side yard areas and the design should preclude the need for security fencing whenever feasible.

UD-7 Site design techniques and standards which allow development, but protect critical areas and other natural features, should be developed and implemented. Some of these techniques include, but are not limited to, planned unit developments or clustering. When these techniques are used, the development shall be required to be consistent, when appropriate, with development surrounding the site.

UD-8 The City shall implement ordinances designed to enhance the protection of major stands of trees, viewsheds, bodies of water and other natural features. To the fullest extent feasible, these should be incorporated into the fundamental design of new development. Enhanced flexibility, such as the use of private drives and/or over-length cul-de-sacs, where necessary to protect sensitive features may be allowed.

Objective 22.2. To improve the visual quality of new development.

Policies:

UD-9 The visual impact of large new developments should be a priority consideration in their review and approval.

UD-10 The City has established design review of multiple family dwellings in order to maintain this housing option as a viable alternative near single family neighborhoods. The design guidelines should be reviewed periodically to maintain current planning trends and market demands.

UD-11 Priority shall be given to protecting industrial sites with quality visual amenities in order to attract industries that seek such amenities.

UD-12 All new development shall be required to underground on-site utility distribution, service and telecommunication lines.

UD-13 Codes regulating commercial strip development should be amended to improve its visual impact.

UD-14 Industrial development shall incorporate appropriate landscaping and site design to minimize its visual impact on surrounding development.

UD-15 The City should require all projects, both public and private, to include landscaping. Codes and regulations which govern

landscaping shall be updated and revised and include provisions for continued maintenance.

Objective 22.3. To improve the visual quality of developed areas.

Policies:

UD-16 Sign clutter should be reduced by updating and revising the City's sign code. While the sign code was substantially updated, with extensive public participation, it should be reviewed periodically.

UD-17 The City should employ its regulatory authority through SEPA to encourage the retention of scenic views of Mount Rainier and the east and west hills.

UD-18 The City should consider the undergrounding of utility distribution, service and telecommunication lines, except for storm drainage systems, whenever opportunities arise, particularly during reconstruction of roads and other facilities.

UD-19 The City shall develop a street tree planting program throughout the City and should require the integration of landscaping within all new street projects.

Objective 22.4.. To develop a comprehensive program to improve the visual quality of the entire City.

Policies:

UD-20 An Urban Design Element to the Comprehensive Plan should be developed which identifies and establishes policies to govern the protection and enhancement of the City's visual amenities and image. Appropriate development codes should be developed and existing codes modified to implement the Urban Design element.

UD-21 The urban design element shall include provisions for the design and construction of entry markers to the City as well as programs for the beautification of the primary travel corridors within the City.

UD-22 The City shall develop uniform signage for all City facilities.

Objective 22.5. To promote the incorporation of artwork into new and existing public facilities to enhance the visual quality of the City.

Policies:

- UD-23 The City shall encourage the integration of artwork in planning new public facilities.
- UD-24 The City shall, when appropriate, encourage and facilitate the placement of artwork in new and existing neighborhoods and the downtown business area.

Objective 22.5. To promote development which eases access by both pedestrians and transit users.

Policies:

- UD-25 Downtown is considered a pedestrian and transit oriented area. Codes in the downtown should encourage development which is more oriented toward these modes of transportation than towards the automobile.
- UD-26 Development along transit routes should include transit friendly designs within the project area. The Urban Design Plan should include a discussion of transit, bicyclist and pedestrian friendly design. Codes which encourage these types of design should be developed and implemented in appropriate areas.
- UD-27 Discourage the use of fences, walls and other barriers around developments which block access by bicyclists, pedestrians and users of other non-motorized modes.

Design Review Process

The City of Auburn generally regulates development through the SEPA process. However, this process is intended to allow for an understanding of impacts and impose conditions for appropriate mitigation. It has not proven to be an effective tool for insuring that new development meets contemporary design standards.

The City adopted design standards for the Downtown Urban Center zone in 2007 to create a distinct and strong identity for downtown Auburn. The design standards will guide development within downtown Auburn to create a sense of place, transit oriented development, and a pedestrian environment.

The City also adopted design guidelines in 2009 for multi-family and mixed-use developments, outside of the downtown, that provide guidance for improvement landscaping, site design, architectural standards, and recreational spaces.

Objective 22.6. Establish a Design Review Process

UD-28 The City developed new design standards for development within downtown Auburn and for multi-family and mixed-use development. These standards provide guidance for improved landscaping, site design and architectural standards. These standards should be reviewed periodically to keep with current planning trends and market demands.

UD-29 The City revised its ordinances to establish an administrative design review procedure for development in the downtown and for multi-family and mixed-use developments. It is handled as a responsibility of the Planning Department and incorporated into current development review procedures to minimize time and expense, both for the City and the applicant. Developments subject to design review standards are outlined in city code.