

Suggested Changes to Design Standards & Guidelines for Centers and Corridors

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Background and Purpose

In 2001, the City of Spokane adopted its first Comprehensive Land Use Plan to guide growth within a 20 year horizon. The City and its citizens spent hundreds of hours laying this foundation for development and increased quality of life, choosing a future that focused new growth in Centers and Corridors (CCs): areas destined for greater density, employment, and/or a mixture of commercial and residential activities. Certain CC zoning categories (CC1, CC2 and the optional CC3) were specifically developed to encourage growth “that promotes a relatively cohesive development pattern with a mix of uses, higher density housing, buildings oriented to the street, screened parking areas behind buildings, alternative modes of transportation with a safe pedestrian environment, quality design, smaller blocks and relatively narrow streets with on-street parking” (SMC, Section 17C.122.010).

Realizing these areas required more careful design and regulation, Initial Design Standards and Guidelines for Centers and Corridors were adopted in July 2002 after feedback from citizens, developers, architectural and planning experts. This document establishes a special set of rules and some non-binding guidelines for the development of buildings and treatment of the streetscape in CC1, CC2 and the optional CC3 zoning categories found on the City of Spokane Zoning Map.

Over the past several years, new development has increased in CC1 and CC2 zones. Some of this development (locating drive-thru lanes between the building and the street, lack of building design elements, lack of screening and transition to single-family residential areas) raises questions from citizens and Council about whether the Design Standards & Guidelines are meeting the intent of the Comp Plan for these zoning categories. There are concerns that the standards have been inconsistently applied and suggestions that some of the non-binding guidelines should become requirements to better implement the intent as described above.

Not directly addressed in these draft changes is the need for **more sub-area planning in CCs, specifically to address transitions between the more intense CC1 and CC2 zoning and single-family residential zoning**. These site-specific planning efforts were to have been done over the past 10 years, but few plans that address transition have been completed. Most of the new development in CCs is infill, so ensuring new buildings are context sensitive and complementary to existing homes and historic character is critical. Some of the draft changes touch on this need (for instance, adding new landscaping requirements to buffer higher intensity uses from lower intensity residential), but more thorough transition zones must be created or else developing CCs may negatively impact the quality of life of adjacent single family properties and surrounding neighborhood.

Purpose

The purpose of refining the design standards for CC1 and CC2 is to better implement the Comp Plan's policy intent for pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development, while understanding the need to buffer the impact of more intense development on adjacent single-family residents and the surrounding neighborhood..

Draft Changes with Policy Discussion (as of October 19, 2014)

- Page 2: "Guidelines Application"

Policy Discussion: Centers and Corridor design standards are critical to the development of mixed-use areas, which require more careful consideration of pedestrian environment and treatment of buildings. "Shall" statements are absolutely mandatory. Some of the "should" statements have been changed to "shall" throughout the document to ensure consistency of center & corridor development standards and to support the intent for a pedestrian-oriented environment.

There are other codes and ordinances beyond those in the Design Standards that apply to Center and Corridors. If there is inconsistency between two codes, the most restrictive code shall apply.

- Page 4: "Buildings Along the Street"

Policy Discussion: Changes to this section would not allow parking between buildings and the street. It would also require that 50% of the frontage of the site consist of building façades. This will ensure a livelier pedestrian environment by placing parking in the rear. And, when developing larger sites, a higher percentage of buildings will be placed on the outside rather than the rear of the site, making pedestrian access from a corridor safer and enhancing the liveliness of the street.

- Page 6: "Lighting"

Policy Discussion: This change clarifies that lighting shall be provided along sidewalks, as well as within parking lots and other walkways to contribute to the character and safety of the site.

- Page 7: "Screening and Noise Control of Service Areas"

Policy Discussion: This change mandates that loading, trash or service areas shall not face or be adjacent to any residential district to reduce the impact of these activities. These activities should happen directly behind a building and shall be appropriately screened.

- Page 10: "Pedestrian Connections in Parking Lots"

Policy Discussion: Requires a clearly marked pedestrian way from all entrances through a parking area to allow safer pedestrian entry and movement.

- Page 11: “Drive-Through Lanes”

Policy Discussion: Clarifying that any lanes serving drive-thru businesses shall not be located between the building and the adjacent street.

- Page 12: “Transition between Commercial and Residential Development”

Policy Discussion: To protect adjacent single family neighborhood quality of life, taller buildings in CC1 need to have design elements such as windows, balconies and landscaping between buildings that keep adjoining commercial activity from negatively impacting single family residents.

- Page 13: “Treatment of Blank Walls”

Policy Discussion: This change clarifies that a projecting cornice (an architectural treatment that adds character to a building) should be outward facing.

- Page 14: “Prominent Entrances”

Policy Discussion: This change requires the principal entry to a store/building to face the street to support pedestrian safety and provide a sense of place.

- Page 16: “Massing”

Policy Discussion: Buildings shall have a distinct base at the ground level and that the top of the building shall be treated with a distinct outline in order to be in scale and character with the surrounding neighborhood. Also, very large buildings should be designed to suggest a series of smaller buildings to add character and articulation

- Page 17: “Roof form”

Policy Discussion: Same as Page 13

- Page 18: “Historic Context Considerations” Intent: ...historic context within the neighborhood. Guidelines – 1.New development shall incorporate...

Policy Discussion: Our architecturally rich neighborhoods are unique. The historical quality can be preserved and enhanced by new construction that respects this heritage. This change requires that new development shall incorporate historic architectural elements as listed.