

Chapter 4 → Urban Design Element

"The general tenor of the responses indicates a strong preference to not allow low-intensity development into natural areas, resource lands or highly visible open space. On the other hand, there was sentiment against dense urban-style development in town. Resolving these apparently conflicting viewpoints will be a major challenge in the planning process" ("The Oak Harbor Urban Growth Area Report: Draft Three," Appendix: Results of Public Workshops and Community Participation, 83.)

Time and again the desire to protect the "rural feel," the small-town atmosphere, of Oak Harbor is expressed. This has already proven difficult in the face of trying to provide affordable housing, diversify the economy, and meet growth projections, while striving to avoid more intense urban-style development. It seems urban design standards could be used as an effective tool in bridging the gap between these Goals, since the nature of urban design is to address and direct the "feel" of a development project. It may be possible through urban design requirements, to retain a "rural feel" in even the densest developments. It is at this point the community should ask itself, "What do we want our community to look like; what atmosphere would we like it to project?"

In 2000 an Oak Harbor citizens' group known as Harbor Pride initiated a process focused on improving the design and function of the waterfront and "Old Town" area of the Central Business District (CBD). With assistance from the American Institute of Architects, Harbor

Pride conducted a design charrette and published the goals, findings, study area proposals and recommendations as *Harbor Pride: A Blueprint for Change*. The recommendations

from this community planning initiative are similar to those detailed in Harbor Watch a decade earlier. Because policy planning is intended to be continuous and responsive to the community and citizen initiatives, specific direction from Harbor Pride's report has been incorporated into the Goals and Policies of this element.

This section sets Goals and Policies to implement the vision of Oak Harbor. Development regulations should be consistent with the Goals and Policies.



Goal 1 - The City shall retain the appearance and character established by existing forests within and around the community.

Policies:

- I.a. Plans for new developments should include tree retention where practical, especially regarding healthy, mature trees, and replacement of those unable to be saved.

Discussion - Methods could include: an ordinance requiring a minimum percentage of vegetation be retained in new developments, encouraging developments to seek alternative siting strategies that include existing vegetation, thus providing reduced landscaping requirements for projects that preserve existing trees.

- I.b. Consideration shall be given to designating and protecting a "greenbelt" of wooded area or open land surrounding the urban growth boundary.

Discussion - The area regarded as "greenbelt" is generally within the joint city-county planning area, beyond the urban growth boundary. Greenbelt may contain forested areas, as well as large tracts of farm land which characterize rural Whidbey Island.

- I.c. A new landscaping ordinance shall be prepared which includes replacement of trees lost through land development.
- I.d. Plans for development on sites which contain significant forest areas or a portion there of shall include a forestry report to evaluate trees for retention.

Discussion - Significant forest areas generally include stands of healthy Douglas Fir/Western Hemlock forest of 3 or more acres. Maps and aerial photographs showing forest areas and viewsheds are on file at the Oak Harbor Planning Department. (Also see the Environment Element, policy 6.g)

- I.e. Priorities for tree retention and replanting should be given to buffers

along arterial streets, riparian areas and ridge lines as well as between different land uses and groupings of trees within developments and on rear lot lines.

Goal 2 - Develop design guidelines which maintain and enhance the unique character of Oak Harbor’s natural setting and existing neighborhoods and districts while ensuring new areas develop with contextual sensitivity.

Policies:

- 2.a. Architectural and landscape design standards for multi-family residential units should be established to promote developments which are compatible with existing residential patterns.
- 2.b. Existing rural features, such as farm buildings which are structures of historic or architectural significance, should be retained where possible.
- 2.c. Pedestrian facilities should be maintained and enhanced, as consistent with the Transportation Element, to promote a pedestrian-friendly character.
- 2.d. Consideration should be given to recognizing and visually expressing separate commercial and residential districts in an effort to promote a sense of community.
- 2.e. The City should identify internal “gateways” between districts and neighborhoods and draft polices to help develop these areas with appropriate way-finding and landmarking initiatives.

Discussion - By marking transition points between different areas with specific architecture, built form and public realm designs a more easily understood built environment and comfortable sense of place can be achieved. For example, specific districts such as the CBD or the waterfront could benefit from clearly defined boundaries that reinforce their unique sense of place.

The elements used to define gateways may include: landscaping, streetscape design, signage, building

scale and detailing, small parks, land use designation and public art. Areas for developing internal gateways include major street intersections, areas of change between residential and commercial districts, locations of significant topographic change, development sites at prominent street corners, and public buildings.

- 2.f. Consideration should be given to revising the sign ordinance in order to encourage signage more in keeping with the unique character of Oak Harbor.
- 2.g. Starting with the downtown waterfront area from Midway to State Route 20 and north to Barrington Avenue, the City should develop separate overlay districts for the application of unique design guidelines.

Discussion - The current commercial and industrial design guidelines are applied based upon the applicable zoning district of the project. One set of design guidelines may not be appropriate for every circumstance within that zoning district as areas with similar zoning may have different design needs. Developing design guidelines specifically for the CBD and waterfront areas would be beneficial for ensuring that new development is contextually sensitive to the city’s natural environment, neighborhoods and precincts.

- 2.h. Consideration should be given to establishing corridor specific guidelines for industrial corridors within the Enterprise Area (i.e. Oak Harbor, Goldie Roads, Gun Club Road and NE 16th Avenue). The nature of the design guidelines may vary depending upon the distance the project is located from the corridor. The guidelines should address the retention of a significant tree buffer along the identified streets.

Goal 3 - The City should adopt measures to improve urban design considerations which define the city's character.

Discussion - These measures should be created to promote high quality development and redevelopment in existing commercial areas and corridors such as CBD, the waterfront, and the Midway Boulevard corridor. These measures may include land use and design guidelines which allow for greater flexibility in uses, promote animated streets and develop pedestrian oriented districts and neighborhoods. For example: density transfers; performance based zoning; and, public realm design guidelines.

Policies:

- 3.a. The City should establish design guidelines, which strongly discourage large parking lots located at corners of arterial intersections.
- 3.b. The City should establish design standards, which promote a trend for buildings, rather than parking lots, to dominate street fronts for commercial uses coupled with effective way-finding tools such as signage and parking program requirements.

Discussion - The focus of this policy is toward pedestrian use in commercial areas and reducing the physical and visual dominance of vehicles.

- 3.c. The City should establish design guidelines with stricter landscaping requirements for parking areas located between the street and the building, such as vegetation buffers.
- 3.d. The City should establish design guidelines incorporating wooded, open, and other natural areas into development designs to promote the area's natural setting.

- 3.e. The City should adopt maintenance standards for new landscaping in developments along major corridors.
- 3.f. The City should apply strict requirements for vegetative buffers screening property lines of commercial uses adjacent to single and multiple-family residentially zoned properties.
- 3.g. The City should establish design guidelines developing mandatory architectural and site design guidelines and performance standards with which all new retail development must comply. The City shall explore a plan provisional overlay process as the implementing vehicle to this policy for new retail development that exceeds 50,000 square feet in floor area.

Goal 4 - Develop a public realm that is safe, aesthetically pleasing and interesting while promoting street life, opportunities for community interactions, and commercial and social activities.

Discussion - This goal is interrelated with the creation of guidelines for architectural design, public realm, and streetscape design.

Policies:

- 4.a. The City should develop policies to strengthen the sense of place and unique qualities of its various districts and neighborhoods.

Discussion - Policies should focus on characteristics that define a particular sense of place and support activities and uses that further strengthen those qualities. Waterfront and CBD policies should focus on improving the function of these areas as highly livable districts primarily for the community and secondarily as an attraction for visitors. It is important that these policies build upon the context of the city and not develop as artificial thematic programming. These policies may include public art plans and street furniture design guidelines that add visual and tactile interest throughout the city.

Goal 5 - Protect viewsheds and view corridors.

Discussion - The City of Oak Harbor defines viewsheds as a panoramic view from a single location. Significant viewsheds include views of Mt. Baker, Mt. Rainier, Cascade mountain range, Olympic mountain range, Oak Harbor Bay, Maylor Point (especially wooded and tidal flat areas) and Saratoga Passage. View corridors are defined as views of landmarks or landscapes that are visible along a traveled path such as a public street or trail such as SR 20, SE Pioneer Way and the waterfront trail. The view corridors and viewsheds within the City should be identified and accurately mapped at a useable scale so they can appropriately guide development.

The City conducted a scenic view study in 2014 and determined that the following view corridors are important to protect.

- *Northbound on SR 20 between SW Scenic Heights Street and SW Erie Street*
- *Southbound on SR 20 between NE 16th Avenue and Midway Boulevard*
- *SE Regatta Drive between SE 8th Street and SE 10th Street*
- *Waterfront Trail from Windjammer Park to the Oak Harbor Marina*

The protection of the scenic views identified above should be done in coordination with adjacent property owners at the time of development using the policies listed below in conjunction with the application of existing design guidelines and administrative design flexibility.

Policies:

- 5.a. Consideration of building impacts on viewsheds and view corridors shall be exercised in all developments, and mitigation measures shall be applied to protect existing views.

Discussion - The City may incorporate policies and guidelines to protect these resources, such as developing: a unified bulk program for building envelopes; performance based zoning; and, density bonuses as development incentives.

- 5.b. Landscape buffers shall be required along major arterials, retaining existing vegetation where possible.
- 5.c. Free standing business signs should be consistent with the speed limit of roadways, and the character of land use districts.
- 5.d. Developments along Oak Harbor's waterfront should enhance the area's natural and physical aesthetics.
- 5.e. Scenic transportation routes should be identified. Adjacent property owners will be encouraged to protect scenic values.
- 5.f. The City and the Navy should cooperate on the protection of viewsheds and view corridors.

Goal 6 - The redevelopment of downtown Oak Harbor shall receive continued support, consistent with the Waterfront Redevelopment, Branding and Marketing Program.

Discussion - Enhancing the pedestrian experience and improving connections and access to the waterfront from neighboring areas of the city should have the highest priority. The City may consider guidelines for: a comprehensive signage program to enhance way-finding; pedestrian oriented design elements within the public right-of-way; and, human scaled architectural detailing and building design.

Policies:

- 6.a. The historic character of downtown and Harborside Shops area should be encouraged through the establishment of design guidelines and a design review process.**

Discussion - For example design policies for the CBD should support the development of an interrelated and connected system of pedestrian walkways while maintaining other access options. Additionally they should provide a variety of pedestrian oriented commercial and cultural opportunities along the street.

- 6.b. Building heights should be coordinated in the downtown and Harborside Shops vicinity to enhance the area's view of the harbor.**

Industrial Development Design

As with commercial development, industrial activities can suffer from blight and unsightliness. However, with landscaping and architectural sensitivity to exterior design, color and materials, such activities can be attractive and complementary to the community. The use of dense, native, forest vegetation or the replanting of a variety of coniferous trees to buffer industrial facilities from neighboring land uses and right of ways can contribute significantly to improve their appearance.

Goal 7 - Establish design guidelines for industrial and business park development.

Policies:

- 7.a. Mitigate the visual and traffic impacts of industrial uses on adjacent properties and street corridors.
- 7.b. Require design standards for all development. These development standards could include:
 - 1. Retaining wooded buffers to screen adjacent non-industrial uses.
 - 2. Protecting sensitive natural areas.
 - 3. Buffering service areas, loading docks and storage yards.
 - 4. Providing generous landscaping of parking areas and buildings.

Goal 8 - Preserve, enhance, and promote significant historic and distinctive architectural features of the City.

Policies:

- 8.a. Prepare an inventory of historic structures within the UGA.
- 8.b. Establish design guidelines which protect and enhance historic features within the community. Guidelines should apply to both new construction and renovation projects in order to promote design cohesiveness. Separate street furniture and pedestrian amenity guidelines should be implemented to create a unifying element along identified street frontages.
- 8.c. Adopt historic preservation building codes and incentives to promote renovation and preservation of buildings with historic value.

Discussion - One method may be to establish a property tax structure which favors preservation of historic properties.

- 8.d. Encourage registration of inventoried historic structures as State and National Historic Sites.

Goal 9 - The City should adopt measures to enhance the entryways into Oak Harbor with early and continuous community input.

Policies:

- 9.a. The entryways into Oak Harbor should be identified in the Comprehensive Plan. The following three primary, regional entryways are identified:
1. North: Along SR-20, from Fakkema Road to approximately 1500 feet north of the SR-20/NE 16th Avenue intersection.
 2. South: Along SR-20 from Waterloo Road to the SR-20/Swantown Road intersection.
 3. East: Along Pioneer Way, from Regatta Drive to Midway Boulevard.

The following secondary, local entryways are identified: Oak Harbor Road, Goldie Road, Auvil Road, Regatta Drive, NE 16th Avenue, Swantown Road, Ft. Nugent Road, Heller Road, Crosby Road, Crescent Harbor Road, and Scenic Heights Road.

Note: The three, primary regional entryways were identified and mapped during the 1999-2000 Comprehensive Plan update process.

- 9.b. Design guidelines should be adopted that promote an aesthetically pleasing first impression of Oak Harbor and which will promote tourism. The guidelines should recognize the unique design characteristics and needs of the identified entryways. The guidelines should address various buffering techniques (vegetative or constructed) along the identified streets.
- 9.c. The design guidelines for the identified corridors should be applied outside of the UGA boundary so as to promote a cohesive corridor appearance. Applying

the guidelines in such a manner will require coordination between the City of Oak Harbor, Island County and the Navy.

Discussion - The guidelines should focus on, but not be limited to: 1) providing special setbacks, 2) providing unique landscape features, 3) the inclusion of community signage, 4) a coordination of private signage for developments occurring at or near the identified entry ways, and 5) the preservation of existing trees.

- 9.d. Form partnerships with the Navy, the Washington State Department of Transportation, Island County and other property owners to implement the entryway design guidelines.

Goal 10 - The City should engage in a community visual analysis process with early and continuous community input.

Discussion - A community visual analysis process could be used to identify the desired visual character for the community. In this process the community, through a series of public meetings, reviews examples of existing developments (usually through a series of photographic slides). These examples are reviewed in order to determine which design features may be desirable and which may be undesirable. This process is intended to help the community arrive at a common vision of which design features or characteristics are desired.

Policies:

- 10.a. Once a community visual analysis process has been undertaken, the City should revise existing design guidelines and/or adopt additional design guidelines (including supporting graphics) which implement that vision.

Goal 11- Design guidelines should be established that encourage wireless and satellite communication facilities to be located and designed in such a manner as to minimize their visual impact to the community.

Policies:

- 11.a. Consideration should be given to establishing design guidelines that address the appearance and siting of ground and building mounted satellite facilities.
- 11.b. Design guidelines should be established that require telecommunication facilities (especially monopoles) to blend into the surrounding environment.