

## DESIGN REVIEW

### I. ISSUES

- A. What types of architectural styles and finishes are desired?
- B. What standards should there be that address the size, type and style of signs and lighting?
- C. What standards should there be that address bulk, size, setbacks and height requirements for residential and commercial structures?
- D. What type of landscaping requirements should be adopted?

### II. BACKGROUND

- A. **Growth Management Act.** The Growth Management Act does not require adoption and implementation of development standards that address design. Incorporation of development standards that address such issues as lighting, building design, landscaping, signs, etc. are typically included in ordinance form as a result of ideas and thoughts expressed by the community that address concerns of how the community should look and feel. Additionally, in the case of Freeland, design standards in the Rural Center and Rural Residential zones have been established as a means of achieving the goal of preserving rural character, which is specifically set forth as a priority in the GMA. While Freeland would not normally be considered rural, it is a small urban community located in a larger rural setting.
- B. **Island County Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations.** On September 29, 1998, the BICC adopted the Island County Comprehensive Plan and implementing development regulations. Several elements within these documents have been included that address the various aspects of design. Specific aspects of design are addressed differently depending upon whether development proposals are residential or commercial. Currently, for those areas that are zoned Rural Residential, specific standards are being applied to development proposals that address signage associated with home occupations; residential lighting limitations; landscaping, design and screening guidelines related to non-residential development; setbacks and uses. In the Rural Center zone, a different, more rigorous set of criteria have been established that address these same aspects of design with additional emphasis on site coverage and intensity of use. In addition to the various aspects of design set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, Design Guidelines (Appendix C of the Zoning Ordinance) have been established to be used as examples of illustrative design guidelines that are applicable to both residential and commercial development. These illustrative examples extract the content of the code and provide sample drawings of design, landscaping, styles screening, etc.
- C. **Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board Order.** The Growth Management Hearings Board Order of June 2, 1999 (and subsequent Orders of clarification) ruled that the Freeland RAID did not comply with the Growth Management Act. Specifically, the boundaries were determined to be too large and the uses too intense. The County responded to the Order by reducing the boundaries and limiting the intensity of commercial uses. This is the only impact that Hearings Board Orders have had on design of development within Freeland.

### III. ISSUE DISCUSSION

The Freeland RAID is actually comprised of a residential RAID and a mixed use/commercial RAID. In the Rural Residential Zone, the residential component of the Freeland RAID, the allowable density is three dwelling units per acre. There is no variation in residential density within Freeland and the goals and policies that have been established to address residential development within Freeland are no different than those that are applied to all of the other areas in the County that are zoned Rural Residential. In other words, the goals, policies and regulations that have been established in the Rural Residential zone are homogeneous and are therefore applied identically throughout the entire county. Likewise, the Rural Center Zone is located in a number of geographically diverse areas throughout the County but regulated by a set of homogeneous development standards. As a result, development proposals in areas like

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Bayview, Clinton and Ken's Korner are reviewed in a like manner, offering little opportunity to foster a unique identity. Designation of Freeland as a Non-Municipal Urban Growth Area will require development of a sub-area plan that establishes unique zoning districts, goals, policies, development standards and design review criteria applicable only to development within Freeland. The following is brief discussion related to the various sub topics associated with design review.

- A. **Finishes and Style.** An important component to creating the desired appearance of a community is determining the desired types of such features as architectural styles, outside finishes, roof and siding materials and color. In determining the appropriate architectural style(s), requirements don't necessarily have to be characterized as a particular era or geographic location, rather, style can be as simple as requiring pitched roofs and gable end roofs or encouraging cupolas and bay windows. In other words, what sort of architectural features and styles will create the desired appearance? Many design regulations discourage blank walls – windows, doors, varying textured materials and landscaping can be required so as to avoid blank walls. Should all external walls be subject to this sort of requirement or just the ones that front a main road or parking lot? Are external materials that are painted/stained with natural colors preferred over bright colors or, as is the case with many older Victorian homes, i.e. Port Townsend, should color schemes that are unique be encouraged? Should pitched roofs be preferred over flat roofs?
- B. **Lighting and Signs.** Current County code limits the overall size of signs, how they are illuminated, and residential, commercial and public lighting standards. No direct light is allowed to pollute adjacent properties by spraying beyond property lines, internally illuminated signs are prohibited and the number of free standing signs within a complex is limited. Issues that need to be addressed include the height of signs, their bulk/size, how the size is calculated, whether the size of signs should be relative to speed limit, how they are illuminated, where they should be located, what type of signs shall be used when calculating the size, how many will be permitted, if off-site signs should be allowed or prohibited, when and what types of temporary or permanent signs should be allowed, the use of banners, architectural integration within the complex or project, maintenance and replacement of non-conforming signs, and numerous other issues. Lighting standards should be addressed with respect to both residential and commercial development. In the residential zones, consideration should be given towards what types of lighting should be allowed (sodium vs. mercury vapor), wattage of outdoor bulbs, controlling spray of direct light and types of street lighting. In the commercial zones, the same issues must be addressed, but additional discussion should cover times of the day when lighting shall be allowed, types of lighting fixtures, and lighting options with respect to signs (indirect, backlit, channel, etc.).
- C. **Bulk, Setbacks and Height.** The size and location of structures on the parcel should also be addressed as a mechanism for achieving the desired look and feel of the community. The amount of parking, impervious surface limitations, lot coverage ratios, public space requirements, landscaping, setbacks, etc. are all factors that will limit the degree of bulk. These types of regulatory requirements are currently in place within the County's code. Modifying these standards to achieve the goals and policies of the applicable zone would be necessary. In addition, further discussion should center on such concepts as the orientation of buildings to streets, paths, sidewalks and other structures, square footage limitations for specific uses, maximum square footage for each building, square footage limitations with respect to size of parcel, maximum number of buildings allowed on a parcel, etc. Special attention should be given to setbacks and what a setback intends to achieve. Setbacks can be established for minimums and maximums. It may be desirable in a commercial zone that is trying to foster a community or village feel to establish a maximum setback so that commercial structures are up close to the street. This sort of concept also has the effect of displacing parking to streets or the rear of buildings.
- D. **Landscaping.** Landscaping is an effective tool used to soften the appearance of the built environment. It is not generally considered a means of screening or hiding buildings, rather as a means of improving the aesthetic character of the built environment. If installed and maintained properly, landscaping will cover blank walls on buildings, soften the concrete appearance of parking lots, streets and sidewalks, create transitions and separations between uses, and improve the aesthetic quality of pedestrian walkways, among other things. The type of landscaping, including specific types of trees and shrubs, can be very helpful in achieving an effective landscape plan. For example, the visibility of each business is essential to their economic viability. For this reason, the type of tree that is located in front of the business along a street should not be one that will eventually hide the building.

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An alternative would be to identify trees that do not have branches on the lower portion of the tree trunk so that the business is still visible to pedestrians and automobiles, and the trees form a high canopy.

### IV. OPTIONS

#### A. Finishes and Styles

1. Determine traditional architectural styles that are associated with era or location, i.e. Victorian, Queen Anne, New England.
2. Identify particular architectural features that are desired, i.e. cupolas, bay windows, gable end roofs, awnings.
3. Identify exterior finishes that are desired and those that should be discouraged, i.e. wood, stucco, brick. Identify colors that are desirable and those that should be discouraged. Encourage a mix of textures on the face of buildings.

#### B. Lighting and Signs.

1. Determine the type of light that is desired. For both residential and commercial buildings, a softer light such as that which is emitted by sodium light bulbs may be preferred over mercury vapor which emits a brighter bluish light. Other types of bulbs include high intensity bulbs such as metal halide, high pressure sodium, low pressure sodium, flood lamps, neon and fluorescent. Standards may be different for residential than those that are established for commercial.
2. Determine appropriate wattage of bulbs. Again, it may be appropriate to establish different standards from commercial and residential. Currently, the Island County Code prohibits outdoor light bulbs that exceed 60 watts that are associated with residential uses. Further consideration should be given to how light is shielded or screened so as to eliminate spray of indirect light on neighboring properties. It may be appropriate to apply this standard differently in a residential neighborhood as opposed to downtown Freeland.
3. Determine the type of lighting that is appropriate for signage, i.e. box lights, channel lighting, backlit, indirect, neon. Are there appropriate hours where a business should be required to dim some or all of their signs and lights? If a new lighting ordinance is implemented in Freeland, how long before and under what circumstances should non-conforming lights be required to retrofit to a conforming standard?
4. What type of signs should be encouraged? There are many different types of signs, monument signs, freestanding signs, pole signs, A-frame signs, banners, letters on the building façade, flashing signs, moving signs, etc. What are the appropriate height limits of each type of sign?
5. How much square footage should a business be allowed for signage? Should there be a standard for the total square footage that is allowed per business as well as a standard for square footage per sign (businesses often desire more than one sign)? Square footage can also be calculated relative to the speed limit of the road upon which the business is located. The purpose of this type of standard is to allow businesses located along a highway to have more signage because automobiles are moving at higher speeds and the sign and business are typically located further from this type of road as opposed to a much smaller interior road where cars are moving slowly and are much closer to the sign and/or business. How should square footage be calculated? Should both sides of a sign be calculated into the total or should it just be the area of the billboard area?
6. What types of features should be considered exempt from calculating signage, i.e. open/closed sign, neon beer signs, enter and exit signs, time and temperature signs?
7. How long before and under what circumstances should non-conforming signs be required to retrofit to a conforming standard? Should there be an amortization period that requires all signs be retrofitted or replaced within a certain time frame? Should retrofitting and replacement take place when a new business occupies the

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space? Should it take place when business owners make application to the County for a permit that requires modification to the sign?

8. How to encourage architectural and aesthetic integration of signs into the complex and community. It may be appropriate to locate signs and design signs such that they contribute to the desired look and feel of the area by landscaping around the sign, prohibiting bright colors and flashing lights, encourage indirect lighting of some or all types of signs in specific zones with landscaping that hides the light fixture (an example of indirect lighting would be lights that are on the ground and shine up upon the face of the sign)?

### C. Bulk, Setbacks and Height.

1. Determining the appropriate scale of bulk is an essential component of achieving the desired goal. There are factors other than limiting the size and square footage of buildings that will automatically limit the bulk aspect of site development. These include the amount of landscaping required, the amount of open space or community space, setback requirements, buffers from critical areas, parking requirements, etc. Other techniques that can be established include creating a lot coverage ratio, height limitations, encourage varying heights of buildings within a complex, eliminating blank external walls and requiring pitched roofs. Requiring a limitation on the size of each building, in addition to the total square footage allowed relative to the size of the parcel, can be an effective way to achieve a mix of clustered smaller buildings rather than having one large structure.
2. Minimum and maximum setbacks can be used to improve aesthetic and functional goals of the particular zone. Requiring a maximum setback from road in a mixed use zone or a village zone will create a more compact neighborhood and encourage pedestrian traffic. Buildings with street level store fronts will benefit from close proximity to a road and sidewalk. Many village type settings have maximum setbacks of 15 or 20 feet which allows just enough space in between the road and the building for sidewalks, benches, street trees and lighting. Minimum setbacks may be appropriate for use located along the highway. A greater distance from the highway will allow for tree buffers that will cut down on noise and visual impacts, they will allow for some highway expansion that may be necessary in the future, and can be beneficial to commercial uses that support highway traffic by allowing improved circulation for those uses and easy ingress and egress for traffic on and off the highway.
3. Establishing a height limitation for each zone will preclude visual obstructions, limit bulk and allow for consistent and harmonious development within a community. Two story height limitations in commercial and village business zones have been effective at allowing a good mix of street level commercial use and second story residential and office uses while allowing good solar access to downtown core streets. It may be appropriate in multi-family or mixed use zones to allow three and four story structures in order to achieve the desired density and achieve a compact urbanized area rather than a more sprawling, geographically larger area.

### D. Landscaping.

1. As stated above, in most cases, landscaping should be used as a means of improving and accentuating the overall aesthetic quality of development rather than being considered as a way of hiding or screening development. However, there are circumstances where the use of landscaping can and possibly should be used as a way of screening a development, i.e. industrial warehouses or junkyards. Native vegetation should be retained to the extent possible and used in combination with newly installed landscaping. Native vegetation, especially mature trees, can be used as a means of preserving viewsapes from the highway. Native vegetation will soften the bulk of new development by minimizing its visual impact. The same buildings will appear much larger if all of the mature trees are removed from the site than if at least a couple are kept. These larger trees can make buildings seem smaller because of the relatively large size of the trees. Mature trees will also offer an easier transition from one use to another.
2. Goals should be established for the number and type of trees that are desired along streetscapes.

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3. Goals should be established for the number and type of trees/bushes that should be required in parking lots. A common approach is to establish a number of internal planters and/or islands required per a specified number of parking spaces or square feet of impervious parking surface.
4. There may be locations where it is appropriate to require landscaped berms along roadways as a separation device between roads and structures. Typically, this type of feature would separate high speed, high use roads from pedestrian friendly areas, where a separation would benefit as a visual buffer, noise buffer and safety buffer.