

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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|---|--|---|-------------|
| Meeting Date | | Staff Contact | |
| 6/18/2009 | | TARA SUNDIN | |
| Subject: | | | |
| A public hearing to consider amendments to BMC 20.25 to establish design standards and a review process for projects developed within urban villages. | | | |
| Attachments: | | | |
| 1. Proposal: Urban Village Design Guidelines and Standards | | | |
| 2. Draft Planning Commission Findings and Conclusions | | | |
| 3. SEPA Determination of Non-Significance | | | |
| 4. Draft Ordinance | | | |
| 5. | | | |
| Meeting Type | | Category | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public Hearing | | <input type="checkbox"/> Legislative | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Meeting | | <input type="checkbox"/> Quasi-judicial | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work Session | | <input type="checkbox"/> Information Only | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Briefing | | | |
| Clearances | | Initials | Date |
| Tim Stewart, Director | | | |
| Alan Marriner, Legal | | | |
| | | | |
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| Previous Commission Meeting or Action: | | | |
| None | | | |
| Recommended Action: | | | |
| Move to adopt the Draft Planning Commission Findings of Fact, Conclusions and Recommendations. | | | |

PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Agenda Topic: Urban Village Design Guidelines and Standards

Date: June 18, 2009

Staff Contact: Tara Sundin, Special Projects Manager

I. Project Summary

This proposal creates new guidelines and standards to facilitate and promote high quality pedestrian friendly development of urban villages in the City of Bellingham. The proposal, see **Attachment 1**, recommends the following actions to accomplish this goal:

- A. Adoption of revisions to **BMC 20.25.020 Applicability** to establish development thresholds for urban village design review by the Design Review Board and to clarify that multi-family design review does not apply to projects that are using urban village guidelines and standards;
- B. Adoption of revisions to **BMC 20.25.040 Decision Criteria** to establish decision criteria for urban village design, and
- C. Adoption of **20.25.070 Urban Village Design** to establish:
 - a. design departure requirements; and
 - b. design guidelines and standards;

II. Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies

The Comprehensive Plan states that the City should accommodate anticipated population growth primarily through the creation of a series of urban villages. Generally, an urban village is an area that:

- Contains a mix of commercial, residential, and service uses;
- Provides amenities and necessities within walking distance;
- Is designed for pedestrians, bikes, and transit, as well as the automobile;
- Facilitates strong community connections and interaction by serving as a neighborhood focal point and providing active public spaces; and
- Promotes sustainability and quality design.

The Comprehensive Plan's Community Design goals and policies related to urban villages are as follows:

- Promote improvement in the quality of public, residential, commercial and industrial development and maintain a high quality environment by ensuring new construction and site development meets high standards (CDG-1);
- Allow for growth and diversity through standards that are adaptable to a variety of situations (CDG-3);

- Successfully integrate mixed use development within four types of urban villages, identified in the Land Use chapter, providing residents with shopping and employment within walking distance (CDG-4);
- Neighborhood and pocket urban villages are accessed by pedestrian scale streets that may include narrow pavement widths, on-street parking, landscaping strips, setback sidewalks, buildings close to the street, and parking in the side and/or rear yards (CDG-20);
- Buildings in transition areas between residential and non-residential should consider the context of both areas (CDP-1); and
- Areas with linear, sprawling commercial land uses along arterial streets that require driving from one business to another should be redeveloped over time into compact areas or nodes, in which many businesses can be easily accessed by pedestrians and transit (CDP-14).

III. Role of the Planning Commission

The above actions require a legislative (Type VI) review process established under BMC 21.10.150. Planning Commission is responsible for holding a public hearing, issuing findings of fact and conclusions, and making a recommendation to the City Council. Draft findings of fact, conclusions and recommendations are provided in **Attachment 2**. The Planning Commission should adopt or modify these draft findings as necessary to support their final recommendations.

IV. Project Background

Design guidelines and standards are a critical component to insuring urban villages are built the way they are envisioned. Great streets, sidewalks, and public spaces create an environment where people feel comfortable walking, visiting and living – a basic requirement of a successful urban village. Equally important is the interface between the public realm and the built environment – quality construction and design details, transparency, human-scale, cleanliness and greenery all contribute to a positive pedestrian experience.

The Old Town Urban Village plan and development regulations were adopted March 2008. Because Old Town was within the City Center Design Review District boundary, those existing guidelines and standards were applied. Currently, the City does not have design guidelines or standards that would apply to commercial construction within the proposed Samish Way Urban Village. Rather than creating different design standards for each urban village, we are proposing the creation of one set of design standards which will apply to Samish Way and future urban villages.

The guidelines and standards do not set a particular style of architecture or design theme. Rather, they are focused on creating a pedestrian experience that is safe, inviting, comfortable and attractive for all urban villages. They are intended to support the creation of a high quality environment by ensuring new construction and site development meets high standards enhancing the character of the neighborhood and

the City as a whole. Many of the proposed guidelines and standards were taken, as appropriate, from the City's existing Multi-family Residential and City Center Design standards. The proposed standards allow for diversity and growth through flexible guidelines that are adaptable to a variety of situations. If a special standard is warranted for a particular urban village, a standard will be incorporated into the development regulations for that particular village and reviewed concurrently under this Design Review process.

V. Public Comment

Staff will document comments received before and at the public hearing scheduled for June 18 on a comment tracker for use at the Planning Commission worksession scheduled for July 9.

The proposal to develop a set of standards and guidelines for urban villages along with many of the specific standards included in the proposal was presented to stakeholders during the Samish Way Urban Village public process and more recently to the stakeholders during the Fountain District public process. Creation of design standards and a review process was raised as a critical element by stakeholders, particularly nearby residents.

The proposed guidelines and standards were also presented to the City's Design Review Board and their recommended revisions are incorporated into the proposal.

VI. Key Issues

- a. Establishing design guidelines and a review process;
- b. Establishing appropriate transitions from the urban village to the existing neighborhoods; and
- c. Emphasizing pedestrian orientation, pedestrian scale and quality building design.

VII. Analysis

(1) *Is the proposed amendment to the plan supported by or consistent with the existing goals and policies of the comprehensive plan and the State Growth Management Act?*

Yes, the proposed amendments comply with the State Growth Management Act and the City's Comprehensive Plan. See Section II.

(2) *How does the proposed amendment address the issues identified in Section VI?*

- a. The proposal requires projects that meet a certain threshold go through a design review process and be reviewed by the City's Design Review Board.

This body is comprised of three professionals in the design field and two members of the community.

- b. Many issues regarding transition from a urban village commercial core to a residential area are addressed by height limits and allowed uses, which are regulated by the individual urban village development regulations. However, this proposal includes a design standard to require a minimum building set back of 15 feet from the adjacent residential property line and require an upper story setback for buildings higher than 2 stories and 30 feet.
- c. The majority of the proposed design guidelines and standards proposed address issues concerning pedestrian orientation, scale and quality building by:
 - i. Minimizing impacts of the vehicle on the pedestrian environment;
 - ii. Creating a network of pedestrian linkages;
 - iii. Creating a variety of building designs;
 - iv. Reducing the mass and bulk of buildings;
 - v. Creating ground-floor visual interest and transparency;
 - vi. Utilizing high quality materials; and
 - vii. Providing weather protection.

(3) What effect will the proposal have?

This proposal should have a positive impact on the development of quality urban villages. It is critical to have minimum design guidelines and standards in place to guide development away from auto-orientation to pedestrian-orientation. There are currently no design guidelines for commercial development in many urban village locations. Additional staff and Design Review Board time will be required to administer design review for projects within urban village boundaries.

(4) Are there alternatives to staff's proposal?

A no-action alternative would leave no guarantee that the form envisioned for urban villages, such as pedestrian orientation, would be achieved.

VIII. SEPA Environmental Review

A Determination of Non-Significance was issued on May 20, 2009 and is provided in **Attachment 3**.

IX. Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends Planning Commission move to adopt Findings of Fact, Conclusions and Recommendations as shown in **Attachment 2**.