

Urban Design Element

Background and Analysis

Purpose and Relationship to GMA

Urban design is defined as that branch of planning which is primarily concerned with the functional and visual relationships between people and their physical environment, and the ways in which those relationships can be improved. Urban design is not a required element under the Growth Management Act, but it is an important concept that contributes directly to the community's quality of life and the achievement of the GMA's planning goals.

Urban design has three distinct components, which vary in scale. These are described below.

Urban spatial structure

This is urban design on a large, or macro, scale. It involves the deliberate distribution, scaling, and combination or separation of land uses to create an integrated whole which defines the form of the community. For example, it involves locating, linking and defining roles for activity centers, open spaces or major transportation corridors.

Urban beautification

This is urban design on a medium scale. This involves the landscaping or beautification of public and private areas of the City and the defining of the relationship between the physical location of different uses and the placement of buildings.

Urban decoration

This is urban design on a small, or micro scale. It involves projects such as the choice of street furniture or colored and textured pavers to decorate an area such as Main Street. Like urban beautification, many of the decorating activities carried out in the renovation of areas such as Bothell's Main Street are thought of as being urban design, but in reality they are simply the micro component of the overall urban design concept.

Although the City at present has no formal design review board which oversees and implements a formal design review process, the City conducts design review in conjunction with any application for permit review. Currently, building and site design standards are regulated within the Bothell Municipal Code. The regulations contain standards for, building design, setbacks, building placement, impervious coverage allotments, critical areas protection and preservation, and natural vegetation retention. These standards all contribute to the design of individual projects and to the overall design of the community. The City's role in urban design is a large and important one since the public sector has traditionally had responsibility for the open space, transportation, utilities, and permitting portions of planning. By the same token, the concept of overall design control on a large (i.e. "citywide") scale is best overseen by the public sector.

It is anticipated that in the future the role played by the City in urban design will continue to gain in importance. As the City grows and strives to meet the requirements of the Growth Management Act; as the amount of land within urban areas available for development dwindles; as mixed uses and other creative approaches to land use within urban areas become more viable; as the transportation system becomes increasingly burdened; and as environmental issues come increasingly to the forefront, urban design that strives to integrate individual developments into a coherent whole and achieve harmony between the built and natural environments will become increasingly critical to helping maintain the quality of life that the people of Bothell have come to expect.

Planning Area Profile

When drafted in 1971, Bothell's Comprehensive Plan concentrated on three specific areas with regard to urban design within the City: the Central Business District (CBD), signs, and lighting. Bothell first became heavily involved in urban design issues with the creation of the North Creek Valley Plan in 1979 which sought to define community goals and policies for the development of the North Creek Valley and the surrounding hillsides. The overall general goals for the North Creek Valley Plan recognized the role that urban design plays in shaping the form and content of the environment:

“Recognize the North Creek Valley as a unique resource suitable for a multiplicity of uses by providing for a variety of uses which will be compatible with each other and the setting...”

Specific standards for architectural features, landscaping, signage, parking and streets were developed which defined the appearance of the valley as it developed and its overall form.

A 1985 amendment to the Comprehensive Plan implemented urban design concepts recommended for Main Street within an Urban Land Institute (ULI) study conducted in 1984; As a result of this 1985 amendment, Main Street was reconfigured and landscaped to create a more pleasing pedestrian environment.

The 1992 annexation of Canyon Park created a substantial urban design challenge: how to visually and functionally integrate North Bothell and South Bothell so as to create the perception and feeling of one community, while respecting and, where possible, enhancing the unique identities and characters of individual residential and business areas throughout the City.

The growth the community has experienced, and is expected to continue to experience, makes the careful review of the three urban design elements discussed above increasingly important to the community. Policies and actions in the Land Use, Natural Environment and Economic Development Elements of the Comprehensive Plan with regard to activity centers, open space corridors and the Bothell Business Loop, for examples, relate directly to the goals, policies and actions incorporated in this Urban Design Element. The following goals, policies and actions address the concerns in detail and many illustrations of design concepts are provided.

Development of Goals, Policies and Actions

The following Goals, Policies, and Actions were developed from a collaborative effort of the City Council, Planning Commission, public, and a professional architectural and urban design consulting firm. Illustrations for this Element were also taken from [A Guide to Land Use and Public Transportation](#), published by the Snohomish County Transportation Authority, and the [Residential Development Handbook for Snohomish County Communities](#), Appendices G and H, respectively, of

this Comprehensive Plan. The policies within this element were further refined during the major update of the plan which occurred in 2001 - 2004.

Urban Design Goals, Policies and Actions

Goals

- UD-G1 To achieve a sense of harmony among the built, natural and cultural environments through the application of design principles to individual buildings, residential, commercial, and industrial districts, and the City as a whole.
- UD-G2 To establish and foster a sense of community pride and identity.
- UD-G3 To reduce dependence on the automobile through building, site and district design which promotes pedestrian, bicycle, and transit usage.
- UD-G4 To ensure that new development is of high quality, on a human scale, and compatible with its surroundings.
- UD-G5 To visually integrate the various residential, commercial and industrial areas of the City.

Policies

- UD-P1 Improve selected arterials within the Planning Area as landscaped boulevards to visually integrate the community and provide a pleasant driving, transit-riding, bicycling and walking experience along arterials. This system of boulevards should consist of features including the following:
- Landscaped medians and a street tree planting scheme;
 - Transit pullouts and architecturally designed shelters;
 - Bikeways;
 - Meandering walkways and special pavement treatment at crosswalks;
 - Noise attenuation walls where appropriate;
 - Special landscaping treatments at gateways to the City, including “Welcome to Bothell” signs, possibly incorporating electronic message displays to announce City activities.
 - Special sidewalk, street furniture, street trees, light fixtures, and other design features should be created for boulevards within community activity centers.

Figure UD-1 depicts the proposed designation of arterials which would comprise the boulevard system. **Figures UD-2 through UD-5** depict proposed boulevard improvements for selected locations within the system.

UD-P2 Promote site design features in Bothell's community and regional activity centers and other residential, commercial and industrial areas which encourage transit, pedestrian and bicycle mobility. Examples of such features are depicted in the following referenced figures:

- Small apartment complexes, **Figure UD-6**;
- Large apartment complexes, **Figure UD-7**;
- Office buildings, **Figure UD-8**;
- Office / industrial parks, **Figure UD-9**;
- Shopping centers, **Figure UD-10**;
- Park and Ride lots, **Figure UD-11**.

(**Figures UD-6 through UD-11** are from A Guide to Land Use and Public Transportation, published by SNO-TRAN, the Snohomish County Transportation Authority.)

UD-P3 Pedestrian linkages between major activity areas should be provided across built features that act as barriers to safe and easy access. For example, a safe and accessible pedestrian linkage should be provided between the downtown/Main Street retail activity area, and the riverfront activity area and the Cascadia Community College / University of Washington, Bothell campus.

Examples of alternative approaches to covering a portion of SR 522 in order to better link Downtown and the Sammamish River are provided in **Figures UD-12, UD-13 and UD-14**.

Policies UD-P4 through UD-P42 are derived from the Residential Development Handbook for Snohomish County Communities, a publication jointly funded by Snohomish County and several Snohomish County cities, including Bothell. This publication is incorporated as **Appendix H** of the Comprehensive Plan. Reference is made in the policies below to specific pages in the Handbook which expand upon and illustrate the policies. It is intended that copies of the Handbook be made available to prospective developers to assist with building and site design consistent with these policies.

Community Policies

UD-P4 Activity centers within Bothell should have a community focal place for public interaction. A focal place may be a park, plaza, shopping street or other feature which invites interaction. The focal place should accommodate transit service and be linked to residential areas via pedestrian and bicycle facilities. See **Pages G-20 and G-21 in Appendix H**.

UD-P5 Provide for pedestrian-oriented mixed use neighborhood villages where appropriate within the Planning Area to promote a sense of community to residential areas and reduce the number and length of limited item convenience shopping trips by automobile. See **page G-22 in Appendix H**. See also Economic Development Element.

UD-P6 Develop a variety of active and passive parks and open spaces accessible to all residents of the community. These facilities may be developed by the City or by private developers in conjunction with a residential, commercial or industrial development.

See **pages G-24 through G-30 in Appendix H**. See also Parks and Recreation Element.

- UD-P7 Retain existing natural features such as steep slopes, wetlands, streams, and mature wooded areas as ~~community~~ open space. See **page G-31 in Appendix H**. See also Natural Environment and Land Use Element.
- UD-P8 Provide convenient pedestrian pathways connecting residences with parks and recreation facilities, transit, shopping and services, other residential areas or subdivisions, and places of employment. Landscaping, lighting, and pedestrian furniture such as benches and trash cans should be incorporated into the design of such pathways. Sidewalks along streets should be separated from the street by landscaping. See **pages G-33 through G-35 in Appendix H**. See also Transportation Element.
- UD-P9 Provide convenient bicycle pathways or routes connecting residential areas with parks and recreation facilities, transit, shopping and services, and places of employment, and connecting City streets with the regional road network to facilitate commuting. See **page G-36 in Appendix H**. See also Transportation Element.
- UD-P10 Due to the difficult topography within Bothell's neighborhoods and the reality that a grid system within Bothell's residential neighborhoods encourages cut-through traffic, it is the policy of the City of Bothell that the residential street pattern shall not emphasize a grid or connected network of streets that would promote neighborhood cut-through traffic, but should accommodate non-motorized connections and emergency and life safety access.
- UD-P11 It is the policy of the City of Bothell to support a connected network of streets within Bothell's community activity centers and other commercial areas so long as these connections do not encourage or promote residential neighborhood cut-through traffic.
- UD-P12 Where the Right-of-Way allows, provide street trees on both sides of all streets. Develop street tree plans for activity centers to visually unify and define the boundaries of such centers. Refine the street tree plan for the boulevard system. Select tree species which are appropriate for their designated locations, taking into consideration factors including but not limited to clearance under aerial wires and proximity of underground utilities and sidewalks. See **pages G-43 and G-44 in Appendix H**.
- UD-P13 Promote transit usage in road improvements through provision for bus pullouts and attractive and inviting shelters. See **page G-49 in Appendix H**.
- UD-P14 Promote the design and installation of subarea or neighborhood signage, where desired by residents and/or business owners, to foster a sense of identity and pride in residential and/or commercial areas.
- UD-P15 Ensure that development on hillsides blends visually and functionally into the natural environment to the maximum extent possible.

Streetscape

- UD-P16 New development should accommodate human activity by providing balconies, terraces and yards for residents' use. Entrances, porches, balconies, decks and seating should be located to promote pedestrian use of the street edge by providing weather protection, security and safety. See **page G-65 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P17 Provide clearly marked pedestrian entries from the street. Parking garage and parking lot entries should be physically separated from the pedestrian entry and should be designed to complement rather than subordinate the pedestrian entry. See **page G-66 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P18 Buildings should not orient large areas of blank walls to the street. Blank walls should be screened with landscaping such as vine-covered trellises and planting beds, architectural features such as decorative tile or masonry, or art such as murals or bas-relief sculptures. See **page G-67 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P19 Retaining walls and exposed foundations should be either of materials which reduce their scale, such as brick or stone, or treated sculpturally to appear less monolithic. High retaining walls should be terraced down and incorporate hanging or climbing vegetation. In hillside development, retaining walls and high foundations on the underside of buildings shall be screened with vegetation. See **page G-68 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P20 Service facilities such as dumpsters, electrical meters and mechanical equipment should not face the street. Dumpsters should be screened with a durable and attractive structure. Gutters and downspouts should be visually integrated into the design of the building. See **page G-69 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P21 All parking lots and storage, loading or maintenance areas within visual proximity of a public sidewalk should be screened from the sidewalk by one or a combination of the following methods:
- A screen wall at least two and one-half feet high, of durable and attractive materials, incorporating a continuous trellis or grillwork with climbing plants;
 - A perimeter planting bed containing a hedge and trees.
- See **page G-70 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P22 Parking garages should be architecturally compatible with the remainder of the building. Parking garages located within a community activity center having frontage on a street should have the street level floor devoted to retail or office uses. Parking garages outside community activity centers having frontage on a street should be screened with landscaping, berming and/or grillwork, subject to maintaining adequate sight lines for the safety of pedestrians and motorists. See **page G-71 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P23 Within and around activity centers, provide pedestrian scale lighting. Lighted bollards should be used to illuminate paths and walkways. Provide indirect light to the sidewalk by lighting elements in the street environment such as trees, walkways, canopies and entryways. See **page G-74 in Appendix H.**

- UD-P24 Exterior lighting should be an integral part of the architectural and landscape design of any project. Fixture style and design should be compatible with the building design, while providing appropriate and safe levels of lighting. See **page G-74 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P25 Infill development on existing streets should enhance and preserve the distinctive and positive qualities of the streetscape, through such measures as matching or complementary landscaping designs and materials, construction materials, colors, textures or elements, and lighting fixtures. See **page G-75 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P26 Integrate trees and planting beds within parking areas. Indigenous varieties of plant species are recommended, particularly those that minimize water and maintenance requirements. See **page G-76 in Appendix H.**

Site Planning

- UD-P27 Buildings should be sited to acknowledge and reinforce the existing characteristics of the street. In established neighborhoods new buildings should be set back from the street approximately the same distance as neighboring buildings. However, where protection of existing trees or other natural features or preservation of views is desired, varying street setbacks may be appropriate. See **pages G-34 and G-81 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P28 Where appropriate, buildings should provide a front face to the street, and building facades should relate to the street. The main approach to any residential building should not be off a parking lot. Provide clear pedestrian entries to buildings from the street and not just from adjacent parking lots. Compose architectural elements to add interest to the building facade. Provide a transition from the public realm of the street to the private realm of the residence. Such a transition could be a well landscaped front yard, a low fence or wall, a courtyard, or other device that provides privacy but visibility from the street. See **page G-82 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P29 Within the context of higher density, mixed residential and commercial zones, residential and mixed-use buildings should be sited to orient to the street and respect adjacent residential properties. Careful siting should focus views towards private courtyards or gardens, and limit parking lots. Structured parking is encouraged to reduce the impact of cars and parking lots. Mixed-use development should provide clear pedestrian circulation routes connecting residences and parking to adjoining uses and services. See **pages G-83 through G-84 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P30 Buildings which project beyond the homes on adjacent lots should be carefully designed to minimize their impacts on privacy and solar access. See **page G-85 in Appendix H.**
- UD-P31 Parking, except on the street edge, should not be located between buildings and the street, particularly where residential structures are concerned. Surface parking which cannot be located to the rear of the development should be located to the side if screened from adjacent residences. Provide a screening wall of solid and attractive materials enhanced by landscaping to buffer the visual and audible impacts of automobiles. The height of the screen should be sufficient to prevent direct views from the parking lot into the first floor of residential units on adjacent lots and block headlights. Provide trees, trellises or other coverings which reduce the views of parking lots from neighboring homes. Locate and aim parking lot and other site lighting

so that it does not cause glare and intrusive light patterns into neighboring residential properties. See **page G-86 in Appendix H**.

UD-P32 Organize and site multi-family residential buildings to create usable open space by utilizing one or more of the following: well landscaped courtyards; individual outdoor spaces for all ground floor units; rooftop decks, balconies, and well defined patios; play areas for children, located away from parking lots and the street edge; group or individual garden plots for residents' use; other similar outdoor open spaces. Open space should be large enough to accommodate human activity and seating. Balconies should generally be at least six feet deep. Orient outdoor spaces to receive sunlight. Provide paths, site furniture, lighting and other elements which will make outdoor spaces more enjoyable and better used. See **pages G-87 and G-88 in Appendix H**.

UD-P33 Consider adoption of an ordinance relating to the protection of significant trees. The purpose of such an ordinance would be to:

- retain the positive visual character of the landscape;
- preserve and enhance the city's physical and aesthetic character;
- minimize surface water runoff, prevent erosion and reduce the risk of landslides.

UD-P34 Encourage transit use by making transit more convenient and by ensuring that transit and bus shelters are integrated compatibly into the neighborhood. Reference is made to A Guide to Land Use and Public Transportation and to **pages G-96 and G-97 in Appendix H**.

Building Design

UD-P35 The design of a building, its location on the site, and its layout should respond to specific site conditions. Site characteristics to consider in the design of a building include the following:

Topography

Reflect natural topography rather than obscure it. For example, buildings should be designed to step up hillsides to accommodate significant changes in elevation.

Where neighboring buildings have responded to similar topographic conditions on their sites in a consistent and positive way, consider similar treatment for the new building.

Designing the building in relation to topography may help to reduce the visibility of parking garages.

Solar Orientation

The design of a structure and its massing on the site should enhance solar exposure for new development and minimize impacts on adjacent structures and public areas to the maximum extent possible.

Corner Lot

Building design can accent the corner at an intersection of streets with a change of building wall plane and roofline.

Site Size and Configuration

On small, narrow sites or sites with frontage on narrow streets, massing and design should help minimize the perception of building bulk, minimize impacts on adjacent development and enhance conditions for on-site open space.

Natural Features

Reflect natural features such as views, stands of trees, and open space by providing views and pedestrian access to these amenities.

Pedestrian Oriented Shopping Streets

Reinforce the streetscape within commercial areas with shops at ground level and pedestrian amenities. Within community activity centers, include wide sidewalks, street trees within tree grates, street furniture, special lighting standards, and other pedestrian amenities. Pedestrian oriented streets can be private streets within shopping centers. See pages G-20-22 and G-34 in Appendix H.

Existing Structures on the Site

Where a new site shares a site with an existing structure or is a major addition to an existing structure, designing the new structure to be compatible with the existing structure will help it fit in.

See pages G-101 and G-102 in Appendix H.

UD-P36

Unless there is an overriding concern or a poorly defined context, new buildings should reflect the architectural character of surrounding buildings in some of the following ways:

- similar unifying concept;
- similar proportions, scale, and roof line;
- similar architectural style, and exterior finish materials;
- similar patterns and proportions of windows;
- similar entry configuration and relationship to the street;
- similar architectural details or features.

See pages G-105, G-106 and G-107 in Appendix H.

- UD-P37 Use modulation and articulation in a clear rhythm to reduce the perceived size of all large buildings. See **pages G-108 and G-109 in Appendix H** for specific details regarding these architectural techniques.
- UD-P38 Buildings should be designed and built with a sensitivity to the architectural scale of adjacent buildings. See **pages G-110 and G-111 in Appendix H**.
- UD-P39 Consideration should be given to the design of a building's roofline. Where practical, the design of the roof should employ at least one of the following:
- gable, gambrel, or hipped roof;
 - prominent cornice or fascia that emphasizes the top of the building;
 - other roof elements that emphasize a building's concept and help it to fit in with its context.
- No roof mounted mechanical equipment should be visible from the sidewalk or roadway of the adjacent street. See **page G-112 in Appendix H**.
- UD-P40 All buildings should incorporate well proportioned architectural features, elements and details to achieve good human scale. See **pages G-113 and G-114 in Appendix H**.
- UD-P41 Building exteriors should be constructed of durable and easily maintainable materials that are attractive at close distances. Materials that have an attractive texture, pattern or quality of detailing are encouraged. Siding should reflect in texture and color typical Northwest building patterns like wood siding and shingles, brick, stone and terra-cotta tile. Metal siding should have visible corner moldings and trim, and should have a matte finish and a neutral earth tone color. Metal roofing colors should be subdued. Reflective glass is discouraged in a residential or pedestrian oriented streetscape. Concrete walls should be enhanced by texturing, coloring with a concrete coating or admixture, or by incorporating embossed or sculpted surfaces, mosaics or artwork. Concrete block walls should be enhanced with textured blocks and colored mortar, decorative bond pattern and/or incorporating other masonry materials. Stucco and other trowel finishes should be trimmed in wood or masonry and should be sheltered from extreme weather by roof overhangs or other methods. See **pages G-118 and G-119 in Appendix H**.
- UD-P42 Signage on commercial, retail, and industrial buildings should be the minimum necessary to indicate the presence and function of the business. Signage design and placement should follow the general guidelines depicted in **Figure UD-17**. Signs that incorporate moving or flashing elements are discouraged, as are portable "marquee" type signs. The size, scale, and amount of signage should be compatible to the mass and scale of the building and its associated architectural features.

Actions

- UD-A1 Develop regulations where appropriate to implement the policies of this element.
- UD-A2 Provide these policies and **Appendix H** to developers to assist them with project design.

- UD-A3 Identify one or more potential “catalyst projects” that may stimulate quality development of the surrounding area and investigate ways the City can promote or encourage their development.
- UD-A4 Identify the location of prime entry points (gateways) within the Planning Area and construct entry signage and landscaping.
- UD-A5 As part of the Subarea plan update process, consider installation of Subarea entry signs, where desired by area residents, and adoption of a unifying design theme for street facilities such as lighting, benches, manhole covers, and kiosks to help foster a sense of neighborhood or community identity.
- UD-A6 Research and consider the adoption of a significant tree ordinance.
- UD-A7 Work with the business community and residents to ensure the effectiveness of the current City sign regulations and update the regulations as necessary to address conflicts or problems with sign code enforcement.
- UD-A8 Explore methods for encouraging or requiring incorporation of public art in developments.

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