

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UPGRADING DOWNTOWN OLYMPIA'S DESIGN GUIDELINES AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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This paper examines the current design guideline sections applicable to Olympia's Downtown and includes preliminary recommendations for preparing a new set of guidelines that integrates and addresses the topics necessary to implement the Downtown Strategy and Comprehensive Plan. This analysis assumes no substantial procedural changes will be considered at this time.

ORGANIZATION

Current Form

There are 7 separate sets of design requirements that apply to various parts of Downtown. The specific design guideline sections are:

- **Chapter 18.105 Historic Structures and Buildings within the Historic Districts.** This Chapter applies to structures listed on the Olympia Heritage Register, Washington Heritage Register, and the National Register of Historic Places, and all structures within a Historic District.
- **Chapter 18.110 Basic Commercial Design Criteria.** This chapter applies to all commercial projects throughout the City that require design review, in addition to the district specific requirements found in the following chapters, as applicable. It also applies to projects with a building area greater than 5,000 square feet in gross floor area that require a Conditional Use Permit in a residential zone, to commercial projects adjacent to residential buildings, to commercial or residential projects. The design districts are shown on the Official Design Review Districts and Corridors.
- **Chapter 18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown District.** This chapter applies to all commercial projects that require design review that are located in the Downtown Design Review District. In addition, commercial projects in the Downtown Design District may also be subject to the requirements of Chapter 18.16, Pedestrian Streets.
- **Chapter 18.170 Residential Design Criteria Multifamily.** Design criteria contained in this chapter (Sections 18.170.030 18.170.160) apply to all multifamily residential buildings with five or more units and any multifamily development with twenty (20) units or more throughout the city. Projects of this type and size are reviewed by the Design Review Board.
- **Chapter 18.175 Residential Design Criteria Infill and other residential.** Sections 18.175.020 through 18.175.060 of this chapter apply to single family dwellings, including designated manufactured housing, proposed on lots within the area depicted on Figure 42a, on lots less than 5000 square feet, or on substandard lots, duplexes, triplexes, four-plexes, and townhouse buildings of four (4) units or

less throughout the city. Sections 18.175.080 and 18.175.090 apply to accessory dwelling units throughout the city. Section 18.175.100 applies to cottage development.

- **Chapter 18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** which includes specific site planning and architectural design requirements for properties fronting on “Pedestrian Streets” shown on Figure 16-1.
- **Chapter 18.150 Port Peninsula** contains guidelines that apply to the Port of Olympia’s Urban Waterfront zoned properties on the Port Peninsula and are the only City guidelines which apply to the Port Peninsula.

Observations

There is no one best way to organize development requirements in a municipal code. Different cities organize design standards or guidelines according to district, use, both district and use –or they lump them all together into a single document. Generally speaking, however, it appears that it is easier for both the applicant and the reviewers to have a single document they can refer to without flipping back and forth between code chapters. Reducing the number of applicable code chapters also reduces the possibility of inconsistencies or conflicts between different provisions.

Experience indicates that the bulk of design objectives and provisions are similar for residential and commercial buildings, so that separating these building types and uses into different design guideline sections is not always necessary. Additionally, many new buildings in the Downtown will be mixed use developments that include both commercial and institutional building elements. Public buildings, single family residences and industrial developments do have some specific conditions that may make it useful to have separate guideline sections or chapters to address those uses.

On the Historic District Guidelines

Conversations with the Heritage Commission (HC) and the general public indicate the need for more specific design guidelines for the Historic District to retain its historic character. Specific design recommendations are included later in this document; however a change to organization should also be considered. While the Commission must use the Secretary of the Interior (SOI) standards for alterations to existing structures (as noted in OMC 18.12), these are not part of the guidelines used by the Design Review Board. Thus, when the Joint OHC/DRB Committee meets to review projects in the district there is often a disconnect. Including the SOI guidelines within the Downtown guidelines would help ensure that the Design Review Board (DRB) members of the Joint Review Committee are familiar with them.

Order of Guideline Topics

In addition to the approaches described above, it is useful to organize design guidelines to model the design process. For example, project designers will usually start with a site plan, identifying the large features, such as buildings (including footprint dimensions), parking, pedestrian and vehicular circulation. Next they will make sure the internal and external functions, building massing, setbacks, buffers and other required site features can be accommodated. Third, they consider the building’s architectural concept, its overall form, and building elements. Finally, they will design the façade treatments, materials, colors, lighting and signage.

This suggests that design guidelines be organized in something like the following:

1. Site Planning
 - Relation to site, adjacencies, topography, natural conditions, etc.
 - Relation to street fronts.
 - Location and size of parking, entries, service areas, and other site features.
 - Pedestrian and Vehicular circulation
 - Other site planning concerns
2. Site Elements and Landscaping
 - Design of parking areas
 - Design of pathways and circulation facilities
 - Site landscaping
 - Site lighting
 - Site signage (if not covered in sign code)
 - The design of other site features
3. Building Design
 - Building form and architectural character (This section could address the different characteristics of the Historic District and individual “Character Areas”).
 - Design relationship to historic or neighborhood qualities
 - Design measures to achieve desired architectural and human scale
 - Design of building elements and details
 - Materials
 - Colors (if applicable)
 - Building signs (If not covered elsewhere)
 - Building lighting

Recommendations

- Downtown is a unique place in the city, thus it would appear most useful for Downtown to have its own set of design guidelines that cover the basic requirements, including those for most building types and pedestrian streets.
- Ideally, applicants should be able to access all of the relevant design guidelines in a single document and not need to refer to additional guideline sections. Therefore, consider reducing the number of different guidelines by integrating the different provisions into a single design review instrument. However, needing to page through pages of material that may not be relevant to the project, is also not ideal. So, it may be appropriate to have specific guidelines for industrial uses or single family residences, for example. Or it may be useful to have separate special historic district requirements. However, if a multiple sets of guidelines is preferred each set of guidelines should stand alone in terms of use by the applicant and reviewing body. This organizational question can be best addressed when the guidelines’ contents are outlined and it can be determined how much difference there is between provisions for different character areas, uses and historic qualities.
- Address character area-specific provisions in the location and size of parking, entries, service areas, and other site features; pedestrian and vehicular circulation; architectural character and site landscaping sections of the guidelines
- In the introduction have a statement on how to use the guidelines and a checklist. Also consider a diagram, such as an axonometric with call-outs to identify what section of the guidelines covers

what parts of the development. Linked table of contents are also a useful tool to help with navigating the document.

- The guidelines should make it clear how mixed use buildings are addressed.
- Include design guideline specific definitions
- Organize the guidelines so that they model the design process

A NEED TO INCORPORATE CHARACTER AREAS

Current Form

Except for the Historic Core and the Pedestrian Street Overlay District, the design guidelines do not address the distinctive qualities of the different character areas.

Observations

The Olympia Downtown Strategy Framework describes “character areas” each with its own use orientation (although most character areas allow a wide variety of uses, each area will favor some uses over others) and streetscape and architectural character. The design guidelines can and should implement the intent of the character areas by including some area specific provisions in the location and size of parking, entries, service areas, and other site features; pedestrian and vehicular circulation; architectural character; and site landscaping sections of the guidelines. Another option would be to establish different design districts within the Downtown, each with its own special provisions, but this may get a bit cumbersome.

Recommendations

- Address character area-specific provisions in the location and size of parking, entries, service areas, and other site features; pedestrian and vehicular circulation; architectural character and site landscaping sections of the guidelines

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER CODE SECTIONS

Current Conditions

- **Section 18.04.080** includes dimensional development standards for lot size, setbacks, building height, building coverage, and other requirements for buildings **in residential zones**.
- **Section 18.06.080 and 100** include dimensional development standards for lot size, setbacks, building height, building coverage, and other requirements for buildings in the DB, UW, UW-H, GC and other **commercial zones** in Downtown. Many of the development standards such as those for building front facades could be better located in the design guidelines.
- **Chapter 18.12** describes the process and additional criteria for reviewing alterations or construction for properties within the Historic District or on the Heritage Register
- **Chapter 18.36** includes extensive provisions for site landscaping.

- **Chapter 18.38** includes provisions for parking. Residential land uses and commercial land uses up to 3,000 sq. within most of the Downtown are exempt from all parking requirements; however, if parking facilities are provided they must meet required parking ratios and design standards.
- **Chapter 18.42** includes extensive provisions for signs.
- **18.34** includes public access requirements from the Shoreline Master Program
- **Chapter 18.100** provides the foundation for other chapters that contain the guidelines.

Observations

Olympia has substantial code standards for the topics identified above. The design guidelines must integrate with these other dimensional and physical code standards.

Recommendations

- During development of design guidelines, make sure that these other code provisions are referenced and check for conflicts.
- It may be useful to add design guidelines that also address topics such as landscaping, or provide some flexibility to dimensional code standards. These should be carefully checked.
- Many of the development standards in 18.06, such as those for non-residential front facades could be better located in the design guidelines.
- Consider unique standards for Downtown as part of the 2017 citywide sign code update

FORMAT, LANGUAGE AND GRAPHICS

Current conditions

The current language and specificity of the different guideline sections vary from very “loose” and unspecific to relatively prescriptive (especially in Chapter 18.16). The terms “should” and “shall” are not defined and so can cause some uncertainty. The graphics for the residential sections are primarily lower density housing than is expected in Downtown.

City planners note the required ratios in 18.12 may be full block developments, but are challenging for infill.

Observations

Photographs are becoming increasingly more prevalent in the newer sets of guidelines, particularly since they are so easy to incorporate on-line and in full color. The better documents employ contemporary development examples and include text notations to point out applicable design features. Diagrammatic illustrations and charts are prominent in the better sets of design guidelines as well. Useful diagrams point out acceptable and unacceptable examples and employ graphic techniques that focus on the key issues at hand.

Recommendations

- Emerging design review practice is to prepare guidelines that establish a minimum predictable standard but allows options for fulfilling that standard and/or opportunities to satisfy the guidelines’ objectives. The current guidelines’ format is to state a general “requirement” and

amplify it with more specific “guidelines” A more useful format may be to include in each guideline:

- An intent statement that clearly identifies the guideline’s objective
 - A requirement that clearly states a minimum level of performance that can be objectively evaluated. In some cases this may be a numerical standard.
 - Provisions that allow for alternate solutions that achieve the guideline’s intent. Determine if this provision applies generally to all standards or if alternative solutions are allowed only where specifically indicated.
- Examples that help explain the intent and types of alternative measures may be appropriate. This format allows both the specificity for staff review, plus the option for more flexibility if the applicant can show that the intent is met and has proven useful in other instances.
 - Discuss and update the existing use and definitions of “shall” and “should” to help better meet objectives.
 - Illustrate the document with photos, sketches, and diagrams, as necessary to visually explain the provisions and provide examples. Where used as good examples, make sure they are exemplary development examples consistent with the desired character for Downtown. Make sure the graphics are internally consistent. Use photos or graphics to show a variety of ways to meet the standards. This can be particularly important when examining issues such as façade articulation where there should be a number of ways that the requirements can be met.
 - Consider doing away with, or simplifying ratios (as currently required in 18.12).

INDIVIDUAL DESIGN TOPICS

A. Site Planning

(A-1) Relationship to street front

Current Standards

- **18.110.020** requires 50% of street front occupied by building.
- **18.120.020** adds requirement to align buildings according to existing pattern, which requires some judgment and is not clear about the purpose.
- **18.130** Visual context of streetscape addresses architectural and site design continuity along a street, but it is unclear when continuity is more important than variety and to what extent similar design elements and materials are required.
- **Chapter 18.16** has much more specific requirements for pedestrian oriented streets noted in Downtown. Pedestrian oriented streets are classified into “A” and “B” streets. Provisions include both site planning and architectural design requirements.

Observations

The four sections noted above do not align very well. Nor do they have the flexibility to set back buildings for landscaping, outdoor cafes, etc. While it is in some ways convenient to have a special section for pedestrian oriented streets, it does make it a bit harder for the applicant to go back and forth between the sections.

Chapter 18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District is quite detailed and also addresses building front design, which is good. There will be a question of whether storefront transparency, etc. should be in the site planning or architecture section, or if there is a whole different section for street fronts that combines the two. There is no straight forward answer to this. It does not appear this section limits parking lots adjacent to pedestrian oriented streets. Section 18.120.040 says to “maintain the visual continuity of the street” and “minimize the width of parking lots located adjacent to the street”, so parking lots are allowed in front of buildings. .

To activate the core retail area, a mix of requirements in 18.120 and 18.16 require certain streets to provide non-residential storefronts (or more accurately the look of a storefront). The required streets should be reviewed to make sure these are the most important streets for pedestrian activity. that the location can support pedestrian oriented retail, and that there will be vehicular access to the site. Also, this requirement needs to be more clearly laid out as the current organization with multiple cross-references makes this guideline confusing.

Recommendations

- Integrate the requirements of Chapter 18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District to substantially strengthen current requirements while adding the flexibility to vary setbacks for positive reasons such as street amenities, outdoor activities, etc.
- Review Chapter 18.16 carefully as it may be better to treat some sub-sections in a different organization. The current pedestrian overlay section is pretty complete but should be reviewed – especially for location of parking lots adjacent to the sidewalk. These provisions could be located in the Site Planning section as a sub-section titled “Relation to Street Fronts”.
- Ensure that the frontage requirements fit with the building façade sections
- Review and update the map of pedestrian oriented streets in 18.16.040 Identify streetfront in the Downtown where building adjacency, pedestrian oriented uses and pedestrian oriented facades are required. These conditions should be mapped. Also, the maps should indicate special corners where special architectural or building features are required.

(A-2) Relationship to adjacent properties

Current Standards

Section 18.170.110 addresses compatibility between new and old buildings and calls for setbacks, modulation and other means to address neighborhood character, but does not directly address loss of privacy and solar access.

Evaluation

Protecting the privacy, solar access and environmental conditions of adjacent properties will be an important issue in the Southeast Downtown neighborhood because a wide variety of residential building types are foreseen. A recent article by John Owen and Rachel Miller, [Protecting Existing Neighborhoods from the Impacts of New Development](#), examines ways to reduce the impacts of new mid-rise development on adjacent single family residences, based on human perception and geometric analysis. It offers a number of solutions from vegetation buffers and step backs to allowing office uses in

residences adjacent to more intense zoning. Some of these solutions may be more appropriate for the zoning code standards, although placing them in design guidelines would allow more flexibility. Another technique for reducing impacts to privacy from new mid-rise residential buildings is to restrict transparent balconies (in those areas within close proximity and facing single family zoned properties).

Recommendation

- Guidelines to address relationship to neighboring properties should be explored, particularly in southeast Olympia.

(A-3) General pedestrian circulation

Current Standards

- **18.120.100 and 110** cover internal walkways and access from parking areas, but they should be significantly strengthened to provide some minimum standards for these elements.
- **Chapter 18.16** has much more specific requirements for pedestrian oriented streets noted in Downtown, but these do not address internal walkways, etc. .
- **18.170.020** covers this a bit but is not sufficiently specific.
- **18.150.030 Port Peninsula** has general requirements that could work if strictly administered. However there is little specific guidance and requirements refer to “where feasible” without specific indications as to how that is evaluated.

Evaluation

Pedestrian connections are clearly an important design objective within current guidelines, but existing provisions lack the specificity that would make them easier to administer.

Recommendations

- Include guidelines for both pedestrian circulation planning and design. Pedestrian circulation planning design guidelines address the location and configuration of circulations systems, while pedestrian circulation design guidelines address more specific issues such as width and pavement of walkways.
- Pedestrian circulation planning guidelines should include provisions for:
 - Pedestrian routes connecting public ROW to all entries and site features
 - Location and connectivity of pedestrian routes to and within developments with multiple buildings and entries
 - Potential for inter-site pedestrian connectivity in some cases
 - Adequate sidewalks
 - Access to ground related residential units
 - Access to secondary entries
- Pedestrian circulation design guidelines can be located here or in the site design section (see below).
- Pedestrian circulation through parking areas can be located here or in vehicle circulation.
- Include provisions for vehicle circulation to address entries and driveways, safety, and relation to streetfront.

(A-4) Vehicular access and circulation

Current Standards

- **18.120 Basic Commercial Design Criteria** does not adequately address vehicle circulation, probably because Downtown properties have little opportunities for on-site vehicle circulation.
- **18.110 Basic Commercial Design Criteria** does not adequately address vehicle circulation.
- **Chapter 18.16** has much more specific requirements for pedestrian oriented streets but does not limit parking lots adjacent to pedestrian oriented streets. So parking lots can face street fronts noted in Downtown, but these do not address internal walkways, etc.
- **18.170.030** covers this a bit but is not sufficient to direct parking areas and circulation into appropriate configurations. It does limit parking lots on street frontage to 30' which is not a useful dimension for parking lots.
- **18.150.030 Port Peninsula** does not address this and it might be more of an issue in this district.

Evaluation

Generally, the existing provisions could be improved with more specific language. It's surprising that the Port Peninsula guidelines do not address this issue.

Recommendations

- Include provisions for vehicle circulation to address entries and driveways, safety, and relation to the streetfront.

(A-5) Site planning of large lots (full block sites)

Current Standards

Not specifically addressed in any of the chapters.

Observations

Provisions for large lots generally apply to sites larger than 2 acres or with multiple buildings and address design concerns related to internal and external circulation, orientation of buildings to one another, open space and special techniques to reduce the scale of massive buildings. In Downtown Olympia, it might be useful to have some provisions for full block sites to make sure that the development is in scale with its surroundings and to take advantage of the special opportunities that such a site provides.

Recommendations

- Include a section to address possible impacts and opportunities that full block development provides. Provisions might address:
 - Interior pedestrian circulation and open space
 - The architectural break-up of facades running the full length of a block
 - Site access
 - Relationship between on-site buildings

- Or, it may be that these issues can be covered in the specific sections. This should be explored in the development of design guidelines.

(A-6) Service areas and mechanical equipment

Current Standards

- **18.110.190 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:** Covers screening of service areas and elements
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown** does not cover this objective – covered in 18.110.190.
- **18.170.070 Multi-family Residential** covers location and screening of mechanical equipment but not service areas:
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** does not cover this objective – covered in 18.110.190.
- **18.150 Port Peninsula** does not cover this objective – covered in 18.110.190.

Evaluation

The lack of service area criteria is a gap. More specific guidance on location and screening could be added.

Recommendations

- Update guidelines for location and screening of service areas, mechanical equipment and utilities. There are a number of good models used by other cities. Screening design could be located in the Site Elements section or this section.
- Generally, guidelines should address location first, and then if an unobtrusive location cannot be found, screening should be seen as a mitigating action. For urban buildings in the core (and perhaps other locations), it may make sense to require service areas to be inside buildings.

(A-7) Storm water facility planning

Current Standards

This topic is not covered in the current design guidelines.

Evaluation

Design guidelines for stormwater management can supplement the stormwater management requirements in the Engineering Design & Development Standards (EDDS) by encouraging low impact development (LID) and green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) techniques. For example, guidelines can make it clear that landscape buffers and setbacks may be used for stormwater infiltration and provide examples of how this may be accomplished. In Downtown Olympia, such techniques will be limited to areas generally south of Legion Street due to high water table.

A more pressing concern is the effects of sea level rise on new and existing construction. The City needs to give a lot of thought to how new buildings address the required elevation change, existing buildings are retrofitted and landscaping withstands sea water inundation.

Recommendations

- Consider how the guidelines relate to the City’s sea level rise actions. Guidelines to address sea level rise may be in different sections. For example, sea level rise may be addressed through grade change, which will involve site planning and building front design. Or sea level rise might be accommodated through temporary flood proofing, which may involve architectural design issues.

(A-8) Multifamily open space

Current Standards

- **18.170.040 Multi-family Residential** includes a brief section on the design of residential open space.
- **18.04.080** requires that 15% (of the site be open space) may include stoops, porches or balcony areas in the Urban Residential (UR) Zone. Section J adds:

J. Private and Common Open Space.

Development of Open Space. *Open space (e.g., private yard areas and common open space) required by Table 4.04 shall be devoted to undisturbed native vegetation, landscaping (consistent with Chapter 18.36, Landscaping and Screening), and/or outdoor recreational facilities. Driveways, loading areas, maneuvering space and parking lots shall not be considered open space. Required open space shall not be covered with impervious surfaces, except for stoops, porches, or balconies, walkways, tennis courts, swimming pools, or similar uses which require an impervious surface. Up to a five (5) percent increase in impervious surface coverage may be allowed to accommodate such hard surfaced facilities.*

- **18.06.080 and 100** do not include provisions for multi-family open space since these are largely commercial zones. However, since residential and mixed use development is expected throughout Downtown, some provision or open space should be included.

Evaluation

Residential “open space” may be provided in a number of ways, including balconies large enough to accommodate human use, roof decks, courtyards, gardens, recreation rooms, etc. While open space is required in the UR zone, the Code does not require it elsewhere in Downtown (DB, UW, UW-H zones).

Recommendations

- The guidelines should include provisions for multifamily open space and include a variety of options specifically appropriate in the Downtown.

(A-9) Non-residential open space

Current Standards

- **18.110 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:** No design criteria to address this topic.
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown:** No design criteria to address this topic.
- **18.16.080 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** includes specific requirements for publically accessible plazas but does not indicate if or where they are required.
- **18.150 Port District:** No design criteria to address this topic.

Evaluation

There needn't be requirements for commercial open space in a downtown setting, however there might be some incentives for some plazas or small areas along the streetfront for outdoor dining or other activities.

Recommendations

- Update the design guidelines for public spaces in 18.16.080 and add some provisions related to security.
- Provide incentives for publically accessible open spaces.

(A-10) Site planning for security

Current Standards

- **18.110.160 Basic Commercial Design Criteria** includes some lighting provisions and refers designers to 18.40.060(D). Section 18.40.060 does address sight triangle requirements.
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown:** No design criteria to address this topic.
- **18.170 Multi-family Residential:** No design criteria to address this topic.
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District:** No design criteria to address this topic.
- **18.150 Port District:** No design criteria to address this topic.

Evaluation

This is a missing element. Guidelines that address Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) criteria can be a useful way to increase safety and security.

Recommendations

- Include design guidelines to address
 - Safe pedestrian lighting levels
 - Passive surveillance
 - Natural access control
 - Defined territory
 - Visibility
 - Preventing entrapment areas
 - Other security issues

(A-11) View Preservation

Current Standards

- **18.110.060 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:**

View preservation. REQUIREMENT: In order to protect the existing outstanding scenic views which significant numbers of the general public have from public rights-of-way, applicants for development must consider the impact their proposal will have on views of Mt. Rainier, the Olympic Mountains, Budd Inlet, the Black Hills, the Capitol Building, and Capitol Lake or its surrounding hillsides. All development must reserve a reasonable portion of such territorial and immediate views of these features for significant numbers of people from public rights-of-way, and shall provide lookouts, viewpoints, or view corridors so that visual access to existing outstanding scenic vistas is maintained.

Refer to the Scenic Vista overlay zoning maps available at the Community Planning and Development Department.

- **18.150.050 Port Peninsula: Site design – View corridors** states:

REQUIREMENT: Provide for public view corridors of the Capitol Building, Olympic Mountains and Budd Inlet.

B. GUIDELINE:

- 1. Intermittent or partial views to the scenic vistas mentioned above may not be deemed necessary to incorporate into the site and building design.*
- 2. Refer to the Scenic Vista overlay zoning maps available at the Community Planning and Development Department.*

Evaluation

The recently updated Comprehensive Plan shifted an emphasis from protecting certain views from public streets to protecting and enhancing views from certain public observation points. The Plan guides the City to implement a public process to identify viewsheds (*line of sight between an observation point and important view.*) This was completed for views related to Downtown as part of the process to form the DTS. Subsequently, the citywide requirement in 18.110 should no longer be applied to Downtown. Instead, design standards to enhance the views identified as important through the DTS should be considered. In addition to the 29 views found to already be protected by current regulation and other conditions, three views were identified which need additional steps.

Recommendations

- The DTS recommends moderate design guidelines be crafted to protect and enhance three important views:
 - West Bay Park to Mt. Rainier

- Deschutes Parkway to Mt. Rainier
- East Bay Overlook to the Capitol Dome

See the DTS report for more information.

B. Site Design, pedestrian access, amenities and open space design

*Note: this section addresses the **design quality** of site features, whereas Section A focuses on the planning of these elements.*

(B.1) Internal pedestrian paths design

Current Standards

- **18.110.050 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:** Pedestrian Amenities requires special features be included in projects where “people typically gather”. Applicants can choose from a menu of items.
- **18.120.100 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown:** Walkways requires sidewalk paving material variety, alley enhancements, and interpretive elements.
- **18.120.110 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown:** Pedestrian access from parking areas includes general, non-quantitative requirements for walkways in parking lots
- **18.120.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown:** Waterfront public access includes guidance for waterfront trails and view corridors.
- **18.170.020 Multi-family Residential:** Pedestrian and vehicle circulation includes minimal direction for pedestrian design.
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District:** includes design provisions for open spaces
- **18.150 Port Peninsula District:** includes similar provisions that are not quantified or specific

Evaluation

Many of the topics are covered in the current set of guidelines; however they are not very specific or sufficiently detailed to provide solid guidance. Some address sidewalk design which might be better in the EDDS or in a separated document. The location and design of pedestrian systems can have an important impact on the perceived quality of the Downtown.

Recommendations

- Upgrade the guidelines for pedestrian system design. Pedestrian circulation design guidelines should include provisions for:
 - Width and accessibility of pathways
 - Lighting, visibility and security issues
 - The design and landscaping of walkways between parking lots and storefronts
 - Measures to enhance pedestrian activity
 - Separation of public walkways and ground related residences

(B.2) Pedestrian-oriented open space

Current Standards

- **18.110 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:** includes multiple sections that address specific elements such as fences, walls, pedestrian amenities and plant selection. However there are no more comprehensive design guidelines describing how these elements can be organized to provide a usable space.
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown** does not include specific design guidelines for this topic.
- **18.170.040 Multi-family Residential:** Usable open space addresses planning, but not design considerations.
- **18.16.080 Pedestrian Street Overlay District:** Specific development requirements includes specific open space design guidance
- **18.150 Port District** does not address this topic in detail.

Evaluation

18.16 goes pretty far in identifying the key design objectives in urban plazas.

Recommendations

- Build on 18.16.080 to refine publically accessible open space design standards.

(B.3) Site landscaping

Current Standards

- **Chapter 18.36** includes specific landscape design standards that cover landscaping for residential and commercial uses, landscape plans, parking lot screening, materials and installation standards, screen types, and performance assurance.
- **18.110 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:** Includes some provisions for screening blank walls and very general requirements for plant selection.
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown:** This section does not really address site landscaping.
- **18.170 Multi-family Residential:** covers a variety of landscape related elements including fences, walls, and plant materials. Also
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District:** Landscaping is a part of this sections objectives.
- **18.150 Port District:** Most guidelines are fairly general and not stated as requirements.

Evaluation

Chapter 18.36 appears adequate to address the fundamental landscape objectives

Recommendations

- Landscape design guidelines should reference 18.36 and augment them rather than duplicate or compete with them.
- Generally landscape design guidelines should address character and integration with building and site design features.

(B.4) Fences and walls

Current Standards

- **18.110 Basic Commercial Design Criteria** does not address this issue.
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown** does not address this issue.
- **18.170.050 Multi-family Residential** calls for the minimum use of fences that inhibit pedestrian movement of separate the project from the neighborhood and provides guidance regarding character and quality.
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** does not address this issue.
- **18.150 Port District** does not address this issue.

Evaluation

The provisions in 18.170.050 might be enhanced with some examples

Recommendations

- Include an enhanced section 18.170.050 in the guidelines

(B.5) Parking area design requirements

Current Standards

- **18.110 Basic Commercial Design Criteria** does not address this.
- **18.120.040 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown:** Parking lots provides general direction on location of lots.
- **18.170.030 Multi-family Residential:** Parking location and design includes provisions to minimize the impact of parking areas. It only allows 30% of the frontage to be in parking.
- **18.16.080. H Pedestrian Street Overlay District:** Surface parking lots specifically restricts parking lots along the street front of pedestrian oriented streets
- **18.150 Port Peninsula District** does not specifically address this.

Evaluation

Together, the different code sections cover the issues related to parking lot design but they need to be better coordinated and strengthened.

Recommendations

- Build on current provisions, especially 18.16 to address parking lot location and design.
- Parking area design can be its own element or the aspects of parking lot design can be located in other sections, including Relationship to street front, landscaping, and pedestrian connections.

C. Building Design

(C.1) Character (not including Historic)

Current Standards

- **18.110.070 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:** Building location and design includes design requirements for articulated entrances street edge orientation and, for buildings over 3 stories, a clearly defined base.
- **18.120.050 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown:** Building design includes some general statements.
- **18.170.110 Multi-family Residential** describes techniques to respond to local neighborhood character through building forms, materials, rooflines, etc.
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** does not address architectural character.
- **18.150 Port District** does not address architectural character

Evaluation

While the design guideline sections to contain guidelines that address the quality of design, they do not address the general character (E.g.: should a building reflect the local historic character, fit in with the neighborhood, have a formal or informal character, etc.)

Recommendations

- The updated Downtown design guidelines should provide guidance related to a building's architectural style or character. This is especially true since the design guidelines can be used to reinforce the different "character areas" such as the Core, the Artisan/Tech area, etc.
- The guidelines should address the overall building form, elements, materials details and special characteristics of the different areas.
- Design guidelines for architectural character should not be too rigid and will require some judgment.
- Photographic examples and diagrammatic illustrations can facilitate discussions with the applicant and project review.

(C.2) Character in Historic District

Current Standards

The standards for the review of designated historic buildings and those in the historic district are summarized below.

OMC 18.12 B. *Review Process*

- *Whenever applications are made for alterations, changes, construction on any properties within a Historic District or on the Heritage Register, the Building Official notifies the Preservation Officer and the applicant so that the proposed change may be reviewed under the provisions of Sections [18.105.020](#) and [18.105.030](#).*
- *If no permit is required to pursue work on a designated property or within a designated Heritage Register District, whoever is responsible for the work is encouraged to consult with the Preservation Officer prior to commencement of the work for consistence with The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*
- *The Preservation Officer may review and approve minor work requiring a permit that does not involve substantial alterations, additions or removals that only alter the features identified when the property was listed on the Heritage Register, or District*
- *Recommendations are made at a regular meeting of the Heritage Commission or at a meeting of the Heritage Review Committee. The Heritage Commission's recommendations shall be in writing and shall state the findings of fact and reasons relied upon in reaching its decision.*
- *The Heritage Commission's recommendations are transmitted to the Building Official and are given substantial weight by the Building Official in establishing conditions for the permit*

C. *Standards for Review.*

1. For a property individually listed on a Heritage Register, the proposed work should not detrimentally alter, destroy or adversely affect any exterior feature or interior feature relating to the designation of the property to the Heritage 2. For any property located within a Historic District, the proposed construction, removal, rehabilitation, alteration, remodeling, excavation or exterior alteration shall conform to the standards in OMC 18.110.210, [18.105.020](#), and [18.105.030](#). 3. Proposed alterations or significant changes necessary or appropriate in order to meet the requirements of any other law, statute, ordinance, regulation, code or ordinance shall be coordinated with, and given consideration along with historic preservation concerns, in reviewing proposed changes to Heritage Register properties.

The provisions of 18.105.020 and 030 are excerpted below

- Additions or Remodeled Historic Buildings

Design criteria contained in chapter 18.105.020 Building Design apply to structures on the Olympia Heritage Register, Washington Heritage Register, and the National Register of Historic Places. These require that the owner Protect and preserve buildings of special historic significance and merit in accordance with The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties through the following means: (.

- 1. Restore or retain as many historic features as possible.*

2. *Maintain or restore original proportions, dimensions and architectural elements.*
3. *Select paint and material colors which are historically accurate, coordinate the entire facade, and do not conflict with adjacent buildings.*
4. *Consult available historical resources, the Heritage Commission, or Community Planning and Development Department for assistance and detailed information.*

Structures within a Historic District

Design criteria contained in Chapter 18.105.030 apply to new and existing structures within a Historic District and require that new or remodeled structures within a historic district preserve the historic context and merit of the district through the following means:

1. *Use roof forms that emulate the historic property roof form.*
2. *Use windows, materials, relief and details similar to the historic property.*
3. *Use similar building articulation that breaks up the building mass into modules which reflect proportions similar to the historic building.*

Evaluation

Conversations with the Heritage Commission (HC) and the general public indicate the need for more specific design guidelines for the Historic District to retain its historic character. There is the concern that new buildings could intrude on the District's architectural character. While the requirements of the pedestrian overlay in Chapter 18.16 address street front qualities, there is general sense that the new buildings should respect the general character of the older structures. And, Special guidelines to address the architectural qualities of the Historic District could be incorporated into the Architectural Character section of the guidelines.

New buildings in the historic district are reviewed by a Joint Design Review Board with members from the Heritage Commission and the DRB. Section 18.105.030 becomes the most useful set of guidelines in this process. However, the guidelines do not adequately address issues of architectural consistency within the district because they do not identify the characteristics that the new building is supposed to support.

Recommendations

- Include a specific section within the Downtown Design Guidelines that identifies the important architectural characteristics that typify Downtown Olympia and establishes guidance regarding the retention of the critical architectural characteristics in the historic district.
- The guidelines should reflect the Joint OHC/DRB review process.

(C.3) Human scale and architectural scale

Current Standards

- **18.110.080 Basic Commercial Design Criteria** includes provisions for both human and architectural scale. The most effective guidelines call for the use of smaller building elements.
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown** does not have an explicit section but does require some elements such as awnings that help to provide a human scale.
- **18.170.120 Multi-family Residential** calls for building modulation and other techniques to provide for architectural and human scale.
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** does not have an explicit section but does require some elements such as awnings that help to provide a human scale.
- **18.150.060 Port Peninsula District** guidelines describe architectural scale rather than human scale.

Evaluation

Architectural design guidelines should cover both human scale and architectural scale. Human scale addresses the perceived relationship between a person and the building with the objective of providing clues about how the building serves human functions (such as entry and visibility) and making the individual “feel comfortable”. Human scale is most often addressed by calling attention to those elements that have a clear human function, such as doors, windows, porches, weather protection, balconies, etc. and making sure that those elements are appropriately sized. Human scale is usually addressed through smaller building elements.

Architectural scale is the relationship of the building to other near-by architectural and site features and addresses the massing, height and perceived size of the building. The objectives of architectural scale are often to ensure that the building does not overwhelm its setting or appear too large for its context. Architectural scale can be addressed by guidelines that shape the building’s overall form such as modulation, setbacks, step-backs, rooflines, and larger building elements.

Current guidelines confuse these two types of scale. While they do address most of the issues related to scale, there are no specific standards to describe when and to what extent measures are to be taken to address scale issues.

Recommendations

- Guidelines to address scale issues should clearly identify the difference between human scale and architectural scale and address each separately.
- The guidelines should set minimum standards for achieving scale related objectives. It may be that different scales are appropriate in different character areas. For example:
 - The Core should have a consistent architectural scale based on historic precedents
 - The Artisan/Tech district may feature a wider variety of building sizes and scales based on the wider variety of uses and the objective of retaining some of the industrial character.

- Both architectural and human scale elements will be very important in the southern residential areas as there will be a wide range of building sizes and types but also the objective of a comfortable residential environment.

(C.4) Pedestrian-oriented facades and weather protection

Current Standards

- **18.110.090 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:** Street Walls requires window transparency and pedestrian oriented building elements. Section 110 calls for canopies, awnings and other elements. Section 140 requires that the visible building facades are consistent – that is of a similar architectural character.
- **18.120.090 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown** adds an explicit requirement for weather protection and includes guidance regarding the character and quality of the elements.
- **18.170 Multi-family Residential** does not address this issue.
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** also requires weather protection and includes design standards. Section “a” requires transparent windows or other pedestrian elements along pedestrian oriented streets.
- **18.150 Port Peninsula District** does not address this, and because this district is not subject to other design standards, it should be addressed if warranted.

Evaluation

The current 18.110.090 provides a good basis for pedestrian oriented facades and weather protection. Provisions in 18.16 are somewhat duplicative.

Recommendations

- The current standards should be combined into one consistent section.
- The map showing pedestrian oriented streets in 18.16 should be reviewed.
- Requirements for the Port Peninsula should be examined.

(C.5) Building corners

Current Standards

- **18.110.130 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:** Corners calls for incorporating features such as inset or angled corners and street corners and alley corners.
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown** does not address this issue.
- **18.170 Multi-family Residential** does not address this issue.
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** does not address this issue.
- **18.150 Port District** does not address this issue.

Evaluation

The provisions of 18.110.130 might be strengthened to sufficiently address this issue. Note that one of the criticisms made at a public meeting of the 123 Fourth building is the poor corner design.

Recommendations

- Strengthen the provisions of 18.110.130.
- Denote specific corners where the guidelines apply. Not every corner needs to be special.

(C.6) Building design details

Current Standards

- **18.110 Basic Commercial Design Criteria** does not explicitly address this objective but does include some general guidelines in different sections, including 18.110.100 Windows.
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown** does not explicitly address this objective but does include some general guidelines in different sections.
- **18.170 Multi-family Residential** does have some useful guidance regarding window design.
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** does not address this issue.
- **18.150 Port Peninsula District** does not address this issue.

Evaluation

A building details section is often included in design guidelines to ensure that consideration is given to the quality and application of smaller elements such as lights, railing, trellises, awnings, window, etc. Guidelines usually require a certain number of building detail element selected from an inclusive menu of options. Because some of these elements are covered elsewhere (for example, awnings might be covered under weather protection and window details might be covered under human scale elements) guidelines usually allow requirements for building elements also count toward those other guideline requirements.

Recommendations

- Include a more explicit building details section in the guidelines with a menu of options for designers to choose from.

(C.7) Materials

Current Standards

- **18.110.150 Basic Commercial Design Criteria** includes a few guidelines – mostly to avoid reflective materials.
- **18.120.060 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown** includes some fairly weak provisions.

- **18.170.140 Multi-family Residential** includes more substantial guidance.
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** does not address this issue
- **18.150.070 Port Peninsula District:** Color and Materials prohibits large expanses of bright colors and reflective materials.

Evaluation

Stronger material standards could be applied to prevent a variety of unattractive, impermanent and inappropriate materials. In many cases materials such as metal siding and concrete masonry units may be appropriate if handled appropriately.

Recommendations

- Prepare more specific material standards for the guidelines.
- Explore whether or not some materials may be appropriate in some character areas but not in others. For example, corrugated metal siding may be appropriate in the Artisan/Tech district but not in the Core.

(C.8) Blank walls

Current Standards

- **18.110.200 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:** Screening of blank walls calls for landscape screening of blank walls but does not define blank walls.
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown** does not address this issue.
- **18.170.090 Multi-family Residential** calls for screening of long expanses of blank building walls or fences.
- **18.16 (F) Pedestrian Street Overlay District:** Bland Wall Limitation provides more explicit quantitative restrictions on blank walls on pedestrian oriented streets.
- **18.150 Port Peninsula District** does not address this issue.

Evaluation

This is an important consideration in the Downtown and should be address more substantively.

Recommendations

- Provide more specific guidelines to define and address “blank walls.”

(C.9) Building entrances

Current Standards

- **18.110 Basic Commercial Design Criteria** does not sufficiently address the location, design and quality of building entrances.
- **18.120.080 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown:** Building orientation requires that building entrances be oriented to the street but does not address the quality, weather protection or enhancement of building entrances which is key in the Downtown. Section 18.120.090 requires that new projects include awnings, canopies, and/or marquees on buildings that abut the sidewalk.
- **18.170 Multi-family Residential** does not deal with this issue.
- **18.16 (G) Pedestrian Street Overlay District – Primary Building Entrance** requires that entrances face the street but does not address weather covering, lighting or enhancements.
- **18.150 Port District** does not address this issue.

Evaluation

Section 18.16 (G) should be a requirement for all buildings in the downtown unless there is a compelling reason to the contrary. There is a need for addressing the quality of entries to include weather protection, lighting and special features.

Recommendations

- Include stronger guidelines for building entries to address the size, location quality, lighting and enhancement of building entries.

(C.10) Parking garage design

Current Standards

- **18.110.170 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:** Parking structures requires a 6' recess from the façade plane and treatment of the ground floor façade with windows or other features.
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown:** No specific guidelines for this issue.
- **18.170 Multi-family Residential** does not address parking garages.
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** does not address parking garages
- **18.150 Port Peninsula District** does not address parking garages.

Evaluation

Section 18.110.170 covers this issue but applies only to commercial facades. There may be new residential buildings with structured parking on the ground floor so the same issues should be addressed for all new buildings.

Recommendations

- Retain section 18.110.170 and make it more broadly applicable.
- Re-examine the requirement for a 6' entry setback from the facade plane as this may make some structured parking not fit into the property dimension.

(C.11) Lighting

Current Standards

- **18.110.160 Basic Commercial Design Criteria:** Lighting encourages designers to use lighting to emphasize building features and landscaping and also for security.
- **18.120 Commercial Design Criteria Downtown** does not address lighting.
- **18.170.080 Multi-family Residential:** Site lighting requires lighting along pedestrian walkways and building entrances and to shield lights from adjacent properties and residential windows. It also encourages lower light poles and low-level landscape lighting.
- **18.16 Pedestrian Street Overlay District** does not address site lighting.
- **18.150 Port Peninsula District** does not address site lighting.

Evaluation

The requirement of 18.110 and 18.170 cover most of the concerns regarding site lighting. However some levels of lighting should be required where necessary for security.

Recommendations

- Combine the directions of 18.110.160 and 18.170.080
- Add ranges of acceptable lighting for different site and building conditions (e.g.: parking lots, building entrances, etc).