

To: Mike Smith, Community Development Director

From: Karen Raymond

Date: September 26, 2013

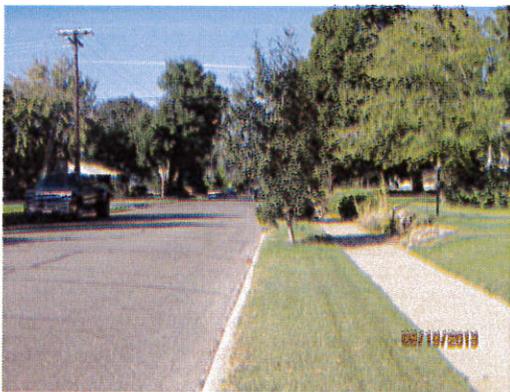
Re: Land Development Code

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Revised Draft Final Land Development Code. I was a member of both the 2008 Nonmotorized Transportation Plan Committee and the 2009-2010 Nonmotorized Transportation Code Committee and have attended the City Council study sessions related to the Community Design section of the code this summer. Please consider the following suggestions related to Articles 4 and 5:

15.410.040 Local Access Street Design

The width of the planting strips on residential streets was shrunk from 10 feet to 6 feet in the final draft. According to the City Arborist, the size of the planting strip dictates the size of the tree that can be planted there. A 6-foot strip will only allow the planting of small (less than 30 foot) trees, such as eastern redbuds or hedge maples, and this size strip would also eliminate even some small trees with aggressive roots. An 8-foot strip would allow homeowners the option of planting medium-sized (less than 45-foot) trees, such as red maples and European mountain ashes, and a 10-foot strip would allow the planting of larger trees (less than 60-foot) such as pin oaks and sugar maples and green ashes.

Here are some examples of 6-foot planting strips on Ellensburg streets:



Here are some examples of larger strips (these are actually 12-foot strips):



Which street would you rather walk on? Six-foot strips are smaller than they sound! An 8- or 10-foot strip would give homeowners the option of planting larger street trees, which do a better job of shading the street and provide a more pleasant walking environment and a more attractive streetscape.

Increasing the strips to 8 feet would only increase the right-of-way to 46-, 50-, and 56-feet for 20-, 24-, and 30-foot roads respectively, and increasing the strips to 10 feet would increase those rights-of-way to 50-, 54-, and 60-feet. Because utilities will be placed under sidewalks, these rights-of-way with either the 8-foot or 10-foot strip option would still be smaller than what was originally proposed and smaller or equal to that required by the current code.

Another issue which came up in a study session but was not addressed in the final draft relates to whether plantings would be required in planting strips. To avoid just rock or bare dirt strips, which heat up the sidewalk and/or cause erosion, language requiring homeowners to plant and maintain vegetation of some kind needs to be inserted in this section. Vegetation could include regular or drought-resistant trees, shrubs, grass, or flowers (the city has an informational pamphlet on xeriscaping).

15.420.030 Community Design Provisions

The final draft allows exceptions to the prohibition against reverse frontage lots in cases where there is a 10-foot vegetative buffer between the sidewalk and the fence. While better than fences with no buffer, this exception would still allow block-long expanses of tall fencing. Imagine Bender Road with trees along the fences. Better? Undoubtedly. But what if both sides of the street were edged by the fences? Even with vegetation, you could still have a sort of “tunnel” effect along arterials, with streets sandwiched between tall fences and no homes facing the street, no “eyes on the street.” Furthermore, this exception as written is not limited to arterials. It would allow reverse frontage/block-long expanses of tall fences even along collectors and local access roads, so long as the other conditions were met. Do we want neighborhoods like this?

This exception also states that a “homeowner’s association” would be responsible for maintaining the vegetation. But what exactly constitutes a homeowner’s association and who will review the agreements? And what happens if they don’t maintain the vegetative buffer or scoop the sidewalks, which would not be easily accessible from the homes because of the fence? Will the city be stuck with that responsibility at taxpayers’ expense? This exception should be deleted.

15.540.020 Housing Type Standards

The final draft sets a 22-foot minimum setback for a garage and a 15-foot minimum setback for a house. But this configuration would still allow a garage to stick out in front of the house if the house were to be set back more than 22 feet (the 15-foot setback is a minimum setback). Sometimes this design is unflatteringly referred to as a “snout house,” a design that reduces street and neighborhood visibility to the left and/or right for residents, particularly if adjacent homes are designed this way (see below), resulting in fewer “eyes on the street.” Many communities, from Portland to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, are imposing some limits on how much a garage can protrude, and new Ellensburg neighborhoods would become safer and more welcoming if we did likewise.



Other (not sure where this belongs)

In the interests of conserving energy, some communities do not allow covenants that prohibit clotheslines—a good idea for Ellensburg, too.

Thank you for considering these suggestions.