

# 11 Community Design Element

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## Introduction

The design of our communities is an important element in realizing the goals and policies of the Growth Management Act, the Community Framework Plan, the vision of Clark County's citizens and the 20-Year Plan.

The Community Design Element relates urban, suburban and rural development to the natural environment. The understanding of these relationships has been central in drafting the 20-Year Plan.

As in natural systems, communities function best when they follow the principles of diversity and interdependence of uses and buildings and the relationship of the physical environment to the human scale that is walkable and supportive of transportation alternatives.

## Background

Through the Perspectives Program which began in October 1991 to develop the Community Framework Plan, citizens in Clark County expressed their opinion about the design of their community. Overriding themes from the comments were:

- preserve open space and natural areas;
- encourage land development that preserves a sense of place and a feeling of community;
- encourage development of a transit system;
- develop a better diversity of employment opportunities and housing;
- avoid sprawling developments; and,
- design criteria are important to the acceptance of higher densities.

These comments lead directly to the development of a Community Design Element. Prior to the 1970's, Clark County was a community with distinct areas of urban development surrounded by agricultural land, forests and open space. The county's rapid growth, increased demands for rural and suburban lifestyles and greater mobility and affordable housing have resulted in encroachment by residential development into agricultural land and forests. The effects of this growth are tremendous: roads and bridges have been filled with cars; Clark County's air shed is in a non-attainment status for some pollutants, neighborhoods have little sense of community, long commutes are becoming normal, water quality has been degraded and farm land, wildlife habitats and open space are being lost.

In 2012, two new plans (Growing Healthier Report and Aging Readiness Plan) were created by and with the community to assure we are developing and sustaining healthy and age-friendly communities. Something as simple as a sidewalk can improve your health and the health of your neighbors by encouraging walking for recreation or travel. Research shows that there are key features of communities that influence health, such as parks, safe streets, public gathering places, and easy access to healthy food. The [Growing Healthier Report](#) and the [Aging Readiness Plan](#) have contributed policies related to community design.

## **Growing Healthier Report**

Clark County Public Health examined the ways that our neighborhoods and our built environment impact our health. Working with the community, they identified specific policies and strategies for improving the long-term health of our community through the development of the [Growing Healthier Report](#).

## **Aging Readiness Plan**

The Aging Readiness Task Force developed a plan that identifies strategies focusing on healthy communities, housing, transportation and mobility, supportive services and community engagement. The [Aging Readiness Plan](#) assesses the county's readiness to serve as a home for a growing number of older residents. The plan includes strategies to improve the community's capacity to support its growing older population and ultimately benefit all ages. The Commission on Aging was established in 2012 to lead and manage the implementation of the plan.

The Community Design Element is an integral part of the entire growth management planning process. Design directly affects land use patterns, transportation planning and neighborhood livability.

The Community Design Element is affected by the Land Use Element which develops policy direction for urban form and critical areas and, in turn, affects the Land Use Element by providing guidelines for how the urban form can be achieved and critical areas be integrated into future projects. This similar policy direction for rural and natural resource areas also affects community design.

The Community Design Element is an integral part of the Transportation Element as the policies in this element direct the use of alternative modes of transportation to facilitate a pedestrian friendly environment.

The Community Design Element is also affected by policies within the Housing element which provide for a variety of housing types in recognition of the various social and economic segments of the population.

A major component to the Community Design Element is the development of parks and open spaces. Policies within the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element provide guidelines for the acquisition and development of such sites.

The Community Design Element is affected by the policies within the Historic, Archaeological and Cultural Preservation Element which recognizes the need to retain and integrate the historical character of the community with new development.

Implementing the goals and policies of the 20-Year Plan can provide predictability in the planning process and development of design standards which encourage a sense of community and make concepts such as "higher density" more acceptable. This can be accomplished by drawing on the best features of our older neighborhoods and looking to the redevelopment of similar areas in the region. A common element of these older neighborhoods is a mixture of uses in compact development that is comfortable for walking, or pedestrian-oriented.

These truly functional neighborhoods contain housing, parks and schools located within walking distance of shops, civic uses, jobs and transit. This still allows for the convenience of the car, but also for the opportunity to walk, bike or use transit. At the regional scale, this means a network of neighborhood centers, transit corridors, urban activity centers, small cities and towns and rural centers. This development is centered around an expanding transit system, urban growth area limits and open space.

This 20-Year Plan directs a change in current development trends, however, part of this change needs to include how to make these changes occur and to understand the need for these changes. For example, as a community we need to modify our thinking that higher density areas equate to more crime or are not owner-occupied.

High density developments have many different forms such as townhouses, garden apartments, infill housing and accessory units (granny flats). Anton Nelessen's Visual Preference Survey conducted for the Vancouver Partnership Planning Area in March 1993 illustrated that well-designed, high density developments were more appealing than typical single-family suburban tract developments. The main ingredients of these developments were human scale and pedestrian orientation. Design elements that contribute to a sense of place include structures which are built nearer to the street, front porches, landscaping, convenient walkways, narrower streets and parking on the street and behind the structures.

## Goals and Policies

### 11.0 Countywide Planning Policies

- 11.0.1 The community design element shall help conserve resources and minimize waste.
- 11.0.2 The county's community design standards shall be appropriate to the region, exhibiting continuity of history and culture and compatibility with the climate and encourage the development of local character and community identity.
- 11.0.3 The goals and policies of this element are intended to:
  - clarify and define design objectives for zoning ordinances;
  - reduce review time during the design phase of proposed projects;
  - improve the visual attractiveness of the community;
  - encourage quality architecture and landscape design;
  - minimize land use conflicts; and,
  - develop clear and consistent analysis of new projects.

### County 20-Year Planning Policies

**Goal: Natural features of Clark County should be incorporated into design and development.**

#### 11.1 Policies

- 11.1.1 Maintain and enhance formal and informal open spaces throughout the urban areas that includes parks, trails and green spaces.
- 11.1.2 In the urban area, waterfront development should be environmentally sensitive and allow maximum public access.

- 11.1.3 Natural land features should be recognized and integrated into the placement of buildings and in site planning. Streams, hillsides and unique vegetation should be considered strong design determinants and incorporated into the overall plan.
- 11.1.4 The siting of buildings should take advantage of river, mountain, lake and agricultural/pastoral views.
- 11.1.5 Encourage the retention and inclusion of existing mature ~~vegetation as~~ vegetation as a design element in the site plan. Every effort should be made to preserve existing trees over 8” in diameter.
- 11.1.6 Where new development adjoins agricultural or rural land or public open space, a soft transitional edge should be provided on-site to create a gradual transition between the open space and new development.

**Goal: Development in urban areas and rural centers should incorporate diverse uses designed in a manner that provides for a sense of community, supports the human scale and allows for multi-modal transportation options.**

## 11.2 Policies

- 11.2.1 Facilitate development and create standards to achieve the following:
  - (a) Increased streetfront use, visual interest, and integration with adjacent buildings;
  - (b) Improved pedestrian connections and proximity of uses within developments;
  - (c) Enhanced sense of identity in neighborhoods and subareas; and
  - (d) Publicly and/or privately owned gathering spaces facilitating interaction.
- 11.2.2 Encourage the development ~~of multi~~ of multi-story, mixed uses and other commercial uses that utilize regional architectural styles and are at a human scale.
- 11.2.3 Encourage the development of urban activity centers that foster community identity and reduce reliance on automobiles.
- 11.2.4 Encourage infill and conversion of existing single uses to mixed use centers in the urban centers and transit corridors.
- 11.2.5 Encourage developments in urban and rural centers that maintain the unique character of the center, e.g., public commons, storefronts, setbacks, landscaping and pedestrian orientation.
- 11.2.6 Develop pedestrian and bicycle corridors between schools, housing, within neighborhoods and rural centers.
- 11.2.7 Promote the development of identifiable residential neighborhoods and shopping districts through the encouragement of more compact development patterns, the use of shared design and landscaping characteristics and development of landmarks.

- 11.2.8 Establish locational and design criteria for commercial and industrial properties fronting on railroad lines.
- 11.2.8 Promote improved public health by encouraging integrated land use and street patterns with sidewalk and recreational facilities that support walking or biking and provide easy access to healthy food.
- 11.2.9 Encourage the development of age-friendly communities that have affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options, to facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life.

**Goal: Housing in Clark County should provide for a variety of styles, be oriented to the street and be supportive of pedestrian and transportation alternatives.**

**11.3 Policies**

- 11.3.1 Incorporate zoning standards that allow housing units to front on and relate to streets by encouraging elements such as balconies, porches, bay windows or decks that promote front yard activity.
- 11.3.2 Create incentives for developments which provide pedestrian access, public commons, maintain existing vegetation and are integrated with existing development.
- 11.3.3 Encourage the design of residential infill developments that reflect or improve the existing neighborhood character.
- 11.3.4 Establish an adequate side yard setback in residential areas for nonresidential uses including buildings, storage and parking.

**Goal: Transportation and parking requirements shall use land efficiently and be oriented to pedestrian and transit uses and minimize dependence on the automobile.**

**11.4 Policies**

- 11.4.1 Develop design standards that create pedestrian friendly streets and public spaces.
- 11.4.2 Study parking supply and demand in the county. Develop parking standards that reflect decreased demand generated by such things as pedestrian facilities, bike paths, improved transit, transit demand management measures and mixed use developments.
- 11.4.3 Revise road standards to respect human scale rather than highway scale by:
  - Reducing road widths wherever feasible.
  - Reducing street lighting with appropriate cut-off to limit glare.
  - Require sidewalk and design elements for pedestrian activity along major arterials including items such as benches, pedestrian-scale street lighting, trash containers, landscaping, paving textures, public art, etc.

- 11.4.4 Coordinate zoning code and road standards to develop pedestrian friendly streets that encourage minimal front yard setbacks, rear yard parking, alleys and mixed uses.
- 11.4.5 Develop street plans beyond the arterial system to include a dense network of interconnecting streets as opposed to low density cul-de-sacs and widely-spaced arterials.
- 11.4.6 Require street connections or, if not feasible due to site conditions, provide pedestrian connections through the use of easements or pedestrian paths in rights-of-way.
- 11.4.7 Develop design standards for transit facilities.
- 11.4.8 Develop commercial zoning and transportation ordinance standards that:
  - require similar uses provide cross-access between properties and joint access to arterials and collectors;
  - provide for separate vehicular and pedestrian circulation in the site development plan of new projects and substantial remodels;
  - provide for pedestrian walkways along roads with landscape buffers as separation between roads and walkways;
  - provide for dedicated internal pedestrian circulation within the development;
  - provide opportunities for surface parking lots to develop transit-oriented uses; and,
  - provide standards for adequate buffering between incompatible industrial, commercial and residential uses.

**Goal: Development in urban areas and rural centers should incorporate design standards and aesthetically visually attractive developments.**

**Goal: Promote the advancement of energy efficiency, green building, waste reduction, composting and recycling, solar and renewable energy use, and local sustainable food production; as well as actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change.**