

STAFF REPORT

DATE: January 6, 2021

TO: Pierce County Planning Commission

FROM: Dan Cardwell, Supervisor, Long Range Planning

BY: Jessica M. Nappi, Senior Planner, Long Range Planning

SUBJECT: **2021 Comprehensive Plan Text Amendment – Application No. 939943**
The Planning Commission will review and consider proposed amendments to the Design Element policies related to Planning Commission’s recommendation that the County provide more flexibility in Countywide design standards.
Applicant: Pierce County Planning and Public Works

NOTICE: Notice of the Planning Commission public hearing was published in the News Tribune on December 23, 2020.

SEPA: SEPA will be conducted pursuant to the State Environmental Policy Act, Pierce County Code Title 18D, and provisions of the Growth Management Act.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The proposal adds a policy to Design and Character Element of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan to provide more flexibility in Countywide design standards.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Design and Character Element / Urban, Rural, and Resource (page 5-8)

GOAL D-14 Encourage regulatory streamlining and innovation, and allow for the flexibility in the design standards and guidelines to ensure they promote quality and innovative development and support a range of housing types and affordability opportunities.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff supports the proposal as it provides flexibility in housing design that would decrease unnecessary costs associated and unintended consequences with prescribed standards. This flexibility may be more responsive to the architectural characteristics of an evolving housing market.

IMPLEMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

If the proposal is adopted, an in-depth review of regulatory amendments to PCC Title 18J Development Regulations – Design Standards and Guidelines with subsequent amendments to appropriate citations may be necessary to implement the proposal.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

Procedures for Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, [PCC 19C.10](#), require that the merits of all amendments to the Plan be evaluated based on the following ([PCC 19C.10.060 A](#)):

1. The effect upon the rate of growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Plan.
The proposal would not affect the rate of growth, development, and conversion of land.
2. The effect upon the County's capacity to provide adequate public facilities.
The proposal would not affect the provision of adequate public facilities.
3. The effect upon the rate of population and employment growth.
The proposal would not affect the rate of population and employment.
4. Whether Plan objectives are being met as specified or remain valid and desirable.
The proposal would meet key objectives relating to housing affordability. The proposal would modify the intent of the design standards from a more prescribed set of guidelines to a flexible approach.
5. The effect upon general land values or housing costs.
The proposal may decrease housing costs as more flexible design standards may be more adaptive towards changing housing markets.
6. Whether capital improvements or expenditures, including transportation, are being made or completed as expected.
Not applicable.
7. Whether the initiated amendment conforms to the requirements of the GMA, is internally consistent with the Plan and is consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies for Pierce County.
The proposal is not inconsistent with design goals and policies within the Comprehensive Plan as the existing goals and policies encourage certain design elements and the proposal promotes flexibility in meeting the overall design.
8. The effect upon critical areas and natural resource lands.
The proposal would not affect critical areas or natural resource lands.
9. Consistency with locational criteria in the Comprehensive Plan and application requirements established by this Chapter.
Not applicable.

10. The effect upon other considerations as deemed necessary by the Department.

In March 2020, the Pierce County Planning Commission made a recommendation relating to the updates of the four community plans. Its recommendation included amendments to the County's design standards and guidelines in Title 18J. Its recommendation included a request for the County explore a more flexible approach to regulating design than the set of prescriptive standards in Title 18J.

Applicable RCWs/Policies

GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT (GMA)

RCW 36.70A.070: The comprehensive plan of a county or city that is required or chooses to plan under RCW 36.70A.040 shall consist of a map or maps, and descriptive text covering objectives, principles, and standards used to develop the comprehensive plan. The plan shall be an internally consistent document and all elements shall be consistent with the future land use map. A comprehensive plan shall be adopted and amended with public participation as provided in RCW 36.70A.140.

MULTICOUNTY PLANNING POLICIES (VISION 2050)

Housing Policies (page 109)

MPP-H-10 Encourage jurisdictions to review and streamline development standards and regulations to advance their public benefit, provide flexibility, and minimize additional costs to housing.

PIERCE COUNTY COUNTYWIDE PLANNING POLICIES (CPPs)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT (page 33)

Ec-2. The County, and each municipality in the County, shall promote diverse economic opportunities for all citizens of the County, especially the unemployed, disadvantaged persons, minorities and small businesses. The following measures may be used in accomplishing this policy, where appropriate:

- 2.5 encouraging flexibility in local zoning and land use controls in order to permit a variety of economic uses, but doing so without sacrificing sound design and development standards;

Health and Well-Being (page 42)

HW-1. The County, and each municipality in the County, will be designed to promote physical, social, and mental well-being so that all people can live healthier and more active lives by:

- 1.2 developing and implementing design guidelines to encourage construction of healthy buildings and facilities to promote healthy people; and

Historic, Archaeological and Cultural Preservation (page 46)

HAC-4. Utilize urban design strategies and approaches to ensure that changes to the built environment preserve and enhance the region's and the county's unique attributes and each community's distinctive identity in recognition of the economic value of sense of place.

Urban (page 5-3)

GOAL D-1 Encourage development that is visually attractive, consistent with the community's identity, compatible with surrounding uses, and respectful of the natural environment.

D-1.1 Encourage an orderly arrangement of buildings, landscaping, and circulation elements that support the functions of a site.

D-1.2 Ensure that landscape designs meet the functional requirements of developments by reinforcing site design, and providing adequate on-site screening and buffering.

Urban Residential (page 5-3)

GOAL D-3 Enhance residential neighborhood quality and promote a strong sense of community.

D-3.1 Encourage modulation of multifamily buildings to make the building mass appear smaller.

D-3.1.1 Discourage multifamily buildings consisting of large blank walls, particularly when visible from adjacent streets.

D-3.2 Encourage dwelling units with a variety of architectural features such as porches, stoops, balconies, decks, or other well-defined pedestrian entrances.

D-3.2.1 Features should be visible from the street.

D-3.2.2 Emphasize each unit through variations in details such as trim, roofline and pitch, porch design, and color.

D-3.3 Promote common recreation and open space areas within residential developments.

D-3.4 Allow residential units to be oriented toward the street.

D-3.5 Design high density developments to be compatible with surrounding lower density residential uses.

D-3.6 Ensure that accessory dwelling units comply with design standards.

D-3.7 Design standards for moderate density single-family development should consider:

D-3.7.1 A range of housing types, costs, and densities;

D-3.7.2 Pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation;

D-3.7.3 Transit strategies; and

D-3.7.4 Environmental constraints.

GOAL D-4 Improve overall mobility through the location and design of residential developments.

D-4.1 Discourage vehicular access points in multifamily developments onto shared streets with lower density residential areas.

D-4.2 Locate new multiple-level, multifamily development close to the right-of-way in a Mixed Use or High Density Residential District.

- D-4.2.1** When any multifamily development of two or more levels abuts or is across a residential or collector arterial from a MSF designation, the development shall be set back a distance equal to or greater than the height of the building.

Urban, Rural, and Resource (page 5-8)

GOAL D-13 Consider and protect important environmental features in the design of any development.

- D-13.1** Promote the retention of clusters of trees.
- D-13.2** Minimize the obstruction of territorial views and scenic vistas.
- D-13.3** Protect and enhance scenic routes.
- D-13.4** Protect viewsheds, skylines, and ridgelines.
- D-13.5** Screen or remove negative elements.