



March 27, 2019

To: Oregon City - City Commission
From: Laura Terway, AICP, Community Development Director
Re: Background Regarding a Request to Replace the Residential Design Standards and Remove Alleys in the Park Place and South End Concept Plans

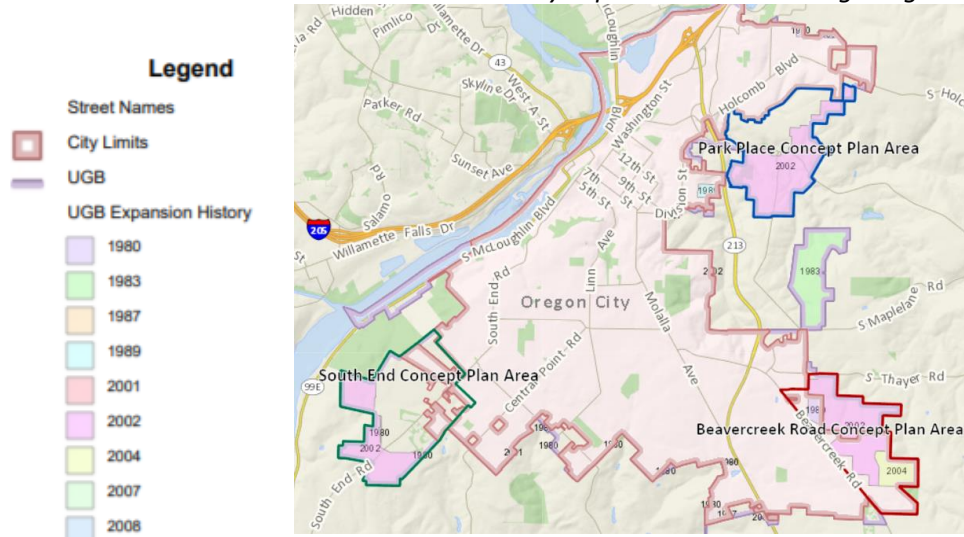
Executive Summary

The purpose of this memo is to provide the City Commission with more clarity regarding the adoption of design standards in the Park Place and South End Concept Plans areas, and how those design standards differ from overall City design requirements. The memo provides background information to prepare the City Commission to address a request to replace residential design standards specific to both Concept Plan areas with city-wide residential design standards, and to remove a requirement for alleys in the commercial and medium/high density residential zoning designations. Given the relatively short duration to consider this topic, the comparatively less targeted public involvement, general confusion regarding the topic, and the existing code allowing developers to request alternative standards, staff recommends the City Commission not amend the residential design standards or alley requirements in the South End and Park Place Concept Plan areas.

Background: Concept Plan Areas

The Metropolitan Service District (Metro) controls growth while protecting farm and forest land through the use of an urban growth boundary (UGB). The area within the UGB is intended to be developed to urban densities while the land outside of the UGB is preserved and protected. After extensive analysis of buildable lands and growth projections, Metro determined that the boundary in Oregon City should expand to provide additional lands for various types of development.

Urban Growth Boundary Expansions Surrounding Oregon City



Once the land was added into the UGB, the City was required to complete a Concept Plan to identify future zoning of the area, urban design, infrastructure, parks, and transportation needs of the area to comply with Metro’s requirements. The Concept Plan is a high level Vision document which answers questions like “What land uses are included in this area,” “What are the priorities for urban design?” and “How dense or spread out will these new neighborhoods be?” This big picture vision is then translated into zoning designations and design standards in the Oregon City Municipal Code to ensure the vision of the Concept Plan is implemented over time as development occurs. Figure 2 shows the overall sequence of this process.

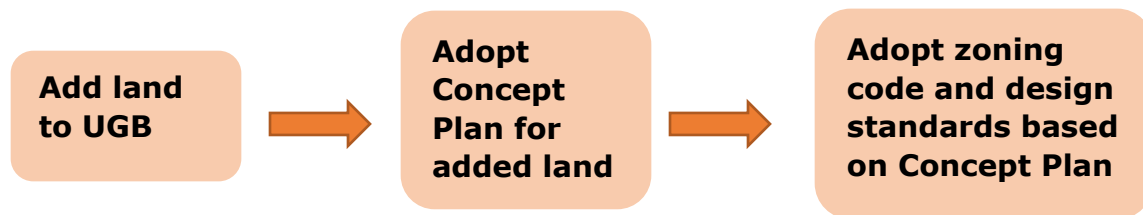


Figure 2: Process for Planning for future development in land added to the UGB

Concept Plans include aspirational language and general ideas; for example, “diverse and compact residential development” and “compatibility with existing neighborhood character.” These statements are useful, but they cannot be used as design standards for development because they are much too vague and can be interpreted in many different ways. Instead, the City provides very specific guidance for builders and developers that satisfy the intent of the concept. The design standards attempt to translate the big picture concepts identified within the Concept Plan into minimum requirements for development, such as garage placement or the amount of windows on a home.

Park Place Concept Plan

The Park Place Concept Plan boundary is approximately 480 acres adjacent to Oregon City’s Park Place neighborhood on the northeastern edge of the City. The Concept Plan itself describes:

The Park Place Concept Plan was developed to help the City of Oregon City prepare for this growth by working with local citizens, area stakeholders, and local and regional jurisdictions to develop a common vision for the area. This vision provides a framework for growth that respects and augments the area’s context, history, and natural systems. The Park Place Concept Plan emphasizes good urban design, multi-modal connectivity, opportunities for place-making and cultivating community, diversity, and, above all, a way to provide for future growth in a sustainable manner. Ultimately, the Park Place Concept Plan will ensure that the land brought in is planned in an efficient and sustainable manner that will maximize the use of the available lands while protecting the natural resources in the study area.

The Park Place Concept Plan was developed through an extensive interactive public process beginning in 2004 guided by a 25-member Project Advisory Committee comprised of neighbors, stakeholders, business owners and City residents. The visioning process included four community forums, a Community Information Night, a weeklong charrette, project website, email list, mailed postcards, public service announcements on Willamette Falls Television, and road signs and sandwich boards. After the creation of the plan, the adoption process included a series of Planning Commission and City Commission hearings prior to its effective date on May 2, 2008.

Park Place Concept Plan Area Design Standards

The design standards that builders will use when designing and constructing new neighborhoods in the Park Place Concept Plan Area were written and adopted through a subsequent process in 2009. Public involvement in this process included mailers to all property owners located within the UGB, affected agencies, Neighborhood Associations and public notices in the Clackamas Review newspaper, along with hearings and work sessions before the Planning and City Commissions starting in February of 2008.

The Park Place Concept Plan contains the following guidance on residential design. It does not contain any specific design requirements for new housing

- Single-family houses can be a range of sizes, styles, and colors. Above all, they should be community-oriented with architectural elements that encourage “eyes on the street” and neighbor interaction. (Page 27)
- “Support architectural integrity and variety in residential and mixed-use neighborhoods.” (Page 62)
- Create design standards for Park Place in order to ensure diverse, compact, attractive, and community-oriented residential development and compatibility with existing and surrounding neighborhood character and scale. (Page 62)
- Consider adopting additional architectural design standards for residential development and consider developing and adopting architectural variety requirements for subdivision development. (Page 62)
- Support architectural integrity and variety in residential and mixed-use neighborhoods. (Page 62)

The design standards that were adopted for Park Place Concept Plan area are in Chapter 17.21 of the municipal code, titled “Single-Family Design Standards – Park Place Concept Plan Area”. The chapter states “The intent of this chapter is to ensure new development is compatible with the goals and policies of the Park Place Concept Plan area and the historic architectural styles of Oregon City”. The chapter applies to all new detached single-family and two-family homes, accessory dwelling units, and cottages located within the Park Place Concept Plan area. Minimum standards are included for roof design, modulation and massing, porches and entries, architectural details, siding materials, windows, garages, and accessory structures.

South End Concept Plan

The South End Concept Plan and implementing design standards were created and adopted at the same time. Effective May 16, 2014, the Concept Plan encompasses 611 acres south of Oregon City on South End Road. Initial public involvement began in mid-2012 and included a 19-member Community Advisory Team, Technical Advisory Team, social media forums, in-depth interviews, 17 community conversations, an online survey, three public meetings (including an open house), virtual open house, community workshop, and hearings before the Planning Commission and City Commissions.

The visioning statement of the South End Concept Plan area is:

“Oregon City’s South End is a safe, vibrant and diverse community. Parks, plazas and other public gathering places strengthen the sense of community and connectedness. A variety of housing choices and amenities are the foundation of great neighborhoods for people of all ages. South End’s historic rural character is retained through a variety of means. Streams, trees, wetlands and wildlife habitat are protected and enhanced through a network of natural areas. As one center of community, McLoughlin Elementary School is a hub of learning and information exchange. Paths, trails and family friendly streets provide safe travel for all. Several

transportation options are available and connect South End to downtown Oregon City and the region."

South End Concept Plan Area Design Standards

South End Concept Plan discusses encouraging detached garages and alleys in residential areas, but has no specific requirements for alleys, porches, or design elements in residential development. The overall description of the Concept Plan Area notes that "Many of the lots in the new neighborhoods will have rear service alleyways for accessing garages behind houses and shops." The South End Concept Plan also contains the following guidance for residential design standards. Excerpts include:

- Design housing to enhance the quality of the streetscape experience and promote neighborly interaction and local surveillance of the streets. (Page 55)
- Encourage architectural elements to present lively building frontages to the street. (Page 55)
- Require entry floor levels be raised as in proportion to its proximity to the sidewalk. The closer the house is to the sidewalk, the higher the entry floor level should be raised. (Page 56)
- When rear alleys are present, limit garage setbacks and require additional parking be located beside the garage. (Page 56)
- Encourage the use of detached garages. (Page 56)
- Encourage rear alleyways to provide additional connectivity for cyclists and pedestrians and break up overly-long blocks.(Page 57)

The adoption process included the creation of Chapter 17.22 "Single-Family Design Standards – South End Concept Plan Area". The chapter states "The intent of this chapter is to ensure new development is compatible with the goals and policies of the South End Concept Plan area". The chapter applies to all new detached single-family and two-family homes, accessory dwelling units, and cottages located within the South End Concept Plan area. Minimum standards are included for modulation and massing, porches and entries, architectural details, siding materials, windows, garages, and accessory structures.

Comparison of Concept Plan Area Design Standards to City-wide Standards

Table 1 below summarizes and compares the Concept Plan Area standards for residential designs to the adopted City-wide standards. Because none of the Concept Plan Areas have been developed yet, there have been no test cases to see the results of the design standards in Chapter 17.21 and 17.22.

The existing city-wide standards are found in Chapter 17.20, which is proposed to be moved to Chapter 17.14 in the package of code amendments. The city-wide standards were adopted in 2004 and have been required for over 1400 new homes in the City in the last ten years. The purpose of the City-wide standards is similar to the aspirational visions discussed in the Concept Plans. The existing citywide standards are meant to accomplish the following, as found in Chapter 17.20.010:

- Enhance Oregon City through the creation of attractively designed housing and streetscapes.
- Ensure that there is a physical and visual connection between the living area of the residence and the street.
- Improve public safety by providing "eyes on the street".
- Promote community interaction by designing the public way, front yards and open spaces so that they are attractive and inviting for neighbors to interact.
- Prevent garages from obscuring or dominating the primary facade of the house.
- Provide guidelines for good design at reasonable costs and with multiple options to achieve the purposes of this chapter.

While the City-wide goals are very similar to the Concept Plan descriptions, the written standards differ. The Concept Plan Area design standards are more stringent than the city-wide standards; for example, front porches are required, along with recessed windows and secondary massing such as cross-gables. Both the City-wide standards and the Concept Plan Area standards provide the opportunity for builders to propose alternative designs through a Type II publicly-noticed land use process.

Single Family Residential Design Standards In Current Oregon City Municipal Code			
	City-wide (Chapter 17.20)	Park Place Concept Plan Area (Chapter 17.21)	South End Concept Plan Area (Chapter 17.22)
Roof Pitch	No restrictions	5:12 minimum	No restrictions
Front Porches	Not required, counts as a design element if provided	Covered front porch at least 80 sq. ft. with railing required for all homes	For homes within 20 feet of sidewalk, covered front porch at least 80 sq. ft. with railing required
Garages	Front garage doors are permitted and limited to 60% of the width of the house	Only side, entry, rear entry, or detached garages are allowed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front garage doors are permitted • For detached garages, design must match home
Windows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No restrictions • More than 15% windows counts as a design element 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recessed windows (2 inches) required • One window every 15 feet on all sides required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recessed windows (2 inches) required • One window every 15 feet on all sides required
Siding	No restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only brick, stone, wood, composite siding is allowed. • Horizontal board siding with 5 inch reveal or less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only brick, stone, wood, composite siding is allowed. • Horizontal board siding with 5 inch reveal or less
Architectural Design Elements	5 to 9 architectural elements from a list of 23 items are required depending on the width and placement of garage	5 elements are required from a list of 8; the bar is higher than citywide list	5 elements are required from a list of 8; the bar is higher than citywide list
Massing	No restrictions	Require secondary massing such as cross gabled wings or sunroom/kitchen/dining room extensions for homes larger than 1200 sf	Require secondary massing such as cross gabled wings or sunroom/kitchen/dining room extensions for homes larger than 1200 sf
Alternative Designs Permitted?	Yes, through Type II review process or Master Plan process	Yes, through Type II review process or Master Plan process	Yes, through Type II review process or Master Plan process

Request to Use City-wide standards for Concept Plan Areas

As part of the Equitable Housing project, the City has been reviewing the Municipal Code with the public since October of 2017 to find ways to remove or reduce barriers to housing development. The scope of the Equitable Housing project included making changes to multifamily design standards, but did not initially include reviewing and amending the residential design standards in the Concept Plan Areas. At the project advisory team meetings, the group discussed removing alley requirements throughout the City, but retaining them in the Concept Plan boundaries.

The City received multiple requests to replace the residential design standards for Park Place and South End Concept Plan areas, as well as remove the associated alley requirement, starting on January 16, 2019. Upon receiving the request, the City Commission directed staff to reach out to the Park Place and South End Neighborhood Associations to solicit input on the request. Staff has met with the Park Place Neighborhood Association, South End Neighborhood Association, and members of the public to discuss the proposal.

The verbal and written comments vary significantly. Some indicated that the design standards are too onerous, costly, and undesirable to buyers, while others expressed concern that the intent of the Concept Plans would be lost. Staff heard both support and opposition for the design standards, along with a fair amount of confusion over the difference between the specific design standards and the general Concept Plans.

Staff encourages the City Commission consider the following regarding the design standards for the Concept Plan Areas:

- The City Commission must balance many competing needs such as good urban design, public input, and housing affordability.
 - Though the City is considering amendments to remove and reduce barriers to housing, we are not obligated to amend the residential design standards. The purpose of the project is to adopt changes as we see appropriate for our community.
 - The development community indicated that the design standards would result in a higher cost of housing to the public in these areas. Staff also acknowledges that many of the standards, such as the recessed window requirement, do in fact add costs to housing construction.
 - During the Concept Plan processes, the public discussed creating unique communities and the use of higher design standards as mitigation for the increased densities compared to much of the City. In addition, there was a desire to have unique neighborhoods that look different from the rest of the city with design standards that mitigate development.
 - The development community indicated that the standards would result in slower development of the Concept Plan areas. Though there is no obligation to develop the Concept Plan areas within any timeframe, the supply of housing is needed to serve the growing population.
 - Some members of the public indicated they like the uniqueness of the design standards, while others indicated some of the standards are not necessary.
 - The community has not had a lot of time to consider amending Chapters 17.21 and 17.22. Staff recommends that any changes should be fully vetted and considered against the larger vision of the Concept Plans. The existing Chapters 17.21 and 17.22 implement the vision of the Concept Plans. The City-wide design standards in Chapter 17.20 would also likely meet the vision of the Concept Plans.

- The existing Chapter 17.21 and 17.22 complies with Metro's requirements for implementation of the Concept Plans. If the City amended the code to remove the standards specific to the Concept Plan areas as well as the alley requirement, the standards would still likely comply with Metro's requirements for implementation of the Concept Plans.
- None of the land within the Concept Plan Areas has been developed using the residential design standards; thus their effects are not fully known. It is unclear how challenging homes are to construct or sell, or how well the alternative design process works.

Staff encourages the City Commission consider the following regarding alleys in Concept Plan Areas:

- The city-wide code has required alleys in commercial and industrial zones since 1998, and in medium density residential zones since 2004.
- The existing code requires alleys in the R-5, R-3.5, R-2, MUC-1, MUC-2 and NC zones throughout the City. Alleys are not required in R-6, R-8, or R-10 Single-Family Dwelling Districts.
- There is a provision in the existing code which removes the alley requirement under certain constraints or conditions. Because of this provision, only about 10 newer developments are alley-loaded.
- The requests received in January included the suggestion to remove the alley requirements in the Concept Plan areas.
- Alleys, and "eyes on the street" are specifically mentioned in both Concept Plans, although not identified as required for low density residential areas.
- The development community expressed concern for alleys on sloped sites, increased cost of maintenance, increased impervious surfaces that alleys create, reduced choice for vehicle access location, smaller yard spaces, when alley-loaded design is used. They also stated that alley-loaded homes are not as marketable today as homes with attached garages facing the street.
- Alley-loaded designs have benefits including additional space for planting street trees in front of the homes, more on-street parking in front of the homes, and a more walkable, pedestrian-friendly streetscape.
- Alleys behind buildings allow for fewer curb cuts, and thus more on-street parking in front of the building. If the alley requirement is removed, the maximum driveway widths should be amended to limit the maximum driveway width in medium and high density zoning designations to retain on-street parking and street trees.

Staff Recommendation

On one hand, the design standards within the Concept Plan Areas create a desired neighborhood character. On the other hand, the design standards may result in homes that are relatively more expensive. While there may be reasonable changes that could be made to the Concept Plan Area design standards that would still meet the intent of the Concept Plans while reducing some of the more costly elements, for example, the recessed window requirement and the secondary massing requirement found in both Concept Plan Area Chapters, and the minimum roof-pitch requirement in Park Place Concept Plan Area, staff does not recommend making changes at this time. Given that the community has had a short duration to consider this topic, comparatively less targeted public involvement, the general confusion regarding the topic, and that the existing code allow developers to request alternative standards, staff recommends the City Commission does not amend the design standards in Chapter 17.21 and Chapter 17.22 or revise the alley requirements in the Concept Plan areas at this time.