



**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,  
NEIGHBORHOODS, AND STRATEGIC  
PLANNING DEPARTMENT**

**M E M O R A N D U M**

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DATE: March 10, 2006  
TO: Planning Commission  
FROM: Rebecca Lind, Planning Manager  
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SUBJECT: **Highlands Subarea Community Design Policies and Regulations**

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ISSUE: In order to ensure that redevelopment of the Highlands Subarea fulfills the Vision of the City, it is necessary to adopt policies and regulations. The Comprehensive Plan has both Community Design and Center Village Land Use policies, but they are not specific to the Vision of the Highlands Subarea. Likewise, Renton adopted Urban Design Regulations (Renton Municipal Code 4-3-100), but these are not strictly appropriate for the Highlands Subarea either.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Planning Commission recommend approval of the **Highlands Subarea Design District 'D' and 'E' design policies and regulations.**

BACKGROUND SUMMARY:

I. Introduction

The purpose of the Highlands Subarea Design Policies is to lay the foundation for standards and guidelines that will shape redevelopment of the Highlands for the life of the Subarea Plan. These policies are implemented through standards and guidelines adopted as the City of Renton Urban Design Regulations (Renton Municipal Code 4-3-100).

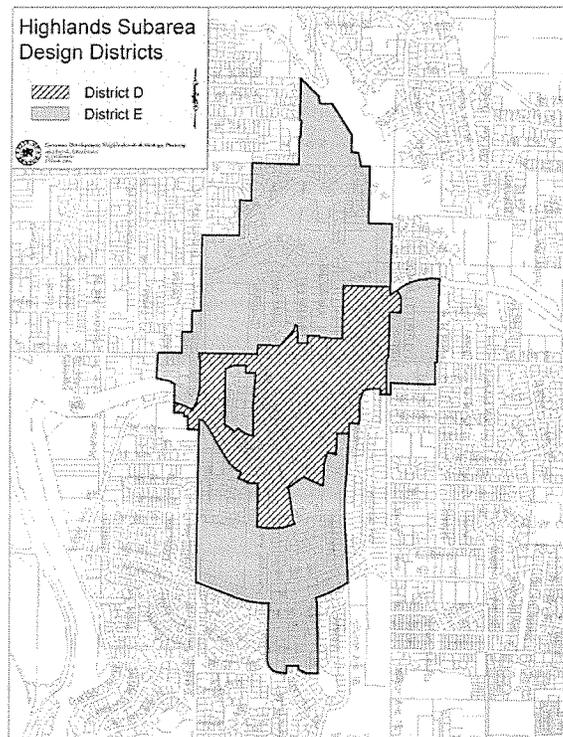
As with the Comprehensive Plan Land Use and Community Design policies, on which the Urban Design Regulations are based, the purpose of the Highlands Subarea Design Policies are established with the following intent:

- a. Maintain and protect property values;
- b. Enhance the general appearance of the City;
- c. Encourage creativity in building and site design;
- d. Achieve predictability, balanced with flexibility; and
- e. Consider the individual merits of proposals.

It is intended that these policies will be implemented by standards and guidelines specific to the Highlands Subarea. As with the Urban Design Regulations, the Highlands Subarea Design Regulations consist of two categories of regulations, those that are mandatory (“minimum standards”) and those that are optional (“guidelines”). Although optional, the guidelines provide assistance in meeting the intent of the policies. While creativity in planning is expected and encouraged, in all cases, **the intent of the policy must be met by the project**. Furthermore, the means by which this is to be accomplished must be demonstrated by the plans submitted for review.

The two categories of regulations apply to two basic land use areas of the Subarea (Figure 1). The first is the commercial center of the Subarea. It consists of the Commercial Neighborhood (CN) zone and the Center Village – Core (CV-C), designated for purposes of design regulations as Design District D. Uses within this area include business and professional offices (insurance offices and medical/dental clinics), service (barber shop), retail (grocery store), restaurants (drive-through fast food and sit down restaurants), recreational business (bowling ally), mixed-use buildings (commercial and residential), and residential (multi-family).

The second area consists primarily of residential land uses. Designated as Design District E, it consists of several residential zones, differentiated by varying densities and building types. They are Center Village – Residential (CV-R), Center Village – Flex (CV-X), Residential Multi-family (RMF), Residential 14 (R-14), Residential 10 (R-10), and Resident 8 (R-8).



The goal of the Highlands Subarea Plan is to revitalize a long-standing neighborhood in Renton. Both the size and scale of the Highlands Subarea is smaller than Renton's Urban Center. Therefore, although some Urban Design regulations are appropriate and applicable to both the Urban Center and the Highlands Subarea, others have been fashioned to meet the particular vision of the Subarea.

The following policy summaries include summaries of the proposed implementation strategies. The fully formed Highlands Subarea Community Design policies are included for District 'D' and District 'E'. The Subarea Design Regulations for both districts are in the attached municipal code text amendments.

## **II. Site Design and Building Location**

The Highlands Subarea policies promote both efficient and flexible land use. To accomplish this, the Subarea should be redeveloped at higher densities.

The existing residential streets are considered efficient, particularly if alleys are located between blocks, although commercial areas may require realignment of streets and driveways. Reinforcement of a hierarchical street system should be incorporated into site planning.

Buildings, sidewalks, and streets should be designed to facilitate pedestrian activity. Commercial structures should front on sidewalks, with parking areas at the rear or in parking structures. Residential structures may be set back from sidewalks, but should front on streets and have garages and parking at the rear, if alleys are available.

Building entries should further the pedestrian nature of the Subarea. Residential structures, however, should consider the privacy of residents in their design and provide public/private transition space.

On a larger scale, the transition from redevelopment areas to neighborhoods not undergoing change should be considered in the development design. Areas of attention in this regard should include bulk and scale of structures, rooflines and roof color; and preservation of daylight and views.

To preserve the feeling of community that is distinct from other areas, the entries to Highlands Subarea should be marked as significant gateways.

## **III. Parking and Vehicular Access**

With an objective of a strong pedestrian-oriented environment throughout the Subarea, the design and location of parking is a key issue. Parking should be connected to pedestrian areas, but should be sited to the rear of buildings and not front on pedestrian-oriented streets. Vehicular access to parking should not conflict with pedestrian walkways.

Parking lots within the Subarea should be small in size, or if large lots are required they should be subdivided into smaller components, located in back of buildings, with interior as well as perimeter landscaping.

Structured parking is preferred within the commercial use areas of the Highlands Subarea. Structured parking should have ground-floor commercial uses when the building abuts pedestrian-oriented streets.

#### **IV. Pedestrian Environment**

The foundation concept of the Highlands Subarea plan is that redevelopment of the Subarea should take into consideration the needs of pedestrians foremost. In addition to reducing traffic volumes and improving air quality, lowering individual cost of living, and improving land efficiency, pedestrian-oriented environments also improve conditions for those who unavoidably must rely on their vehicles for transportation. A network that is safe and convenient for pedestrians is probably safer and more convenient for users of other forms of transportation.

In addition, within the Highlands Subarea the existing street pattern with alleys is highly conducive to a pedestrian-oriented network. Subarea policies are intended to reinforce the existing network by requiring multiple connections, additional sidewalks and alleys, street furniture and other amenities, reduced impediments to foot travel, and architectural treatments that reduce building scale to human-sized standards.

#### **V. Landscape/Recreation/Open Space**

It is anticipated that the density of buildings and people will increase as the Highlands Subarea is redeveloped. Although there is no verified correlation between higher density living and low quality of life, there is evidence that a relationship between open space and parks and high quality of life does exist. This relationship is anticipated by policies that encourage landscaped plazas and open spaces in privately developed projects throughout the Subarea.

#### **VI. Building Architectural Design**

The policies of the Highlands Subarea that address architectural design are intended to encourage building character, massing, detailing, and construction that is visually engaging, human in scale, and characteristic of the Pacific Northwest.

#### **VII. Signage and Lighting**

Signage should be scaled for the Village nature of the Subarea and clearly communicate business names, location information, and assist in way finding. Lighting should contribute to the safety and liveliness of the Subarea without becoming a nuisance.

CONCLUSION: It is the intent of the recommended Highlands Subarea design policies and implementing regulations to set standards to meet multi-faceted goals. While it is important that the overall character of the Highlands Subarea meets the Vision, the goal is not aesthetic only. The over-riding need for the Highlands Subarea is to create and maintain a neighborhood that is safe and provides security for residents, encourages private investment and economic development, and provides an environment of high quality of life for a diverse community.