

DATE: April 4th, 2023

TO: Chair Ledell and Planning Commission members

FROM: Becky Coutinho, Associate Planner and Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner
Community Development Department

CC: Rebecca Kennedy, Deputy Director, Community Development Department

RE: April 11 workshop review of Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridors Strategy Implementation

Introduction

The April 11 workshop is intended to update the Planning Commission on the status of the Evergreen and Grand commercial corridors implementation process. This memorandum includes a recap of the recent and upcoming work intended to result in zoning code changes and various other implementation measures in 2023. This workshop will feature an overview of the draft Evergreen and Grand Overlay district code language, community outreach, and design standards.

Brief Summary of Strategy Document



The Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridor study area is focused on Grand Blvd. between Mill Plain and Evergreen Blvd., and on Evergreen Blvd. between V and Grove Streets as indicated in the study area map. The area is an emerging small business district with smaller-scale buildings oriented to the street adjacent to established neighborhoods. The desired outcome of the Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridors Strategy is to enhance the existing commercial corridors, increase walkability, ensure access to services and amenities, establish a balanced multi-modal transportation network, support locally owned businesses, increase housing opportunities, and create public and private spaces that are inclusive and integrated into the community.

The Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridors Strategy document was adopted by City Council on February 28, 2022, intended to guide future zoning code text changes and other land use, community development and transportation implementation. Implementation efforts began in late 2022 and are ongoing. The Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridors Strategy can be viewed here: [Commercial Corridors Strategy | City of Vancouver, Washington, USA](#).

Draft Evergreen and Grand Overlay District Language

City staff and project consultant Cascadia Partners presented at the February 14th, 2023, Planning Commission workshop and presented four code concepts:

- 1) Building Height- Maintain existing 4-story height limit along Evergreen and western half of Grand. Increase to 5-story along eastern half of Grand near new transit line.
- 2) Building Form- Adopt new standards that address the shape and size of new buildings to address concerns about buildings being in character with existing neighborhood.
- 3) Required Ground Floor Commercial- Require ground floor commercial uses only along Grand and allow more flexibility for ground floor residential along Evergreen.
- 4) Parking- Reduce parking requirements for commercial uses, do not require for ground floor commercial uses, and further reduce requirements for residential uses

These code concepts have been integrated into draft Evergreen and Grand Overlay District code language (see Attachment A), to apply to the corridor boundaries consistent with the original Strategy Document. The overlay district outlines the types of land uses are permitted in the district and development standards around density, building orientation, building setbacks and buffers, building heights, building massing, and parking.

At the April 11th workshop, staff is seeking to confirm a few specific components of the proposed overlay:

- The proposed standards in the overlay apply to expansions or alternations of any existing building or structures that increase the square footage by more than 25%.

- What should the thresholds be for meeting standards? Is a 25% increase in square footage expansion or alteration enough of a change, that property owners should be required to meet new standards?
- Proposing a minimum density of 30 Dwelling Units per Acre (DUA)
 - Are townhomes and duplexes high enough density to activate the corridor or should they not be permitted?
- As called for in the adopted Strategy, auto-oriented uses, including drive-throughs, will not be permitted, which will make some existing uses (gas station, auto repair, etc.) non-conforming.
 - Are there additional considerations around non-conforming uses that the code should address?
- The rear of buildings abutting to low density residential zones will be required to step down to a maximum height of 35 feet, which is the same maximum height allowed in low density residential zones. This height step-down will not be required on sites adjacent to higher density or commercial zones
 - Are there issues with this recommendation that the code should also address?
- Proposing parking ratio for multi-unit buildings 0.5 spaces per dwelling unit
 - What other policies or programs are needed to support this change?
 - Should the ground floor commercial exemption for providing off-street parking only be applied to multi-story buildings to incentivize this desired urban form?

Community Outreach summary

Following the February Planning Commission meeting, a virtual open house was held on March 16th. Roughly 20 people were in attendance, business owners, developers, and community members. At the open house staff and Cascadia Partners presented the four code concepts and allowed for discussion on each. Overall, there remained a broad support for the goals of the Corridor Strategy, wanting to see the area redevelop even considering that increased activity along the corridor would mean change in the area, including taller buildings and less parking. During the conversations there was a focus of questions asking what other programmatic activities the city planned to do to support the corridor's growth.

In addition to the open house, there was a survey posted on the project BeHeard page. As of the writing of this report, there have been four responses. Below are excerpts from the survey responses:

- *Code changes proposed will likely push residential development along evergreen to replace businesses rather than promote an increasingly walkable neighborhood.*
- *Zoning to go at least 5 stories please. Less parking requirements.*
- *I encourage deeper thought being given to encouraging connections with the Historic Reserve.*
 - *With increasing density at Grand and Evergreen, residents and businesses will benefit from a heightened awareness of a large open space nearby a short distance to the west for recreation and education.*

- *Consider opportunities for the installation of interpretive information on Evergreen between Grand and the Reserve.*
- *Give the inclusion of historical information the same importance as inclusion of public art.*

Design Standards

Objective design standards are proposed in the proposed overlay district code to meet the vision of the Strategy Document, focusing on the ground floor of buildings in an effort to create a vibrant street and pedestrian experience, and to address the unique challenges of creating an active street while preserving resident privacy. The standards are not intended to promote a particular architectural style or aesthetics. Use of objective standards is intended to allow for consistent administration and interpretation as opposed to more discretionary guidelines, with the goal of striking a balance between the number/complexity of standards and encouraging new development in the Corridor.

The proposed requirements have two parts, one a set of objective design standards included in the draft overlay code standards provided with this memorandum, to address the primary issues. A second set of flexible requirements to address additional features presented below for discussion, after which specific proposed code language will be developed for the next Commission workshop.

Design Standards

- Building Orientation
 - *Build-to-Line*: A minimum of 50% of the street-facing facade of the building must be located within 0-10 feet of the street.
 - *Parking Areas*: No more than 50% of the street frontage may be used for vehicle areas. Where parking is adjacent to the street, it must be screened with low wall and/or landscaping.
- Main Entrances
 - *Commercial Uses*: Must provide at least one entrance on either Evergreen or Grand. If on a corner, the entrance must be oriented to the corner.
 - *Residential Uses*:
 - Minimum 50% of ground floor residential units must have individual entrances.
 - Additional setback and design standards to create a transition from street to private units and activate the street.
- Ground Floor Commercial
 - *Minimum Height*: Ground floor commercial spaces must be 12-15 feet in height.
 - *Windows*: Minimum 60% of the ground floor elevation must be windows or other glazed openings.
 - *Weather Protection*: A minimum of 25-50% of the width of street-facing facade must include weather protection (awnings, canopies, etc.)
- Ground Floor Residential
 - Entrances to residential units must be setback 5-10 feet from street.
 - Must provide either a hardscape patio, landscaped private open space, raised private open space (patio, porch, etc) or the dwelling unit must be raised above the street, steps to a terrace, among other design features that create a public private realm.

- Must provide either a transparent low wall or fence (18-24”) or landscape screening.
- Facade Articulation
 - *Applicability*: Buildings more than 20 feet high. The standard would only apply to larger buildings, not single-story commercial buildings.
 - *Standard*: Buildings must incorporate vertical and horizontal elements that articulate the facade.
 - These elements help to divide the mass of the building into a base, middle, and top with distinct physical transitions.
 - This standard does not dictate architectural style.
 - It requires details that break up larger facades, so they are interesting to people walking by and contribute to the identity of the Corridor.
- Screening and Fences
 - *No High Fences/Walls on Street*: Fences, walls, or hedges higher than 3 feet shall be prohibited between the street and the building.
 - *Ground Mounted Utilities/Equipment/Waste Receptacles*. New electric meters, gas meters, HVAC equipment, and waste receptacles must be screened from view from the street.
 - *Rooftop Utilities/Equipment*: must be set back at least 15 feet from roof edges on street-facing facades and include screening

Additional Design Features

These additional design features are components that are more subjective and more challenging to enforce. They can either be enforced through a points-based system or design guidelines. There are advantages and disadvantages to each.

A points-based system offers flexibility for developers and architects to achieve design outcomes in different ways while also providing clarity and certainty of objective standards for both applicants and staff. A points-based system would not give the City discretion to reject a design if it meets the objective standards and can be complex for applicants and staff, requires tallying points and evaluating compliance with quantitative standards.

Alternatively, design guidelines have been implemented at the City and they offer flexibility for developers and architects to achieve design outcomes in different ways, flexibility for staff to influence design, and prevents instances of complying with the “letter” of the standard but not the “intent”. However, design guidelines bring a greater uncertainty of approval for developers, which can deter risk-averse developers, staff may have varying interpretations of the intent/scope of a guideline or whether a specific project meets it, and it can be more difficult to regulate projects consistently over time, may need to rely on institutional knowledge of past decisions.

Below are examples of the types of additional design features that are recommended to be required either through a points-based system or design guidelines:

- Extra plaza space
- Outdoor recreation area
- Small scale retail spaces

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- Transit stop amenities
- Public art feature
- Historical markers or features
- Extra window seating
- Public seating
- Pervious paving
- Extra weather protection
- Extra corner feature
- Native plants
- Distinct ground floor
- Oversized openings

Project Next Steps

Staff will return to Planning Commission for another Workshop on June 13th to provide an update on design standards, introduce the implementation strategy, and further community input.

There are City Council Workshops scheduled on July 17th and August 14th.

The Planning Commission Public Hearing is scheduled for July 25th and the City Council Public hearing is tentatively scheduled for August 28th.

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Attachment(s):

- A. Draft Evergreen and Grand Overlay District code language