

# MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** June 1<sup>st</sup>, 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:** June 13 workshop review of Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridors Strategy  
Implementation

## Introduction

The June 13 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 recent and upcoming work that will result in zoning code changes and various other implementation measures in 2023 and beyond. This workshop will feature an overview of the draft Evergreen and Grand Overlay district code language, which now includes both development and design standards, as well as community outreach conducted to date and a longer-term implementation plan for non-regulatory strategy recommendations.

## Brief Summary of Strategy Document



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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 above. The area is an emerging small business district with smaller-scale buildings oriented to the street adjacent to established neighborhoods. The desired outcomes of the Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridors Strategy include the following: 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 longer-term community placemaking, economic 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**

The project team presented at the [February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023](#), Planning Commission workshop on four development code concepts and at the [April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023](#) Planning Commission workshop on design standards. Using Planning Commission input, community outreach, and staff feedback the Evergreen and Grand Overlay District language has been refined into a working draft (see Attachment A). The overlay district outlines the types of land uses that are permitted in the district and development standards around density, building orientation, building setbacks and buffers, building heights, building massing, and parking.

Objective design standards are also incorporated in the proposed overlay district code to meet the vision of the Strategy Document, with a focus on the ground floor of buildings 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 aesthetic. 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.

While a points-based system for additional design criteria was proposed at the April 11<sup>th</sup> meeting, the project team and development review staff believe that base standards are sufficient to get high quality design outcomes and are no longer proposing to include a points-based system. The project team also believes some of the desired outcomes of the points-based system can be achieved through other implementation efforts as highlighted in the implementation plan (see Attachment C).

The below chart summarizes key differences between what was recommended in the Strategy document and what is proposed in the draft overlay. These changes are the result of new State laws requiring lower parking minimums for developments near high frequency transit as well as new State established targets for housing that jurisdictions must demonstrate their zoning allows. Reduced parking minimums and slightly increased building heights in some areas will incrementally increase

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housing production over what would likely develop under the Strategy document recommendations. These changes are also informed by a proforma analysis performed by Cascadia Partners that reflects current market conditions and development feasibility, which have significantly shifted in the last 18 months since the Strategy document was adopted.

	<b>Current Development Code</b>	<b>2022 Strategy Document</b>	<b>Proposed New Code</b>
<b>Maximum Building Height</b>	• 50-feet throughout, typically 4 stories	• 3-5 stories, varying by parcel	• 4 stories along Evergreen and west Grand, 5 stories at Mill Plain/Grand transit node.
<b>Building Bulk and Massing</b>	• Silent beyond height limits and setbacks. Commercial abutting lower density residential requires 10-foot setback • Upper portions need $\frac{1}{2}$ foot setback for each foot of building height above 20 feet.	• No standard directly proposed to address the development form beyond active edge requirements, maximum front setback of 0-5 feet at the ground floor	• Maximum height step down only on rear face within 25 feet of a residentially zoned site • Maximum building width, with breaks within the building
<b>Required Ground Floor Commercial</b>	• At least half of frontage along arterial/collector streets must be commercial or office	• More flexibility along Evergreen, keep existing requirement on Grand	• Allow for either ground floor commercial or residential along Evergreen. Require ground floor commercial along Grand
<b>Required Minimum Off-Street Parking Spaces</b>	• 0.75 per multi-family unit near frequent transit such as Evergreen and Grand • 1/300sf for goods and services, 1/250sf for eating and drinking, 1/400sf office	• Zero for ground floor retail • 1/1000sf for commercial uses • 1 per unit for residential	• 0.5 per multi-family unit • 1/1000sf commercial, zero for ground floor retail

### **Community Outreach summary**

Following the February Planning Commission meeting, a virtual open house was held on March 16<sup>th</sup>. Roughly 20 people were in attendance, business owners, developers, and community members. At the open house the project team presented the four code concepts and facilitated a discussion on each. Overall, attendees continued to broadly support the goals of the Corridor Strategy, with a desire to see the area redevelop and with the acknowledgment that increased activity along the corridor will

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result in some changes, including taller buildings and less parking. Questions were raised about what other programmatic activities were planned to support the corridor's growth.

In addition to the open house, there was a survey posted on the project BeHeard page. 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.*

The implementation plan directly responds to comments and feedback received through the engagement process, including goals and actions related to placemaking, district branding and capacity building, events and street level activation, and tactical urbanism projects.

### **Developer Focus Group Summary**

On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, the project team organized a developer focus group to get feedback on the draft code standards and understand if they strike an appropriate balance between high quality design outcomes and development feasibility. Input from the developers included:

- Would like to see height limit of 5 stories in the entire corridor.
- Support having no height minimum.
- Question if 0-5ft setback for commercial uses along Grand is enough to create comfortable outdoor space.
- Supportive of step-down requirement as it gives opportunity for more outdoor living space which in turn can activate the street.
- Concern if requiring maximum building length and breaks in buildings could make development less feasible as the project would be losing developable space.
- Would like to see additional transportation and right-of-way improvement projects led by the City.
- Support investing in public realm with signage and flower planters to create a pleasant experience in the Corridors.
- No major concerns regarding the design standards proposed.

Based on this feedback, the project team is proposing one change to the draft design standards to allow for an increase of the maximum setback to 10 feet while also maintaining no minimum setback.

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### **Implementation Plan Summary**

Realizing the full extent of the vision outlined in the Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridors Strategy requires both development code regulations and other programmatic efforts. The Evergreen and Grand Implementation Plan has been drafted to guide the work that falls outside the purview of the development code (see Attachment B & C) and is intended to guide internal staff and departments, while also bringing in key partners like neighborhood associations, business alliances and technical assistance providers, affordable housing developers, and the community at large. The tasks have been broken down to four main focus areas including housing and economic development, urban design, mobility, and parking, as outlined below. All will require resources to implement in the coming years.

- *Economic Development:*
  - Foster a unique and attractive corridor identity
  - Establish a business-friendly climate that supports a diversity of neighborhood-serving businesses
- *Housing:*
  - Maintain economic diversity and housing affordability, especially for low- and moderate-income households
- *Urban Design:*
  - Support a vibrant and active corridor
  - Pursue opportunities for climate resilient design
- *Mobility:*
  - Leverage ongoing corridor and neighborhood-wide infrastructure projects
  - Support targeted interventions to improve walkability, bike ability, and connectivity to transit
  - Improve safety for all corridor users
- *Parking:*
  - Evaluate and manage vehicular parking impacts to local residents
  - Support climate and parking goals by increasing micro mobility, shared parking options, and EV infrastructure

The two tasks below are highlighted here as shorter term non-regulatory implementation priorities, as they play a critical role in catalyzing several of the other implementation tasks.

- *ED 1.1:* Provide seed support for a locally based, self-created neighborhood Business District Organization that can meet the shared needs of new and future businesses through networking, marketing, promotions, special events, beautification, and advocacy

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- *ED 1.2:* Provide staff and resource support to the Business District Organization so it can develop into a fully-fledged, self-sustaining, and independent organization.

The goals and associated tasks that fall under them reflect input and expertise from various City departments who will lead them, with a particular emphasis on feasibility. Timing and resource needs. It will continue to be refined as the team collaborates with other partners.

### **City Council Direction**

On June 5<sup>th</sup> staff presented to City Council to provide a high-level overview of the project work to date and draft proposal and get initial Council feedback prior to further advancing the draft concepts. Council comments indicated overall support, including for the step-down proposal when new development abuts single family development. One comment was a concern regarding height requirements and ensuring that they account for taller ceiling heights in ground floor commercial space and still allow for the intended number of floors within a development. For example, if the intent is to have five-story buildings with ground floor commercial spaces, the overall height maximum needs to factor in the additional ceiling heights associated with the ground floor commercial.

### **Project Next Steps**

Further community outreach is planned, including physical mailing, email, and website updates, and direct outreach to neighborhood associations, to review the draft overlay language and implementation plan and inform any additional refinements. Outreach will focus on the draft proposed changes and will also be clear about where this deviates from or refines recommendations included in the original Strategy document.

A City Council Workshop is scheduled for July 17<sup>th</sup>.

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

### **Staff Contact**

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### **Attachment(s):**

- A. Draft Evergreen and Grand Overlay District Code Language
- B. Evergreen and Grand Implementation Plan memo
- C. Draft Evergreen and Grand Implementation Plan