

COMMUNITY DESIGN BACKGROUND REPORT

CHAPTER

7

TABLE OF CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION	CD-BR-3
PURPOSE OF ELEMENT	CD-BR-3
EXISTING CONTEXT	CD-BR-5
Overall Image.....	CD-BR-5
Commercial Corridor (International Boulevard)	CD-BR-5
Residential Neighborhoods.....	CD-BR-5
Entryways.....	CD-BR-6
Streets with Trees	CD-BR-6
Parks, Open Space, and Greenbelts.....	CD-BR-6
Vistas and Viewpoints.....	CD-BR-6
Civic Facilities	CD-BR-6
Airport Edges	CD-BR-6

INTRODUCTION

The Community Design Element Background Report establishes a framework and context for examining urban design issues in SeaTac. It explains the purpose for establishing policies about the physical shape and character of the community and presents an overview of the present character of SeaTac, providing a basis for the City's adopted Community Design goals and policies.

PURPOSE OF ELEMENT

This Element is intended to help shape the physical character of the community. While other elements address such aspects as the arrangement of land uses, the circulation system, open space and housing, the Community Design Element principally addresses the form and appearance of development and relationships between buildings and streets. Related Elements include Transportation (with its streetscape, pedestrian amenities, and transit policies) and Land Use and Housing (with their quantity and distribution of development policies).

The character of a community is the result of change and evolution over time. In planning for the future image of SeaTac, it is important to build upon the best features of the past and to anticipate an incremental process of development and redevelopment over time. The sensitive mixing of old and new gives a city depth, continuity, and a distinct identity. This necessitates a long-term commitment to community image policies, programs, and projects.

Beyond the Community Design Element's general purpose, there are a number of specific reasons to establish community design policies:

- **Strengthen Civic Pride and Identity.** People feel a sense of belonging and delight in the place where they live and work when it has attributes that create emotional attachment, elicit strong responses, and engage people at a deep-rooted level. The image and identity of a city can spur that sense of “belonging” to a special place, as well as stimulate investment as the community gains a positive reputation.
- **Guide Capital Improvements.** The City's Capital Improvement Program implements some design policies. In particular, street improvements can enhance the quality of surrounding neighborhoods and land uses.
- **Influence Private Sector Investments.** The Community Design Element provides a clear, visual image of preferred community character. Without it, private development can result in generic designs that do not reflect the history, character, regional vegetation, or climate of the community. The urban design policies guide the private sector in designing developments that respond better to the community's desires.
- **Help Relationships with Other Governmental Entities.** The City prepares the Citywide Comprehensive Plan, subarea plans, and Capital Improvement Program. Other public sector actors, such as schools, hospitals, and the Port of Seattle, also engage in master planning. These plans can incorporate important urban design principles, with zoning and development standards tailored to the needs of a specific area.
- **Create Framework and Vision.** The Community Design Element integrates community features that are addressed individually in other elements. The overall vision provides a vivid and integrated expression of the future desired by the community.
- **Provide a Regulatory Basis.** Conventional zoning codes and their associated development standards usually focus on regulating height, bulk, parking, landscaping, and signage, and they may include design guidelines or standards that offer direction for specially designated districts or development conditions. Carefully crafted standards can guarantee that new development is compatible with and sensitive to existing patterns and character. Having a set of community design policies creates the required legal foundations for many code provisions.
- **Define Neighborhood Character.** Finally, residents of SeaTac feel strongly about the neighborhood in which they live. The Community Design Element helps ensure that the positive attributes of neighborhoods are protected and enhanced.

EXISTING CONTEXT

Overall Image

SeaTac's image is influenced by having been part of unincorporated King County until 1990. Generalized policies and codes that were not specific to the needs of the area left a legacy that is being addressed through the Comprehensive Plan's goals and policies.

SeaTac's identity and character are greatly influenced by the presence of the Sea-Tac International Airport (Airport) located in the center of the City. This situation provides opportunities and challenges for the City's image, especially regarding scale and accessibility. The scale of buildings, roads, asphalt aprons, hangars, lights, and other airport facilities is large. For safety and security reasons, much of the Airport is fenced off from adjacent areas. International Boulevard serves the airport and is the City's main commercial area, with a long linear pattern of auto-oriented development that forms a significant barrier to vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Many of SeaTac's residential neighborhoods are separated from one another by major transportation corridors, steep topography, and/or the Airport.

Commercial Corridor (International Boulevard)

The City's main commercial corridor is linear, almost exclusively following International Boulevard (SR 99). The majority of development along this corridor is commercial, with much of it oriented toward serving the Airport and air travelers. There are also several multifamily housing developments and mobile home parks and an increasing amount of office use in the corridor.

Because of the width and length of this corridor, the dominant image is of a long sequence of single-use buildings separated from one another by large amounts of space. Low-rise buildings alternate with large areas of asphalt. A cluster of high rise hotels, office buildings, and parking structures is near the Airport terminal complex. A number of streets intersect and cross International Boulevard, and they are mostly lined with residential development (S 188th Street west of the boulevard is the principal exception). Despite the presence of pedestrians, the corridor primarily accommodates large volumes of fast-moving automobiles, buses, and trucks.

Residential Neighborhoods

Relatively small areas that are separated by traffic corridors, topography, or airport property comprise SeaTac's residential neighborhoods. Some neighborhoods are hidden amongst a network of private streets and stands of trees (e.g., areas around Angle Lake). Some residential areas include small commercial zones that are usually located at intersections of arterial streets. Outside of these arterial streets, most of the existing community fabric is concealed from view.

Entryways

The community is directly accessible from freeways at a number of locations; the “entrance” familiar to most people in the region is probably the North Airport Expressway off of SR 518. However, the sense of entering a city is hardly perceptible at most freeway access points. There are ground level monument signs at several locations to mark entry into the City (e.g., at SeaTac City Hall and on Des Moines Memorial Drive near the SR 509 terminus) but in general few people have a sense of the boundaries or size of the overall community.

Streets with Trees

The four phases of International Boulevard redevelopment provided a landscaped median, sidewalks, and street trees, but most neighborhood streets do not have these amenities. The City has initiated an annual pedestrian program to upgrade local streets with sidewalks, but most of the projects completed to date do not include street trees.

Parks, Open Space, and Greenbelts

North SeaTac Park, in conjunction with the SeaTac Community Center and Senior Center, provide regional-scale open space in addition to preserving sensitive areas near Tub Lake. Angle Lake Park provides an opportunity to coordinate with future public/civic facilities in the area. There are also several other community and neighborhood parks in SeaTac, including the highly visible Valley Ridge Park and playfields on S 188th Street. The Washington Memorial Cemetery occupies a large tract of land on the west side of International Boulevard but does not have any strong physical connections to the community. The future SR 509 extension includes a project to connect the Des Moines Creek trail to the Lakes to Sound Trail, including the section along Des Moines Memorial Drive north of SR 518. In terms of other greenbelt areas, there are portions of the hillside along Military Road South that are undeveloped and steep slopes along 32nd Avenue S between S 160th and 170th Streets. Many of these greenbelt areas are associated with environmentally sensitive areas.

Vistas and Viewpoints

The Kent Valley is visible from several areas of the City, particularly on the eastern sides. Views of the Cascade and Olympic Mountain ranges also exist from many locations in the community.

Civic Facilities

SeaTac has a number of civic places that serve important symbolic functions, such as schools, a library, public parks, and the SeaTac Community Center. However, there are no facilities that visually serve as a “civic” focal point (facilities that symbolize the democratic functions of local government). Also, in areas where there are large volumes of visitors and employees, very few accessible outdoor spaces exist to serve these users.

Airport Edges

The physical edge of the Airport is clearly defined with landscaping, chain-link fencing, building and/or topographic changes. For safety and security reasons, much of the Airport is separated from the rest of the City, with the passenger terminal being the major exception.