6. URBAN DESIGN CONCEPTS

Community Design Overview

The Gorst UGA currently lacks a cohesive design character and is often perceived to be haphazard and unattractive, with heavy traffic congestion and poorly maintained uses. Buildings tend to be low rise and spread out with large setbacks and large impervious areas.

The Guiding Principles for this Subarea Plan intend, in part, to improve the aesthetic character of the UGA and to make the built environment function in a more pedestrian and transit oriented fashion. By implementing modest design standards, significant improvement can be made in these areas.

Based on the Preferred Alternative, Design Guidelines address the design of the public realm, which generally consists of the space within the public right-of-way or other public ownership, as well as the relationship of private development to the public realm. In addition, best practices for Site Design are addressed. Public realm and site design concepts are described in this chapter.

The implementation of Design Guidelines in association with the Preferred Alternative will help achieve several design goals:

- **Walkability** – Ensure a safe, comfortable, and interesting pedestrian environment and prioritize pedestrian accessibility.
- **Complete Streets** – Ensure that streets are supportive of multiple modes of transportation, including walking, bicycling, transit, and automobiles.
- **Identifiable Character** – Create an attractive and functional public realm that identifies Gorst as a unique place. This contrasts with the uncoordinated, and confusing development pattern that often characterizes auto-oriented strip development.
- **Efficient and Coordinated Use of Land and Infrastructure** – Use compact development, shared driveways and parking areas, and consistent street frontage standards to efficiently use land and infrastructure and avoid leftover or “dead” spaces.

Public Realm Design

The space within public rights-of-ways typically accounts for 25% or more of land area within an urban area. This is also the area over which local governments are able to have the greatest design influence, either by way of direct capital expenditures, or through proportionate street frontage improvement requirements that accompany private development proposals. Public rights-of-way are the areas most commonly seen by the general public and therefore contribute significantly to the perceived character of an area.

The design of the public realm is therefore critical to achieving the desired change in public perception of the Gorst UGA. A common perception of Gorst is that of haphazard development. Streetscape design can create a more cohesive and consistent character. This is not to say that the streetscape or the uses...
fronting it need to be uniform or lacking individuality, but rather that the presence of a few unifying elements can make a noticeable improvement. For example, ensuring that street trees are planted at regular intervals along all streets, ensuring the presence of paved and connected sidewalks that are separated from the roadway, and ensuring that utilities are placed underground can drastically change a street from seeming haphazard into one that seems cohesive and livable.

Streetscape design can improve safety, comfort, and function as well, particularly for the goal of creating pedestrian friendly and transit oriented development. There are certain conditions that are prevalent throughout Washington State and the country that discourage pedestrian activity. Such conditions include:

- Lack of or disconnected sidewalks;
- Lack of a buffer between high speed traffic and pedestrians;
- Lack of street trees;
- Lack of shade during the summer or weather protection during the rainy season;
- Large expanses of paved surfaces that often become dusty, littered, and hot;
- Frequent driveways and curb cuts and long crossing distances that endanger pedestrians in high traffic areas; and
- Uninteresting pathways that increase the perception of distance, either through long blank walls, or large setbacks occupied by parking.

Encouraging pedestrian activity is simply a matter of mitigating the conditions noted above, such as by:

- Providing paved, connected sidewalks;
- Buffering pedestrians from traffic through the use of planter strips, street trees, and even on-street parking;
- Weather protection along building frontages;
- Limiting vehicle and pedestrian conflicts;
- Shorter crosswalks; and
- Smaller setbacks with building entrances, windows, and varying façades oriented to the street.

Example of paved sidewalk, planter strip and street trees.

**Site Design Best Practices**

Site design can have a significant effect on the aesthetic character and pedestrian orientation of an area as well. Typical automobile oriented strip development, such as what characterizes much of the Gorst UGA, consists of several common design elements that, while sometimes convenient for automobile access, are less desirable when looked at more comprehensively.
Common design elements of undesirable strip development include:

- Parking located between the building and the street;
- Large parking areas that are rarely fully utilized;
- Unbroken expanses of pavement;
- Lack of clear and safe routes for pedestrians through parking lots, either from cars to the building, or from the street to the building;
- Building entrances oriented to the parking lot and not the street;
- Building entrances not easily identifiable from the street; and
- Large, cluttered signage oriented to passing vehicles and not pedestrians.

A few simple design changes can create a development that appears more orderly, pleasant, and accessible to both pedestrians and vehicles. Such design elements include:

- Placing parking areas to the side or rear of a building where possible;
- Limiting the amount of street frontage that is occupied by parking;
- Pulling the building closer to the street;
- Providing easily identifiable building entrances oriented to the street and connected to the sidewalk;
- Providing pedestrian routes through parking areas, using striping, different paving materials, signage, curbs, and islands;
- Providing landscaping and trees in parking areas to provide visual interest, shade, traffic calming, and for stormwater management;
- Sharing driveways and parking areas with adjacent uses; and
- Reducing impervious area through the use of shared vehicle infrastructure and by properly sizing parking areas.

Example of pedestrian routes, landscaping, and trees in parking area.