

# Community Culture and Urban Design Element

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## Community Culture

**General.** Edmonds is one of the oldest settlements in the southwest county area. It lies within territory once attributed to the Snohomish, Suquamish and Snoqualmie tribes, all of whom spoke Coast Salish languages. Later explorations were made by both British and Americans. Certain geographical areas and sites within Edmonds have special significance because of historical, archeological, architectural, recreational, social, cultural and scenic importance. Contemporary Edmonds has a reputation as an arts community with strong local organizations supporting visual, performing and literary arts.

The citizens of Edmonds recognize the historic significance of culture, environment, arts, beauty, and recreation in our geographic area. A number of professional, non-profit, and volunteer organizations exist to ensure that these combined elements remain a vital part of the community's heritage and quality of life.

Cultural facilities in the City of Edmonds can be divided into three categories:

- Those funded, supported and maintained by private groups and organizations such as the Edmonds Theater, the Phoenix Theatre, and the various art galleries and art-related businesses in town;
- Facilities operated and maintained in public/private partnership such as the Historical Museum, the Wade James Theatre, and ArtWorks at Old Public Works; and,
- Public facilities such as Sno-Isle Regional Library, the Edmonds Center for the Arts (ECA), and the Frances Anderson Community Cultural Center.

Outdoor public gathering spaces include:

- Specific parks and sites such as the Hazel Miller Plaza, Edmonds Library Plaza, Frances Anderson Center amphitheater and the City Park Pavilion, and
- Corridors such as the 4th Avenue Cultural Corridor.

Outdoor gathering spaces provide venues for performing, visual and literary events and opportunities for inclusion of public art. The 4th Avenue Cultural Corridor Plan (2009) was developed to enhance Edmonds' reputation as a cultural destination and stimulate economic activity in the downtown through redevelopment of the public right of way to encourage pedestrian flow between the Edmonds Center for the Arts and downtown retail. The plan includes art elements in a curbless roadway design as well as incorporation of public art and interpretive elements highlighting local history along the corridor.

The City has a current Community Cultural Plan (2014), adopted by reference as a part of the Comprehensive Plan, which provides the vision, goals and implementation strategies for the cultural development of the community. The Community Cultural Plan points to incorporation of public art

and quality design to increase public use and enjoyment of public facilities, spaces, and gateways to the community.

Historic preservation is an important facet of community culture. The City has an inventory of various historic buildings and sites. The Edmonds Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has been established to promote historic preservation in the community and encourage owners of historically significant properties to voluntarily add them to the Edmonds Register of Historic Places. The HPC partners with other arts and historical organizations, such as the Edmonds South Snohomish County Historical Society and Museum, in pursuing its mission.

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## Community Culture Goals & Policies

The Community Culture component of the Comprehensive Plan has five goals emphasizing historic, recreational, social, cultural facilities, and scenic values.

Each key goal in this element (or section) is identified by an alphabet letter (for example, “D”). Goals are typically followed by associated policies and these are identified by the letter of the goal and a sequential number (for example, “D.2”)

**Community Culture Goal A.** Encourage the identification, maintenance and preservation of historical sites in accordance with the following policies:

- A.1 Continue to support an historic preservation program to identify and preserve the city’s historic architectural, archeological and cultural resources for future generations to study and enjoy.
- A.2 Work with other public agencies and the Edmonds Historic Preservation Commission to determine priorities and incentives for identifying and preserving historic properties. Incentives encouraging the adaptive use of historic properties should be integrated into City codes and development standards.
- A.3 Continue to maintain and expand its inventory of historic properties.
- A.4 Use a variety of means to promote public awareness and recognition of the value of historic resources, especially those listed on the City’s Register of Historic Places. Look for opportunities to partner with other historical, cultural, or arts organizations to jointly promote the City’s historic and cultural resources.
- A.5 Additions or alterations to significant architectural buildings should not destroy historic materials that characterize the property and should be differentiated from the elements that define the historic property. Development of adjacent properties should be encouraged to be sympathetic to listed historic sites by acknowledging and including historic forms, materials, and architectural details in their design.
- A.6 Encourage the adoption of incentives and flexible standards to promote the adaptive use and restoration of historic properties.
- A.7 Maintain a HPC strategic plan to help guide the priorities and activities of the Commission.

**Community Culture Goal B.** Encourage recreational opportunities.

- B.1 Encourage public access to significant recreational areas and development of pedestrian friendly connections between areas.
- B.2 Significant recreational areas would include, but not be limited to: Puget Sound Shorelines, Lake Ballinger, Edmonds Marsh, Yost Park, Lund's Gulch, etc.
- B.3 Compatible land uses should be made of surrounding areas.
- B.4 Promote public awareness and recognition of the value of these resources.

**Community Culture Goal C.** Identify and maintain significant public and private social areas.

- C.1 Compatible land uses should be made of surrounding lands including potential for incorporation of public art elements.
- C.2 Pursue public and private funding for such social areas such as: Senior Center, Frances Anderson Center, Edmonds Center for the Arts, Edmonds Museum, Wade James Theatre, Maplewood Rock and Gem Club House, and public plazas.

**Community Culture Goal D.** Identify, maintain and develop cultural facilities – both public and private – in a wide variety of areas, including drama, dance, music, visual arts, literary arts, theaters, museums, and library.

- D.1 Encourage compatible land uses surrounding cultural sites including potential for incorporation of public art elements.
- D.2 Pursue funding for public purposes and partner with private non-profit organizations to develop and operate cultural facilities.
- D.3 Cultural sites would include, but not be limited to: the Wade James Theatre, the Edmonds Center for the Arts, Frances Anderson Center and amphitheater, Museum, Edmonds Theater, Masonic Hall, Old Public Works, and Sno-Isle Library.

**Community Culture Goal E.** Identify, maintain and enhance scenic areas throughout the city.

- E.1 Identify and inventory scenic areas and features within the city which contribute to the overall enjoyment of the environment for both residents and visitors.
- E.2 Incorporate scenic and aesthetic design features, such as public art, into the development of public projects.
- E.3 Preserve scenic features whenever possible in the development of public projects.
- E.4 Use environmental and urban design review of development projects to avoid or mitigate impacts to identified scenic features.

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## Urban Design

**General.** The man-made environment is an expression of human culture and reflects, in physical form, the social values of the members of the community. The manner in which the man-made elements are integrated into the natural environment helps create the community's special characteristics and contribute to the quality of life in Edmonds.

The beauty and variety of the natural surroundings in Edmonds and the historical development of the City have combined to create an interesting and visually attractive community. Views, especially views from public corridors and public places, are an important community asset.

However, unsightly development – of poor quality or design – does exist in the City. Aging buildings in some parts of the City can create an aesthetic problem if they are not maintained. Retaining historic buildings can positively reinforce the character of an area such as downtown. The strip type of development along Highway 99 has often resulted in economic underdevelopment of private properties that end up being aesthetically displeasing.

Although utility wires are placed underground where new development takes place, overhead wires still exist in most of the older parts of the City where they interfere with views and create visual blight.

Commercial signs contribute to the color and variety of community life as well as providing an important function but they may also create discordant and unsightly conditions where they are excessive or of poor design.

Street landscaping has been utilized in the past on a limited basis. However, in many areas, parking lots, access roads, streets and buildings can be better integrated with the landscape.

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## Urban Design Goals & Policies

The general design objectives provided with this goal are intended to provide general guidance, while the subsequent design objectives (Goals B, C and D) for specific locations or situations are intended to supplement the general objectives and add more guidance for those specific situations.

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**General Design Goal A.** Design goals and objectives are intended to provide a set of tools for the City to use to guide future development to result in high quality, well-designed, and sensitive projects that reflect the values of the citizens of Edmonds. The goals and related objectives contained in this section are intended to:

- improve the physical appearance and character of Edmonds,
- improve retail and pedestrian circulation options,

- improve business opportunities,
- protect natural environments using sustainable design practices,
- protect and enhance the residential character of Edmonds.

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## General Design Objectives

**Design Objectives for Site Design.** The development of parking lots, pedestrian walkways and landscaping features is an integral part of how a building interacts with its site and its surrounding environment. Good design and site planning improves access by pedestrians, bicycles and automobiles, minimizes potential negative impacts to adjacent development, reinforces the character and activities within a district and builds a more cohesive and coherent physical environment.

- A.1 **Vehicular Access.** Reduce the numbers and width of driveways (curb cuts) in order to improve pedestrian, bicycle and auto safety.
- A.2 **Layout of Parking.** Locating buildings in proximity to the street to facilitate direct pedestrian access and help define the street edge. Parking should be placed to the side and rear.
- A.3 **Connections On- and Offsite.** Design site access and circulation within and between sites to encourage linkages for pedestrians, vehicles, and bicycles. Special attention should be paid to providing and improving connections to transit.
- A.4 **Building Entry Location.** Building entries should be configured to provide clear entry points to buildings, be oriented to pedestrian walkways/pathways, and support the overall intent of the streetscape environment. Space at the entry for gathering or seating is desirable for residential or mixed use buildings.
- A.5 **Setbacks.** Create and maintain the landscape and site characteristics of each neighborhood area and provide a common street frontage tying each site to its neighbor. Setbacks should be appropriate to the desired streetscape, providing for transition areas between public streets and private building entries where a variety of activities and amenities can occur.
- A.6 **Open Space.** For residential settings, create green spaces to enhance the visual attributes of the development and provide places for interaction, play, seating, and other activities.
- A.7 **Building/Site Identity.** Improve pedestrian access and way-finding by providing variety in building forms, colors, materials and individuality of buildings.
- A.8 **Weather Protection.** Provide covered walkways and entries for pedestrian weather protection.

- A.9 Lighting. Provide adequate and appropriate illumination in all areas used by automobiles, bicycles and pedestrians – including building entries, walkways, parking areas, circulation areas and other open spaces – to support activity and security.
- A.10 Signage. Encourage signage that provides clear information and direction for properties and businesses while preventing the streetscape from becoming cluttered. Encourage the use of graphics and symbols in signage to support the city’s emphasis on uniqueness and the arts.
- A.11 Site Utilities, Storage, Trash and Mechanical Systems. Minimize the noise, odor and visual impacts of utility systems using such features as landscaping, building forms, or integrated design.
- A.12 Integrating Site Features. Integrate natural landscape features and unique landforms – such as rocky outcroppings or significant trees – into site design whenever possible.
- A.13 Landscape Buffers. Use landscaping and/or other features such as fences to maintain privacy and create a visual barrier between incompatible uses. These buffering techniques should also be used to soften hard edges (such as the perimeters of parking lots) and reinforce pedestrian ways and circulation routes. Native plants and rain gardens should be promoted as alternatives to lawns and runoff retention areas.

**Design Objectives for Building Form.** Building height and modulation guidelines are essential to create diversity in building forms, minimize shadows cast by taller buildings upon the pedestrian areas and to ensure compliance with policies in the city’s Comprehensive Plan. Protecting views from public parks and building entries as well as street views to the mountains and Puget Sound are an important part of Edmonds character and urban form.

- A.14 Building Form. Encourage new construction to avoid repetitive, monotonous building forms.
- A.15 Massing. Reduce the apparent bulk and mass of buildings by encouraging human scale elements in building design and/or by subdividing building masses vertically or horizontally.
- A.16 Roof Modulation. Use roof forms to help identify different programs or functional areas within the building and support differentiation of building form and massing. Roof design, in combination with wall modulation, can allow for additional light to enter buildings or pedestrian spaces.
- A.17 Wall Modulation. Variation in materials, decorative elements, or other features should be employed to support pedestrian scale environments and streetscapes, or to help break up large building masses to keep in scale with the surrounding environment.

**Design Objectives for Building Façade.** Building facade objectives ensure that the exterior of a building – the portion of a building that defines the character and visual appearance of a place – is of high quality and demonstrates the strong sense of place and integrity valued by the residents of the City of Edmonds.

- A.18 Building Façade Design. Encourage building façades that reinforce the appearance and consistency of streetscape patterns while supporting diversity and identity in building design.
- A.19 Window Variety and Articulation. Use window size and placement to help define the scale and character of the building. Use the organization and combinations of window types to reinforce the streetscape character or to provide variation in a façade, as well as provide light and air to the building interior.
- A.20 Variation in Façade Materials. Employ variation in materials, colors or design elements on building façades to help define the scale and style of the structure. Variation in façade materials can help reduce the apparent bulk of larger buildings while allowing variety and individuality of building design.

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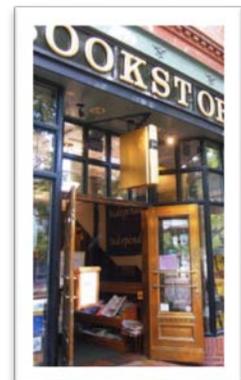
## Urban Design Goals & Policies for Specific Areas

In addition to the general design goal and objectives described above under Goal A, supplemental design objectives are outlined below for specific areas or districts within the city.

Each key goal in this element (or section) is identified by an alphabet letter (for example, “D”). Goals are typically followed by associated policies and these are identified by the letter of the goal and a sequential number (for example, “D.2”)

**Urban Design Goal B: Downtown/Waterfront Activity Center.** Design objectives and standards should be carefully crafted for the Downtown/Waterfront Activity Center to encourage its unique design character and important place-making status within the city.

- B.1 Vehicular Access and Parking. Driveways and curb cuts should be minimized to assure a consistent and safe streetscape for pedestrians. When alleys are present, these should be the preferred method of providing vehicular access to a property and should be used unless there is no reasonable alternative available. Configuration of parking should support a “park and walk” policy that provides adequate parking while minimizing impacts on the pedestrian streetscape.
- B.2 Pedestrian Access and Connections. Improve pedestrian access from the street by locating buildings close to the street and sidewalks, and defining the street edge. Cross walks at key intersections should be accentuated by the use of special materials, signage or paving treatments. Transit access and waiting areas should be provided where appropriate.



B.3 Building Entry Location. Commercial building entries should be easily recognizable and oriented to the pedestrian streetscape by being located at sidewalk grade.

B.4 Building Setbacks. Create a common street frontage view with enough repetition to tie each site to its neighbor. Encourage the creation of public spaces to enhance the visual attributes of the development and encourage outdoor interaction. In the Waterfront area west of the railroad, buildings should be set back from the waterfront to preserve and provide a buffer from existing beach areas. In the Waterfront area, site layout should be coordinated with existing buildings and proposed improvements to provide views of the water, open spaces, and easy pedestrian access to the beach.



B.5 Building/Site Identity. In the downtown area, retain a connection with the scale and character of downtown through the use of similar materials, proportions, forms, masses or building elements. Encourage new construction to use designs that reference, but do not replicate historic forms or patterns.



B.6 Weather Protection. Provide a covered walkway for pedestrians traveling along public sidewalks or walkways.

B.7 Signage. Lighting of signs should be indirect or minimally backlit to display lettering and symbols or graphic design instead of broadly lighting the face of the sign. Signage using graphics or symbols or that contributes to the historic character of a building should be encouraged.



B.8 Art and Public Spaces. Public art and amenities such as mini parks, flower baskets, street furniture, etc., should be provided as a normal part of the public streetscape. Whenever possible, these elements should be continued in the portion of the private streetscape that adjoins the public streetscape. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue Arts Corridor, art should be a common element of building design, with greater design flexibility provided when art is made a central feature of the design.

B.9 Building Height. Create and preserve a human scale for downtown buildings. Building frontages along downtown streetscapes should be pedestrian in scale.

B.10 Massing. Large building masses should be subdivided or softened using design elements that emphasize the human scale of the streetscape. Building façades should respect and echo historic patterns along downtown pedestrian streets.

B.11 **Building Façade.** Provide a human scale streetscape, breaking up long façades into defined forms that continue a pattern of individual and distinct tenant spaces in commercial and mixed use areas. Avoid blank, monotonous and imposing building facades using design elements that add detail and emphasize the different levels of the building (e.g. the top or cornice vs. the pedestrian level or building base).

B.12 **Window Variety and Articulation.** In the downtown retail and mixed commercial districts, building storefronts should be dominated by clear, transparent glass windows that allow and encourage pedestrians to walk past and look into the commercial space. Decorative trim and surrounds should be encouraged to add interest and variety. Upper floors of buildings should use windows as part of the overall design to encourage rhythm and accents in the façade.



**Urban Design Goal C: Highway 99 Corridor.** Additional Design Objectives for the Highway 99 Corridor should support its function as a locus of commercial and potential mixed use activity, building on the availability of multiple forms of transportation and its proximate location to surrounding neighborhoods.

- C.1 **General Appearance and Identity.** Design of buildings and spaces along Highway 99 should encourage a feeling of identity associated with different sections of the highway.
- C.2 **Site Design.** Site design should allow for vehicular access and parking as well as safe access and circulation for pedestrians. Whenever possible, sites should provide connections between adjacent businesses and between businesses and nearby residential neighborhoods.
- C.3 **Landscaping and Buffering.** Landscaping, fencing or other appropriate techniques should be used to soften the street front of sites and also used to buffer more intensive uses from adjoining less intensive use areas (e.g. buffer commercial from residential development).

**Urban Design Goal D: Neighborhood Commercial Areas.** Design in neighborhood commercial areas should seek to support the function of the neighborhood center while paying close attention to its place within the neighborhood setting.

- D.1 **Landscape and Buffering.** Special attention should be paid to transitions from commercial development to surrounding residential areas, using landscaping and/or gradations in building scale to provide compatible development.

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## Streetscape and Street Trees

**General.** Trees are a valuable asset to the community. They help absorb stormwater, provide habitat for wildlife, clean pollution from the air, and give both summer shade and aesthetic pleasure. Trees on public property and within the right-of-way are a common feature of urban design.

“Streetscape” is a term that refers to the street environment, often including pedestrian features, landscaping, lighting, pavement materials, and signage. The streetscape plays an important role in the livability and character of Edmonds. Public streets, with their associated walkways and pedestrian spaces, provide the places for people to interact with their neighbors, accommodate public events and commerce, promote human needs for enjoyment and exercise including arts and aesthetics, and can improve the ecological function of the city. When designed properly, the streetscape complements the urban design elements incorporated into the development of private property.

A Streetscape Plan was developed in 2002 by the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Department and updated in 2006. It focused on the public realm along streets, certain areas of the City such as the 4th Avenue Arts Corridor, Highway 99 International area, and downtown. The Streetscape Plan included a Street Tree Plan as an appendix. The Street Tree Plan has since been updated to reflect lessons learned about preferred tree species in certain locations. The Street Tree Plan provides guidance to the City in selecting and maintaining street trees in specific areas.

In 2011, the City adopted a ‘Complete Streets’ program that prioritizes accommodating the needs of all users – including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit and individual vehicles – in transportation projects. The intent is to create safe environments for people of all ages and abilities while improving transportation options and connections between the City’s destinations and centers of activity. A complete streets approach can improve the ability of residents and visitors to experience the City in a variety of ways while improving environmental quality, enhancing economic activity, and promoting healthy lifestyle.

Where feasible, street trees or other landscaping located between the travel lane and the sidewalk can improve the pedestrian experience.

This section has a key goal and several policies specifically related to streetscape and street trees within the public right of way.

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## Streetscape and Street Trees Goals & Policies

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**Streetscape and Street Trees Goal A.** Enhance the public realm through streetscape and street tree choices.

- A.1. Encourage improvements to streets that link parks, open spaces, recreation centers, employment centers, and transportation nodes.
- A.2. Balance the need for short-term parking for shoppers and loading for businesses with the need for pedestrian-oriented design, especially downtown.
- A.3. As opportunities arise, provide for sustainable streetscapes that can enhance the natural environment, help ensure safety, and complement the characteristics of the neighborhood or district in which they are located.
- A.4. Promote the planting and maintenance of landscaping and street trees to enhance City gateways and connections; strengthen the character and identify of downtown and other retail/commercial centers; and improve the pedestrian environment.
- A.5. Seek to maintain and retain existing healthy trees in the rights-of-way without sacrificing public safety or public infrastructure or allowing a hazard or nuisance.
- A.6. Selecting and managing trees for planting in the public rights-of-way should be based on a variety of factors, such as aesthetics, view corridors, safety, maintenance, size, spacing, longevity, location, utilities, and adaptability to the regional environment.

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## Implementation Actions

Implementation actions are steps that are intended to be taken within a specified timeframe to address high priority Streetscape and Street Tree goals. The actions identified here are specifically called out as being important, but are not intended to be the only actions or measures that may be used by the City.

Action 1: Develop an update to the Street Tree Plan by the end of 2018.

Action 2: Develop an Urban Forest Management Plan by the end of 2018.