

DRAFT CONCEPTS FOR COLLEGE HILL CORE DESIGN REVIEW
(9/16/11 DRAFT)

In order to advance the community dialogue regarding design review standards for the College Hill Core, planning staff offers the following draft concepts for consideration by College Hill stakeholders. Once sufficient review time has elapsed, planning staff will organize a meeting of the stakeholders to discuss these concepts. In the meantime, staff welcomes all comments and questions related to the contents of this document.

These concepts have been formulated to continue the process of fulfilling College Hill Core Neighborhood Plan Implementation Strategy No. 2A, which reads as follows:

Adopt and implement architectural design standards for new construction in the College Hill Core to improve compatibility between existing and new structures and to enhance the appearance of the built environment.

The Planning Commission conducted discussions regarding this matter at meetings on July 28 and September 22, 2010. At those sessions, the Commission entertained public input and provided guidance as to the parameters of design review for the College Hill Core. At that time, planning staff indicated it would develop draft standards for review by stakeholders and the Planning Commission. The Commission will eventually hold public meetings on the standards, and then forward them to the City Council for action.

The concepts presented in this document address residential uses only. Draft standards for commercial and institutional uses will be produced at a later time.

Please note that the concepts identified herein are not meant to serve as an all-inclusive list. Instead, they are provided to initiate discussion about an appropriate set of standards for the College Hill Core neighborhood.

PURPOSES

The basic purposes of the College Hill Core design review standards are to:

- 1) improve land use compatibility;
- 2) preserve the historic integrity of the neighborhood;
- 3) improve the appearance of the area;
- 4) enhance property values;
- 5) promote public health, safety, and general welfare.

APPLICATION

The standards would apply to new construction related to all residential uses (single family houses, multi-family housing [structures containing two or more dwellings], and fraternities and sororities), churches, businesses, and institutional uses located within

the College Hill Core. The College Hill Core is generally defined as that portion of the city bordered by Grand Avenue, Main Street, and Stadium Way, excluding the WSU campus. It is anticipated that a special overlay zoning classification would be assigned for those districts to which design review would apply.

PROCESS

As currently envisioned, a design review board would be established to administer the standards. For straightforward issues (e.g., an addition to an existing structure), planning staff may be assigned decision-making responsibility. Another possibility is to give staff the authority to approve an application if a proposed development conforms to specific criteria outlined in the standards, and to submit the application to the design review board if the developer desires more flexibility (the board would be able to waive specific requirements if it finds that an alternative design provides an equivalent or superior solution).

DESIGN REVIEW CONCEPTS

A. Site Design

Objective 1: Design new developments to fit comfortably within the existing neighborhood fabric

- new developments should create a streetscape consistent with other properties in the immediate area (including curbs, planting strips, street trees, and sidewalk)
- the front setback of each principal building shall generally match the setbacks of structures on adjoining lots
- design new developments so that they are oriented to public streets
- emphasize the pedestrian entry to the site from the fronting street with landscaping, special paving, gateways, arbors, or similar features
- review the city's existing transition area standards for potential enhancement (these transition area standards, contained in Zoning Code Subsection 17.75.080(10), prescribe special regulations for developments located near the boundary between a high density residential zone and a low density residential zone)

Objective 2: Provide functional pedestrian and vehicular connections to the existing neighborhood

- establish a minimum 4½-foot-wide walkway between each building entrance and the public right of way; if possible, said walkway should not extend through any off-street parking area

- establish a minimum 3-foot-wide walkway between all off-street parking areas or recreation areas and the building entrance
- all walkways shall otherwise abide by the standards contained in Zoning Code Section 17.35.035
- limit vehicular curb cuts to one per 200 feet of lot frontage (a second cut may be allowed within the 200-foot dimension if access routes are one-way)
- limit curb cut width to 24 feet for two-lane driveways, and 15 feet for one-way driveways
- when installing new sidewalks in the public right of way, ensure that they match the character of existing sidewalks in the area (e.g., sidewalk width and location relative to the street and/or planting strip)

Objective 3: Minimize the visual impact of parking facilities through optimal design and location

- locate off-street parking areas to rear or side of lots to minimize their visual impact
- allow for no more than 50 percent of the yard adjacent to a street to be consumed by off-street parking area; the “yard adjacent to a street” is defined as that part of a lot between the façade of a building (extended) and the public right of way for a street
- off-street parking areas located on the front or side of a lot adjacent to a public street shall be fully screened during construction of the project with wood fencing or a Type I landscape strip (see Zoning Code Section 17.45.080)
- off-street parking areas shall be fully screened from adjacent developments with wood fencing or a Type I landscape strip
- avoid establishing off-street parking in front of building entrances
- allow no more than eight off-street parking spaces in a row without a planting area containing a tree, shrubs, or ground cover

Objective 4: Respect the natural topography of a site and preserve its significant natural features

- balance cut and fill when grading a site
- wherever possible, limit retaining walls to six feet in height

- attempt to use a stable slope of less than 2 horizontal to 1 vertical instead of a retaining wall
- terrace buildings and parking areas rather than relying on significant grading and tall retaining walls
- retain significant trees to the greatest extent practical—development plans should identify each significant tree and the developer’s intentions to retain it or compensate for its removal
- allow for limited encroachment into standard setback areas to retain significant trees or other significant natural features on a property

Objective 5: Provide attractive lighting that is adequate for function without creating excessive glare for adjacent properties

- light sources (e.g., light bulbs) shall not be visible except on approved decorator lights
- use downward directional illumination
- for larger areas, use a series of low-intensity light sources rather than a single light source
- choose from a series of “approved light designs” to be selected by the city (e.g., ornamental lamps would be acceptable, while utilitarian designs would not be acceptable)
- limit the height of light fixtures to a maximum of 20 feet in parking areas and 10 feet in pedestrian walkway areas
- lights mounted on buildings should not extend above the top of the wall

Objective 6: Design trash/recycling facilities and service areas to be unobtrusive aspects of the development

- fully screen Dumpsters from view or place them in locations not visible from the street
- generally orient areas devoted to the service of a building (e.g., loading areas) to places not visible from a street

Objective 7: Provide landscaping, fences, and walls that enhance the appearance and functionality of the development

- provide landscaping between buildings and sidewalks/off-street parking areas

- install landscaping in open spaces and within parking areas pursuant to the provisions of Zoning Code Chapter 17.45
- use low-water-use landscaping whenever possible
- front and side yards which abut a street should be visually open to the street; therefore, fencing and walls should be minimized in these areas
- when fences or walls are considered necessary along a street, employ indentations, stepped fence/wall heights, or other means of breaking up the fence/wall surface
- for fencing, use wood (except for plywood or composition sheeting), wrought iron, brick, stone, or textured concrete block; avoid chain link fencing

Objective 8: Install signage that complements the overall design of the development

- permit signage only for fraternities, sororities, and developments that involve four or more dwellings
- design signage that echoes the materials used in the development's architectural features
- comply with the standards of Zoning Code Chapter 17.50 that limit the size and height of signs for residential uses

B. Building Design

Objective 1: Reflect the architectural character and scale of surrounding buildings in the design of the new building

- to the extent possible, the design of new structures should have similar proportions and roof forms, similar architectural style and materials, and a similar window pattern and entry configuration relative to adjacent structures
- larger structures built near existing smaller structures on adjacent lots should include as part of its design building projections that reflect the approximate width and height of the existing structures
- except for minor cantilevers such as bay windows or balconies, avoid cantilevered buildings or portions of buildings; also, avoid buildings supported in any part by posts
- limit building height to the average building height of structures on adjacent lots

Objective 2: Clearly define the main entrance of a building when viewed from the street

- provide a prominent entrance to the building(s)—one that faces the street and is clearly visible by pedestrians and motorists traveling on said street
- define the building entrance with a doorway designed as a focal point in the façade and provide distinctive architectural elements, such as a front porch, to emphasize and shelter the entry
- the building entry should be accessed from the public street by a well-defined walkway

Objective 3: Use architectural features that break up blank walls and roofs and give the building a welcoming appearance

- a prominent façade (one that is clearly visible from a public right of way) should be varied at least every 30 horizontal feet through such means as the following:
 - step the building wall back or forward at least four feet and change the roof shape or step the ridge line to correspond to the wall change
 - change several of the architectural elements for the width of the module, such as primary siding material, decks, windows, and entry designs
 - break up the roof line and wall heights by use of dormers, gables, or similar variations; when flat roofs are used, add architectural detail such as a cornice or fascia and measured offsets to reduce the perceived mass of the walls
- no prominent façade wall plane should exceed a height of 25 feet above any point of finished grade; additional wall plane above that height should only be allowed if it is stepped back a minimum of eight feet from the lower wall plane
- incorporate architectural details that enhance visual interest, such as windows and doors sized and spaced in a similar fashion to those used in single family houses; decorative details such as columns, horizontal features, bay windows, and dormers; and roof details such as wide cornices and wide overhangs
- use pitched roofs whenever possible, with a minimum roof pitch of 4:12
- maintain balance in the placement of windows—space out and align windows with other windows and doors on the same wall plane
- maintain proper window/door to wall space ratio; generally, windows and doors should constitute at least 30 percent of prominent façade wall planes

Objective 4: Use exterior finish materials that provide visual detail and that complement those used elsewhere in the neighborhood

- use siding materials that match neighborhood character, such as wood or cement-like materials, shingles made of cedar or cement-like materials, brick, or stone
- for pitched roofs, use materials that are non-reflective; acceptable materials are cedar shingles, architectural grade asphalt shingles, tile, and slate

Objective 5: Design the building foundation to blend visually with the site

- step the foundation up or down to follow site contours
- minimize the visibility of the foundation walls by limiting the height of the exposed unfinished foundation, using a finish material on the foundation wall to complement the siding, and using a landscape screen to obscure walls exposed at a height of two feet or greater

Objective 6: Orient buildings to provide for privacy, both within the project and for adjacent residential uses

- locate windows so residents from one dwelling cannot look directly into another dwelling
- arrange parking areas and recreation areas away from ground floor windows and patios, or provide landscape screening or wood fencing between these features
- separate decks and patios with fencing, walls, and screens

Objective 7: Design garages, carports, and other accessory buildings in a manner that enhances the appearance of the development

- secondary (accessory) structures should be linked to the principal structure(s) through the use of similar siding, trim, and roofing materials
- all garages and carports must comply with the existing garage design standards contained in Zoning Code Subsection 17.75.080(8)

Objective 8: Ensure that building additions are incorporated into a project in a way that preserves the integrity of the original development and contributes to a desirable neighborhood character

- relative to the original building, an addition should have similar proportions and roof forms, and similar architectural style and materials, so long as the project complies with all other applicable design review standards