

DRAFT CONCEPTS FOR COLLEGE HILL CORE DESIGN REVIEW (11/6/13 DRAFT)

The following draft concepts have been prepared by planning staff to continue the community dialogue regarding design review standards for the College Hill Core. These concepts have been formulated in partial fulfillment of 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. On September 16, 2011, planning staff assembled the first set of draft design review concepts. College Hill Core stakeholders (including property owners, real estate developers, College Hill Association members, Whitman County Landlord/Tenant Association members, WSU Administration and Capital Planning representatives, and WSU students) reviewed and commented upon the September 2011 draft material. Planning staff used this input to refine the concepts as presented in this document. 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 this is a work in progress and the concepts identified herein are not meant to serve as an all-inclusive list. Instead, they are provided to advance the 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) improve the appearance of the area;
- 3) preserve the integrity of this historic neighborhood;
- 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. (As noted above, design review options for non-residential uses will be prepared in the future.) 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 within the College Hill Core.

“New construction” is defined as original construction of new land use developments, a remodel or addition that would demand a building permit (excluding plumbing and mechanical permits), or construction of any improvements identified in these design review standards (e.g., fences or signs).

PROCESS

As currently envisioned, planning department staff would administer a set of basic standards (outlined in the bullet points listed below). In those cases where a property owner wishes to vary from the basic standards, a design review board would review and take action on the development proposal using established criteria (building upon the “objectives” listed below).

DESIGN REVIEW CONCEPTS

A. Site Design

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

- new developments shall create a streetscape consistent with other properties in the immediate area (including curbs, planting strips, street trees, and sidewalk)
- buildings should be set back from the street a distance similar to other buildings on the same block, with setback variations allowed to meet Objectives A.3 and A.4 below
- 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 clearly defined walkway between each building entrance and the public right of way; said walkway should be a minimum of 4½ feet wide for any development requiring site plan review (in accordance with Zoning Code

Subsection 17.35.035) and a minimum of three feet wide for other developments; said walkways should not extend through any off-street parking area

- 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

- attempt to locate off-street parking areas to rear or side of lots to minimize their visual impact; allow for an administrative variance regarding setbacks to facilitate this purpose
- 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
- if off-street parking areas are located on the front or side of a lot adjacent to a public street, they shall be fully screened at the outset of the project with sight-obscuring wood fencing and/or sight-obscuring landscaping [NOTE: the current standard is that plantings in a sight-obscuring landscape strip be placed to grow together within three years of the time of their planting]
- off-street parking areas shall be screened from adjacent developments with wood fencing and/or a Type I landscape strip [see Zoning Code Subsection 17.45.080(1)]
- prohibit off-street parking in front of building entrances
- allow no more than six off-street parking spaces in a row without a planting area containing a tree, shrubs, or ground cover
- allow for a reduction in the number of required off-street parking spaces if the proposed development meets certain criteria regarding location of the property, type of development, ability to share parking facilities with nearby land uses, etc.

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

- balance cut and fill when grading a site
- 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
- 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 an administrative variance regarding setbacks 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
- attempt to limit the height of light fixtures to a maximum of 20 feet in parking areas and 10 feet in pedestrian walkway areas
- permanent lights mounted on buildings should not extend above the top of the wall

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

- 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
- locate utility meters and/or service panels on side or rear building walls

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

- 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
- when fences or walls are placed between a public street and a building, attempt to employ indentations, stepped fence/wall heights, or other means of breaking up the fence/wall surface
- for screening, use wood fencing (except for plywood or composition sheeting), wrought iron fencing, brick, or stone; avoid chain link or vinyl 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 existing buildings in the vicinity with the design of the new project

- the design of new structures should have similar proportions and roof forms, similar architectural style and materials, and a similar entry configuration relative to structures on the same block
- 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 the same block, or 35 feet, whichever is less

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

- provide a prominent entrance to the building(s)—this entrance should consist of a front door or front porch facing the public street, or a courtyard or landscaped open space that has a visible connection to the public street and that leads to dwelling entrances
- the building entry shall 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 25 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 features
- 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
- use pitched roofs only, with a minimum roof pitch of 4:12
- maintain proper window/door to wall space ratio; 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; avoid vinyl or plywood siding
- use roofing materials that are non-reflective; acceptable materials are cedar shingles, architectural grade asphalt shingles, tile, and slate; avoid metal materials

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 either by limiting the height of the exposed unfinished foundation to a maximum of two feet from grade, or by using a solid landscape screen to obscure the walls such that no more than two vertical feet of unfinished foundation is exposed to view

Objective 6: 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

- limit the height of the addition to no more than 150 percent of the height of the original structure, or 35 feet, whichever is less
- relative to the original building, an addition must have similar window/door treatments and similar roof forms
- building additions must meet all other relevant design review standards contained herein (including those pertaining to siding and roofing materials)

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

- secondary (accessory) structures must 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)