

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Planning Commission

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**Date:** January 11, 2023

**Subject:** Introduction to Community Design

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### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study session is to describe and obtain Planning Commission input on two proposals:

1. Shifting the conversation from community and neighborhood “character” to a focus on design, and
2. Proposed restructuring of multiple sections of the Comprehensive Plan into a “Community Design” element. This restructuring would move the content from the existing Community Character and Historic Preservation chapter into a different, expanded chapter.

The goals behind the proposals are to remove ambiguity that exists in the phrase “character”, remove policy and regulatory inequities that result from use of the term, and improve equity and inclusion outcomes by focusing on specific elements like form and design. The proposed restructuring would also consolidate all form/design based policies that impact how our community will look in the future into one chapter to make it easier for the community to envision the future look and feel for Redmond.

### **BACKGROUND**

Policy considerations for Redmond 2050 updates include:

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Redmond, WA  
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## Introduction to Community Design

- Consider revising policies that prioritize character over goals for equity and inclusion, sustainability, and resiliency. Where policies have been or could be used to exclude segments of our community consider either removing or revising to improve equity outcomes.
- Review how “neighborhood character” has been practically defined and applied in the past to ensure it does not exclude desired changes and updates and the ability to accommodate the growth allocated to Redmond.
- Update policies that are out of date or in conflict with anticipated growth and new building typologies. (Related to the transition from suburban to urban standards/policies.)

There are tensions between historic interpretations of policies around preservation of character, the Redmond 2050 themes of equity and inclusion, and the need to accommodate growth in Redmond (especially new building types).

Policies and codes that specifically state a desire to protect neighborhood character have historically resulted in the exclusion of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and lower income individuals and families from specific geographic areas. This can be direct exclusion through policies that require specific housing types/sizes or limits/bans different housing types, or indirect exclusion by limiting options that are allowed, providing limits on total units or spacing requirements, or other requirements that make it difficult to develop anything other than detached single-family homes.

Both direct and indirect policies have resulted in disparities and can have some of the same outcomes as racial covenants and redlining, sometimes by design.

A few examples of policies and zoning code sections that have been flagged during this review include:

- Even where the zoning district does allow multiplex housing types, there can be policy barriers, such as limitation on number of multiplexes, minimum spacing requirements, and/or other restrictions.
- Limitations on form of multiplex. Some areas require multiplex homes to look like single-family homes.
- Zoning districts that require significant side or rear yard setbacks and minimum landscaping requirements that are economically exclusionary in effect.

## PROPOSAL

1. **Evaluate the many references to “character” in the Comprehensive Plan (not just in the Community Character chapter) and minimize use of the term by removing ambiguous references or rewriting to focus specifically on design elements only.**
2. **Move the content of the Community Character and Historic Preservation chapter into a new chapter that is based on community design, combining it with the centers and corridors content and other related elements that address how our community is built.**

### **Key Questions for Commission Discussion :**

- Does removing reference to “community character” help the City pursue desired equity outcomes or do references to character make it easier for community members to understand the vision for their neighborhood?
- Does a unified Community Design element make sense?
- Should a Community Design element include only explicitly built environment design policies or should the element include broader policies which impact how the City feels, looks, or sounds?
- What should be included in a Community Design element?
  - Centers
  - Corridors
  - Neighborhoods
    - High-level policies, which set the foundation for neighborhood plans?
  - Historic preservation
  - Public realm (design of areas between front of building to back of curb)
  - Accessibility / universal design
  - Inclusive / cultural design elements
  - Site and building designs
- What else should be considered as part of the discussion of community/neighborhood character?

### **RESOURCES**

- City of Redmond [2021 Report on Redmond 2050 Themes](#).
- City of Redmond [Flyer on the Equity Theme](#).
- Existing Comprehensive Plan Element: [Community Character and Historic Preservation](#).

### **ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Presentation Slides