



TOWN CENTER

Development & Design Guideline Update

Current Town Center Vision--DRAFT

WHAT IS A VISION?

Vision is the high level description of the community's values, aspirations, preferences and priorities for its desired future. It can be articulated with words and/or images. Vision is embodied in Comprehensive Plans, subarea plans and implementation strategies. It can be implemented by programs, projects and development codes.



WHAT ARE MERCER ISLAND'S COMMUNITY VALUES?

The Island's community values can be found in the Introduction section of the current Comprehensive Plan and are copied below:

Mercer Island is not an island unto itself. The community is part of a regional complex that affords housing, human services, jobs, transportation, cultural and recreational opportunities. As a partner in the ever changing world of environment, economics and politics, Mercer Island has and will continue to be an active player in regional issues. However, within this framework, Mercer Island will continue to maintain local control of all significant policy issues. Likewise, active community participation and leadership are fundamental for protecting and enhancing the values and characteristics that have shaped the quality of life and liveability of Mercer Island.

In relative terms, Mercer Island is a young community. However, the City adheres to a collection of intrinsic values and has a desire to shape its own future as well as be an effective regional partner. While values can change over time, they do provide the basic foundation for a host of community actions and generally reflect the "heart and soul" of the community. The values listed below are among the community's most important and therefore deserve special attention.

Residential Community

Mercer Island is principally a single-family residential community, supported by healthy schools, religious institutions and recreational clubs.

Quality Municipal Services

Mercer Islanders need and expect safety, efficiency and continuously improving municipal services.

Education is the Key

The community and its public and private institutions are committed to provide excellence in education.

Liveability is Paramount	Our community's values are reflected by safety and freedom from fear, physical and environmental attributes, and the cultural and recreational opportunities of our Island. This translates into the feeling that Mercer Island is "the nicest of places for everyone to live."
Cherish The Environment	Island residents see themselves as "stewards" of the island environment. In considering community decisions, protection and enhancement of trees, open spaces, clean water and air, neighborhood quiet and environmentally sensitive lands will be given high priority.
Sustainable Community	Mercer Island strives to be a sustainable community: Meeting the needs of the present while preserving the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. We consider the relationship between the decisions we make as a community and their long-term impacts before committing to them. We understand that our strength is dependent on an open decision-making process that takes into account the economic, environmental and social well-being of our community.

The Town Center Vision is scattered throughout the Comprehensive Plan, development code and the 1994 Town Center Plan. What follows is an attempt by City staff to synthesize the scattered vision into an easily understood Town Center Vision.

Adopted in 1994, the Town Center Vision called for focusing growth through targeted capital improvements and zoning standards to foster high quality development. Five distinct "Focus Areas" were mapped for buildings up to five stories with ground level retail and small gathering spaces next to wide sidewalks. Upper stories of new buildings would provide space for offices and residences, increasing economic vitality as well as foot traffic and a lively street scene. Continued reliance on the automobile as well as transit and other forms of access was envisioned, with future parking in structures rather than open lots. Ongoing attention to urban design principles, pedestrian needs, traffic considerations and green spaces is essential.

LAND USE

The Town Center is intended to be a place of diverse land uses within an attractive, easily accessible and economically healthy environment. The community-scaled business district will primarily cater to the needs and desires of Island residents and employees. Residential, retail, office, civic, transit and vehicular uses are integrated into a vibrant, healthy, mixed use downtown that serves as the city's retail, business, social, cultural and entertainment center.

New development provides attractions and pedestrian amenities that bring residents of all ages and abilities to the Town Center, including local shopping, services, offices, specialty retail, lodging, restaurants, residences, community/recreational facilities, festivals, special events, and entertainment.

Outdoor spaces function as social settings for a variety of experiences, adding to the comfort and complexity of life in an urban environment, while maintaining a human scaled sense of place.

DESIGN

New development provides interesting architecture and pedestrian-scale design. Visual interest and identity are provided through appropriate massing and roof forms, and landscaping. Textured high quality materials and colors bring a visually interesting experience into the streetscape. Public amenities such as significant public plazas, significant pedestrian connections and affordable housing are provided for buildings greater than two stories in height.

CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Town Center circulation is convenient and accessible to the pedestrian, motorist and public transit user. New development enhances and supports a range of transportation choices, but favors the pedestrian over the automobile.

Parking structures do not dominate the street frontage, and blend with the building's architectural theme. Creatively designed, clean and functional pedestrian connections are encouraged to provide access through mid-blocks, between properties and/or from the public right-of-way.

SUBAREAS

A range of multifamily residential densities are allowed in the Town Center. Higher density development is allowed around the core with decreasing density toward the single-family residential neighborhoods to the south.

The Gateway Focus Area provides a commercial core oriented toward pedestrian connections and regional transit access. Open spaces are suitable for informal gathering or public events, such as community events, celebrations, and concerts enhanced by such features as trees and flower displays, fountains, and art.

The Mixed Use Focus Area provides mixed retail, office, and residential uses at a level of intensity sufficient to support transit service.

The Mid-Rise Office Focus Area provides an area for office use with ground floor retail in close proximity to retail, transit and the Interstate 90 corridor.

The Residential Focus Area provides a mix of low-rise, high-density housing around the commercial core. Housing types include townhouses, condominiums, and apartments, while office and retail uses are also encouraged. The area is attractive to the needs of a variety of housing markets including current Mercer Island homeowners.

The Auto-Oriented Focus Area provides for automobile intensive uses on the periphery of the Town Center. Uses respect neighboring residential uses in terms of aesthetics, noise and automobile traffic.