

## D# 20 COMPLETE STREETS

### General Description

This docket item focuses on updating current street standards in a number of areas as well as the adoption of a complete streets model. The proposal includes:

- Adopting Complete Streets policy within the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan that directs new and redeveloped facilities to be designed for all users (pedestrian, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities), eliminating barriers to bicycling and walking.
- Updating street standards and the format in which they are presented that will:
  - Provide for safer streets with traffic calming techniques,
  - Allow narrower residential streets,
  - Update street functional classifications to base them on average daily trips,
  - Develop new standards for elements in the streetscape (street trees, planting strips, swales, sidewalks, lighting, etc.)
  - Update the maximum driveway width for single family residences, and
  - With flag lot situations, allow up to three single family properties access from a private shared driveway.

### Impact Analysis

#### Effect on rate of growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Plan

The proposal's effect on the rate of growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan is not expected to change.

#### Effect on the City's capacity to provide adequate public facilities

Minimal impact is foreseen on the City's capacity to provide adequate public facilities where new standards for public right of ways may require a reconfiguration of, or addition, of streetscape elements with current roadways.

#### Effect on the rate of population and employment growth

The proposal should not create an impact on either population or employment growth.

#### Whether Plan objectives are being met as specified or remain valid and desirable

Comprehensive Plan objectives and Business Plan Goals remain valid and desirable and provide specific direction for street standards updates in this proposal. A majority of Comprehensive Plan Elements (Transportation, Community Design, Economic Development, Environmental, Housing, and Land Use) have related policies. Attachment A provides a detailed list of specific objectives and policies. Related objectives and policies cover:

- Development of high quality neighborhoods, safe streets, and connections between neighborhoods that provide for bicycling, transit, walking, and motor vehicles.
- Constructing residential streets to the narrowest widths feasible.
- Minimization of impermeable surfaces including reducing the negative impact on water quality from vehicular pollutants associated with run-off from roadway surfaces.

#### Effect on general land values or housing costs

Land values and housing costs can be impacted, both to increase land values through added amenities and potentially in lowering housing costs by allowing narrower residential streets. First, a streetscape that includes planting strips and street trees generally increases the value of properties. Studies show that property values and rents are enhanced in both residential and commercial areas when street trees and high quality landscaping is included along roadways. Second, allowing for and constructing narrower residential streets is less costly than development of wide streets. Construction costs are lower with related long-term maintenance of a lesser paved area also being less costly.

#### Whether capital improvements or expenditures are being made or completed as expected

No specific capital improvements or expenditures are associated with this proposal.

#### Consistency with GMA, the Plan, and Countywide Planning Policies

Elements within this proposal are consistent with state, county, and City policies. Renton Comprehensive Plan Elements are reflections of state and regional growth policies at the local level. Much of the direction for street standards development is provided by the Transportation Element within Renton's Plan. The goal of the Transportation Element is to provide "a balanced multi-modal transportation system that will support land use patterns, and adequately serve existing and future residential and employment growth within the City... a multi-modal system is defined as one which provides various choices of transportation for the public such as automobiles, buses, rail, transit, bicycles, walking" (page XI-2). Although not a policy, but definitely a regional baseline to compare to, 5 percent of all trips made in the Central Puget Sound region are bicycle or walking trips. However, within Renton, 2.6 percent of commuting trips are made by foot or bike (Puget Sound Regional Council study).

#### Effect on critical areas and natural resource lands

No impact is foreseen.

#### Effect on other considerations

Stormwater pollution mitigation: Streets are usually constructed of an impervious surface (a hardscape of impenetrable asphalt or concrete) that does not allow water to filter through. Water is usually conveyed to a pipe system. An element being proposed is the allowance of bioswales at different locations along roadways that would allow water to filter into the underlying ground and be naturally treated rather than drain into a constructed system. Additionally, in considering narrower street widths for residential areas, there would be less impervious surfaces created.

#### **Staff Recommendation**

Background information for each element is provided below followed by staff recommendations.

Complete Streets: The intent of Complete Streets policy is to require safe accommodation of all users for a street and to eliminate barriers to bicycling and walking. Pedestrian, bicyclists,

motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities must be able to safely move along and cross a complete street. Adoption of Complete Streets policy and related code ensures that the entire right of way is routinely designed and operated to enable safe access for all users and help provide a connected and complete network that research shows is needed to encourage people to walk, bicycle, and take transit.

Many planning and transportation professional groups acknowledge the importance of complete streets and are re-evaluating current practices to include design provisions for all users. Advancements and adoption of policies and development standards is occurring at multi-governmental levels. The Federal Department of Transportation policy requires the construction of bicycling and walkways as part of all projects, unless exceptional circumstances exist. At the state level, Washington State Department of Transportation will provide design assistance to create complete streets solutions for community transportation challenges. Regionally, Seattle, Redmond, Kirkland, and Issaquah have adopted Complete Streets ordinances. Renton's Comprehensive Plan *Non-motorized Transportation Section*, in addition to other plan sections, provides the framework and direction for complete streets design. See Attachment A for related policies.

Comprehensive Plan policies speak to the creation of multi-modal connections throughout the community. Policies also speak to creating non-motorized transportation facilities to promote alternative commute options. Although Renton already plans, designs, and constructs some of these facilities for all roadway users, or retrofits facilities to include bike lanes during a pavement overlay project for example, adoption of an a policy and ordinance can further clarify and formalize standards.

Research finds that complete streets development standards:

- Improve safety for everyone,
- Ease transportation problems and increase the overall capacity of the network,
- Encourage more walking and bicycling,
- Help children with more physical activity and walking to school,
- Make economic and fiscal sense, and
- Are good for air quality.

The City's recently adopted *Trails and Bicycle Master Plan* provides background information for Complete Streets. The Master Plan reflects the City's desire to create an interconnected non-motorized transportation network that accommodates both recreational and commuting uses, pedestrians, transit users, cyclists, etc. The Current Conditions section references the many opportunities for walking within the community (although not always connected), but then swings to the other extreme, where "the situation for bicyclists is different... bike lanes are few and nearly always discontinuous not linking to other bike lanes or non-motorized facilities, as are separated multi-use trails... [further,] some signed shared-use roadways exist, but often are not contiguous with other bicycle facilities."

Goals and objectives of the Master Plan speak to similar goals of the complete streets idea, with a Plan objective being to “update policies, ordinances, and procedures to make opportunities for walking and bicycling” within the City. To encourage Comprehensive Plan policies and programs such as the *Trails and Bicycle Master Plan* to be further implemented, a Complete Streets requirement would standardize that non-motorized facilities to be part of the design and construction process for new streets and streets being improved, are constructed to serve the needs of the maximum number of user groups as possible.

Additional information sources on the internet:

- <http://www.completestreets.org/benefits.html#benefits>
- <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/LocalPrograms/Planning/CompleteStreets.htm>
- <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/design.htm#>

*Staff Recommendation:* Renton should adopt Complete Streets policy and related development standards that requires streets to be designed for all users. Policy T-58 from the Transportation Element states “Non-motorized transportation should be developed in tandem with motorized transportation systems, recognizing issues such as safety, user diversity, and experiential diversity.” Although Comprehensive Plan objectives and policies speak to complete streets goals, current development requirements do not mandate these intents. A policy reflected in development standards and requirements will create clarity as facilities are developed or redeveloped. Standards would require bicycle and pedestrian ways to be accommodated in the planning, development, and construction of new and retrofitted transportation facilities except where it would be:

- Contrary to public safety,
- Disproportionately costly in consideration of the number of users,
- Where there is not a need,
- Where the establishment would violate Comprehensive Plan policies, or
- Where a documented exception is granted at the administration level.

Update of design standards for streets: Renton’s street standards should be improved to create predictable expectations for the development or redevelopment of facilities to:

- Reflect related Comprehensive Plan policies,
- Allow for additional traffic calming techniques,
- Create a clearer understanding of required standards,
- Develop alternative narrow residential street options, and
- Build a system that is built for and encourages all user types.

Generally, street standards are established to encourage the uniform development of an integrated and accessible public street system that will support present and future multi-modal transportation. Current standards do not provide sufficient guidance which allows for inconsistencies in the development of the street network. Streets should:

- Be built as both transportation facilities as well as public spaces, contributing positively to the character of an area,

- Help create an efficient multi-modal transportation system with minimal environmental impact to the community, and
- Balance the safety and mobility of all users (motor vehicles, bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders, etc.).

Renton's standards could improve in all of these areas. There are many improvements that can be made to the current development standards to create more uniformity. Consistent design should be part of the process and streetscape elements to evaluate and include are:

- Sidewalks and planting strips,
- Planting strip location between street and walkway,
- Evaluation of lane widths for commercial and residential streets,
- Allowance of Low Impact Development elements,
- Alley widths for one-way and two-way access,
- Street trees requirement,
- Bicycle lanes, on-street parking widths, location of utilities, etc.

An interdepartmental group has been working together to talk through and evaluate the elements within this proposal. Moving forward, there is consensus amongst the departments represented that the current format for street standards can be improved if a street standards guide document were to be created. Some of the other discussion points from these meetings, using policies as a guide, have been to:

- Include a Complete Streets provision,
- Develop a table with required streetscape elements for each street classification,
- Rename and reclassify the street functional classifications to be based upon Average Daily Trips of vehicles,
- Develop cross sections of streetscape standards for all street types,
- Include narrow residential streets alternatives.

Attachment B is an example of the type of table that would be developed to create greater clarity. A similar table could be placed in the street standards section. Within such a minimum street design standards table, design standards that have been traditionally located in other areas of the municipal code such as street tree requirements and spacing and planting strips, are shown in the table. As seen in the attachment example, all of those elements within the streetscape can be easily identified. This would be an improvement upon the format of current standards.

*Staff Recommendation:* An update of current street minimum development standards should be developed to those elements spoken about above and shown within the example attachment that assist in creating complete streets. Standards should be developed in a new format, different than the current textual format to provide clarity and predictable expectations of all requirements in an easily understood way. A table similar to Attachment B should be created for the streets standards code section and a streets development guide document

created outside the code, to be referenced for the development and redevelopment of the street network.

Allowance of narrower residential streets: The narrow streets discussion is not a new one to the City. Over the past ten years, information has been gathered to create the basis for allowing narrower street widths in residential zones. Much of this research found that jurisdictions around the region and country were rethinking their residential streets widths, favoring more traditional neighborhood street widths, especially as traffic calming programs have become more and more popular (and costly) as community members in residential neighborhoods have seen that wider streets allow higher vehicle speeds and safety to be compromised.

There are many variables in the discussion such as fire truck access for potential emergencies as seen in Attachment C. There are also numerous benefits to reducing wider street width requirements in residential neighborhoods including:

- Less costly to construct and maintain,
- Reduced tendency to use for cut through traffic,
- Saving more trees and removing less vegetation,
- Built to human scale,
- Reduced impervious surface,
- Reduced runoff, and
- Encouraging lower traffic speeds.

The table below compares different cities' standards to Renton's 32 feet paved width requirement. Portland, for example, in evaluating existing narrow streets with their fire department twenty years ago, found that the most narrow streets work best only in low-density, detached, single family neighborhoods:

- Because they do not generate large volumes of traffic,
- They generally have ample off-street parking,
- There is little demand for on-street parking, and
- There are frequent driveway openings.

City / County	Total Width (feet)		
	No Parking	Parking One side	Parking Both sides
Renton			32
Bellevue	20	24	28
Bellevue, <i>prior</i>	24	28	36
Kirkland		20	24/28*
Kent			32
Seattle			25
Pierce	20	28	
Portland		20	26

**Staff Recommendation:** Residential access streets should be updated to include paved widths that are narrower. Not only have narrow streets been in place since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century in many cities, but many jurisdictions around the country and region over the past couple decades have re-evaluated widths and adopted narrower standards. City policy provides clear direction in this matter in many of the Comprehensive Plan Elements, summarized by Policy CD-102 where “Residential streets should be constructed to the narrowest widths (distance from curb to curb) feasible without impeding emergency vehicle access. Working with the Fire and Emergency Services Department, narrower widths should be developed. These street designs should be based on density levels of residential neighborhoods, with options for parking on both sides, one side, and an option without on-street parking.

Update curb cut widths for residential zones: Curb cut widths for driveways are based on land use. For single family and duplex residences, the maximum width is 20 feet (exclusive of the radii of the returns or taper section) as found in RMC 4-4-080.1.3.b *Driveway Design Standards*. This maximum width should be reduced for single family homes for multiple reasons including:

- Safety of pedestrians of all ages and bicyclists,
- Potential speed reduction of vehicles crossing sidewalk and walkway areas (entering, exiting, backing across),
- Establishment of the traditional urban standard, and
- Creating consistency for residential areas as new infill projects develop.

For single family homes along streets, vehicular movements to and from a driveway or towards a garage are usually fairly simple. Access is usually gained by pulling into a driveway and backing out. To provide basic background on setbacks of houses in residential zones, garages are allowed as close 20 feet from the street frontage property line. Curb cut widths can impact the speed in which a vehicle enters a driveway from a travel lane or exits to the roadway. With wider curb cuts for a residential driveway, vehicles can enter and exit more quickly, allowing increased speeds. Narrower driveway curb cuts can create a safer residential neighborhood environment. Turning movement speeds can be reduced and vehicles would need to slow to a safe speed to enter a driveway.

*Staff recommendation:* The maximum driveway width (exclusive of the radii of the returns or taper section) for single family residential projects should be reduced to a maximum of 9 feet. For houses with garages, the 20 foot minimum setback to the entrance would still allow enough maneuverable square footage for multiple car garages.

Vehicular access to pipestem lots: Current standards allow vehicular access to two residential lots through a pipestem private access easement. A pipestem is a narrow connection to a street that provides access to properties further back from the street that are located behind other lots fronting a street. For the property abutting a pipestem and street, vehicular access could be gained through the same private access easement. This would allow for the driveway to the home abutting a pipestem to be located off the pipestem, rather than the roadway, which can allow less curb cuts along a street.

*Staff recommendation:* The current standard of only allowing two homes to be accessed from a pipestem access drive should be changed to allow for the abutting home along a street to gain access to parking through the same drive.

### **Implementation Requirements**

#### Adoption of Complete Streets policy and related development standards:

- Add a policy to the Transportation Element that clarifies creation of complete streets to include provisions for high quality design of elements within the right of way and where streets are planned, designed, and constructed for all users.
- Update development standards to reflect the policy and other related Comprehensive Plan policies.

#### Update of design standards for street rights-of-way:

- Create a table similar to Attachment B to add to the street standards code section.
- Provide clarity as to those elements required within the right of way and their locations.
- Continue working with the interdepartmental group to develop appropriate and acceptable standards and a guiding document for streets development.

#### Allowance of narrower residential streets:

- Work with the interdepartmental team to develop alternatives and standards for narrow street widths that can be approved by Fire and Emergency Services.

#### Update curb cut widths for residential zones:

- Update the code to reflect the proposed width.

#### Vehicular access to pipestem lots:

- Update code to reflect the proposed change.