

FOUNTAIN DISTRICT URBAN VILLAGE SUBAREA PLAN

City of Bellingham, Washington



Planning & Community Development Department
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**Historic photos are courtesy of the Whatcom Museum Photo Archives*

INTRODUCTION

1.1. PURPOSE OF THE SUBAREA PLAN

This document provides a policy framework for the creation of an urban village in the Fountain District, a 90 acre area along Meridian Street generally located north of Girard Street, south of W. Illinois Street, and extending to Elm Street toward the west and east to Grove Street. The area includes portions of the Columbia, Cornwall Park and Lettered Streets neighborhoods. The goal of the Subarea Plan is to guide redevelopment so that it supports the collective vision of the neighborhoods. Specific implementing regulations accompany this document and will be adopted to codify the policies and vision.

Connections and compatibility with surrounding areas were of paramount importance in developing the plan. However, unless specified, the goals presented in this plan are only applicable to areas within the Fountain District Urban Village boundaries (see ***Boundary and Land Use Areas Map*** on page 2). Implementing policies and strategies in adjacent areas would require a separate planning process.

1.2 RELATIONSHIP TO THE 2006 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The *2006 City of Bellingham Comprehensive Plan* states that anticipated population growth should be accommodated primarily through the creation of a series of urban centers. An urban center (also known as an “urban village”) is generally considered an area that:

- Contains a mix of commercial, residential, and service uses;
- Provides amenities and necessities within walking distance;



Fairhaven has a wide mix of uses with many amenities within walking distance.

- Is designed for pedestrians, bikes and transit, as well as the automobile;
- Facilitates strong community connections and interaction by serving as a neighborhood focal point and providing active public spaces; and
- Promotes sustainability and quality design.

The *Comprehensive Plan* identifies the Meridian Street corridor (known locally as the “Fountain District”) as a potential “Neighborhood Center.” Additionally, the triangular property at 2620 Northwest Avenue (located at the intersection of Elm and Northwest Avenue) is called out as a “Pocket Urban Center,” as is an area on Broadway Avenue near the intersection at Broadway Park. The *Comprehensive Plan* defines Neighborhood Urban Centers as areas that primarily serve the needs of those residing within one mile of the center and provide retail, service and office type uses as well as a mix of higher density housing; and Pocket Urban Centers as the smallest of the “center” designations, designed to serve the immediate vicinity, which may include a range of neighborhood oriented shops and services.

Comprehensive Plan policy FLU-18 directs the City to develop a master plan for each of

the proposed urban centers. Each plan must address the following elements:

- Land uses and densities;
- Street and utility layouts;
- Lot arrangements and housing types;
- Plaza locations and streetscape amenities;
- Relationship of buildings to the street;
- Parking structures or lots;
- Protection of critical areas;
- Pedestrian and bicycle facilities; and
- Other items deemed necessary to ensure compatibility with surrounding areas.

Each of these elements is addressed in the Fountain District Urban Village Subarea Plan and/or the associated development regulations.

1.3 THE PLANNING PROCESS

In 2007, a group of interested neighbors and business owners initiated a process to develop a vision for the future of the Fountain District as an urban village. Leaders from the three relevant neighborhood associations – Columbia, Cornwall Park, and Lettered Streets – conducted a two-year outreach effort to gauge the interest and preferences of residents and business owners in creating a more walkable, mixed-use community along the Meridian Street corridor. Outreach efforts included contacting area residents and business people by distributing flyers door-to-door, and inviting all those interested to visioning and discussion meetings. Concurrently, the ReStore (a retail salvage store run by the nonprofit ReSources organization located at 2309 Meridian Street), initiated a public process to plan for the revitalization of the Fountain Plaza Park located at the southern end of the Fountain District.

It was these grass roots efforts that led to the initiation of the city-sponsored subarea planning and rezoning project. In April 2009 City



A total of eight public meetings were held, beginning in 2009.



staff launched the master planning process by inviting neighbors, business owners and all anticipated stakeholders to attend a series of four workshops and to give input on how the area should redevelop over time. Each workshop focused on a specific subject:

Meeting #1 - Introduction and Character: Discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the area and the potential boundaries of the commercial core.

Meeting #2 - Public Realm: Streets, Trails and Plazas: Discussion of circulation, street design, trail connections, parks and plazas.

Meeting #3 - Development Character: Permitted

Uses, Design and Scale: Discussion of future development regulations, such as permitted uses, design standards, floor area ratio and height limits, and identification of the different types of commercial areas.

Meeting #4 - Summary of Input and Discussion

of Alternatives: Presentation and discussion of concepts developed at the previous meetings.

Over the summer months an historic resource survey and parking study were completed to provide information upon which planning proposals would be based, and in September and October 2009 staff held additional “focus group” meetings to address specific issues that had been raised in the previous public meetings. The three additional meetings focused on the following:

Focus Group Meeting #1- Fountain Plaza Park:

A “place-making” party in the street was held to help neighbors and businesses envision new uses for the plaza-like park and the adjacent Monroe Street right-of-way.

Focus Group Meeting #2 - Elm Street Commercial Transition / Historic Character Preservation:

Discussion of appropriate new uses proposed for Elm Street, and which aspects of the existing neighborhood character were important to preserve.

Focus Group Meeting #3 - Meridian Street Commercial Core and Alley Interface:

Discussion of how to maintain compatibility with adjacent residential areas by limiting building heights and creating special alley design standards for development along Meridian Street commercial core.

Over the following months, staff hired an architectural firm to analyze the feasibility of development concepts generated at the workshops. Staff from relevant city departments and other external agencies such as Whatcom Transit Authority (WTA) were also consulted regarding the feasibility of specific proposals.

On February 18, 2010, staff presented the draft master plan concepts and regulations for public review during a pre-application meeting, and later to the relevant City boards and commissions, City departments, and small stakeholder groups. After review by the Planning Commission and the City Council, the plan was finalized.



The Fountain Plaza Park, above, is an under-utilized amenity that connects all three neighborhoods.



In September a “place-making” party in the street was held to enable neighbors and businesses to experience Monroe Street and the Fountain Plaza Park from an entirely new perspective.

1.4 NATURAL AND HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Fountain District evolved at the junction of the City’s most historically gracious boulevard, Broadway Avenue, and its most travelled route north, the “Guide Meridian.” As the story goes, a freshwater fountain was kept under a shady tree at the base of Meridian to provide for draft animals and livestock coming and going from Bellingham to the county and on to Canada.



The Guide Meridian *circa* 1890.

History of the Fountain District

Broadway Avenue was one of Bellingham’s first civilized streets and marked the border between the city’s first two settler land claims: sea captain Henry Roeder’s farm claim ran along the north and adventurer Russell Peabody’s townsite claim lay to the south. Elm Street is the eldest road of the Fountain District, forking off from Broadway to Ferndale and the river towns along the Nooksack

After the 1858 gold rush and the arrival of formal surveying methods in the years just before the American Civil War, the Guide Meridian was graded and planked, roughly paralleling Elm Street on a true north axis. Elm Street also earned a compass point bend to align with a northwest direction.

Meridian, also known as “The Guide,” became a primary travel route and hosted one of the city’s first streetcar lines in the late 1880’s. By 1903 the electric streetcar system’s “Court-house Line” was extended from the central business district through the Lettered Streets and north on Meridian, creating a shift in commercial development and home building from Elm to the Meridian Street corridor. The intersection at Broadway and Meridian



Aerial photo taken from a hot air balloon *circa* 1912 of the Fountain District.

emerged as the center of the district, marked by a streetcar stop at the old water fountain, which by 1904 was referred to as “Fountain Square.”

Although Elm Street did not serve the surrounding neighborhood as a primary streetcar line, it did evolve into a familiar shopping street anchored by grocery, barber, butcher and candy stores. Over time, foot traffic along Elm led to the conversion of houses and bungalows into professional offices and specialty merchants.



2404 Elm Street, Goddard's Elm Market in the late 1930's.



2404 Elm Street today as Gifford's Market.

Goddard's grocery store (currently Gifford's Market) at 2404 Elm Street became a local landmark for its produce.

In 1913 the streetcar on Meridian was extended to a turn-around at W. Illinois, and the homes lining the street began to be replaced with or converted into commercial buildings and shops. With this new transit extension, home sites for the “North Addition” were sold along Meridian from North Street to Illinois, and Broadway Park – a new, unconventional, curvilinear real estate development – was launched.

After World War I, plans to extend the streetcar line to Cornwall Park were sidetracked by accommodations for automobile traffic along Meridian, and a bus route was developed to carry neighbors to Cornwall Park and workers to the newly opened Bellingham Coal Mines near Birchwood and Northwest Avenues. The densely packed businesses and shops clustered around the Fountain District's streetcar stops began to string out along Meridian and Elm as automobiles and buses brought people to the district. By the middle of the Great Depression, the streetcar system was abandoned and more and more, buses and cars directed transportation patterns.

Another major influence the automobile had on Elm Street occurred after World War II, when the Pacific Coast Highway 99 was rerouted from Eldridge Avenue to Elm Street where it carried northbound traffic to Ferndale and the Canadian border. The motor age brought a different sense of place to the Fountain District as people began to drive rather than walk, and traffic increased in both speed and intensity. In the early 1960's the completion of Interstate 5 created intersections with both Northwest/ Highway 99 and Meridian, and today the Fountain District seems embedded in the city rather than perched on its northern edge.

Residential Character of the Fountain District

The first residential streets and building lots in the Fountain District were laid out over farmland and orchards that had been cleared the ancient forest. These early building lots were platted on a north-south grid in 16-lot blocks. Beginning around 1880, modest wood frame homes began to fill in the streets north of Broadway Avenue along Park, Elizabeth, Elm, Kulshan, Meridian and Peabody Streets. The neat residential blocks were serviced by a central dividing alley, which after the 1920's, became lined with small wood frame garages. By 1900 many streetscapes were graced with paved sidewalks (some with curbs), and front lawns were continuous with no curb cuts or driveways. The one-and two-story frame houses reflect a Victorian-era "city cottage" style, and today are interspersed with bungalows and Arts and Crafts-style homes built in the 1920's.

On Elm Street, the southern end of the Fountain District blends into the present day Eldridge Avenue Historic District and includes some of the oldest buildings in the area. Wood frame construction methods common from the 1880's through the World War I era predominate in the area. By 1913,



Gas station at 2620 Northwest Ave. circa 1950s, above. More recently, the structure has been adaptively reused as a local nursery business, below.



Elm Street from Monroe, 1954
Whatcom Museum #1996.10.776

Historic photograph of Elm Street at corner of Monroe. The area's character has changed very little over time.



Fountain Bakery, 2404 Meridian *circa* 1920.

new real estate additions above North Street and to the west of Meridian reflected a more uniform bungalow form, and the refined features of the Roeder Home (built 1903-07) can be found expressed in a number of homes in the Fountain District.

The 1920's brought more diversity of architectural style to the district as brick, stucco and other veneer materials were used on the exterior of houses. Most of the residential lots in the area had been built up before the onset of the Great Depression, but some post-war home construction did continue to fill in the neighborhood.

The Area Today

Today, Meridian Street serves as the Fountain District's commercial core and contains an eclectic mixture of local businesses, many of which are housed in a wide range of one- and two-story structures that include historic "traditional" commercial buildings, single family houses adaptively reused for businesses and shops, and more contemporary construction from the 1950s up to the present day. Meridian is currently home to numerous restaurants, small specialty shops and a large grocery store, as well as numerous service professional offices and specialty shops, many of which are arts- and culture-related. Sidewalks are relatively narrow, reflecting the street's early residential character, and the streetscape is



Fountain Drug *circa* 1950s.



Meridian Street in 2010.

stark in many places. Pedestrian crossings exist only at the southern- and northernmost ends, and numerous surface parking lots tend to create an expansive, unprotected feeling for the pedestrian.

In contrast to Meridian, the Elm Street corridor presents a slower, more residential atmosphere and is lined with well-kept historic homes, some of which contribute to the Eldridge National Historic District and have been adapted for use as professional offices and businesses.



Historic homes along Elm Street, 2010.

Like Meridian, sidewalks are narrow and the streetscape is relatively stark, but the area is well used by pedestrians, commuting bicyclists, and residents using the public transit “Go Line” system.

Broadway Avenue forms the southeastern boundary of the urban village and near the Elm Street intersection has a mix of commercial and public uses and adapted historic homes. North of the Meridian Street intersection Broadway becomes decidedly more residential, with a gracious grass median and pedestrian-scaled light fixtures adding to the boulevard-like entrance to the historic Broadway Park development.

Located at the intersection of Broadway and Meridian, the Fountain Plaza Park retains its original triangular configuration, a fountain and a large old oak tree. Like an oasis in a sea of cars and concrete, the little park remains, although downtrodden, a respite and potential opportunity for the urban village.

Residential areas to the east and west of Meridian Street are divided into 5000 square foot lots, most developed as single-family residences between the late 1900s and the mid-1950s. While some properties are held as rentals, many are owner-occupied and the majority are in good condition, and homes in the Lettered Streets, Columbia and Cornwall Park Neighborhoods are exceedingly sought after by professionals, families, and empty-nesters interested in a good quality of life near urban centers, parks and schools. East of Meridian in the Cornwall Park Neighborhood, existing homes are predominantly large single-family buildings with a few having been converted to duplexes and apartments.

Residential streets adjacent to the commercial areas generally have mature landscaping, and



Intersection of Broadway Avenue and Meridian Street.



Survey monument in the Fountain Plaza Park.

most have sidewalks (although many do not have curb and gutter which during the wet season creates drainage problems). Most of the streets have the potential for large planting strips, but because parking areas are not demarcated cars often park on the grass strip between the travel lane and the sidewalk, creating a haphazard appearance that detracts from the feeling of the neighborhoods.



Intersection of Peabody and Jefferson Streets in the Cornwall Park Neighborhood.

2. VISION

In the future, the Fountain District has become a diverse village that offers a variety of housing, commercial and transportation options to residents of many cultures, ages and income levels. Residents can be entertained, eat, shop, work and play without ever getting into a car – children walk to school, families bike to a baseball game or take hikes to any of the numerous parks in the area, and college-age, young professionals, and retirees take the bus, walk or ride their bikes to downtown, the university, or out to the northern neighborhoods and on to the county.

Meridian, the “main street” of the district, is the focus for the community and has the richest mix of uses. New multi-story development lines the street and incorporates high-quality design and building materials. Street trees and quality landscaping encourage pedestrian use and allow commercial activity to spill out onto the ample sidewalks. Commercial buildings include an eclectic mix of funky, older homes adapted for business use, and sophisticated new multi-story commercial buildings that combine to create a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood.

The little triangular Fountain Plaza Park located at the southern edge of the village functions as “public square” of the district. Now a destination, the space includes a renovated sculptural fountain, naturalistic plantings and creative, functional seating and landscape elements. Surrounded by both historic and newer three and four-story buildings that house restaurants, small retail shops, and have offices and apartments on the upper stories, the small quarter-acre park has become an oasis in the busy



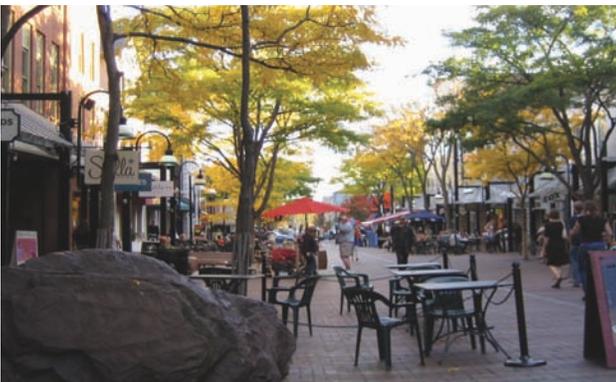
Wide sidewalks create a pedestrian-friendly environment and provide space for outdoor dining.



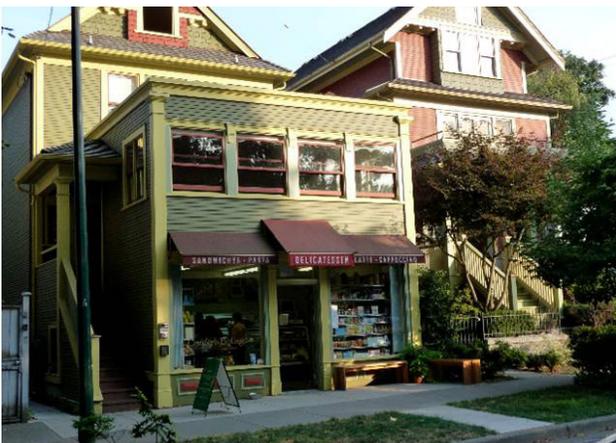
The incorporation of a water feature is central to the revitalization plan for the Fountain Plaza Park.



Example of quality design and building materials with ground floor retail and residential units above.



Example of naturalistic features incorporated into a public plaza.



Adaptive re-use helps retain a neighborhood's character.

intersection and is bustling with bicyclists and pedestrians on their way to and from home, the numerous nearby parks, businesses, and schools. On special occasions, Monroe Street is closed to expand the park into a dynamic festival place where the three neighborhoods hold informal concerts, harvest exchanges, street fairs and other gatherings. The past is honored in the park's design and is interpreted with art, landscape features and signage.

At the northern end of the district at the intersection of Meridian and Illinois, the large Haggen's grocery site has been rebuilt into a dynamic mixed-use development, with the grocery on the ground floor and apartments and studios on the upper four stories. A community plaza is incorporated into the site design and creates an informal space for shoppers and commuters to gather, eat and socialize.

Bike commuters use the Elm Street bike lanes, and pedestrians use the frequent "Go Line" bus system to travel to and from work. Many of the historic homes on Elm Street have been adapted as professional offices, and new commercial mixed-use buildings on corner lots have been well-designed to be compatible with the historic homes in the adjacent Eldridge Avenue National Historic District. Residents appreciate being able to walk to the new diner created in the former gas station at the intersection of Elm and Northwest Avenue. Carriage houses and "backyard cottages" provide a wide range of housing options and helps provide the population to support new businesses, while retaining the neighborhood's character, feeling and setting.

The Fountain District has increased in population and vitality, sensitively developing around



Apartments at the heart of the Fountain District Urban Village overlook the active commercial street. Up to three floors of apartments sit atop a single commercial level.

its existing infrastructure to create a healthy commercial climate while preserving and improving the much valued quality of life for its residents.

the first five years of the adoption of this plan, and depending on the economic environment and interests of private property owners, some parcels may not develop until 2022 or later.

2.1 Redevelopment Potential

Each parcel in the Fountain District was evaluated for redevelopment potential, based on physical characteristics of the lots, recent financial investment in the property, condition of existing structures and the redevelopment interests of property owners. Utilizing this method of analysis, it is estimated that between 200 and 475 additional housing units and up to 72,000 additional square feet of commercial space could be added by 2022. This level of residential development results in a net density of approximately up to 14 units per acre. Limited development is anticipated within



Example of cottage housing.

CHAPTER THREE

DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

3. DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

The Broadway, Meridian and Elm Street corridors have a mix of commercial uses, serving the residents within the district as well as the surrounding neighborhood residents. This variety of use should be retained as it contributes to the place as an urban village. Opportunities for additional upper-story residential use exist in the commercial areas of the district.

The development character policies outlined in this chapter focus primarily on the commercial core of Meridian and commercial transition areas identified along the Elm Street corridor. The underlying goals for these policies are to preserve neighborhood character through adaptive use of existing and historic buildings;



Examples of mixed-use buildings with commercial uses on the ground level and residential units above.

guide development to create a more comfortable and appropriately-scaled pedestrian environment; uphold quality design and materials standards for new development; and to improve the interface between commercial and residential areas.

Development character policies for the Fountain District support small commercial businesses that maintain a neighborhood-appropriate scale, as opposed to the more intense development allowed in Bellingham's downtown, and in the Old Town and Samish Way Urban Villages.

Energy Efficiency and Design Goals

The Leadership in Energy Efficiency and Design for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) rating system was developed by the U.S. Green Building Council and its partners to integrate principles of efficient land use, multi-modal transportation options, creating places for people, and limiting environmental degradation. The resulting standard creates a tool by which to measure a project's level of sustainability. The four focus areas of the LEED-ND framework include:

1. Smart Location and Linkage
2. Neighborhood Pattern and Design
3. Green Construction and Technology
4. Innovation and Design

Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan (FLU-18) encourages "the use of [LEED-ND] or equivalent system, as a tool to measure the long term sustainability of proposed master plans." Staff analyzed the Fountain District Urban Village Subarea Plan and associated development regulations against these scoring criteria, and found the urban village would likely fall below a



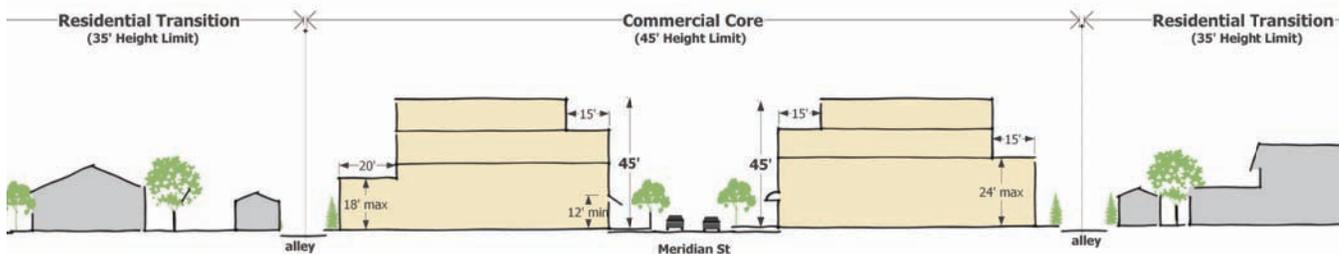
Example of adaptive reuse of existing houses, above.
Streetscape improvement examples, below.



LEED Silver rating, but could potentially achieve enough points to be a Certified project.

From a sustainable urban design perspective, the strengths of the Fountain District Urban Village are:

- Location within a previously-developed area with no environmentally-sensitive features, served by existing infrastructure (including high-frequency transit service) and a compact, walkable street grid;
- Proximity to a wide array of plazas, parks and open space, as well as neighborhood elementary, middle and high schools;
- Historic preservation and building reuse goals, as well as a high level of community involvement in the planning process; and
- Proposed diversity of housing with a comparable variety of jobs.



The weaker project score reflects the lack of sidewalks and street trees on many of the existing streets, and an anticipated development density that would most likely result in surface parking. Many of the scoring criteria within this system are project-specific and must be integrated by a developer during the planning and design phase. Individuals are encouraged to explore how their projects may achieve the highest possible level of sustainable development.

3.1. DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER POLICES

Land Use Policies

- Encourage a healthy mix of residential and commercial uses to make the area a desirable place to live, work, walk, bike, shop and play.
- Emphasize Meridian Street as the primary commercial corridor by requiring ground floor commercial uses built up to the street edge.
- Support the adaptive reuse of existing buildings, and encourage preservation of buildings that contribute to the character of the Eldridge National Historic District.

Site Design Policies

- Develop sites to create an interesting and comfortable environment for pedestrians.
- Construct buildings adjacent to the sidewalk, except when setback to accommodate plazas, outdoor dining, wider sidewalks and / or enhanced landscaping.
- Locate surface parking behind buildings to minimize automobile impacts on the pedestrian environment.

- Locate eateries, outdoor cafes and plazas on the southern and western sides of buildings whenever possible to encourage outdoor activity by maximizing light, warmth and comfort.



- Provide bicycle parking with all new development in the Core and Commercial Transition areas.



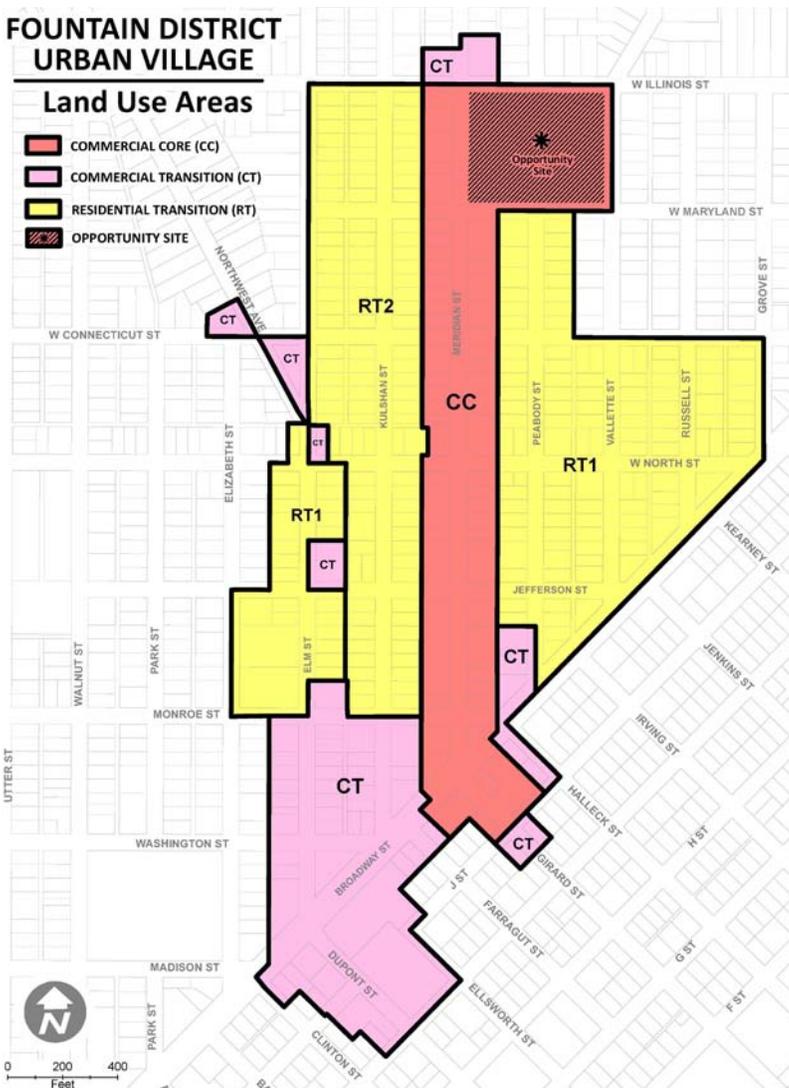
Building Design Policies

- Employ a design review process for new construction and for additions and modifications to existing structures.
- Encourage preservation of historic buildings by allowing flexibility for adaptive reuse.
- Establish building heights and design standards that, while providing feasible redevelopment opportunities, create development that is appropriately scaled to the neighboring residential areas.
- Require signage to be proportionally scaled to the building and site.
- Provide low-intensity, pedestrian-scale lighting for entries, walkways, parking lots and refuse enclosures. Prevent “light pollution” by directing lighting away from the sky, dwellings and adjacent residential development.
- Encourage new mixed-use developments to add sound-dampening elements between commercial and residential floors.

FOUNTAIN DISTRICT URBAN VILLAGE

Land Use Areas

- COMMERCIAL CORE (CC)
- COMMERCIAL TRANSITION (CT)
- RESIDENTIAL TRANSITION (RT)
- OPPORTUNITY SITE



Commercial Core (C) -

The Commercial Core area is intended to be the densest area within the urban village with the highest concentration of employment and housing opportunities. These areas are likely to have direct access to transit and a wide range of supportive land uses such as retail, office, recreation, public facilities and plazas. The pedestrian environment is emphasized in this area. Ground floor commercial is required along Meridian Street (between Broadway and Illinois Street).

Opportunity Site

Due to its size and location on a full city block, the Hagggen Grocery Store property was identified as an Opportunity Site within the Commercial Core area. Designated as such, this site can be developed to a maximum height of 55' and a maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 2.5. Urban Village Design Standards as identified in the Fountain District Urban Village development regulations apply.

Commercial Transition (CT) –

The Commercial Transition areas are intended to allow commercial uses similar to the Core Area but those with less noise and vehicular impacts on abutting residential areas. Height limits and building square footages are set lower to minimize the impact on the adjacent residential areas, discourage demolition of buildings with historic integrity and encourage adaptive reuse of structures by providing additional flexibility of use. Buildings with residential only uses are permitted in this area.

Residential Transition (RT) –

The Residential Transition areas are immediately adjacent to existing single-family neighborhoods. A mix of residential housing types, as outlined in BMC 20.28 Infill Housing, including Single Family and Infill Housing types, is encouraged to support the abutting commercial areas and provide housing choices for people of various incomes and ages. These areas are regulated under the standards established for Single Family and Infill Housing types.

CHAPTER THREE

DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER



Example of a recent use of an existing building at 1910 Broadway in the Commercial Transition Area. The Fountain Restaurant opened in 2010 in the remodeled KFC.



3.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Adopt development regulations and design guidelines and standards that are consistent with and implement the policy recommendations of the Subarea Plan.
- Develop a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) system with maximum height limits.
- Establish three development areas based on the desired intensity of development and physical characteristics: the Commercial Core, Commercial Transition and Residential Transition areas. The

intent of designating these areas is to ensure compatible use and appropriately scaled development as it relates to the surrounding neighborhoods.

- Support the multi-modal nature of the urban village and encourage the reuse of existing buildings by reducing the minimum parking rate and providing bicycle parking with all new development in the Commercial Core and Transition areas.
- Provide training for staff to enable them to effectively guide developers in utilizing the adopted design guidelines in their building plans.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the adopted design guidelines and standards as redevelopment occurs in the area.
- Explore the establishment of a multi-family tax exemption zone within the Fountain District to encourage development of affordable and market-rate housing.



The City Station Building at 1304 Railroad Avenue is a mixed-use development with both commercial and residential units. As such, at the time of construction in 2002 the project qualified for multi-family tax exemption.



Gas Station Site, 1.0 FAR

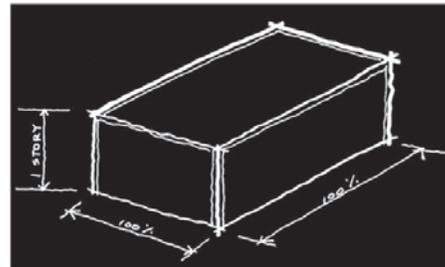


Gas Station Site, 1.5 FAR

What is Floor Area Ratio (FAR)?

FAR is the gross square footage of a building divided by the square footage of the site. For example, in both diagrams below, the building is 10,000 square feet, and is built on a 10,000 square foot lot, which creates a FAR of 1.0.

If you know the FAR and you want to calculate how much gross floor area you could build, multiply by the FAR by the site area.



Two different forms of a 1.0 FAR building

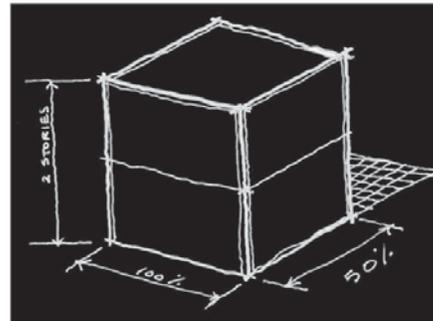


Photo Realization of
Griffiths Furniture Store
 (Residential 2 Story Add-On)
 &
Oriento Restaurant Site
 (Urban Village Design Standard)



Fountain District “Opportunity Site”

Haggen’s Grocery Store, 2814 Meridian Street

During the public planning meetings, participants identified walking and biking routes they used most often within the Fountain District Urban Village area. The majority of neighbors identified Haggen’s at Meridian and Illinois as one of their most visited destinations, and a site that could host a mix of uses, increased density and additional height.

Located at the northernmost end of the Fountain District, the Haggen grocery store was the first one constructed by the company. In 1957 the Haggen’s Thriftway was built at the corner of Meridian and Illinois in the “Town and Country Shopping Center,” which was also home to a commercial strip development that housed numerous businesses .

Since the time of its inception the company has grown to regional size, but the Haggen family company retains a special fondness for their flagship store. Haggen has no current development plans beyond the use of the site for a grocery store. However, company leaders are open to considering future development opportunities for the site that will benefit the surrounding neighbors as well as further the company’s business goals, provided that the increased density and upper-story housing options are viewed by the City and community as an opportunity and not a mandate for future development.

Land Use, Site and Building Design Policies for the Haggen Opportunity Site

- Allow additional density by increasing the height limit to 55’ and FAR to 2.5.



Photo of ground-breaking for new Haggen’s (in the Town and Country Shopping Center) at the corner of Peabody and Maryland, June 6, 1957.

- Encourage additional upper-story housing and other mixed-uses.
- Require setbacks and step-backs at the street edge and upper stories where adjacent to residential areas.
- Encourage new construction to be built to the sidewalk edge (optimally with a two foot or more setback, if feasible, to allow for wider sidewalks), while recognizing that grocery stores have special needs such as location of patron parking, access for large delivery trucks, blank walls for storage space and other unique design constraints.
- Support interim redevelopment plans such as additions and remodels to the existing building.
- Encourage incorporation of a transit stop and shelter, and plaza or other community-oriented public access space in the development of the site.
- Commercial parking access off of Vallette Street is discouraged.



CHAPTER FOUR

CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PARKING

4. CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PUBLIC PARKING

The Fountain District Urban Village area is graced with an existing street grid that is laid out in small blocks, is well-connected to the surrounding neighborhoods as well as other destinations outside of the district, and provides good multi-modal circulation opportunities. The district's close proximity to numerous destinations such as downtown, the waterfront, parks, trails and schools create viable alternatives to commuting by car. Meridian and Elm Streets both serve the City's Fire and Emergency Response vehicles and Whatcom Transit Authority (WTA) bus service on a continuous basis.

Meridian and Elm Streets are the two main arterials of the district, with Meridian defining the character for most people traveling through the area by car. The existing design of Meridian can be daunting to pedestrians due to wide traffic lanes, lack of marked pedestrian crossings, numerous curb-cuts for parking lot access which separate businesses from the sidewalk, and a lack of vegetation – all of which combine to create a less than desirable pedestrian environment.



Meridian Street, a primary arterial.

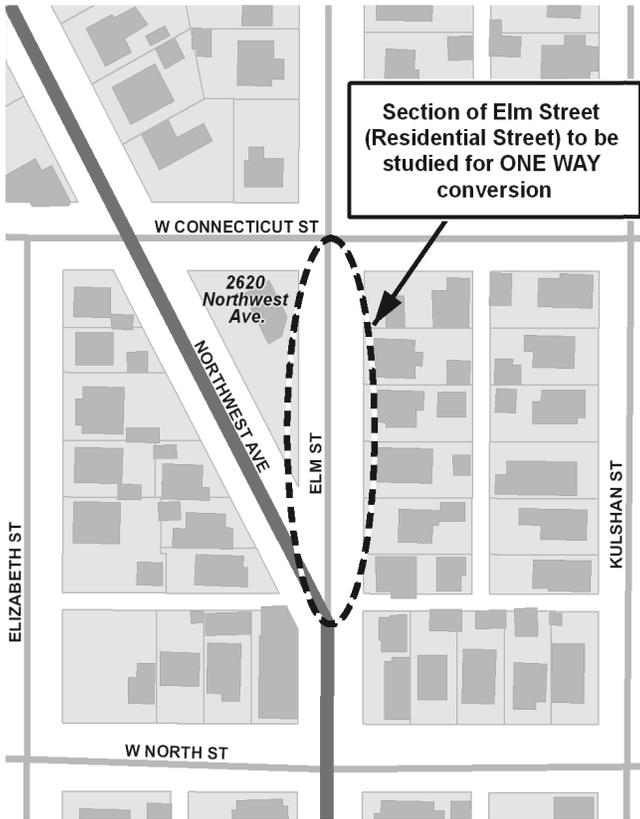
Located west of Meridian, Elm Street presents a calmer, more residential and historic feeling. Like Meridian, Elm Street has narrow sidewalks, but these are mainly uninterrupted by curb-cuts, driveways and parking lots. As one of the city's "GO Lines," Elm Street provides a major link in Bellingham's mass transit network, and is also a heavily-used bike route, connecting downtown Bellingham and the city's northern neighborhoods.

At the southernmost end of the district, Broadway Avenue serves as an east-west traffic route, and is striped with designated bike lanes. Girard and Dupont Streets both serve as traffic routes leading into the heart of downtown Bellingham, and Monroe Street provides additional east-west circulation for the southern end of the district. At the northern end of the district, W. Illinois Street serves as an east-west arterial traffic and recommended bike route, but lacks continuous sidewalks and has no marked bike lanes.

Residential streets in the district are relatively accommodating to bicyclists and pedestrians, and many have sidewalks. Area school-aged children walk through the area to and from Columbia Elementary in the Columbia Neighborhood, Parkview Elementary in the Cornwall



Elm Street, also a primary arterial.



Park Neighborhood, and to Whatcom Middle School in the Lettered Streets Neighborhood. While most areas are pedestrian-friendly, there are several arterial crossings that are challenging for pedestrians.

As Meridian’s streetscape is redeveloped to become more walkable and enticing to pedestrians, adequate off-street parking needs to be provided in a way that does not detract from the pedestrian-oriented streetscape. Shared parking facilities should be encouraged and on-street parking added wherever possible to support the area’s commercial activity. A compromise between the need for on-street parking, marked bike lanes and wider sidewalks must be made to encourage multi-modal activity.

4.1 CIRCULATION, STREETScape AND PARKING POLICIES

Circulation Policies

- Consolidate driveways along Meridian and Elm whenever possible to increase automobile, bicycle and pedestrian safety.
- Create curb-cuts in the Broadway Avenue median to enable bicyclists traveling north to easily cross to and from Vallette Street.
- Enhance bicyclist safety and encourage use of Elm Street by removing on-street parking on one side or the other, as needed, to provide sufficient space for striped bike lanes.
- Study the feasibility of converting the residential portion of Elm to a one-way street between W. Connecticut and W. North Streets to maximize on-street parking for commercial transition uses on Elm, and to minimize through-traffic impacts to residents (see **map to the left**)
- Improve safety along school walking routes by adding bulb-out sidewalks where Monroe intersections with Meridian and Elm Streets.
- Consider creating traffic calming devices to discourage traffic from cutting through the residential area on Halleck Street at the south end of Peabody Street, if warranted according to criteria in Bellingham’s Neighborhood Traffic Safety Program (NTSP).
- Improve pedestrian crossings with bulb-out sidewalks at the W. North Street intersection at Meridian.

CHAPTER FOUR

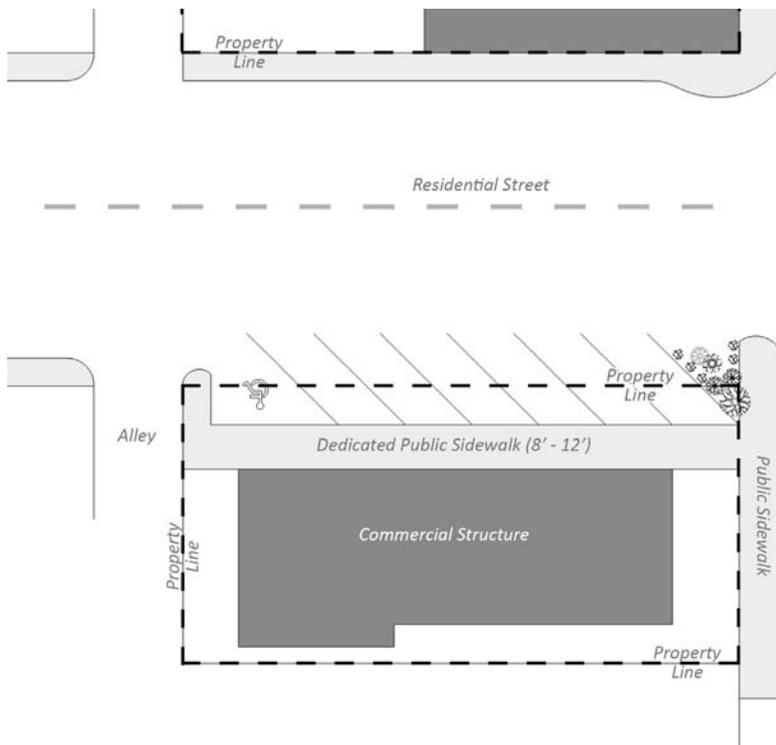
CIRCULATION, STREETScape AND PARKING



- Add enhanced (flashing light) crossings to Meridian and Elm Streets at W. Connecticut Street intersections to improve safety for crossing pedestrians and bicyclists by alerting motorists.
- If possible, improve pedestrian crossings at the W. Illinois / Meridian Street intersections.
- Encourage pedestrian use by constructing continuous sidewalks on Illinois Street.
- Create enhanced biking opportunities by constructing an east-west bike boulevard on W. North or W. Connecticut Streets, and a north-south bike boulevard on Peabody or Vallette Streets.
- As traffic changes in the district over time, implement traffic management techniques, if warranted (based on established Public Works' adopted criteria) to regulate traffic flow through established neighborhoods.

Transit Policies

- Promote transit use by coordinating with private property owners to provide bus shelters and other bus stop amenities wherever possible. Orient development towards accessible transit stops to create a comfortable and safe environment for pedestrians and transit riders.
- Encourage WTA to maintain high-frequency ("GO Line") transit service on Elm Street, and as new residential development and increased density creates ridership demand, encourage high-frequency service on Meridian Street.
- Wherever possible, consolidate transit stops and fire hydrants into one location to maximize on-street parking opportunities.
- Encourage developers to work with the WTA to provide annual bus passes to residents and employees in exchange for development incentives such as reduced parking requirements. New developments that are proven through performance standards to reduce vehicle trips may also be eligible for a reduction in transportation impact fees.

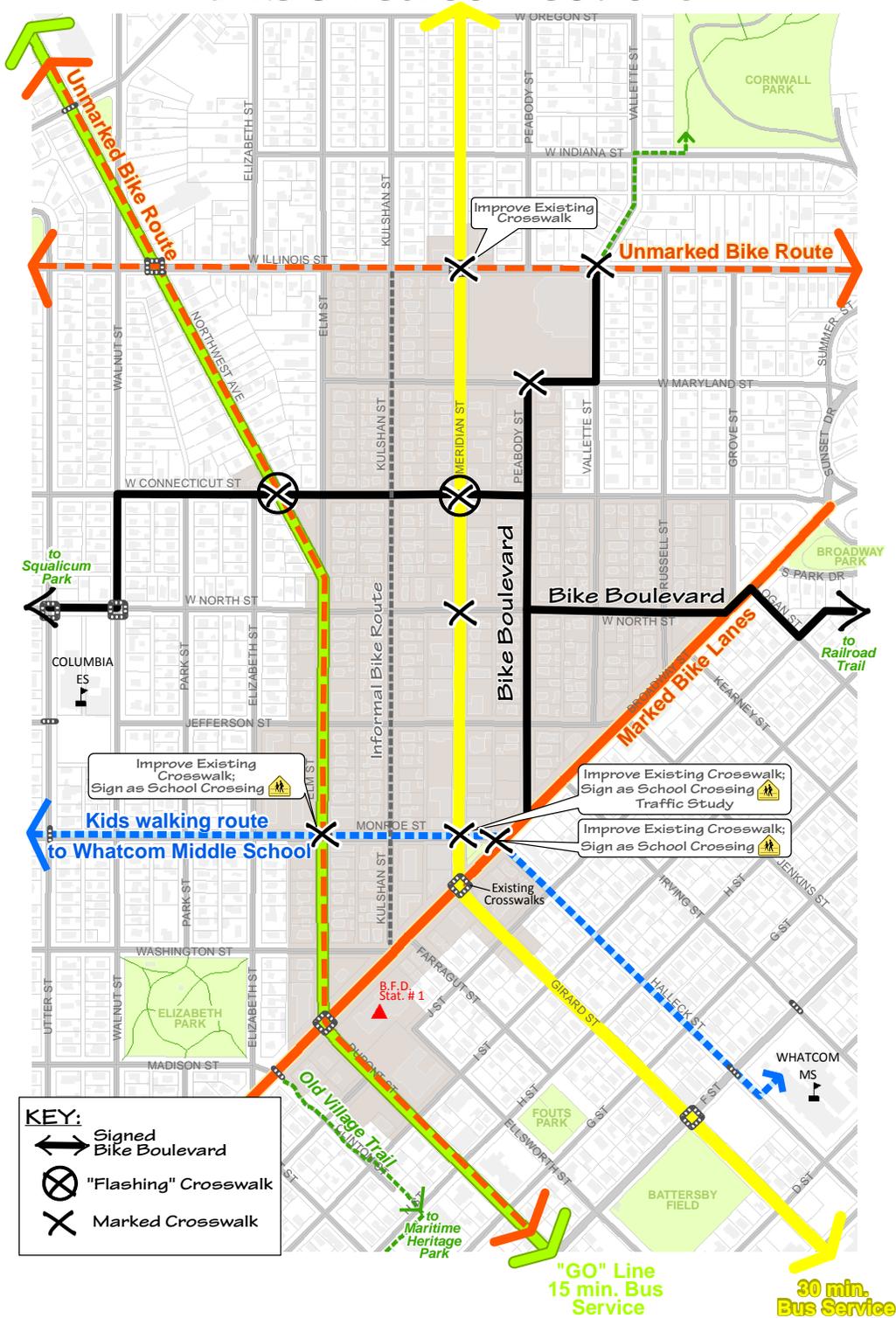


8' – 12' Pedestrian walkway located between the building and parking area. Parking spaces may be designed as parallel, perpendicular, or angled in relation to the property line (applies to commercial core and transition areas only)

Streetscape Policies

- Maximize sidewalk widths to improve pedestrian safety and comfort.
- Install pedestrian-scale lighting on Meridian and Elm Streets to enhance safety and create a sense of place.
- Wherever possible, design landscaping beds at bulb-out intersections to soften the streetscape and provide stormwater treatment opportunities.
- Construct a widened sidewalk area on the northern side of Monroe Street adjacent to the Fountain Plaza Park to create a better connection to the park, and allow for more street-side activity.
- Encourage design consistency for the commercial core by coordinating plantings along Meridian with those in the Fountain Plaza Park.
- Whenever possible, add trees and landscaping to streetscapes within the project area.
- On residential streets where curb and gutter do not exist, encourage private property owners to demarcate the travel lane, parking spaces and planting strips, or form Local Improvement Districts to fund street improvements. Standards for upgrading streets should be consistent with the predominant character of the neighborhood
- Construct sidewalks on the northern side of W. Illinois Street from Northwest Avenue to Lynn Street, and missing sidewalk sections on the southern side of W. Illinois between Northwest and Cornwall Avenues.

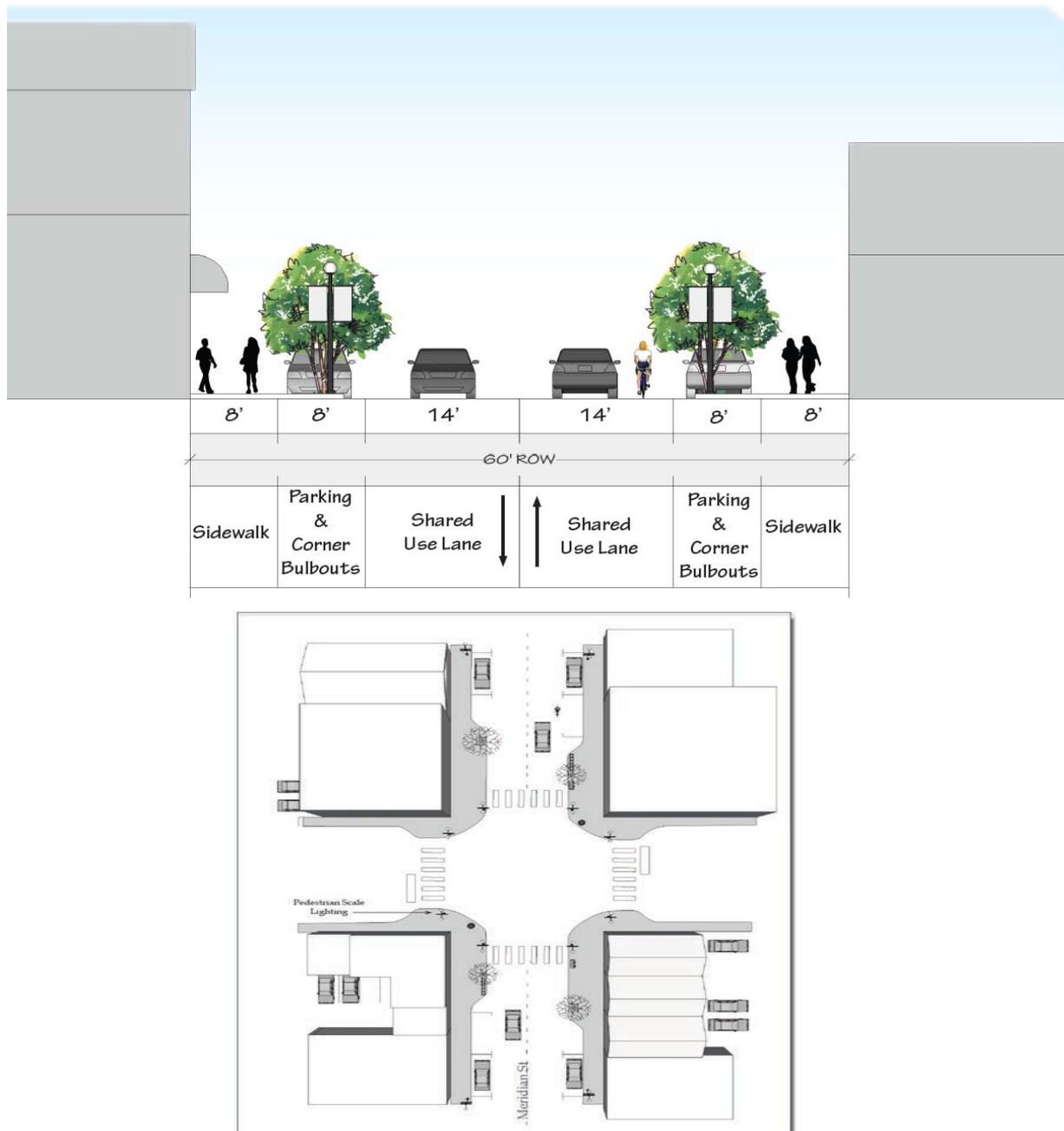
Fountain District Urban Village: Bike & Ped Connections



Fountain District Urban Village Street Design

Arterial Streets

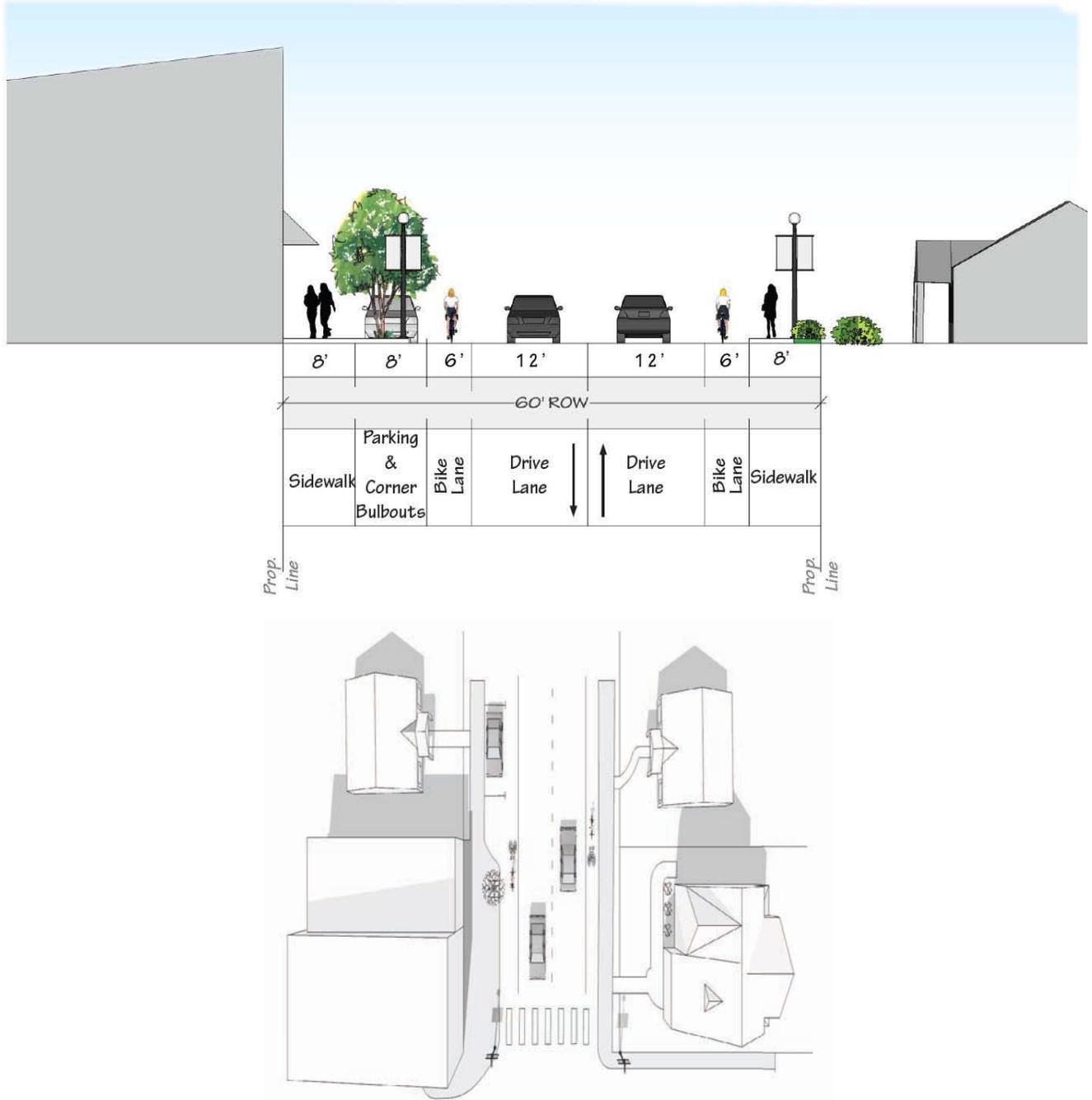
MERIDIAN STREET. The cross section and plan views below represent a street standard guide for Meridian, the primary arterial in the district. The main goals are to prioritize the pedestrian, and to narrow the perceived width of the street by adding bulb-out crossings, landscaping and street trees, as well as striping on-street parking spaces. Flexibility to these designs should be considered if they result in enhancements to bike and pedestrian systems.



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CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PARKING

ELM STREET. The cross section and plan views below represent a street standard guide for Elm Street, the second major arterial in the district. The main goals are to prioritize the bicyclist, and to narrow the perceived width of the street by adding bulb-out crossings, landscaping and street trees, as well as striping bike lanes and on-street parking spaces. Flexibility to these designs should be considered if they result in enhancements to bike and pedestrian systems.



Public Parking Policies

- Consider creating a Residential Parking Zone (RPZ) if needed to limit parking encroachment from commercial areas into adjacent residential streets as development occurs.
- Wherever possible, add on-street parking to the Commercial Core of Meridian Street and all side streets.
- Provide secure bicycle parking along sidewalks in close proximity to building entrances.
- Enhance bicyclist safety and encourage use of Elm Street by removing on-street parking on one side or the other, as needed, to provide sufficient space to bike lanes to be striped.
- Narrow the perceived width of arterials by striping parking spaces, and where possible, bike lanes.
- Maximize parking spaces and enhance pedestrian connectivity on residential streets in the Commercial Core and Transition areas by requiring new development to provide a pedestrian walkway between buildings and parking area. New commercial development will not be permitted to use the sidewalk as parking lot driveway access.



Some parking behaviors on residential streets can negatively effect pedestrian access.

4.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Assist neighborhood and business associations to develop a maintenance plan for public spaces, landscaping and other public amenities within the district.
- Stripe on-street parking stalls and explore adding metered parking stalls and the creation of a Parking Benefit District within the Commercial Core to direct parking revenues into local beautification and maintenance programs and projects.
- Study traffic alternatives for improving the intersection at Monroe and Meridian Streets to improve the safety of the crossing, used as a walking route used by school children.
- Require new development to construct sidewalk improvements to the recommended standards between the property line to the curb.
- Explore grants and other financing tools to implement proposed street improvements for Meridian, Elm, and bike boulevards.
- Development of on-street parking on side streets within the Commercial Core and Commercial Transition areas is encouraged, where space allows, through the creation of diagonal parking.
- Consider reclassifying Monroe Street between Meridian and Elm from “arterial” to “residential.” Work with property and business owners, residents, and the City Fire Department to explore additional parking opportunities that could be created in this portion of the Monroe Street right-of-way.”

CHAPTER FOUR

CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PARKING

Residential Streets

Residential streets are low-speed, low-volume streets that provide direct local access within neighborhoods, with pedestrian and bicycle safety a main priority. Several bike boulevards are proposed for residential streets in the Fountain District: Peabody, Vallette, and Kulshan Streets were identified during the public process as heavily used north-south bike routes through the district, and W. North and W. Connecticut Streets were called out as good east-west bike routes that connected the district to the adjacent neighborhoods, schools, parks and beyond. The nature of the low-traffic residential streets optimizes them as potential “bike boulevards,” which are designed to allow free flow travel for bicyclists by orienting stop signs to keep bicyclists moving, while discouraging cut-through motor vehicle traffic by creating traffic islands, chicanes and diverters. Other key components of the bike boulevard concept are traffic signals (either existing, or added where warranted) and median islands to help bicyclists cross busy streets.

Peabody and Vallette Streets were both identified as good candidates for a north-south route through the district, ending at the northern end at the much visited Haggen’s grocery destination. As an east-west bike boulevard connector, a route combining W. North and W. Connecticut Streets was chosen, with consideration given to ease of navigation, functional destinations that would inspire use, and the deciding factor – safe crossing at the Elm / Northwest intersection. Additional study to determine the best route for bike boulevards on Peabody, Vallette, North and Connecticut Streets should be conducted prior to implementation.



Alleys are often used by pedestrians.



Children use Monroe Street as a route home from school.



Bike Boulevards are proposed for several residential streets.

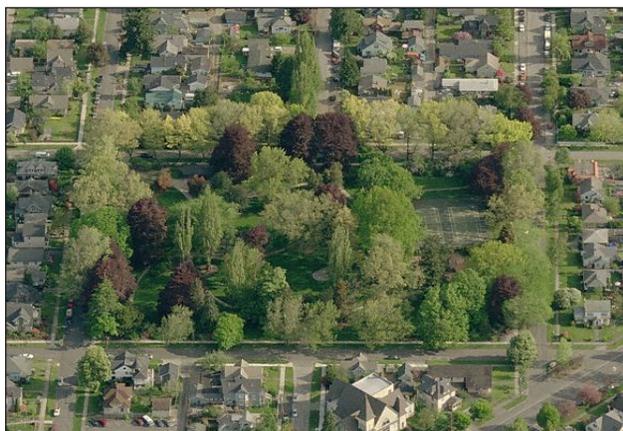


Bicyclists commonly use W. North Street as an east-west route through the district.



5 . PARKS, PLAZAS AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

Public spaces within the Fountain District Urban Village boundary are limited to the Fountain Plaza Park, but opportunities abound to connect to existing parks, trails and open space. Numerous parks lie within walking distance of the village boundary and provide ample open space for residents to hike, commune with nature, socialize or play. These include historic Elizabeth Park, a 4.5 acre neighborhood park located southwest of the lower Fountain District in the Columbia Neighborhood. Elizabeth is the city's oldest park and has mature trees,



Elizabeth Park in the Columbia Neighborhood.

children's play equipment, tennis courts and a gazebo. At the northernmost end of the district the 65-acre wooded Cornwall Park provides ample hiking opportunities, disc golf and a children's spray park. Distinctive Broadway Park, a 6-acre residential park developed as part of a planned development in the early 1900s in the Cornwall Park Neighborhood provides a destination, as well as a common "village green" for the adjacent residents. In the Lettered Streets Neighborhood 1.4-acre Fouts Park on H Street

provides a full block of open space, and a short walk down the Old Village Trail connects to the 11.2-acre Maritime Heritage Park and on to the waterfront. Connections to these parks currently exist, but additional wayfinding tactics for bikes and pedestrians could be helpful.

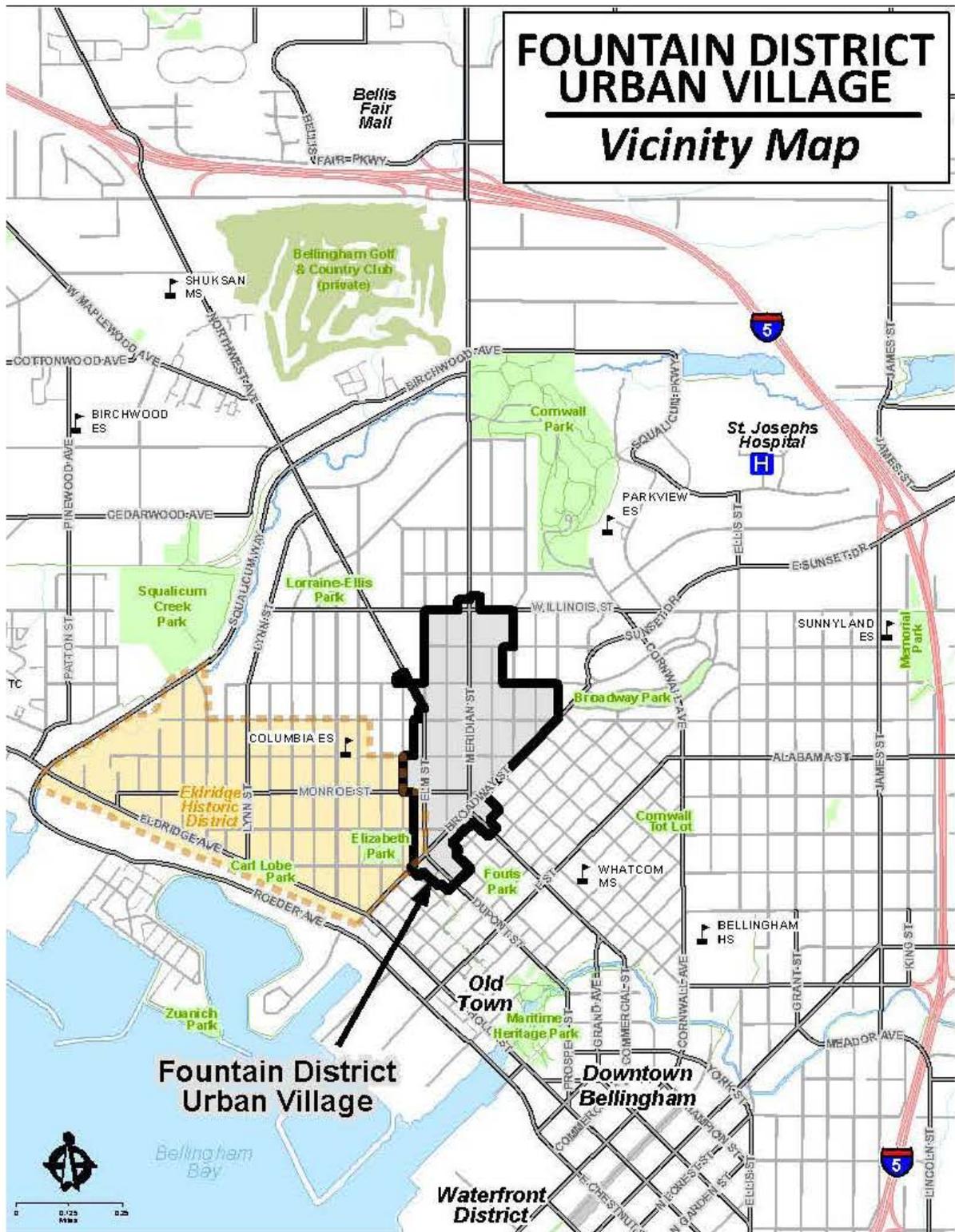
5.1 PARKS, PLAZAS, AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTION POLICIES

- Construct improvements to the Fountain Plaza Park and adjacent Monroe Street right-of-way. The Parks and Recreation Department will be responsible for the design and construction of the park improvements.



Fountain Plaza Park.

- The mouth of Monroe Street on the east side of Meridian should be narrowed to highlight the one-way directional traffic flow, with bulb-outs at the pedestrian crossing and wider sidewalks on the northern side of Monroe, to create more of a sense that the little triangular park is a "peninsula" rather than an isolated "island."
- In the future if adjacent business and commercial property owners desire, the Monroe Street right-of-way could be fully



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PARKS, PLAZAS, AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS



Conceptual schematic for proposed improvements to the Fountain Plaza Park and Monroe Street right-of-way.

closed and the park area extended across the street to the sidewalk edge. Currently, street closure is only envisioned for special occasions.

- The Fountain Plaza Park should incorporate some or all of the following amenities: water feature; places to rest, sit and social-



Example of an improved streetscape in downtown Bellingham.

ize; landscaping that incorporates native trees, shrubs and groundcover; interactive, sculptural, or naturalistic furniture; public art; pedestrian-scale lighting; unique paving for Monroe Street; and other elements that promote public use.

- Encourage the development of privately-owned and maintained plazas with public access at the Haggen's "opportunity site."

5.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Planning and Community Development will help assist neighborhood and business associations in fundraising for capital improvements to the Fountain Plaza Park.
- Explore grants and other financing tools to help implement the proposed park improvement and street design and construction.

6. CAPITAL FACILITIES

The Fountain District Urban Village contains basic capital facilities, such as utility infrastructure, streets, and sidewalks, and a small park. Enhancements are needed primarily in the form of public space improvements, sidewalks, and street improvements to achieve a pedestrian-oriented environment. Much of the area lacks adequate sidewalks or street trees, crosswalks, or other pedestrian amenities such as street furniture and waste receptacles. The Fountain Plaza Park is an amenity but is in need of revitalization. Utilities are well established in the area and appear to have the capacity to handle increased development and density. Prior to increasing infrastructure capacity, developers should explore new technologies that could reduce additional impact on the existing system without requiring an expansion of these systems.

6.1 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Where possible, the City should invest in improvements that will generate renewed interest in the area and promote redevelopment, primarily in the high-visibility location of the Fountain District itself. These types of improvements are necessary for City-wide benefit, as they play into the larger transportation network.

Private property owners are responsible for undertaking local street improvements on a site-specific project basis, but may wish to explore establishment of an LID, urban taxation district, latecomer fee system or other funding method to more equitably time street improvement costs.

Full implementation of the proposed street designs for Meridian, Elm and Monroe Streets



View of Meridian looking northeast at the North Street intersection. The four-story building in the center of this computer-generated image illustrates how a new development might look under the Fountain District Urban Village development regulations.



should be completed by the City and paid for with a combination of infrastructure improvement grants or loans, Local Improvement District and any available City funds.

Park and Transportation Impact Fees generated from redevelopment in this area may be a potential source of revenue for capital facility projects. However, these projects must be incorporated into the Capital Facility Plans of the Parks and Recreation and Public Works Departments in order to utilize this funding source.



Above are a few examples of development that would be encouraged, and in some cases required, in the Fountain District Urban Village Commercial Core and Transition areas.

Capital Improvement Costs and Revenues

The costs and sources of revenues below are estimates only, and reflect the approximate costs and fees in 2010 dollars.

Arterial Upgrade (Meridian)		
Estimated Cost		\$1,077,000.00
Sources of Revenue		
City Funds (REET, Street, Traffic Impact Fees*, etc)		\$810,000.00
State and Federal Grants (Transit-oriented development, Low-Impact Development, Urban Renewal, etc)		
Private Development (sidewalks)		\$267,000.00
 Arterial Upgrade (Elm)		
Estimated Cost		\$659,000.00
Sources of Revenue		
City Funds (REET, Street, Traffic Impact Fees*, etc)		\$420,000.00
State and Federal Grants (Transit-oriented development, Low-Impact Development, Urban Renewal, etc)		
Private Development (sidewalks)		\$239,000.00
 Arterial Upgrade (W. Illinois)**		
Estimated Cost		\$178,000.00
Sources of Revenue		
City Funds (REET, Street, Traffic Impact Fees*, etc)		
State and Federal Grants (Safe Routes to School, Bike/Ped Improvements, etc)		
 Local Streets***		
Estimated Cost		\$600,000.00
Sources of Revenue		
Private development would be required to make improvements to 1/2 block (one side only) of local streets off Meridian and/or Elm Streets		
 Local Streets -- Bike Boulevards		
Estimated Cost		\$518,000.00
Sources of Revenue		
City Funds (REET, Street, etc)		
State and Federal Grants (Bike / Ped Improvements, etc)		
 Plaza Park Construction & Monroe Street right-of-way		
Estimated Cost		\$490,700.00
Sources of Revenue		
City Funds (PIF, REET, etc)		
State and Federal Grants		

*Traffic Impact Fees (TIF) and Park Impact Fees (PIF) estimates were based on potential build-out of the Fountain District urban village through 2022 using 2010 impact fee charges.

**Includes costs of sidewalk construction on the northern side of W. Illinois Street from Northwest Avenue to Lynn Street, and missing sidewalk section on the southern side of W. Illinois between Northwest and Cornwall Avenues.

***Includes 1/2 blocks off Meridian and Elm