



LIBERTY LAKE – 2046

DRAFT CITY OF LIBERTY LAKE

**URBAN
DESIGN
ELEMENT**

FOR THE 2026 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

VERSION 7/7/2025

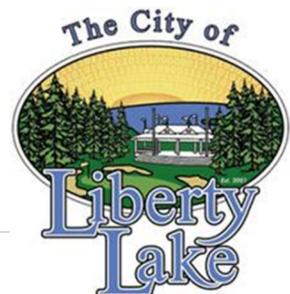
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A. Introduction

The Urban Design Element establishes goals and policies that will guide patterns of development and redevelopment to ensure it harmonizes with both the built and natural environments. This element attempts to emphasize the community's core values and enhance the city's distinct character. The goals, policies, and programs identified in this element will help to ensure that new development is consistent with the existing built and natural environments.

Historically, Liberty Lake began as a master-planned community, with several commercial and residential developments bound by design covenants covering aspects such as signage, building colors, landscaping and materials. This element, alongside the development regulations and design standards, will shape and enhance the city's existing aesthetic character within the built environment.

This element is influenced by the Land Use, Transportation, Climate, and Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Elements, with a particular focus on community safety, environmental conservation, and the overall physical design of the built environment. The city's character is defined by its pedestrian-oriented design features, with its robust multimodal pathway network integrated into a network of roadways providing connectivity and punctuated with street trees, grassy swales, and other plantings. Human-scale buildings incorporated into mixed-use zones, and ample green spaces in this walkable community help to foster a distinct "sense of place." The cohesive integration of these design principles creates an urban village where residents have ample opportunities to interact and engage with one another, and where small, locally owned businesses can flourish.

The City recognizes the importance of design standards and development criteria that are sensitive to both aesthetic and environmental needs as a catalyst for enhancing the city's economic base. The standards in this element support a range of architectural styles, natural colors and materials to blend the urban and natural environments. Future developments prioritizing quality design, accessibility, and craftsmanship will contribute to a beautiful, functional and resilient city.

B. Goals and Policies

Urban Design Goal 1: Maintain the urban character and the scenic resources of the community.

Policy 1: Maintain design standards and a design review process to ensure that neighborhood and community centers are developed with minimal impact on surrounding land uses and assure pedestrian and vehicular access.

Policy 2: Maintain and support an administrative design review committee consisting of five members. Two (2) positions shall be filled by City staff members and three (3) positions shall be filled by members of the Planning Commission.

Policy 3: Public and private sector development shall be subject to citywide design guidelines which are intended to protect the community’s scenic views, provide community cohesion, and enhance the community image of Liberty Lake. Design review shall be required for the following developments:

- a. Developments within designated mixed-use areas;
- b. Public buildings over 5,000 square feet;
- c. Aesthetic corridors and boulevards;
- d. Commercial and industrial developments; and
- e. All non-residential buildings that are visible from a public street.

Policy 4: Separated sidewalks with appropriate lighting shall be required on public streets in all new residential subdivisions.

Policy 5: Require the planting of curbside trees. Identify those species of trees that are most appropriate for curbside plantings, considering safety, soils, aesthetics, and compatibility with infrastructure, and require species diversity to protect from disease and promote neighborhood identity.

Policy 6: Encourage new developments, including multifamily projects, to be arranged in a pattern of connecting streets and blocks to allow people to get around easily by foot, bicycle, bus or car. Cul-de-sacs or other closed street systems may be appropriate under certain circumstances including, but not limited to, topography and other physical limitations which make connecting systems impractical.

Policy 7: Maintain standards that prescribe maximum building heights and other building design features to give a residential scale to multifamily developments.

Policy 8: Continue to implement and strengthen standards for the scale and intensity of commercial signs that protect views and minimize signage clutter while still allowing adequate business identification.

Policy 9: Prohibit construction of new video boards, billboards, and electronically changeable message signs, except under limited circumstances. Work with business owners to transform such existing signs while providing the option of directional signage.

Policy 10: Work with public agencies and private property owners to improve the appearance of gateways into the city.

Policy 11: Encourage the use of native, adaptive, and drought-resistant landscape materials in public and private building projects, where appropriate, to enhance the cohesion between the natural and built environments.

Policy 12: Encourage locating parking lots to the rear or side of buildings to enhance streetscapes and promote pedestrian access.

Policy 13: Require landscaping in parking areas to avoid large uninterrupted areas of asphalt.

Policy 14: In an effort to preserve the value of the community's night sky, outdoor lighting should be downward facing and shall be limited in height, number, and intensity of fixtures needed to provide sufficient security and identification on residential, commercial, and other development.

Policy 15: Incorporate the City's identification symbol into planters, benches, public buildings, City vehicles, streetscape furnishings, and other appropriate applications.

Policy 16: The City should support proactive code enforcement in a manner that encourages voluntary compliance to maintain community aesthetic standards, preserve property values, and enhance the overall quality of life.

Policy 17: Maintain design standards and land use plans for neighborhood centers, community centers, and the Central Business District that are based on the following principles:

- a. Centers should be compact, nonlinear development to encourage transit, bicycle, and pedestrian travel. Multistory construction, shared parking, and other techniques to use land efficiently should be encouraged.
- b. Aesthetic quality and compatibility among land uses within and adjacent to centers should be enhanced through landscaping, building orientation and setbacks, traffic control, and other measures to reduce potential conflicts.

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Distinctive or historical local character and natural features should be reflected in development design to provide variety within centers.

- c. Unsightly views, such as heavy machinery, storage areas, loading docks, and parking areas, should be fully screened from the view of adjacent uses and from all public streets and residential zones.
- d. Signs should be regulated to reduce glare and other adverse visual impacts on nearby residents, without limiting their potential contribution to the color and design of the center.
- e. Routes for pedestrian, auto, bicycle, transit, and truck travel within centers should have convenient access to each major destination. Buildings should be close to sidewalks to promote walking and browsing, with parking areas located on the side or at the rear of buildings.
- f. Commercial development in centers should provide or contribute to public spaces such as plazas, parks, and building atriums to enhance the appearance of the center and to provide amenities for employees and shoppers.
- g. Off-street parking areas should be designed to enhance pedestrian and handicapped access to commercial uses.
- h. To encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation, require the installation of secure bicycle parking facilities that are convenient for users and safe for pedestrians.
- i. Facilitate the safe use of golf carts where appropriate.

Policy 18: Maintain specific design standards for development that occurs adjacent to designated aesthetic corridors and boulevards that:

- a. Provide incentives for aesthetic design;
- b. Require landscaping buffers adjacent to roadways;
- c. Limit sign height and size;
- d. Provide performance standards to adequately screen heavy or “manufacturing” industrial-type developments that have exterior clutter (exterior storage, exterior heavy equipment, exterior fabrication/ assembly); and
- e. Use non-glare, energy efficient lighting techniques when possible.

Policy 19: Maintain the following routes as boulevards with pathways and landscaped center medians or other aesthetically pleasing landscaping or features:

- a. Molter Road;
- b. Liberty Lake Road; and
- c. Mission Avenue.

Policy 20: Continue to work closely with property owners in the Central Business District to support their efforts to develop the remaining vacant lots and to renovate and enhance existing developments.

Policy 21: Actively involve the Planning Commission, Parks & Arts Commission, and public in the design of improvements to roads and gateways in the city.

Policy 22: Underground overhead utility lines, especially in the Central Business District, whenever feasible.

C. Urban Design Features

Natural Systems and a Basic Strategy

Development and population growth can result in substantial environmental effects, which can be addressed through a thoughtful integration of the natural environmental systems with the built environment. Developing a vision of the mature City provides the basis for innovative uses of old and new approaches. Liberty Lake's unique climate and landscape offer both challenges and opportunities for design, promoting the use of native, weather-resilient landscaping to maintain natural continuity. The strategic placement of trees, shrubs, grassy areas, open space opportunities, and naturally-occurring building materials further integrates and enhances the connection between the built environment and nature.

Criteria for Evaluating Building and Site Design

The relationship of new and infill development to other structures and the larger environment should be the focus of building and site design evaluation. Planning and design criteria assist in determining a project's compatibility with the surrounding area. These criteria include:

- a. Zoning category and associated design standards, appropriate for the uses allowed within the zone;
- b. Percentage of impervious surface (roof, parking, sidewalks – areas that promote run-off);

- c. Building height;
- d. Setbacks;
- e. Overall building lot coverage;
- f. Proportions and massing;
- g. Roof types and materials;
- h. Surface color and texture;
- i. Building projections and articulation;
- j. Architectural details; and
- k. Landscape design features.

Building Proportions, Height and Setbacks

New structures should be compatible with other buildings in the vicinity, with the goals of preserving and enhancing design qualities of the built environment and preserving views. Setbacks should be compatible with those of surrounding structures and scenic resources, providing building presence without allowing the structure or development to dominate other buildings, the streetscape, or the natural scenic views. The proportions of proposed residential, commercial, or industrial structures will also affect their compatibility with site and surrounding conditions. Establishing a relationship between existing and planned development may set a standard that is meant to rejuvenate a neighborhood, giving it greater influence in establishing future design criteria for the neighborhood. Generally, height and width of building elevations should not be significantly out of character with existing neighborhood development or interfere with natural scenic views.

Roof Types and Materials

Roof types and materials and roof lines can play a critical role in either complementing or degrading natural scenic views. Roof types, from flat to multiple arrays of hipped and gabled roofs, provide a range of possibilities for contrasting or imitative treatment.

Surface Texture and Color

Variable weather conditions and the natural hues of the surrounding hills should influence the selection of surface textures and colors, ensuring compatibility with the environment. Surfaces that mimic the course, warm tones of the hills are preferable, as slick and shiny finishes can create unwanted glare and detract from the natural setting. While post-modern and hybrid architectural

styles often incorporate contrasting colors and materials, these should still align with broader design standards. Surface texture is less prominent but essential in complementing architectural pattern and massing. Like all design elements, texture should be carefully considered to enhance the overall design and harmonize with the environment.

Building Projections and Architectural Details

Much of a building's design is expressed in the detail, articulation, and projections that grow out of the building envelope. Building projections and other architectural details play important functional and aesthetic roles in a building's efficiency as shelter as well as its appearance. Providing privacy and screening from the elements, projections and architectural detail also affect surrounding development. The use of porches and verandas can further enhance residential living space and provide protection from sun and wind.

Site Planning and Community Design

Site planning involves the distribution of buildings, parking, driveways, and landscaped open space areas of a site. It establishes the development's relationship to the street and surrounding properties. The influences of site design are not always easy to visualize and assess without the development of a detailed site plan. Care should be taken not to allow artistic applications of color, landscaping, and graphic "eye wash" to obscure or misrepresent the final product as it will actually appear on the development site. Together with building architecture, site planning is a critical design parameter determining the compatibility of proposed development with the existing development.

Gateways, Crossroads, Corridors and Scenic Places

In addition to the architectural character of community design, other elements must be addressed when considering the community as a whole. These include areas with important landmarks and focal points, which lend identity and character to the community, and create a sense of place. Landmarks or focal points may include natural, historic, architectural, or cultural areas of interest.

Some of the most important community assets are the scenic resources within and surrounding the City, including Liberty Lake, the Spokane River, Mica Peak, Mt. Spokane, Kramer Hill, and Holiday Hill. Preservation of these scenic vistas is an important goal of the community. However, various types of land development, the construction of buildings and walls, landscaping, roads, and the extension of utility lines and other facilities may impact the scenic resources of the community. The protection and enhancement of the City's views is important to the aesthetics of the City of Liberty Lake.

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Liberty Lake has a variety of important entry and focal points, which provide opportunities to reinforce the City’s identity. The integration of monuments and appropriate signage, as well as special streetscape and landscape standards, can be used to reflect the community’s unique character. Focal points such as public art can be located anywhere along major routes, including important street corners, within parks and other public open spaces, civic buildings, schools, and historic areas. Adequate areas for significant landscape or architectural treatment, City entry signage, special paving, and other identifiable features all lend character and identity to entry and other focal points. Examples of developed landscape architectural elements include the boulevard designs of Harvard Road, Molter Road, and Country Vista, which provide a welcoming experience to motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians as they travel through those portions of the City. The boulevards also provide a sense of place and vitality to the City. Landscaping elements, monument signage, site furnishings, public art, and open space areas should all be considered in the development standards and policies for landmark or focal point enhancement.

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