Design Guidelines for Small Towns and Rural Communities

Conference resources online at: www.planning.org/audioconference/DESIGN

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What is “Inside Out Urban Design”?

• Context sensitive design for small towns and rural areas

The Problem

• Many rural areas experience rapid growth
• Losing the sense of place
• Need to respect for the past, while acknowledging change is coming

Urban Design for Rural Areas

• Traditional urban design focuses on density, intensity, walkability, etc
Design Guidelines for Small Towns and Rural Communities

Principles of Design
Binoy Panicker, AICP

Preparing Rural Design Standards

• Keep highways rural – two lanes, soft shoulders, etc
• Larger setbacks
• Less dense

• What are rural design standards/guidelines?
  – Regulations that establish an aesthetic framework in the rural context
• Generally associated with zoning/bulk standards, overlay districts, redevelopment areas, or strategic plan study areas
Smart Standards for Small Towns

• What is the difference between "urban design" standards and "rural design" standards?
The Key Issue

• How to balance sustainable growth and aesthetics in a rural environment?

Major Considerations

• Uses
• Right-of-way treatment
• Building placement
• Landscape setting
• Architectural vocabulary
• Signage theme
1. Right-of-Way Treatment

- Limit lanes, roadway widths, and shoulders
- Restrict turn lanes where appropriate

- Plant native vegetation and wildflower
- Highlight places of interest through roadway design

2. Building Placement

- Cluster nonresidential development
- Leverage common parking and infrastructure
3. Landscape Setting

• Create rural ambience using landscape buffers
• Plan major parking to sides/rear of buildings

• Create central public space “village square”
• Generate “critical mass” for economic viability
• Realize/market as a destination

• Cluster landscape planting
for greater impact

• Integrate natural features such as rivers
• Integrate man-made features such as trails

4. Architectural Vocabulary

• Determine built space massing
• Formulate solid-void ratio
• Stipulate roof design

• Consider lighting design to reduce “spill”
• Require quality architectural elements
• Focus on materials and finishes
5. Signage and Theme

- Create a collective visual impression
- Make signs functional
- Leverage signs to generate theme

- Restrict total copy area
- Stipulate size and number
- Determine allowable sign types

Typical Table of Contents

- Introduction
- Public Space Design Guidelines
- Private Property Design Guidelines
  - Site Development
  - Building Design
  - Signage
- Administrative Process
Putting Design into Practice

Greg Hoch

Durango, Colorado

- Background / Setting / Population
  - 125 year old city, strong historical roots, high quality of life, aesthetics a priority, pro-planning
  - 16,000 people: cowboy / Indian; conservative / progressive mix; college town; tourist and retirees destination
  - grew 3,800 people in 30 years, then 1,800 people in last 5 years

Durango’s Design Initiatives

- Sign Code and Landscaping Regs – 1983
- Integrated Code - 1989
- Big Box Design Initiatives – 1997, rev. 2002
- Commercial Use Design Guidelines – 2004
Downtown Design Guidelines

- Product of the Main Street Program
- Adopted initially as voluntary, changed to mandatory within 5 years
- First guidelines nationally to be applied to entire CBD, not just historic district
- 7 citizen member design review board, with appeal to City Council
- Success spawned future successes