



Memorandum:

TO: Planning and Zoning Commission
FROM: Wes Morrison, City Planner
Date: February 3, 2014
RE: 2035 Comprehensive Plan Approved Amendments

The City Council recently amended the 2035 Comprehensive Plan revising the standards of development related to parking, park and green space calculations, Low Impact Development and LEED requirements, focus of commuter rail, and introduced unit value to city services ratios within residential development. Attached are the redline changes and below is a summary of those changes.

Residential Development

There were three changes to the Comprehensive Plan Policies that will affect residential development. These changes focused on minimizing the financial impact that new development may have on the increased costs of city services while still providing developers flexibility to meet market demands. One policy introduced that the average per unit value of any new residential development shall exceed the costs created by providing city services based on a cost of service model updated annually. This policy will be enforced through the platting and permitting process as stated in the policy. The policy following is to provide residential standards that are flexible to allow developers to respond to the market while still meeting the requirements of cover the total costs of the extended city services.

The last change was to repeal a previous policy to eliminate minimum lot size and replaced with a similar policy with the revised focus to provide developers maximum flexibility to developers to meet markets demands. Both of these two policies were focused on moving away from minimum lot sizes, though the new policy is to promote flexibility within market demands.

Parking

The 2035 Comprehensive Plan previously supported compact parking spaces including spaces for motorcycles and electronic vehicles, but the revisions repealed allowing compact spaces and also repealed the encouragement of charging stations in parking areas to promote alternative fuel vehicles.

Park Calculations

Previously the Comprehensive Plan used a weighted calculation to determine the City's parks and green space service, the newly adopted policy requires that all open spaces, green belts, parks, trails, playgrounds, and other recreational facilities that are open to the public be included within the City's calculations. This will effectively revise our previously weighted calculation and increase the parks and green space per capita calculation.

Low Impact Designs & LEED

The 2035 Comprehensive Plan had a focus, to the extent practical, to implement low impact designs within development and LEED certification of public facilities. While these focuses were repealed, there were no additional policies adopted to prevent development from integrating low impact designs or to develop new public facilities under LEED design.

Commuter Rail

The 2035 Comprehensive Plan had a policy to implement the trails system and promote the use of commuter rail. With the changes adopted the policy of implement the trails system still stands, but without the promotion of commuter rail.

Exhibit A: Excerpted Draft Comprehensive Plan

REDLINE VERSION

Excerpt from page 5-23

POLICIES

Character

- All plan approval and rezoning requests should be consistent with the character for the area, policies established in the Comprehensive Plan and the Future Land Use Plan. Any zoning request that does not conform should require a request for a Comprehensive Plan amendment prior to submittal of a rezoning application.
 - A comprehensive plan amendment should be required for any change in the land use/character designation or for any text amendment.
 - A comprehensive plan amendment may be submitted concurrent with a rezoning or other development application.
 - Amendments should clearly describe the need for the proposed change, changing or unforeseen circumstances warranting the change, the guiding principles or goals the proposed change supports, the effect of the proposed change on city services and facilities, compatibility with surrounding uses and any implications the amendment would have on other plan elements.
- The Comprehensive Plan should be regularly monitored and updated in order to respond to changing needs and conditions and remain useful overtime.
 - City staff should monitor and report upon plan progress and success every year to at minimum the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council.
 - Minor revisions should be compiled and made at regular intervals such as annually, or more often as needed. Revisions that include changes to the future land use plan and/or new or revised policies should be considered major amendments and should be made as the need arises.
 - The City should conduct a thorough review and potential revision and adoption of the Plan every 5 years. At this the time the base studies, guiding principles, future land use plan and policies should be updated and revised as necessary to reflect changing circumstances and priorities and emerging needs and opportunities.
- Approve and evaluate development requests based on compatibility with

“community character”, including overall intensity of a site using measures such as open space ratio, density, floor area ratio, setbacks, massing and scale.

- Treatment of the site, particularly open space and impervious/pervious surfaces, and relationship of a structure to its site and surrounding areas, is as important to character the actual structure.
- Designs incorporating best management practices including cluster development, Traditional Neighborhood Development, and Low Impact Development, where appropriate, are encouraged, preferable to typical conventional designs and should be allowed by right.
- Encourage compact, mixed use developments that include a variety of land uses, housing types and higher densities in designated Urban High and Urban Low areas.
- Promote flexibility in development patterns, site designs and uses by right, to the extent practical, and by Special Use Permit to further extent practical. Planned Unit Development should be considered a route of last resort.
- ~~• Eliminate minimum lot size and configuration requirements in favor of density requirements. If necessary, establish average lot sizes to create additional flexibility.~~
- The average per unit value of any new residential development shall exceed the value necessary to cover the total cost of providing city services. The total cost of providing services shall be based upon an annually updated cost of service model that is enforced through the platting and permitting process.
- Residential standards should be sufficiently flexible to allow developers to respond to the market while still meeting the cost of service and quality demands of the community.
- Eliminate standards such as minimum lot size and configuration in favor of density or yield requirements as a means of allowing maximum flexibility to developers to meet market demands.
- Utilize “build-to” lines in replacement of front setbacks in all but rural character areas. Establish a “build-to” range and percentage of frontage that must be within that range in order to promote continuity but also add flexibility (for example, 60 percent of frontage within 10 to 12 feet of the property line).
- Establish average height limits and increase maximum height to allow flexibility in massing and design, where appropriate.
- A pattern book or design guidelines should accompany major development activity to establish architectural and site design standards for a development project

beyond the minimum requirements of the code (and as a means of assisting HOA or COA architectural review committees in making more informed decisions).

- Design standards in Urban areas should address the podium, shaft and top of structures in terms of space, massing and transparency.
- Different uses may be adjacent or mixed if the desired character is achieved and if impacts are appropriately addressed.
- Natural areas such as floodplains, native habitat areas, prairie land and wetlands should be protected and, when appropriate, utilized as amenities in achieving desired character. Natural features should be used as buffers or open space between or around developed areas and incompatible uses.
- Infill development and redevelopment, particularly in designated areas identified on Map 4.5, is preferable to new development in largely undeveloped or agriculturally productive areas.
- All infill development should be compatible with the character and context of surrounding areas.
- New development on sites adjacent to existing infrastructure is preferable to “leapfrog” development.

Excerpt from page 5-25

Parking

- Parking requirements should allow for flexibility based upon market demand while also respecting community character.
- Off-street parking should be shared to the greatest extent possible, particularly in instances of complementary uses.
- Structured parking is preferable in Urban areas, particularly in areas characterized as Urban High.
- When possible, structured parking should be integrated into structures with commercial retail activity on the first floor.
- On-street parking is encouraged as appropriate to area character and context.
- Public parking should be promoted as a viable means of spurring economic activity and, when appropriate, should be counted toward parking requirements of surrounding uses.
- Public parking should be strategically located for purposes of promoting pedestrian activity.

- Reduce parking and space requirements for development that installs bike racks (where appropriate).
- ~~Allow for compact parking spaces, including a percentage of spaces for motorcycles and electronic vehicles.~~
- ~~Encourage installation of charging stations in parking areas, particularly public parking, at prominent locations to encourage use of alternative fuel vehicles and alternative sources of transportation.~~
- Location and design needs for parking, like parking type, should differ according to character area.
- The percentage of off-street parking allowed in front of a structure should decrease as intensity of character increases from Rural to Urban.
- Encourage low impact design in parking areas, including use of pervious pavement, rain gardens, and naturalized parking techniques such as cellular grass paving.

Open Space

- All open spaces, green belts, parks, trails, playgrounds and other recreational facilities which are open to the public will be included in the city's parks and green space calculation.
- Open space should be functional for purposes of enhancing recreation, character, connectivity, conservation, wildlife habitat and/or stormwater management.
- Open space should be promoted in meeting several urban design needs, including creation of landmarks, gathering spaces/destinations, paths, or edges.
- Open space should be prominent in site design and development/redevelopment efforts in a manner appropriate to area character and intensity of development.
- Residual space resulting from poor site design should not be considered acceptable for meeting open space requirements.
- Alternative housing types may be used to achieve greater design flexibility in preserving and taking advantage of opportunities related to open space.
- Open spaces should be connected within a development as well as with open spaces on adjacent sites. Linkages between open spaces and with other destinations should be considered a critical component of good site design.
- Primary conservation areas, such as floodplains, should be maintained in a natural state, free from development with the exception of recreation or other low-impact uses. Secondary conservation areas should be preserved and utilized in site development to the extent practical.
- Primary and secondary conservation (see Map 4.1) areas should be preserved through dedication, conservation easements or other means of acquisition and

management.

- Open space is best maintained in a coordinated, connected and accessible system of natural areas, greenways and recreation spaces.
- Conservation subdivision techniques offer an optimal tool that creatively allows for both development and preservation (and full and marketable use of) of sensitive areas such as wetlands and other existing natural areas.
- Encourage creation of natural wetland areas (as opposed to lakes) as an amenity or to compensate for native areas (including prairie lands) that have been destroyed during development.
- If open space is to remain private, then require assurance that it will remain protected and maintained in an appropriate condition.
- Consider conservation easement as a tool for protecting natural areas with maintenance through a land trust or homeowners association.
- Innovative techniques for increasing open space, such as development of a green roof or naturalized parking areas, should be encouraged and should count toward meeting a portion of open space requirements and as tools for reducing impervious surfaces.
- Enhance and expand, to the greatest degree possible, linkages and access to Clear Creek and adjacent sensitive areas.

Bufferyards

- Promote architectural and natural solutions for noise issues, including berms, mounds, vegetative walls/screens.
- Bufferyards are a better means of addressing impacts than setbacks and/or simple vegetative screens. Bufferyards should include a mix of landscaping, berms, and walls (including noise reducing materials), in addition to setbacks.
- Bufferyard standards should vary based on the level/type of impact, intensity, and compatibility of adjacent uses.
- Water conservation and stormwater drainage systems, may be integrated into required bufferyards, if designed appropriately.
- Bufferyards should complement existing natural areas.

Responsible Growth

- Development should, at worst case, run concurrent with the availability of infrastructure and acceptable levels of service.
- Municipal Improvement Districts are not an appropriate substitute for municipal infrastructure and service and should be discouraged, if not fully avoided.
- Total population and employment upon buildout should not be allowed to exceed

the ability to adequately provide water, stormwater, wastewater, and transportation services, with particular emphasis on the most finite of these resources - water.

- Ordinances should be revised to ensure that population and employment do not exceed the capacity.
- Ordinances should not allow short term development to render additional sites unavailable for development because water capacity has been reached.
- ~~Existing development should, to the extent practical, be retrofitted to implement low impact design practices.~~
- Water management is critical to growth and water conservation practices can substantially reduce water consumption, particularly during peak periods.
- Development patterns, intensity, and design standards can all play a role in impacting water consumption.

Impacts

- Establish noise mitigation measures that maintain the ambient noise level in existence prior to development of a project (or better).
- Lighting should be designed to promote the objectives of the International Dark Sky Association.
- Minimize the impact of tall buildings upon adjacent shorter buildings through use of a Sky Exposure Angle in addition to setback requirements.
- Promote the use of innovative methods of addressing impacts, particularly if such methods are successful without creating additional impacts that cannot be successfully mitigated.
- Consider construction impacts, particularly in situations that require construction outside of daylight hours, separately from post-construction impacts.
- Distance is typically a poor means of addressing impacts in comparison to other methods.

Excerpt from page 5-26

Water Management and Energy Conservation

- Promote development patterns and architecture that reduce the need for energy and water consumption.
- Encourage development patterns to take advantage of sun angles and natural wind flow.
- Encourage an intense tree canopy as a tool for reducing energy consumption and

thermal pollution while also increasing value.

- ~~• Incorporate low impact design techniques into development activity including green roofs (primarily on commercial, institutional and multifamily structures), rain barrels, cisterns, rain gardens, and naturalized landscaping.~~
- Native grasses and groundcovers should be encouraged instead of turf to reduce water usage.

Annexation

- Annex remaining lands in the extraterritorial jurisdiction only as appropriate and feasible.
- Ensure that a plan is provided at the time of annexation that clarifies appropriate character for the area.

Excerpt from page 7-2 requiring recalculation of parks needs assessment figures to be provided upon second reading

Excerpt from page 9-7

Shared Resources

- At minimum, League City should pursue joint use of resources such as library or park resources, parking areas, and meeting areas between departments or government entities that share common needs or interests, such as the fire department and EMS, or City of League City Police Department and Galveston County Sheriffs Department.
- Utilize resources such as parking areas, parks and meeting areas as a means of promoting shared use with private uses, such as retail, office and residential activities.
- The City should explore shared resources as a means of attracting additional higher education opportunities, as well as increased presence of the College of the Mainland.
- Maximize the potential for critical mass by clustering complementary activities to the extent practical.

Energy and Quality of Design

- ~~• Public facilities should be constructed, to the extent practical, using green standards, with consideration given for development to LEED standards.~~
- Water conservation and stormwater management techniques should be fully

integrated into all existing and new public structures and site to the fullest extent practical.

- All public facilities should reflect dignity and permanence in design while allowing for sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing technology and needs.
- Architecture of public facilities should be innovative and bold in design. At the same time, architecture should fit into the surrounding context and should avoid styles capable of becoming quickly dated.
- Site design of any public facility should be highly respectful of the surrounding community character, including location of parking, open space requirements, and lot coverage.

Partnerships

- Partnerships that enhance educational opportunities in League City are strongly encouraged including construction of distinctive facilities that expand the learning experience and the possibility of research or training centers.
- Coordination with nonprofit organizations, particularly those related to cultural activities and the arts should be considered a viable means of expanding the creative use of facilities and the quality of services provided to League City residents.
- Public/private partnerships are strongly encouraged as a means of building stronger destinations and enhancing opportunities for customer service.
- Partnerships with other government entities that provide services in League City are encouraged for purposes of improving customer service and efficiently using resources.
- Partnerships with adjacent municipalities, Galveston County, Harris County and other entities could spur development of major regional attractions located strategically throughout the area.

Excerpt from page 11-2

Specific recommendations of the Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan include:

- Development of an implementation plan for the Historic District and Main Street as the first major destination to be established in League City. Unlike typical plans, the implementation plan is intended to serve as a “business plan” for improvements that incorporates development of catalyst projects such as a large, scale permanent public market, redevelopment of League Park as a true event and gathering space, reinvented use for Perkins Station, and the possibility of an amphitheater in or near

the area. The plan proposes recommendation of a desired retail mix and implementation of complementary strategies related to parking, gateways, free wireless access, and identification of the area.

- Establishment of a business incubator in the community to grow startup firms seeking to take advantage of the emphasis on innovation and support for small business.
- Development of Class A office space, particularly for small businesses.
- Design and implementation of a wayfinding and gateway system that links the important destinations throughout League City.
- Enhancement of the number and magnitude of activities, events and programs in League City.
- Implementation of the trails system ~~and promotion of commuter rail.~~
- Improvement to the appearance of gateways and major corridors.
- Acquisition of recruitment expertise with a focus on business capable of building critical mass in each of the commercial and cultural districts that will become destinations.
- Coordination and potential affiliation with Main Street USA and other national programs or organizations that promote destination based economic development.
- Establishment of improved marketing efforts including a process for selling the community's brand to local organizations, as well as creation of a new style guide, photo library, brand posters, brand bookmarks, marketing pieces, business cabinet (letterhead, envelopes, business cards, etc.), promotional materials, community profile, and marketing website.