

Urban Design

Element 17

INTRODUCTION

The community of Sierra Vista enjoys a beautiful natural setting surrounded by the Huachuca Mountains on the west and south, the San Pedro River Valley to the east, and nearby mountain ranges across the valley. While no central theme of urban design has evolved in Sierra Vista, the below listed urban goals and strategies will promote both orderly and aesthetic diversity.

In April 2009, the City Council adopted Architectural and Design Guidelines as an appendix to the General Plan. The guidelines are very flexible and allow creativity on the part of architects and site designers. Although the guidelines are flexible, compliance with the guidelines is mandated under Development Code Article 151.20. The review process is administrative and incorporated into the site design process.



Building, North Garden Avenue

BACKGROUND

Sierra Vista originally came into being as a support town for Fort Huachuca. The City does not benefit from an “established downtown,” rather, the City is defined by two primary, linear commercial strips, Fry Boulevard and State Route 92. While there are numerous examples of high-quality architecture throughout the City, the linear development patterns create design challenges.

Since the Guidelines were adopted, the newly constructed commercial buildings better reflect the community’s desire for high-quality development. While there are many attractively designed buildings constructed prior to the adoption of the Guidelines, the level of consistent quality is now generally higher.

During the City’s “Dream Your City” visioning process, numerous comments were made relating to establishment of a town center. In the 2013 City Council Strategic Leadership Plan, an objective was formulated that requires the creation of a “concept plan” for the development of a Town Center (variously described in the *Dream Your City* visioning process as a “downtown”, a “central plaza”, or a “heart”). The lack of a *downtown center* reflects the linear growth patterns noted above and acknowledges the City is lacking in this most fundamental of urban design features.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 17-1 **Make Sierra Vista a city distinguished by its orderly and aesthetic-character**
The Sierra Vista City Council approved Architecture and Design Review Standards on April 11, 2019. Many of the strategies indicated below were addressed through these standards.

- Strategies**
1. Promote architectural and site design and materials that complement the topography, views, and other natural features.
The Architecture and Design Standards require new commercial developments to provide façade materials that are appropriate to the architectural style and vernacular of Sierra Vista. Further, one of the Standards requires that buildings be oriented to views of activities, architectural landmarks, or natural features to provide visual interest.
 2. Encourage architectural design that is in keeping with a regional southwestern appearance while allowing for creative interpretation and designs, when appropriate.
The Architectural Design Standards allow for a number of façade materials which can often be found in southwestern architecture such as wood, stucco, stone, textured concrete, glass, textured and split-face or ground-face concrete masonry units, brick, stone, or metal veneers. Further, additional façade materials can be considered as determined by the City. Building colors are to be muted earthtones with a reflectivity value less than 50 percent. Earthtones are standard colors within southwestern design.
 3. Site and orient buildings with consideration to the pedestrian and vehicular components of a street.

One of the requirements in the Architectural Design standards is to orient front entrances toward a street, plaza, or pedestrian way which allows for the entrance to be easily identifiable as well as provide quick and easy access.

4. Integrate pedestrian considerations in all development.

One of the Architectural and Design Standards integrates a number of pedestrian considerations such as covered walkways and canopies; courtyard and pedestrian gathering areas; pedestrian-scale light fixtures in areas of high pedestrian use such as patios, outdoor dining areas, connected pathways; and outdoor benches or other seating elements.

5. Incorporate street furniture and landscaping, where possible, that complement the pedestrian network and adds to the city aesthetic.

As stated previously, the Architectural and Design standards incorporate street furniture and landscaping such as requiring outdoor benches and elements that can be built to include seating, such as landscape planters. The West Fry Boulevard/North Garden Avenue Corridor Plan proposes to incorporate a streetscape that include pedestrian amenities such as furniture and landscaping.

6. Encourage the location of off-street parking facilities to the rear and sides for new structures (when the street-side views of the buildings are attractive and present a “front-façade” appearance and feel).

Although the Architectural and Design Standards do not require parking facilities to be constructed to the rear and side of buildings to create a front-façade appearance, other elements are required which can create the same front-façade appearance such as requiring the main entrance to a building be clearly identifiable by emphasizing and enhancing the level of architectural details such as a change in plane, differentiation in materials and color, and enhanced lighting. Further, as previously stated, the primary entrance shall be oriented to face a street, plaza or pedestrian way.

7. Require appropriate landscaping and setbacks as a condition of residential, commercial, and industrial subdivision and site plan approval.

Development Code Article 151.18, *Site Plans*, requires that 15 percent of the site be landscaped to include a 10-foot wide landscape strip between the sidewalk and the parking area and 10-foot wide landscape islands every 12 parking spaces. Development Code Section 151.15.006, Buffering and

Screening Requirements, provides a buffering chart to determine distance separations and landscaping requirements between residential, commercial, and industrial uses. In addition, the development code has been amended to provide reduced setbacks on properties in the Infill Incentive District to accommodate building expansions.

8. Vary the scale and nature of mature landscape materials as appropriate to the site, structure, and signage.

Development Code Section 151.15.004, Landscaping, requires that all new commercial developments plant shrubs which are a minimum of 5 gallon and trees which are a minimum of 15 gallon. The Development Code provides a link to the Low Water/ Drought Tolerant Plant List that provides numerous options for developers when landscaping their sites. Location of the plantings is site specific to ensure there are no impacts on clear vision, accessibility, and pedestrian safety.

9. Require lighting and signage that does not pollute the night sky and adjoining properties.

The Sierra Vista City Council approved a Dark Skies Ordinance on May 28, 2015. The Ordinance included limitations on the brightness and glare of commercial signs and exterior lighting. For example, commercial sites adjacent to residential uses are required a maximum of 150,000 lumens per acre. In addition, the maximum color correlated temperature for LED lights shall not exceed 3,000 Kelvins. For signs, electronic message center signs the brightness cannot exceed 100 nits. Further, illuminated white backgrounds for other ground mounted signs are prohibited.

10. Insure that commercial lighting has no negative effect on vehicular traffic.

In addition to the above requirements to reduce the impacts of lighting, the Dark Skies Ordinance also requires that exterior lighting fixtures for commercial businesses shall be turned off between the hours of 10:00pm and sunrise or whenever the business activities cease, whichever is later, excluding security lighting. Also, electronic message center signs are required to be turned-off when the business activities cease.

11. Review and update the Architectural and Design Guidelines to ensure they are adapting to changing community desires and technology.

As previously stated, City Council approved Architectural and Design Standards on April 11, 2019. The Standards went through a lengthy public hearing process and reflect the desires of the community. In addition, the

Standards encourage innovative design when developing façade and architectural plans.

12. Reduce the visual clutter created by signs and billboards along major roads.
As stated previously, the Dark Sky Ordinance will reduce the light pollution issues associated with signs. Article 151.10, Sign Regulations requires aesthetic features for new free-standing commercial signs such as signs being located within landscaped areas and pole covers. In 2018, the City required a minimum 5-foot setback for all free-standing signs from the front property line to provide a visual separation between the roadway and the sign. Although many older non-conforming signs have been replaced with more modern conforming signs, there are still many non-conforming signs along major roadways. However, it is the City's goal to replace the non-conforming signs with conforming signs as these properties are redeveloped.
13. Require that the installation of new utility lines, and the retrofit of existing utility lines, be placed underground, whenever feasible.
Standard operating procedures for utility line installation in new commercial and residential developments is to install the lines underground.

Goal 17-2 Develop a cohesive urban character that makes Sierra Vista a community unto itself

- Strategies*
1. Develop the City through cohesive urban design.
The City approved Architecture & Design Review Standards on April 11, 2019. The purpose of the Standards is to promote reasonable and context-sensitive site and building design standards. Design as it applies to the Architecture & Design Review Standards, describes the image and character of the City's built environment and includes both site and building architectural considerations. Therefore, the Standards were created to provide a cohesive urban design. Further the Design Standards are intended to ensure the following:
 - a. Siting and architectural design of structures harmonize visually with surrounding development and creates a built environment that is safe and aesthetically pleasing;
 - b. The arrangement of buildings, parking areas, drive aisles, storm water detention areas, pedestrian ways and other features of the site

combine to create a functional project that is convenient for users of the property.

- c. Unsightly uses, features or activities are screened from public view and from adjacent property, and dissimilar uses are separated by buffers to prevent conflicts, promote privacy, and maintain property values;
- d. Landscaping that provides a visually pleasing setting for structures on the site, complements the architecture of the project, blends harmoniously with the natural landscape, conserves water, does not conflict with public or private utilities, and is suited to the site and Sierra Vista's climatic conditions.
- e. Provide materials and colors that are appropriate to the architectural style of the structures, complement neighboring properties and project a high quality image.

2. Continue constructing pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods that promote a healthy lifestyle via the development of wide sidewalks, subdivision interconnection, and access to multi-use paths and parks.

There are currently three subdivisions under construction that will all provide subdivision interconnection and access to multi-use paths.

- a. The second phase of the Summit Heights subdivision located at the corner of Golf Links Road and Savanna Drive is currently under construction. A multi-use path was constructed under Phase one which extended from Buffalo Soldier Trail to Golf Links Road.
- b. The final phase of the Holiday Subdivision located at the corner of Canyon De Flores Drive and Resort Drive is currently under construction. There are a number of multi-use paths that were constructed during the earlier phases of construction such as a loop path which connects all phases. Also provided was a multi-use path along Garden Canyon Wash which will connect to a multi-use path further east which will be constructed with the development of Buffalo Soldier Ranch.
- c. The Canada Vista subdivision is currently under construction. When completed the informal multi-use path along Coronado Drive between Busby Drive and Golf Link Road will be constructed to City standards. Further, a second multi-use path will be constructed along the Town & Country Drainageway which will provide pedestrian connectivity between Coronado Drive and Lenzner Avenue.

3. Pursue creating signed, landscaped, and planned land-use gateways at the four primary vehicular entrances into the City that reflect the urban

character of Sierra Vista (State Route 90, State Route 90 East, State Route 92, and Charleston Road).

A Sierra Vista entryway sign was installed at the intersection of State Route 90 and Buffalo Soldier Trail. The sign includes the new City brand and logo. The City is in the design phase of improvements to N. Garden Avenue and West Fry Boulevard known as the West Fry Boulevard Corridor North Garden Avenue Improvement Project. The plans for N. Garden Avenue and W. Fry Boulevard include a road diet, enhanced landscaping, bike lanes, and pedestrian amenities. There are currently no improvements or aesthetic streetscapes proposed along the eastern and southern gateways into the City. However, the City can continue to include the planning for these gateways in the updated General Plan.

- a. Create a regional gateway overlay district in coordination with Cochise County.

An overlay has not been created at this time. The City will look at the need and necessity of an overlay district in the update to the General Plan.

Goal 17-3 Provide a variety of housing types

Strategies

1. Encourage land use changes that will facilitate the greatest amount of variety in housing types.

The City amended the Development Code in 2016 to allow apartments as permitted uses with the General Commercial Zoning Districts. This Code amendment was reflective of trend of developers converting hotels to apartments because of the need for additional multi-family housing in the community. The amendment simplified the conversion process as additional public hearings are no longer required.

2. Continue encouraging private developers who are pursuing funding to provide affordable housing.

The City encourages private developers constructing affordable housing by providing a 50 percent reduction in the processing review fees and a waiver of development impact fees. According to Chapter 154 of the City Code, "No development fees shall be assessed against projects that meet HUD affordability guidelines for low and moderate income households." Affordable housing developments located within the Infill Incentive District Area may also be provided development relief through the Infill Incentive District Policy.

Goal 17-4 **Develop a Town Center**

In 2013, the Mayor and City Council created a strategic objective that would, “explore ways in which a future Town Center could be created and sustained within the community.” In 2014, City staff presented the City Council with three options to determine the most strategic location for a Town Center.

The first location was the Tribute Town Center which would be located within the Tribute Master Plan area which consists of approximately 1916 acres. The appeal of this location was that land was already dedicated for a Tribute town center within the master plan area which would be designed using “new urbanism” techniques such as mixed uses, store front entryways located adjacent to sidewalks, and narrow roads.

The second location proposed was N. Garden Avenue because it was the main entryway or gateway into the community, the City currently owned land in which to construct a town center, and the design of a streetscape design had commenced.

The third option was the State Trust Land adjacent to Veteran’s Park. The advantages of this location was that this land was geographically located within the center of town, was prime commercial property being adjacent to Fry Boulevard, was walkable to City facilities and businesses, and was a logical extension and use of Veteran’s Park. Ultimately, the City Council decided that the State Trust Land, adjacent to Veteran’s Park was the ultimate location for the Town Center.

Subsequent to the presentation by staff, the City received a grant to create a plan on redeveloping the West End of Fry Boulevard. This document, which was completed in 2017, became known as the West Fry Boulevard, North Garden Avenue study. The emphasis on the plan was redevelopment of the West End by improving the form, function, and character of the streets to meet this goal, which in turn would spur additional private investment. As a result, the focus of the town center shifted from the State Trust Land adjacent to Veteran’s Park to the West Fry Boulevard, N. Garden Avenue corridor. Construction is anticipated to start in the summer/fall of 2021.

- Strategies**
1. Prepare a concept plan identifying design parameters, location, and development options.
 2. Work with the public to refine the concept plan.

3. Acquire land.
4. Implement plans to develop a town center.

STATE LAW REQUIREMENTS

None

ATTACHMENTS

None

REFERENCES

The following references used in this element are City approved documents.

- Architectural and Design Guidelines, April, 2009, VISTA 2030 Appendix