

Bend Area General Plan

Chapter 9: Community Appearance

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PREAMBLE

One of the hallmarks of the nation's best communities is the thought, planning and community involvement put into creating and delineating an attractively built environment that relates to and incorporates the area's natural environment. A basic objective of this Plan is to retain and, where required, re-establish a sense of community in Bend as growth occurs.

An important step in achieving this objective involves paying more attention to the overall appearance of the community and promoting better designs for all types of development. This step benefits the residents by creating a more visually attractive community, and can in some areas, such as along the main highways and transportation corridors, create the image of Bend for visitors and other Central Oregon residents.

GOALS

The purpose of including a community appearance section and policies in the *General Plan* is to provide direction to significantly improve the appearance of the entire community, and especially in those high visibility areas along the commercial corridors. The community appearance section of this Plan has therefore been prepared in conformance with the following general goals:

- ❑ To make a concerted effort to improve the appearance of the community, particularly in the commercial, industrial and multifamily areas;
- ❑ To initiate community action programs for the purposes of developing an awareness in the community's citizens of appearance-related issues, evaluating community appearance and developing specific improvement programs;
- ❑ To identify those characteristics that give the community its individual identity and to preserve and expand those characteristics as growth occurs; and
- ❑ To significantly improve the appearance along the state highways and other transportation corridors as one means of recapturing the individual and distinct identity of the Bend area.



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OVERVIEW

Since the early 1970s Bend has had growth rates well in excess of the state average, and this trend is expected to continue into the first decade of the 21st century. The rapid growth has had an enormous impact on the physical character of the community, and has frequently resulted in a significant loss of the physical qualities that make Bend a unique and attractive place to live.

Simultaneous with this growth, a deliberate and continuous effort is necessary to see that the thousands of individual decisions made in the process of development collectively constitute tangible progress towards retaining and re-establishing the livability and appearance of our community.

The appearance of a community is a complex planning issue that involves both general concerns relating to categories of developments, and specific concerns about areas with high visibility and public use. These concerns are described under several categories in the remainder of this chapter.

Residential areas

The residential areas of Bend are generally among the most attractive and pleasant sections in the city. The city and county are developing new subdivision and other land development standards to ensure that future residential developments continue the tradition of quality that currently exists. Care should be taken to make certain that older residential neighborhoods retain their charm and vitality and do not enter into decline.

One of the major challenges facing the community is to ensure that new housing developing at the edge of the community or as “in-fill” projects within neighborhoods is well planned and integrated within the larger context of the community. Future subdivisions will have a more thoughtful design that works with the land and with the surrounding neighborhoods. Natural topography, foliage and rock outcroppings should be preserved and used to create character within developments rather than eliminated, and grading should be kept to a minimum. Naturally occurring open space, parks and greenbelts provide visual relief for residents and can link a developing residential area to an established one.

Commercial areas

Outside of downtown, the commercial sections of the community generally show a lack of order and relationship between buildings and their sites. Although commercial areas make up only about three percent of the urban land area, they are often along the most frequently traveled routes and have a strong influence on the “look” of Bend. The development of

automobile oriented businesses along the highways, coupled with the increase in national food, gasoline, and retail chains, have done more to set the current image of Bend than any other single factor.



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If the overall community appearance is to improve, it is important that the businesses within the commercial districts and local governments work together to improve the site design, building design, landscaping, signs and interconnections between properties. Several design considerations, examples of which are presented below, can improve the appearance of a development and keep it more competitive as Bend's commercial sector becomes more sophisticated:

- ❑ distributing parking around buildings so the building, not the parking lot, is the main focus of the site;
- ❑ using building designs that reflect the regional setting and native materials such as rock and wood in the exterior;
- ❑ designing large structures so they blend in better with a more human scale and charm of Bend's older commercial areas;
- ❑ incorporating natural features of the site into the landscape plans, and maintaining the landscape areas; and
- ❑ integrating signs into the overall design of a site rather than relying solely on large signs to attract attention.

Other structures that have an impact on the appearance of the commercial corridors are the electric power transmission and distribution lines. Most of the corridors have wooden poles, but larger and taller rust-colored metal poles for high voltage lines have been erected along Highway 97 South and the parts of the Parkway. In addition to the visual impact of the poles themselves, other utility lines for local power, telephones, and cable are also hung on these poles below the electric transmission lines thereby creating a ladder effect of lines and visual clutter. Eliminating or relocating the system of above ground utility poles and cables along the commercial corridors will improve the appearance of the commercial areas.

Industrial areas

Bend is known for both the high quality of its work force and the goods that are produced in the area. With the exception of Shevlin Center, most industrial areas do not have a consistent development standard so there is much variation from site to site.

Although a few industrial operations do not lend themselves to significant building or site design changes, improvements to the appearance of most industrial operations would be beneficial to the community. First, since these are places where workers spend about half of their waking hours, improving the buildings and grounds would make them more pleasant places in which to work and take breaks. Second, given that the "clean" high-tech industries the city is trying to attract usually locate in pleasant, well landscaped campuses, the city and county need to develop new standards to ensure that new industrial areas meet the expectations of new businesses. Third, improving the appearance of industrial areas will create a more pleasing visual environment for community residents and visitors.

Deschutes River corridor

The Deschutes River has long been an important element of the appearance and quality of life in



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Bend. The city and county have adopted regulations to protect this priceless resource and promote good design as the community grows. A Design Review overlay zone applies to all development within 100 feet of the river, and the Mixed-use Riverfront zone guides the redevelopment of land along the historic “Farewell Bend” portion of the river.

Transportation corridors

Improving the appearance of the community also requires better, more thoughtful designs of the transportation corridors that serve the community. Streets in the community that are commonly recognized for their good design — and also function well for all transportation modes — are those that are designed with planter strips between the sidewalk and roadway and with a planted median strip. The Bend Parkway incorporates a planted median strip in its design, and city engineers have developed standards for including planted medians in the major arterial and collector streets.

The addition of landscaped medians along the major transportation corridors will help control traffic and prevent accidents, and will also help create a more attractive community by softening the appearance of areas that are currently completely dominated by man-made surfaces. Traffic signs, street lighting and street signs should be integrated into one structure to help eliminate confusing and hazardous visual clutter at intersections. The city and county will continue to work with the state highway department to find alternatives to the old style traffic signals that hang from wires and dangle over state highways.

Site planning and design

Thoughtfully planning the location of structures, parking, service areas, walkways and amenities has a marked impact on the overall appearance of an area. Well-planned sites that are carefully integrated with neighboring areas have a powerful impact upon the function and attractiveness of their entire neighborhood.

To recapture some of the human-scale, small town ambiance that for many years was Bend, much of the recent pattern and trends in site planning will need to be reversed. The pattern of buildings surrounded by acres of parking and set back away from the public street should

be modified so that additional buildings on development “pads” or buildings on new sites are placed closer to the front property line and have a main entrance oriented to the street and sidewalk.

Interrelated to building siting, pedestrian walkways from both sidewalks and parking lots should be provided for safety and to help reestablish the desirability of pedestrian travel. These walkways should be pleasant to use and incorporate landscaping, drop-off bays, bicycle facilities and other non-automobile related amenities. They should be designed in such a manner that they are logical extensions of walkways on adjoining sites, and complement established urban and bicycle trails.

Community amenities such as patio/seating areas, water features, artwork or sculpture, clock towers, pedestrian-oriented plazas with park benches or other features should be located adjacent to the primary entrances of buildings to help facilitate pedestrian meeting spaces and to provide places of



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refuge from parking areas. These amenities should be scaled to the size of their development and should be required for larger developments. The inclusion of community amenities helps to create attractive public spaces and reinforces the importance of a human-scaled environment.

Site grading should be held to a minimum, and new developments should work within the parameters of existing topography in order to create a natural looking setting. Natural features and areas of special interest must be protected during construction and incorporated into the overall project design.

Landscaping

Attractive, well maintained landscaping can make an enormous difference in improving the appearance of an area. Landscaping should be integrated into the overall design of the site and structure and should reflect an understanding of how plant selection and placement can moderate and enhance a site. Large parking lots should be divided into areas, with each area surrounded by landscaped beds. Pedestrian walkways should be integrated into the landscaped areas, and trees should be required in parking areas to create a canopy over the majority of the paved areas.

Bend's short growing season and rocky ground make it difficult for trees and shrubs to acclimate or grow quickly. Because of that, the use of large trees and shrubs that are native to Central Oregon is encouraged. These plantings also tend to be disease resistant and low maintenance, which make them especially suitable for commercial and industrial developments. This type of landscaping, combined with existing natural features on a site, can produce an especially pleasant environment that fits into the natural setting.

Architecture

During the first 60 years of Bend's existence, the structures that were built here reflected the scale of the town and were largely composed of the natural resources available within the region.

Although a variety of styles were used, the resulting mix never detracted from the small town feel. The area has grown threefold since the 1970s, and most of the featureless building designs that could be from "anywhere USA" have occurred during the last 30 years of the century. This trend was emphasized in the 1990s as large, national retail chains moved to Bend.

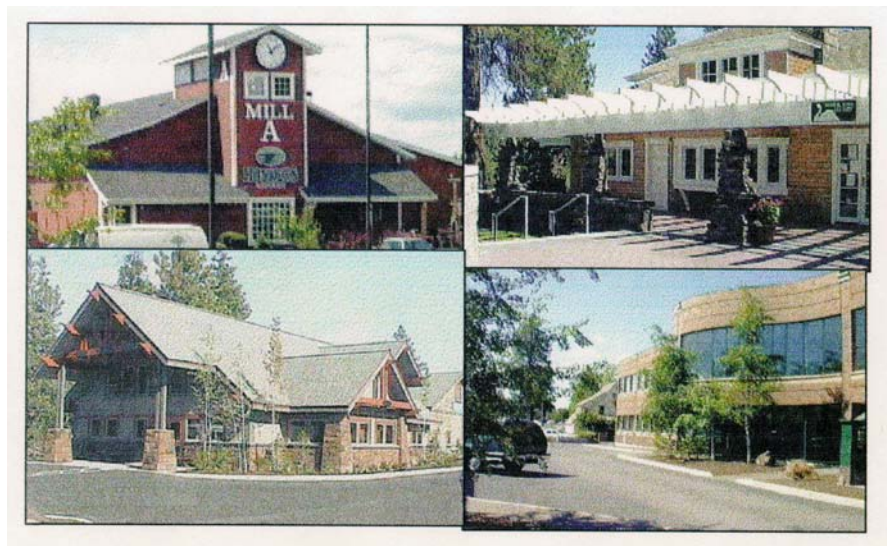


Figure 9-1. Examples of Commercial Buildings



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Yet in spite of this, people remain attracted to Bend largely because of its original character, and have expressed a strong desire for new development in the town to be respectful of and, to some degree, express its original small town roots in the design of new structures. In order to accomplish this, structures need to be evaluated in terms of several components, including exterior design, wall articulation, building materials and roof design.

Bend does not have a history that allows it to claim a particular architectural style as indigenous; however all existing styles here were designed to what is termed “human scale.” Structures were small to moderate in scale and incorporated architectural details and elements for interest. Although it is unrealistic to ever expect a complete return to the designs of the past, large structures should be designed so that their impact is more consistent with the scale of commercial buildings in Bend. Specifically:

- ❑ walls on large buildings should be broken into smaller scale elements and articulated with architectural features appropriate to the chosen design;
- ❑ landscaping should also be incorporated along large walls to further break up the impact of large structural planes;
- ❑ main entrances should be clearly defined and highly visible, again using architectural features to enhance their design;
- ❑ roofs should be designed to be integral with and appropriate to the overall architectural style of a structure. On large buildings, they should be designed to reduce the apparent exterior mass of the building. Variations within one architectural style are desirable, as are overhangs and other shadow-producing elements;
- ❑ the predominant building materials used on building exteriors should be materials that are characteristic of Central Oregon. These include brick, wood, native stone, textured concrete masonry units, and traditional glass products. Other materials should only be used as accents and be architecturally appropriate to a specific design. Building colors should be subtle, neutral or earth tone colors that reflect their natural setting; and
- ❑ exterior lighting should be shielded, directed down onto the site and confined to the site. Light poles, light fixtures, flag poles and similar structures should be limited in height.

Business and directional signs

If Bend is to retain the character and quality that originally made it one of the most attractive communities in Oregon, a major effort must be made to improve the appearance of business signs and public signs along its roadways.

Apart from the national chains, the type, size and location of business identification signs are seldom considered in the overall design of a site. The most attractive and typically the most effective signs are those that are designed to fit in with the building and site. These signs are memorable and effective because they carry through with the building theme and are not just another pole sign placed at the edge of the site just above or below the adjacent business sign.



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The large number of businesses along the main transportation corridors, combined with the ever-increasing competition to catch a driver's attention, has created a forest of pole signs. Currently, principal business signs are accompanied by many lesser message signs relating to credit cards, prices, specials, hours of operation and so forth.

A second category of signs are directional and information signs. These signs, most of which are public signs in the street right-of-way, guide visitors and the motoring public to parks, the mountains, the college, and numerous other sites. Sign clutter so completely dominates the landscape of the major commercial arterials that the individual effectiveness of each sign is minimized, thereby defeating the purpose of signs.



Figure 9-2. Examples of Bend wall mounted and ground signs

Billboards and other “off-premise” signs are a third category of signs. These signs are most often used to advertise a product, business, or high-end housing development, or used as a directory sign, but also may provide community service information. Because they are targeted at the motoring public, they are most prominent along the state highways and main arterial streets in town. Billboards frequently compete with the on-site business signs and add to the sign clutter, which is contrary to the goal of improving the appearance of the commercial corridors. The city and county should review the local billboard regulations as part of their overall review and upgrading of the city and county sign codes.

As community concerns increase about the appearance of the transportation corridors and the neighborhoods, new, more thoughtful sign regulations must be developed. Sign regulations should be adopted that would not only control new signs, but establish a reasonable amortization period for the removal of existing non-complying signs.

Conclusion

If the appearance of the community is to be reestablished and improved, local citizens must be involved in programs that effectively evaluate community appearance and develop programs for its



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improvement. Additionally, the city and county must act upon the citizens' wishes by enacting regulations that will effectively direct future development and redevelopment in a manner that is consistent with the historic patterns and aesthetic values of the community. Continued efforts by local government and its citizens can preserve and enhance the natural beauty and livability of the area and, in time, create a city that is truly worthy of its spectacular setting.

POLICIES

1. The city, county, and special districts shall publicly advocate and coordinate activities relating to beautification and landscaping throughout the community. Unless otherwise agreed, each agency shall be responsible for improving the appearance of its own properties.
2. Community appearance shall continue to be a major concern and the subject of a major effort in the area. Major natural features, such as rock outcrops or stands of trees, should be preserved as a community asset as the area develops.
3. The city will use advisory committees, public workshops, and other measures, to identify those characteristics that give the community its individual identity and preserve and expand those characteristics as growth occurs.
4. Sign regulations shall be adopted that limit the size, location, and number of signs in residential, mixed-use, commercial and industrial areas and have amortization provisions to remove non-conforming signs within a reasonable period of time.
5. Special design and landscaping requirements shall be established along streets that include, but not be limited to Highway 20 West; Highway 97 and 3rd Street; Greenwood Avenue and Highway 20 East; Franklin Avenue; Riverside Avenue opposite Drake Park; Newport Avenue; Galveston Avenue from the river to 14th Street; Century Drive to the Deschutes National Forest boundary; Reed Market Road; NE 27th Street from Reed Market Road to Butler Market Road; and Mt. Washington Drive.
6. After the Highway 97 Parkway opens, the city and county shall work with ODOT to improve the appearance of Highway 20, NE 3rd Street and South Business Highway 97.
7. The city shall develop designs for arterial and collector streets that include landscaped planter strips and medians. Such designs shall include trees in the planter and median strips when practical and safe.
8. Special design consideration shall be given to development on hillside areas visible from developed areas, and from Highway 20 and the Parkway within the Bend area.
9. The city shall consider establishing design review for all new development in the community



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with the exception of single-family houses, duplexes and tri-plexes.

10. The city shall seek opportunities to relocate existing overhead utility lines underground in all parts of the community, and especially along the commercial corridors.
11. The city shall develop ordinances requiring grading permits.
12. The city shall develop an Urban Forestry Plan which shall include:
 - annual tree planting plans for existing areas of the community;
 - a city approved street tree list;
 - steps to re-capture and maintain a “tree-city USA” designation; and
 - the adoption of a formal Bend City Tree Ordinance which includes regulating the removal of trees on commercial and industrial land and during residential subdivision development.

