

RIGHT-SIZING STREETS: SAN JUAN-DISCOVERY PROJECT

WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS, DO SHARED STREETS BEGIN?

THE NEIGHBORHOOD ‘HOME ZONE’ STREET SOLUTION

INTRODUCTION

“People have always lived on streets. They have been the places where children first learned about the world, where neighbors met, the social centers of towns and cities.”

- Donald Appleyard, *Livable Streets*, 1981

These words by Donald Appleyard remind us that streets are for people, not just cars. They should be places where we come together to play, socialize, and build community, and where young and old alike improve physical, social and creative health. In addition, streets by design should help restore our climate. Thus, the guiding design principle for neighborhood residential streets should be livability.

The San Juan-Discovery Planned Unit Development (PUD) project presents the opportunity to design neighborhood residential streets in a more sustainable way. To achieve a new model that honors the existing residential streets and small town character of Port Townsend, existing street standards and vehicle codes (i.e. parking) need to be modified to create neighborhood streets that prioritize people walking, biking, playing and socializing, first.

As housing and land prices in Port Townsend rise, the residential or neighborhood street becomes increasingly valuable as a location for physical and social activity and health, stormwater management, and multi-modal movement, including storing vehicles.

Fortunately, the Planned Unit Development code in Port Townsend (Chapter 17.32) allows for innovation, creativity, and flexibility to help encourage affordable housing development, enhance environmental features, advance Comprehensive Plan goals, and provide other public benefit (e.g. open space, parks, trails).

WHY TAKE A NEW APPROACH TO STREET DESIGN

The Port Townsend Preservation Alliance (PTPA) is at a place of refinement of the PUD. The infrastructure costs associated with the development are making the future housing and rental costs unaffordable. New solutions are needed. Outdated zoning codes and street standards that require overbuilding infrastructure coupled with high land costs is limiting PTPA’s ability to ensure housing affordability within the project.

For example, many cities like Port Townsend require minimum parking requirements, which cause more off-street parking to be built. This causes excessive development costs, which are then bundled into the housing or rental costs further driving up prices. Based on typical affordable housing development costs, one parking space per unit increases costs approximately

12.5%, and two parking spaces can increase costs by up to 25% (Victoria Transport Policy Institute). This becomes an economic burden on the homeowner or renter, especially the most vulnerable—seniors and low income households who tend to own fewer vehicles. Various parking management strategies can increase affordability, economic efficiency and equity, including unbundling parking requirements, removing minimum parking requirements, counting bicycle parking and on-street parking towards parking requirements, to name a few.

Additionally, the City is requiring that streets be overbuilt. Requiring sidewalks, and sidewalks on one side, does not necessarily make for a more walkable street, especially when multiple driveway cuts interrupt the walking environment. In fact, the majority of Port Townsend neighborhood or residential streets lack sidewalks, and where sidewalks do exist there are often many gaps. In turn, and in large part to low traffic volumes and low vehicle speeds, people feel comfortable walking in the street. Why not elevate and promote this type of street?

The streets within the San Juan-Discovery development are not connecting streets and therefore will not allow cut-through or additional auto traffic. Therefore, they will be low volume and should be designed as low speed streets. This makes a shared street or ‘home zone’ street a desirable design model.

As a PUD, this project offers an opportunity to showcase and implement innovative solutions that then become a model for retrofitting existing neighborhood streets, as desired by community members, in a low cost community owned way. The City of Port Townsend has a very limited budget for sidewalk construction, and much of that is rightly directed towards filling the remaining sidewalk gaps on main streets (arterials), and will likely never have the funds to for sidewalk infill on existing residential streets — we need a new residential model.

THE MODEL

The shared street—known as *woonerfs* or residential yards in the Netherlands— is a place where people walking, biking, and playing share the same space as people driving. Shared streets are also called *living streets* or *home zones*. The choreography of movement is strongly influenced by street design where traffic speed is engineered to be slow—10 mph— both through physical and visual treatments.

The main goals for designing shared streets, include:

1. Make Port Townsend more walkable;
2. Integrate with small town community character and other efforts (trail development, safe routes to school, traffic calming);
3. Ensure streets are safe and comfortable for people of all ages and abilities to walk, bike, and play on their streets;
4. Better manage auto traffic, ensuring slow motoring speeds and allowing neighbors to get to their home, emergency access, deliveries, and occasional visits by other community members arriving by car;
5. Better manage valuable land resources; and
6. Enhance the quality of life for residents and strengthen the overall sense of community.

To achieve low speed, shared streets where pedestrian, bicycle, and social activity coexist with vehicular movement key physical and visual design measures include:

- **Gateways:** clear and distinct features, such as mini circles, that celebrate the neighborhoods identity and announce to drivers that they are guests in a neighborhood space.
- **Serpentine Effect:** a serpentine effect is created through landscaping and parking chicanes that break up the driver’s sight-lines, helping to ensure slow speeds.
- **Curbless:** street curbing is removed and instead drivers and pedestrians are placed on the same level, sharing the same space. Landscaping, trees, colored pavement treatments, street furniture, and bollards help direct drivers.
- **Traffic Calming Measures:** traffic calming measures include road narrowing, speed tables, varied pavement color or texture, mini-circles, chicanes, street trees, raised intersections or crossings, and curb extensions.
- **Yield Effect:** on a yield street with parallel parking on both sides, drivers must yield for the other to pass, and a “checkered” parking pattern can help to improve the functionality of the street both for drivers and emergency vehicles (fire). A yield effect helps to create an environment where people driving are expected to travel at low speeds.
- **On-Street Parking:** On-street parking is a traffic calming tool. Parking should be maximized on-street to free up land that could otherwise be used for something else (e.g. gardens, homes, ADUs). Additionally, secure bicycle parking—12 bicycles can fit in one parking spot—can be offered to help prioritize bicycling.
- **Placemaking:** the street should provide places for people to sit and play. Take advantage of the multifunctional aspects of various elements, for example a curb extension, as part of the chicane effect, can be a location for benches.

Additionally, the relationship of homes (and other buildings) to the street matters. Homes should be designed to have a strong relationship to the street through the orientation of doors, windows, and rooms. Residents should have direct views of the street – their outdoor living room – from their home, enhancing the sense of safety and community.

NEXT STEPS:

- **Right-Size Street Design:** Sketch up a shared street model for internal streets within the PUD and see what cost-savings or other community benefit comes from the design, including how parking, traffic calming tools, and stormwater are addressed in the street design.
- **Address Parking:** Off-street parking design is being driven by outdated, auto-driven, City code. Creating driveways for most homes, creates many curb cuts that interrupt the walking environment of the street, as well as, requires more drainage and stormwater infrastructure. The cost of providing this level of off-street parking gets bundled into the cost of homes, driving up home prices. Parking should be maximized on-street, and counted towards requirements. In addition, the case should be made for other infrastructure investments like trail development/connectivity and secure bicycle parking areas in the reduction of parking requirements, at minimum.
- **Develop Cost Benefit Ratio/ Making the Case Points:** Work with the engineer to count the total number of on-street parking spots and compare to current code requirements; compare impervious surface reduction and thus associate heat gain reduction; total

linear feet (or miles) of trail being proposed; and total tree canopy (which should be considered as part of the stormwater management strategies) (see more about street tree and stormwater management from the [EPA](http://treesandstormwater.org/), and additional resources can be found at <http://treesandstormwater.org/>)

- **Refine Building Design:** Design ADUs to face streets when they are positioned on the street.
- **Meet with City to work on PUD agreement, code variances:** Meet with the City of Port Townsend to discuss opportunities to better clarify and develop actions and performance criteria that address the purpose of a PUD, including the following (as stated in Chapter 17.32 of the municipal code):

D. Allow developers to use innovative methods and approaches not available under conventional zoning methods to:

1. Facilitate the construction of a variety of housing types and densities serving the diverse housing needs of Port Townsend residents to promote the affordable housing goals and policies of the Port Townsend Comprehensive Plan

E. Provide for the economic provision of public facilities and services by allowing choices in the layout of streets, utility networks, and other public improvements through superior site design and the use of clustering;

F. Avoid the overburdening of present or planned capacity of public utilities, services, facilities and streets, which may occur under conventional site development and zoning methods