# 4.0 DOWNTOWN ELEMENT

## 4.1 Introduction

The Downtown Element is intended to establish goals, objectives and policies that provide a solid foundation and framework for a pedestrian-friendly Covington downtown and for a new Town Center, while accommodating efficient access for vehicles. Because this element relates to the major business, office, service and retail sector of the community, by nature it also addresses many of the major issues of the Comprehensive Plan such as land use, transportation, and parks and open space, as found in other elements, but with a more specific focus on the downtown. This Downtown Element is structured similarly to the other elements of this comprehensive plan: it begins with a description of existing conditions; including an assessment of opportunities and constraints; includes a discussion of the major concepts; and concludes with a set of goals and policies and key implementation mechanisms.

### 4.1.1 Purpose of Downtown Element

The purpose and intent of the Downtown Element is to establish a detailed framework and foundation for the future downtown, including a Town Center, with emphasis on land use, circulation, and physical development. It is actually a long range 20-year plan and vision that will have to be developed in various phases, depending upon private initiative, public investments and some public-private partnerships. Over time, some existing businesses will choose to remain and others will choose to redevelop as market forces bring about redevelopment. In the interim, surface parking may remain, with improved pedestrian connections and landscaping, until economics, land values, and private initiative reach a level to support structured parking or there is a publicly constructed structured parking garage.

The Downtown Concept Plan and Vision would be realized over time, in a phased manner, and near-term development or redevelopment of downtown properties (including properties in the proposed Town Center Focus Area and Zone) might not fully be realized in the short term. The resulting zoning standards to implement this vision of the new Town Center Zone should allow single story, single-use development to occur (with appropriate

design standards) in the short term until the private sector market can support higher intensity uses or mixed-uses with heights greater than single story development, and until the City has planned for the infrastructure to support such uses.

The downtown vision, goals and policies; future land uses; and zoning implementation discussed in the following narrative of this Downtown Element; is the result of a 9 month Planning and Zoning Study & Planning Process undertaken by a joint Planning Team of AHBL Planning & Engineering, Mithun Architects, Nelson Nygaard Transportation Engineers, and Economist Greg Easton. The narrative references in this Downtown Element, while referencing the existing zoning classification system developed and adopted in 2005, proposes a new downtown vision, new policies, and a new zoning consolidation system for downtown Covington. This will need to be part of the implementation tasks undertaken in 2010 and beyond. At that time updates to the Downtown Element should be made to ensure the Comprehensive Plan is consistent with the zoning and development regulations as required by the State Growth Management Act (GMA).

Covington's existing downtown zoning currently covers approximately 520 acres of land and includes twelve (12) different commercial (DN) zoning classifications allowing a wide variety of residential, commercial, office uses with some limited industrial, storage and light manufacturing uses.

The City Council's new goals and vision for downtown Covington places a strong emphasis on creating a smaller focus area known as the Town Center, which includes a future civic plaza, a new City Hall, major public open space, and other community buildings, and sets the tone for that special place known as downtown Covington. The concept behind this new Downtown Element of the Comprehensive Plan is to encourage appropriate private and public development in an area with existing infrastructure to support planned economic and population growth through a mixture of commercial, office, residential, mixed-use, and public uses, within a truly pedestrian-friendly environment.

The City's Vision, Mission and Goal Statement provides:

**VISION:**

Covington: Unmatched Quality of Life

**MISSION:**

Covington is a place where community, business and civic leaders work together with citizens to preserve and foster a strong sense of community.

**GOAL:**

Downtown: Establish Downtown Covington as a vibrant residential, commercial, social, and cultural gathering place that is safe, pedestrian-friendly, well-designed, and well-maintained.

## 4.2 Existing Conditions Summary

### 4.2.1 Existing Land Use

Most new commercial development in downtown Covington since incorporation in 1997 has occurred on the north side of SE 272nd Street (also known as SR 516 and the Kent-Kangley Road) between SR 18 and Wax Road. Examples are Covington Place and Skagen Plaza, Covington Esplanade, The Valley Medical Center Complex, and specifically the new retail outlets of Wal-Mart, Kohl's and Home Depot. These newer projects offer a variety of retail, restaurant and office uses, are generally one story, and exhibit coordinated building signage and landscaping. The multi-story buildings in Covington are the Valley Medical Center building, the office building which contains City Hall (two stories), the Adagio Apartments (three stories), and the new Covington Place Retirement Apartments (5 stories and 121 residential units). The portion of the Downtown that lies directly south of SE 272nd Street consists primarily of older commercial developments that pre-date Covington's incorporation, except for the new Costco, LA Fitness, and Daniel Ross Salon, and one small retail and restaurant development adjacent to Costco. Much of this development south of SE 272nd Street is contained in large single-story retail plazas surrounded by large parking lots which lack well coordinated internal circulation or connections to the surrounding street grid. A new arterial roadway, 168th/165th Place SE, now connects SE 272nd Street to Covington Way and serves as an alternative to Wax Road. Dominant examples of the single story retail plazas include the Safeway Shopping Center, Fred Meyer, and the QFC plaza. This area also contains a number of free-standing pads with drive-through facilities, including banks and fast-food restaurants.

The Downtown also contains public or institutional properties and facilities including the King County Public Library, the Covington Elementary School, City Hall, the U.S. Post Office and several churches. Jenkins Creek Park is also located just northeast of the downtown proper. To the south and southwest of the SE 272nd Street corridor is a large area containing a broad range of land uses, including industrial uses southwest of Covington Way, the Covington Elementary School on SE Wax Road, and several small and older subdivisions, including Covington Firs. Some of these

uses are separated by large tracts of undeveloped or underdeveloped land. Although these lands abut major arterials, such as Wax Road, Covington Way, and SE 272nd Street, these super-blocks lack an internal road network or grid system to link the arterials and provide secondary access.

Lands immediately east of SE Wax Road, between Covington Way and SE 272nd Street are primarily developed with older single family homes. This area is probably more suitable for higher density housing or limited office and retail/personal service uses because of its close proximity to the downtown retail core. A few parcels closer to the SE 272nd Street intersection have already made this transition and are developed with more intense uses, such as a bank, a nail salon and spa, and a church. Many of the parcels located in the southerly portion of the corridor are adjacent to Jenkins Creek and its associated floodplains, wetlands, and shoreline restricted areas, which restrict future development and have limited water and sewer availability. *See* Fig. 4.3.

This pattern of single family homes adjacent to Jenkins Creek continues further north beginning where SE Wax Road turns into 180th Ave SE and continues north to SR 18. Most of this housing stock is in relatively good condition, largely centered on three cul-de-sacs which face the Burrwood subdivision to the west and abut the Jenkins Creek Park to the east. Further north is a pattern of larger lots which can accommodate residential infill at reasonably higher densities of 8-12 units per acre, and may be suitable for transitioning to multi-family residential uses close to the commercial center of Covington.

Those lands east of SE Wax Road which front onto SE 272nd Street comprise a large area, and share certain characteristics with other Downtown districts. The area contains the four-story Multi-Care building, a scattering of low-rise, stand-alone retail uses, the new Covington Esplanade Retail Center and a few single family homes. The lot pattern is fairly large with a number of undeveloped parcels. These large and undeveloped parcels present a major opportunity for coordinated site planning and design. The area is also traversed by Jenkins Creek and its associated wetlands.

### 4.2.2 Existing Circulation

Downtown Covington is not currently served by a complete street grid, but rather by a limited number of arterials. The major road corridor is SE 272nd Street (also known as SR 516 and Kent-Kangley Road), a principal arterial that provides east-west regional travel as well as serving the majority of Covington's commercial

properties. Three other major streets serving downtown are SE Wax Road, a collector arterial that traverses the eastern edge of downtown; Covington Way, another collector arterial on the southern edge of downtown; and SE 168th Place, which connects SE 272nd Street south to Covington Way and provides access to the Costco .

In addition to the limited street grid, the other notable feature of downtown Covington's circulation infrastructure is the limited pedestrian amenities. Few of the roads that were built prior to Covington's incorporation contained sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities, and those that do are very basic. Walking is difficult due to the frequency and width of commercial driveways that interrupt the sidewalk and the lack of planting strip to separate pedestrians from the heavy traffic volumes. Also, the lack of a small street grid and existence of large parking areas increases the apparent distances between destinations, making walking an inconvenient and unpleasant experience.

### 4.2.3 Summary of Downtown Past and Present

Much of Downtown Covington was originally developed under the rules for unincorporated King County, and was characterized by retail shopping plazas and associated parking. Single-story, single use buildings with some minor architectural distinction dominated Covington's most visible parcels, providing little visual cue of being the downtown of a city. The image was not clearly a downtown due to the limited street grid, minimal pedestrian activity, and the lack of civic buildings, cultural landmarks, or public open space typical of cities.

More recent development under the current City's code has begun to change the Downtown's visual image. New streets with sidewalks, planting strips, decorative crosswalks, and distinctive pedestrian scale lighting are being built. With Covington Place, Skagen Plaza, and Covington Esplanade, containing Kohl's, WalMart, and Home Depot, the architecture in downtown is improving with the generous use of masonry and other pleasing textural facades. Those projects have also set a new standard for pedestrian-friendly access across the parking areas to store fronts, more coherent signage, and improved landscaping. The future development of an identifiable Town Center, incorporating a more traditional, pedestrian-friendly Main Street, adjacent to a true civic plaza and public open space will provide an improved identity for "downtown' Covington.

## 4.3 Downtown Vision

Downtown Covington is the commercial, social, and civic heart of this community. That is true for its 2009 population of 17,530 and will become more so for its projected 2025 population of 22,000. Some even feel these population projections for the next fifteen years are low. While the downtown provides important goods and services for Covington's residents, it also serves a much larger market area, estimated at 184,000 in 2005 and forecasted to increase to almost 250,000 by 2025. Downtown Covington is dependent upon and supports a larger regional retail market. Future economic development in the region can only assist downtown Covington in accomplishing it's economic goals by increasing new businesses, encouraging higher residential densities, providing for better paying jobs, especially in the medical office sector and truly diversifying the Covington economy.

The commercial growth of the Downtown will reap local benefits in the form of a strengthened retail sales tax base for the City. However, there are risks and costs associated with providing an over-supply of commercially-zoned land. The Downtown's land area must be "right-sized" to accommodate the 2 million square feet of new commercial uses projected to locate here by 2025, yet remain compact enough to encourage future investment decisions by promoting focused, coherent and orderly growth. A compact pattern will help Downtown to function from a pedestrian perspective and prevent needless commercial/retail encroachment into single family neighborhoods. New multi-story mixed-use structures with residential dwellings and/or office uses above ground floor retail, or multi-story residential or office uses at higher densities will be the vision for a good portion of new development and redevelopment of the commercial core of the Town Center of Covington.

### 4.3.1 Concepts to Guide the Future of the Downtown

Following are major organizing concepts for the downtown's future, grouped into six headings: (1) Fewer, larger consolidated land use focus areas, where over time the majority of new development will be multiple-story, mixed-use projects; (2) Introduction of a smaller roadway grid system within the Town Center Focus Area with two new north/south collector/arterial roadways, both of which will allow vehicular and pedestrian circulation, have an active streetscape and contain pedestrian-oriented ground-floor retail uses; (3) Capital plans which address the public infrastructure needed to serve existing and future land uses, along with needed public buildings; (4) Strong public goals

and policies to enhance community life and local identity by creating signature streets, public places, and major links to both the Jenkins Creek Park and Trail system and the Soos Creek Trail system; (5) A new parking strategy that considers multiple use of parking; and (6) New design standards with consistency throughout the downtown and weighted to pedestrian-friendly features within the smaller Town Center Focus Area.

### 4.3.2 Future Downtown Land Use Focus Areas

Residential uses, integrated both vertically and horizontally with commercial uses, are strongly encouraged in the Town Center Focus Area of the downtown and potentially long-term adjacent to and near the Town Center Focus Area. This close-in population not only provides additional housing choices and lessens vehicle trips, but boosts civic vitality and security, and helps provide a market to support all downtown businesses.

The future downtown area should consist of a central Town Center Focus Area developed around a central civic plaza and open space, a new City Hall and/or other community facilities, and a public parking facility/transit center. Surrounding this Town Center core should be other Mixed Commercial and/or General Commercial focus areas permitting a wide variety of retail, residential, office, service, and public uses. Surrounding the retail, residential, office, service and public uses should be a less intensive Mixed Housing and Office focus area with a variety of housing and office uses at various levels of density and height. These four inter-related but discreet land use focus areas are described below. They are

(a) Town Center; (b) Mixed Commercial; (c) Mixed Housing and Office; and (d) General Commercial.

a. *Town Center Focus Area*

The new Town Center Focus Area should be concentrated south of the SE 272$^{nd}$ Street corridor between Covington Way, Wax Road, and the new 168$^{th}$/165$^{th}$ Place SE. It should consist of mixed-use buildings combining residential, office, retail and public uses mixed with open spaces, public plazas, public gathering venues and abundant landscaped spaces that are pedestrian-friendly. This new Town Center Focus Area is intended to promote a lively pedestrian-oriented area where some citizens may choose to live, work and shop without being dependent on the automobile; and it would encompass the existing DN 6 and DN 1 zoning districts.

The Town Center Focus Area is intended to provide the visual, pedestrian and civic heart of the City, which makes that unique place of “Downtown Covington” where people come to meet

friends; dine and drink; engage in various civic and social activities, including concerts, special events and farmers markets. This is where the greatest mix of the most intensive land uses should occur, as well as the tallest buildings. Shops and restaurant should front roadways immediately behind the sidewalk for pedestrian-oriented streets. Buildings in the Town Center Focus Area should convey a sense of permanence through the use of durable, quality materials such as masonry, brick, stone and wood. Primary building facades should be oriented to the street, and new parking lots should primarily be placed behind or beside buildings.

If adjacent areas remain in single family use, new adjacent commercial developments should provide significant functional separation, in the form of setbacks, landscaping, and visual and noise buffering.

*b. Mixed Commercial Focus Area*

Adjoining the Town Center to the west, north, and northeast is a Mixed Commercial Focus Area, which consists of zoning districts DN 2, DN 4, DN 8, and DN 9. These areas are the "Gateways" to the Downtown from Kent to the west and Maple Valley to the east. They are sited to maximize access to regional transportation corridors and still minimize noise and traffic impacts to less intense surrounding land uses. Even though these areas are more dependent upon automobile traffic, their proximity to the Town Center suggests that they should be designed in a manner compatible with those areas. This includes the need for improved linked-walkways, landscaping, and parking.

A mix of commercial, retail and office uses is most appropriate for these areas due to varying natural features, adjacent uses, the regional nature of SR 516 (SE 272$^{nd}$ Street), and freeway access to SR 18. Although the building footprint and parking field appropriate in these areas will be much larger than in the central core of the Town Center Focus Area, design guidelines, pedestrian connections and amenities, and landscaping are also very important and appropriate.

*c. Mixed Housing and Office Focus Area*

This new Focus Area encompasses the existing DN 5, DN7A, DN7B, DN7C, and DN 10 zones which have somewhat different predominately residential land uses and character. Jenkins Creek and its associated critical areas, wetlands, floodplains and shoreline jurisdiction areas are a constraint on development potential, due to setbacks required from these critical areas and adjacent buffers. However, the creek can also be an amenity due to the potential green, open space it provides for these existing and future

residential and office areas, as well as the potential it creates for a regional trail serving the larger community.

The existing single family detached uses may continue indefinitely as permitted uses in the Mixed Housing and Office Focus Area. However, due to the potential impacts of the critical areas adjacent to Jenkins creek, as well as impacts from the plans for the Jenkins Creek trail or impacts from the plans to widen SE Wax Road, it is appropriate to enable new residential and office development to occur in a variety of different building forms, intensity, and site development schemes.

Special consideration is appropriate for the Covington Firs subdivision (DN 5) to reflect its present circumstances and its alternative future possibilities. As long as the area remains in single family use, new development within Covington Firs and adjacent to it should provide significant functional separation, as well as visual and noise buffering. Currently development regulations stipulate an "all or nothing" proposition for redevelopment that would require a large developer to buy the entire subdivision to undertake any redevelopment or transition to higher density housing or office uses. That system should be evaluated for effectiveness in the current economic times and possibly replaced with a smaller threshold or thresholds, or some other minimum site aggregation requirement for redevelopment when property owners desire to sell and choose to offer their property for more intense residential or office uses.

The existing medium density residential land use and DN7C residential neighborhood (8 dwelling units per acre) zoning district immediately northeast of downtown is currently included in the downtown zones and land use vision, not because it should contain general commercial/retail uses, but because of its potential use for close-in high density residential and office uses and for its proximity to other retail uses. This existing residential neighborhood should be considered for reclassification as a new medium density, multi-family residential zone and removal from the downtown DN zoning classification system. The area is not currently served by the full range of utility infrastructure including public sewers, and much of the property has some development limitations due to critical areas adjacent to Jenkins Creek. As a new higher density multi-family residential area, when adequately served by utility infrastructure, it could provide hundreds of dwelling units within walking distance of the downtown and its wide range of commercial and office uses, including new employment possibilities. Such a future land use vision for this residential area contributes to the downtown objectives of creating

a pedestrian-oriented downtown and provision of affordable higher density housing for downtown workers.

To complement the residential character of these close-in residential neighborhoods and subdivisions, to promote community interaction, and to facilitate trail improvements and links to the larger Town Center, any Jenkins Creek Park Trail development or other park acquisition could be an important part of this area close to downtown and should be explored through a broader community wide Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan. Such projects should be coordinated with the Parks and Recreation Element and Parks CIP within the Comprehensive Plan. Within the zones abutting Wax Road, other office, small service or size-limited light commercial uses might also be considered if they are in keeping with the primarily housing and office character of the zone, and are located within existing structures or on the ground floor of new housing or office development. Since the predominant use in the corridor will probably remain different types of residential and office uses, any new non-residential uses (dwellings converted to offices or new, mixed-use structures) should have appropriate limitations on size, traffic generation and access, parking, and signage. If office, service and/or size-limited commercial uses are permitted in these areas, consideration should be given to the following factors:

a. Because of its proximity to Jenkins Creek, any potential increase in impervious surface would need to be outside the required buffers and be mitigated with low impact development practices and when required, with enhancements to the existing wetland areas, in accordance with critical area and Shoreline Master Program regulations.

b. Consistent with the new Town Center Focus Area vision and plan, any new or significantly-changed development should exhibit high quality design and construction standards that emphasizes pedestrian-friendliness and community interaction.

c. Public access to any planned community trail or new park sites will need to be provided at key points and integrated with development plans.

d. Shared access from residential, office, service and size-limited retail uses to Wax Road should be required in order to improve traffic flow and safety.

*d. General Commercial Focus Area*

The General Commercial Focus Area consists of DN2 south of SE 272nd Street and the DN3 zone, located west of the Town Center Focus Area. This area provides one of the major "Gateways" to the downtown from SR 18 and Covington Way entering the city from multiple directions including the west, southwest, southeast and northeast. This area is impacted by heavy traffic volumes on SR 18, SE 272nd Street, Covington Way and SE Wax Road. This General Commercial Focus Area is more automobile oriented and currently contains several new and used auto dealerships as well as some existing intensive heavy commercial and storage uses.

Unlike the Mixed Commercial Focus Area, there is limited immediate pedestrian and visual connection between this General Commercial Focus Area and the Town Center because of the separation of this area by Covington Way. Efforts should be made to improve integration of this area into the larger downtown, as it does provide a "Gateway" potential to the downtown from Highway 18, SE 272nd Street and Covington Way. Land Uses should support the overall vision and objectives of the Town Center and impacts from allowed uses should not detract from the overall Town Center vision.

### 4.3.4 Capital Improvement Plans Supporting Land Use Plans

The Growth Management Act requires that the Comprehensive Plan's Land Use Element be consistent with and supported by its Capital Facilities Element and envisioned capital improvement plans. Therefore, public funding or public/private partnerships for the designated capital projects identified in the Capital Facilities Element of the Comprehensive Plan must occur.

The Capital Facilities Element of this Comprehensive Plan describes at a city-wide level the roads, parks & trails, storm drainage and other public infrastructure necessary to serve the growth and development projected to occur over the next twenty years. Identified in the Capital Facilities Element are a number of capital projects, including many within the downtown area. Several of those road and park projects are noted on Fig. 4.5.

For downtown Covington to properly function as a true mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly downtown, with a more traditional "Main Street", its internal circulation, both vehicular and pedestrian must be prioritized and substantially improved. A major challenge will be to improve access to the uses in the emerging downtown while also facilitating movement through and across the downtown. The proposed local street grid (*See* Fig. 4.5) would greatly improve internal vehicular circulation in parts of downtown by adding new

road segments and making intersection improvements at existing and projected future congestion points.

### 4.3.5 Streetscapes, Gateways, and Public Places

In addition to their primary function of carrying vehicular traffic, streets perform several other key functions in building a downtown. The design and furnishing of the streetscape are critical to creating a pedestrian-friendly downtown with a more traditional "Main Street" that has a unique gathering place for citizens, residents, and visitors. Downtown streets, particularly in the Town Center Focus Area, should provide space for trees, benches, wide sidewalks, a public plaza, buildings brought to the sidewalk edge, and outdoor dining and beverage opportunities. Local streets should support two-way vehicle lanes as well as 8-foot minimum width sidewalks, street trees, and unique forms of pedestrian lighting. Safety, accessibility, and maintenance should be top priorities for new walking surfaces.

The City should also consider the important role that street names can play in making a downtown more legible and memorable. While the numbered streets of the King County grid system serve a utilitarian purpose, they can also contribute to a feeling of anonymity rather than a sense of place. In contrast, both Covington Way and Wax Road are well-known to residents and emergency responders, have historic or place-specific meaning, and assist in orienting newcomers to the Downtown. As the City builds and improves the roads shown in Fig. 4.5, it should consider christening several of them as "signature streets" such as "Main Street," "Central Avenue," and "Jenkins Creek Parkway." The City might also consider re-naming a segment of its most prominent street-the variously named SR 516, SE 272$^{nd}$ Street, Kent-Kangley Road-as "Covington Boulevard." *See* Fig. 4.6.

An important part of community identity is the sense of arrival that one experiences at the "gateways" to the city, which in Covington's case are generally the entry points into downtown. Not only does this present an opportunity to make a good first impression on visitors, but it also can reinforce the image that citizens hold about their community. The City should address how it handles this "sense of arrival" into Covington through various visual, signage, landscaping and illumination techniques.

The downtown of every great city, large or small, provides spaces where people can congregate. Sometimes on public land and sometimes on private property, these spaces constitute the "third place" or unique gathering space where a variety of meetings,

social events, public or community functions, and inter-personal interactions take place, some by chance, others by design. It is within these spaces where the civic life of communities is played out, where neighbors meet for coffee, a bite to eat, or encounter each other while running errands, where children learn to explore their home town in a stimulating and relatively safe environment, and where the community celebrates special events like Summer Celebrations, Annual Holiday Tree Lightings, and the Fourth of July.

Some of these new places will occur as individual stores and restaurants recognize the commercial advantage of making their businesses attractive places for outdoor dining, drinking, or casual seating. Others will be more formal public plazas, open spaces or parks that should be provided through some combination of public sector planning, public funding, and private sector development in exchange for the City permitting more intensive development or other incentives.

## 4.4 Downtown Vision and Plan Implementation

### 4.4.1 "Zoning District Consolidation"

At the time of incorporation in 1997, the City's downtown zoning map and development regulations was based on the traditional and generic King County Code. A new Comprehensive Plan containing some new future land use vision and direction was completed in 2006. In addition a new zoning district classification system for the downtown was outlined in a new Downtown element and reflected 11 new smaller zoning districts. While the City has initiated a number of design guidelines and standards, many of those are advisory rather than mandatory, some of them are more subjective than objective, and few deal specifically with the important questions of building bulk, scale and modulation.

Currently the circumstances and public policy objectives for the downtown vary greatly from one downtown zoning district to another. Likewise, the current Comprehensive Plan calls for accommodation of up to 2 million additional square feet of commercial growth in the coming 20 years. The current eleven-zone district zoning map configuration and lack of detailed, objective development standards no longer serve as a suitable means to implement a new vision for downtown Covington, in concert with the new City Council vision which states:

*"Establish Downtown Covington as a vibrant residential, commercial, social, and cultural gathering place that is safe, pedestrian friendly, well-organized, and well-maintained."*

The existing twelve small downtown zoning districts should be consolidated into four or five larger zoning districts with specific development and design standards that reflect their true allowed uses. Central to this new zoning reclassification system should be a new Town Center Zone that provides the heart of Covington, contains a more traditional "Main Street", has a new public plaza and gathering place, and eventually embodies a new city hall, other civic buildings and spaces. This new Covington Town Center Zone should be located south of SE 272nd Street, west of Wax Road, north of Covington Way and east of the new 168th Place SE.

A major focus of the consolidation of zoning districts should be improved development and design standards containing improved density, bulk, scale, façade modulation, height, setback, lot coverage, impervious surface, and landscaping standards, as well as required architectural details for new structures.

### 4.4.2 Design Standards and Administrative Design Review

Design and "place-making" is an important part of creating a unique downtown that will encourage citizens and visitors to shop locally and spend more time at community events and happenings in a true town center. Covington should continue to use specific architectural and site design standards and general design guidelines along with other development standards within the zoning code. Such design standards should use photographs and drawings to clearly illustrate the vision, character, principles and priorities as identified in this Comprehensive Plan and the City Council's Vision Statement.

The focus on administrative review of adopted design standards, rather than discretionary design review by an architectural review board is intended to keep the permit process objective, timely and predictable, while also assuring that project outcomes meet the City's articulated policies for Downtown Covington.

## 4.5 Goals and Policies

### 4.5.1 General Downtown Land Use

**VISION:** Downtown Covington should be the center of economic activity for this area; the place for community events; contain vibrant, active streetscapes with street trees and the opportunity for street vendors; allow

intensification over time with re-use of parking lots for structured parking and/or new building development; foster high quality development with a scale and form that is comfortable for pedestrians and bicycles with connections to area parks, trails, and natural spaces; and contain distinctive landmarks, especially in the Town Center Focus Area, that makes Covington unique and allows people to easily find their way and identify with a more traditional downtown public gathering place.

DTG 1.0 Plan for and create a new Downtown Covington as a vibrant residential, commercial, social, and cultural gathering place that is safe, pedestrian-friendly, well-designed, and well-maintained, with a land use pattern and intensity over a twenty-year phased time frame that encourages residents to live, work, shop, gather for community events, walk and bicycle in the downtown.

*DTP 1.1 Allow and encourage developments throughout the downtown which combine compatible retail, office, service, health care, and residential uses to provide a diverse and vibrant mixed-use downtown area with benefits to the larger community. Development in the downtown area shall provide complementary functional relationships between various land uses.*

*DTP 1.2 Encourage a variety of developments in the downtown area with an emphasis on multi-story mixed-use, while allowing existing, major retail components to exist until market conditions suggest redevelopment; permitting limited, regulated and high-quality designed large format retail; while minimizing impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods.*

*DTP 1.3 Encourage development of an attractive and economically healthy downtown that offers a variety of service, office, retail, health care, residential, cultural, open space & public gatherings places, and recreational opportunities.*

*DTP 1.4 Provide a downtown circulation pattern and parking strategy conducive to pedestrians*

*that encourages people to park once and walk or use shuttles, thereby encouraging healthy activity, and contributing to a more vibrant and active streetscape, and reducing traffic and the overall need for parking.*

*DTP 1.5 Encourage the integration of new office, service, health care, and residential uses into the downtown area to support business/retail activities and to increase the vitality of the downtown.*

*DTP 1.6 Provide regulatory incentives (related to allowable building height, density and parking requirements, etc.) for private developments to accomplish public objectives.*

*DTP 1.7 Prohibit heavy industrial uses throughout downtown, in order to reduce the potential for noise, odor, air emissions, excessive amounts of land devoted to freight loading, and excessive truck trips that impact the existing and planned mix of retail, office, service, public, and residential uses.*

*DTP 1.8 Develop a flexible and tiered approach to zoning regulation of non-conforming uses and structures in the Town Center Focus Area/All Downtown Zones that allows owners to rebuild non-conforming structures to previous configurations in the event of catastrophic loss; allows for interior tenant improvements without bringing exterior improvements to new standards; and allows limited remodeling and expansion of existing buildings as long as they do not increase the degree of nonconformance. This allows for continued use of existing non-conforming uses and structures until market conditions support total redevelopment in accordance with the Town Center Focus Area Concept Plan, goals and policies.*

### 4.5.2 Town Center Focus Area

**VISION:** The Town Center Focus Area should be the central community-oriented heart of the downtown with public plazas and civic buildings, public spaces and landmarks, a mix of multi-story residential, office, service and retail uses; contain short block sizes on a rectangular grid system that are conducive to walking; focus around a traditional "Main Street" with sidewalk cafes and ground floor retail uses where Covington residents and visitors outside the community can come to shop, socialize, relax, and attend special community events; and be located south of SE 272nd St.

DTG 2.0 Use a new Town Center land use and zoning designation to proactively implement a walkable, pedestrian scale mixed-use development pattern that emphasizes the public realm at the heart of the downtown.

*DTP 2.1 Apply the Town Center designation to a single area comprised of large parcels suitable for development or redevelopment that are central to downtown and accessible from highways and major arterials.*

*DTP 2.2 Allow one new large-format retail store to be built within the Town Center Focus Area. The City should adopt development regulations requiring this store to be located west of the proposed 171st Avenue SE, as projected. Any new large-format retai9l facility should be set back from the proposed 171st Avenue SE a sufficient distance to allow the future construction space for street-frontage, pedestrian-oriented retail, reasonable pedestrian connections, and complimentary uses along the proposed 171st Avenue SE. Access for service and delivery vehicles to the large-format retail facility should be prohibited from using the proposed 171st Avenue SE. There should be no curb cuts along the proposed 171st Avenue SE providing vehicular access of any kind to the large-format retail facility*

*(except for emergency vehicle access, if required by the Fire Marshall).*

*DTP 2.3 The City should move forward with efforts to acquire property for a civic building and plaza space within the new Town Center Focus Area, that is consistent with the vision of the new Town Center Concept Plan, supports an interactive pedestrian-oriented Streetscape, and provides that unique, identifiable public gathering space with public business and community functions. The civic building and plaza space should support other potential future public investments such as a public parking facility, a transit center/park-and-ride facility, and a community center, and be adjacent to the pedestrian-oriented "Main Street".*

*DTP 2.4 Encourage residential uses in the Town Center Focus Area at more urban densities, greater than 24 units per acre, making efficient use of prime land, supporting transit friendly and pedestrian-oriented retail, and encouraging inclusion of residential uses in new mixed-use projects, as well as supporting stand-alone multi-family housing developments.*

*DTP 2.5 Zoning and development regulations in the Town Center Focus Area should promote specific types and a mix of uses, building forms and public realm improvements described in the Town Center Vision statement, including retail, service, office, health care, and residential uses.*

*DTP 2.6 Provide incentives for innovative, affordable housing development and encourage workforce housing targeted for workers expected to fill retail and service jobs within the downtown.*

*DTP 2.7 Recognize Downtown as uniquely suited to supporting special-needs housing due to the convenience of nearby health services.*

*DTP 2.8 Encourage transit oriented development (TOD) where feasible, to locate within the Town Center Focus Area.*

### 4.5.3 Mixed Commercial Focus Area

**VISION:** The Mixed Commercial Focus Area should generally surround the Town Center Focus Area on the north, northeast and west, and emphasize retail and office uses, including large-format retail and auto-oriented uses, yet with built-in pedestrian orientation and amenities; certain uses such as outdoor storage and heavy industrial are not compatible with this designation.

DTG 3.0 Use the Mixed Commercial designation to encourage diverse employment; increase walkability and connectivity in portions of the downtown outside of the Town Center, while encouraging a mix of commercial and multi-story residential uses, with mixed-use buildings, public uses and spaces, compatible food-related uses; and still allowing for large-format and auto-oriented retail, provided they meet pedestrian-oriented design goals and policies.

*DTP 3.1 Apply the Mixed Commercial designation to areas close to SE 272nd St. that have a mix of parcel sizes and are already dominated by large-format retail, yet encourage redevelopment with more intensive and higher mixed-use developments with improvements to the pedestrian and street network, locating building footprints fronting a new street grid, and requiring corner architectural treatments in key areas.*

*DTP 3.2 Provide incentives for innovative, affordable housing development and encourage workforce housing targeted for workers expected to fill retail and service jobs within the downtown.*

*DTP 3.3 Recognize Downtown as uniquely suited to supporting mixed-use residential and commercial developments with affordable housing due the convenience of nearby health services.*

*DTP 3.4 Encourage transit oriented development (TOD) where feasible, to locate within the Mixed Commercial Focus Area.*

### 4.5.4 General Commercial Focus Area

**VISION:** The General Commercial Focus Area is the broadest of land use designations of any land uses in the downtown and is intended for the location of major auto-oriented uses, major commercial, storage, office, and retail, and may include some light manufacturing, transportation related, and utility uses; yet high density residential uses may also be allowed if buffered adequately to ensure compatibility.

DTG 4.0 Use the General Commercial designation to allow for a complete variety and mix of commercial and office uses, some appropriate low-impact manufacturing and storage uses, transportation-related and utility facilities uses, and limited residential uses that can be buffered to ensure compatibility.

*DTP 4.1 Apply the General Commercial designation to the portion of the downtown that is Southwest of Covington Way and south of SE 272nd St. and between Highway 18, Covington Way and SE 272nd St.*

*DTP 4.2 Encourage auto sales, office, appropriate storage and light manufacturing, and other vehicular service uses in this land use designation.*

*DTP 4.3 Prohibit heavy industrial uses in this land use designation to ensure compatibility with the mix of desired uses, proximity of pedestrian-oriented retail and residential uses and the general pedestrian orientation of the downtown.*

*DTP 4.4 Apply zoning classifications and development and design standards that ensure compatibility between uses, requires pedestrian and trail connections to the rest of the town center and Soos Creek, and addresses the potential for a new SR 18 "peel-off" ramp onto Covington Way.*

*DTP 4.5 Encourage the enhancement of Big Soos Creek through appropriate incentives or development standards.*

### 4.5.5 Mixed Housing and Office Focus Area

**VISION:** The Mixed Housing and Office Focus Area is intended to preserve existing housing stock for its useful life, yet encourage infill housing and office development and redevelopment that is designed to be compatible with existing and surrounding residential uses; development and design standards should emphasize compatibility through limits on height, bulk, scale, density and size-threshold for redevelopment.

DTG 5.0 Use the Mixed Housing and Office designation to encourage infill development and redevelopment of a variety of housing and professional office uses such as townhouses, cottage housing, and multi-family dwellings; professional offices; and medical and educational offices.

*DTP 5.1 Develop zoning and design standards for the Mixed Housing and Office (MHO) Focus Areas that allow incremental redevelopment of existing single-family subdivisions as property owners are ready to redevelop. A minimum site area for redevelopment should be established that is large enough to accommodate creative site design and the coordination of needed street improvements, while minimizing impacts on remaining single-family residences. The minimum site area should not be so large as to effectively prevent redevelopment. Consider establishing two minimum site area standards, with different development standards and review processes applicable to each. Require administrative design review for projects other than traditional single-family development.*

*DTP 5.2 Develop zoning and design standards for the properties along the east side of Wax Road that are similar to those currently in place, and that also reflect the development constraints on these properties due to their*

*proximity to Jenkins Creek and the planned reconstruction of Wax Road.*

*DTP 5.3 Establish minimum project size and/or threshold requirements for redevelopment to higher intensity uses in the Mixed Housing and Office designation to assure a higher level of design, coordination of needed improvements, and reduced impacts on adjacent single-family uses.*

*DTP 5.4 Emphasize extensive landscaping, particularly for larger projects, along with requiring adequate buffers to reduce impacts on existing residential development.*

*DTP 5.5 Encourage flexibility for innovative housing types and foster demonstration projects for a mix and variety of housing types.*

*DTP 5.6 Establish development regulations so they are sensitive to nearby single family uses, and require administrative design review for large projects other than traditional single-family development.*

### 4.5.6 Transportation, Circulation, and Development

DTG 6.0 Implement a balanced transportation network including public transportation, motor vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle circulation, and an integrated parking strategy to increase mobility of all modes of travel within the downtown.

*DTP 6.1 Streets should safely and comfortably allow for all modes of travel, including vehicles, pedestrians and bicycles, and transit where appropriate.*

*DTP 6.2 Provide for adequate and necessary vehicular access into and across the downtown with efficient connections to and from nearby neighborhoods by prioritizing capital investment decisions accordingly, yet still recognizing downtown pedestrian*

*circulation needs as vital to a more pedestrian-friendly and healthy town center.*

*DTP 6.3 Work with all governmental entities and the private sector to develop trail and bikeway plans and facilities that serve Covington residents, pedestrians, cyclists, and visitors from the greater region with improved connections to the Soos Creek Trail system and the planned Jenkins Creek trail system.*

*DTP 6.4 Develop and provide for unique street design standards that emphasize improved pedestrian circulation and amenities consistent with the Town Center vision.*

*DTP 6.5 Establish a walkable, pedestrian-friendly, street grid system in the Town Center Focus Area. Key to this pedestrian-friendly grid system is the early development of two north/south streets (roughly on the alignments of 171st and 172nd Avenues SE, if extended); an east/west street connecting Wax Road to the existing south roundabout on 168th Avenue SE; and an additional east/west street connecting 168th Avenue SE to Wax Road in an alignment just south of the existing Safeway. All of these new streets should be built to special, pedestrian-oriented design standards, with eventual ground-floor retail uses, and all should accommodate local vehicular circulation. One of these north/south streets should place special emphasis on pedestrian circulation, within the Town Center Focus Area. These streets should be generally located as shown on the Town Center Concept Plan and in Figure 4.2.*

*DTP 6.6 Reconstruct SE Wax Road in its current alignment, with a minor western realignment to accommodate new intersection improvements at the intersection at Covington Way.*

*DTP 6.7 Develop a comprehensive parking strategy with specific site and parking space design standards in the downtown which supports transit and pedestrians and provides for either parallel or angular on-street parking where appropriate .*

*DTP 6.8 Additional pedestrian connections and grid streets should be developed in the Town Center Focus Area as private development occurs; the location and timing of these pedestrian connections and grid streets should be determined based on the location, design, and timing of new development. All new public and private development in the Town Center Focus Area should be designed to further this goal of an eventual walkable, pedestrian-friendly, grid street pattern in this area of the downtown as emphasized in DTP 6.5.*

*DTP 6.9 Coordinate with the King County METRO bus system to develop ways to improve mass transit service, frequency, and connections into the city that establishes a unified transit strategy, including a park-and-ride transit center and public parking facility.*

*DTP 6.10 Develop a unified downtown parking strategy that avoid excessive parking supplies, by encouraging shared (joint-use) parking to reduce the total number of parking stalls and to improve the visual and aesthetic character of the downtown.*

*DTP 6.11 Provide efficient local access from regional transportation corridors (e.g. SR-516 and SR-18) to the downtown area.*

*DTP 6.12 Enhance the attractiveness of the SR-18 right-of-way in accordance with its role as a gateway to the downtown area.*

*DTP 6.13 Encourage off-street parking to be located at the rear of buildings and within structured parking facilities where possible and develop site and parking design*

*standards in the downtown area which support transit.*

*DTP 6.14 Require provision of bicycle racks in conjunction with new developments, bike lanes on arterial streets and signage at key points and intersections.*

### 4.5.7 Infrastructure

DTG 7.0 Encourage the planning and financing of public infrastructure such as road, water and sewer systems to support the development and redevelopment of the downtown area and as an incentive for new, more intensive mixed-use development.

*DTP 7.1 Promote the efficient use of public infrastructure and urban services.*

*DTP 7.2 Combine utility and transportation rights-of-way into common corridors, where possible.*

*DTP 7.3 Provide, where appropriate, regulatory incentives related to items such as allowable building height, density, and parking requirements for private developments in exchange for public funding of infrastructure such as extensions of utility lines and roadway improvements.*

*DTP 7.4 Encourage redevelopment and infill to take advantage of existing land resources, streets and utilities.*

### 4.5.8 Civic Buildings, Parks, and Open Space

DTG 8.0 Provide sufficient civic buildings, public plazas, parks, open spaces and gathering spaces within the Downtown to meet the needs of Covington's planned residential, office and commercial growth.

*DTP 8.1 Develop public plaza, park and usable open space areas to serve both residents and employees in the downtown area.*

*DTP 8.2 Encourage the location of civic buildings and facilities, such as City Hall, public plazas, community centers, public libraries, etc., in the Town Center Focus Area.*

*DTP 8.3 Improve the street environment and appearance for use as public open space.*

*DTP 8.4 Increase the diversity of spaces in the downtown area by enhancing the types, size and hierarchy of spaces through the introduction of public amenities such as civic spaces and public areas.*

*DTP 8.5 Encourage developers to provide a variety of open spaces, such as plazas and courtyards with outdoor seating and landscaping, in private developments.*

*DTP 8.6 Encourage private participation in development of community facilities in the downtown area.*

*DTP 8.7 Utilize the power line corridors and adjacent stream corridors as part of an overall pedestrian and bicycle trail system that offers recreational potential and residential connections into and within the downtown area.*

### 4.5.9 Urban Design

DTG 9.0 Create a safe, physically attractive downtown area with high quality design, ample vegetation and landscaping, pedestrian amenities such as public benches, street lighting, and public art through urban design standards that address compatibility of use; bulk, scale, and modulation of buildings; texture, material and color of facades; and pedestrian-friendly features.

*DTP 9.1 Encourage a development pattern that places buildings near the street and makes surface parking a non-dominate use.*

*DTP 9.2 Encourage vegetation and landscaping plans which can thrive in urban settings,*

*conserve water, retain desirable trees and use native plant materials.*

*DTP 9.3 Use landscaping and other forms of screening to soften the appearance of parking lots, backs of buildings, "blank" building walls, and service areas from public streets, sidewalks, and open spaces.*

*DTP 9.4 Encourage the development and strategic placement of public art features within the downtown area.*

*DTP 9.5 Adopt development requirements and design standards for the downtown area relating to building appearance, public realm amenities, pedestrian orientation, and impact on adjacent properties.*

*DTP 9.6 Provide for a sense of approach and entry to the downtown area through the development of key distinctive focal points, such as special architectural, water and/or landscaping features.*

*DTP 9.7 Require all downtown site plans to include a coordinated scheme for well-designed and well-located street furniture, including but not limited to benches, lighting, and trash receptacles.*

*DTP 9.8 Encourage interconnected walkway systems to accommodate areas for landscaping and wide sidewalks that provide the opportunity for appropriate outdoor commercial and civic activities, including seating for food and beverage establishments.*

*DTP 9.9 Encourage public open spaces or community plazas, where appropriate, for the congregation of people. .*

*DTP 9.10 Provide for a variety and mix of uses in individual buildings, with retail on the ground floor. Residential and/or office uses are appropriate and are encouraged on upper floors of downtown retail buildings.*

*DTP 9.11 Encourage the location of e shared parking lots behind or between buildings with pedestrian connections to the main walkways.*