

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** May 7, 2019  
**To:** City Council  
**From:** Christy Carr, AICP  
Senior Planner  
**Subject:** **Subdivision Update**  
Revisions to Planning Commission Recommended Draft based on City Council Input

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The Planning Commission's recommended draft of the subdivision update has been discussed at three study sessions on March 19 and April 2 and 16, 2019. These discussions were wide-ranging but focused somewhat on a handful of topics around which the City Council requested additional information and/or revised code language. This memorandum provides staff's input on these topics and provides a reference to the specific code language to be revised, if applicable.

Attached materials to support the narrative below include:

- Potential development scenarios: Graphics depicting variations of natural area, ARPA, community space, and development area in the R-0.4, R-1, and R-2 zoning districts.
- Ord 2019-03 Exhibit A PC Recommendation with Notes and Revisions: BIMC 17.12 draft with staff input (yellow text, not yet discussed by City Council) and proposed revisions based on City Council input (green text, to be discussed at tonight's study session).
- Proposed new Table 17.12.060-1 – Clustering Requirements.

**Definition and Designation of Natural Area**

The subdivision update proposed to change the term "open space" to "natural area." Natural area would be made up of primary conservation areas – critical areas and aquifer recharge protection areas – and secondary conservation areas – mature woodlands, significant trees, wildlife corridors, etc. As proposed, natural area would not include other valued open space features such as pastures, meadows, and orchards. The City Council discussed that these other open space features are important to maintaining island character and should be included in natural area. Staff proposes revising the language around natural area to reflect the diversity in valued open space features and clarify its designation and allowed uses.

[See proposed revisions to BIMC 17.12.050.](#)

## Definition and Applicability of Clustering

The Planning Commission's recommended draft included the concept of homesite clustering as the "preferred design model" for all types of subdivisions in all zoning districts. As proposed, cluster means "grouping homesites within a subdivision to facilitate the efficient use of land by limiting areas of disturbance, impervious surfaces, utility extensions and roadways." The City Council's discussion regarding clustering focused on these points:

- Conservation areas (R-0.4, R-1, and R-2 zoning districts) should be treated differently than higher density zoning districts.
- Requirements for short vs. long subdivisions.
- Requirements for large subdivisions (10+ lots).

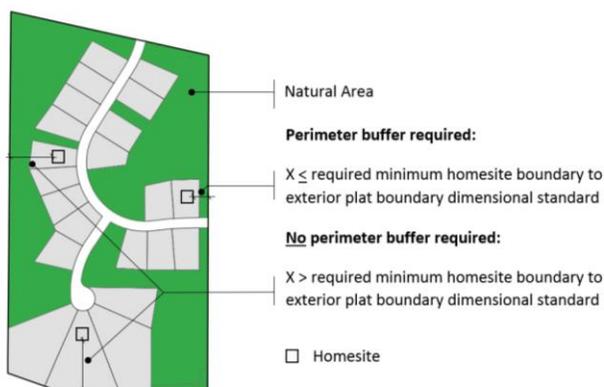
As previously noted by staff, it would be difficult to achieve predictable and consistent outcomes in the absence of standards. If the intent is to minimize site disturbance and the overall development footprint, a standard is needed to achieve that – guidelines and preferences will not. The necessity and type of standard(s) will depend on the size and vegetation character of the site and the development potential (i.e., number of allowed lots). In some cases, the City Council may want to consider limiting site disturbance rather than requiring (or preferring) homesite clustering, or some combination of both.

Staff is providing for the City Council's consideration separate sections, one called "homesite location" and the other called "homesite clustering." Homesite location requirements would apply to all types of subdivisions. These locational requirements include limiting areas of disturbance, topographic alteration, and clearing of existing vegetation. Homesite clustering would be achieved through a maximum homesite separation standard only for subdivisions with specific existing natural area characteristics. An alternative to the maximum homesite separation – maximum site disturbance -- is also included. Applicability of required homesite clustering is shown in a new table. Either maximum homesite separation or maximum site disturbance would be required, unless a departure is granted.

[See "potential development scenarios," proposed revisions to BIMC 17.12.060.B, and new BIMC 17.12.060.C and Table 17.12.060-1.](#)

## Perimeter Buffers

There was some discussion that the proposed perimeter buffers are onerous. Staff developed the following diagram to provide an alternative applicability of perimeter buffers. They would only be required when one or more homesites is within close proximity to the perimeter plat boundary. Perimeter buffers would not be required around the entire perimeter. The extent (or length) of the perimeter buffer could be determined on a case-by-case basis. For example: length of lot line, length of perimeter boundary, length of abutting property line.



## Diversity in Layout and Architectural Style

There is clear agreement among Council members that recent subdivision development is inconsistent with island character due to its “cookie cutter” look and feel. Newer subdivision development does not reflect the island’s rural-like development pattern or existing neighborhood context. Staff suggests that this look and feel is due to a number of factors, including a standardized layout and the uniform placement and appearance of homes. The Planning Commission’s recommended draft includes general standards intended to address this:

BIMC 17.12.070.P. Design Diversity. Subdivision designs shall avoid monotonous rows of duplicative dwellings by incorporating measures that promote design diversity, including:

1. Providing a mixture of lot sizes and/or front setbacks; and/or
2. Providing a variety of floor plans and façade treatments.

The proposed subdivision design guidelines also include:

<b>Diversity in House Design</b>	<b>Intent:</b> To provide a range of home sizes and designs to achieve diversity in visual appearance and affordability.  <b>Guideline:</b> House designs should be varied in size, massing, and frontage character using methods such as varied floor plans, staggered front yard setbacks, building modulation, and changes in exterior materials. Houses should display shared architectural features to establish continuity and harmony.
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The City Council may wish to consider including more detailed standards to avoid a uniform appearance and better integrate new subdivisions with the existing development pattern. These standards would become conditions of preliminary plat approval, noted on the plat. Subsequent building permits would then need to be checked against these conditions of approval. Alternatively, elevations and models could be required as part of preliminary plat review. It is likely that not all standards would apply to all zoning districts, since the development pattern varies throughout the island. Some examples include:

- Buildings shall vary, and in so doing provide a range of compatible styles, elevations, designs, home sizes, home prices, and neighborhood diversity.
- Buildings shall avoid a uniform appearance by providing variation in building architecture and elevations using methods such as building modulation, primary and secondary building forms (e.g., covered porches, dormers, window bays), and changes in exterior materials, colors, windows, doors, and trim.
- No more than two of the same model and elevation shall be built within long subdivisions. The same model and elevation shall not be built next to each other. Mirrored floor plans to not count as different floor plans.
- Different models are defined as having significant variations in the floor plans, which allows for variation in the massing of the home. The following major elements must be substantially different:
  - Floor plan, building configuration, massing
  - Roof type (gable, hip, shed, etc.)
- A clear pattern of massing changes and modulation of building forms and composition is required to create architectural variety and interest.

- The front yard setback shall be varied between lots. To break up visual monotony on a straight street, no more than two homes in a row shall be sited at the same front yard setback. Varied shall be defined as a difference of at least five feet.
- Individual lots sizes shall vary in size to reflect the neighborhood context. Not more than two adjacent lots shall be of the same size (“same size” is defined as within 500 square feet in area relative to each other). In the R-0.4, R-1, and R-2 zoning districts, at least one-third of the lots shall vary by at least 2,000 square feet.

### **Administrative Departures**

The Planning Commission’s recommended draft includes the concept of administrative departures. These departures are intended to allow flexibility in subdivision design based on unique site conditions without going through a formal variance process. There was general agreement that the City should not be allowed to require a departure (and/or that there is no need for it). This provision was deleted. In addition, the language around the decision criteria and process for departures was revised for clarity.

The terms “preferred” and “optional” related to clustering are not used in the proposed revisions to BIMC 17.12.060. A table outlining clustering requirements is also included in the proposed revisions. These two revisions should eliminate confusion between required/mandatory and preferred/optional. The City Council may want to consider whether the proposed clustering requirements – either maximum homesite separation or maximum site disturbance – should be eligible for a departure. If not, “clustering requirements pursuant to Table 17.12.060-1” should be added to the list of standards from which a departure is not allowed (see BIMC 17.12.040.B).

[See proposed revisions to BIMC 17.12.040.](#)

### **Outstanding Topics**

The City Council indicated an interest in further discussing at least two additional topics: limiting and/or promoting smaller home sizes and roadside buffers. Staff is prepared to support this discussion.