CHAPTER 3 COMMUNITY CHARACTER

3.1 Plan Context

The character of a community is influenced by a variety of factors, including its residents, social network, schools, community and business organizations, history, built environment, and natural resources. Although it is not possible to legislate a strong community, public policy can provide a framework that supports desirable characteristics. Community cohesiveness develops in many ways. It can come from a shared vision for the community, nurtured by community events, or developed through the use of public places for interaction.

The Community Character Chapter provides a framework for shaping the future form and character of Sequim. This chapter focuses on placemaking and on those physical features that shape the setting for life in the community. It addresses the building and site design, public spaces and landscapes, streetscapes and other physical features.

The Community Character Chapter is not a required Comprehensive Plan chapter under State law; however, because of the value Sequim places on character, the City has chosen to include it as an additional chapter in the Comprehensive Plan. This chapter plays a critical role in maintaining and improving the physical quality of the environments that define the City's identity and give character to its commercial districts and residential neighborhoods.

3.2 Goals and Policies

This chapter is complementary to other chapters of the Comprehensive Plan, and many of the policies identified in this chapter may be included or further refined in other chapters. This chapter considers the following aspects of Community Character:

- People and Public Places
- Entrances, Gateways, Landmarks, and Wayfinding
- Building and Site Review
- Streets and Pathways
- Downtown Sequim
- Cultural and Historic Resources, and Landmarks

3.2.1 People and Public Places

The best public places appeal to the broadest number of people: young and old, residents and visitors, workers and shoppers. Public places should draw people because they are comfortable, attractive, and convenient. Public art and community activities also draw people together and express the diversity of a community's character.

GOAL CC-1
Provide well-designed and interesting public places that foster community cohesiveness and interaction while showcasing the natural features of Sequim and the Dungeness Valley.

Policy CC-1.1
Continue to support longstanding and new community festivals and events that reflect the heritage and cultural traditions of the community.

Policy CC-1.2
Support the development of inter-generational recreational and cultural programs that celebrate Sequim's heritage and community diversity.

Policy CC-1.3
Preserve, develop, and enhance community gathering places such as, but not limited to parks, public facilities, community markets and event venues throughout the City.

Policy CC-1.4
Design and build Sequim's public buildings with quality, sustainable materials and construction techniques to serve as a model to the community, and to enhance their function as community gathering places.

Policy CC-1.5
Incorporate and provide a display opportunity for art in and outside of public buildings and provide opportunities for artists to contribute to public art within parks, bridges, or other public facilities.

Policy CC-1.6
Continue support of the City's Arts Commission to review and make recommendations on public art, funding opportunities, and identify locations suitable for art installations.

Policy CC-1.7
Support the use of public spaces – including parks, plazas, streetscapes, and landmarks – as platforms for community-led education, storytelling, and cultural interpretation that reflect Sequim's history, identity, and civic life.

Policy CC-1.8
Partner with local institutions such as the library, museum, and schools to expand opportunities for public education through place-based exhibits, interpretive signage, and programs that connect people to Sequim's past, present, and future.

Policy CC-1.9
Encourage public art, including murals and street art, reflects the diversity, history, and identity of the Sequim community and fosters a sense of belonging in public spaces.

3.2.2 Entrances, Gateways, Landmarks, and Wayfinding

People orient themselves in their community by remembering certain features, including unique public views, defined entrances, and landmarks. These features can also set one community apart from another and are part of what defines the unique character of a place. Preserving key features and creating new ones can help define and enhance Sequim's character.

GOAL CC-2
Provide residents and visitors with positive, identifiable images that reflect Sequim's unique characteristics and create a sense of place and belonging.

Policy CC-2.1
Continue and support the establishment of gateways into the city and emphasize these entrances with distinctive design elements such as symbolic markers, signage, monuments, water-wise landscaping, or other design features.

Policy CC-2.2
Enhance the visual appeal of the city by developing a signage and wayfinding program that identifies Sequim, is cohesive throughout the city, and links the community's resources to its residents and visitors.

Policy CC-2.3
Identify opportunities to highlight and preserve Sequim's distinctive public views, such as those of the Olympic Mountains and notable community features through site design and orientation.

Policy CC-2.4
Encourage schools, places of worship, library and other public or semi-public buildings to design facilities that reflect Sequim's unique characteristics and serve as community landmarks.

3.2.3 Building and Site Review

Quality and pleasing design is as important in the details of a building and site as a development's contribution is to the urban character of the city. As Sequim continues to grow, the quality of buildings, sidewalks, and vegetation are important. These elements involve a consideration of building bulk and character, lighting, planting, signs, and other elements that compose the built environment.

GOAL CC-3
Promote high-quality building and site design that is complementary to the community's character while encouraging architectural variety. Support the integration of new urban design elements in commercial, residential multiplexes, and mixed-use developments.

Policy CC-3.1
Utilize design standards and design review to accomplish the following for new commercial and mixed-use development:

- Include architectural features that create visual interest;
- Use of high-quality, durable, and sustainable materials;
- Architectural elements that provide protection from the weather;
- The height and bulk of buildings are proportional and appropriate to the site and surrounding natural and built environment;
- Roof forms include visual focal points and variation in detail, including pitch, terraced and cornice roof forms;
- Rooftop equipment is creatively concealed, and
- Landscaping that unifies site design and creates character.

Policy CC-3.2
Design standards for commercially zoned areas should support key elements of the northwestern architectural style while complementing the existing character of adjacent buildings or areas.

Policy CC-3.3
For large buildings or development with multiple buildings, similar design features and characteristics must be included in all buildings to create continuity, while also allowing individual architectural designs.

Policy CC-3.4
Encourage new development to incorporate art in building and site design that reinforces community identity, creates unique places, and provides a basis for community pride and ownership. Encourage diversity in content, media, and placement to reflect an array of cultural influences.

Policy CC-3.5
Support the integration of distinctive, city-themed design elements, such as color palettes, motifs, and iconography, in site and building design features to reflect Sequim's natural environment, history, culture, and community values.

Policy CC-3.6
Require landscaping that contributes to and is an integral part of how a site interacts with the built and natural environment, and:

- Retains, enhances, and creates character and a sense of place;
- Utilizes native trees and plants, when feasible;
- Enhances water and air quality;
- Minimizes water consumption;
- Provides aesthetic value;
- Softens or disguises less aesthetically pleasing features of a site; and
- Provides buffers for transitions between uses or helps protect natural features.

3.2.4 Streets and Pathways

Streets and pathways can be more than just a means of getting from one point to another. They can define how the city is viewed as one passes through it and create a sense of unique character. Elements of design, such as width, provisions for different users, material treatments, and vegetation, affect the quality of a traveler's trip and the sense of place. Attracting people into the public realm means supporting them with safe street crossings, sidewalks, walkways, and bicycle routes as important connections between different places in the city. Street corridors and pathways tie different parts of Sequim together and should instill public pride through their design.

GOAL CC-4
Provide connectivity and attractive streets that enhance the City's aesthetics and sense of place.

Policy CC-4.1
Design and create sidewalks, bikeways, and paths to increase connectivity for people by providing safe and direct, or convenient links throughout the city.

Policy CC-4.2
Identify streets in the city that could be considered for special treatment due to their importance, location, activity, and connection to public spaces. Such treatments could include elements such as:

- Specially designed landscaped island(s);
- Unique crosswalk treatments;
- Unique and interesting street lighting;
- Sidewalk furniture;
- Street landscaping and sidewalk planters; and
- Low Impact Development (LID) features.

Policy CC-4.3
Promote the planting of low-maintenance landscaping and street trees to enhance City rights-of-way and improve the pedestrian environment.

Policy CC-4.4
Encourage the development and maintenance of a catalog of approved public street furniture and streetscape elements, such as benches, bike racks, lamp posts, and signage, that reflect Sequim's identity. Support opportunities for residents, businesses, and organizations to purchase or donate customized street furniture and amenities that enhance public spaces, promote community pride, and maintain design consistency.

3.2.5 Downtown Sequim

Downtown Sequim is a vibrant hub for local gatherings, shopping, dining, and community connection. Residents and visitors alike enjoy its charming, walkable core, where a visit to the Farmers Market can lead to lunch with friends, browsing lavender boutiques, and exploring local art galleries. Views of the Olympic Mountains and the eclectic charm of Washington Street, lined with small storefronts, colorful awnings, and street-facing facades, add to its unique character.

Beyond commerce, Downtown is also home to places that reflect the heart of Sequim—from the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall to the local co-op and cherished community spaces, it's where connection and everyday life flourish.

GOAL CC-5
Promote an economically healthy Downtown that is unique, attractive, and offers a variety of retail, office, service, residential, cultural, and recreational opportunities.

Policy CC-5.1
Preserve and enhance the existing character and scale of the Downtown Corridor through control of height, scale, and design while reinforcing the area as a primary identifying feature of Sequim, setting it apart from the rest of the city.

Policy CC-5.2
Preserve the eclectic character of Washington Street by encouraging individual small storefronts with street-facing facades, awnings, and distinctive design elements that contribute to a pedestrian-oriented, human-scale environment.

Policy CC-5.3
Identify and improve walking, rolling, and biking routes to Downtown Sequim as a pedestrian and biking-friendly destination. Provide safe methods, such as treated crosswalk paths and pedestrian islands, where people can cross major streets at regular and convenient intervals.

Policy CC-5.4
Encourage revitalization strategies and preservation efforts for the restoration of buildings, walkways, and features of the Downtown and surroundings, which recognize the historic traditions of Sequim and the Sequim-Dungeness Valley region.

3.2.6 Cultural and Historic Resources, and Landmarks

The City of Sequim values its rich historic and cultural heritage as central to its identity, rural character, and community pride. With sites listed on both the National and Washington State Historic Registers, including the Sequim Opera House, the City emphasizes preservation as a key element in its comprehensive planning—supporting heritage tourism, recognizing Native and pioneer histories, and protecting archeological resources as part of responsible future development.

The Sequim community values locally significant historic and cultural resources—such as irrigation ditches, barns, vistas, and traditional land use patterns—as key elements of its agricultural and coastal heritage. It also recognizes the importance of ancient Native American sites, some over 14,000 years old.

The City can enrich the lives of its citizens and its appeal to visitors by commemorating its past. In some cases, this may mean active involvement in the preservation of landmarks, or continued support of the efforts of the Sequim Museum's important task of retaining the link with previous generations.

The Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe is a valued partner in economic development, natural resource stewardship, and cultural preservation in the Sequim-Dungeness Valley. The City and Tribe work together to protect historical and cultural sites.

GOAL CC-6
Protect, conserve, celebrate, and enhance cultural, historical, and archaeological resources throughout the City of Sequim.

Policy CC-6.1
Cooperate with the Sequim Museum, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, other organizations and interested citizens in identifying cultural, historical, and archaeological resources that provide unique insights into the history of the area and the city.

Policy CC-6.2
Promote and support cultural events and resources that enrich community life such as theater, music, art and sculptures.

Policy CC-6.3
Protect and steward Tribal cultural sites and resources as vital to Sequim's shared heritage. Coordinate with Tribal governments and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation during City review of development proposals as appropriate.

Policy CC-6.4
Partner with the Tribe to maintain the visibility and prominence of indigenous culture and identity; and on projects that benefit economic health, recreational opportunities, and quality of life in the community.

Policy CC-6.5
Incorporate interpretative signage, historic street names, and features reflecting original historic designs into park projects, transportation projects, and buildings when feasible, as a means of commemorating past events, persons of note, and City history.

Policy CC-6.6
Assist developers, landowners, and interested citizens in obtaining grants and tax incentives for the reuse and rehabilitation of designated historic sites and buildings.

Policy CC-6.7
Partner with the Tribe to preserve the presence of native flora and fauna that are inherent to the traditions and lifestyles of the S'Klallam people.