

Shape Our Fremont

Community Character

Fremont's General Plan is the constitution of the City. It has twelve main parts called Elements. Each General Plan Element is supposed to be just as important as any other. Therefore, the Community Character Element should be taken just as seriously as, say, the Land Use Element or Housing Element. The Community Character Element was new to our General Plan as of the December 2011 revision. Let's take a look at its implementation over the last seven years of housing development.

Community Character Element

The Community Character Element's introduction says that it "focuses on the ways in which Fremont's buildings, streets, and open spaces work together to define the City's sense of place" and that it "strives for a more cohesive design vision for the City."

Community Character is not limited to neighborhood character, but it also looks at commercial, city government and open space areas throughout the city.

The Element says community character "is about design, aesthetics and place-making." However, many of the new townhouse developments all around Fremont have very similar exterior architecture and site layout. Many have narrow straight private streets with long rows of tall, multi-plex buildings with nothing but garage doors visible from the main street. Front doors face narrow walkways along rear fences.

Place Types

Part of the Community Character Element is the Place-Type Design Manual "which is meant to be a tool-kit for design solutions when reviewing development proposals in the City." It identifies different types of Centers: "City", "Town" (historical), "Neighborhood", and "Regional" (large-scale commercial). It also defines types of Corridors: "Urban", "Suburban", "Landscape", and "Main Street".

The design manual shows examples of what Fremont wants to see in its different centers and along its different corridors.

Center Example

The five Town Centers are the historic centers of the five original districts that formed Fremont. As a Place Type Center, they should be "pedestrian oriented and within easy walking distance to serve the surrounding neighborhoods." and consist of "traditional architecture and historic buildings".

Centerville Town Center is along Fremont Blvd. basically between Central Ave. and Thornton Ave.

The surrounding neighborhoods now consist of new townhouse developments which replaced businesses and housing some of which are from the early 1900's.

The proposed development of the entire east side of Fremont Blvd. between Parish St. and Peralta Blvd. would demolish many old commercial buildings and possibly demolish the Old Centerville Fire Station. The plans show a three-story frontage that is supposed to look like an old train station - but with a stone facade and not the yellow wood siding of our historic stations. The massing, scale and architecture of the streetscape seem out of character with the existing Town Center buildings across the street. Will the City approve this design?

Corridor Example

Landscape Corridors should be "characterized by landscaping, street trees, wide landscaped medians and large setbacks."

Stevenson Blvd. between Paseo Padre and Mission Blvd. is a Landscape Corridor. From the Fremont Main Library to the railroad tracks, the existing housing opposite Central Park is angled

away from the street and there are deep setbacks. However, between the railroad tracks and Mission Blvd., the new housing is right at the sidewalk and there are no landscaped medians.

Several other new residential developments on Landscape Corridors also have no setbacks.

Take a Look

As you go around Fremont, look at how Fremont is shaping up - about design, aesthetics and place-making. Is Fremont adhering to its Community Character Element?

Each Element of the General Plan is posted online in booklet format with an interesting, easy-to-read section with pictures, diagrams and maps at the beginning, and policy code at the end. Take a look:

<http://www.fremont.gov/398/General-Plan>