

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 25, 2021

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Cayla Cothron, Associate Planner, and Bryan Snodgrass, Principal Planner,
Community and Economic Development Department

RE: March 8 workshop review of the Evergreen and Grand component of the
Commercial Corridors Strategy

The March 8 workshop is intended to update the City Council on the status of the Evergreen and Grand commercial corridors planning process, and overall Commercial Corridors Strategy. It follows prior City Council workshops on this project on September 14, 2020, and on the related temporary development moratorium in fall 2019 and spring 2020. The Planning Commission also reviewed the project at workshops on June 9, 2020 and February 23, 2021.

Background

The larger Commercial Corridors Strategy was initiated in 2019 as a community planning process to enhance existing commercial corridors, increase walkability, ensure access to services and amenities, support job growth, and increase housing opportunities. This project envisioned development of policies and programs for three separate areas: the St. Johns/St. James couplet, Fourth Plain and Mill Plain Boulevards, and Evergreen and lower Grand Boulevards. Recommendations resulting from this process will address types of land uses and development that are allowed, the pedestrian environment, building orientation in relationship to the street, and parking and access. Non-regulatory tools and programs will be considered in addition to development standards, and corridor housing as well as commercial uses will be addressed. Project focus shifted to the [Evergreen and Grand study area](#) with the onset of the pandemic. Future work on the remaining study corridors will be integrated into the City's Comprehensive Plan update process. Work done on the Evergreen and Grand commercial corridors may allow for revisitation of the St. Johns/St. James couplet in its own planning process; however, timelines and resources are still uncertain.

The Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridor study area is focused on Grand Blvd. between Mill Plain and Evergreen Blvd., and on Evergreen Blvd. between V and Grove Streets as indicated in the [study area map](#). The area is an emerging small business district with smaller-scale buildings oriented to the street adjacent to established neighborhoods. There has been increasing development interest in the area in recent years, including the construction of two new multi-family buildings. The City Council adopted a six-month moratorium on new development along Evergreen and Grand

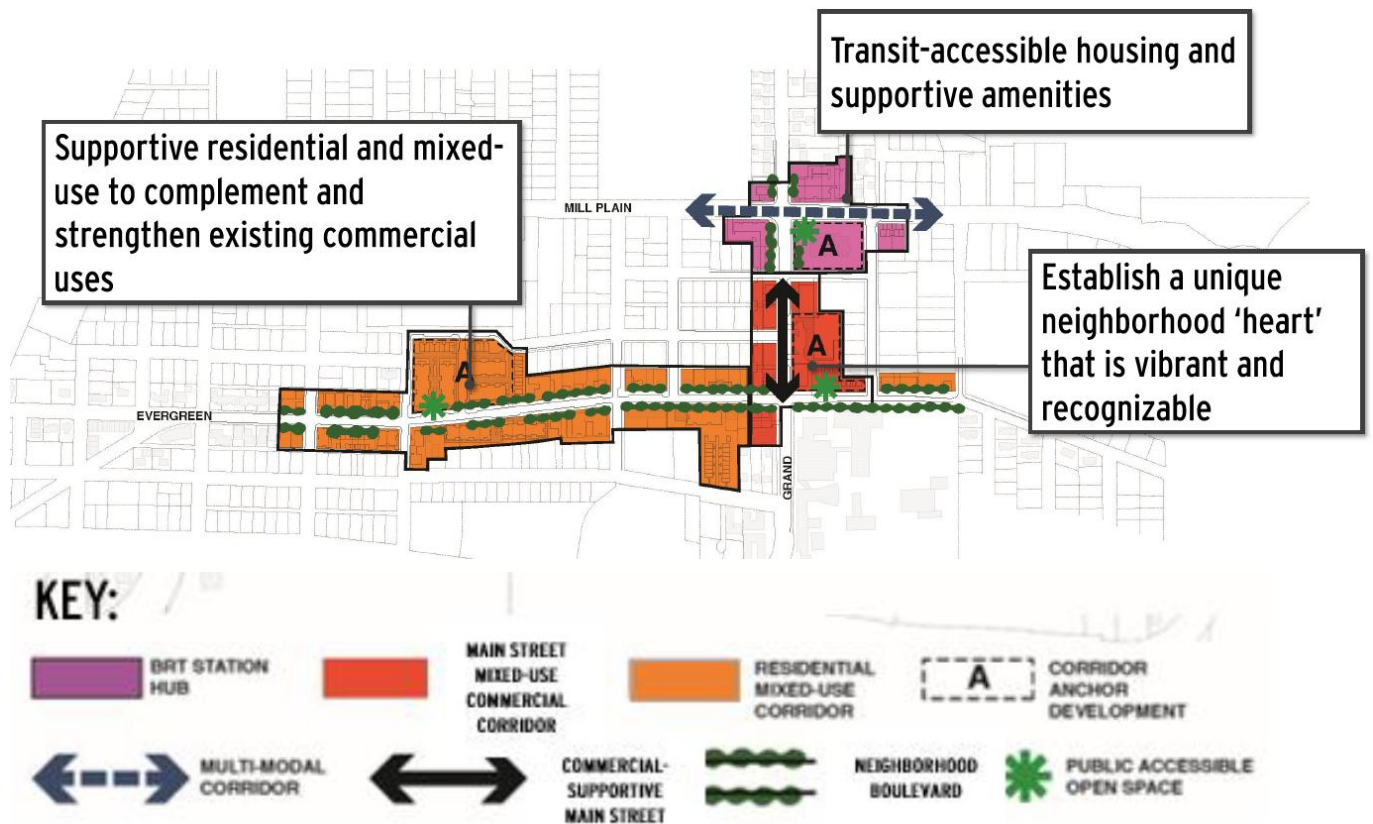
Boulevards in November 2019 but lifted it in May 2020 in recognition of local economic conditions associated with the pandemic, and directed staff to proceed with the planning work in this area.

The Evergreen and Grand corridors engagement process kicked-off in February 2020 with an in-person community open house and online survey to identify issues, opportunities, and community priorities for future development of the corridors. This input helped shape general long-term vision, goals and objectives, which were then refined by the community at live virtual open houses and an online survey in August 2020. Community input is described in more detail on page 7 of this memorandum.

Evergreen and Grand Corridor Vision Concepts and General Recommendations

Community feedback and data gathered from the August 2020 outreach was used to develop the corridor concepts and initial general recommendations described in this memorandum. The below corridor vision concepts are intended to be conceptual and establish a land use framework to achieve the long-term community vision and goals for future development of the corridors. They were shaped by a mix of best practices in planning and urban design, public input gathered throughout the process, and consideration of current and future real estate market conditions and the feasibility of different types of development

Corridor Vision Concepts



Three distinct and complementary land use areas are identified – a Commercial Mixed-Use Corridor, a Residential Mixed-Use Corridor, and a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Hub. Anchor development sites (A on the map) are also shown where either existing use enhancements or future redevelopment could catalyze positive change. A summary of each vision concept area is provided below:

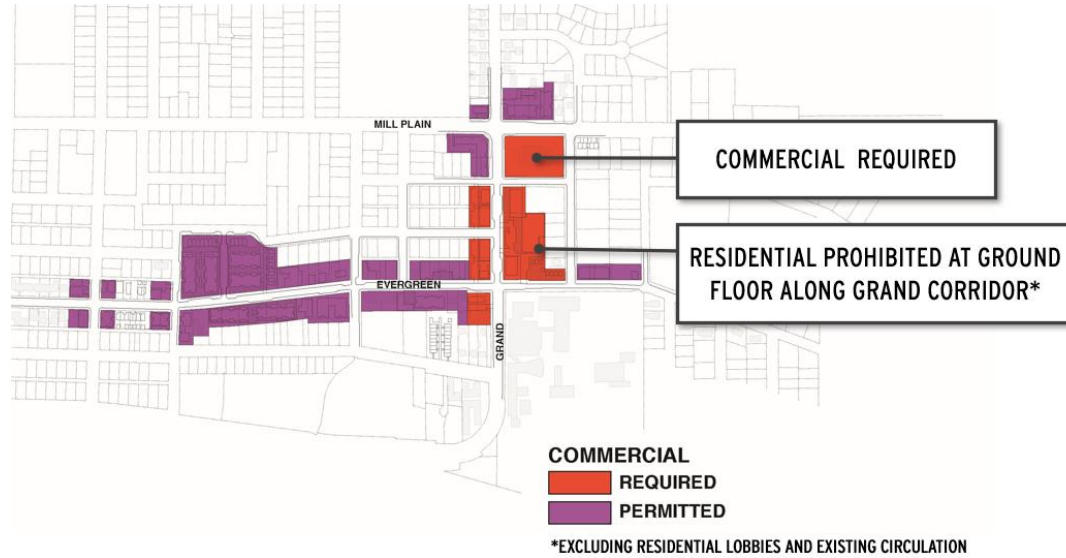
- The Commercial Mixed-use Corridor is located along Grand Boulevard at the crossroads of the corridors, extending from the intersection of Evergreen Boulevard north to Ninth Street. Land uses and infrastructure improvements should establish a unique neighborhood ‘heart’ that is vibrant and recognizable to create a compact commercial core for the District.
- The Residential Mixed-Use Corridor encompasses parcels along Evergreen Boulevard from the western edge of the study area to near Grand Boulevard. Envisioned is a greater emphasis on residential development that complements and strengthens existing neighborhood-scale commercial uses.
- The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Hub includes parcels at the intersection of Mill Plain Boulevard and Grand Boulevard. There is a planned Bus Rapid Transit station that will be built in this area, providing premium transit access to the City’s two largest employment hubs – downtown and the Columbia Tech Center. Envisioned are changes that address the needs of those who are transit-dependent and will benefit most from the future Mill Plain BRT.

Evergreen and Grand Corridor General Recommendations

To achieve the community vision and goals for the study area, initial recommendations for short-term zoning code changes have also been identified. These would likely be implemented through an overlay zone, and would bolster existing standards to better encourage site design which facilitates a vibrant neighborhood-serving commercial corridor, and recognize goals for the overall District and attributes of the individual areas. Mid- to long-term implementation recommendations for programs and tools will also be necessary to achieve the vision, and will be included in the full set of refined recommendations for the draft Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridors Strategy report.

General recommendations listed below include potential changes to commercial ground floor requirements, building height limitations, minimum off-street parking requirements, and requirements for building to achieve an ‘active edge’ at the ground floor.

Ground Floor Commercial Requirements



- In the Commercial Mixed-Use Corridor vision concept and anchor site at intersection of Grand and Mill Plain Boulevards, the recommendation is to continue to require commercial on the ground floor.
- Along Evergreen Boulevard and on smaller parcels in the BRT Hub, the recommendation is to allow some ground floor residential uses to provide flexibility outside of the commercial 'heart' of the study area and foster a mix of ground floor uses in these areas. Additional consideration is needed to mitigate against potential demolition of existing commercial structures given current market preferences for residential development and ensure that residential uses contribute positively to the character of the corridors.

Maximum Building Heights

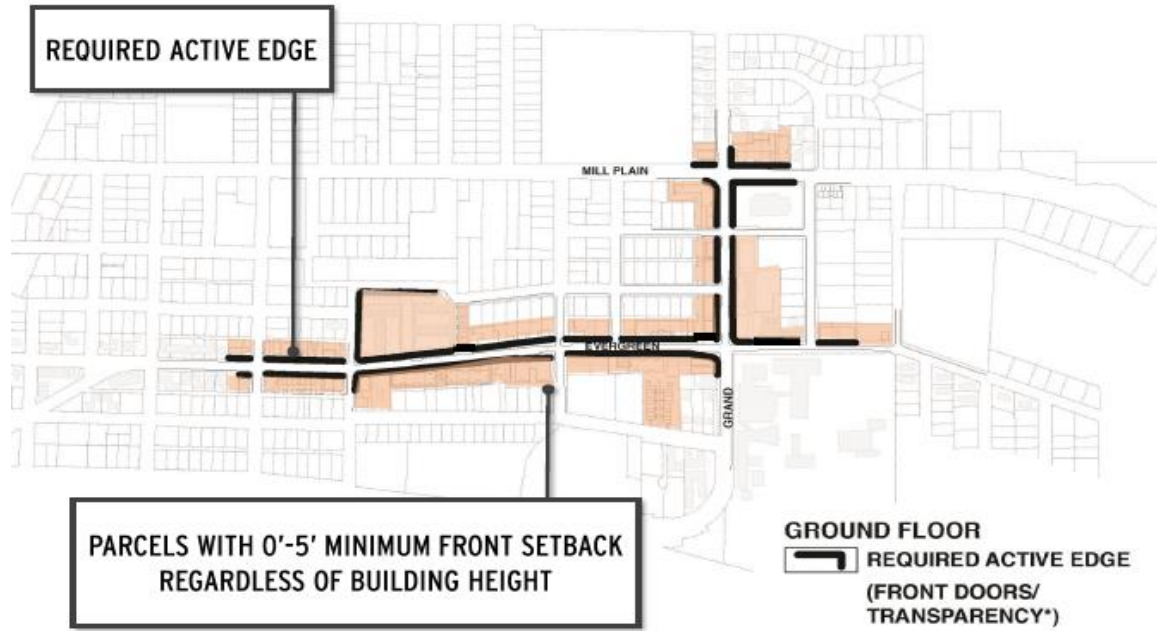


- Staff is proposing a maximum building height of 3 stories on smaller parcels throughout the study area, primarily located along Evergreen Boulevard. This scale is more restrictive than what is currently allowed under existing zoning, and is recommended to be responsive to community concerns, acknowledge local neighborhood character, and support viability of residential and commercial development.
- A 4-story maximum building height (consistent with existing zoning) is recommended along Grand Boulevard to encourage concentrating commercial in this area, as well as on larger parcels along Evergreen Boulevard, including the anchor site for the Residential Mixed-Use Corridor vision concept.
- To support higher-density transit-oriented development in proximity to the planned Mill Plain BRT, staff proposes maximum building heights of 4-5 stories in the BRT Hub.

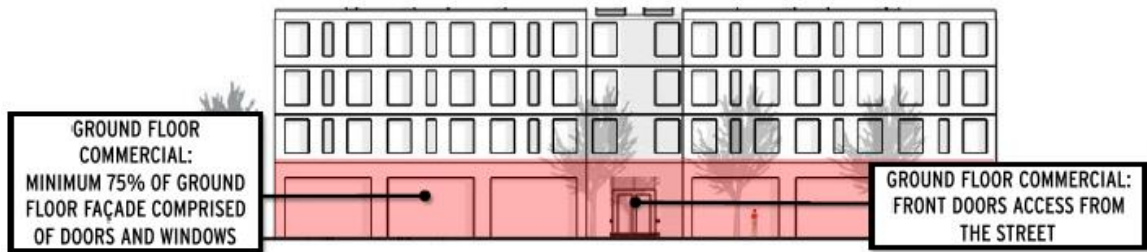
Parking

- A simplified minimum parking standard of at least one space per 1,000 square feet of floor area for commercial uses, and one space per dwelling unit for residential is recommended. This potential standard recognizes the mix of uses along the corridors, the existing bus service and planned Mill Plain BRT, and is similar to minimum requirements in downtown Vancouver. Developers can choose to provide more than the minimum, and often do, but for those with limited space, the proposed simplified standard could help reduce costs while still limiting spillover parking impacts to the neighborhood.

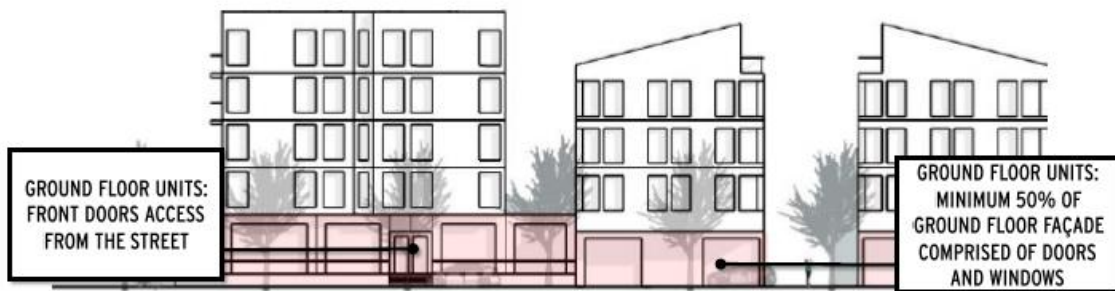
Active Edge Standards (Minimum Setback, Building Transparency, Front Door Access)



REQUIRED COMMERCIAL ACTIVE EDGE



REQUIRED RESIDENTIAL ACTIVE EDGE



- Staff is proposed a minimum front setbacks of 0-5 feet regardless of building height that would apply to the ground floor only of new development. Locating parking behind buildings and/or screening it from view would also be recommended.
- Requiring front door access to be from the street for both commercial and residential uses on the ground floor. Orienting front doors to the street supports street-oriented buildings rather than parking lot-oriented buildings, increases pedestrian activity, and reduces or eliminates visual impacts of surface parking. It also provides eyes on the street, often resulting in safer street environments.
- A higher minimum transparency requirement for commercial uses of around 75% of the ground floor façade is recommended to provide essential visibility of goods and services by pedestrians and those traveling along adjacent roadways. Visibility of indoor spaces also animates the street where there are restaurants, pubs, and other types of retail uses.
- For residential uses, a moderate minimum transparency requirement of around 50% is recommended to support “eyes on the street” and recognize that privacy is important as well.

Community Feedback

Community engagement for the study area began with a February 13, 2020 in-person open house and online survey where over 50 residents, property and business owners, and other stakeholders helped identify issues, opportunities, and community priorities. Key community concerns included improving walkability and pedestrian safety, new development being out of character with the surrounding area, and poor appearance and disrepair of the public realm and existing buildings. A desire for more local eating and drinking establishments, small-scale retail, and neighborhood-serving amenities was also expressed. More detail is available [here](#) and [here](#).

Community feedback and data gathered during the first stage of the process was used to develop a long-term community vision, as well as supportive goals and objectives for land use, mobility, parking, urban design, and economic development that were presented at virtual open houses on August 26 and 27, 2020, which were attended by a total of 15 persons. There was general agreement with the vision, goals, and objectives presented, available [here](#). There were specific concerns about existing buildings needing repair, excess traffic speeds on Grand Blvd, and public safety. Desires for multi-modal upgrades on Evergreen Blvd and traffic calming on Grand Blvd, community gathering spaces, and a local grocery and/or farmers market were also as expressed. A need for adequate parking for retail businesses and new residential development, and to maintain and build upon the existing character of the corridors was also cited. More direct connections to the corridors from surrounding areas/destinations and wayfinding were also called for.

The most recent February 4, 2021 virtual community open house was attended by 15 people, most of which appeared to support the corridor vision concepts and general regulatory recommendations (the recorded February 4 presentation given to facilitate public input is available [here](#)). For those unable to attend, there is an online survey available on the project [Be Heard page](#) through the end of February where community members can provide input. Specific feedback gathered to-date includes the following:

- Support for an improved streetscape with wider sidewalks, greenery, and trees, and more public amenities and community gathering spaces.

- Support for grants, funding assistance, and incentives to support existing and new small businesses, and a desire for local businesses rather than chains.
- Continue to accommodate and encourage ground floor commercial along Evergreen Boulevard.
- Desire for a local grocer in the BRT Hub.
- Maintain economic diversity and a variety of housing types.
- Concerns about building height taller than 3-4 stories resulting in corridor ‘canyoning’ particular along Evergreen Boulevard, and potential conflicts with Pearson Airport airspace.
- Ensure adequate parking for new development, and in particular multi-family, to mitigate neighborhood spillover.
- Maintain affordability and prevent gentrification and displacement along the corridors and in the surrounding area.
- Concern that higher-density development is out of scale, and the need to ensure new development complements existing neighborhood character.
- Need for right-of-way and streetscape improvements throughout the study area and along Grand Boulevard to support a walkable pedestrian environment as envisioned.

As part of this outreach, the project team also held individual meetings in January 2021 with key stakeholders along the corridors, including the property owner of the Crosley Lanes site, property owner of the International Air & Hospitality Academy site, property manager for the shopping mall site on Grand Boulevard, and a representative from the School for the Blind. Input received through these meetings is indicated below:

- Concerns about the feasibility of new commercial development and prohibiting certain land uses the corridors, such as drive-thrus.
- Concerns about maintaining the neighborhood character and promoting the appropriate style and intensity of development through this process.
- Desire for lower building heights at the intersection of Evergreen and Grand and encouraging non-mixed use housing stock.
- Ensure adequate parking for new development.
- Support for providing flexibility to the existing ground floor commercial requirement along Evergreen Boulevard.
- Ensure any right-of-way or streetscape recommendations promote accessibility for people of all abilities and an inclusive pedestrian environment.

More information about past outreach efforts, including community engagement summaries and the recorded presentations used to generate public feedback can be viewed on the [project website](#).

February 23 Planning Commission Workshop

Feedback from Planning Commissioners at the recent workshop was generally in support of the corridor vision concepts and general recommendations presented, with the below specifics:

- Support for building height recommendations in this area, and the need to ensure clear communication to the community and policy direction from decision-makers. A Commissioner also suggested looking at winter shadows for maximum building height recommendations.
- Support for focusing commercial development on Grand Boulevard, and allowing flexibility for diverse types of commercial and residential development on Evergreen Boulevard. A Commissioner expressed concern about requiring any ground floor commercial along Evergreen, and commented that the proposed active edge standards would still ensure streetfront activation. Other Commissioners echoed this concern, but acknowledged the desire to maintain the small, authentic, granular feel of the corridors and need for strategies to address this.
- Importance of signage along Grand Boulevard and the need for a signage program, as well as the benefit of design review for the overall study area.
- Potential city investments to consider to support future development, such as assistance to address potential environmental contamination on sites, or regional/corridor-wide stormwater control.
- Consider including a recommendation for a proactive neighborhood traffic monitoring program for this area to help mitigate for any future spillover parking into neighborhoods that might occur.
- Consider accommodating emerging trends in transportation, such as dedicated rideshare and autonomous vehicle drop-off zones and other micro-mobility strategies, when planning for how the roadway can support adjacent land uses.
- Comments about streetscape and roadway changes in this area being key to achieving the vision for the corridors, with a couple Commissioners noting that roadway changes on Grand Boulevard need to consider the possibility of cut-through traffic on side streets, and that sharrows instead of bike lanes on Evergreen could potentially help to reduce traffic speeds by encouraging a very activated street frontage.
- Question about staff capacity and resources at the City to implement mid- to long-term recommendations resulting from this process over time.

Next Steps

Based on feedback to-date and additional survey results being collected through the end of February, the project team will begin to develop the draft Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridors Strategy report. This will include the full set of refined recommendations for future actions, including adoption of regulatory standards. Workshops and hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council will be scheduled once the Strategy report is drafted in spring or summer 2021. Specific code language and other short-term implementation measures will be drafted in fall 2021 or later following adoption of the Strategy report, and will involve further Commission and Council review.

The adoption of the Strategy report would constitute a text change to the Comprehensive Plan, and the adoption of implementing standards would constitute a text change to the zoning code. Both would be subject to the VMC 20.285.070 approval criteria of demonstrating consistency with the balance of applicable policies of the Comprehensive Plan and Strategic Plans, and the public interest.

For more information, please consult the [project website](#), or contact Cayla Cothron cayla.cothron@cityofvancouver.us/(360) 487-7899, or Bryan Snodgrass bryan.snodgrass@cityofvancouver.us/(360) 487-7946).