

Week 5 of Edmonds' Comprehensive Plan Visioning Process

Cultural Arts & Urban Design

By Susan McLaughlin, Edmonds Development Services Director

What makes a city great? I speculate that it is all about surprise and delight. It requires multi-sensory experiences, inspiring art, and unifying design. Great cities go beyond iconic architecture and centers of industry. I can tell you that the zoning code alone will not foster greatness, nor will purely market-based factors.

The question of what makes a city great becomes more challenging when realizing what worked in the past for legacy cities may not be the solution for the future. Cities have changed not only in the way that people access work, due to the pandemic, but also in the way consumers shop. Retail is changing. Forbes reported that “Millennials prefer to spend their money on experiences, not stuff.” Cities of the past relied heavily on the physical market place and the trade of commodities to draw people into central places. Today’s dispersion of goods, services, and employment areas makes it difficult to guarantee there will be a critical mass of people in any given area.

How can cities reinvent commercial cores and neighborhood districts to foster experiences that people are looking for?

The interface between public and private space is the simple definition of urban design. Urban design contemplates how buildings and public space are curated to create an environment that makes people want to linger instead of simply moving through. If we know that the city of the future is going to rely heavily on experiences instead of traditional, commercial transactions, then it will be important to focus on how we leverage our creative industries and offer deeper, more meaningful places that bolster our sense of belonging. After all, without a sense of belonging, we lack community, and if we lack community, we lack resilience.

I lived and worked in Christchurch, New Zealand when the 2011 earthquake destroyed 70 percent the buildings in the central city. It was important for the community to realize that the soul of the city was not in the built form, nor was it in the shared assets that framed the city – the river, the streets, the plazas – but it was in the community spirit that came together to shape a new Christchurch.

The new Christchurch embraced a layered yet legible city that did not lose its past but celebrated it. Art and creativity sustained life in vacant spaces as the city rebuilt, and that cultural reckoning became the foundation of the new central core.



Photo Reference: Traveller.com.au

A beautiful example of how this creativity was realized early was the project called ReStart, which was a temporary mall built from shipping containers within months of the earthquakes to support the central city businesses. Would this have been possible in the pre-earthquake planning framework? How do we enable this level of creative thinking and allow for adaptive cultural expression in our urban and neighborhood districts?

The City of Edmonds adopted a Community Cultural Plan in 2014 which includes the following vision statement:

“Artistic and cultural experiences are integrated into everyday life, working and visiting in Edmonds.”

Given the trends, this vision remains very relevant. Spreading the cultural arts and urban design efforts across the city will be critically important in the next 20 years to support everyday life for residents, workers and visitors across our city.

What are your thoughts about art, culture, and urban design as we plan for Edmonds’ future?

Over the next two weeks, we will be focusing on key topics that touch upon various aspects of the Plan. Here is the line-up:

- Culture: Sept 5-11
- Livability and Land Use: Sept 12-18

Next week we begin the community conversation with a focus on Edmonds’ Culture.

Please take our mini-survey on Edmonds' culture (available at <https://bit.ly/culture2024>, or by scanning the QR code below) and visit us over the next week at the following events to share your perspective:



Friends & Fries with Susan, Development Services Director | 5:00-6:00 pm on Wednesday, September 7th | Dick's Drive-in at 21910 Highway 99 | Join us for a burger and casual chat about what Edmonds means to you. **Free burgers for the first 50 people in attendance.**

Edmonds Summer Market | Saturday, September 10th | 5th Ave N & Main St. | Stop by our table at the market to discuss your thoughts on the future of Edmonds.

Panel Discussion: Arts Culture in Edmonds | 10:30 am-noon on Saturday, September 10th | Edmonds Center for the Arts lobby | 410 4th Ave N | The event will feature members from the community for a discussion on Edmonds' arts and culture scene. Space is limited. Please RSVP via email everyonesedmonds@edmondswa.gov to secure a spot. Event is available for livestream at <https://bit.ly/CulturePanel> and will be published on the project webpage for later viewing.

Keep an eye out for more event announcements later next week as we move onto the themed community conversation on Livability and Land Use the week of September 12th.

As a reminder, the survey on this week's theme, Environment, is still open and available through this Saturday, September 3, at <https://bit.ly/environment2024> or by scanning this QR code:

