

## Flexible Street Design Standards

### What is it?

Flexible street design standards are intended to tailor streets to the scale of the neighborhood and types of traffic they serve. These flexible standards typically allow narrower street widths and incorporate other design elements (such as streetside parking, bicycle lanes or raised pedestrian crossings) intended to slow traffic and increase the pedestrian-friendliness of the roadways. They contrast sharply with conventional street design standards that tend to emphasize maximizing the speed and efficiency of automobile travel, frequently at the expense of pedestrian safety and the peace and quiet of bordering neighborhoods.

### How to do it

1. **Involve stakeholders.** Identify stakeholders likely to be affected by the new street design standards and representing various points of view in the community. Stakeholders may include:
  - local government representatives
  - neighborhood organizations
  - property owners
  - realtors
  - home builders and commercial developers
  - bankers

Make sure that both traffic planners and traffic engineers are included in all discussions about changing street design standards.

2. **Review current street design standards.** Prepare an overview of your current street design standards by drawing sketches of the "build-out" streets that would result from your current regulations.
3. **Evaluate the appropriateness of the build-out streets for different types of neighborhoods.** Work with the stakeholder group to compare your build-out streets to national standards for flexible street design. A good resource is "Street Design Guidelines for Healthy Neighborhoods" by Dan Burden, published by the Local Government Commission's Center for Livable Communities (<http://www.lgc.org/center/index.html>). Consider traffic handling capacity, average speeds likely to result, pedestrian-friendliness, and appropriateness for use by bicycles or other non-automotive means of transportation.
4. **Identify new design standards.** Based on the above review of current standards, work with the stakeholder group to determine where your street design standards should be changed. New street design standards should vary by type of street and neighborhood. Typical flexible design standards include:

- *Narrower street standards.* Determine the narrowest street width that still allows for safe passage of emergency vehicles and accommodates the typical traffic volume for the particular street type. Adjust required street widths accordingly. Many communities discover that streets can be designed much narrower than allowed under current regulations.
- *Pedestrian and bicycle design requirements.* Add requirements for bicycle and/or pedestrian passageways along the roadway. This will effectively narrow the street, while also accommodating shared use for alternative modes of transportation. This can be a low cost alternative for retrofitting existing streets (built under the old street design standards), since the new bicycle/pedestrian lanes can typically be added simply by remarking the street.
- *Adding on-street parking* (refer to GQGP quality growth tool: Creating More On-Street Parking). Add requirements for parallel or angle parking along particular roadways. This will effectively narrow the street while adding on-street parking in areas where additional parking is needed. This is another low cost alternative for retrofitting existing streets, since new parking could be added simply by remarking the street.

Consult with your traffic planners or traffic engineers to verify that proposed changes to street design standards do not conflict with any Federal or State DOT specifications.

5. **Adopt new design standards.** Identify all amendments to your existing development regulations that are necessary to implement the stakeholders' recommended street design standards. Present these amendments to local elected officials for official adoption. Abide by all applicable notice and public meeting requirements.
6. **Publicize your new street design standards** within the development and real estate community.

### **Things to consider before using this tool**

- Changes in street design standards are likely to be welcomed by pedestrian and bicycle travelers. However, automobile commuters may object to the new standards since they won't be able to drive as fast on the resulting narrower roadways.
- Ensure that your new street design standards do not impede access by emergency vehicles, such as ambulances and fire trucks. This has always been a major rationale for wider streets. One option for addressing this issue is to gradually replace your local emergency vehicle fleet with smaller vehicles.
- Evaluate all applicable local regulations and programs and adjust these as necessary to work in concert with the revised street standards. Also

communicate with neighboring local governments whose roads join those in your community. You'll want to avoid conflicts in adjoining street patterns.

## Additional Information on Reducing Barriers to Quality Growth

### Background

- Could the interesting older neighborhoods or districts in your community have been built under your current development regulations?
- Do developers in your community complain about unnecessary regulatory barriers and hurdles when attempting to implement alternative types of development projects?
- Does your community desire, but has yet to attract, "new urbanism" style development like mixed-use projects, walkable commercial centers, and traditional neighborhood developments?
- Is the new development in your community less attractive than what was built a few generations ago?

If your community is like the typical Georgia city or county, outdated or inflexible local land use regulations may inadvertently be preventing high quality, innovative new development projects from locating in your area. There are good reasons why this situation is not desirable:

- **Loss of community character.** Chances are good that your local development regulations do not permit (or encourage) traditional development patterns of your community to be emulated in new developments. The traditional charm of your community - the type of place where people walked to work, met their neighbors at the corner drugstore, or bicycled to the nearest park - will continue to disappear as each new development project is approved.
- **Excessive land consumption.** Typical land use regulations specify minimum lot sizes, street width and parking requirements that inadvertently put more distance between neighbors and cause excessive amounts of land to be paved over for automobiles. These spread-out development patterns, commonly referred to as "urban sprawl," tend to be more expensive for your local government to serve with public facilities such as water and sewer lines. Large lot sizes also prevent developers from providing affordable, higher-density housing options in your community and can also increase the purchase prices of homes.
- **Changing development markets.** Populations are changing as citizens live longer, as single parent households increase, as fewer married couples have children, and as more people live alone. These changes are fueling a demand for a greater range of choices in where people live and locate businesses. More people these days want to live and work in traditional style neighborhoods or commercial centers. If your local development codes limit

the range of development options in your community, developers will not be able to respond effectively to these market changes.