



6/6/2014

VIA EMAIL

Christopher Jordan, AICP, Planning Manager
City of Elk Grove
Development Services, Planning
8401 Laguna Palms Way
Elk Grove, CA 95758

RE: Meridian Special Planning Area

Dear Mr. Jordan:

WALKSacramento has reviewed the Meridian Special Planning Area March 2014 Public Draft and appreciate the opportunity to make the following comments.

Development projects that lead to more walking and active travel are critical to our community's future. Human beings need moderate exercise, such as walking, for about 30 minutes a day in order to prevent the development of chronic disease and overweight. Only 38% of the population in the Sacramento region is active at this minimal level, often due to limitations placed by a built environment not suited to walking and other types of physically active travel. A 30-minute walk is about one and a half miles. If more people could obtain regular exercise by walking and bicycling to their regular destinations, in lieu of driving, it could yield significant health improvements to the resident population of this area. Reduced driving would also decrease vehicle emissions and the prevalence of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and other air pollution-related conditions. More trips by walking and bicycling could help reduce the current expensive burden on the health care system of providing medical care to more and more people with chronic conditions due to inactivity and poor air quality.

Pedestrian Supportive Standards and Guidelines

The Meridian Special Planning Area development standards and guidelines will promote walking and active travel in Elk Grove's Southeast Policy Area as it builds out. Standards and guidelines in the SPA that will promote more walking and active transportation include the following. (Page numbers are included within parentheses.)

- Detached sidewalks on arterial (4-8), arterial with transit corridor (4-10), collector commercial (4-12), collector residential (4-14), and primary residential (4-16)

Pedestrians are safer and feel more comfortable walking on sidewalks that are separated from the traffic flow. The vertical curb (on all except for primary residential) and the landscape area between the street and sidewalk provide physical separation and trees provide a physical barrier.

- Porch frontage (4-78), stoop frontage (4-80) and forward patio (4-82)

These residential building frontages promote personal interaction within the community and increase “eyes on the street”. Many people are more inclined to walk when they know they may see their neighbors and are not isolated on the street.

- Pedestrian amenities at key locations on greenways (4-86) and major drainage channels (4-89)

Including pedestrian amenities, such as benches, encourages more use by pedestrians. Benches provide opportunities for personal interaction or a place to rest while on a walk trip.

- Homes along greenways shall be sited to promote “eyes on activities” (5-22)

Designing and siting homes so that active-use rooms, such as kitchens and family rooms, face public space will provide “eyes on public space” and increase the personal safety of people in the public space. Providing greenways “eyes on activities” can reduce criminal activities in such areas and encourage greater use by residents.

- Use structural soil (5-36)

Trees are an important feature of a pleasant pedestrian environment. Structural soils helps trees planted along roadways and near buildings attain their typical canopy size, providing more shade for pedestrians.

Recommend Revisions

Revising a few standards and guidelines could enhance pedestrian safety and access. WALKSacramento makes the following observations and recommendations.

- Kammerer Road Class I/Sidewalk (4-6)

The 10-foot wide paved Class I path can be used as multi-use path if it's not used as a primary route bike path. If a high percentage of cyclists are expected, then 2-foot wide decomposed granite shoulders on each side should be included. If high numbers of both pedestrians and bicyclists are expected, then the paved path width should be increased to 12 feet to provide a safe pedestrian and bicyclist areas.

- Commercial Main Street sidewalk width when adjacent to parking (4-13)

The SPA requires sidewalks on Commercial Main Streets to be a minimum of 12 feet wide to facilitate greater pedestrian activity, but they may be reduced to 5 feet when adjacent to parking areas. On-street parking is not likely to reduce the number of pedestrians by almost 60%. If that is the case, the commercial corridor may not be as successful as it could be. Sidewalks should be at least 10 feet wide on Commercial Main Streets.

- Local Residential Street (4-18)

The local residential street, with a width of 32 feet and attached sidewalks, is eight feet narrower than the primary residential street. This means vehicles will be about four feet closer to the sidewalk, which will reduce the comfort level for pedestrians. The rolled curb with attached 5' sidewalk will encourage parking on the sidewalk, which will reduce the pedestrian space. The local residential street should be required to have vertical curbs or

detached sidewalks to improve the safety and comfort of pedestrians in residential neighborhoods.

- Shoulders on greenways (4-86), major drainage canals (4-89) and detention basins (4-90)

To provide for all-weather use by pedestrians and to accommodate travel by pedestrians of all abilities, the 2-foot wide shoulders on each side of the paths should be decomposed granite.

- Bollards at trail heads, e.g. photo lower left (4-87)

Avoid using bollards at trail heads as they are a hazard to both pedestrians and bicyclists.

- Neighborhood walls (4-108)

The text seems to indicate that masonry walls are required along arterials because of noise impacts. Traffic noise may not exceed the maximum allowable level for outdoor activity areas if homes face the arterial, there is a sufficiently large distance between the street and the rear yard on homes backing up to the street, or if the traffic speed is low enough. We recommend revising the SPA text to indicate that masonry walls are required only if needed to comply with the maximum noise levels as stated in the General Plan Noise Element.

- Cul-de-sacs (5-3)

Cul-de-sacs can have significant impacts on pedestrian access by reducing connectivity and increasing travel distances. Requiring pedestrian connections through cul-de-sacs to neighboring developments and greenways will improve pedestrian connectivity, but the street network should be designed such that connections from cul-de-sacs to nearby streets or other cul-de-sacs are feasible.

WALKSacramento is working to support increased physical activity such as walking and bicycling in local neighborhoods as well as helping to create community environments that support walking and bicycling. The benefits include improved physical fitness, less motor vehicle traffic congestion, better air quality, and a stronger sense of cohesion and safety in local neighborhoods.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and recommendations. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact me at (916) 446-9255 or cholm@walksacramento.org.

Sincerely,

Chris Holm
Project Analyst