

Sultan 2044 Comprehensive Plan Update  
**Existing Conditions Report**

1

# community design



# Community Design

## 1.1 Overview

Community design is the process through which a city forms its unique identity and sense of place. It focuses on the form and character of the built environment, including public spaces, buildings, and streetscapes, and how these features influence what people see and experience as they move through the city. Ultimately, the community design element aims to provide clear and creative guidance to enhance Sultan's small-town character while acknowledging the reality of continued growth and development in the area.

Community design, while a distinct component within the comprehensive plan, is also interwoven throughout all the other elements—it's most closely linked to land use, housing, environment, and transportation. It influences urban form, circulation patterns, and the relationship between development and natural areas. This existing conditions chapter inventories the streetscapes, open space, and buildings that make Sultan unique.

## 1.2 Key Findings

- **Sultan's character stems from its physical, natural, and social assets** - Smaller building scales, historic architecture, pedestrian-friendly streets, locally-owned businesses, public spaces, natural beauty, and a strong sense of community are all characteristics that make Sultan unique.
- **Elements like walkability, local traditions, and community engagement contribute to Sultan's "small town character"** - The city's older neighborhoods show signs of walkability, but newer subdivisions along Sultan Basin Road lack this type of connectivity.
- **Limited pedestrian and bicycle amenities exist** - Main Street lacks dedicated bicycle infrastructure and experiences limited public seating, and other pedestrian amenities. US-2 also acts as a bottleneck for non-motorized users with commercial development facing the highway, leading to safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists.
- **Residential patterns vary across the city** - Older, gridded streets exist near downtown while newer suburban subdivisions tend to be closed loops. The architectural styles of single-family homes are wide-ranging and there is a distinct lack of multi-family housing options.
- **Sultan boasts over 150 acres of public parks, but other spaces dedicated to community gathering are limited** - What does exist is in or near downtown Sultan, and poses challenges for serving new developments along Sultan Basin Road.
- **Commercial building types fluctuate** - Strip-style development and industrial buildings exist along US-2 and a mix of old and new historic retail structures line Main Street.

## 1.3 Regulatory Context and Planning Framework

### WASHINGTON STATE GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT

WAC 365-196-445.3.c lists “design” as an optional element that may be included within a jurisdiction’s comprehensive plan, along with other relevant topics such as subarea plans, environmental protection, and historic preservation.

### VISION 2050

Included here are the most relevant and helpful regional planning policies that might guide the development of the Community Design element moving forward:

- MPP-En-5** Locate development in a manner that minimizes impacts to natural features. Promote the use of innovative environmentally sensitive development practices, including design, materials, construction, and on-going maintenance.
- MPP-En-9** Enhance urban tree canopy to support community resilience, mitigate urban heat, manage stormwater, conserve energy, improve mental and physical health, and strengthen economic prosperity.
- MPP-En-15** Provide parks, trails, and open space within walking distance of urban residents. Prioritize historically underserved communities for open space improvements and investments.
- MPP-DP-1** Develop high-quality, compact urban communities throughout the region’s urban growth area that impart a sense of place, preserve local character, provide for mixed uses and choices in housing types, and encourage walking, bicycling, and transit use.
- MPP-DP-3** Enhance existing neighborhoods to provide a high degree of connectivity in the street network to accommodate walking, bicycling, and transit use, and sufficient public spaces.
- MPP-DP-5** Identify, protect, and enhance those elements and characteristics that give the central Puget Sound region its identity, especially the natural visual resources and positive urban form elements.
- MPP-DP-6** Preserve significant regional historic, visual, and cultural resources, including public views, landmarks, archaeological sites, historic and cultural landscapes, and areas of special character.
- MPP-DP-9** Support urban design, historic preservation, and arts to enhance quality of life, support local culture, improve the natural and human-made environments, promote health and well-being, contribute to a prosperous economy, and increase the region’s resiliency in adapting to changes or adverse events.

- MPP-DP-10** Design public buildings and spaces that contribute to a sense of community and a sense of place.
- MPP-DP-13** Allow natural boundaries to help determine the routes and placement of infrastructure connections and improvements.
- MPP-DP-19** Develop and implement design guidelines to encourage construction of healthy buildings and facilities to promote healthy people.
- MPP-H-2** Provide a range of housing types and choices to meet the housing needs of all income levels and demographic groups within the region.
- MPP-EC-7** Foster a supportive environment for business startups, small businesses, locally owned and women- and minority-owned businesses to help them continue to prosper.
- MPP-T-4** Improve the safety of the transportation system and, in the long term, achieve the state’s goal of zero deaths and serious injuries.
- MPP-T-16** Improve local street patterns – including their design and how they are used – for walking, bicycling, and transit use to enhance communities, connectivity, and physical activity

## **SNOHOMISH COUNTY POLICIES**

### Development Pattern Policies:

- DP-13** The County and cities should integrate the desirable qualities of existing residential neighborhoods when planning for urban centers and mixed-use developments. Jurisdictions should adopt design guidelines and standards for urban centers to provide for compact, efficient site design that integrates building design with multimodal transportation facilities and publicly accessible open spaces.
- DP-16** Jurisdictions should encourage the use of innovative development standards, design guidelines, regulatory incentives, and applicable low impact development measures to provide compact, high quality communities.
- DP-34** Jurisdictions should design public buildings and spaces, transportation facilities, and infrastructure so they contribute to livability, a desirable sense of place and community identity.
- DP-36** Jurisdictions should develop high quality, compact urban communities that impart a sense of place, preserve local character, provide for mixed uses and choices in housing types, and encourage walking, bicycling, and transit use.
- DP-38** The County and cities should reduce disparities in access to opportunity for all residents through inclusive community planning and making investments that meet the needs of current and future residents and businesses.

## LOCAL PLANNING VISION

Sultan's existing comprehensive plan includes a Vision, adopted in 2004, that represents the community's collective aspirations for Sultan's future. Key points of that vision which are relevant to community design include the following:

- Maintain the city's small town character
- Emphasize the recreation opportunities outside the immediate community and within the city
- Improve the visual image (buildings, landscape, and streetscape)
- Diversify services so the shopping needs of Sultan residents can be met within the city
- Encourage small business
- Maintain the single-family character while recognizing the need to provide housing for all income ranges

Below are some of the planning directives from the current comprehensive plan that are most relevant to community design:

### 2.3.1 Downtown's future

- **Encourage new residential development.** Downtown's retail viability is a function of demand. By locating more of Sultan's residents within easy reach of downtown, the retail storefronts will have a larger demand base upon which they can rely.
- **Consider building design and placement along US 2** to improve the community's image and open up access to the Main Street commercial district. Development along the edge of US 2 can be considered a gateway to both the community of Sultan and to the central business district that lies behind it. Much of the existing development along the highway screens Main Street from the highway, ignoring the opportunity to have the two areas work cooperatively. Likewise, some of the construction on Main Street turns its back to the highway.
- **Revise zoning and development standards** to both encourage investment in the downtown and to respect the likelihood of flooding there.

### 2.3.2 Outdoors access

- **Land-use strategies that discourage sprawl.** This and other policies urge Sultan to weigh expansion judiciously, favoring development onto lands capable and suitable for development – with the additional benefits of reducing automotive traffic and ensuring the vitality of its existing urban fabric.
- Support for the **conservation and preservation of critical areas.**
- Support for work protecting the **presence, function, and overall appearance of working farms** near Sultan, coordinating closely with Snohomish County to help keep agriculture viable in the Skykomish River Valley.

- **Integrating open space into development projects.** Sultan’s growth will cause development to reach into sensitive environmental territory, providing the opportunity to incorporate those sensitive environmental elements into project design. Inclusion of these open spaces and the preservation of their functions and values will reinforce the community’s commitment to the health and respect of its natural surroundings.

### 2.3.3 Employment

- **Expanding local business opportunity,** by collaborating with local businesses to adopt policies and suggest legislation to improve Sultan’s business environment.
- **Integrating the natural landscape** into the manufacturing context, using it as an amenity to make these districts more attractive and as a buffer to separate residential areas from the noise and bustle of manufacturing and industrial uses.

### 2.3.5 Neighborhoods

- Ensuring that **new neighborhoods and infill projects are compatible** with the overall scale, architectural, transportation and public-space characteristics of Sultan’s neighborhoods.
- Working to establish “**transition zones**” **between the highway frontage** near Rice Road and the tracts of land to the north, using this area to introduce higher-intensity housing within an easy walk of the commercial land uses likely to develop along the highway.
- **Encouraging mixed-use and or civic activity centers** where suitable. Traditional neighborhood patterns follow the logical, practical needs of residents within a convenient walking distance, usually measured as no more than five minutes from any given point. This pattern is rooted in Sultan’s downtown, but there is room for more as the community considers how to accommodate its forecast population within the context of environmental constraints.

## LOCAL DESIGN REGULATIONS

The City of Sultan has various standards that dictate the design of streets, buildings, and public spaces. These regulations typically occur in Title 16 Zoning of the Sultan Municipal Code (SMC). Other relevant standards for streets and signs exist in Title 12 Streets, Sidewalks, and Public Places and Title 22 Sign Regulations.

- Ordinance No. 1260-17: Sultan adopts Snohomish County’s Engineering Design Standards (EDDS).
- SMC 12.40 Complete Streets Policy
- SMC 16.12 Density
- SMC 16.20 Design Standards and Specifications
- SMC 16.26 Nonconformances

- SMC 16.32 Design Standards for the Urban Center and High Density Residential Zones
- SMC 16.34 Design Standards for Infill Development
- SMC 16.54-A Off-street parking Requirements
- SMC 16.58 Landscaping Standards
- SMC 16.62 Recreation and Open Space Standards
- SMC 22.06 Sign Standards

## **STRATEGIC PLAN AND VISION 2021**

Created through a collaboration with the University of Washington, this plan outlines an overall strategy to revitalize Sultan’s downtown, with the use of community input. The following goals from that plan also contribute to community design:

### **Create a sense of place on Main Street**

- Develop and adopt downtown Design Guidelines
- Implement a façade improvement program
- Build bike paths and increase walkability, prioritize alternative route from Sultan Basin
- Create an illumination plan

### **Invest now for the long-term**

- Prioritize flooding solutions
- Explore tax increment financing
- Revise city code to a “form-based” code
- Purchase property for future development

## **STOREFRONT STUDIO**

Another collaboration with the University of Washington, the Storefront Studio, focused on improvements to existing parks and storefronts in the Downtown area. Part of those improvements included design strategies for mitigating floods and other natural hazards exacerbated by climate change, including:

- Permeable pavement
- Natural shading improvements
- Rain gardens / Bio-retention areas
- Public space drainage basins / sunken courts

Additionally, the following “enhancement strategies” were proposed as ideas for improving Sultan’s existing community assets:

- **Living Nature:** Sultan sits at the confluence of two rivers surrounded by lush forests and alpine mountains. By bringing more nature to Main Street, Sultan can reinforce its status as a town perfectly nestled among the natural wonders of the Pacific Northwest.
- **Supporting Community:** Sultan hosts community events such as the weekly Farmers’ Market which brings people together on Main Street. Building pedestrian focused streets and new amenities that serve people of all ages, abilities, and interests will continue to foster community.
- **Hosting Visitors:** Sultan’s yearly Shindig brings hundreds of visitors to Main Street for a summer celebration. Developing a wayfinding strategy will help visitors find their way around the city. Hosting impermanent/movable events is a great way to utilize undeveloped parcels for visitor attractions.

## HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2022

The following key findings come out of Sultan’s recent Housing Needs. Addressing each of them would in turn create impacts on community design:

- Sultan will need to increase its average rate of production of 23.4 units per year between 2010 and 2019 to around 54 units annually to meet its 2044 growth target.
- Accounting for the income distribution within the county, there is not enough housing for extremely low-income and moderate income and above households based on what they can afford (not be cost-burdened).
- For all existing gaps, an effort should be made to preserve the housing that is currently available at those price points.
- By comparing the household sizes and number of bedrooms provided in units in Sultan, there do not appear to be enough smaller units, which could provide sufficiently sized, more affordable housing options for smaller households.
- Most of Sultan’s housing stock is single family, the majority of which is three bedrooms.
- Most of Sultan’s households are one or two people.



## 1.4 History

Sultan’s unique design characteristics are rooted in the rivers, forests, and plateaus that have shaped the historic development of the city. The confluence of the Skykomish and Sultan rivers was for generations the site of a village of the Skykomish tribe. The discovery of gold in the late 1800’s by non-natives brought American settlers to the area, who within a few decades established several small industries and railroads along the Sultan River.

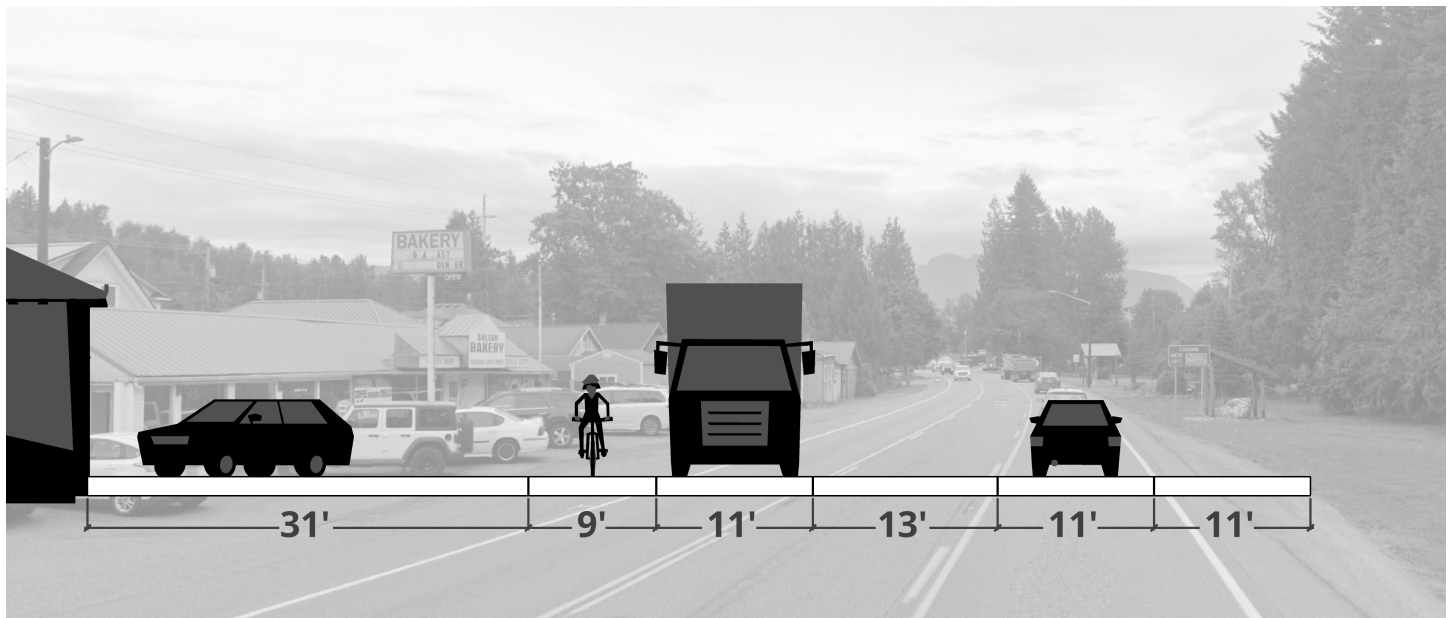
Early population growth and development primarily occurred within this original settlement, bounded by the Skykomish River to the south, the Sultan River to the west, and steep hills to the east. These flat lowlands provided unimpeded construction opportunities and proximity to Sultan’s downtown and easy river access. However, this came at the cost of major flood risk, which became a reality several times over for the city.

Topographic challenges persist, and new residential development today occurs primarily along Sultan Basin Road, northeast of the historic central city on an elevated plateau. There is no direct connection from this area to the downtown and rest of Sultan, isolating these developments from the commercial core of the city.

## 1.5 Existing Design Context

### STREETSCAPES

Figure 1 Typical section of US-2 as it passes through downtown Sultan.



Google, 2023

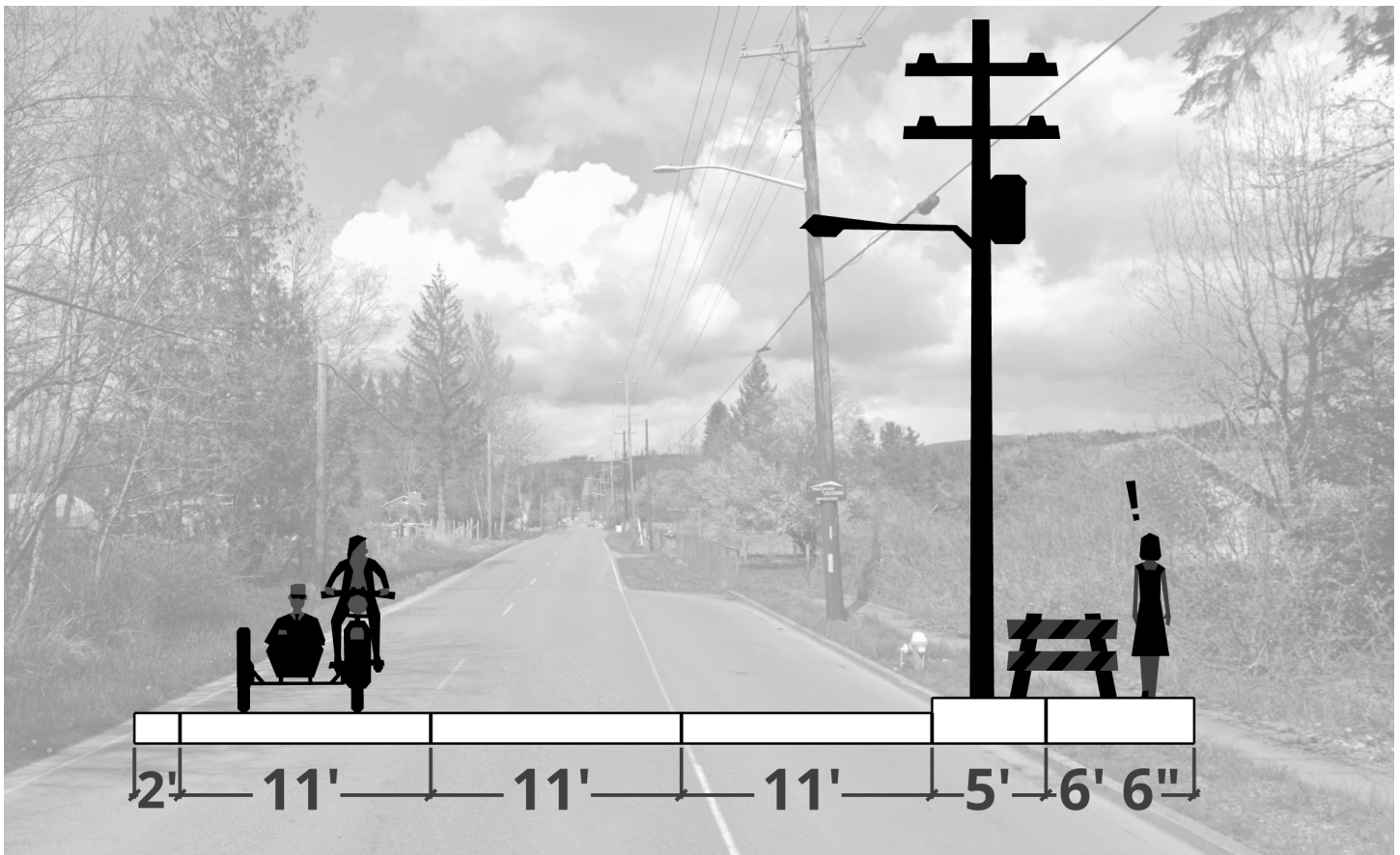
## Highway/Arterial

U.S. Highway 2 is the primary connection between Sultan and the surrounding communities, providing access to the greater region for residents and a vital cross-state route for travelers. US-2 is also the only east-west connection across the city, and has one primary travel lane moving either direction and a central turn lane running most of the western part of the city. It acts as both a lifeline and a bottleneck, depending on the volume of out-of-town traffic passing through Sultan.

While historically businesses in Sultan were oriented towards Main Street, the creation of US-2 and its subsequent travel boom has resulted in newer commercial development facing the highway instead. This has primarily taken the form of strip-style developments (e.g. Sultan Plaza) and long single-story buildings (e.g. Sultan Bakery). Gas stations and drive-up stands also dot the highway, catering to travelers passing through.

Parking lots for many of these businesses are little more than expanded shoulders for the highway, running directly parallel to US-2, without physical barriers, giving vehicles unhindered access off the highway. Pedestrians and cyclists who have little infrastructure of their own are then placed in danger as cars pull directly off US-2 and across their path.

**Figure 2** Section view of Sultan Basin Road, where the sidewalk and shoulder disappear.



Google, 2023

A sidewalk runs along the northern edge of the highway, connecting pedestrians to the stretch of commerce from Old Owen Road to 6th Street. However, east of 6th the sidewalk becomes spotty, requiring pedestrians to walk along US-2 with no barrier between them and vehicle traffic. Any dedicated infrastructure disappears completely at Sultan Basin Road.

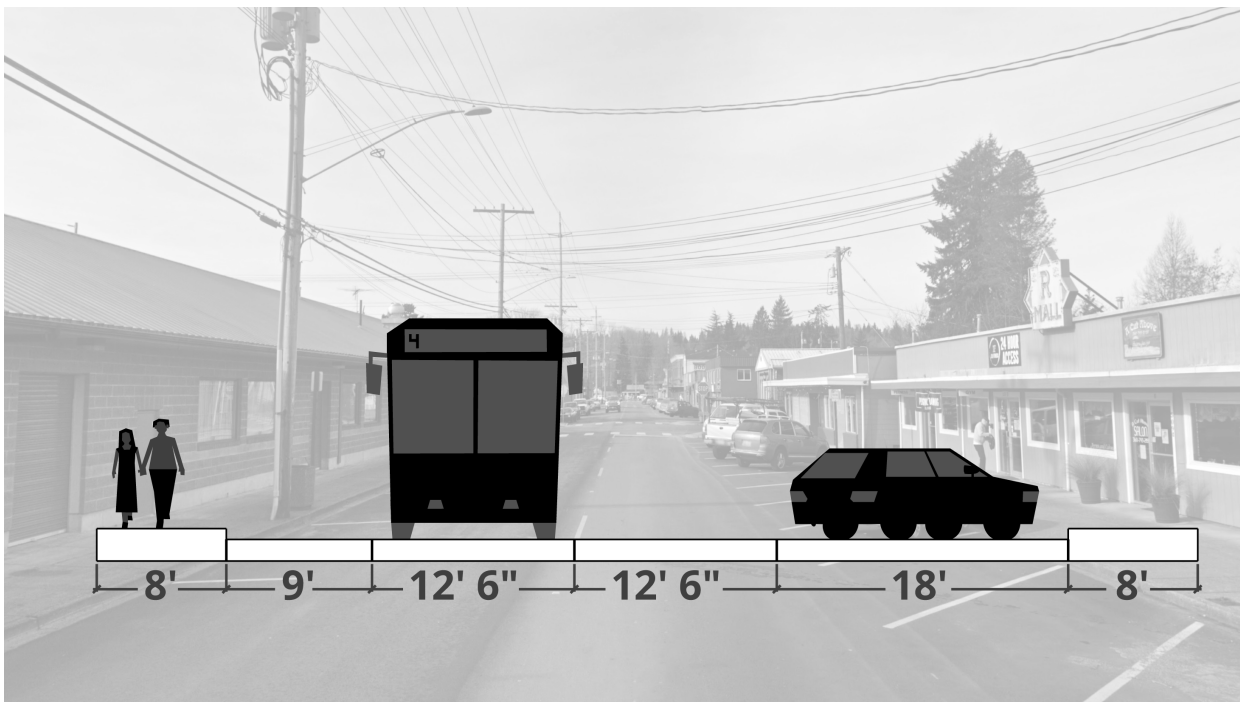
Sultan Basin Road and 339<sup>th</sup> Ave SE (Rice Road) run north-south, feeding US-2 as arterial roads. Like the highway, both have one primary travel lane for vehicles and intermittent pedestrian infrastructure.

Both the highways and arterials provide clear sightlines for drivers of forested, rural, and low-density commercial edges, and scenic vistas of the surrounding landscape. There are very few, if any, residences that directly face any one of them, and speed limits range between 35 and 40mph across each.

## Main Street

Sultan's Main Street is the historic commercial district of the city, running east-west just one block north of US 2. One- and two-story historic retail buildings line the western portion of Main Street, with detached residences making up much of the eastern half. The downtown area is a major civic hub and home to City Hall, the local police and county sheriff station, Sky Valley visitors center, museum, and the Sno-Isle library.

**Figure 3** A section of Sultan's Main Street



Google, 2023

Vehicle traffic is 25mph, one lane either way, separated by a dashed yellow line. Angled parking runs almost the full length of Main Street along the north side, and parallel parking along the south—both of which are rarely full. There are no stoplights along Main Street, and intersections are controlled by all-way stops with curb bulbs, curb cuts, and painted markers.

Main Street has sidewalks along both the north and south sides, but no dedicated bicycle infrastructure. Lighting is provided by overhanging streetlamps attached to utility poles along the south side of the road. The utility poles, located within the sidewalk, can sometimes present obstacles to pedestrians, though that varies based on the diameter of the pole.

Awnings are intermittent, and what few exist are found primarily along the north side of the street. Planters and small beds exist in limited quantities, and there are no street trees in the downtown area. Shade and protection from the elements is sparse.

There are few places to sit on Main Street: a picnic table outside the police station, a wood bench located a few feet off the sidewalk near the post office, a small bench in front of the Visitors Center, and a very small metal perch for people waiting at the 270/271 bus stop adjacent to City Hall. These seating stations potentially provide a temporary respite but do not support community gathering or lingering.

**Figure 4** View looking westward from 8th and Main, in 2008, 2019, and 2023. Removal of the street trees and median increased the space available for cars at the expense of safety and attractiveness.



*Google, 2023*

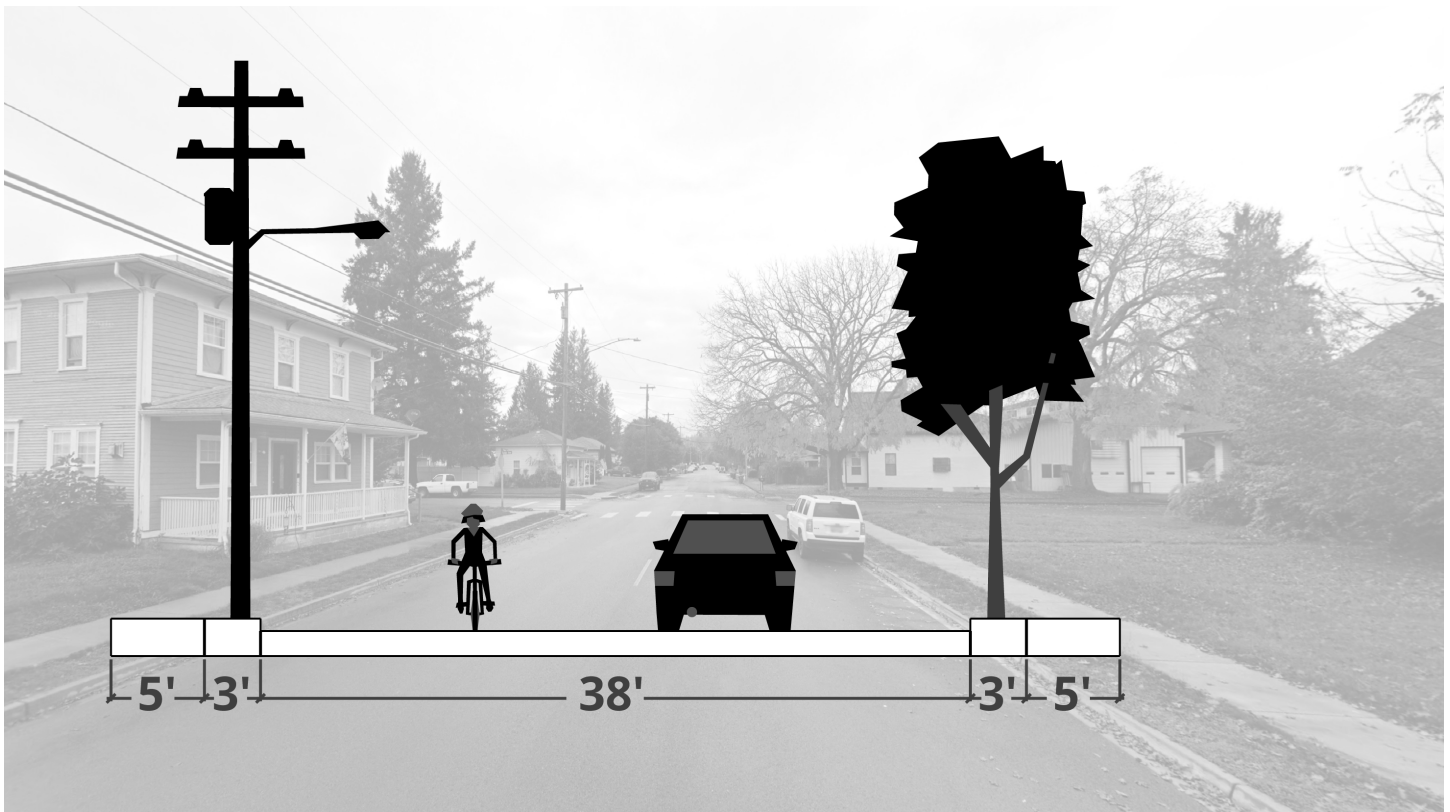
Overall, despite having the bones of an historically walkable retail and residential corridor, Main Street over time has developed into a vehicle-first area. Recent improvements to the pedestrian realm are primarily aesthetic, and compared to the existing historic structures, newer commercial buildings that run along Main Street such as Sultan Plaza and the O’Reilly Auto Parts are being oriented towards the highway, and not toward Main Street itself.

## Contiguous residential

The closest Sultan has to a residential street grid exists in the western half of town, south of the high school and north of US-2. Some of these streets have painted center lines, most have sidewalks on one or both sides, and most have street parking. Although they are lower speeds, many of these streets are quite wide as a result, often 40 feet wide and occasionally even wider. These streets are the main form of circulation through the central part of the city, including access to the elementary, middle, and high schools.

Pedestrian facilities are primarily limited to sidewalks, crosswalks, and curb ramps. Coverage overall in the western portion of the city is excellent, though severely limited moving past the eastern edge of Main Street. In this older part of town, it's clear that neighborhoods were conceived with walking and easy access to downtown. There are some overhead lights dispersed over the street grid, but many are largely spaced out, and the lack of coverage overall does little to provide pedestrian and bicycle safety or comfort.

**Figure 5** Typical section of a street in Sultan's older neighborhoods.



Google, 2023

There are very few street trees or landscaping on these circulation streets, and what foliage does exist is primarily on private property. Between the wide streets and lack of greenery, both the pedestrian and vehicular realms are exposed and monotonous. Sultan's public realm would benefit from incorporating more of the natural beauty of its surroundings into the city itself.

## Subdivision residential

Beyond the older, more gridded part of Sultan’s streetscape are newer neighborhoods constructed in a traditional “suburban” style. As Sultan expanded beyond its early borders, the geographic features that limited earlier development had to be circumvented, giving rise to long spurs, private roads, culs-de-sac, and other street systems that created pockets of neighborhoods and subdivisions. Today, these subdivisions can be found both in the western portion of the city and up Sultan Basin Road, splitting off to the east.

Compared to the more contiguous street grid, these subdivision streets have smaller and more uniform setbacks than the rest of the city and are more likely to have street trees, creating a more pleasant walking experience within the subdivision itself. However, they can also at times be just as wide, and because of the sprawling layout of the city, are isolated from most amenities. Pedestrian paths leading out of the subdivision often give way to long, straight connector roads where street lighting and trees vanish, and sidewalks are not always a guarantee.

**Figure 6** A street section from a newer subdivision located north off of Sultan Basin Road.



Google, 2023

Particularly along Sultan Basin Road where most growth and new housing development is happening today, small subdivisions branch off Sultan Basin and create relatively intense pockets of suburban development. Between these pockets are rural and forested edges that often do not have dedicated pedestrian or bicycle facilities.

## Public Space

### Parks & recreation spaces

Sultan has over 150 acres of public park space, many of which have amenities like picnic seating and restrooms, as well as dedicated recreation opportunities such as play structures and sports facilities.

All of Sultan’s public parks, including the playfields associated with the schools, are located west of 8th Street. While expansive, due to their location these parks do not serve new developments along Sultan Basin Road as well as they do the rest of the city. The challenge faced by the city is to maintain and improve their existing parks where needed, while creating new public park space to serve future residents moving to this growing area.



**Figure 7** “Private parks” in Sultan’s subdivisions put up signage that is unwelcoming to those from outside the neighborhood.

*Framework, 2023*

### Trails

Sultan’s trail system is a valuable asset for recreation and connectivity as the city develops. Most public trails can be found in Osprey Park and River Park. Private trails are more widespread and tend to be around or within new residential development.

Public trails are generally well-maintained, but some sections are at risk of flooding due to proximity to the Sultan River. The Sultan Evacuation Trail near Sultan High School is used for both pedestrians and emergency vehicles, and while new lighting has been added to this trail to aid visibility, the area’s topography means the trail remains quite steep. Combined with lack of paving, overall the Evac Trail is not very pedestrian friendly or ADA accessible.

## Community gathering spaces

There are few dedicated community gathering spaces. River Park is the location for numerous community events, including the Sultan Shindig and National Night Out, as well as the seasonal Farmers Market. The park has two sub-facilities—a small pavilion that is used for musical performers during large events and a community skate park.

Aside from River Park, Main Street is sometimes closed to vehicle traffic and used as a gathering place for other events such as the Sultan Car Show. However, aside from the facilities at River Park and Osprey Park, there is no other outdoor community gathering space that is used on a consistent basis. The City’s recent acquisition of the property at 500 Alder Street, across from City Hall and behind Kiss the Sky Books, represents an opportunity to create a different kind of gathering space than exists today.

## BUILDINGS

**Figure 8** Sultan’s west side has a variety of home styles including ranch style, cottage, and colonial.



Google, 2023



## Existing residential types

Sultan’s residential housing pattern can be characterized primarily as single-family detached homes—one to two stories in height, laid out in either a grid pattern or in irregular, isolated branches that split off from connector streets. Older housing stock is closer to downtown and tends to be single-story homes often in either a ranch or cottage style arranged in the familiar grid. Larger homes in this area tend to be two-story colonials. Most homes have driveways leading to attached garages, though large parcels often use their extra room for detached garage structures. Ample curb space provides consistent parking for those homes without dedicated garages.

Newer homes tend to be larger than older housing stock, primarily two stories in height, and sited further from the center of town. These homes resemble many others found in American suburbs and emphasize vehicular access with large garage doors and long driveway cuts fronting the street. While homes of this style can be found in the older, closer-in parts of Sultan, they are much less common. While these newer homes are often larger by square footage, subdivisions tend to have narrower parcels fronting the street, greatly reducing the distance between homes.

**Figure 9** Newer homes in Sultan, arranged on smaller parcels and in a rigidly constrained architectural style.



*Everett Herald, 2022*

Multi-family homes are much less common in Sultan, and those that do exist usually attempt to emulate the existing fabric as much as possible, in the form of duplexes, triplexes, or large townhomes. There are limited options for apartment-style homes, but some can be found in Mid-Town Sultan. However, this style of home tends to be available only for rent.

**Figure 10** (Right) A sixplex in downtown Sultan.

*Zillow, 2023*



### Existing commercial types

Aside from the older, single-use buildings along US-2 previously mentioned, Sultan Plaza represents a typical strip-style commercial development. The Plaza fronts US 2 with two rows of parking and a planter strip. There is no sidewalk in front of this development, but those on foot can avoid the parking lot by walking directly in front of the businesses instead. The building is wrapped in brick and has sheet metal roof, which combine to give it a clean, if not impersonal aesthetic, and large square windows face US-2 and the parking lot. While the other side of the building directly interfaces with Main Street, that side is mostly flat brick with sparse windows, opaque roll-up doors, and only one pedestrian entrance, clearly denoting it as the “back” of the building. This configuration, facing the highway with little consideration for the pedestrian downtown, reinforces the importance of the vehicular realm, a pattern emulated by other businesses along US-2.

**Figure 11** Sultan Plaza’s front (left) and rear (right). Note the lack of transparency to Main Street.



*LoopNet, 2023*

The Red Apple is the only fresh grocery in Sultan and is located inside a “big box” building with a large parking lot. Transparency from anywhere is virtually nonexistent, as corrugated metal is wrapped around the building facade. The size of the building and its corresponding parking lot requires a larger parcel than was available in the existing commercial core, so the grocery is relegated to the far west

end of town. In this location, pedestrian and bicycle access is limited and uncomfortable as it requires taking a path adjacent to US 2 for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile, much of which is unprotected by a guard rail. The sidewalk also ends just before it reaches Red Apple.

In contrast to the previous commercial buildings, Main Street businesses are a mixture of old and new historic retail structures, one or two stories tall with brick, stucco/plaster, or plank wood facades and traditional siding. Main Street itself being the most pedestrian-oriented district in Sultan, these businesses make use of their excellent transparency to the street, and a few have inset entryways that provide additional window frontage. Although the older retail spaces typically do not have their own dedicated parking lots, customers can use the angled parking on the north side of the street.

**Figure 12** Kiss the Sky Books is among the most distinctive places on Main Street. City Hall sits across the street.



*Framework, 2023*

## Existing industrial types

Industrial buildings and companies in Sultan tend to be clustered near US 2, taking advantage of highway access for movement of goods, and are primarily located on the eastern side of the city (east of Sultan Basin Road). However, aside from the proximity to US 2, these facilities remain relatively isolated as the highway functions as the sole point of entry and exit. There are generally few if any pedestrian amenities surrounding these buildings, and while they can range in size, Sultan's industrial facilities have much larger footprints than the rest of the commercial buildings in the city.

**Figure 13** Single story sheet metal industrial buildings at the intersection of 339<sup>th</sup> and US-2.



*LoopNet, 2023*

## Existing civic types

City Hall and Sultan's Visitor's Center face each other on Main Street. The building home to the Visitor's Center was constructed in 1928 and provides an historic anchor for the area while maintaining its original brick-and-mortar charm and simplicity. City Hall, built in 2000, emulates that character but provides updated facilities, and hosts a library and other civic functions within. Also clustered along Main Street are the Post Office and Police Station, and taken together these four buildings provide the only public seating in the Downtown district.

Clustered along 1st Street near Osprey Park are the Volunteers of America Sky Valley Community Resource Center and Sultan Food Bank, as well as the Boys and Girls Club of Sultan. The VOA campus is home to a senior center and food bank and provides social services including public showers and other resources for families in crisis and people experiencing homelessness. The campus is a 10 to 15 minute walk from the nearest bus stop (at City Hall downtown), so while not far, it is also not co-located near any other services or local government resources.

**Figure 14** The Sky Valley Community Resource Center.



*Volunteers of America Western Washington, 2023*

Sultan’s elementary, middle, and high schools provide anchors for the wider community as well as for students, often hosting meetings, events, and recreational activities in their playfields. All three campuses are located in the older, gridded part of Sultan.

## 1.6 Defining Character

Sultan's streetscapes, public spaces, and buildings do not exist in isolation, however, and the interaction of these elements is what contributes to its "small town character," prized by many in the community.

**Scale and Proportion:** Sultan features smaller, more intimate building scales, and most buildings reach only two stories tall in most of the city. The downtown area especially maintains a focus on human-scale architecture, creating a cozy and inviting atmosphere. In the neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown, the homes are smaller and more traditional in style, making them feel familiar yet distinct from one another.

**Architecture and History:** Sultan's historic core also contains elements of the architectural styles that defined the city's history and cultural heritage. These vernacular designs give the downtown a timeless quality and include styles such as the Visitor's Center and Kiss the Sky Books with their original brick, and the false front architecture exhibited by the Cascade Health Clinic. Museums and cultural markers downtown further celebrate Sultan's history and heritage.

**Pedestrian-Friendly Streets:** Downtown Sultan and adjacent neighborhoods emphasize walkability with sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian-scale streetscapes, due in part to Sultan's history that pre-dates the dominance of the automobile. City blocks range between 250' and 300' in length, making them attractive for mixed and diverse uses while providing an interesting visual and textural landscape for those on foot. Ultimately, this walkability encourages residents and visitors to stroll, shop, and interact more than they would in disconnected and unfriendly streets.

**Local Businesses:** Locally-owned shops, restaurants, and service providers are prized by the community, and keeping them economically sustainable is a priority.

**Public Spaces:** Sultan's parks provide places for community gatherings and recreation, and River Park's proximity to downtown makes it an ideal location for many of these events. These are places for everyone, which helps to create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

**Natural and Scenic Beauty:** Natural features, such as the scenic views of the mountains, confluence of the rivers, and surrounding forests define much of Sultan.

**Sense of Community:** The sense of community is a fundamental aspect of Sultan's character. Community involvement and engagement in planning and decision-making processes is critical, and residents have a say in shaping their town's future. Residents have strong social connections and a shared sense of identity.

Taken together, these elements combine to create Sultan's "small town character." They emphasize local traditions, foster a strong sense of community, and reflect the physical, historic, and geographic elements that distinguish Sultan from larger urban centers in the Puget Sound.

## 1.7 Summary

Sultan’s unique community design is shaped by its historical development, geography, and values. Neighborhoods can vary greatly in both age and form—largely due to history, topographic separation, and a lack of paths bridging east and west. Continued subdivision sprawl to the north may contribute this separation without creating additional connections between neighborhoods. However, its historic elements, natural beauty, and strong sense of community remain Sultan’s biggest assets, and embracing its “small town character” could contribute vitality and a stronger sense of identity to the city.