



Community Development Department

38624 SE River Street | P.O. Box 987
Snoqualmie, Washington 98065
(425) 888-5337
www.snoqualmiewa.gov

MEMORANDUM

To: Community Development Committee / City Council
From: Mona Davis, Community & Economic Development Director
Andrew Love, AICP, Contract Planner
Date of Memo: June 13, 2025
Date of Meeting: July 7, 2025
Subject: Snoqualmie Color Palette (Chapter 17.35 SMC)

INTRODUCTION:

City staff were tasked with updates to the approved color palette. Currently, Chapter 17.35 of the Snoqualmie Municipal Code (SMC) requires historical design review for the City's "historic district overlay zones," "downtown historic commercial landmark district," and individual landmarks.

Type I projects are administrative and can include "exterior painting of **noncontributing** buildings or structures [in the overlay zones and/or landmark district], **using approved colors**" (SMC 17.35.120(A)(2)).

Type II projects are reviewed by the historic preservation officer, who makes a staff report and recommendation to the Historical Design Review Board (which the Planning Commission has been serving as for many years). A Type II project can include the following:

- "For **contributing** buildings or structures [in the Landmark District or individual Landmarks], any alteration in exterior appearance or replacement of historic materials with nonhistoric materials" (SMC 17.35.120(B)(1)).
- "For **noncontributing** buildings or structures [in the overlay zones and/or landmark district], any exterior repairs (other than emergency repairs needed for the immediate protection of property, life or safety) or alterations other than those designated as Type I" (SMC 17.35.120(B)(2)).

The last section of code above means that if a business in a non-historical building (but still in either the overlay zone or landmark district) proposes a color scheme other than the approved color palette, they still must go through design review. The existing color palette is quite restrictive, because it only allows four color combinations for the main building, trim, and accent colors. Businesses cannot pick between the four choices. Optionally, there are four additional colors that can be used for "trim/storefront window." Previously, the city has heard frustration from the small business owners of downtown about the limited color palette.

BACKGROUND:

- On February 3, 2025, City staff brought a memorandum to Planning Commission seeking feedback on potential updates to the City's historic overlay color palette.
- On April 7, 2025, City staff presented potential options for updating the color palette and posed several questions for discussion. Some communities like the City of Orting maintained strict color options, whereas other cities like Burien, Carnation, and Gig Harbor have more general guidelines. In Carnation's case, there is a chart outlining which types of colors are allowed without prescribing certain shades.
- On April 21, 2025, staff provided the Planning Commission a wide range of colors from the two historic paint collections mentioned above, but the Planning Commission instructed staff to return with only the Orting colors (24 out of 60 colors in the Sherwin-Williams Historical Color Collection) and the currently approved Snoqualmie color palette (which feature 20 colors, with limitations on mixing and matching).
- On May 5, 2025, King County Historic Preservation came to present and later gave feedback on the color palette issue, including the fact that no other jurisdiction in King County has a strict color palette for their historic district. They recommended having a "preferred" color palette rather than a strict color palette. In addition, two other members of the public gave input as did Councilmember Jo Johnson. After a lengthy discussion of options and weighing pros and cons, the Planning Commission gave guidance on what they would like to see for the Public Hearing.
- On May 19, 2025, Planning Commission held a public hearing to further discuss the options staff provided based on the guidance from May 5, in addition to seeking comments from the public. City staff prepared three options:
 - **Option 1** included the 16 colors of the existing Snoqualmie color palette and the addition of the 24 identified Sherwin-Williams options with the option to mix and match most colors.
 - **Option 2** included a general table of example colors without limiting applicants to specific paint colors. This was intended to be like the regulations of cities like Burien, Carnation, and Gig Harbor. Certain color families would have been allowed or prohibited instead of requiring very specific paint colors, based on whether it is a main color, trim, or accent.
 - **Option 3** provided example language that could supplement either Option 1 or Option 2.

City staff received several comment letters ahead of the meeting in support of expanded the color palette, and these letters were provided to the Planning Commissioners before the public hearing and entered into the record. One of the commenters and downtown businessowner, Ashley Grammer, recommended 12 additional colors to include some lighter options as trim or accent color options.

After the Public Hearing, the Planning Commission made a motion to recommend Option 3 (with minor language modification) and a blend Option 1 and Option 2, resulting in a similar table as Option 2 while maintaining a set color palette like Option 1. The motion also incorporated the 12 additional colors as pastel options, and to include an additional white.

NEXT STEPS:

The City Council's affirmation of the Planning Commission's updated approved color palette would provide businessowners and residents in the overlay zones, landmark district, and individual designated landmarks greater flexibility with exterior paint color in the interim.