



Community Development Department

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MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Commission
From: Mona Davis, Interim Community Development Director
Andrew Love, Contract Planner
Date of Memo: April 17, 2025
Date of Meeting: April 21, 2025
Subject: SMC 17.35 Historic District Overlay Zones – Color Palette

INTRODUCTION:

On April 10, 1995, City Council adopted Ordinance No. 744, which created Chapter 17.35 of the Snoqualmie Municipal Code, Historic Overlay Zones and Landmarks, and therefore two Historic District Overlay Zones, the **Downtown Historic District Overlay Zone** and the **Meadowbrook Historic District Overlay Zone**. Later on January 22, 2001, City Council adopted Ordinance No. 874, repealing Chapter 16.26 (Landmarks) and amending various sections of Chapter 17.35, including Section 17.35.090, which establishes the **Downtown Historic Commercial Landmark District**. Potential revisions to this chapter are forthcoming to bring further clarity and to fix inconsistencies with the 1994 Interlocal Agreement with King County relating to landmark designation and protection services.

For now, city staff have been tasked with updates to the color palette, which local businessowners and residents are held to within these zones of the city (which are depicted on the City's official zoning map). Previously, the city has heard frustration from the business owners over the limited color palette based on the expense and lengthy process to seek a variance from these standards. A Type 1 permit is required to change the exterior paint color using approved colors in the color palette; however, a Type 2 Variance permit is required if businesses opt to utilize a different color that is not on the approved exterior 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. Planning Commission discussed concerns, provided feedback, and asked additional questions.

Based on this engagement with Planning Commission and downtown businessowners, City staff did additional research on other cities around Washington and presented color palette options to the Planning Commission on April 7, 2025. City staff also presented potential options for updating the color palette and posed several questions for discussion. A local businessowner interested in painting her art studio a brighter color was also present and provided public comment and feedback, along with the Planning Commission Council Liaison, Councilmember Johnson. In addition, Nicole Wiebe, Community Liaison, was present and voiced the concerns expressed by downtown businessowners.

The Planning Commission liked certain aspects of several of the cities, particularly the City of Carnation due to the visual example of the acceptable and unacceptable building colors. However, they felt that keeping particular adopted colors, rather than allowing for a range, would be better for the City and avoid potential situations of bright colors being allowed. The color palette example used by the City of Orting was of favor as it included a range of colors without being too bright. Unlike the examples from Carnation and Gig Harbor, some Planning Commissioners did not like the idea of allowing excessively bright colors as trim or accent colors. This goes against the recommendation from King County Historic Preservation that instead suggested the City to have a preferred palette of colors. The County staff's justification was that paint is easy to change. However, the city would no longer have a legal justification for mandating a property owner to repaint their exterior.

During the April 7 meeting, a suggestion was also made that the City should not allow colors based on a particular brand of paint like the current color. Pantone colors were a suggested option.

Based on this feedback, City staff researched historic paint color options. Examples were gathered from the different cities researched. In particular, the City of Orting uses Sherwin-Williams Historic Colors (see Figure 1 and Table 1 of Attachment 1) and the City of Port Townsend uses select colors from the Benjamin Moore historical color collection (see Figures 2 through 5 of Attachment 1). To the staff's knowledge, Pantone does not have a historical color palette so this made it difficult to not rely on paint brands. Behr has a northwest color palette, but it is limited to mostly shades of gray, blue, and brown. One option is to adopt one or two of the different color palettes, but make it explicit that comparable shades of paint using other brands is acceptable.

Based on feedback from community members, Planning Commission, and King County Historic Preservation, in addition to research of other city standards, staff would be in support of the Sherwin-Williams Historic Colors and/or the Benjamin Moore Historical Colors. This would greatly improve choices for local businessowners and add to the artistic and independent spirit of Downtown Snoqualmie by allowing more building colors than beige. At the same time, the color options would be explicit and not too bright. While we do not recommend debating each individual color of each palette, it may be worth limiting the Heritage Red (HC-181) to trim or accent colors only if Planning Commission includes the Benjamin Moore palette.

NEXT STEPS:

Depending on feedback from the Planning Commission, staff will prepare an updated color palette exhibit and bring it back to Planning Commission for a public hearing in May. Currently, SMC 17.35.040(C) defines an approved color as "a color from a palette approved by the historic design review board and maintained on file by the historic preservation officer."

ATTACHMENT:

1. Proposed color palette options for Snoqualmie Historic District Overlays
2. Map of Historic Areas