



# Community Development Department

---

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

## MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Commission  
From: Mona Davis, Senior Planner  
Andrew Love, Contract Planner  
Date: April 3, 2025  
Subject: SMC 17.35 Historic Overlay – Color Palettes

---

### INTRODUCTION:

Snoqualmie Municipal Code (SMC) Chapter 17.35 requires historical design review on some applications, which is designated to the Planning Commission as the Historical Design Review Board. A Type 1 permit is required to change the exterior paint color using approved colors in the color palette; however, a variance is required if businesses opt to utilize a different color that's not on the approved exterior color palette (see attached).

### BACKGROUND:

Historic district color requirements are guidelines set to maintain the aesthetic and historical integrity of buildings in designated areas. These requirements often aim to preserve the character of a neighborhood or area by ensuring that any changes or renovations align with the established architectural style.

### ANALYSIS:

Below are some pros and cons, based on feedback from business owners and Planning Commissioners, in addition to some additional research by staff.

#### *PROS:*

- **Preserves Historical Integrity:** Historic color guidelines help maintain the original look and feel of a neighborhood, which can protect the historical significance of a district and ensure that modern changes don't compromise its cultural value.
- **Can Increase Property Values:** Well-preserved historic districts often attract tourists and buyers who appreciate the charm and authenticity of the area. This can lead to increased property values, benefiting homeowners and businesses.
- **Aesthetic Appeal:** A consistent color scheme can create a harmonious visual environment that feels cohesive and thoughtfully designed. This aesthetic uniformity can enhance the overall appeal of a neighborhood.
- **Protection from Inappropriate Alterations:** Color requirements can prevent owners from making alterations that may clash with the surrounding buildings or neighborhood's history, helping to maintain architectural authenticity.

### *CONS:*

- **Limited Creative Freedom:** The City has heard from businesses that the color palette is drab with limited variety between the given options. Property owners may feel restricted in their ability to express themselves or customize their home or business.
- **Boring Streetscape:** Having a row of buildings in the same general color scheme, like different tones of beige, can create a monotonous and sterile feeling that ironically would be overly prescriptive and uncharacteristic of a historic downtown. Multiple buildings of the same shade could also work against building articulation.
- **Potential Increase in Costs:** Complying with color requirements might require extra effort, such as finding specific paints or seeking a variance.
- **Enforcement Challenges:** The enforcement of color requirements can be complicated.

In summary, while historic district color requirements help preserve the character and history of a neighborhood, they can sometimes restrict personal expression and add challenges for property owners, including small local businesses. In the City of Snoqualmie’s case, the existing color palette only offers four different combinations of colors, and applicants are not allowed to swap the base or accent color of one combination for another (only trim color). The restrictive color palette options and Type II process to seek relief from the strict standards increases the financial hardship of the applicant and lengthens the approval time. By balancing preservation with flexibility, the City of Snoqualmie can help maintain both the charm of the district and the individuality of its businesses.

### *OTHER CITY EXAMPLES:*

City staff researched other Washington cities and focused on Burien, Carnation, Gig Harbor, Kirkland, Orting, Port Townsend, and Walla Walla. Some cities have approved specific colors (Orting and Port Townsend) while others simply have general references to earth tones, neutrals, dark saturated colors, etc. The Cities of Burien, Carnation, and Gig Harbor are similar in that they try to emphasize a darker base color with a lighter trim or a lighter base color with a darker trim. Burien standards are a bit unclear on bright colors, whereas Carnation only allows them as accent or trim colors, and Gig Harbor only allows them as accent colors.

### *KING COUNTY RECOMMENDATION:*

It is important to note that City staff reached out to King County Historic Preservation to ensure none of the decisions made on color palette would have a negative effect on historic preservation efforts. Preservation Architect, J. Todd Scott, expressed mandating specific colors is not appropriate. They think it is fine to develop a “preferred” palette of colors, but requiring approval of paint or materials colors seems too restrictive.

### **NEXT STEPS:**

Depending on feedback from the Planning Commission, staff will prepare a draft code amendment to Snoqualmie Municipal Code Chapter 17.35. This will be shared for review and discussion at a future regular meeting, which will include an opportunity to solicit additional public comments.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

- Existing Snoqualmie Façade – Exterior Color Palette
- Research of other Washington cities with color palette restrictions in historic areas