Cannon Beach, Oregon
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Summary
There are no regulations limiting the size of large retail stores in Cannon Beach, Oregon. Instead, the constrictive geographic setting of this village, small lot size, design guidelines, zoning ordinance and design-review process have limited development. It is just a ten-minute drive to shop in Seaside, the historic service center for this area, and residents will also shop further afield in Astoria and Portland. Recently the town has lost stores that serve the basic needs of local residents, a trend that concerns both Cannon Beach and the town of Homer.

*Cannon Beach can inform the growth of Homer, Alaska by:*
1) its strong vision statement;
2) its design guidelines and rigorous review process;
3) its loss of small stores that serve local’s basic needs;
4) its preservation of character without confinement to a particular aesthetic.

*Cannon Beach may not be a useful or appropriate model for Homer in these ways:*
1) smaller size of Cannon Beach and earlier development mean greater limits on growth;
2) Cannon Beach’s zoning ordinances and design guidelines may be more restrictive regarding changes to private property and aesthetic considerations than Homer’s citizens would permit;
3) tourist/small-business/retirement economy may make preservation of character more important to Cannon Beach residents, on a whole, than to Homer residents.
Location
Cannon Beach is on the Pacific coast at the northwest corner of Oregon, 81 miles west of Portland on State Highway 26.

Homer and Cannon Beach have very similar stories. Cannon Beach started as a community of loggers and fishermen, with tourists in the summer months, from the 4th of July until Labor Day. Arts and crafts came to the town in the 1970s with “hippie entrepreneurs” (Klebba et al. 2001). It has never been a service center; Seaside (pop. 5750) has served that role, seven miles to the north. The highway formed the main street through Cannon Beach until the state of Oregon built the U.S. Highway 101 bypass in 1952. However, bounded by the Clatsop State Forest to the east, Ecola State Park to the north, and the Pacific Ocean to the west, the terrain limits outward expansion of the city. Geologic hazards of landslide, erosion and flooding further restrict infill within the city limits. Since incorporation in 1956, the population of the community has grown from 516 (1956) to 1600 (2001). Like Homer, the population swells significantly in the summer months.

Reconstruction of the north entrance to Cannon Beach was completed last year and several areas along the highway have undergone annexation since 1952. However, both the Oregon Coast Highway Corridor Master Plan (1995) and the city emphasize and prioritize the preservation of natural and scenic resources south of the junction (the area of bypass). The City of Cannon Beach Transportation System Plan/Comprehensive Plan Background Report (Dec 1998) limits access and restricts commercial uses along the highway to small areas zoned for commercial uses (see Appendix 1). The city is opposed to any highway widening within the urban growth boundary (ODOT 2003) and will not consider any proposals that would result in a commercial strip along Highway 101 (Comprehensive Plan 2002).

Local Communities
Cannon Beach is located in Clatsop County which has a population of 36,000. Receiving vehicles traveling from Portland to coastal destinations, the intersection of State Highway 26 and the north-south U.S. Highway 101 lies just four miles north of Cannon Beach. The community of Cannon Beach Junction is a “Rural Service Center,” which is defined by the state as “an unincorporated community consisting of commercial or industrial uses providing goods and services to the surrounding rural area or to persons traveling through the area, but which also includes some permanent residential dwellings” (CREST 1, 2003). Consistent with the Unincorporated Communities Rule, commercial properties “generally consist of uses which 1) are small scale, low impact (less than 4,000 square feet of building
Three years ago Cannon Beach lost one of its businesses to Cannon Beach Junction. Cannon Beach Lumber owner Ken Clark envisioned a consolidated superstore at the highway junction. He bought a site for lumber storage and maintained the main office downtown. The functions shifted out of town and, finally, when the owner sold to Lumbermen’s the business moved to the junction and built two additional buildings, each 12,000 square feet (LCBOnline 2003). The former Cannon Beach site has been converted to a restaurant (Bartl 2003).

Seaside (pop. 5400), also a tourist community, is seven miles north of Cannon Beach on Highway 101. On each side of the highway are four miles of gas stations, large commercial stores, mini-malls and a factory outlet center (over 100,000 sq. ft.). To the north of Seaside is the community of Gearhart which discourages both franchise operations and large stores.

Cannon Beach Community
Tourism, home businesses and retirement dominate the economy of Cannon Beach. Recreational draws include several seasonal festivals, the local beach, seastacks and parks, art galleries, shopping and whale watching.

The median value of owner-occupied housing in Cannon Beach is $81,400 (2000) versus $143,400 for the entire county. There are no resource lands. The definitions of the rural service center requires the provision of goods and services to the rural community, however Cannon Beach residents will also shop at Cannon Beach Junction. Stated limits on floor area would seem to prevent the development of large retail at this location.

Aerial view of Cannon Beach Junction.

Intimate scale of Cannon Beach shops.
manufacturing companies in the city vs. 97 in the county. Annual per capita personal income for the county is $24,491 (2000).

According to Cannon Beach City Planner Rainmar Bartl, business owners are residents of the community, which, he asserts, makes developments fit the town in a natural and positive way. On the other hand, as is the case in Homer, some of the property owners live elsewhere. “Formula-food” restaurants are not permitted (see Appendix 3), however there are no standards limiting the size of the stores. There are neither big buildings nor large lots; lot size is 50 by 100 feet. Bartl considers the Design Review Guidelines to be simple, “Design 101” standards. With general criteria plus the constraints of the zoning ordinance, it is largely the review process itself that makes Cannon Beach what it is now due to active community involvement. Although there are property owners that own contiguous lots, Bartl says if a property owner were to propose a large store on these, the design review would require the building volume broken up into visually smaller pieces, to suit the “different” look of downtown Cannon Beach. Bartl claims that this issue has not come up yet.

Rainmar Bartl admits that the town is losing its commercial business over time. Currently, the largest retailer is the grocery store at about 5,000 sq. ft. The other grocery store, Osburn’s Grocery and Delicatessen, is going out of business (Bartl 2003), though the owners may continue to use it as a grocery (CB Gazette, Apr 2003). The town’s only drug store closed a few years ago. Loss of these basic stores is not an issue that any citizen wants to see, and made one Chamber of Commerce business representative hesitant to even discuss the issue.

The Chamber of Commerce also voices their emphasis on the preservation of the visible character of Cannon Beach through the mission statement (with bold highlighting) at the top of their website; “The mission of the Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce is to promote, enhance and maintain a healthy environment for business. This includes a desire that such an environment will be **protective of the aesthetics** and livability of the community.” Both the city planning documents and the Chamber emphasize the goal of a pedestrian-oriented community with a mix of cars and people.

**Regulation**

Regulations include the Comprehensive Plan (April 2002, provided separately), the Zoning Ordinance (November 2002, provided separately) and the Subdivision Ordinance (1995).

The Cannon Beach Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1979 following workshops, meetings, regular newspaper articles and surveys seeking the views of the town’s citizens. It is reviewed and updated, if necessary, every two years. The plan’s stated intention is not “to encourage growth, or stop development; rather ... to establish a set of policies and guidelines which will allow for development to occur, while preserving those qualities which brought them to the community, or has made the community what it is today” (Comprehensive Plan 2002).
The vision statement (Appendix 2) defines the character of the community and voices the need for balance, so that the resort aspects of Cannon Beach are not disruptive to the residential village character of the community. The Plan attempts to foster these aspects of the town’s form: compact mixed-use development for livability and accessibility; a distinct edge separating the urban from the rural and natural-resource areas; buildings that are small in scale, appropriate to their setting; small-scale family-owned businesses; pedestrian amenities in commercial zones; and public spaces for community interaction.

General policies that control commercial development include prohibiting “formula food restaurants,” drive-in restaurants, commercial amusement activities, and transient outdoor merchandising. Other controls include maximum building height (24 feet), maximum Floor-Area Ratio of 0.6, and restrictions on signage. Density, vegetation removal, excavation and filling all are strictly controlled to avoid erosion and landslides, and to protect aesthetic character.

The city encourages the development of housing that meets the needs of a variety of ages, income groups and groups with special needs, and encourages its dispersal throughout the community.

In considering priorities for growth, the Plan encouraged (in a 1988 amendment) the Chamber of Commerce, in cooperation with the City, to consider “developing a recruitment plan for businesses that provide basic services for local residents, as well as exploring methods that could be used to retain existing non-tourist-oriented businesses.” The city will consider actions that diversify the economy in as much as they are in keeping with the small-town character of Cannon Beach.

The Zoning Ordinance, Title 17 of the Cannon Beach Municipal Code, defines residential, commercial, environmental and overlay zones, as well as design-review procedures and criteria as well as many other general requirements, standards and procedures. Commercial activities are permitted in zones C1 and C2, with retail restricted to zone C1. Restrictions for this zone include limiting building heights (24 feet or 28 feet if pitched roof), signage, and floor-area ratio (0.7).

A Planned Development Zone allows opportunity for larger tracts of land to be planned and developed, allowing more spatial flexibility than in the units of the individual lots. The three-stage review process culminates in a public hearing. A permit may be granted if several criteria are met including: “that the location, design, size and uses will result in an attractive, healthful and efficient and stable environment for living, shopping or working.”

Design Review Procedures and Criteria are also covered in a section of the Zoning
Ordinance (see Appendix 4). The design review process exists “to exercise aesthetic judgment over development projects within the city in order to to maintain the desirable character of the community.” This desired character is broadly defined in having buildings that are small in scale with charm in their design, honoring the beauty and ecology of the natural setting and recognizing the integral role of the arts in the community. Design review is required prior to any site clearing activities (tree removal, grading, excavation or filling) and the issuance of a building permit. Site, architectural and landscape design evaluation criteria are each ranked according to their relative importance in the review (Appendix 4). Emphasis is on visual and functional relationships with surrounding built and natural landscapes, not degrading quality of life and, when possible, enhancing overall livibility. Plant cover as a percentage of lot size is required to be at least 10 percent for non-residential uses. If a design-review process is adopted by the town of Homer, the general as well as specific criteria from Cannon Beach would be particularly informative to help create a framework for project review.

Examples of other general restrictions of interest to Homer:

- signage – regulations constrain location, size and construction materials of signs, and prohibit neon signs, internally-lit signs, sandwich-board signs and wall graphics;
- outdoor storage – it is unlawful to accumulate vehicles or vehicular parts, or accumulate debris within view;
- tree removal – a permit is required to remove any tree greater than 6” diameter. A permit is granted if the tree is a safety hazard, dying or highly damaged, if it is being removed for the health of surrounding trees, if it is necessary in order to build an approved structure (including vehicular and utility access), and, under certain conditions for solar energy collection or for implementation of a new landscape plan. Preservation of trees provides a basis for consideration of a setback reduction or variance. (The town is recognized by National Arbor Day Foundation as a Tree City USA.)
Lessons from Cannon Beach
This community’s economy is thriving due to the niche it has carved out as a village-scale coastal destination. As the cost of living increases and larger stores outside the community outcompete small local businesses, the city of Cannon Beach may need to make bolder moves to prioritize the needs of serving its residents. There is a balance to strike in communities that are favored destinations for tourists and retirees. The guidelines that Cannon Beach has established to control the development of their city can also serve Homer. The two share many characteristics, the difference between the two perhaps largely a matter of scale. The design and sensitive-development lessons of Cannon Beach can be easily applied to the larger building lots of Homer.

References
Rainmar Bartl, Cannon Beach City Planner. Personal telephone conversation. 24 Apr 03.
The Cannon Beach Comprehensive Plan (Through Ordinance 02-10). Cannon Beach, OR: Apr 2002.