Summary of recommendations to consider during the update

1. **Update the organization and layout of the design standards to improve legibility and way-finding.** The 2009 LMN code assessment documented several shortcomings of the existing design standards. Recommendations to improve Redmond's design standards include:

   - Retain the current location of the design standards within the RZC but carefully consider whether some elements of the standards should be within other sections of the RZC, or vice versa. For example, determine how the "relationship to adjacent properties" design standards section relates to setback and bulk standards in RZC 21.10.
   - Improve cross referencing within the design standards and to RZC provisions.
   - Organize the standards in sequence that mirrors the design process. That is, present the standards most fundamental to site development and design first. This leads to an contents organization outline like: 1.) Site planning (including building location and orientation, vehicle and pedestrian circulation, parking and service area location, etc.), 2.) Site design elements (function and design of pathways, landscaping, open spaces, etc.), 3.) Architectural character and building elements, and 4) Signs, lights and miscellaneous.
   - Revise the current organization to separate city-wide standards from those of the special districts such as Downtown and Overlake. Include all the standards that apply to a district within the district design standards. This might cause some duplication but will facilitate design and review because a project applicant and DRB will need to consider just one set of design standards instead of two.

2. **Clarify the standards' language in the updated design standards to provide more specific design direction to applicants, staff, and other project review participants**. The 2009 LMN assessment described the problem: the frequent use of "subjective and vague language" that limit the guidance to applicants and decision-makers and perhaps expose the City to legal challenges where interpretations differ. Recommendations include:

   - Thoroughly edit the document
   - Review and update definitions
   - Clarify the meaning and use of "should" and "shall"
   - Strengthen intent statements
   - Include the Principles section up front in the document as a policy basis for the RDS.

.3. **Provide better graphics and photo examples to illustrate and clarify the standards.** Project participants agreed that better illustrations and photos would help to clarify the standards. Recommendations include:

   - Employ a full range of graphics.
   - When using photo examples, use "exceptional" examples and use images that focus on the design issue being discussed.

4. **Provide for flexibility and certainty.** A primary reason for establishing a design review process is that it allows for design flexibility. Under an effective review process administering design standards such as in the RDS, project applicants can propose alternative design measures provided that the design intent is satisfied. The current RDS allows

alternate designs for ALL such standards provided "they achieve equal or greater results in achieving the intent statements and design criteria". But, vague intent statements and criteria are used and there is often poor guidance in determining whether specific alternatives should be approved. At the same time, project applicants need greater certainty that if they provide design measures in accordance with the RDS, the project is likely to be approved by the Design Review Board (DRB). Additionally, the RDS must provide DRB with clear enough language that they can reject a proposal that does not meet the RDS provisions' intent. Therefore the RDS must provide both certainty and flexibility. Recommendations include:

- Strengthen the intent statements to clearly identify a standard's objective
- Write the standards so that they clearly state a minimum level of performance that can be objectively evaluated. In some cases this may be a numerical standard.
- Include provisions that allows for alternate solutions that achieve the standard's intent. Determine if this provision applies generally to all standards or if alternative solutions are allowed only where specifically indicated. State that the DRB is the entity that determines whether or not the proposal's intent is met. (with appeal process).
- Include examples that help explain the intent and types of alternative measures that may be appropriate.

5. **Incorporate the current standards that are working well**. This report identifies a number of provisions and concepts within the Downtown and Overlake Design Standards such as the Downtown courtyard standards that are well considered and might apply on a citywide basis.

6. **Incorporate a modified "form-based" approach that identifies specific standards to specific street fronts or locations.** The current RZC includes a map identifying where and what kind of pedestrian walkways and trails are required. Other cities have applied this "form based" approach to describe the requirements related to sidewalk and streetscape standards, setbacks, view corridors, desired landscape types and other objectives. This document recommends incorporating such a location specific approach to some design issues such as ground floor building front standards on specific streets, streetscape standards, trails, open spaces, and internal pedestrian and vehicular connections.

7. **Address most important building design considerations.** The following architectural design issues were among the most of concern to those interviewed and participants at the public workshops. It is recommended that they receive special attention during the update process.

   a. Architectural character – clarify the City's goals and vision. See suggested direction below.

   b. Approach to new development in historic contexts. Update the text and illustrations associated with the Old Town District, and perhaps the Anderson Park District. Avoid promoting a "false historicism" as noted in the 2009 LMN code assessment. Discuss key design elements and allow modern interpretations provided they respect the historic context. One suggestion was to incorporate historically appropriate materials such as brick and traditional architectural details on lower floors.

   c. Massing. Provide better direction and more options in building mass reduction provisions. Add other means of building scale reduction to the building offsets and stepbacks. Include photo examples and graphics that show a variety of ways to articulate facades that meet the intent.

d. <u>Building details.</u> Place a high importance on façade design details. Provide guidance regarding the appropriateness of the details' architectural styles. For example, note that using historically styled details on contemporary styled buildings, and vice versa, should generally be avoided. Utilize good and bad photo examples. Consider a toolbox approach (list of options to choose from).

e. <u>Building materials.</u> Emphasize quality materials on first floor in key districts and provide conditions for the use of certain materials. Consider a requirement for brick on the ground level in Old Town and perhaps Anderson Park, but allow alternatives provided the design meets the intent and supplemental criteria. Utilize good and bad photo examples for clarification.

8. **Emphasize coordinated development design on large sites and along internal lot lines** This is particularly important where parcels are large, site development is phased, and where coordination between property owners would benefit public and private interests. It is recommended that specific provisions for large lot and multiple building developments be included in the RDS. It may be that separate provisions for each district would be advantageous.

9. **Revise the approach to residential open space requirements.** Existing standards place a great emphasis on balconies. While these can be useful forms of semi-private open space for urban residents, the City should consider allowing greater flexibility in how open space is regulated. Consider placing the greatest emphasis on shared common open space, but include provisions that allow for other forms of open space provided they meet design criteria for usability (including rooftop decks, which are becoming increasingly popular in urban areas).

10. **Identify what elements or characteristics make Redmond's city/landscape unique**. A simple, well-articulated statement describing the city's physical character distinctive could provide a very general direction that guides more specific design decisions. A statement might be something like:

Redmond's design image is characterized by a composition of distinctive centers and neighborhoods, each with their individual identity:

- *The Downtown reflects both its historical origins and its emergence as a contemporary urban center. Downtown buildings provide a welcoming, unified, and traditional pedestrian environment while their upper stories exhibit a greater variety of design characters.*
- *Overlake exhibits the very latest in architectural design with contemporary buildings in an urban-campus setting.*
- *Redmond's residential neighborhoods are "green", both in their ample landscaping and their sustainable design features.*

This diversity of settings is unified by the city's network of landscaped corridors and open spaces, including verdant streetscapes, active parks, enhanced natural areas, and crown of forested hillsides.