

MOUNT BAKER TOWN CENTER

Urban Design Framework



Mount Baker Town Center Urban Design Framework

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North Rainier urban design framework has three primary objectives:

- To further develop and refine key actions identified by the community during the recent update of the North Rainier neighborhood plan, including defining strategies for implementing these actions.
- To provide a blueprint for enhancing and strengthening the neighborhood's town center—a center that is more vital, walkable and has all the essential components for livability, including a range of housing options; attractive and engaging parks, plazas and open spaces; and comfortable and convenient transportation choices.
- To assist and inform the Seattle City Council in their decisions related to land use and the built environment, giving specific focus to the following elements described in Council Resolution number 31204:
 - Structure height and bulk concepts (page 15)
 - Right of way improvement concepts (pages 10-13)
 - Preferred use locations (pages 18-19)
 - Incentive structures for public benefits (page 24)
 - Open space concepts (page 11)
 - Pedestrian connections (pages 11-13)
 - An analysis of transferable development rights as an appropriate development tool (page 26)
 - An analysis of proposed and existing employment and residential growth capacity (page 21)
 - An assessment of the value and applicability of minimum densities or similar tools (page 28)

Implementation

Creating the successful town center described by this urban design framework will require coordinated public and private initiative. In some cases implementation will need to be opportunistic—occurring as individual private development takes place. In other cases the improvements will be iterative.

Fundamentally, this document is a blueprint for cementing community goals, coordinating private and public action, and prioritizing capital funding decisions.

INTRODUCTION

What is an Urban Design Framework

This Urban Design Framework is a tool for envisioning a desired outcome for the physical design of an area. These frameworks are “vehicles of opportunity” that allow a broad consideration of issues that could be implemented by the City as well as private property owners. The Design Framework is essential in addressing how the physical development of the North Rainier Urban Village will affect quality of life and the role that place-making and urban design play in creating a successful neighborhood.

Elements included in this Urban Design Framework

- Key Actions from the Neighborhood Plan Update
- Urban Design Recommendations
- Improving Streets and Public Spaces
- Gateways
- Building Types
- Land Use and Built Form
- Sustainable Strategies
- Implementation

Other products this Urban Design Framework will inform

- Zoning changes (land use, heights, incentives)
- New or updated Neighborhood Design Guidelines
- Street Design Concept Plans
- Pedestrian, Green, and Festival street designations
- Proposals for direct capital investments



Mount Baker Town Center
Action Team.



VISION

The 1999 North Rainier neighborhood plan called for the establishment of a Town Center at the intersection of Rainier Avenue and Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. Then as now the community placed a high value on creating a vital neighborhood core with a range of transportation options. The plan recommended physical improvements including wider sidewalks, additional landscaping and street trees, and a mixture of residential and commercial land uses.

This framework describes specific strategies and design solutions for implementing this vision.



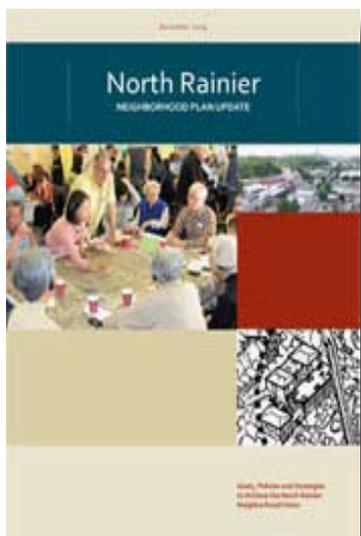
BACKGROUND

Neighborhood Planning History

In the early 1990s, Seattle began a substantial and unprecedented neighborhood planning process. This effort involved over 20,000 residents and created plans for 38 Seattle neighborhoods. These plans provided direction on a broad range of categories including land use, transportation, economic development, parks and open space, resulting in over 4,200 recommended specific actions. The North Rainier Hub Urban Village plan was completed in 1999.

Neighborhood Planning Update

A decade later, new opportunities such as the opening of Link light rail prompted the need for a plan update. Beginning in March of 2009 a diverse group of community stakeholders began meeting to articulate and define their new priorities for the future of the North Rainier Urban Village. The result of this work was summarized in January 2010 in the North Rainier Neighborhood Plan Update. Creating a vital, pedestrian friendly, transit-oriented Town Center, a central theme of the initial neighborhood plan, continues to be a neighborhood priority. Specific goals include developing a vibrant neighborhood core that concentrates housing, commercial uses, services and living-wage employment opportunities-- a hub that is well served by transit and non-motorized travel options.



Mount Baker Town Center Action Team

In May of 2010 North Rainier community members and the City of Seattle formed a Town Center action team to assist in the implementation of goals, strategies and action items identified in the recent neighborhood plan update. In September this team met to further define the vision and make specific recommendations on how to change the physical form of the neighborhood to make the Mount Baker Town Center more vital, walkable and economically successful.

MOUNT BAKER TOWN CENTER URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Key action items from the North Rainier plan update.

- Explore funding mechanisms to create long-term affordable commercial space
- Implement programming and improvements that are culturally relevant to people with disabilities throughout the town center,
- Continue to pursue zoning and design review changes that support the inclusion of green building components.
- Increase the vibrancy and safety of the public realm with wider sidewalks, landscaping and pedestrian lighting.
- Create neighborhood design guidelines that emphasize pedestrian-friendly elements in new developments and ensure “eyes on the street.”
- Define and protect emergency access routes to and through the town center for reliable access by police and fire vehicles.
- Increase the mix of uses and residential density in the town center to increase the numbers of people using the public spaces including the sidewalks.
- Through processes that engage community stakeholders consider and evaluate the application of zoning designations and related development regulations that are most likely to achieve the neighborhood’s urban design vision.
- Evaluate proposed height and land use changes within the Town Center
- Address zoning on west side of Rainier Ave. S. immediately south of S. Walden St. There are eight single-family parcels adjacent to parcels zoned NC3-65 and L-3. Rezone these parcels to be more consistent with adjacent properties.
- Expand the Town Center area to focus new mixed use development south of S. Bayview St. and north of S. Byron St.
- Consider including within the urban village a portion of single family area located between 24th Ave. S. and 25th Ave. S. and north of S. McClellan St., and rezoning more consistent with adjacent zoning, to allow more compact residential development.
- Within mixed-use zones in the Station Area Overlay District, consider minimum residential densities (related to the zoning designations).
- Create a pedestrian network of pathways throughout the Town Center, connecting retail, services and the light rail station.
- Identify desired off-street circulation patterns and work with developers of large parcels to create internal circulation that
 - promotes walking within developments and between the sites.
- Modify the Land Use Code to define minimum widths for sidewalks and landscaped planting strips on all streets in station areas with pedestrian designations. Define areas that are appropriate for, and associated sidewalk dimensions that are supportive of sidewalk cafes and/or stores that open to the sidewalk.
- Create active, family-oriented spaces within the Town Center to invite positive use that enhances public safety.

KEY URBAN DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

A Connected Neighborhood

- Provide safe and shorter pedestrian crossing at intersections on MLK Way and Rainier Ave
- Create a network of safe pedestrian routes for varying levels of ability and mobility including the visually/hearing impaired
- Improve bike/pedestrian link between town center and surrounding neighborhoods
- Create hierarchy of streets that emphasize mobility by all modes and support a vibrant retail district

A Walkable Town Center

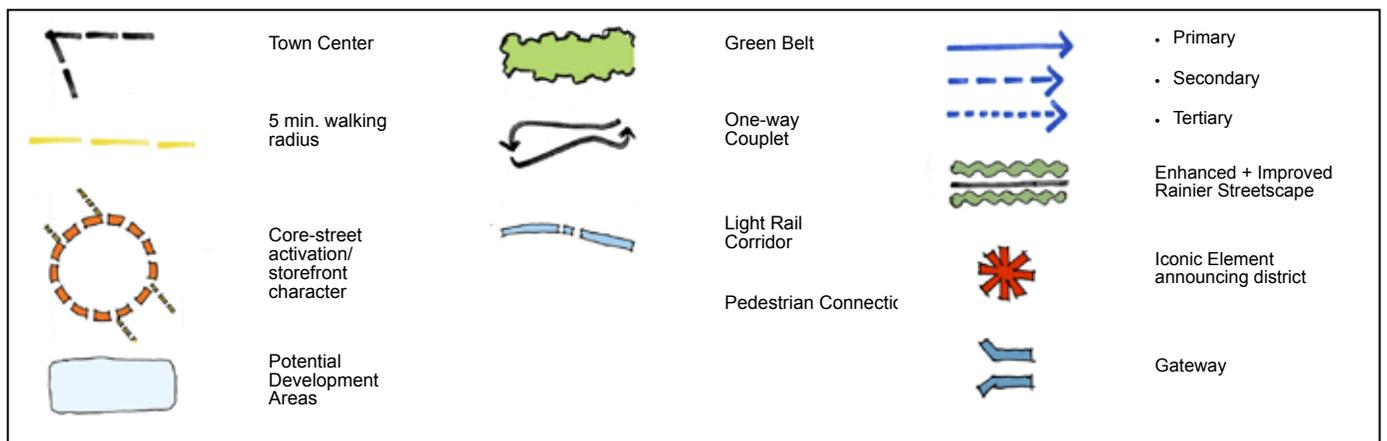
- Create a pedestrian network throughout the town center
- Develop Rainer Avenue as a vital retail street
- Ensure new development complements Cheasty /Mt. Baker Boulevards and other hillside open spaces
- Improve connectivity/walkability with light rail station and on-street buses
- Pursue options to relocate transit layover function – allows redevelopment of key parcel along Rainier Ave
- Use both Cheasty/Mt. Baker Blvds segments and one-way segment dramatically establish the urban, pedestrian character for the Town Center

Improved Pedestrian Connection Uphill

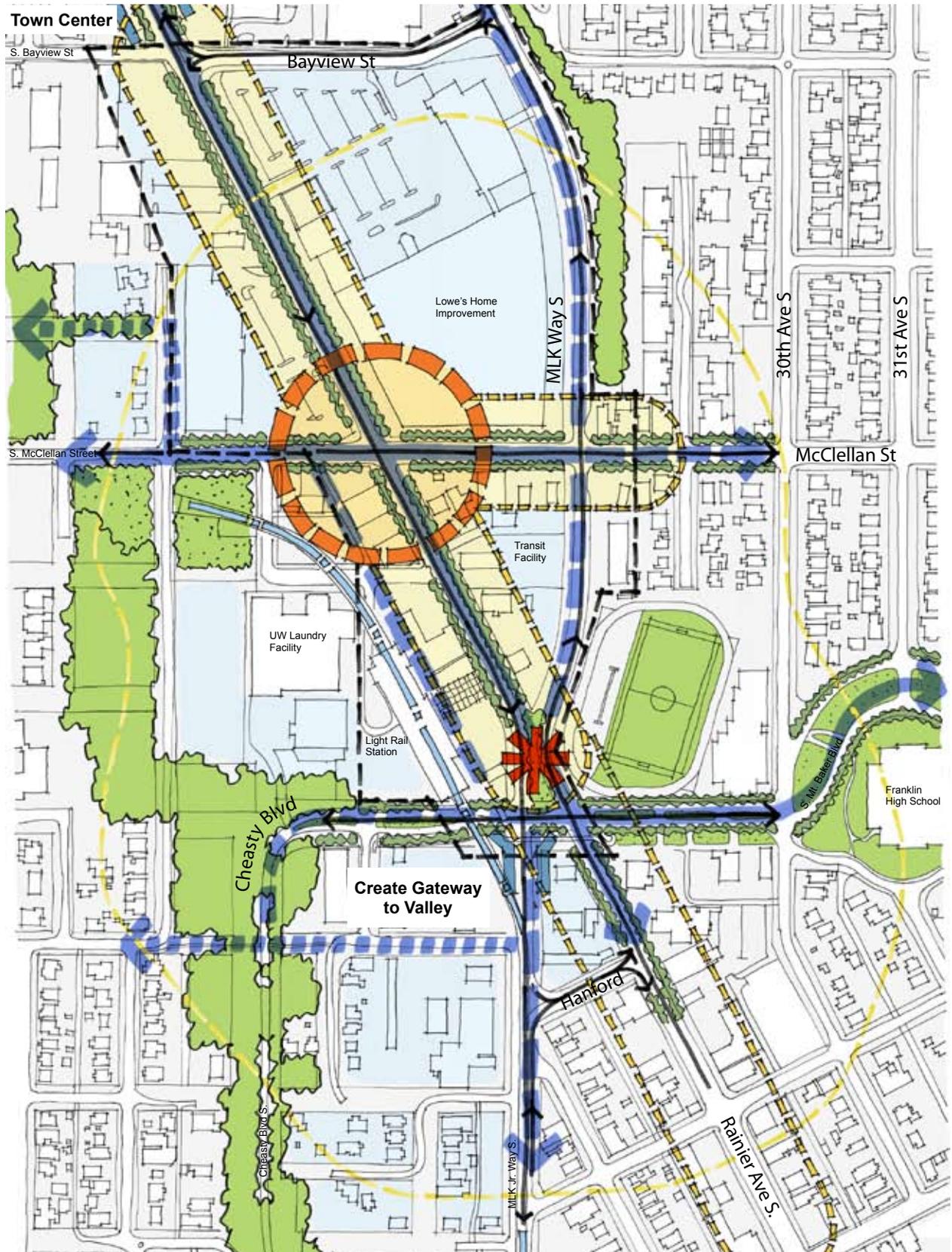
- Explore additional pedestrian routes and open space access to Cheasty green belt
- Respect informal naturalistic landscape conditions of Cheasty Blvd
- Use pedestrian improvements projects as a catalyst for safety, habitat and stormwater functions

Reconnect Cheasty/Mt. Baker Boulevards

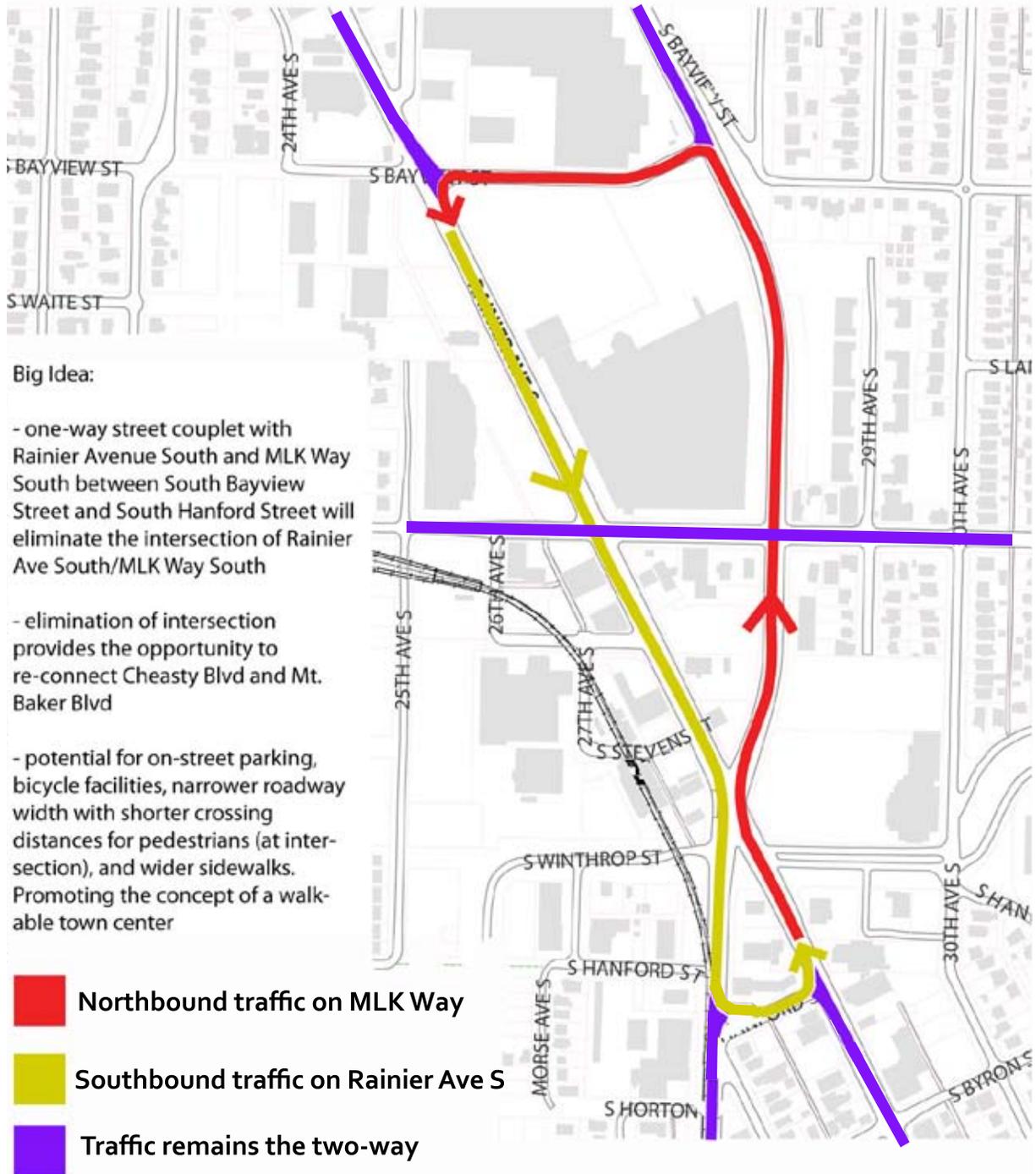
- Improve street ROW to complete connection between boulevards and open space corridor
- Enhance connections from neighbor destination to town center
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity
- Promote and reinforce original concept of the Olmstead Boulevard Plan
- Redevelopment of key sites to activate streets —specifically Lowe’s and QFC
- Widen sidewalk to improve pedestrian safety and retail environment on Rainier Ave and MLK Way



MOUNT BAKER TOWN CENTER URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK



BOWTIE TRAFFIC CONCEPT



MOUNT BAKER TOWN CENTER CONCEPT PLAN



See sections on pages 12 and 13.

IMPROVING STREETS AND PUBLIC SPACES



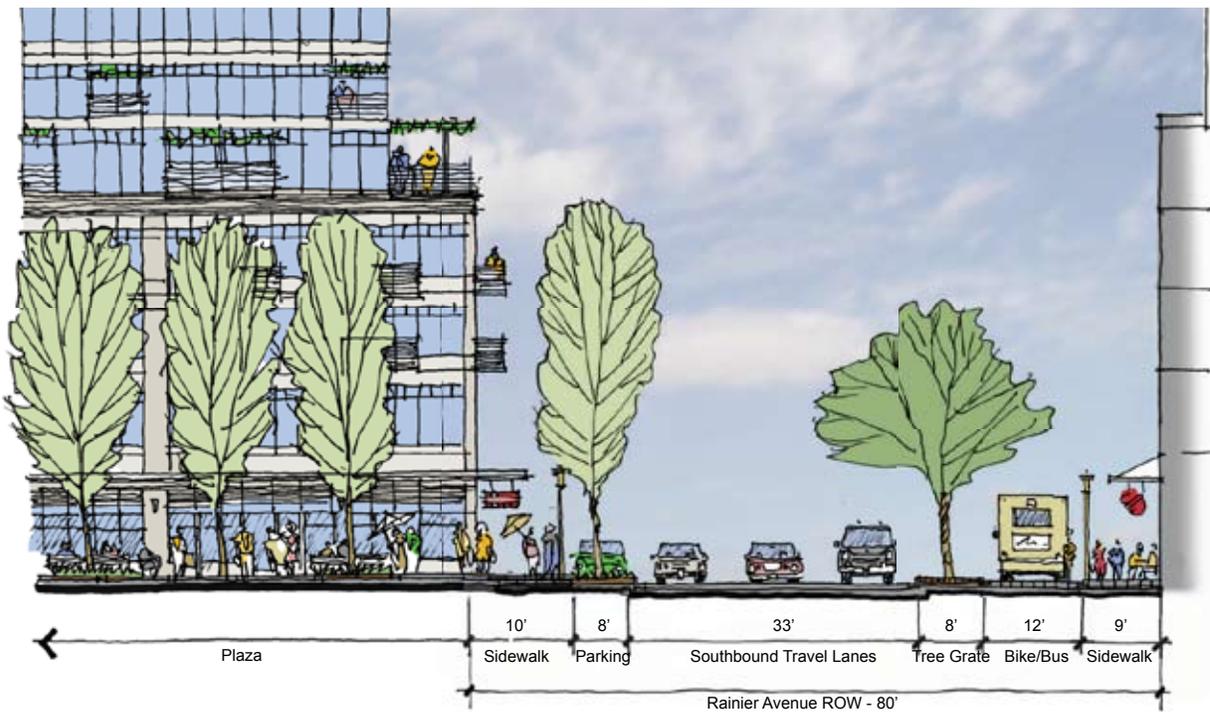
Improving the Town Center for pedestrians, cyclists, shoppers and transit patrons was identified as a high priority in the 2010 North Rainier Neighborhood plan update. Solutions include widening sidewalks, adding landscape, and reconnecting the Olmsted Boulevard.

The illustrations on page 11 shows a right of way improvement concept to enhance the vitality and improve pedestrian connections at the core of the Town Center.



A. Proposed traffic revisions would allow for wider sidewalks, on street parking and a separated bicycle track on MLK Way Jr.

IMPROVING STREETS AND PUBLIC SPACES

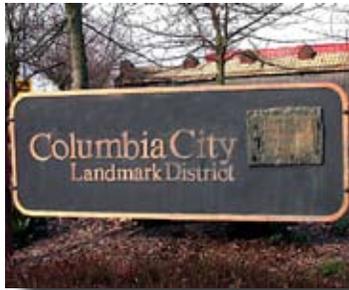


B. A reconfigured Rainier Avenue S with better public spaces, wider sidewalks, on-street parking and a dedicated transit only lane northbound on Rainier Avenue S.



GATEWAYS

The North Rainier community emphasized the importance of establishing gateway elements to better define the neighborhood's town center's identity. Gateways of this kind are an urban design tool that can transform utilitarian transportation corridors into memorable points of arrival. By definition gateway elements are in highly visible, heavily traveled locations. Their design should benefit from broad community input and represent the highest level of design excellence. The following types of gateways options would be appropriate for the Mount Baker Town Center.



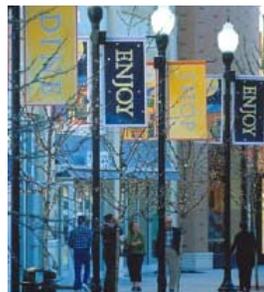
Signage

Signs whether simple or ornate are an effective way to clearly mark the town center boundary. The City of Seattle can assist communities in developing neighborhood specific welcoming signs.



Physical structures

Structures such as pylons and sculptures can signify entrance and provide traffic calming.



Unique Streetscape Elements

Elements such as pedestrian scaled lighting, distinctive tree species, directional signs and seasonal banners and plantings can define the distinctive quality of the Town Center.

LAND USE AND BUILT FORM

Structure Height and Bulk

A necessary component to achieving a vital Town Center is greater pedestrian activity and residential density. To achieve this goal the Plan Update recommends increased building heights at the core, see page 13. Specific recommendations include increasing the existing height limit from 65 feet up to 85 feet on those parcels closest to the Mt Baker light rail station. In addition, the plan recognizes that the triangle of land bordered by S Bayview St, Rainier Ave S and MLK Jr Way S presents a significant opportunity for increased density within the town center. This 13 acre site is currently occupied by a Lowes Home Improvement Store and Amazon.com. Within this triangle the plan recommends changing the zoning height from the current 65 feet to 125 feet. To ensure that these new heights are compatible with the less intense land uses of abutting parcels particular attention should be paid by massing and modulation—see illustration below. The plan update recommends the development of neighborhood specific design review guidelines. These guidelines can further address and define preferred structure massing, transitions and street-level façade design.



Lowrise 3 Description

The Lowrise 3 zone provides for a variety of housing types in existing multifamily neighborhoods of moderate scale. LR-3 accommodates residential growth within designated urban villages and station area overlay districts. A mix of small to moderate scale multifamily housing is encouraged including apartments, townhouses and rowhouses.



Neighborhood Commercial 3 Description

A larger pedestrian-oriented shopping district serving the surrounding neighborhood and communities. The examples projects on this page show NC3 heights of 65, 85 and 125 feet.

Example of Neighborhood Commercial 3-65'



The use of a range of exterior cladding material adds variety to the building façade.

Example of Neighborhood Commercial 3-85''

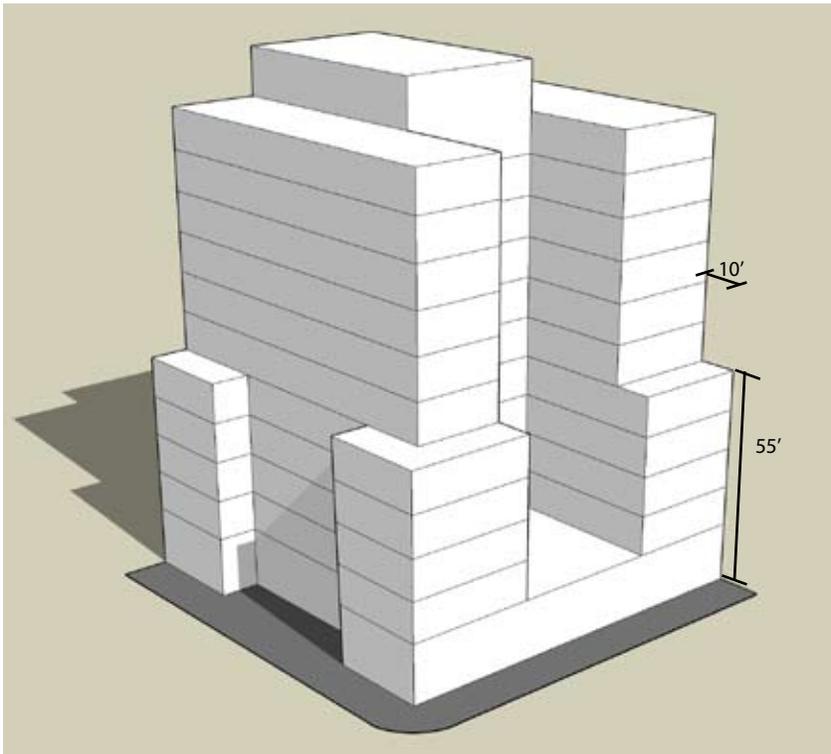


Upper level setbacks and vertical modulation reduce the building's bulk.

Example of Neighborhood Commercial 3-125"



In this example, the third floor upper-level setback reduces the building's bulk along the primary street façade.

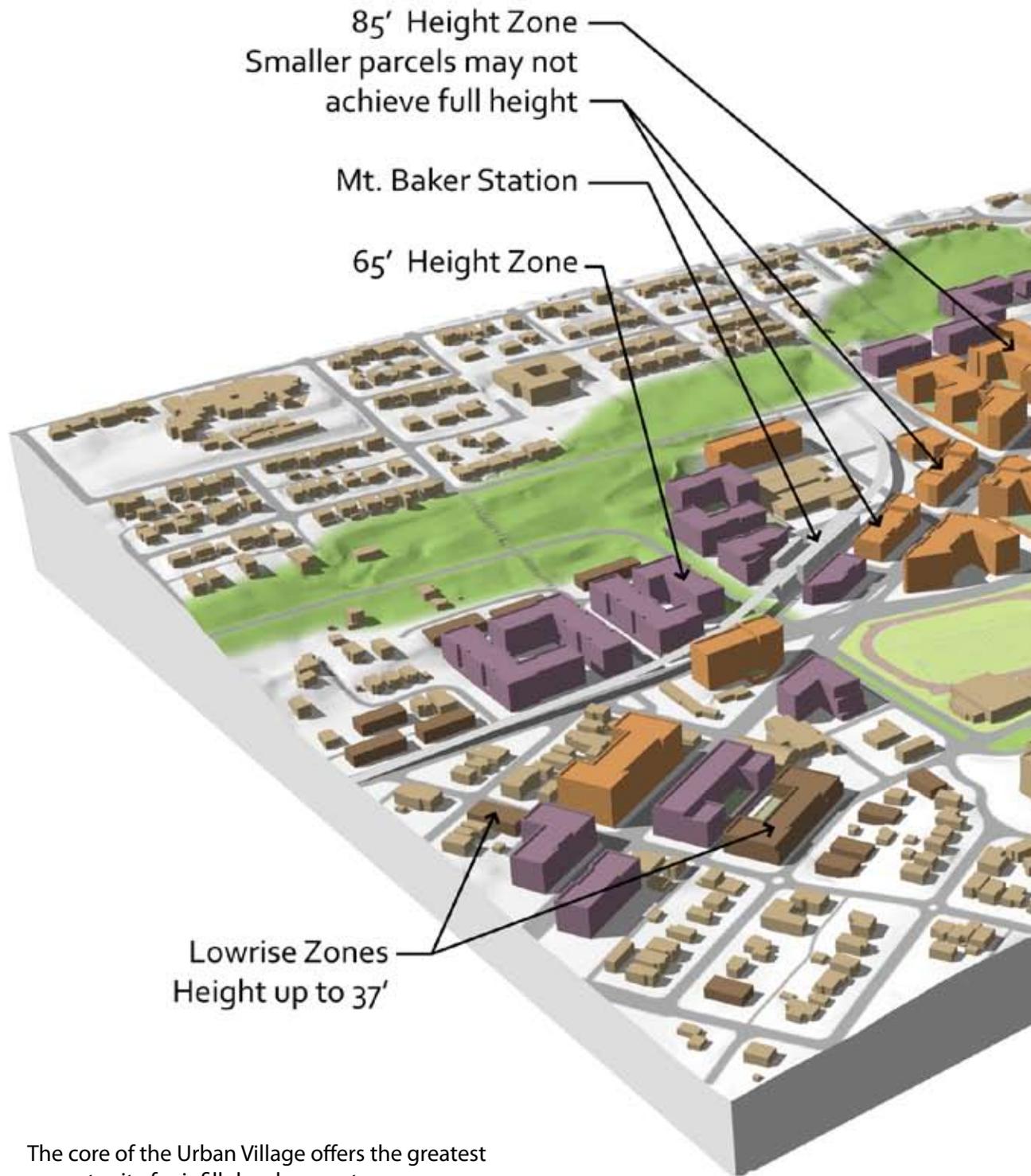


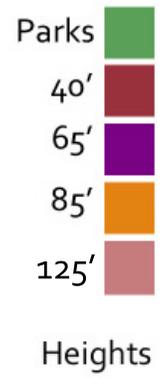
Upper Level Set-Back Requirement

Specific recommendations

An upper-level setback of ten feet from all street property lines shall be required for buildings over 55 feet in height.

LAND USE AND BUILT FORM





LAND USE AND BUILT FORM

Enhancing the Public Realm

To ensure a walkable Town Center this plan recommends that pedestrian oriented retail and amenity be concentrated, (see 'Core street activator/storefront character' zone page 9). This area should be rich with amenities including, seating, pedestrian scaled lighting, directional signage, on-street parking, overhead weather protection, and improved crosswalks.

The Mount Baker Town Center is constrained and defined by steep topography to the east and west and lower density residential zoning in all directions. Increasing the intensity and residential and commercial density at the core is a important recommendation of this urban design framework.



Franklin High School



Mount Baker Station



Physical Context

The Mount Baker Town Center is situated in a valley bottom between steep slopes to the east and west.



The town center is bordered by light industrial uses to the north and south, and medium and low density residential uses to the east and west.

Assessing Development Capacity

The Department of Planning and Development utilizes and maintains a development capacity model. This model estimates the amount of new development that could be built in the City by comparing existing land uses, housing units and commercial square feet to what could be built under current or proposed zoning. The difference between potential and existing development yields the capacity for new development. This capacity is measured as the number of housing units, the amount of commercial square feet and the number of potential jobs that could be added.

Development capacity is not a prediction that a certain amount of development will occur in a certain time period. The capacity estimates do not include a time dimension because they do not incorporate any direct measurement of demand, which would help determine when parcels would be developed. Many parcels in the city today have zoning that allows for more development than currently exists on them, but not all of them are available or have a demand for development.

For the purposes of determining development capacity it is assumed within the model that development will eventually occur regardless of market forces. Therefore, development capacity is not a forecast and has no planning horizon. It is simply an estimate of the additional development that could occur under the current zoning regulations. This additional development could happen all in one year or not at all depending on the economy, attractiveness to development, or other market conditions. Capacity represents the amount of new growth that could be accommodated. The amount of growth that is expected to occur and that City policy intends to accommodate is established as the 20-year growth targets in the Comprehensive Plan.

Development Capacity Analysis

The actual level of development activity that occurs is controlled by a variety of future factors, many of which are beyond our ability to predict or influence. These factors include such things as the future demand for a particular type of development (such as for townhouses, high-amenity multifamily or small-unit multifamily), whether the owner of any particular land is willing to sell or redevelop it, the financial feasibility of developing the land, and the intensity of development when it does occur. Other factors, such as the relative attractiveness of certain areas for living and commerce, and the relative densities allowed by the existing zoning, can cause some areas to be developed earlier or later than others. No one can predict with certainty the total effect of all these factors on the choices made by land developers.

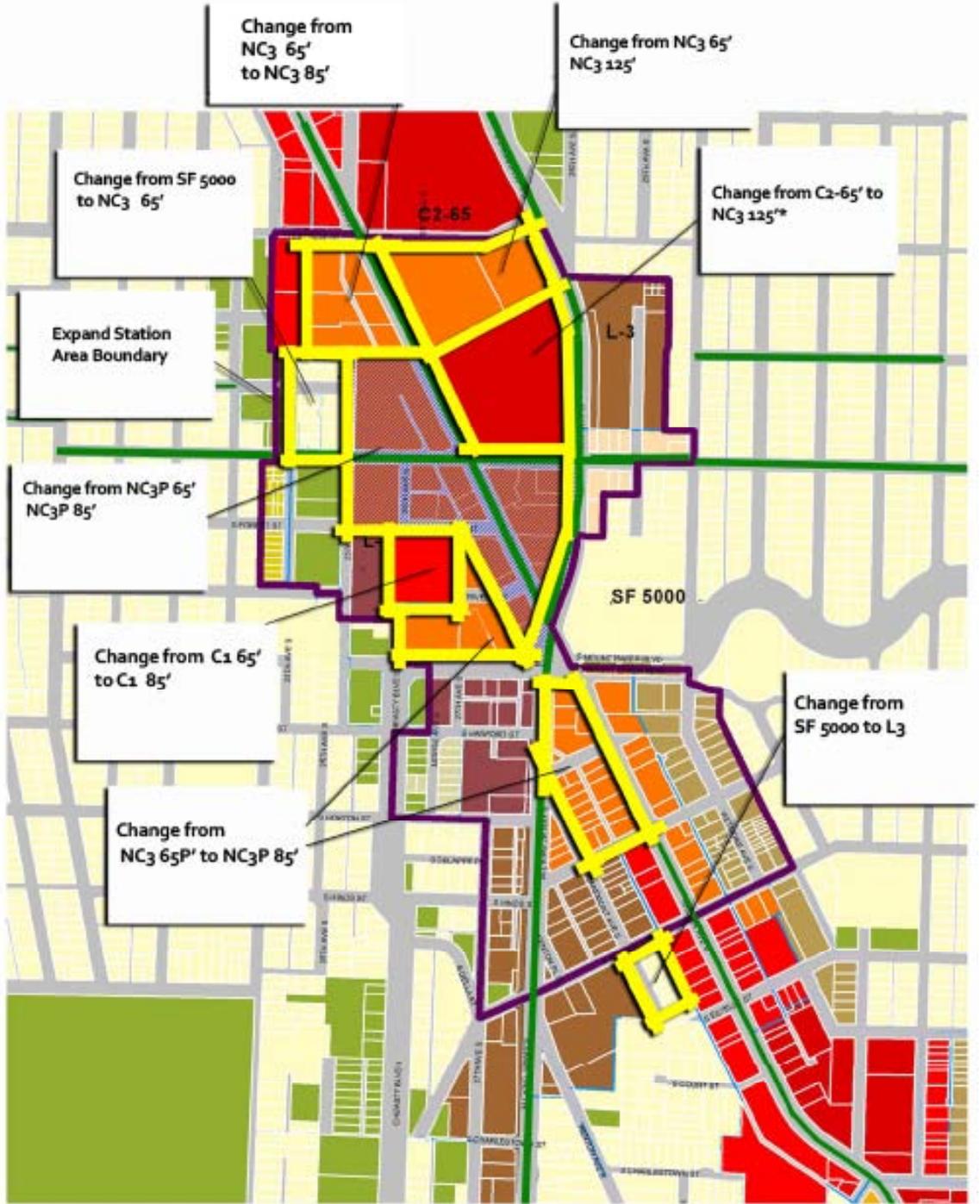
These numbers are based on real residential and commercial densities in comparable zones elsewhere in Seattle. Jobs are calculated at 1 job per 300 square feet.

Mount Baker Town Center

20 Year Growth Targets			
	Existing	Proposed	Increase
Residential	994 units	1,243 units	249 units
Employment	579 jobs	749 jobs	170 jobs

Based on proposed increase in zoning capacity described on page 22.

PROPOSED ZONING CHANGES



SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIES

TOD Approach

Transit oriented communities are inherently sustainable. Walkable neighborhoods near public transit consume half the energy of housing in conventional suburbs according to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Because buildings and transportation together account for about 70% of US energy use and 62% of our greenhouse gas emissions, planning and building successful, pedestrian and transit oriented communities are among the most significant steps we can take toward achieving a sustainable future.

Green Stormwater

As part the urban design framework review, the City of Seattle analyzed the potential for green stormwater infrastructure such as rain gardens, swales, or pervious pavement within the Mount Baker Town Center. This area was not found to be a good candidate for these strategies for two reasons:

1. Generally, there are no systemic capacity problems resulting in flooding or related stormwater problems.
2. The unique glacial conditions in the area create significant localized impediments to infiltration due to a combination of steep slopes, varying soil conditions, and areas of shallow water table.

However, many local opportunities still remain which should be considered on a site-by-site basis. In addition the new Stormwater Code requires Green Stormwater Infrastructure to the 'maximum extent feasible' for new projects throughout the city including the Mount Baker Town Center. All new development, such as buildings, streets, and trails will incorporate Green Stormwater solutions were feasible.

In addition, projects in NC zones will be encourage to pursue City programs that encourage sustainable building and design:
[www.seattle.gov/util/About_SPU/Drainage & Sewer System/Green-StormwaterInfrastructure/index.htm](http://www.seattle.gov/util/About_SPU/Drainage_&_Sewer_System/Green-StormwaterInfrastructure/index.htm)

New development, particularly on larger sites, provides the opportunity for the integration of additional sustainable elements. For more information see:

- [Green Factor](#)
- [Priority Green Permitting](#)
- [Living Building Challenge](#)



Incentive Structures for Public Benefits

In developing this proposal, DPD considered opportunities to incentivize the provision of public benefits such as affordable housing, affordable retail space, open space, or alternative building configurations as a part of new development by the private sector by allowing additional floor area contingent on the provision of public benefits. This type of regulation would help ensure that growth in this area supports the types of amenities that would make a denser neighborhood more livable.

Incentive structures for additional floor area are currently regulated under Seattle Municipal Code Section 23.58A, Incentive Provisions. Section 23.58A was adopted by Council in December of 2008, in order to define the process and criteria for allow extra floor area contingent on the provision of public benefits. Under this code, bonus floor area allowed for buildings with a maximum height limit of 85 feet or less must be used to provide affordable housing. For buildings with a maximum height limit of greater than 85 feet, at least 60 percent of the total bonus floor area must be used to provide affordable housing. The remaining extra floor area can be achieved through provision of affordable housing or other public benefits. Section 23.58A also defines the specific process for providing affordable housing through this provision including targeting specific income levels, length of affordability subsidies, and a payment-in-lieu option. No provisions exist defining what non-affordable-housing benefits may be provided for the remaining 40 percent of the extra floor area for buildings over 85 feet.

Based on the urban design analysis discussed earlier, DPD is not recommending heights greater than 85 feet within the planning area with the exception of one block currently occupied by Lowe's Home Improvement store. Consequently, incentive structures for additional floor area will be used to provide affordable housing outside of this one block. The existing Mount Baker Neighborhood Plan and the Neighborhood Plan Update both provided considerable support for making new height contingent on provision of affordable housing. Below are specific policies and strategies including in the 2009 Plan Update that are relevant:

- **Policy 3.A.** Encourage a mix of home prices and sizes through active use of incentives and funding.
- **Strategy 3.3.** Encourage affordable family-sized homes through incentives, direct City funding, and surplus property programs.
- **Strategy 3.6.** Set affordable housing objectives and use incentives, direct City funding, and surplus property programs to fill gaps.

Under the current zoning proposal, proposed floor area increases are generally small in proportion to existing heights (mostly 65 feet to 85 feet).

The Lowes property provides substantial opportunities to encourage a gateway property that could define and support the creation of a town center within the North Rainier planning area. A development of this nature would substantially support one of the goals of the Neighborhood Plan Update to develop **“A Town Center that concentrates housing, commercial uses, services and living-wage employment opportunities; that is well served by transit and nonmotorized travel options; and that is well designed and attractive to pedestrians”**. Accordingly, this parcel is recommended to be rezoned to a maximum height of 125 feet. This potential increase provides a substantial incentive that would merit the provision of public benefit. Additionally, the signature nature of this property and its potential size justify additional requirements that will help to ensure the project is a benefit to the community. Public benefits discussed in the neighborhood plan update that should be considered in the final zoning proposal include:

- breaking down scale of super blocks to create a balance of inwardly and street-focused development;
- use of green building strategies such as those that address drainage; building efficiency; tree canopy; and opportunities for district energy systems;
- open space that invites people to gather and to engage in physical activity;
- pedestrian connections and wider sidewalks along Rainier Ave; and
- guidelines to help ensure that new housing fits well into the existing neighborhood.



Conceptual redevelopment of Lowe's site.

Transfer of Development Rights

DPD evaluated the prospect of designating the Mount Baker planning area as a receiving site for the regional TDR program. However, we do not recommend this approach for the following reasons:

- 1. Contradicts existing public policy.** Seattle Municipal Code Section 23.58A requires that development incentives be targeted to affordable housing.
- 2. High value of competing public benefits identified in the neighborhood plan.** Allowing additional height through incentive zoning provisions such as TDR programs or local public benefits programs creates an additional value for developers, which can be used to justify the provision of public benefits through private development projects. As this value is finite, it is critical to make balanced choices about the specific regional and local benefits that should be incentivized through this system. Within the North Rainier planning area, there is a relatively small amount of additional height available for incentivizing public benefits. The neighborhood plan update provides guidance about the types of public benefits that are prioritized by the community. Given the relatively small amount of incentive available and the importance of affordable housing in the neighborhood plan update, we are not recommending a regional TDR system appropriate.
- 3. High transactional cost relative to potential benefit.** Transfers of Development Rights carry substantial transactional costs due to legal and brokerage fees associated with developing the contract, deed restrictions, and monetary transaction. Because each of these steps must be undertaken on a project-by-project basis, the relative costs of the program become substantially higher. With the exception of the Lowe's Property or within the North Rainier planning area, there are few parcels with the lot size and potential height increase to justify use of a TDR transaction. Ownership across multiple parcels is relatively fractured which means that there are few opportunities to take advantage of this approach without incurring substantial costs.

Minimum Densities

Policy 8.F of the North Rainier Neighborhood Plan Update asks the City to consider minimum densities for the Station Area Overlay. Requiring minimum densities in development projects is a tool that has been used in other cities to ensure that developers do not redevelop parcels with substantially less residential or commercial space than is allowed under zoning.

The use of these tools, however, must also be balanced with market realities and potential unintended consequence for existing businesses. For example, density requirements that require buildings of a size, density, or land use mix that can't be supported by the market can actually hinder redevelopment if it becomes infeasible for developers to provide development above the minimum density. Additionally, minimum density requirements can negatively impact existing businesses if they are unable to undertake incremental expansion that would fall below minimum density, or if certain building types in place now that support local businesses are prohibited.

The city is considering the following approaches in order to encourage the development of a vibrant town center in lieu of minimum densities:

- Requiring a minimum square footage density requirement for any development either above a certain size threshold or with an exception for additions (ex. 1 unit per 500 square feet of site area or 3 square feet of development per 1 square feet of site area) – This approach ensures that a minimum amount of development occurs as part of any project. Minimum densities are typically for residential development, but could allow commercial or other uses.
- Requiring a minimum ratio of non-retail development for all retail development above a certain size threshold or with an exception for additions (ex. Minimum of 1 square feet of non-retail development per 1 square feet of retail development for any development over 4,000 square feet) - The purpose of this approach would be to prevent auto-oriented or large-format retail uses without an office or residential component. At the same time, this approach would avoid precluding development where the market can't support larger buildings as it is proportional to the amount of retail development rather than being a fixed minimum. The size threshold could be varied to ensure mixed-use redevelopment in most projects or just to prevent single-use large-format retail.

Present projects in area suggest the market is mature enough not to support low-density strip retail.



IMPLEMENTATION

Building a successful Town Center requires the coordinated effort of the community, the City, private development and a range of other public and private entities. The following matrix describes the likely time frame for completion and the responsible parties. The actions described are those defined in the neighborhood plan update process.

ACTIONS	City of Seattle	Community	King County Metro	Private Development	Sound Transit
Building a great Town Center					
Improve pedestrian crossings at multiple intersections	●			□	
Create a network of comfortable pedestrian routes for varying levels of ability and mobility including the visually/hearing impaired	● SDOT	●		●	
Create seamless bike/pedestrian link between town center and surrounding neighborhoods	● SDOT				
Establish a hierarchy of streets (e.g. green streets/bike boulevards/local, etc.) that emphasize pedestrian/bike mobility	● SDOT				
Explore additional pedestrian routes and open space access in the Cheasty green belt	● Parks/DPD	●		●	
Continue to pursue zoning and Design Review changes that support the inclusion of green building components	● DPD	●		●	
Develop Neighborhood Specific Design Review Guidelines	◆ DPD				
Consider employing a Health Impact Assessment to increase the success of implementation in reducing disparities in health	● DPD				
Create a more secure environment for people and businesses using the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to enliven temporarily vacant sites.	● DPD	●		●	●
Identify desired off-street circulation patterns and work with developers of large parcels to create internal circulation that promotes walking within developments and between sites.	● DPD			●	
Complete bicycle infrastructure improvements per the SDOT Bicycle Master Plan.	◆ SDOT				

◆ Underway ● Short Term □ Long Term

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Neighborhood_Planning/Overview/