



LAND USE

Deliver walkable neighborhoods & essential components of livability

Meeting the growing demand for conveniently located homes and businesses in walkable neighborhoods can significantly reduce the number of miles Seattleites drive, shrinking the city’s carbon footprint while giving people more housing choices and access to essential components of livable communities (such as parks, plazas, sidewalks, etc.).

Enabling Strategies

In short, regardless of income, people drive less when provided with easy walk and bike access to transit, basic retail, and community services. Seattle is expected to grow by 100,000 people by 2030. Without land use policies, regulations, and development incentives that accommodate our growing population in compact, complete communities near transit, the most aggressive transportation strategies for reducing GHG emissions will fall short of meeting local targets.

1. POLICY AND PLANNING

Policies and legislation that guide land development have long-term impacts on how people travel. Transitioning from policies that assume auto-access and travel as the norm to those that promote diverse options for travel will require new laws, policies, and approaches for planning and prioritizing projects. A Transit Communities Policy and related updates to the Comprehensive Plan will align planning, zoning and public investments to support transit communities and inform neighborhood planning.

2. FLEXIBLE, PERFORMANCE BASED ZONING FOR TRANSIT COMMUNITIES

Zoning codes and development requirements often create obstacles for developers to build better developments in connected and complete communities. Creating more flexible zoning regulations that measure performance and form and providing incentives for low-trip generating development types are keys to meeting Climate Action Plan (CAP) goals.

3. INCENTIVES & OUTREACH TO ENCOURAGE CARBON-FRIENDLY BUSINESS DISTRICTS

There is opportunity to provide incentives and target outreach to encourage local businesses to support and leverage the benefits of pedestrian and bicycle access. In particular, city resources should be focused in transitional commercial districts to support retention of existing small businesses.

4. PARKING REFORM

Excess off-street parking (parking spaces built to code that are rarely used) reduces space for new development, increases the cost of housing and commercial space, and increases emissions from transportation. Developers should be provided with options to reduce or eliminate off-street parking for well-designed, transit-oriented development. Use of new and existing parking should be maximized at all times of day, and its physical impact on neighborhoods limited. Parking pricing can be used strategically to increase access and improve walkability in business districts.

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KEY OUTCOMES

- Reduced per capita vehicle miles traveled and GHG emissions resulting from increasing the share of residents living in close proximity to retail and other essential services (and close to transit, enabling low-impact, long-distance travel within the region)
- Policies and regulations that support private investment in compact, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods, particularly where there are high-quality transit and non-motorized transportation options
- Complete communities where most new housing units and jobs are within walking distance of transit and basic services, recreation, and cultural activities

CO-BENEFITS / SYNERGIES WITH OTHER STRATEGIES

- Improved human health due to more people using active transportation; reduced pollution and improved safety for cyclists, drivers and pedestrians
- Increased options for the type, size and location of housing for families and multi-generational households
- Improved access to and economic vitality of local retail districts; more customers within a short walk of local retailers
- Opportunities created for more compact, energy efficient buildings
- More incentives and opportunities provided for the integration of affordable housing and creation of accessible family wage jobs in complete, walkable, bicycle accessible, transit-oriented communities

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS

- Educate the public about community character, vitality, and business benefits of infill development and moderate and high density urban development
- Foster compact, walkable neighborhood development, while restricting negative impacts of gentrification (displacement, housing cost increases, loss of cultural resources, etc.)
- Provide family-sized housing units and high-quality neighborhood public schools in transit communities, two key elements needed to attract a broad range of household types including families
- Protect and encourage local businesses by creating new opportunities for customer access as neighborhoods transition from auto-dependent to more transit and pedestrian oriented (e.g. target parking maximums, pricing strategies to areas already well-served by transit)
- Preserve affordable commercial space and protect industrial lands



LAND USE POLICY AND PLANNING

Adopt policies to support climate-friendly communities

Policies and legislation that guide public and private land development have long-term impacts on how people travel. Historically, comprehensive planning and environmental review processes assume that single-occupant vehicle travel is the norm. Adjusting to the new norm, where people desire diverse options for travel, will require new laws, policies, and approaches for planning and prioritizing project spending.

Enabling Strategies

1. ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT A TRANSIT COMMUNITIES POLICY

Adopt a Transit Communities Policy to better align land use and investment strategies to maximize transit investments; update the Comprehensive Plan to align planning and zoning to support transit communities; use walksheds to define planning areas and inform neighborhood planning.

2. CREATE A DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Create a city development authority that would partner with the private sector and use district-based funding mechanisms (i.e., tax increment finance, tax abatement, local improvement districts) to promote and shape transit communities.

3. REDUCE COST AND UNCERTAINTY OF PROJECT REVIEW IN TRANSIT COMMUNITIES

Provide categorical exemption from SEPA for projects that meet minimum criteria for density, mix of uses, and GHG reductions (advocate for authority to allow mitigation of project impacts by payment of a multimodal transportation impact fee based on estimated Vehicle Trip Generation); align planning and development review functions and reduce process time; continue to reform the design review process to ensure transit-oriented projects are provided with an expedited review timeline.

4. ESTABLISH NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE GOALS

Identify priorities for green space, shared use facilities, and green infrastructure needs on an individual neighborhood scale. Integrate these priorities into neighborhood plans and allow development of shared public spaces to meet Green Factor requirements through fee-in-lieu of options or similar.

PILOT PROJECT	TRANSIT COMMUNITIES POLICY Adopt and apply to a set of neighborhoods or station areas.
LEGISLATIVE ACTION	ADVOCATE FOR STATE LEGISLATIVE REFORM Advocate for state legislative reforms to update the Growth Management Act to incorporate GHG reduction goals and allow tools that support Transit Community development such as inclusionary zoning, opportunities to influence housing unit size, and tax increment financing.

Top Image: Courtesy of Dan Bertolet





LAND USE ZONING

Update zoning to foster complete, walkable Transit Communities

Residents of compact neighborhoods, with a mix of shops, services, and cultural, recreational and civic uses within walking distance of transit, drive less and generate less GHG emissions per capita than residents of lower-density, single-use districts. Accommodating more jobs and households in neighborhoods accessible to transit is essential for GHG emissions reduction. With an influx of nearly 100,000 new residents by 2030, investments in walking, cycling and transit infrastructure and services are needed.

Enabling Strategies

The City is developing a citywide Transit Communities Policy that will further enhance its successful Urban Village Strategy by better aligning land use and investment strategies to maximize new investments in Link lighttrail, RapidRide, streetcar and other modes of transit. Soon to be desingated Transit Communities will allow zoning and development codes to create compact, vibrant, healthy communities with affordable housing choices that are accessible by transit and rich in the essential components of livability such as parks, open space, sidewalks, etc. Providing more flexibility in the zoning code – especially in areas with good transit access, and providing incentives for low-traffic development are keys to meeting climate protection goals.

1. INCREASE THE DIVERSITY OF HOUSING TYPES IN SINGLE-FAMILY ZONES WITHIN TRANSIT COMMUNITIES

Allow and facilitate permitting for a greater diversity of housing types (e.g. duplex, tri-plex, courtyard cottages etc.) in single family zones within Transit Community boundaries.

2. INCREASE THE DIVERSITY OF HOUSING TYPES IN MULTI-FAMILY ZONES WITHIN TRANSIT COMMUNITIES

Develop tools to foster family-sized housing and accommodations for multi-generational households in Transit Communities (e.g. provide FAR and height bonuses for three or more bedroom units etc.)

3. USE ZONING TO INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND COMMERCIAL SPACE IN TRANSIT COMMUNITIES

Implement inclusionary zoning (requiring a share of units in a new multifamily project to be “affordable”), expanded density and height bonuses [incentive zoning], tax exemptions, and/or other tools to foster affordable housing and to preserve spaces for small businesses in commercial and/or mixed-use buildings.

4. INCREASE FLEXIBILITY IN NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL ZONES

Modify codes to foster diverse commercial activities and to preserve and promote business and job opportunities (e.g. provide height bonuses to allow leasable ground floor commercial spaces).

PILOT PROJECT

CLIMATE FRIENDLY VISUALIZATIONS
Expand the climate friendly visualization project into a neighborhood outreach program that uses visual preference testing to promote smart growth policies, zoning changes, etc.

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LAND USE INCENTIVES & OUTREACH

Provide incentives and conduct outreach to encourage businesses to support and leverage the benefits of pedestrian and bicycle access

Success in shifting more trips in Seattle to walking, biking, and transit will require not only quality services and facilities, but also collaborative programs that encourage changes in how neighborhoods are designed. Programs that improve the pedestrian accessibility of retail businesses and services encourage people to leave their car at home and households to operate with one less vehicle. Prioritizing underutilized rights-of-way for new pocket parks, bike parking, and/or pedestrian ways makes walking and biking more attractive and can bring more customers to local businesses.

Enabling Strategies

1. PROVIDE GRANTS TO CONVERT PARKING AND OTHER AREAS TO ACTIVE USES AND BUSINESS ACCESS BY OTHER MODES

Provide small targeted investments for retailers to transition auto-oriented space to other purposes that support business access and uses (e.g. bicycle corrals, café seating etc).

2. PROMOTE THE BUSINESS BENEFITS OF PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE IMPROVEMENTS

Educate businesses on the increased patronage that could be achieved by improving access to local businesses by pedestrian and bicycle traffic (e.g. provide pedestrian and bicycle count data to increase awareness of the amount of non-motorized traffic passing by).

3. TARGET AND EXPAND GRANT PROGRAMS TO TRANSITIONAL COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

Target and expand existing grant programs that support local business to commercial areas that are transitioning into complete Transit Communities.

PILOT PROJECT

CLIMATE-FRIENDLY BRAND

Create a brand and marketing program for climate friendly, transit-oriented communities.

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PARKING AS A LAND USE

Reform parking requirements and manage parking to maintain accessibility; encourage access by walking, cycling and public transit

Walkable, bicycle-accessible, transit communities, with a mix-of land uses and services and well managed parking, can be accessible without over-committing valuable, limited land to parking. With measures to prevent parking congestion on streets in surrounding areas, and elimination of off-street parking requirements, parking can be developed, shared between uses, and managed efficiently to provide auto access, while encouraging travelers to arrive by walking, cycling, or transit, or to “park once” to visit multiple destinations. By reducing costs for the development of excess parking (off-street parking spaces that are built to code, but rarely used) these reforms may also reduce the cost of housing, commercial space and retail goods and services.

Enabling Strategies

1. REFORM OFF-STREET PARKING REQUIREMENTS IN TRANSIT COMMUNITIES

Eliminate minimum parking space requirements and establish appropriate maximums for land uses in Transit Communities, while enacting policies to minimize spillover impacts in adjacent areas.

2. DEVELOP A NON-RESIDENTIAL PARKING SPACE TAX

Advocate for authority to levy a per space tax on off-street parking to be paid by property-owners. Pricing may be tiered to account for climate impacts based on factors such as the transit accessibility and density of the area.

3. DEVELOP PARKING BENEFIT AREAS

Consider creating parking benefit districts in areas with priced on-street parking to allow parking fees and taxes to be used for local improvements focused on enhancing access by walking, cycling and transit.

4. MINIMIZE THE IMPACT OF PARKING ON BUSINESS DISTRICT CHARACTER

Design parking to provide access to businesses without interrupting building frontage on walkable retail streets, and build shared parking structures that accommodate demand from multiple sites efficiently.

PILOT PROJECT

DEVELOP A PARKING BENEFIT DISTRICT (PBD)
Implement a PBD in a Transit Community business district with demand for on-street parking pricing

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