



City of Seattle
Seattle Planning Commission

David Cutler and Amalia Leighton, Co- Chair

MEMORANDUM

November 15, 2013

To: Diane Sugimura, Director, Department of Planning & Development

From: Seattle Planning Commission

Re: Commission comments on Northgate Urban Design Framework Draft, July 2013

CC: Marshall Foster, Tom Hauger, Gordon Clowers; DPD

Dear Ms. Sugimura,

The Planning Commission appreciates the work of the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) to prepare the draft Northgate Urban Design Framework (UDF). The Commission supports using the UDF as a guiding document for both the private and public sector regarding physical development of the area. The Commission has reviewed the public draft (July 2013) and would appreciate the opportunity to do a final review of the Northgate draft UDF when it is updated in consideration of the Commission's and others' comments.

Although the Commission supports the concept and content of the UDF, we suggest DPD develop a template to ensure consistency of style, organization and content among UDFs; similar to the current work to tie together the various neighborhood design guideline documents. We understand that providing some flexibility for individual neighborhoods is valuable, and we recommend that certain key components (such as transportation systems for all modes, topography and critical areas, Future Land Use Map (FLUM), and zoning changes) be incorporated at a similar level of detail into each UDF to ensure it is relevant to the neighborhood and is utilized to achieve intended land use and transportation outcomes.

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- ***Seattle Transit Communities Report provides guidance***

“Northgate is a burgeoning transit community success story where a 1950s auto dependent area is being transformed into a mixed-use, transit-rich community. A light rail station is scheduled to open in 2020 adjacent to an existing transit center...With the support of public investment, revitalization continues to take place in this urban center that is quickly morphing into a transit community.” (Seattle Transit Communities Report 2010) The Planning Commission’s *Seattle Transit Communities* report outlined several key actions that we are pleased to see included in the draft Northgate UDF, including: focus on bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and in particular the connections needed to support the transit investment; and better non-motorized system connections for the east and west parts of the neighborhood.

- ***General Context for UDF should lay the foundation***

Specific context-setting in the document should lay the foundation for neighborhood design recommendations. We recommend augmenting this document to include a robust and relevant existing conditions section which includes: 1) more detail to adequately show relationships to existing neighborhoods, land use and transportation; 2) remove context-setting elements that are not related to any of the recommendations; 3) include a more robust discussion of the natural settings that are a vital part of this neighborhood and that influence design; and 4) incorporate key components of the built environment - see discussion below.

- ***Acknowledge the Northgate Mall as a Heart of the Community***

The Northgate Mall is the most recognized feature of the Northgate neighborhood yet its role in the overall design and function of the neighborhood is substantially overlooked within the current draft. We recommend the document fully acknowledge the presence of and activity at the Mall and reflect the importance of the Mall as a component of the neighborhood, even though the core of the Mall site may not be changing under this UDF. The Mall is not necessarily an adversarial player in the Northgate neighborhood, and the Commission recommends combing through the draft UDF to remove language in reference to the Mall that paints it as such. Be explicit about the opportunity sites for redevelopment that exist on the current Mall property on the north, south and east sides, and specifically note the opportunities to increase connections within the neighborhood and to transit. Finally, the Northgate light rail station and redevelopment around the Mall site will lead to more pedestrian use, and the

document should incorporate detailed design guidance to improve the environment for pedestrians as they interact with the Mall site.

- ***“Loop” and “Bridge” concepts should be dropped***

The “Loop” and “Bridge” concepts in the UDF are intended to create a framework on which to build necessary components of access to, from, and within the neighborhood. In particular, the concepts identify and address significantly substandard and undesirable components of the existing environment. The concepts embedded in the “Loop” and “Bridge” framework are fundamentally strong mobility principles that should be applied broadly throughout the neighborhood. Although we agree with the concepts and we recommend retaining them in the UDF, we recommend removing the notion of the “Loop” and “Bridge” from the document.

- ***Pedestrian/bicycle bridge over I-5 may not be a given***

The draft UDF includes a planned, but not fully funded pedestrian bridge across I-5. The Commission fully supports the implementation of a pedestrian/bicycle bridge in order to provide neighborhood connections long severed by I-5 and to enhance access to the light rail station. However, we note that the draft UDF assumes the presence of the pedestrian/bicycle bridge and recommends design considerations accordingly. The Commission suggests that as a matter of good planning for the entire neighborhood on both sides of I-5, that the UDF also include a vision and guidelines for non-motorized connections across I-5 in case the pedestrian/bicycle bridge is not constructed. For example, include enhancements to pedestrian and bicycle facilities parallel to I-5 and to the existing I-5 crossings.

- ***Superblocks narrative and illustrations should be streamlined***

The Commission recommends streamlining the section dealing with the several “superblock” that comprise the Northgate neighborhood to include one set of guiding principles for redevelopment in all superblocks. We suggest providing a few illustrations to help the reader better understand the overarching themes. Do not include speculative design concepts; however, if there are unique features or opportunities in any of the superblocks, these should be highlighted.

- *Transit Oriented Development on the Metro Blocks as a catalyst site*

The Metro Blocks is a key component of redevelopment in the Northgate area. While we understand the thinking behind including the Metro Blocks within the Northgate UDF, we recommend instead that the Metro Blocks be incorporated by reference within the Northgate UDF, and that Metro Blocks should stand alone as a planning document that can be readily updated and revised without opening up the entire UDF. The Metro Blocks document will serve as the foundation for the development agreement and should incorporate the level of detail necessary to guide decision makers in that process, a level of detail that, in our estimation, exceeds that needed for the neighborhood-scale UDF. The Metro Blocks will serve as a catalyst for future growth and implement much of the vision for superblock redevelopment.

Upon review of the public draft of the Northgate UDF members of the Planning Commission's Land Use and Transportation Committee met with UDF project manager, Gordon Clowers and relayed our review comments. We appreciated the opportunity to meet with Mr. Clowers and expressed our willingness to review future completed drafts of this Northgate UDF document.

If you have any questions or would like further clarification please do not hesitate to call our analyst, Jesseca Brand at (206) 684-8694 or either of us.

Sincerely,



David Cutler
Co-Chair



Amalia Leighton
Co-Chair

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION RECORD OF DISCLOSURES & RECUSALS:

Commissioner Matt Roewe recused himself from this discussion.
Commissioner Hough-Beck disclosed that the firm she works for, Hough Beck Baird, Inc., works on public, private and non-profit projects throughout the City of Seattle that might be impacted and that Sound Transit is a client.
Commissioner Krikawa disclosed that the firm she works for, Underhill Company, works on projects throughout the City of Seattle that might be impacted and Sound Transit is a client.

Commissioner Cutler disclosed that the firm he works for, GGLO, works on projects throughout the City of Seattle and have contracts with Sound Transit that might be impacted.

Commissioner Benotto disclosed that her employer, Weber Thompson, works on projects throughout the city of Seattle that might be impacted and she serves on the Light Rail Review Panel.

Commissioner Borrero disclosed that his firm, DRiVE, works on projects throughout the City of Seattle that might be impacted.

Commissioner Brower disclosed that his firm, Veris Law Group, represents single and multi-family developers, businesses and others that might be impacted.

Commissioner Kim disclosed that her firm, Schemata Workshop, works on projects throughout the City of Seattle that might be impacted and that her firm is working on the Sound Transit Station at Northgate.

Commissioner Khouri disclosed that his firm, b9 architects, works on projects for private clients throughout the City of Seattle that might be impacted.

Commissioner McDonald disclosed that he serves on the Light Rail Review Panel