

# Columbia City

The Columbia City light rail station can serve as the focal point for a transit-oriented neighborhood of commercial, mixed use, moderate-density residential uses. Infill development can create a compact urban form without altering the historic character of the Columbia City neighborhood and compact development pattern.

## **SOUND TRANSIT ALIGNMENT AND STATION OPTIONS**

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There are five possible Columbia City station locations under review. Depending on the alignment selected, one or two of these stations will be built. One of these would be located near South Edmunds, 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, and Rainier Avenue South (the “Columbia City” station). The proposed site for this station is within the Columbia City Landmark District. Particular care must be taken in siting and designing this station to reflect the historic character of the neighborhood.

## **EXISTING STATION AREA CONDITIONS**

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### **LAND USE AND HOUSING**

Single-family uses cover the largest amount of land in the Columbia City station area, followed by vacant parcels and schools. The single-family uses and vacant parcels together create a very low density environment. Genesee Park provides the largest contiguous open space in the area.



*View of the station vicinity and opportunity site, from 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue at Edmunds, looking north toward historic library.*

Single-family residential areas in the southwest and northeast portions of the station area have densities of approximately 5 units per acre. There are some higher density residential uses (6 units per acre) interspersed with retail uses or above ground-floor commercial uses in commercial zones.

## TRANSPORTATION

The major transportation corridor in the Columbia City station area is Rainier Avenue South, which provides a link to Downtown Seattle, Renton, and other neighborhoods in the Rainier Valley. Major arterial streets in the station area are generally not oriented to pedestrians, although the Columbia City Landmark District and adjacent streets provide excellent pedestrian facilities and abundant opportunities for walking. Issues include:

- *Auto Access to Adjacent Neighborhoods.* Rainier Avenue South and 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue South are the principal automobile routes through the station area. South Ferdinand Street and South Alaska Street provide east-west connections, with the latter providing a connection to the Beacon Hill neighborhood.
- *Pedestrian Circulation.* Much of the Columbia City station area is included in the Columbia City Landmark District, a key pedestrian-oriented area. The Rainier Community Center, Genesee Playfield, public library branch, and the Columbia School also generate significant pedestrian activity. Rainier Avenue South is not oriented to pedestrians and does not provide for convenient or comfortable access from adjacent neighborhoods, however, pedestrian facilities at South Edmunds and South Ferdinand Streets allow for easy pedestrian crossings in these locations.

<b>Columbia City Station Area – Existing Conditions, 1997<sup>1</sup></b>	
Population	1,852
Employment	612
Median Household Income (1996)	\$ 27,995
<i>Residential Land Use</i>	
Total Dwelling Units	734
Density <sup>2</sup>	
Single-family Zones	9.1
Multi-family Zones	10.5
<i>Commercial Land Use</i>	
Total Floor Area (sq. ft)	1,015,690
Retail/Service	134,767
Office	75,932
Floor Area Ratio (FAR) <sup>3</sup>	0.24
<sup>1</sup> Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.	
<sup>2</sup> Dwelling units per net acre in specified residential zones. Residential units in non-residential and downtown zones are excluded.	
<sup>3</sup> Ratio of non-residential space per net acre of commercial and industrial land use.	

### ***Community Issues***

The *Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Draft Interim Planning Report* includes a Transportation Improvement Program calling for pedestrian safety and access, bicycle safety and circulation, traffic-calming, an evaluation of commercial parking, and coordination with King County METRO to enhance local transit service and light rail connections.

The community wishes to design light rail stations to facilitate good connections between the light rail station and the neighborhood core. The neighborhood conducted a community forum on this issue in summer 1998.

### ***1995 Metro Six-Year Plan***

Rainier Avenue South is designated a major consolidation corridor, meaning that bus service along the corridor will be consolidated to improve efficiency. Savings from the efficiency improvements will be reinvested in the subareas where the savings are generated. In addition, bus frequencies along the Rainier Beach-Downtown core connection, which uses Rainier Avenue South as a primary corridor, will be increased. More convenient transit connections to downtown – the City’s central transit hub – suggests that residents will be able to make connections to other parts of the city more quickly and easily.

These strategies are consistent with the Plan’s overall objective to improve Metro’s service structure. Routes are consolidated, bus frequencies are increased, and transit hubs of various size provide quick, easy transfers.

## **PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE NETWORK**

Rainier Avenue, the major arterial street in the station area, has several pedestrian crossings. Pedestrian connections into Beacon Hill are inadequate. Recognizing that Sound Transit will improve public transit service to this area, the neighborhood proposed a Pedestrian Overlay (P2) for areas zoned NC. The City approved the overlay for NC-zoned areas in Columbia City and Hillman City.

## **URBAN DESIGN FEATURES**

The Columbia City station site is located along Rainier Avenue South and between the Beacon Hill neighborhood and the hill separating the station area from Lake Washington. The Columbia City Landmark District and commercial area are located at the heart of the station area. The Rainier Community Center and Genesee Playfield are located at the northern end of the station area.

### ***Visual Landmarks***

The most prominent visual landmarks in the Columbia City station area are the historic architecture within the Landmark District (in particular the public library branch), Genesee Playfield, and the Columbia Funeral Home at the intersection of Alaska and Rainier. Light

rail station siting and design of new transit-oriented development should respect the Landmark District.

**Views**

There are no significant scenic views in or from the Columbia City station area.

**RECENT MARKET TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY**

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**MARKET CONDITIONS**

The Columbia City station area has relatively low apartment rents and vacancy rates of approximately 6%, suggesting that the residential housing market currently has low-rent housing available. However, recent trends in land prices for multi-family housing suggest that housing prices and rents are increasing. While the area may be relatively affordable for housing, its affordability is attracting new residents and, therefore, increasing the value of properties.

**RECENT DEVELOPMENT**

There has been little commercial development overall in the station area, although there is an increasing trend in commercial land prices. This suggests that commercial properties may be able to support additional development in the near future. Established retail uses along Rainier Avenue South can potentially support additional space.

<b>Columbia City Station Area – Market Conditions<sup>1</sup></b>	
<b>Rents and Vacancy Rates</b>	
Apartment Rents (sq. ft.)	\$ 0.71
Apartment Vacancy Rate	6.0%
Office Rents (sq. ft.)	N/A
Office Vacancy Rate	N/A
<b>Trends in Land Prices<sup>2</sup></b>	
Commercial Lots	8.2%
Single Family Lots	7.2%
Multi-family Lots	4.5%
<b>Active Permit Applications</b>	
Housing Units	0
Commercial Space (sq. ft.)	0
<sup>1</sup> Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.	
<sup>2</sup> 1985-95 average annual increase, based on sales prices recorded by King County Assessor and reported by zone category.	

## RELATIVE STRENGTH OF DEVELOPMENT MARKETS IN THE COLUMBIA CITY STATION AREA

Retail development has market potential in the Columbia City station area because existing retail uses along Rainier Avenue South attract enough customers potentially to support additional retail development.

<b>Columbia City Station Area – Relative Market Strength<sup>1</sup></b>	
	Ranking (5 high, 1 low)
Housing	2
Retail	2
Office	1

<sup>1</sup> Indicates relative strength of market type of station area, compared to other potential station areas. Ranking is based on rents, employment levels, vacancy rates, land values, recent development activity, stakeholder interviews, field observations, and other information.

Housing also has some development potential in the station area. Opportunity sites could be developed for multi-family housing; and densification can be achieved through accessory dwelling units in single-family homes (which cover more than 50 acres of the station area).

## EXISTING PLANS AND ZONING

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### PLANNING CONTEXT

The potential Columbia City station area is located within the Columbia City Residential Urban Village. A neighborhood of commercial buildings, churches, apartment buildings, and single-family homes, Columbia City is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is designated a City of Seattle Landmark District. The station area includes several schools, parks, and an historic library, as well as neighborhood retail uses.

### ZONING

Generally, Columbia City is zoned for single-family, multi-family, neighborhood commercial, and commercial development. The areas around both the South Alaska Street and South Edmunds Street are zoned for multi-family, single-family, retail, park, and school uses.

Zoning in the Columbia City station is focused around a compact commercial node that is zoned NC3 for neighborhood commercial uses and C2 for commercial uses. These uses provide the neighborhood with the mix of necessary commercial services and pedestrian facilities. The NC3 zone favors pedestrians by specifically allowing for mixed use development and

limiting the size of retail shops to a compact size. This style of development is consistent with the historic character of Columbia City.

Low-rise multi-family residential zones are clustered around the commercial node on Rainier Avenue South; surrounding this cluster of commercial and multi-family residential uses are single-family residential zones.

***Southeast Seattle Reinvestment Area (SESRA)***

Commercial areas abutting Rainier Avenue South are included in the SESRA Overlay District, the intent of which is to promote community revitalization and investment, business activity, and employment opportunities for Southeast Seattle residents. SESRA’s neighborhood-oriented and pedestrian-oriented regulations can serve as the basis for transit-supportive policies. SESRA regulations encompass two types of regulations:

- *Prohibited Uses.* SESRA prohibits uses incompatible with reinvestment goals, such as outdoor storage, adult movie theaters, work release centers, and construction services.
- *Rezoning Criteria.* SESRA establishes criteria for the rezoning of base zones. A rezoning must reinforce existing commercial nodes and promote business retention, or it must enhance the business environment (increased pedestrian activity; more retail, entertainment, and personal services; infill development; more recreational opportunities).

***Columbia City Landmark District***

Areas that flank Rainier Avenue South, between Angeline Street and South Pearl Street, are included in the Columbia City Landmark District. Standards for open space, setbacks, width and depth limits, and screening and landscaping may be waived in landmark districts, consistent with adopted design and development guidelines and with the recommendations of the Landmarks Preservation Board or the Director of Neighborhoods. This provision ensures that new development in the Columbia City Landmark District will be consistent with the pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use character of existing structures.

<b>Columbia City Station Area – Potential Development Under Current Zoning Regulations<sup>1</sup></b>		
	<i>Commercial (sq. ft.)</i>	<i>Residential (units)</i>
Existing Development	1,015,690	734
Additional Potential Development under Current Zoning Regulations <sup>2</sup>	428,063	742
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,443,753</b>	<b>1,476</b>
<sup>1</sup> Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.		
<sup>2</sup> Potential development capacity is based on City of Seattle GIS database and Scenario 2 in the “Zoned Development Capacity” background paper.		

## NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN ISSUES

The *Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Draft Interim Planning Report* recommends several policies for improving the character of the neighborhood. Suggested policies include:

- Ensuring that light rail serves as a catalyst for transit-oriented development within the station area.
- Cleaning up the neighborhood and improve the neighborhood image.
- Instituting an anti-graffiti and litter reduction campaign to deter vandalism.

High priority concerns cited at the summer 1998 open house include:

- Adopting design guidelines to reinforce the positive elements that distinguish the business district.
- Adopting design guidelines to promote a good pedestrian environment.
- Eliminating/reducing litter and weeds.
- Zoning changes to promote more pedestrian-oriented development.
- Improving enforcement of abandoned vehicles.
- Incorporating public art in public/community facilities.

## STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

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The neighborhood plan that includes the Columbia City station area acknowledges Sound Transit's light rail planning effort. At a neighborhood planning workshop during the summer of 1998, the planning group identified key parameters to be met by any selected light rail station. Issues include historic preservation, pedestrian linkages, neighborhood image, local transit access, and protection of existing residential and commercial uses. Specific comments include:

- *Pedestrian Network.* "The heart of Columbia City should look like 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue East. Development should help build pedestrian activity, especially late at night to promote safety." "Create a pleasant pedestrian mall and business park at Edmund Street, connecting MLK Jr. Way and Rainier Avenue and linking the station to Columbia City historic district."
- *Density and Mixed Use.* "A good mix of housing and businesses is needed to make the LINK system work in the area. You cannot expect business growth without density." "A mix of housing, retail, and offices is needed near the Rainier Valley station."
- *Community Facilities.* "We need street improvements, parks, and recreation areas to beautify the area, as well as more open space, curbs, sidewalks, and gutters."
- *Design Guidelines.* As identified at the Open House of June 27, 1998, design guidelines would help to reinforce positive elements that distinguish each of the business districts and to promote a good pedestrian environment.
- *Safety and Neighborhood Image.* "Columbia City still has the image of a neighborhood

hardened by crime, drugs, and prostitution. If we overcome this, there is a market just waiting to be tapped.”

## **STATION AREA DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

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### **AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITY SITES**

The Columbia City station area has 69 parcels comprising less than 12 acres of land available for development. These opportunity sites represent vacant and underutilized parcels.

<b>Columbia City Station Area – Opportunity Sites by Zoning Designation<sup>1</sup></b>		
	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Acreage<sup>2</sup></i>
NC2-40	2	0.31
L-3	13	1.38
SF 5000	13	1.62
L-1	3	0.24
NC3-65	2	1.63
L-2	23	4.35
NC3-40	10	1.39
C1-40	3	0.70
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>11.62</b>
<sup>1</sup> Within a ¼-mile radius of the station location.		
<sup>2</sup> Based on City of Seattle GIS database.		

### ***Zoning for Opportunity Sites***

Most of the opportunity sites are located in the multi-family residential areas in the western part of the station area and single-family residential areas in at the outer edges of the station area. These L2 and SF5000 zones allow low-rise multi-family residential and single-family residential uses. Additional multi-family residential development is possible on opportunity sites zoned L1 and L3. Residential and commercial mixed uses are allowed in NC zones.

### **DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS**

Existing zoning may constrain the potential for transit-supportive development in the Columbia City station area. Single-family residential zones have low density development patterns and do not permit mixed use development. Low-rise multi-family residential allows greater density, but does not allow the mixed use development that would promote pedestrian access to the station.

The C and NC3 commercial zones in the southern part of the station area, along Rainier Avenue South, permit a wide range of general commercial and light manufacturing uses. In particular, they allow more auto retail sales and services, sale of non-households goods, and warehousing uses as-of-right than the NC1 zones. While NC zones allow mixed use development, they also permit a wide variety of commercial uses, and there are no incentives for mixed use in zoning height categories below 85 feet. (The Columbia City station area has -40 foot and -65 foot NC height categories.)

Thus, new commercial development is likely to be consistent with low-density commercial uses and parking in the area. Overall, current zoning is likely to encourage and maintain the existing separation of low-density uses in the neighborhood. Potential development will not be likely to create improved conditions for pedestrian activity in the station area.

## **STATION AREA FORECASTS**

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Three different forecasts were developed for the new population, employment, dwelling units, and commercial floor area that will be added to the station area by 2020:

1. “Without light rail transit;”
2. “With light rail transit, but without supportive land use policies;” and
3. “With both light rail transit *and* supportive land use policies.”

## **POPULATION AND HOUSING**

An average of the PSRC Trends and *Comprehensive Plan* Extrapolation forecasts project an additional 200 new housing units in the Columbia City station area. While there are currently no residential projects in the permit pipeline, several developers have identified this area as having development potential. Although perceptions of crime have limited the demand for housing, the area may experience additional demand as housing costs rise in other parts of the city.

## **EMPLOYMENT AND COMMERCIAL FLOOR AREA**

The PSRC Trends and *Comprehensive Plan* Extrapolation forecasts project approximately 100,000 additional square feet of commercial space, more than either the Rainier Valley Square or Genesee station areas. . Most of this new space will tend to be auto-oriented retail uses that take advantage of high traffic volumes on Rainier Avenue South.

## **LAND USE IMPACTS OF LIGHT RAIL**

The land use impacts of “rail without supportive policies” will likely be a modest increase in housing within the station area. Housing and commercial uses may tend to cluster in the historic Columbia City station area, given the pedestrian connections that currently characterize the area.

## LAND USE IMPACTS OF LIGHT RAIL WITH SUPPORTIVE POLICIES

The potential development strategies for the Columbia City station area focus on providing incentives in the zoning code for mixed-use transit-oriented development, improved pedestrian linkages, and direct economic and financial assistance including tax abatements to support housing and mixed uses. The historic and transit-oriented character of Columbia City creates some special opportunities. Transit-oriented development policies need to address parking in Columbia City and try to leverage the existing historic character to attract new development. Targeted development strategies could boost the number of new dwelling units by 130 units and new commercial floor area by 35,000 square feet. Of all the stations in the Rainier Valley, the Columbia City station is expected to have one of the highest overall increase in residential and commercial development resulting from transit-supportive policies.

<b>Columbia City Station Area – Market Forecasts, 1997-2020<sup>1</sup></b>				
	<u>1997</u>	<u>1997-2020 Growth</u>		
		<i>Without LRT</i>	<i>With LRT Only</i>	<i>LRT and Supportive Policies</i>
Population	1852	300	315	510
Dwelling Units	734	200	210	340
Employment	612	330	350	470
Commercial Floor Area <sup>2</sup>	1015	100	105	140

<sup>1</sup> Within a ¼-mile radius of the station location.  
<sup>2</sup> Square footage (in thousands); includes commercial, industrial and institutional space, but excludes Sound Transit facilities and public facilities.

## POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The overall approach for the Columbia City station area is to ensure that new development supports transit use and pedestrian activity. The area is not seen as being able to accommodate high-density commercial or residential development, primarily because the local real estate market is not likely to be able to support such intensive development. Existing commercial and residential structures, as well as infill development, can be regulated to optimize transit and pedestrian use. The overall development strategy for the Columbia City station areas can be summarized as follows:

- *Mixed Use.* Provisions for mixed use development, including housing, can help support transit use. Additional provisions can help ensure that new development is compatible with the area’s historic character.
- *Pedestrian Environment.* The station area can be made more supportive of pedestrian travel. Incentives for transit-supportive site design and mixed use can help maintain and enhance pedestrian activity. Implementation of a POZ could also create a pedestrian-oriented environment and would limit new auto-oriented uses to provide greater opportunities for pedestrian-oriented development. Linkages to adjacent communities can be improved as well.

## Columbia City

- *Urban Design.* Buffering and design standards, as in the L-3 zone, can be implemented to better protect residential areas from commercial areas along the main commercial areas along Rainier Avenue South.
- *Parking Management.* Implementation of an RPZ in residential areas can help control the supply of parking and encourage the use of alternative modes of travel, including light rail. In conjunction with improved transit service, parking management can help change travel patterns to and from the neighborhood in the long run.
- *Affordable Housing.* Provision of affordable housing in the station area can provide opportunities for living in proximity to transit, particularly for lower income households that are less likely to own cars. Work with a local CDC, such as SEED, is possible.
- *Historic Preservation.* Land use provisions and development opportunities may be useful in preserving the integrity of the Columbia City Landmark District.

The table on the next page shows potential high-priority and recommended actions for the Columbia City station area. Development partnerships and pilot projects may demonstrate how new development can be integrated effectively with historic structures.

## Potential Development Strategies: Columbia City (26)

Strategy	Potential Action	Comments
Land Use Tools	●	<i>Establish POZ on Rainier Avenue; provide incentives for mixed-use development, including housing, on opportunity parcels, subject to standards that will ensure compatibility with historic character. Amend NC zoning with T overlay to provide flexibility in ground floor uses on sites off Rainier Avenue (e.g. live-work units). Any regulatory measures must reflect the historic character of the neighborhood.</i>
Pedestrian Network	●	<i>Improve linkages to adjacent neighborhoods, especially Edmunds to MLK.</i>
Parking Management	○	<i>Consider establishing parking “lids” and reducing the number of spaces required to protect the historic character of the district; provide public parking for short-term needs.</i>
Economics/Financial Assistance	✓	<i>Support SEED to help finance affordable housing and economic development projects.</i>
Regulatory Process	✓ / ?	<i>SESRA in place; Any regulatory measures must reflect the historic character of the neighborhood.</i>
Local Transit Service	○	<i>Provide feeder bus service, especially to Beacon Hill.</i>
Development Partnerships	●	<i>Explore specific joint development opportunities with qualified developers who will respect integrity of historic district.</i>
Pilot Projects	?	<i>Further planning needed.</i>

- |                                        |                                    |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ✓ = Supportive Policy/Program in Place | TOD = Transit-Oriented Development |
| ● = High Priority Action               | POZ = Pedestrian Overlay Zone      |
| ○ = Recommended Action                 | RPZ = Residential Parking Zone     |
| ? = Further Study Required             |                                    |

# Alaska

The Alaska station area affords opportunities for neighborhood-scale, transit-oriented development. Infill residential development, combined with some ground-floor mixed use, would be consistent with the character of the neighborhood and would provide housing opportunities near the station. Mixed use and pedestrian development can also help create opportunities for walking and transit use, complementing the existing commercial uses in the area.

## **SOUND TRANSIT ALIGNMENT AND STATION OPTIONS**

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There are five possible Columbia City station locations under review. Depending on the alignment selected, one or two of these stations will be built. The Alaska station provides a siting option near the Rainier Vista public housing Garden Community along MLK Way at Alaska Street. This at-grade station would be located at the intersection of South Alaska Street and MLK, Jr. Way.

## **EXISTING STATION AREA CONDITIONS**

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### **LAND USE AND HOUSING**

Multi-family uses cover the largest amount of land in the Alaska station area, followed by vacant and single-family uses. The multi-family uses largely reflect the Rainier Vista development located in the northern portion of the station area. Genesee Park—which is within walking distance—provides the largest contiguous open space in the area.



*Existing auto-oriented retail at Martin Luther King, Jr. Way/Alaska with potential redevelopment of Rainier Vista public housing site beyond.*

Despite the presence of the Rainier Vista project, the station area is predominantly low density and underdeveloped. There are 82 vacant parcels, which make up almost 30% of the net acreage in the station area. The single-family residential areas in the northeast and southern portions of the station area have densities of 3.4 units per acre. Multi-family areas, including the Rainier Vista development, have even lower densities of less than 2 units per acre.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

The major transportation corridor in the Alaska station area is MLK, Jr. Way South, which provides a link to Downtown Seattle, Renton, and other neighborhoods in the Rainier Valley. The major arterial streets in the station area are generally not oriented to pedestrians, although the compact street grid in the southern and eastern portions of the station area provides opportunities for walking.

- *Auto Access to Adjacent Neighborhoods.* MLK Jr. Way is the principal automobile route in the area, with Mountain View Drive South and 30<sup>th</sup> Avenue South also providing north-south connections. The hillside to the west of the station area prevents good access from MLK, Jr. Way westward. South Alaska Street crosses MLK, Jr. Way, allowing through traffic to cross the neighborhood.

<b>Alaska Station Area – Existing Conditions, 1997<sup>1</sup></b>	
Population	1,006
Employment	607
Median Household Income (1996)	\$ 44,585
<i>Residential Land Use</i>	
Total Dwelling Units	371
Density <sup>2</sup>	
Single-family Zones	3.4
Multi-family Zones	1.7
<i>Commercial Land Use</i>	
Total Floor Area (sq. ft.)	283,185
Retail/Service	8,040
Office	0
Floor Area Ratio (FAR) <sup>3</sup>	0.04
<sup>1</sup> Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.	
<sup>2</sup> Dwelling units per net acre in specified residential zones. Residential units in non-residential and downtown zones are excluded.	
<sup>3</sup> Ratio of non-residential space per net acre of commercial and industrial land use.	

- *Pedestrian Circulation.* MLK Jr. Way is not oriented to pedestrian travel and does not permit convenient or comfortable access from adjacent neighborhoods. Due to the steep slopes and the unsafe pedestrian conditions, Beacon Hill residents cannot access the Alaska light rail station easily. Residents of the Rainier Vista development must contend with a winding street pattern to access the station site. Moreover, the immediate area of the Alaska light rail station does not include a destination, since it has few commercial or institutional uses.

### ***Community Issues***

The *Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Draft Interim Planning Report* includes a Transportation Improvement Program calling for pedestrian safety and access, bicycle safety and circulation, traffic-calming, an evaluation of commercial parking, and coordination with King County METRO to enhance local transit service and light rail connections.

The community wants the light rail station design to facilitate good connections to the neighborhood and conducted a community forum on this issue in summer 1998.

### ***1995 Metro Six-Year Plan***

MLK Way South is designated a major consolidation corridor, meaning that bus service along the corridor will be consolidated to improve efficiency. Savings from the efficiency improvements will be reinvested in the subareas where the savings are generated. Meanwhile, bus frequencies along the Rainier Beach-Downtown core connection will be increased. The connection uses Rainier Avenue South – roughly parallel to MLK, one half-mile to the east – as a primary corridor.

These strategies are consistent with the Plan's overall objective to improve Metro's service structure. Routes are consolidated, bus frequencies are increased along core routes, and transit hubs of various size provide quick, easy transfers.

## **PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE NETWORK**

MLK, Jr. Way South is the major arterial in the Alaska station area. Pedestrian connections to Beacon Hill are inadequate. Pedestrian stairs located at select street-ends would improve access to the station.

## **URBAN DESIGN FEATURES**

The Alaska station site is located along MLK, Jr. Way South between the Beacon Hill neighborhood and the hill separating the station area from Lake Washington. In this area, MLK, Jr. Way is dominated by the Rainier Vista public housing site, interspersed with a few commercial areas. Zion Preparatory and Columbia School are located in residential portions of the station area. Columbia City, the Rainier Community Center, and Rainier Playfield are within walking distance of the station site.

This generally underdeveloped station area is characterized by a variety of auto-oriented uses, including commercial strip development, an auto repair lot, and residential housing. New development in this station area would likely cluster new multi-family mixed-use development around the light rail station.

***Visual Landmarks***

The most prominent visual landmark in the area is the Rainier Vista public housing site. This subsidized housing is characterized by its post-World War 2 era wood construction.

***Views***

There are no significant scenic views in or from the Alaska station area.

**RECENT MARKET TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY**

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**MARKET CONDITIONS**

The Alaska station area has relatively low apartment rents and vacancy rates of approximately six percent, suggesting that the residential housing market currently has low-rent housing available. However, recent trends in land prices for multi-family housing suggest that housing prices and rents are increasing. While the area may be relatively affordable for housing, its affordability is attracting new residents and, therefore, increasing the value of properties.

<b>Alaska Station Area – Market Conditions<sup>1</sup></b>	
Rents and Vacancy Rates	
Apartment Rents (sq. ft.)	\$ 0.71
Apartment Vacancy Rate	6.0%
Office Rents (sq. ft.)	N/A
Office Vacancy Rate	N/A
Trends in Land Prices <sup>2</sup>	
Commercial Lots	8.2%
Single Family Lots	7.2%
Multi-family Lots	4.5%
Active Permit Applications	
Housing Units	0
Commercial Space (sq. ft.)	0
<sup>1</sup> Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.	
<sup>2</sup> 1985-95 average annual increase, based on sales prices recorded by King County Assessor and reported by zone category.	

There has been little commercial development overall in the Alaska station area, although there is an increasing trend in commercial land prices. This suggests that commercial properties may be able to support additional development in the near future. Established retail uses along MLK, Jr. Way South can potentially support additional space.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The Rainier Vista garden community is being considered for redevelopment in the near future. That project would significantly change the character of the Alaska station area, with new architecture, open space, and frontages along MLK, Jr. Way South.

## RELATIVE STRENGTH OF DEVELOPMENT MARKETS IN THE ALASKA STATION AREA

Retail development has market potential in the Alaska station area. Parcels along MLK and Alaska have excellent accessibility and visibility, the two key elements for retail development. The station site itself has particular potential for retail uses, as it is situated at the intersection of the two streets. The station area currently has few established retail uses serving the population of more than 1,000, suggesting that additional retail can be supported. Housing also has development potential. Although rents are low, rents have increased rapidly in recent years, suggesting that housing development has a future in the station area. Opportunity sites can potentially be used to add additional multi-family housing to the station area. Densification through development of accessory dwelling units in single-family homes (which cover more than 35 acres of the station area) could provide additional housing opportunities.

<b>Alaska Station Area – Relative Market Strength<sup>1</sup></b>	
	Ranking (5 high, 1 low)
Housing	2
Retail	2
Office	1

<sup>1</sup> Indicates relative strength of market type of station area, compared to other potential station areas. Ranking is based on rents, employment levels, vacancy rates, land values, recent development activity, stakeholder interviews, field observations, and other information.

## EXISTING PLANS AND ZONING

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### PLANNING CONTEXT

Most of the Alaska station area is located within the western portion of the Columbia City Residential Urban Village. Approximately one-third of the station area is the Rainier Vista Garden Community, a public housing site that may be redeveloped. The southwestern por-

tion of the station area includes a steep wooded slope. The main thoroughfare through the station area is MLK Way South, which is bordered by low-density residential development.

## **ZONING**

Zoning in the Alaska station area focuses more intensive residential development along MLK, Jr. Way, with lower density single-family residential uses farther away. Low-rise multi-family residential zones (including L1 and L2) are clustered near South Alaska Street and MLK Jr. Way. The Rainier Vista housing development is zoned L2, which allows for low-rise residential development. Surrounding this cluster of commercial and multi-family residential uses are single-family residential zones.

### ***Southeast Seattle Reinvestment Area (SESRA)***

Commercial areas abutting MLK Way South are included in the SESRA Overlay District, the intent of which is to promote community revitalization and investment, business activity, and employment opportunities for Southeast Seattle residents. SESRA’s neighborhood-oriented and pedestrian-oriented regulations can serve as the basis for transit-supportive policies. SESRA regulations encompass two types of regulations:

- *Prohibited Uses.* SESRA prohibits uses incompatible with reinvestment goals, such as outdoor storage, adult movie theaters, work release centers, and construction services.

<b>Alaska Station Area – Potential Development Under Current Zoning Regulations<sup>1</sup></b>		
	<i>Commercial (sq. ft)</i>	<i>Residential (units)</i>
Existing Development	283,185	371
Additional Potential Development under Current Zoning Regulations <sup>2</sup>	12,152	227
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>295,337</b>	<b>598</b>
<sup>1</sup> Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.		
<sup>2</sup> Potential development capacity is based on City of Seattle GIS database and Scenario 2 in the “Zoned Development Capacity” background paper.		

- *Rezoning Criteria.* SESRA establishes criteria for the rezoning of base zones. A rezoning must reinforce existing commercial nodes and promote business retention, or it must enhance the business environment (increased pedestrian activity; more retail, entertainment, and personal services; infill development; more recreational opportunities).

## NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN ISSUES

The *Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Draft Interim Planning Report* recommends several policies for improving the character of the neighborhood. Suggested policies include:

- Ensuring that light rail serves as a catalyst for transit-oriented development within the station area.
- Cleaning up the neighborhood and improve the neighborhood image.
- Instituting an anti-graffiti and litter reduction campaign to deter vandalism.

High priority concerns cited at the summer 1998 open house include:

- Adopting design guidelines to reinforce the positive elements that distinguish the business district.
- Adopting design guidelines to promote a good pedestrian environment.
- Eliminating/reducing litter and weeds.
- Zoning changes to promote more pedestrian-oriented development.
- Improving enforcement of abandoned vehicles.
- Incorporating public art in public/community facilities.

## STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

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The neighborhood plan that includes the Alaska City station area acknowledges Sound Transit's light rail planning effort. At a neighborhood planning workshop during the summer of 1998, the planning group identified key parameters to be met by any selected light rail station. Issues include historic preservation, pedestrian linkages, neighborhood image, local transit access, and protection of existing residential and commercial uses. Specific comments include:

- *Pedestrian Network.* "Create a pleasant pedestrian mall and business park at Edmunds Street, connecting MLK Jr. Way and Rainier Avenue and linking the station to Columbia City historic district."
- *Density and Mixed Use.* "A good mix of housing and businesses is needed to make the LINK system work in the area. You cannot expect business growth without density." "A mix of housing, retail, and offices is needed near the Rainier Valley station."
- *Community Facilities.* "We need street improvements, parks, and recreation areas to beautify the area, as well as more open space, curbs, sidewalks, and gutters."
- *Design Guidelines.* As identified at the summer 1998 open house, design guidelines would help to reinforce positive elements that distinguish each of the business districts and to promote a good pedestrian environment.

- *Safety and Neighborhood Image.* “Columbia City still has the image of a neighborhood hardened by crime, drugs, and prostitution. If we overcome this, there is a market just waiting to be tapped.”

## **STATION AREA DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

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### **AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITY SITES**

The Alaska station area has 79 parcels comprising nearly 11 acres of land available for development. These opportunity sites represent vacant and underutilized parcels.

#### *Zoning for Opportunity Sites*

Most opportunity sites in the Alaska station area are found in the L2 and SF5000 zones, which allow low-rise multi-family residential and single-family residential uses. Additional multi-family residential development is possible on opportunity sites zoned L1 and L3.

<b>Alaska Station Area – Opportunity Sites by Zoning Designation<sup>1</sup></b>		
	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Acreage<sup>2</sup></i>
NC2-40	2	0.31
L-3	18	1.70
SF 5000	22	5.01
L-1	15	1.45
NC1-40	3	0.18
L-2	19	2.22
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>10.86</b>
<sup>1</sup> Within a ¼-mile radius of the station location.		
<sup>2</sup> Based on City of Seattle GIS database.		

### **DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS**

Existing zoning in the Alaska station area may constrain the potential for transit-supportive development. Single-family residential zones have low density development patterns and do not permit mixed use development. Low-rise multi-family residential zones allows denser development, but do not allow mixed use development that would promote pedestrian access to the station.

New development, therefore, is likely to be consistent with low-density commercial uses and parking in the area. Overall, current zoning is likely to encourage and maintain the existing separation of low-density uses in the neighborhood. Potential development will not be likely to create improved conditions for pedestrian activity in the station area.

## **STATION AREA FORECASTS**

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Three different forecasts were developed for the new population, employment, dwelling units, and commercial floor area that will be added to the station area by 2020:

1. “Without light rail transit;”
2. “With light rail transit, but without supportive land use policies;” and
3. “With both light rail transit *and* supportive land use policies.”

## **POPULATION AND HOUSING**

An average of the PSRC Trends and *Comprehensive Plan* Extrapolation forecasts project an additional 60 new housing units in the Alaska station area. While there are currently no residential projects in the permit pipeline, several developers have identified this area as having development potential. Although perceptions of crime have limited the demand for housing, this area may experience additional demand as housing costs rise in other parts of the city.

## **EMPLOYMENT AND COMMERCIAL FLOOR AREA**

The PSRC Trends and *Comprehensive Plan* Extrapolation forecasts project 3,000 additional square feet of commercial space. Most of this new space will tend to be auto-oriented retail uses that take advantage of high traffic volumes on MLK Jr. Way South.

## **LAND USE IMPACTS OF LIGHT RAIL**

The land use impacts of “rail without supportive policies” will likely be a modest increase in housing within the station area. Whereas housing and commercial uses may be clustered in the nearby historic Columbia City station area, given the pedestrian-supportive environment that currently characterize the area, the Alaska station area is much more auto-oriented, and the development of new housing would more likely be dispersed throughout the station area.

## **LAND USE IMPACTS OF LIGHT RAIL WITH SUPPORTIVE POLICIES**

The potential development strategies for the Alaska station area focus on providing incentives in the zoning code for mixed use transit-oriented development, improved pedestrian linkages, and direct economic and financial assistance to support housing and mixed uses. Targeted development strategies could boost the number of new dwelling units by 80 dwelling units and the new commercial floor area by 7,000 square feet.

## **POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES**

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The overall approach for the Alaska station is to ensure that new development supports tran-

*Background Report for Light Rail Station Area Planning in Seattle:  
Existing Conditions and Future Prospects for Transit-Oriented Development*

sit use and pedestrian activity. The area is not seen as being able to accommodate high-density commercial or residential development, primarily because the local real estate market

<b>Alaska Station Area – Market Forecasts, 1997-2020<sup>1</sup></b>				
	<u>1997</u>	<u>1997-2020 Growth</u>		
		<i>Without LRT</i>	<i>With LRT Only</i>	<i>LRT and Supportive Policies</i>
Population	1006	90	90	210
Dwelling Units	371	60	60	140
Employment	607	10	10	30
Commercial Floor Area <sup>2</sup>	238	3	3	10

<sup>1</sup> Within a ¼-mile radius of the station location.  
<sup>2</sup> Square footage (in thousands); includes commercial, industrial and institutional space, but excludes Sound Transit facilities and public facilities.

is not likely to be able to support such intensive development. Existing commercial and residential structures, as well as infill development, can be regulated to optimize transit and pedestrian use. The overall development strategy for the Alaska station area can be summarized as follows:

- *Transit-Oriented Development.* Provisions for transit-oriented development, including housing, can establish regulations for site design that support transit use. Infill development, therefore, can be more oriented to pedestrians than cars, favoring transit use in an area currently oriented predominantly to auto use.
- *Pedestrian Environment.* The station area can be made more supportive of pedestrians. Incentives for transit-supportive site design and mixed use can help maintain and enhance pedestrian activity. Implementation of a POZ could also create a pedestrian environment and would limit auto-oriented uses to provide greater opportunities for pedestrian-oriented development. Linkages to adjacent communities and streetscapes on major east-west streets can be improved as well.
- *Affordable Housing.* Provision of affordable housing in the station area can provide opportunities for living in proximity to transit, particularly for lower income households that are less likely to own cars. Work with a local CDC, such as SEED, is possible.
- *Parking Management.* Implementation of an RPZ in residential areas can help control the supply of parking and encourage the use of alternative modes of travel, including light rail. In conjunction with improved transit service, parking management can help change travel patterns to and from the neighborhood in the long run.

The table on the next page shows potential high-priority and recommended actions for the Alaska station area. Development partnerships and pilot projects may be used as strategies to demonstrate how new development can be used to create attractive living environments in what is considered an economically disadvantaged area. The nearby Rainier Vista Redevelopment project can serve as a model for further development partnerships and pilot projects.

## Potential Development Strategies: Alaska (29)

Strategy	Potential Action	Comments
Land Use Tools	●	<i>Establish TOD zoning and pedestrian overlay zone (POZ) for small commercial opportunity sites adjacent to station.</i>
Pedestrian Network	●	<i>Improve linkages to adjacent neighborhoods and provide streetscape improvement on MLK. Sound Transit to provide streetscape improvements on Edmunds and Alaska between Rainier and MLK.</i>
Parking Management	○	<i>Establish residential parking zone in adjacent neighborhoods, if needed.</i>
Economics/Financial Assistance	✓	<i>Support SEED to help finance affordable housing and economic development projects.</i>
Regulatory Process	✓	<i>SESRA in place.</i>
Local Transit Service	○	<i>Provide feeder bus service, especially to Beacon Hill destinations.</i>
Development Partnerships	●	<i>TOD to be coordinated with Housing Authority plans for Rainier Vista redevelopment</i>
Pilot Projects	?	<i>Further planning needed.</i>

- ✓ = Supportive Policy/Program in Place      TOD = Transit-Oriented Development  
 ● = High Priority Action                      POZ = Pedestrian Overlay Zone  
 ○ = Recommended Action                    RPZ = Residential Parking Zone  
 ? = Further Study Required

