

## **Department of Neighborhoods Open House**

At the June 14, 2001 DON Open House, ten members of the community completed interview forms geared towards residents of the Northgate Area. The respondents' average length of residency in the Northgate Area is 15.8 years.

The interviewed residents get around the neighborhood primarily by walking or driving, though many expressed the desire to walk more if it was an attractive walk. While many use Metro buses to get downtown, several respondents said the bus was not useful for getting around the neighborhood. Two different respondents recommended creating a Northgate circulator bus or shuttle to facilitate intra-neighborhood trips. All respondents reported using 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue several times a week if not daily. While most spend the majority of their time driving on 5<sup>th</sup>, several do walk along it several times a week, especially to the Transit Center or their bus stop.

Many different streets in the area were listed as being favorites, including 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE around 85<sup>th</sup> and the streets around Greenlake. Reasons cited for favorite streets included their landscaping or greenery, walk-ability, small businesses, and places to eat outside. One respondent said that Northgate Way is their favorite because it is the "Main Street" of the area, and the Target store adds some color and distinctive graphic design.

When describing 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, this group said that 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue is a concrete pedestrian desert, a highway, and an unattractive, bland, barren place with almost nothing there except traffic. One person questioned how one could even describe something as nondescript as 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Other descriptions included that it is unpleasant to walk along, a terrible place to wait for a bus, and a conduit for cars and buses to rush from here to there. Several comments were made about the lack of a safe feeling for pedestrians on the street due to high levels of traffic and narrow sidewalks obstructed by utility poles. One respondent did add that the public transportation routes on 5<sup>th</sup> are excellent for getting her husband to work.

"Pedestrian friendly" meant the following to the respondents: wider sidewalks (mentioned by a strong majority), landscaping including street trees, less cars, a circulator bus to reduce traffic congestion, destinations to walk to, attractive and interesting retail uses, housing, on-street parking serving as a buffer from traffic, a variety of building types and appearances, businesses built up to the sidewalk without a parking lot setback, protected areas to wait for the bus, other people, coffee shops, drinking fountains, benches, waste containers, and shade. One respondent said that three things need to be done to 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. to make it pedestrian friendly: "Make it safe to walk, attractive to walk, and have places worthwhile to walk to."

Respondents would like to see a big change in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue from what it currently is to a pedestrian street. They recommended changes so they would use the street more including having more people, less cars, sidewalks cafes, landscaping including street trees, and retail uses built to the sidewalk. One respondent recommended hiding the mall. Another interviewee recommended accommodating Metro buses less, because they use 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. as a "runway" to the Transit Center. One interviewee said that to make a positive change, "It is vital that property owners along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue become engaged in the discussion and encouraged to participate in the implementation." Other recommendations included bribing Simon to put in a parking garage and

get rid of their acres of parking, and providing incentives for small businesses to develop along 5<sup>th</sup> near the Mall.

To achieve their vision of 5<sup>th</sup>, interviewees put forth a variety of ideas including using eminent domain over the mall, finding millions of dollars, having good planners, getting a strong commitment from City leaders, and generating a productive working relationship and trust between the community and private developers. According to one respondent, “the community needs to consist of the City, County, citizens and property owners working cooperatively to achieve the goals of the Northgate Area Comprehensive Plan (NACP). The City has not been particularly enthusiastic about endorsing the NACP’s vision of gradually changing the Northgate Core travel nodes, and property owners have not been engaged.” Other respondents recommended developing the south lot, building the library and community center, and changing the mindset that resists higher density housing.

### **Northgate Mall Walkers & Employees**

On June 15<sup>th</sup>, 14 citizens were interviewed at Northgate Mall. While most of the respondents were senior mall walkers, several were employees. The answers from this group were less consistent as those given by citizens at the DON Open House. Several of the respondents only use the area to walk at Northgate Mall, and a few people interviewed were unfamiliar with 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE and where it was located.

Descriptions of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave ranged from it being friendly and nice all the way down to Greenlake, busy and safe with lots of buses, congested, and a major thoroughfare. One person stated that “Parking spots are more important in Northgate than parks.” Several commented that 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE is fine the way it is and they don’t have any problems with it. One respondent described 5<sup>th</sup> lovingly then realized he was not being asked about 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. downtown. One elderly mallwalker commented that the slope along 5<sup>th</sup> Ave makes it hard to walk. Another mallwalker who lives in a retirement building north of Northgate Way said that she is unwilling to cross Northgate Way because drivers there don’t look out for pedestrians.

The interviewees used 5<sup>th</sup> anywhere between daily and monthly. With the exception of one respondent who walks and takes the bus, all other interviewees either drove or were driven to the mall.

The citizens interviewed at the mall defined “pedestrian-friendly” as primarily meaning safe, though two respondents stated that it meant no automobile traffic at all. Safety was defined as being able to walk without any feeling of danger, without cars whizzing by, and without being hit by a car when you’re crossing the street. Pedestrian friendly also meant better, wider, safer sidewalks, businesses, bus stops, safe crosswalks, medians, street lighting, bus delivery directly to the Bon Marche, and “more walking, less driving.” One respondent said that pedestrian friendly meant wider sidewalks, a green oasis, street level shopping, places to go, destinations, parks, places to sit and relax, a Library, a Community Center, and traffic that is slower or more broken up.

## 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Streetscape Design Project Interview Summary

Interviewees had different responses when asked what they would like to see 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. become in the future and what changes to 5<sup>th</sup> would cause them to use it more. Several interviewees stated that there is nothing to fix, or that they don't care because they only use the area for a specific purpose (Mall or Clinic). One respondent recommended that the City buy a portion of the south lot and put the Library and Community Center on the property to reduce the amount of traffic at 5<sup>th</sup> and Northgate Way, and institute a circulating shuttle to run from the retirement apartments to the South Lot. She also recommended opening up 8<sup>th</sup> to improve traffic on 5<sup>th</sup>. Another respondent said that the number of parking spaces in the park-and-ride should be increased, and there should not be on-street parking because it obstructs your view of oncoming cars. Other recommendations included more businesses, benches, landscaping along the street, prohibiting strip malls, and putting in more bus stops. Alternatively, one respondent said that 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. NE should be a street that you can drive on; It is not currently congested, and they shouldn't put in the library.

While most respondents had no response for the question of how we achieve their vision for 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, two respondents said that light rail needs to be built and that mass transit is needed for the Northgate Area. One respondent recommended getting those groups and businesses that would benefit from light rail to contribute to getting it built.

### Senior Retirement Apartments

On June 15<sup>th</sup>, 19 seniors and one staff person at the Northgate Plaza Retirement Apartments were shown the Visual Preference Survey (VPS) and then led in a group discussion that centered around the same questions given to other interviewees. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, 15 senior residents and 2 staff people at the Northaven Retirements Apartments participated in the same VPS followed by a group discussion. In light of the consistency of those responses, they are summarized together.

When asked to describe 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, senior residents of Northgate shared many of the same concerns, most focused on their safety as they move throughout the area. For example, walkers and canes get caught in the cracks in the sidewalks, cars heading north on 5<sup>th</sup> turning east onto Northgate Way cut people off as they cross the street, and there is not enough time to cross Northgate Way at 5<sup>th</sup> Ave because after you take four steps the light starts to change (this was an almost universal concern of respondents). Another concern is that the bus stop located on the east side of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. at 112<sup>th</sup> is very dangerous, because it blocks off the ability of people entering and existing the Northgate Plaza parking lot to see.

The majority of senior residents use 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue once a week with lesser proportions using it once a month and even fewer using it once every day. While a small percentage drive themselves on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue or ride the bus, the majority travel on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in their facility's van.

“Pedestrian-friendly” meant safe, especially getting across 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Northgate Way, better controlled entrances and exists in and out of the mall and mini-malls, covered seats and benches, and street trees. However, one woman said that she doesn't like the idea of trees. If there are street trees, she won't walk there. She walks alone and she doesn't want anyone hiding in the trees. A man responded that if they take care of this one woman's concerns, then 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. will be stark without any beauty.

## 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Streetscape Design Project Interview Summary

Visions of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the future and necessary changes to achieve that vision were centered around the predominant safety theme. Respondents said they would like to be able to use the crosswalks and to cross them safely. There was some debate over the need for an overhead walkway between Target and the Mall. Some respondents felt this was needed while others felt it would be dangerous, unusable for those with walkers or wheelchairs, and expensive.

When asked what the community must do to achieve their vision of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, respondents said it must install new cross-walk signals with timers that show you how much time you have left to cross the intersection, get Target to beautify their building, and install garbage cans at the bus stops. One interviewee felt that nothing should be done because the primary purpose of 5<sup>th</sup> is to move traffic. Pedestrians are incidental, and 5<sup>th</sup> needs to function as intended. “If you start to impede the traffic, we’re in trouble.”

### **Northgate Chamber of Commerce**

On June 27, 2001, three members of the Northgate business community attended a breakfast event sponsored by the Northgate Chamber of Commerce. They were administered the VPS and discussed the Northgate area both before and afterwards. The attendees were given survey forms tailored to business and property owners. None of those forms have yet been returned, but the group discussion is summarized. The attendees were Michelle Rupp, of Nowogroski Rupp Insurance Group, Nancy Johnson of Delta Dental, and Rick Randall of Pacific Medical Clinic.

Rick has an agreement with Northgate Mall for 50 parking spots, because the Clinic does not have sufficient surface parking and there is no on street parking. The Clinic has approximately 90 full-time employees, and probably 25 people have bus passes. They have a lot of incentives for their employees to carpool. He is concerned about changes within the right-of-way and his building’s setback from the street. It was discussed how the Streetscape Design Plan would contain short term and long term design ideas. In the short term, it is unlikely that the right-of-way in front of PacMed would be utilized. Michelle thinks it makes sense that the project would not need to be done all at once.

Rick also added several other concerns he’d heard from his staff including: it is dangerous to make the turn into the mall off of 5<sup>th</sup> because the street is a raceway and people typically travel 50-60 mph on it; his staff cross the street and eat at the mall all the time and they need a safe way to get across 5<sup>th</sup> to go to the food court or their own car parked across the site; getting in and out of the PacMed site is difficult for their elderly patients; lighting along 5<sup>th</sup> and 103<sup>rd</sup> is terrible creating a lack of safety and comfort for employees that need to walk to the Transit Center and it is difficult to get the staff to walk there in the dark because the south lot is a dead space. Nancy has heard from her staff that the traffic and public parking along 100<sup>th</sup> in the vicinity of 5<sup>th</sup> is terrible.

In reference to the possibility of the south lot being developed with 900+ housing units, Michelle commented that parking becomes critical and traffic will become worse. However, development of that site alleviates concerns about lighting and dead space. There are trade-offs in developing the area.

Concerns were expressed about the 5<sup>th</sup> and Northgate Way intersection, which is always backed up and has a long wait. Is there anyway to get freeway traffic to unload elsewhere? The 1<sup>st</sup> and Northgate Way intersection is even worse and there's no alternative to getting north besides being on one of those major streets.

### **Pacific Medical Clinic**

On July 9, 2001 the project description boards and interview forms were available in the PacMed Clinic lunchroom. Staff described the project and distributed forms to both employees and visitors to the clinic throughout a three hour period. 14 completed interview forms were obtained.

Respondents described 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue as congested during rush hour, unattractive, possessing no character, not very safe, more safe than the Central Area and downtown, not pedestrian-friendly, and allowing for good movement of traffic. One respondent felt that 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue is pleasant, not too congested, and one of the better streets because of the bank of greenery on the west side. Other varied comments about 5<sup>th</sup> were that the light at 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. and Northgate Way turning left towards the freeway is too short, there is no straight path for pedestrians, bike riders, and/or for wheelchairs, and there is no crosswalk from PacMed to the Mall parking lot. The lack of a crosswalk or a safe way of getting from the Clinic to the Mall property was mentioned by several respondents. One interviewee said that 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue is like the desert in Lawrence of Arabia – you don't know if you'll survive the crossing.

The respondents fell into two categories of use, depending on whether they were patients or employees. Many of the patients come to the clinic regularly, and typically drive to get there. Some will finish errands in the area, like at the Mall or at Target, but generally drive to other places in Northgate from the Clinic. The employees often walk to the Mall for lunch. While many of them drive on 5<sup>th</sup> to work, several of them walk from the Transit Center. One respondent bicycled along 5<sup>th</sup> regularly.

The respondents felt that “pedestrian-friendly” meant more and/or safer crosswalks, a potential pedestrian bridge across 5<sup>th</sup> to the Mall, sidewalks wide enough for pedestrians, bikes, and people in wheelchairs, so they don't have to dodge street utility poles, covered areas, a bus stop in front of PacMed, traffic re-routed to 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE, wherever possible, and finding a way of giving autos better visual access so they don't have to pull out so far into the street.

When asked what they would like to see 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. be in the future and what changes would cause them to use the street more, responses included building a library, making pedestrian improvements to the sidewalks, building a park, lighting, more crosswalks, less concrete and more greenery, more parking spaces, nice shops, and bus stops. One respondent said that to increase safety along 5<sup>th</sup> you need places to eat and trees, not bushes. Another respondent recommended a trolley service which would be free to go between elementary school, group health, PacMed, Library, Park, Metro stop and other businesses. It could be a small, user-friendly hop-on similar to that on the Seattle waterfront. It would allow employed persons to not use 5<sup>th</sup> so much and park in designated lots which the trolley would service.

## **5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Streetscape Design Project Interview Summary**

To achieve their vision of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave., they recommended that the community ask Metro to buy/rent land for more parking for their bus riders, install more crosswalks, build a nice movie theatre, a good bakery, and a nice restaurant. One interviewee recommended that the Mall build some outdoor fast food and small children's rides, like a merry go round and a small rollercoaster to make it a fun place and sidewalk mall. Another respondent said that one way to improve the Northgate Way/5<sup>th</sup> Avenue intersection is to put a traffic cop there. It will create a job while increasing the civility of drivers. It will allow the cop to decide if people crossing the street need more time. Other recommendations were to restrict further business development, keep the green bank on the mall side of street, widen the sidewalks, and reduce the need to use your own car by providing extra bike racks, walking trails and a Northgate Area trolley.