

North Rainier Urban Village Assessment
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Seattle Economic
Development
Commission



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INTRODUCTION

The City of Seattle Economic Development Commission (EDC) initiated this study as part of its role in shaping urban centers and villages. The EDC provides expertise from industry, labor, civic, and education leaders to inform the City's decision-making and help execute major initiatives to achieve a long-term economic development agenda. One of the Commission's action items identified in its 2014 inaugural year report is to "Envision and intentionally create great urban centers and neighborhoods." The report emphasizes the City's role in creating great urban centers and neighborhoods:

The City plays an essential role in facilitating and shaping how our urban centers and neighborhoods grow and maintain their authenticity. We must get better at how we imagine, plan, permit and execute on the visions for these unique neighborhoods so that we are responsive to the profound demographic, environmental, and technological changes shaping our future (Seattle EDC, 2014).

This report uses lessons learned from the North Rainier Urban Village and is intended to guide the EDC and the City in future planning and implementation activities. The goal of this report and its recommendations is to create great urban neighborhoods.

SEATTLE'S URBAN VILLAGE STRATEGY

With the adoption of its Comprehensive Plan in 1994, the City of Seattle established a strategy to focus population and employment growth in urban centers and villages. The goal was to create thriving neighborhoods with a mix of housing, employment, and services within walking distance of public transit. This would enable Seattle to accommodate its share of the region's expected growth while largely preserving single-family neighborhoods. The Urban Village Strategy was further developed in Seattle's 2004 Comprehensive Plan Update, *Toward a Sustainable Seattle*, which included targets for population and job growth in urban centers and villages.

In the 20 years since the Urban Village Strategy was created, Seattle has boomed, with population growing 29% and employment by 17%. The majority of growth has been in urban centers and villages, including over 90% of housing growth over the past ten years. Between 2005 and 2013, over 40,000 jobs were added in urban centers and villages, while the number



Existing Context - North Rainier is currently defined by auto oriented development and a pedestrian environment that is inconsistent with the neighborhood plan

elsewhere in the city declined over the same period (City of Seattle, 2014).

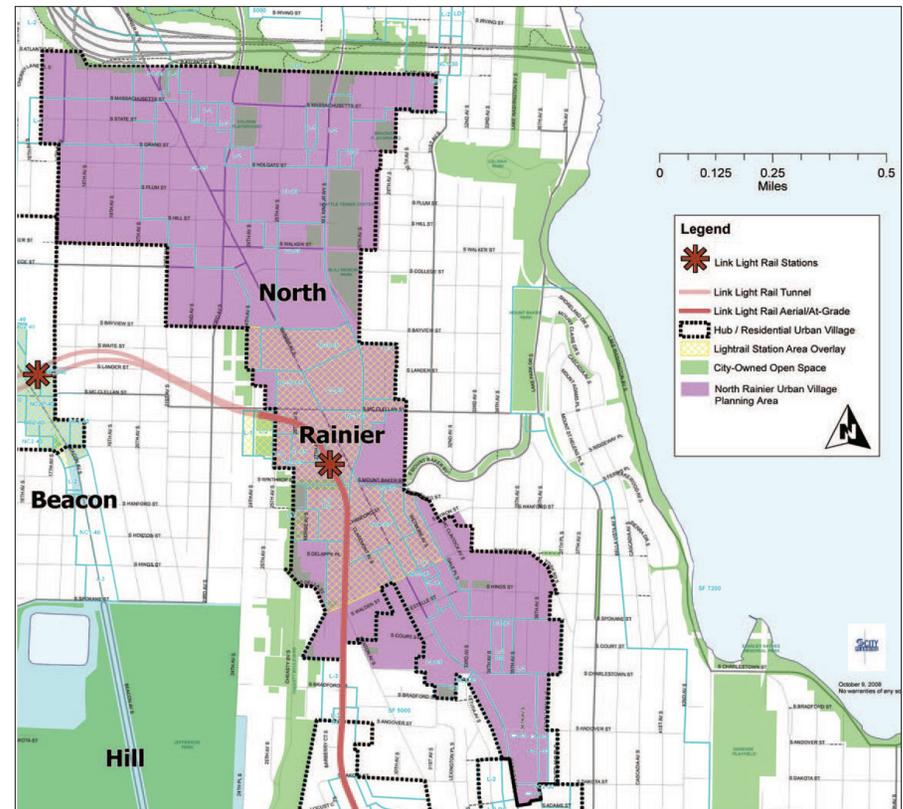
But while some urban villages have grown far beyond targets (similar to the city as a whole), others have failed to see significant new growth. For example, the North Rainier Urban Village, particularly the area surrounding the Mt. Baker Light Rail Station, has not advanced towards the vision of the North Rainier Neighborhood Plan of 1999. Rather than a thriving town center, the station area is defined by vacant lots and auto-oriented uses and lacks a defined character and sense of place.



Streetscape Concept - Pedestrian oriented development envisioned for the area includes active first floor uses, high density housing, office space and taller building heights.

Despite expectations that light rail would drive private investment, very little new development has occurred around the Mt. Baker Light Rail Station. The following excerpt from a 2005 Seattle Times article provides insight into the thinking of city leaders prior to the introduction of light rail:

Nickels and his top aides agree that gentrification is coming. Sound Transit's 14-mile, \$2.4 billion light-rail line from Tukwila to downtown Seattle will run down Martin Luther King Jr. Way, through the heart of Rainier Valley. Nickels expects a transit system that is supposed to get people downtown in 12 minutes will attract heavy private investment and new residents to the area (Seattle Times, 2005).



Study Area - The study area includes the North Rainier Urban Village and the Mt. Baker Station Overlay Area

The 2014 report *Seattle Sustainable Neighborhoods Assessment Project* by Steinbrueck Urban Strategies provides an assessment of the overall Urban Village Strategy, which is described as mostly a success in terms of focusing housing and employment growth in urban villages. However, there are fundamental differences between the overall success and growth between urban villages that warrants a context sensitive approach specific to the each urban village.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

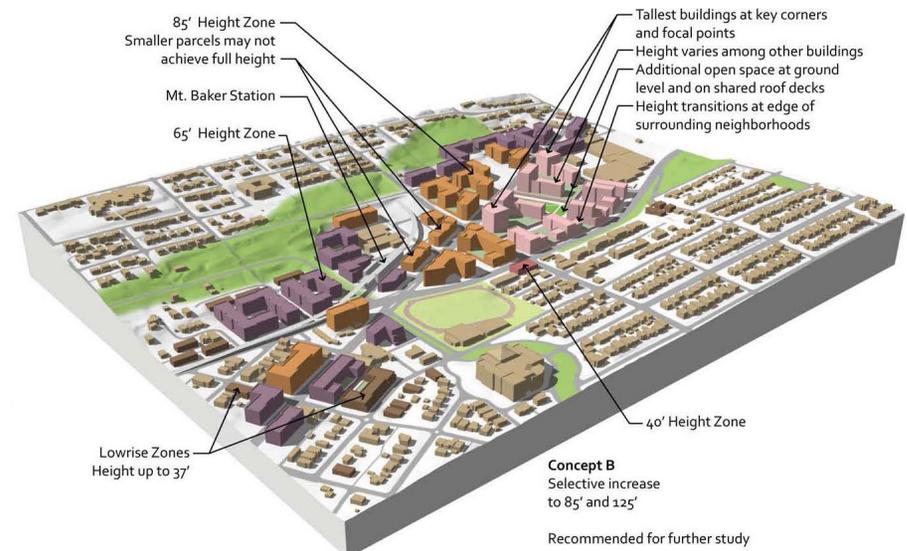
Part of creating “great urban centers and neighborhoods” is bringing a walkable mix of housing, employment, and services to Seattle’s urban villages, particularly those near light-rail stations. Light rail is a multi-billion dollar investment made by taxpayers in Seattle and neighboring jurisdictions. To leverage this investment, the City must attract development to the areas within walking distance of stations, so that more residents and workers can easily access this transportation option.

This study evaluates how the City of Seattle “imagines, plans, permits, and executes” its Urban Village Strategy, using the North Rainier Urban Village as a case study to identify lessons applicable to other urban villages. This study includes a history and analysis of the following key aspects for implementing the Urban Village Strategy in North Rainier:

- ▶ Planning process
- ▶ Timing and sequencing of planning and implementation actions

- ▶ Intra and Inter-agency coordination
- ▶ Progress towards addressing infrastructure improvements, including public investment
- ▶ Integration of a job growth strategy
- ▶ Other factors affecting plan implementation

Many studies have been produced to date on transit oriented development (TOD), urban villages, and transit communities in Seattle. This report seeks to build on past efforts by addressing the specific history, process, and actions in the North Rainier Urban Village and around the Mt. Baker Light Rail Station.

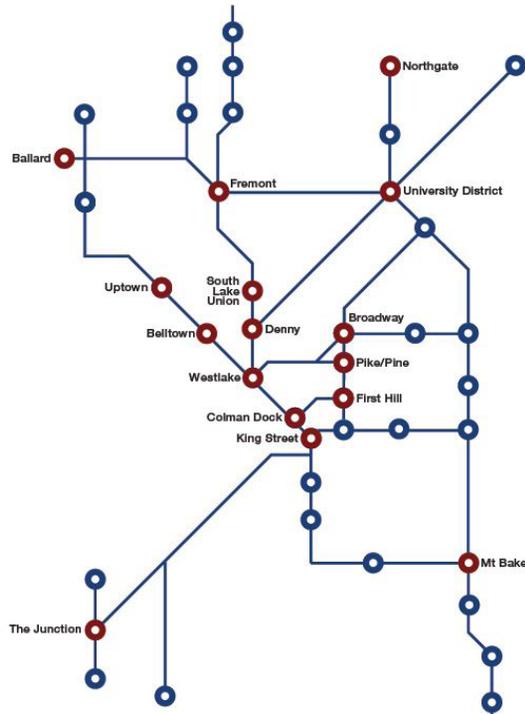


Proposed Neighborhood Build-Out - Likely build-out as proposed in the 2010 North Rainier Neighborhood Plan Update. The City Council upzoned the area in 2014 to allow for increased density and building heights.

TRANSIT COMMUNITY TYPOLOGIES

The Seattle Planning Commission’s 2010 report *Seattle Transit Communities* identifies four distinct TOD typologies: Mixed Use Centers, Mixed Use Neighborhoods, Special Districts, and Industrial Jobs Centers. The North Rainier Urban Village and the Mt. Baker Light-Rail Station are both categorized as a Mixed Use Center, described as:

vibrant and eclectic local or regional hub where frequent, reliable transit supports jobs, residents and services. A variety of retail and commercial activities support a mix of housing types and civic and recreational amenities are easily accessible on foot, bike or transit (Seattle PC, 2010).



Seattle Mixed Use Centers - The support for TOD in the built environment character differs substantially between urban centers

MIXED USE CENTERS

The *Seattle Transit Communities* report lists the essential components for livability for mixed use centers and the importance of a high quality pedestrian and bicycle environment and street life. The essential components of livability include:

- A. Breathing Room
- B. Getting to Transit is Easy
- C. Complete Streets
- D. Transit is at the Center of the Community
- E. Vibrant Street Life
- F. A Community for All Ages

The essential components of livability are described in more detail in the assessment section of this report and are used to assess the City’s approach to implementing the urban village strategy in the North Rainier Urban Village.

GROWTH TARGETS

The City of Seattle establishes growth targets for housing and jobs in Urban Centers and Villages over a twenty-year period. The tables identify the growth targets through 2024 for the City's Hub Urban Villages. Overall, the Hub Urban Villages are exceeding targets for both housing and employment. For housing, Hub Urban Villages as a whole have already exceeded the 2024 target by approximately 25%. Employment growth through 2013 is on pace to exceed the 2024 targets, having met approximately 81% of the 2024 target.

Some Hub Urban Villages, such as Ballard and Fremont, have far exceeded both growth targets while others have fallen behind. Through 2014, urban villages should have achieved 50% of the 2024 target to be on pace to meet the 2024 targets. The North Rainier Hub Urban Village is on pace to meet the housing target for 2024 having already reached 56.7% of the target through 2014. The area has experienced job losses in recent years and is behind the pace needed to meet the 2024 target (City of Seattle, 2014).

Meeting growth targets is only one measure of the success of an urban village. However, the differences highlight the importance of location and a need for context sensitive approaches to urban villages. The Urban Village Strategy is based on several interrelated goals for urban villages including a desire for compact, high-density, walkable, and mixed use development served by a high level of transit service.

Housing

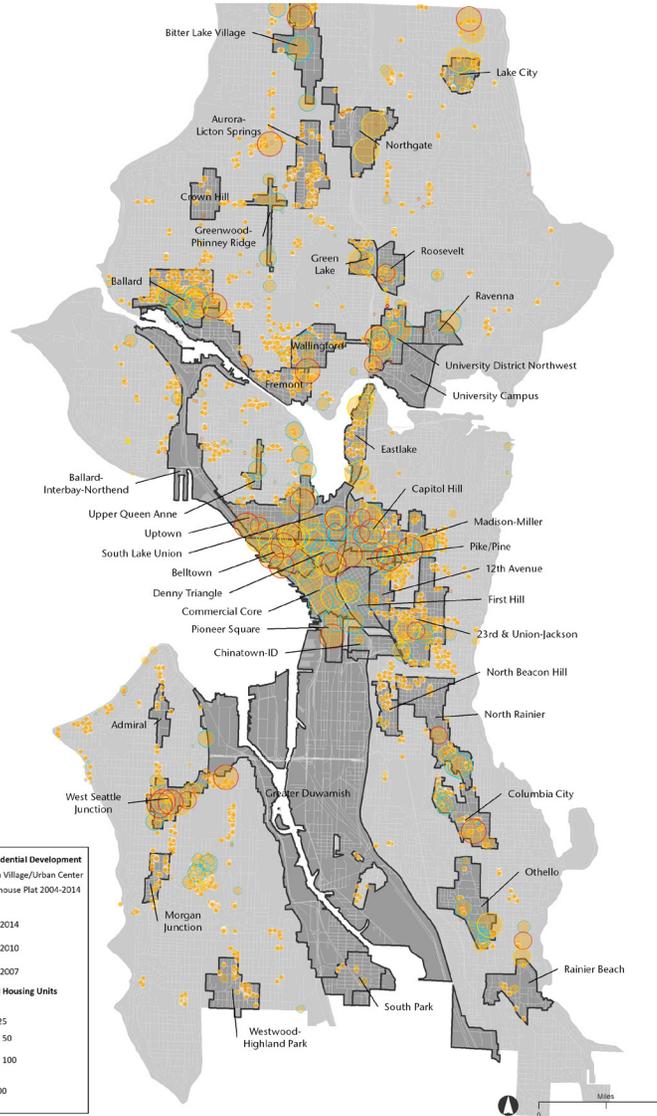
Hub Urban Village	Housing Growth 2005-2014	2024 Target	% of 2024 Target Achieved	Surplus/Deficit 2014
Ballard	2471	1000	247.1%	1971
Bitter Lake	1174	800	146.8%	774
Fremont	519	500	103.8%	269
Lake City	523	900	58.1%	73
North Rainier	510	900	56.7%	60
W Seattle Junction	787	700	112.4%	437

Employment

Hub Urban Village	Job Growth 2004-2013	2024 Target	% of 2024 Target Achieved	Surplus/Deficit 2013
Ballard	1369	750	182.5%	994
Bitter Lake	-249	750	-33.2%	-624
Fremont	1786	800	223.3%	1386
Lake City	438	650	67.4%	113
North Rainier	218	750	29.1%	-157
W Seattle Junction	34	750	4.5%	-341

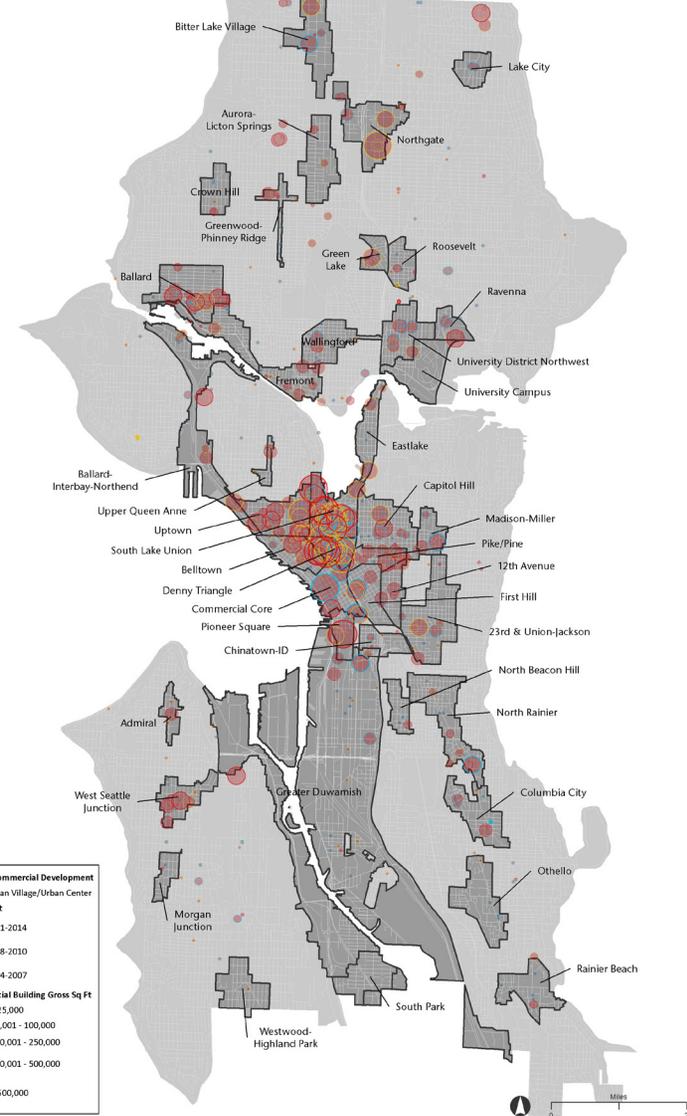
Source: City of Seattle 2014, BERK Consulting 2015

Housing Development in Urban Villages, 2004-2014



Source: King County Assessor, 2015; BERK Consulting 2015

Commercial Development in Urban Villages, 2004-2014



SOURCE: King County Assessor, 2015

PLANNING TIMELINE

1999

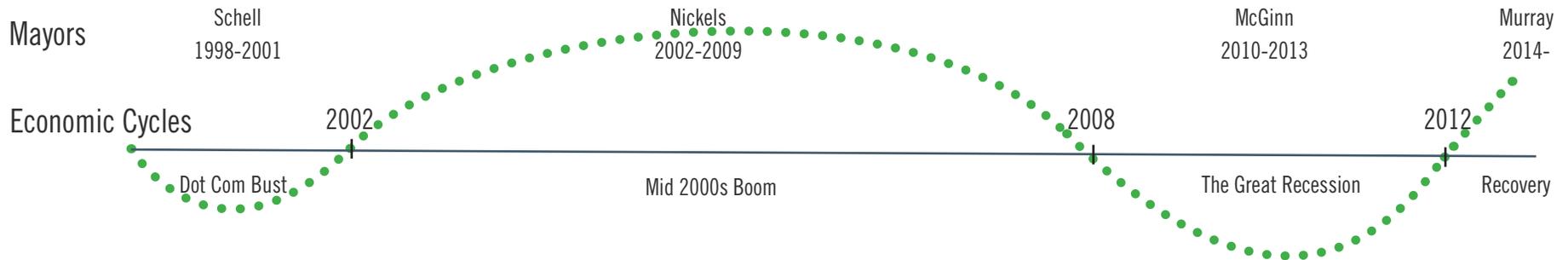
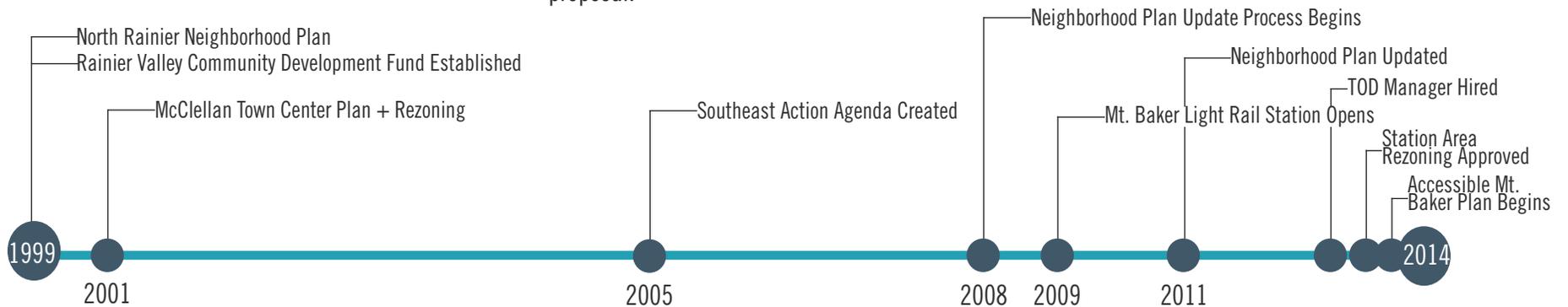
The North Rainier Neighborhood Plan is completed. The Rainier Valley Community Development Fund is established in anticipation of light rail coming to the Rainier Valley.

2001-2008

The McClellan Town Center Plan is developed for the area around the future Mt. Baker Light Rail Station. The City Council upzones the area by increasing building heights and density allowances. The Southeast Action Agenda is created under Mayor Nickels, including a Community Renewal proposal.

2009-2014

The Neighborhood Plan is updated to include an urban design framework, action plan, and upzone around the light rail station. In 2014, The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) hires a TOD Manager. The Department of Transportation (SDOT) kicks off a new transportation planning effort called "Accessible Mt. Baker."



ORGANIZATIONS

Several organizations and City Departments have a role in planning and implementing transit oriented development (TOD) and the Urban Village Strategy. The following is a summary of each organization and department's role:

Mayor's Office - sets priorities for planning, development, and infrastructure investments. The Mayor's Office may oversee interdepartmental teams on key issues. Any major organizational changes to individual departments or department relationships will be implemented by the Mayor's Office.

Department of Planning and Development (DPD) - responsible for long-range planning including the City's Comprehensive Plan and neighborhood plans. The department also regulates private development and administers the city's land use and zoning codes. Implements any new rezoning strategies, which typically occur immediately following neighborhood plan development or updates.

Parks and Recreation - responsible for planning new parks and open spaces within Urban Villages.

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) - responsible for any new utility or infrastructure needs to implement an Urban Village Plan such as stormwater, water, sewer, or electricity upgrades.

Department of Neighborhoods (DON) - maintains ongoing neighborhood service and public involvement programs that may be utilized in implementing an Urban Village Plan.

Office of Economic Development (OED) - works chiefly through partnerships with community-based organizations, community lending institutions, community colleges, individual businesses, and industry associations and business organizations. Staff provides program management, policy planning, and other technical assistance services to assist specific enterprises or groups of firms, neighborhoods, and individual Seattle residents.

Department of Transportation (SDOT) - responsible for transportation improvements in Urban Villages including street, pedestrian, bicycle, and freight improvements.

Seattle Police Department (SPD): responsible for law enforcement and public safety.

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) - responsible for delivery of a high-quality public education and planning and siting of new schools and associated facilities.

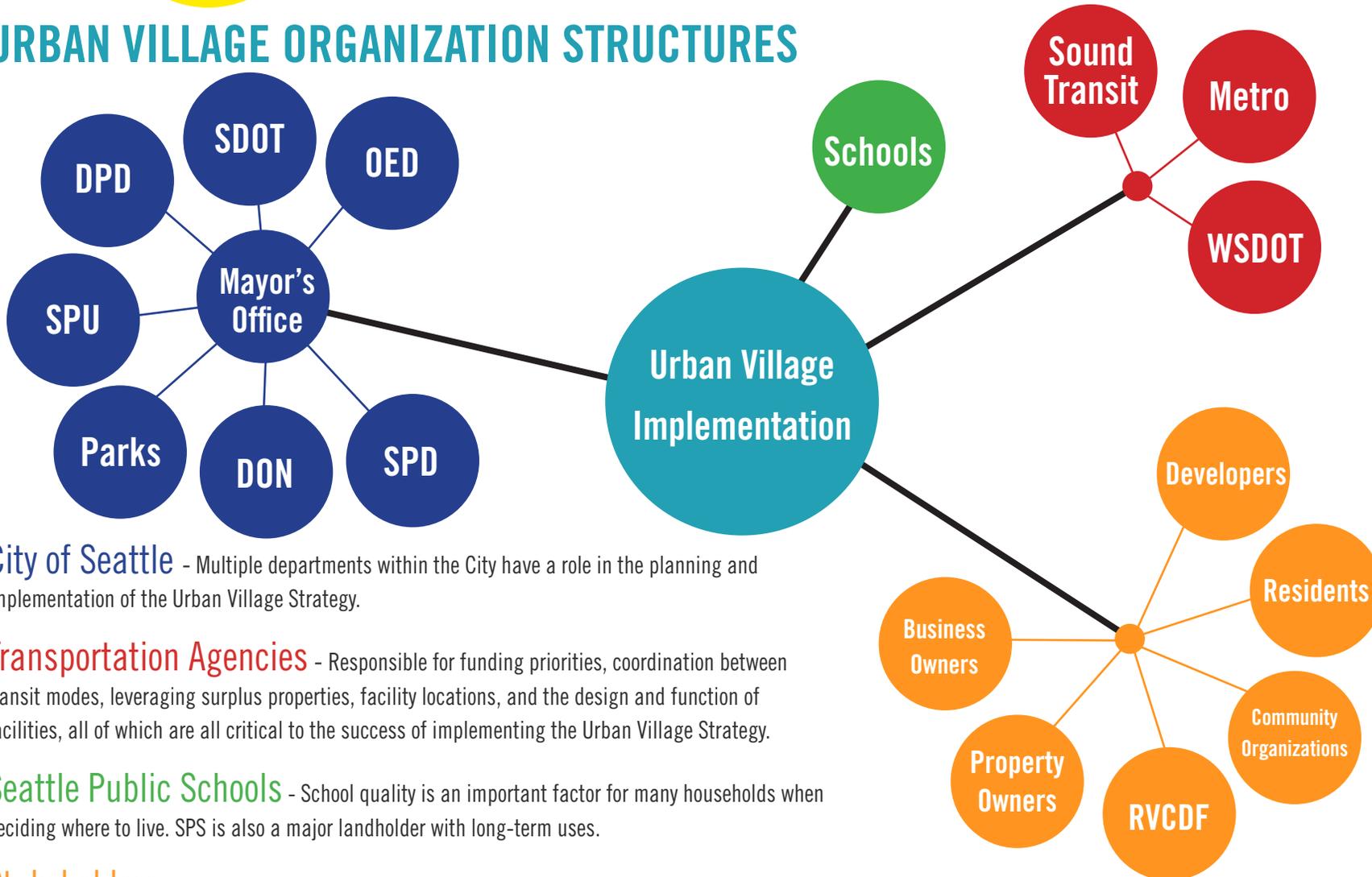
Sound Transit - responsible for regional transportation planning and implementation including light rail station area location and bus services. Sound Transit also has a role in private development through the organization's surplus properties around transit stations.

King County Metro - responsible for providing bus service in urban villages. Planning for connections to light rail stations in urban villages is a key factor in implementing the Urban Village Strategy.

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) - has a role in funding major transportation projects such as street improvements, light rail investments and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects if they are on a state-owned facility, done as mitigation for a state-owned facility, or using federal funds.

Rainier Valley Community Development Fund (RVCDF) - responsible for administering \$50 million in community development funds to minimize impacts to businesses in the Rainier Valley from light-rail construction.

URBAN VILLAGE ORGANIZATION STRUCTURES



City of Seattle - Multiple departments within the City have a role in the planning and implementation of the Urban Village Strategy.

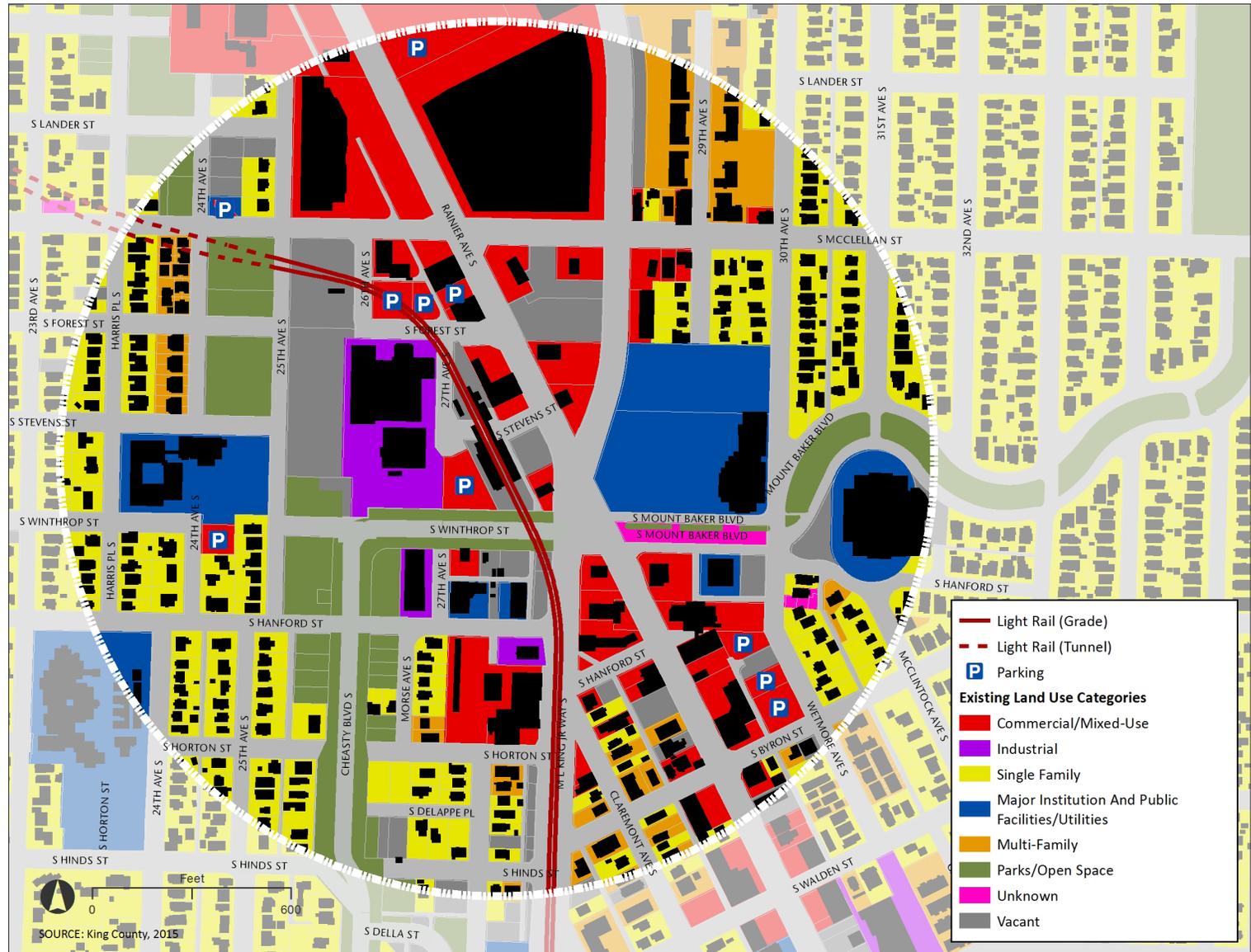
Transportation Agencies - Responsible for funding priorities, coordination between transit modes, leveraging surplus properties, facility locations, and the design and function of facilities, all of which are all critical to the success of implementing the Urban Village Strategy.

Seattle Public Schools - School quality is an important factor for many households when deciding where to live. SPS is also a major landholder with long-term uses.

Stakeholders - Public involvement is essential during plan development and implementation. Finding opportunities for public/public and public/private partnerships, addressing infrastructure needs, and facilitating new development is critical to implementing the Urban Village Strategy.

SITE CONTEXT

Today, 15 years after the North Rainier Neighborhood Plan was completed and five years after light rail opened, the area within one-quarter of a mile of the Mt. Baker station is characterized by auto-oriented uses, parking, and vacant lots.



Source: King County Assessor 2015; BERK Consulting, 2015

SITE PHOTOS



Rainier Ave. at the Mt. Baker Station

Under utilized spaces exist adjacent to the transit station that could be programmed for community uses to add vitality to the area and attract further investment.



Rainier Ave. and MLK Way Intersection

The intersection of Rainier and MLK is auto-dominated and lacks the multi-modal infrastructure necessary to support an urban village environment.



Below Mt. Baker Light Rail Station

Originally designed for a transit connection, the public space beneath the light rail station lacks active community uses. The space could be used to host events, pop-up retail, food trucks, or other tactical urbanism interventions.



Sidewalk Network

Narrow sidewalks, blank walls, lack of on-street parking, and poor infrastructure all contribute to an auto-dominated environment.



Major Employer

The UW Laundry Facility is located in the area because of its proximity to I-5 and other major transportation routes. The facility workforce comes from the Rainier Valley.



Artspace

The new Artspace project incorporates artists residences, first-floor retail, and pedestrian improvements. It is the first major project adjacent to the station area.



New Development

A few development projects have been proposed consistent with the vision for the Urban Village. However, the projects have not been constructed, indicating that conditions may not be ripe for development.



Side Streets

Pedestrian connections from adjacent neighborhoods are lacking. The poor condition of the infrastructure is likely deterring investment in TOD.

INTERVIEWS

The consultant team spoke with 17 individuals who have either been directly involved in planning in the North Rainier Urban Village or have knowledge of development issues in the city. A list of interviewees is provided in Appendix B. The following themes were identified:

- A. Site Challenges
- B. Strategic Outreach
- C. Plan Updates and Rezoning
- D. Interagency Coordination
- E. Investment in Infrastructure
- F. Political Leadership
- G. Diverse Opinions

A. Site Challenges

Several people interviewed acknowledged the many challenges associated with development in the study area, including:

- ▶ Fragmented parcel ownership
- ▶ Poor soils

- ▶ Auto-dominated environment
- ▶ Lack of identity and neighborhood cohesiveness
- ▶ Lack of market demand

B. Strategic Outreach

Many interviewees stated that the City did not do sufficient outreach to property and business owners and potential developers. Other comments included:

- ▶ The hiring of the TOD Manager is key to establishing partnerships with property owners and developers
- ▶ The plan update should have focused on strategic outreach to property owners and implementing the concepts in the 2001 McClellan Town Center Plan

C. Plan Updates and Rezoning

Several people questioned the plan update process and timing of the rezoning.

- ▶ Development agreements should be favored over area wide upzoning in areas that lack demand for new development
- ▶ Upzoning creates an inflated sense of property value, which may further decrease the likelihood of development
- ▶ Permit streamlining, waiving fees or deferring payments, or Local Improvement Districts (LID) should be the focus rather than plan updates

D. Interagency Coordination

The lack of effective interagency coordination is a consistent theme identified during the interviews.

- ▶ Not enough coordination between city departments, too many silos
- ▶ Follow the model used in South Lake Union with an interdepartmental team, annual work program, and oversight from the Mayor's Office
- ▶ Strike teams should become part of the organizational culture
- ▶ Transit agencies are not involved enough in planning process

E. Investment in Infrastructure

A lack of investment in infrastructure to support development was raised repeatedly.

- ▶ Poor infrastructure is preventing development. No one wants to be the first to develop in the area. City needs to make the area more attractive for development by investing in infrastructure first
- ▶ City is relying on a major property owner to do a catalyst project to spur development in the area and address infrastructure issues
- ▶ The area needs major infrastructure changes, not just traffic, but the City stepping up to make urban design work

- ▶ The area needs community investments similar to the library and community center in Northgate
- ▶ Major stormwater issue is preventing development on a private site and needs to be addressed
- ▶ Following the initial investment in light rail there is a sense that further infrastructure investment in the Rainier is not a high priority
- ▶ If the City had purchased property in the area, it would have had more tools to work with

F. Political Leadership

Some interviewees described the role that political leadership, or lack thereof, plays in getting things done.

- ▶ Big concerns regarding the many plans that have been produced, but nothing has been implemented
- ▶ Three mayors in the last six years is a major factor for the lack of progress
- ▶ All three of the previous mayors were aligned on promoting increased density in urban villages
- ▶ A decision on transportation improvements was not made earlier because the area is complicated and involves lots of diverse stakeholders

G. Diverse Opinions

Interviewees had differing opinions on both what is desired and what is feasible in terms of development.

- ▶ The City should focus more on recruiting employers than on housing in the study area. Office space should be a key part of the strategy
- ▶ It is not feasible to do an office development in the middle of nowhere. If there is no track record of office development in an area then financing it will be difficult
- ▶ The City needs fewer requirements and more flexibility
- ▶ First floor retail uses are not viable in the area and should not be required
- ▶ If jobs are what is needed, who will make that happen

NORTH RAINIER LIVABILITY ASSESSMENT

Before assessing the City's actions in North Rainier, an assessment of current conditions and a comparison with city livability goals are presented.

As described above, a 2010 report by the Seattle Planning Commission, *Seattle Transit Communities: Integrating Neighborhoods with Transit*, provides “recommendations on what it takes to create and support successful transit communities.” The report identifies the Mt. Baker area as a “Mixed Use Center,” which has six essential livability components. Each component is described below, followed by an assessment of North Rainier. While the Commission's work is a strong base for livability, other factors such as social equity and public safety should also be considered.

Essential Livability Components

Breathing Room: Parks, open spaces, and other facilities to improve quality of life, as well as Green Streets and landscaping to provide environmental benefits.

While there are some parks and open spaces in North Rainier, they are not very accessible due to poor pedestrian and bicycle connections and the auto-dominated environment; in addition, many of the open spaces are not within a quarter-mile of the Mt. Baker station. Additional parks and open spaces are needed along with

small urban public spaces to support the transition to a mixed use center.

Friends of Mt. Baker Town Center has proposed a “land bridge” to increase connectivity across Rainier Avenue South and Martin Luther King Jr. Way South. The North Rainier Urban Village is also in close proximity to several larger regional parks just outside of the study area.

The lack of park and open space is an issue in North Rainier, but other urban villages that are thriving and attracting new growth, such as Ballard, Fremont and Downtown, also have unmet park and open space needs. There is need for additional “breathing room” in North Rainier, particularly near the light rail station, but it is not the largest obstacle to creating a thriving urban village.

Getting to Transit is Easy: Safe and clean transit stops and stations, wide sidewalks with pedestrian lighting, bicycle lanes and parking; and wayfinding.

The light rail station provides high-quality transit service north to Downtown and south to SeaTac Airport. However, connections to the station from adjacent residential areas and connections to bus service need improvement as light rail is not yet a full system. The location of the bus layover facility on the opposite side of Rainier Ave. does not provide a seamless transition between transit modes.

Complete Streets: Safe and accessible to all users, well lit, with healthy trees and landscaping.

Rainier Ave. South and Martin Luther King Jr Way South are not complete streets; the current design favors automobile capacity. Bicycle lanes, wider sidewalks, lighting, and pedestrian amenities are all needed to support the mixed use center vision.

Complete streets are particularly important in the study area because existing development is not pedestrian oriented. To promote private investment that supports an enhanced pedestrian environment, significant changes in the street system are required. The SDOT Accessible Mt. Baker project is assessing short and long term options for improving the pedestrian environment.

Transit at the Center of the Community: Areas surrounding the transit station include public art, plazas, open spaces, businesses open 16-18 hours/day, uses such as day care, restaurants, and coffee shops, and the tallest buildings.

Although development of the station area did include some investment in public space such as the public plaza along Rainier Ave. S, transit is not the center of this community. The area surrounding the light rail station is defined by linear, auto-oriented development, making it a place to drive through rather than a transit community. The abundance of parking lots and dispersed commercial uses with poor pedestrian connections do not support a transit community. Today, the new Artspace project adjacent to the station has brought new residents and shops to the area, but on its own will not transform the area into a transit community. Ensuring that transit is at the center of the community will require both proactive and

sustained City actions as well as willing partners in Sound Transit and King County Metro.

Vibrant Street life: Wide sidewalks, bicycle facilities, landscaping, street furniture, public art, and café tables.

Vibrant street life cannot exist without people. While the station area includes some public art, bicycle parking, landscaping, and street furniture, lively streets require pedestrian-oriented development with active ground-floor uses - whether retail, institutional, or community spaces. Investment in streets and public spaces may serve as a catalyst to new development, which may increase the population and pedestrian flow.

A Community for All Ages: Schools, play areas, senior centers, libraries, and public spaces where people of all ages can thrive, along with a broad mix of housing sizes and affordability levels.

The station area lacks a residential population and neighborhood identity. While the area does include assets like the Franklin High School and affordable housing developments like the Claremont, it does not have sufficient public services and amenities to meet this criteria.

The investment in the library, community center and park in Northgate is an example of how investments in public buildings, services and open spaces can serve as a catalyst to transform an area to a mixed use center serving people of all ages.

Comparison with Other Mixed Use Centers

Fremont and Ballard, also described as mixed use centers in the Planning Commission's report, have seen significant growth even while lacking some in livability components. For example, according to the *Seattle Sustainable Neighborhoods Assessment Project*, Ballard lacks sufficient park space and proximity to parks (Steinbrueck Urban Strategies, 2015). Does this mean a neighborhood does not require livability components to attract new development? More likely it indicates that some of the livability components may be larger drivers of growth than others.

A key difference is that Fremont and Ballard have a history of housing and commercial development that have commanded higher rents than North Rainier. For example, Ballard and Fremont have always had a walkable, pedestrian-oriented commercial and mixed use district with vibrant street life. The public schools in these two centers also have stronger academic performance (based on test scores) than the schools in North Rainier.

Parks and open spaces can be accessed in other parts of the city to meet demand in underserved areas. However, being able to walk to a pedestrian oriented commercial area from a home is a significant asset that North Rainier lacks.

New parks are often more challenging to fund than investments in city-owned streets. The Bell Street Project is intended to increase park space in an underserved area using existing street right of way, largely because purchasing new park space is prohibitively expensive.

In rapidly growing neighborhoods, demand for new parks, open spaces, street improvements, and community facilities will grow, increasing competition for limited city resources.

Neighborhoods that are not “market ready” may continue to languish without new city resources. Investments in parks and open spaces alone will not likely drive future growth without addressing the need for complete streets and vibrant street life.

While the City of Seattle may have traditionally invested in areas after private investments have been made a different approach is needed in North Rainier and other urban villages that are not market ready and lack the necessary infrastructure, community facilities, and high-quality public realm necessary to support development consistent with neighborhood plans.

- ▶ **FINDING:** The North Rainier Urban Village lacks the essential components of livability for Mixed Use Centers.
- ▶ **FINDING:** Of the Planning Commission's essential components of livability, the City should focus on complete streets, vibrant street life, and a community for all ages to implement the North Rainier Neighborhood Plan.

Profiles of Successful City Leadership

Northgate

In the early 2000s, development at Northgate was at a standstill, largely due to a contentious neighborhood process. When Mayor Nickels took office in 2002, he declared that solving the Northgate development logjam was a top priority. Several strategies moved development forward:

- ▶ The City made substantial public investments, changing the character of the area to improve livability and attract private investment. This included a library, community center, a park, and street improvements.
- ▶ A structured interdepartmental team led by the Mayor's Office with a high degree of accountability was critical to success.
- ▶ The City had a relatively high level of engagement with property owners and developers, including a Development Agreement with Simons Property Group.
- ▶ The Mayor made executive decisions about siting the library and community center, developing the south lot, and reforming development regulations.
- ▶ The Northgate Stakeholders group was able to reach consensus on design and development issues, resolving the "Northgate logjam" which had stalled redevelopment efforts for years. The stakeholder process took significant work by the Mayor, City Council, and the community, and required significant city resources over several years.

Today, Northgate has taken significant steps towards a major transformation with new residential buildings, a new park, office and commercial development, a new community center and library, and street improvements. The urban center has grown

by over 1,000 housing units between 2005 and 2014, after only 170 new units in the previous ten years. Employment grew 11% between 2004 and 2013.

City of Seattle-funded Infrastructure in Northgate (partial list):

- ▶ Hubbard Homestead Park Acquisition: \$3 million
- ▶ Thornton Creek Water Quality Channel: \$7 million
- ▶ Northgate Civic Center Park: \$1 million acquisition
- ▶ Library: \$6.7 million
- ▶ Community Center: \$8.85 million
- ▶ 5th Avenue NE Streetscape Improvements: \$2.1 million



Northgate Library, Community Center and Park - City investments have improved the livability of the Northgate Neighborhood and provided a platform for private sector investment (Miller Hull, 2015).

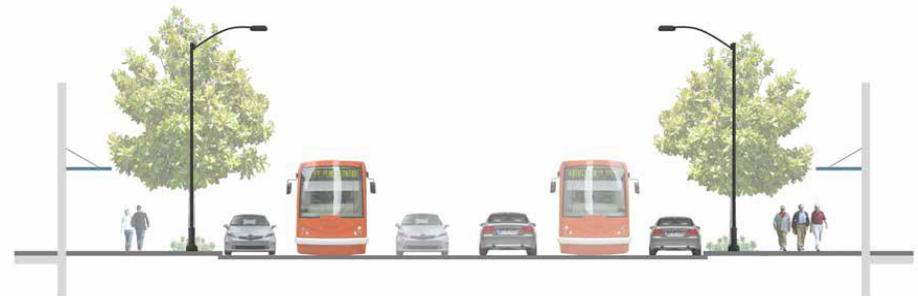
South Lake Union

Until the early 2000s, South Lake Union (SLU) consisted primarily of light industrial and auto-oriented commercial uses, with a small population living in the Cascade neighborhood. Today, SLU is a dense, mixed use urban neighborhood and employment center with an increasing number of retail stores, restaurants, and housing. Between 2005 and 2014, SLU has added over 3,200 housing units and 16,000 new jobs. There are several reasons for the success of South Lake Union:

- ▶ The Mayor established an “Action Agenda” focused on infrastructure investments to support growth in jobs and housing.
- ▶ The City invested in transportation infrastructure, public park space, a street car, an electrical substation and affordable housing to support a dense mixed-use community.
- ▶ The City formed interdepartmental teams lead by the Mayor’s office charged with moving projects forward quickly.
- ▶ A single property owner, Vulcan, owned a large portion of the land in SLU and worked with the City and community to craft a vision that aligned with the City’s policies. Vulcan also partnered with the City on infrastructure investments.
- ▶ Market conditions, including the location near downtown and the University of Washington and the real estate boom of the mid-2000s, helped attract private investment.
- ▶ The City invested considerable effort and resources to plan and zone for growth in the neighborhood.

City of Seattle-funded Infrastructure in SLU (partial list):

- ▶ Street Car: \$8.5 Million
- ▶ Electrical Substation: \$201 Million (funded by ratepayers)
- ▶ South Lake Union Park: \$9.4 Million
- ▶ Mercer Street Improvements: \$83 Million



Westlake Avenue Streetscape Improvements have enhanced the pedestrian environment and attracted investment in South Lake Union.

ASSESSMENT OF CITY ACTIONS IN NORTH RAINIER

A 2013 report for DPD, *Implementing Transit Oriented Development in Seattle: Assessment and Recommendations for Action*, identified seven factors that led to successful neighborhood revitalization in Seattle. These factors were used to assess the City's process and actions in North Rainier.

1. City Leadership

Over the past fifteen years, the City of Seattle has at times shown leadership and vision for implementing the Urban Village Strategy in North Rainier. However, these periods of leadership have been interrupted by political or economic disruptions. During the early planning, several outside forces influenced political decisions:

- ▶ **Surface route controversy:** Planning for light rail in the Rainier Valley ran into significant controversy in the late 1990s and early 2000s over the proposed surface alignment on Martin Luther King Junior Way South. Concerns from the community included noise, safety, disruption to business, acquisition of properties, and unfair treatment of poor and minority populations. To allay concerns about disruptions to businesses, a \$50 million fund for community development was created, leading to the Rainier Valley Community Development Fund. However, a climate of distrust of the light rail project would continue to impact decisions and activities in the area, including efforts to acquire properties for redevelopment.

- ▶ **Sound Transit woes:** The early 2000s were marked by major financial turmoil at Sound Transit, nearly leading to a loss of federal funds for light-rail and the folding of the agency. In 2001, the Board approved a drastically reduced initial light rail segment. These financial troubles may have reduced the agency's emphasis on development near stations and instead focused political and agency leadership on getting the rail line built.

Early City Planning, 1999-2001

The 1999 North Rainier Neighborhood Plan, 2001 zoning updates, and 2001 McClellan Town Center Development Strategy together show an impressive vision for the area, interdepartmental coordination, and a detailed implementation plan. The Town Center Development Strategy includes next steps for public investments and development activities at key parcels, with lead agencies identified for each. But despite the detailed strategy, little progress was made towards implementation. For example, the roundabout proposal for the Rainier Avenue South/ Martin Luther King Junior Way South intersection, identified in the Strategy as a way to



Concept Plan from McClellan Town Center Development Strategy

improve safety and create a sense of place, was neither implemented nor replaced with an alternative proposal.

Failure to implement these strategies was the first major failure of leadership for North Rainier, and set back redevelopment several years. Disruptions from the 2001 recession, the 2002 change in Mayoral administration, and accompanying changes in city staffing and departments are the likely major reasons.

Southeast Seattle Action Agenda, 2004-2006

In 2004, then-Mayor Greg Nickels convened a broad group of stakeholders to discuss strategies for the revitalization of Southeast Seattle, resulting in the Southeast Seattle Action Agenda. The Agenda focused on five issue areas: business and job creation; physical development; education and workforce development; public safety; and arts, culture, and public space. When the Agenda was released in 2005, Mayor Greg Nickels promised to focus attention on the Rainier Valley:

Mayor Greg Nickels rolled out his Southeast Seattle “action agenda” yesterday, vowing to put as much city attention on Rainier Valley neighborhoods as he has focused on downtown, Northgate and South Lake Union in his first three years on the job (Seattle Times, 2005).

Regarding physical development issues, the Agenda appears to reflect an assumption among city leaders that private development would automatically follow the introduction of light rail and therefore the City’s primary role was to preserve small businesses and housing affordability rather than to encourage new market-rate development. As described in the Seattle Times:

Nickels’ goal in Southeast Seattle is to take advantage of huge public investment in Sound Transit’s new light-rail line to revitalize an area that private developers and employers have passed by for decades. The mayor’s plan emphasizes preserving the diverse ethnic mix of businesses and residents in Rainier Valley more than it calls for new city spending to spur growth in the area. (Seattle Times, 2005)

It appears that the City did not accurately perceive the market in North Rainier and what was needed to attract private investment, and therefore did not take actions to attract development such as transportation and utility improvements and partnerships with the private sector.

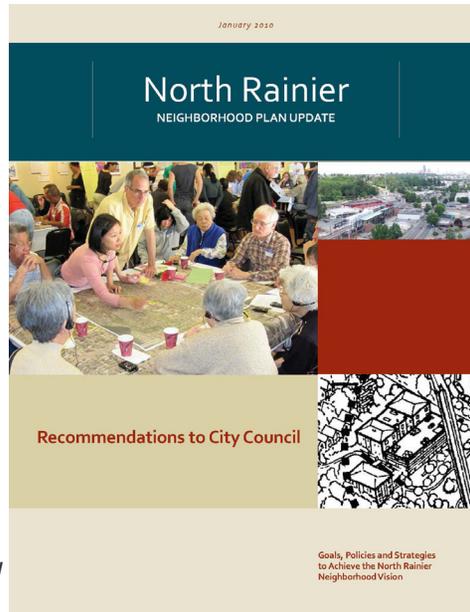
For the purpose of urban village development, the Action Agenda may have been too broadly focused, incorporating a wide variety of issues and several neighborhoods.

Community Renewal

One of the strategies recommended in the Action Agenda was using the Community Renewal Law to support investment in the Rainier Valley. In 2006, the City convened representatives of community organizations to explore a community renewal designation. The purpose was to encourage economic growth and development through public purchase of land for redevelopment. But the proposal ran into community opposition over the idea of public acquisition of private land, and was abandoned within a year. Planning and investment activities in North Rainier then lost momentum.

Recent City Planning, 2009-2015

Recent city actions in North Rainier have included a Neighborhood Plan update, an Urban Design Framework, an Action Plan, a Transportation Plan, and an upzone for the Station Area. While DPD staff performed the functions they were tasked with, strategic city leadership in infrastructure investment, interdepartmental coordination, and partnerships with the private sector have been lacking. Today, progress is being made. DPD's new TOD Manager is strengthening relationships with property owners and developers while SDOT has launched the Accessible Mount Baker study to improve transportation in the area. The study will include short and long-term improvements for improving safety and priority consideration for transit, pedestrian and bicycle modes.



- ▶ **FINDING:** Leadership to implement the neighborhood plan, including investments in the public realm, community facilities and infrastructure; interdepartmental coordination, and partnerships with the private sector, has been lacking.

2. Effective Coordination across City Departments

Since planning for North Rainier began in 1999, coordination among City departments has been inconsistent. While DPD was responsible for developing the North Rainier plan, it has not had a major role in implementation other than the two rezones. For example, discussions with property owners and developers about infrastructure investment are not generally conducted by the team that develops the neighborhood plan. It does not appear that any City Department or interdepartmental team is responsible or accountable for the implementation of the Urban Village Strategy and neighborhood plan in North Rainier.

The City started off well in the 2001 McClellan Town Center Development Strategy, which included participation from key departments and implementation tasks. However, the combination of recession and administration change in 2002 likely impacted momentum towards plan implementation

There have been several missed opportunities for City leadership and interdepartmental coordination in North Rainier. One is the Rainier Ave South and Martin Luther King Jr South intersection. The 2001 Strategy recognized that taming this intersection was key to attracting new development and creating an urban village. The plan recommended a roundabout, but the City never progressed beyond

- ▶ **FINDING:** City Leadership for planning and implementation in the North Rainier Urban Village has been inconsistent due to changes in political leadership, economic cycles, and staffing.
- ▶ **FINDING:** The Southeast Seattle Action Agenda did not include enough focus on attracting private investment, did not lead to needed public improvements, and was too broadly focused to be effective for urban village-specific goals.

the concept stage and the roundabout or any other solution for the intersection has not been implemented.

Another barrier to new development is the stormwater pipe at the QFC site, which if redeveloped could be a catalyst for the redevelopment of other sites. As revealed in stakeholder interviews, City TOD staff worked hard in the years before the 2009 recession with Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) and the property owner to find a way to move the pipe. However, agreement with SPU and the property owner was not reached and the opportunity for redevelopment was missed during that economic cycle.

Intra-departmental coordination also needs improvement. For example, individuals and divisions in SDOT are tasked with mode-specific responsibilities, such as implementing bicycle lanes. This becomes an obstacle to the comprehensive multimodal approach needed for addressing transportation issues in urban villages.

The 2011 North Rainier Neighborhood Action Plan includes a recommendation to create a “Neighborhood Action Team.” However, there is little evidence that the team was formed or was effective at implementing the plan. Efforts may have been better spent on establishing a City interdepartmental team to implement the North Rainier Plan with a coordinated strategy for planning, design, funding, and construction of public investments.

- ▶ **FINDING:** Interdepartmental coordination during the creation and implementation of plans was insufficient in North Rainier, resulting in a lack of physical improvements or new development.

3. Early Planning

The City and DPD have done high-quality planning for North Rainier and made significant efforts to involve the community in the planning process.

- ▶ Between 1999 and 2001, the neighborhood plan and the McClellan Town Center Development Strategy set the vision and objectives for transforming the area to a mixed-use urban center.
- ▶ A rezone for the Mt. Baker Station Area was approved in 2001 to allow for development consistent with the neighborhood plan.
- ▶ The 2008-2011 planning period involved a robust public involvement effort and an update to the Neighborhood Plan.
- ▶ Another rezoning effort was approved in 2014 to allow for increased density in the Mt. Baker Station Area.
- ▶ In the Accessible Mt. Baker project, SDOT is looking at transportation issues in a comprehensive and multi-modal approach that may yield better results than previous efforts, which prioritized all modes equally.

Several stakeholders viewed the City’s planning and zoning activities as lacking one crucial piece: strategic outreach to property owners and developers, the parties that would be needed to build the new housing, office, or commercial development outlined in the neighborhood plan. While property owners participated in the broader community planning processes, strategic outreach with this group was insufficient. When the City depends on actions by private actors to bring an urban village vision

to reality, it must understand what those private interests are looking for, rather than assuming “if you build it [light rail] and rezone, they [developers] will come.” However, more strategic interaction with this group should not be viewed as a replacement for broad community outreach.

Today the City has a renewed effort to work with property owners and developers, led by DPD’s TOD Manager. This work includes a market study and architectural massing study for the Lowe’s property through a partnership between the City and property owner.

Aside from the lack of property owner and developer participation, there are a variety of stakeholder opinions about the recent neighborhood plan update and the 2014 upzone:

- ▶ In one view, the lack of demand from property owners or developers for the upzone limited its efficacy and may delay development by raising perceived property values. A better tactic to encourage development is to assess the market, implement the infrastructure needed to encourage development, and negotiate with individual property owners for zoning changes assuming the baseline zoning already supports TOD. Creating demand for the upzone then gives the City leverage to require community benefits from the property owner (such as widened sidewalks, affordable housing set-asides, etc.).
- ▶ Other stakeholders believe that a blanket rezone is preferable to site-by-site actions and negotiations. In this view, a blanket rezone encourages property owners and developers to take action and lowers their risk and engages a

wider array of community members in the process. Further, some stakeholders believe that community suspicion of developers limits the City’s ability to negotiate with individual developers (even to achieve greater community benefits).

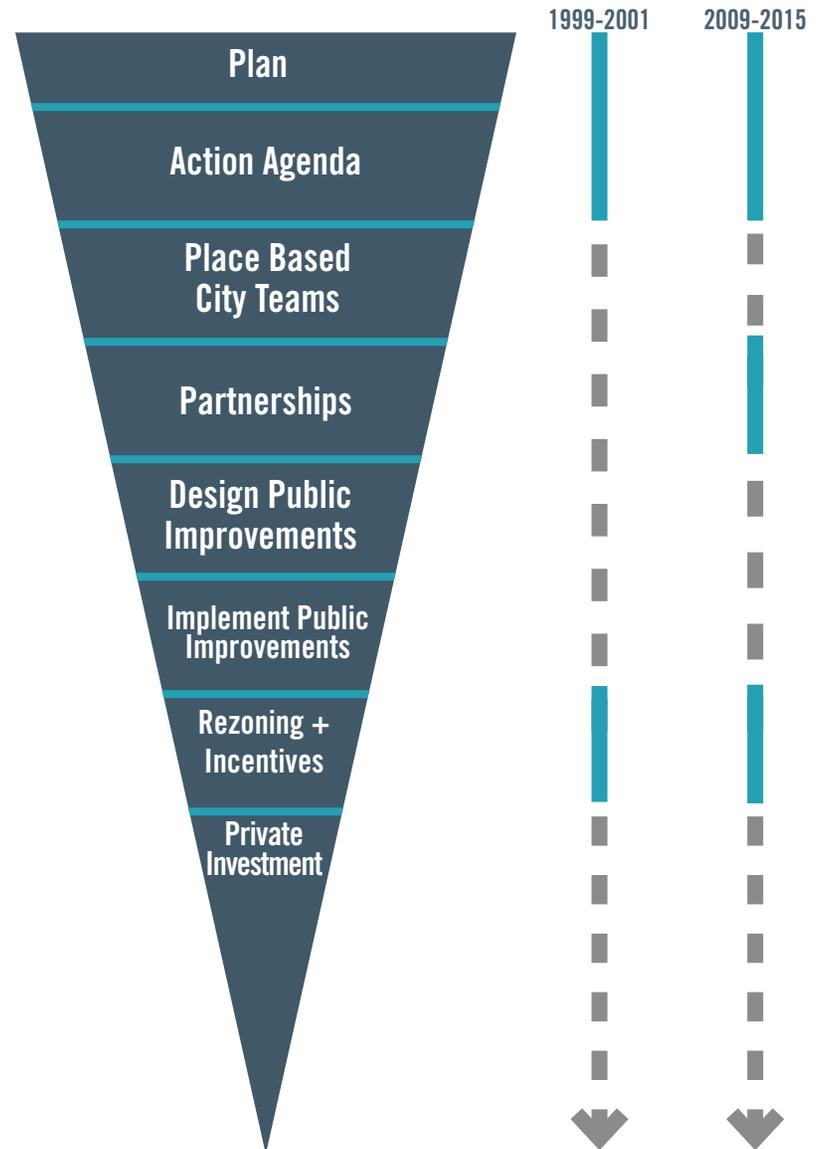
- ▶ While some community members supported the goals of the upzone as a way to encourage a vital Town Center, others opposed it for a variety of reasons. Concerns included several issues: taller buildings would block views; employers and commercial businesses could be pushed out; the City was not doing enough to attract jobs in the area; and the upzone would lead to more subsidized affordable housing, harming the neighborhood. All these concerns were not shared by all opponents as people opposed for different reasons.
- ▶ **FINDING:** The City has spent considerable effort and resources planning for the area over the last 15 years, including broad-based community outreach, which has resulted in high-quality plans.
- ▶ **FINDING:** City planning processes, particularly the 2011 neighborhood plan update, should have focused more on property owner/developer/business participation, with an emphasis on partnerships to coordinate public investments with private development and understand market conditions.
- ▶ **FINDING:** The time and resources used in the 2014 rezone may have been better directed toward forming strategic partnerships and addressing major infrastructure needs that are barriers to redevelopment. In addition, upzones may lead to property owners waiting longer to develop or sell their property, further delaying development, and therefore should be carefully weighed by the City.

- ▶ **FINDING:** In the 2014 rezone, the City missed an opportunity to generate new community or public benefits through agreements with property owners in exchange for incentives such as increased height.

IMPLEMENTATION SCALE LADDER

Implementation of the Urban Village Strategy in North Rainier requires a high level of coordination and timing to move from the planning stage to seeing private investment consistent with adopted plans. The City has used this approach in South Lake Union and Northgate with a high level of success. However, external forces and changes in political leadership have prevented the approach from becoming institutionalized within the broader city structure for planning, coordination and implementation.

The City’s approach to planning and implementation in North Rainier has resulted in gaps in the implementation scale ladder during both of the neighborhood planning periods. The gaps include investment in public infrastructure and creation of strong partnerships that remain barriers to private investment. Today some of these issues are being addressed, including property owner outreach by DPD’s TOD Manager and a new multi-modal transportation plan. The recommended Urban Village Team would provide a framework for more coordinated planning and implementation to eliminate the gaps.



LEGEND

- ■ Implementation Gaps
- City Actions Completed

4. City Focus and Prioritization of Investment in Development Areas

The most significant infrastructure investment in North Rainier was the Mt. Baker Light Rail Station, although smaller scale investments have been made. It was widely acknowledged during stakeholder interviews that insufficient investment in infrastructure is a key factor explaining why the area has not transformed into a mixed-use center.

Stormwater facility: One of the major opportunity sites near the Mt. Baker station sits above a 102-inch stormwater pipe which effectively prevents redevelopment of the site. Conversations with Seattle Public Utilities about moving the pipe have been going on for years. The challenge has been getting agreement on who should pay. To move redevelopment forward at this site, the City may need to invest in moving the facility, possibly through a Community Benefit Agreement, which could require certain community benefits from the property owner.

Transportation: Over the past 15 years the City has proposed several ideas for calming traffic and improving pedestrian safety near the Mt. Baker light rail station, but no major projects have been implemented between 1999 and 2015. Reasons include: disagreement among stakeholders and opposition to some proposals; a desire to equally accommodate all modes that was unrealistic (creating better pedestrian crossings while also accommodating movement of heavy freight); a lack of City leadership; and a lack of funding.

Over the past 15 years, the City failed to make necessary streetscape, sidewalk,

and intersection improvements to improve walkability in the area, which could have improved market demand by signaling the City's commitment to the area. Property owners could be partners in improving pedestrian space, similar to the widened sidewalk outside the Artspace development.

- ▶ **FINDING:** The City has not invested enough in public facilities and infrastructure near the Mt. Baker station, which remains a major obstacle to redevelopment. Investments in transportation are needed to support the transition to a mixed use center.
- ▶ **FINDING:** Historically the City has not prioritized transportation modes consistent with the vision for the area. Today, the Accessible Mt. Baker Project proposes to give a higher priority to pedestrians, bicyclists and transit.

5. Strong Partnerships

Over the past fifteen years, the City's planning efforts in North Rainier have focused more on broad community outreach and less on forming strategic partnerships with the stakeholders who can make development happen. The City's new TOD Manager is leading a renewed effort to form partnerships with key property owners, businesses, and developers, an important asset for the area.

Public-Private Partnerships: The 2001 McClellan Town Center Development Strategy included an assessment of market conditions in the station area and detailed analysis of seven parcels adjacent to the station. The implementation section includes next steps for each parcel with designated public sector leads including the Office of Housing, Office of Economic Development, Sound Transit, and the City's Strategic Planning Office. While this was a strong start for developing

partnerships, it appears that no single city agency or interdepartmental team had ownership of the Strategy.

Incentives & Community Benefit Agreements: In areas that are not already attracting private investment, incentives can help promote development. These can range from financial tools like tax incentives to flexibility on regulations. For example, requirements for ground-floor retail in North Rainier, while intended to improve the pedestrian environment, can be difficult to meet and may impede development. Flexibility on those types of standards are a tool which the City does not appear to have used in North Rainier. Community Benefit Agreements (also called Development Agreements) are another tool that cities can use to coordinate public and private investments that include significant community benefits in exchange for development incentives.

Infrastructure: The lack of infrastructure investment may make strategic partnerships more difficult if stakeholders are not confident that infrastructure will be improved. Strong public/private partnerships such as the Thornton Creek Restoration Project in Northgate or South Lake Union Streetcar have not occurred in North Rainier.

Partnerships with Transit Agencies: Partnerships with transit agencies are critical to implementing the Urban Village Strategy, particularly in areas without the infrastructure or market conditions to support development. At the Mt. Baker Station, Sound Transit chose to lease rather than purchase properties needed for construction, due to concerns about displacement of businesses and residents. Acquiring less land makes it more difficult to assemble larger parcels, which are better suited to development. Today Sound Transit is more focused on facilitating TOD at new station locations. For example, at the Capitol Hill Station, Sound Transit

purchased (rather than leased) properties for construction. This has allowed assembly of large parcels and a redevelopment process in conjunction with the City.

- ▶ **FINDING:** The City historically has not formed strong partnerships with property owners and developers in North Rainier to coordinate private and public investments.
- ▶ **FINDING:** In an area that is not market-ready and attracting private investment, some City regulations may pose additional constraints on new development, such as the requirement for ground-floor retail.
- ▶ **FINDING:** The City and transit agencies did not acquire sufficient parcels to support major development opportunities.
- ▶ **FINDING:** The City must actively engage transit partners before, during, and after station construction on issues of land acquisition, station design, and redevelopment.

6. Other Factors

Market Timing and Location

The market viability for new development and investment in the project area is a key factor that is influenced in part by outside forces that the City has little or no control over. One lesson from North Rainier is that outside economic and political forces can disrupt momentum for urban village development. Recessions in 2001 and 2008 reduced private investment and public funds. On the political front, opposition to community renewal proposals in 2006 reduced momentum for development while changes in mayoral administrations in 2002, 2010, and 2014

slowed City momentum as new leaders got up to speed, brought in new staff, and decided on priorities. Recessions and political change cannot be predicted, yet they happen regularly and can disrupt Seattle's Urban Village Strategy, particularly in neighborhoods with lower market demand like North Rainier.

However, City actions in the project area can help to influence market demand, as has occurred in Northgate and South Lake Union. The "Great Recession" affected the degree to which private investment occurred in North Rainier following light rail opening in 2009, but it is not the only factor. The number of apartments developed citywide in 2013, 2014, and expected in 2015 are greater than any single year over the last 20 year period, yet North Rainier has not seen significant new residential development compared to other urban villages (Seattle Times, 2014). As shown on the next page, average rents are lower in the area which has certainly contributed to patterns of development.

To be successful, the City needs to be prepared to capture the momentum that occurs during times of economic growth. At times over the past fifteen years of planning, it appears that public officials have viewed private investment near rail stations as inevitable and were most concerned about preserving small businesses and housing affordability. The City made investments in subsidized housing and to preserve existing commercial businesses, but did not take steps needed to attract substantial new private investment, such as providing infrastructure or incentives.

- ▶ **FINDING:** The lack of market demand in the project area remains a significant challenge for implementing the neighborhood vision and plan. City investments in infrastructure may signal a commitment to improving the area thereby improving market demand for additional growth and development.

- ▶ **FINDING:** Public officials and agency staff should not assume that "if you build it, they will come" regarding private investment after transit investments are made. Careful market analysis and interaction with property owners and developers is needed to determine the likelihood of development.

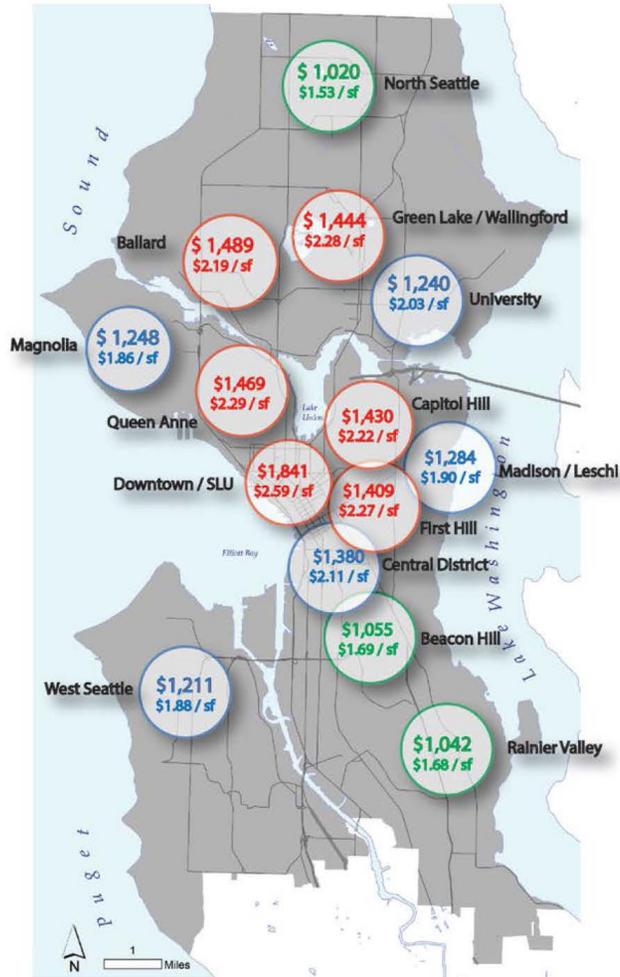
Jobs Strategy

Job growth is frequently mentioned by local residents and public officials as a top goal for the Rainier Valley, along with post-secondary educational facilities and workforce training.

To attract jobs to North Rainier as part of the Urban Village Strategy requires a focused employment strategy from the City and other partners. However, it is unclear that the City has a unified strategy for job growth in the Rainier Valley that is specific and realistic.

In addition, the types of jobs desired are not always articulated. Attracting light industry is very different from attracting commercial businesses or new office development, and may have different chances of success and require different strategies and infrastructure needs. Many of the recommendations in this report are necessary to support any new development and growth whether it includes housing, employment, or mixed-use components.

A unified strategy for attracting employment to the Rainier Valley would include goals, a market assessment, marketing, match-making, and other activities. The City also needs to determine what realistic job growth goals for the Rainier Valley look like, and communicate with residents about those goals.



Average Rents by Sub-Market (1 Bedroom)

Rents are highest in Downtown, and around Lake Union and the Ship Canal.

Lowest rents are in North Seattle, Rainier Valley, and Beacon Hill.

- \$1,400+
- \$1,200 - \$1,399
- \$1,000 - \$1,199

Dupre+Scott Apartment Advisors, Apartment Vacancy Report, 20+ unit buildings, Fall 2014, Seattle-14 market areas.

Source: Dupre+Scott, 2014

RECOMMENDATIONS

How the City of Seattle can Encourage Great Urban Neighborhoods

Overall, the Urban Village Strategy has been successful at focusing growth in urban villages. However, some urban villages have seen high rates of growth while others, such as North Rainier, have grown slowly despite several neighborhood planning efforts and the opening of light rail. As a result, city and neighborhood goals identified in neighborhood plans have not been achieved. The City lacks a coordinated system to implement the Urban Village Strategy and in particular to prioritize city resources and move beyond the planning stage to implementation. North Rainier, and other urban villages that aren't seeing growth, require a higher level of involvement and coordination from the City to implement the neighborhood plans. Coordination between city departments, a way to prioritize the allocation of city resources, and stronger partnerships are needed to advance the Urban Village Strategy.

1. Integrate City Functions Necessary to the Execution of the Urban Village Plans

Right now, no one person or agency is responsible for implementing the Urban Village Strategy. DPD creates plans, proposes zoning changes, and reviews development proposals; OED provides assistance to businesses; SDOT, SPU, and

other agencies build and maintain city infrastructure; and DON connects residents with city services. Developing thriving urban villages, particularly in areas that are not already attracting growth, requires committed and accountable City leadership.

To create accountable and responsible leadership, the City should create an Urban Village (UV) Team to oversee citywide urban village planning, implementation, and monitoring. DPD, as the planning agency, would lead the team, which would also include decision-makers from all relevant city agencies and the Mayor's office, as well as regional transit agencies. Creating a new city department to coordinate the Urban Village Strategy is an option, but this team proposal is simpler to implement and builds upon existing resources. The UV Team would be responsible for assessing the needs within urban villages, prioritizing city actions among urban villages, monitoring and assessing urban village progress, and managing smaller place-based teams working on particular villages at specific times.

Place-based teams would include city staff from DPD, SDOT, OED, SPU, DON, SPD, and other relevant agencies as needed, and would be responsible for community engagement, the design of streets and public spaces, market analysis, business and property owner relations, zoning, design review, public safety, and other functions. Planning activities would reflect both city goals and neighborhood aspirations, as well as constraints posed by the market, economic conditions, and departmental budgets. In addition, the City should strongly encourage participation by decision-makers at important regional partners including Sound Transit and King County Metro.

URBAN VILLAGE TEAM

The combination of an Urban Village Team and urban village specific interdepartmental teams would lead to better planning and implementation both for the overall Urban Village Strategy and neighborhood plans. Organizing interdepartmental teams around places allows for a more integrated approach to implementing Seattle’s Urban Village Strategy in specific locations. Rather than having independent departmental efforts to address planning, regulations, transportation, infrastructure, and facilitating partnerships, interdepartmental place-based teams should be used to provide a more cohesive and focused effort.

Example: San Jose Neighborhood Initiative

The City of San Jose has used interdepartmental staff teams to implement 75% of priority neighborhood projects identified by local residents as part of its “Strong Neighborhoods Initiative.” The neighborhood plans were implemented by six Strong Neighborhood Teams, which consisted of representatives from four city departments as well as the City Council. Each Strong Neighborhood Team was led by a team manager and included staff members from the Planning, Building, Code Enforcement, Police, Parks and Neighborhood Services Departments.



2. *Improve Capacity to Assess Needs and Prioritize Investments Across Urban Villages*

Assessing

Not all urban villages are the same; each has its own history, strengths, and needs. A fast-growing area will need a different strategy for livability than a neighborhood with scant development. Before undertaking planning for an urban village, the City should undertake a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). This would include an assessment of current growth levels, infrastructure, social equity indicators, public safety, community engagement, market demand, and other factors. The City can then determine what actions and what level of financial and staff resources are needed to make the area a thriving urban village. Appendix B includes a high-level SWOT analysis for the North Rainier Urban Village developed by the consultant team.

Prioritizing

No prioritization system is currently in place for allocating city resources among Urban Villages. While no neighborhood would or should be left out of city funding opportunities, it is possible to prioritize among urban villages. A detailed rating scale for urban villages is beyond the scope of this report, but general factors for prioritization are discussed below.

One general principle for determining priority is equal opportunity – everyone in Seattle should get an equal chance at success. To realize that vision, the City should do more in areas where opportunity is lower and facilities are sub-standard, while taking care to preserve affordability. Under this screen, neighborhoods with

lower socioeconomic indicators would receive higher priority for city dollars.

A second screen for prioritizing city resources is the location of high-capacity transit. Areas within walking distance of light rail have the potential to become home to a large proportion of the city's homes and jobs without adding to city traffic, and therefore should receive high priority for city funds leveraging the region's billion dollar investment in light rail.

Investing

New homes, stores, offices, or other development will not be created unless basic infrastructure is present, including everything from city streets and sidewalks to water and sewer access. In addition, parks, open spaces, and community facilities such as libraries and community centers also contribute to livability and make neighborhoods more desirable.

To attract and support growth in urban villages, the City should assess infrastructure needs and follow through by funding improvements consistent with the prioritization, particularly when needs are a barrier to redevelopment.

Monitoring

Building on the data collection analysis in the report *Seattle Sustainable Neighborhoods Assessment Project* the City should continue to monitor the overall success of the Urban Village Strategy and adjust the City's strategy accordingly.

3. Increase Private Sector Partnerships

Concentrating housing and job growth in urban villages requires community engagement and partnerships between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Consistent with neighborhood priorities, the City (specifically the Urban Village Team) should take the lead to initiate partnerships with property owners, developers, nonprofit organizations, institutions, and public agencies to coordinate public and private investments and planning in urban villages. While the City did a good job involving the community in neighborhood planning efforts, consultation and partnerships with the private sector were lacking. Coordination of public and private investments is critical, particularly in areas that are not market ready. The City demonstrated it has the ability and capacity to develop successful partnerships with the private sector in both South Lake Union and Northgate.

Community benefit agreements or other tools should be considered to facilitate partnerships and ensure that the value created by public improvements is shared by the community and larger public. These incentives should also be used to respond to demand for neighborhood infrastructure and amenities.



Transportation Improvements - Additional transportation improvements to address pedestrian safety, mobility, and comfort are necessary to support additional development consistent with the neighborhood plan.

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APPENDIX A

Interview List

- ▶ Steven Shain, TOD Manager, Seattle Department of Planning and Development
- ▶ Lyle Bicknell, Principal Urban Designer, Seattle Department of Planning and Development
- ▶ Michael James, Strategic Advisor, Seattle Department of Transportation
- ▶ Matt Anderson, Heartland
- ▶ Jenny Frankl, Seattle Department of Neighborhoods
- ▶ David Essig, Rainier Valley Community Development Fund
- ▶ A-P Hurd, Touchstone
- ▶ Catherine Vandenbrink, Artspace
- ▶ Jeannie O'Brien, Lakewood Seward Park Community Club
- ▶ Ray Akers, Akers & Cargill Properties
- ▶ Marshall Foster, Waterfront Design Manager (Former City Planning Director)
- ▶ Ron Lewis, Sound Transit
- ▶ Nora Liu, Community Development Manager, Seattle Department of Planning and Development
- ▶ Talis Abolins, Friends of Mt. Baker Town Center
- ▶ Stephen Johnson, Director, Seattle Department of Economic Development
- ▶ Sally Clark, Seattle City Council
- ▶ Dan Rosenfeld, Property Owner

APPENDIX B

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

- ▶ Light Rail
- ▶ Location within the City and Region
- ▶ Infill and Redevelopment Opportunities (Large Catalyst Sites)
- ▶ City Planning Efforts
- ▶ Grocery and Drug Stores
- ▶ Franklin High School
- ▶ Understanding of factors that have lead to stagnation

WEAKNESSES

- ▶ Market
- ▶ Auto-Dominated Environment
- ▶ Street Design + Lack of Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities
- ▶ Infrastructure
- ▶ Public Safety
- ▶ Location and Function of Bus Layover
- ▶ Schools

OPPORTUNITIES

- ▶ Infill and Redevelopment Opportunities
- ▶ City Population and Employment Growth
- ▶ Improving Opportunity
- ▶ Accessible Mt. Baker Effort
- ▶ Only in Seattle Grants
- ▶ Proposed Land Bridge
- ▶ Mountain Bike Park
- ▶ East Link Light Rail Expansion
- ▶ Sound Transit Redevelopment Opportunities and Strategic Plan
- ▶ Adjacent Neighborhood Centers

THREATS

- ▶ Economic Cycles
- ▶ Political Changes
- ▶ Community Opposition
- ▶ Cost of Infrastructure Investments
- ▶ Other City Priorities
- ▶ Transportation Funding Limitations and Cycles
- ▶ Lack of progress to date