

**CITY OF SEATTLE**

**ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR  
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

**SEPA Threshold Determination  
for the  
2009 Comprehensive Plan Amendments – MLK at Holly (Othello) Residential Urban  
Village  
Neighborhood Plan Update**

**Project Sponsor:** City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD)

**Location of Proposal:** The amendments relate to the entire MLK at Holly (Othello) Residential Urban Village.

**SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION**

The proposal comprises several amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.

The following approval is required:

SEPA - Environmental Determination - Chapter 25.05, Seattle Municipal Code.

**SEPA DETERMINATION**     Exempt  DNS     MDNS     EIS  
  
 DNS with conditions  
  
 DNS involving non-exempt grading or demolition or involving another agency with jurisdiction.

**BACKGROUND**

**Proposal Description**

Neighborhood plans were completed between 1995 and 2000 to manage growth in the neighborhoods, especially in light of Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan and growth management strategy, adopted in 1994. Since neighborhood plans were completed, growth throughout Seattle has been generally consistent with expectations but has varied by neighborhood. In some neighborhoods growth has been far more or far less than anticipated. The City Council passed legislation in September 2008 that authorized the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) and the Department of Planning & Development (DPD) to work with citizens to begin updating

neighborhood plans where appropriate, creating a neighborhood-based planning process that is rooted in the good work citizens conducted in the 1990s. The resulting neighborhood plan update for the MLK at Holly (Othello) Residential Urban Village (the Plan Update) amends the Future Land Use Map (FLUM), and amends and restates goals and policies to, among other objectives, encourage density within the town center and near the Othello Link Light Rail Station, foster a vibrant business district, preserve the area's ethnic and cultural heritage, and improve the pedestrian environment.

### Public Comment

Since this SEPA analysis and decision is not subject to the procedural requirements of SMC Chapter 23.76, public notice is not required for the proposal and accordingly there are no public comments. The City conducted outreach to a broad cross-section of neighborhood stakeholders, using a variety of methods, from workshops to smaller-scale interactive meetings with community-based organizations, as well as on-line updates and surveys. In 2009, City staff have sponsored or contributed to more than 300 meetings and events associated with three neighborhood plan updates, reaching both long-time veterans of neighborhood planning, stewards of the plan developed in the 1990s, and a new generation of community members. This includes the work of Planning Outreach Liaisons (POLs), engaging historically underrepresented communities and multiple language groups.

DON was primarily responsible for the City's neighborhood plan outreach efforts, seeking to identify and involve groups that may be hard to reach, or not typically involved in planning activities, to ensure that the Plan Update results were broadly representative of all the members of the neighborhood.

## **ANALYSIS - OVERVIEW**

The following describes the analysis conducted to determine if the proposal is likely to have a probable significant adverse environmental impact. This threshold determination is based on:

- the proposal, as described above and in memoranda;
- the information contained in the SEPA checklist;
- Neighborhood Plan status reports;
- additional information, such as analyses prepared by City staff; and
- the experience of DPD analysts in reviewing similar documents and actions.

## **ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

Adoption of the Plan Update and FLUM amendments would result in no immediate adverse short-term impacts because the adoption would be a non-project action. The discussion below generally evaluates the potential long-term impacts that might conceivably result from

differences in future development patterns or other physical environmental implications due to the proposed amendments.

## **Natural Environment**

### **Earth, Air, Water, Plants and Animals, Environmental Health**

Changes to the Future Land Use Map, with corresponding changes to applicable neighborhood plan policies, would support anticipated proposals to rezone property from single family to another zoning designation. As non-project actions involving a prospective policy statement, no direct impacts to the environment would occur. A key question, however, is whether any of these new policy statements and FLUM amendments result in any meaningful differences in future development patterns that could generate significant adverse impacts to the natural environment. Even though the new policies do not necessitate development activity, they could have a relationship to future growth in that future decisions could subsequently be made that would encourage additional growth or different growth patterns in the affected area. Therefore, the Plan Update should be examined with respect to potential natural environmental impacts.

In reflecting upon the status of City codes and regulations that protect water, environmental critical areas and habitat, and those that regulate land use and zoning, there is minimal potential for long-term significant adverse natural environmental impacts due to the proposed change.

In the MLK at Holly (Othello) Residential Urban Village, the character of the environment is developed primarily as an auto-oriented commercial district along MLK Jr. Way South, with a medium density residential area in the southwest portion on the slope of Beacon Hill.

Several areas generally near S. Graham Street and MLK Jr. Way S. are located on a Category 2 peat settlement-prone area. Development in those areas will be required to perform geotechnical analysis and construction will be, among other limitations, prohibited below the annual high static groundwater level. City regulations set forth ways to avoid and minimize those environmental impacts.

Potential environmental impacts from the FLUM amendment affecting Filipino Community Center's residential property would include grading, installation of improved pedestrian infrastructure, and short-term impacts associated with construction. There would thus be some potential for additional disturbance of land and plant/animal habitat within the MLK at Holly (Othello) Residential Urban Village boundary. Currently unidentified environmentally critical areas to the east of the site, if any, would be protected by the City's environmental critical areas regulations. Potential stormwater runoff-related impacts, such as erosion, sedimentation and pollutant loading, may reach local stormdrains and sewers. City regulations define how those impacts can be avoided or minimized through implementation of construction controls.

Plan Update policies encouraging increased density near the light rail station and in the area's town center are intended to foster more housing near public transit and more affordable housing

in Seattle. It generally reinforces Comprehensive Plan policies encouraging denser infill growth within urban villages, and near transit hubs. As a non-project action involving a prospective policy statement, no direct impacts to the environment would occur. To the extent that it steers new housing into areas already served by transit, it should have minimal impacts on the natural environment because these areas of Seattle are already developed. If the amended policies increase the rate at which housing is built, the Plan Update could potentially lead to short-term impacts from construction activities. City regulations govern how short-term impacts from construction can be avoided or minimized. Due to City codes and regulations that protect water, environmental critical areas and habitat, and those that regulate land use and zoning, there is minimal potential for long-term significant adverse natural environmental impacts due to the proposed new policy.

### **Built Environment**

#### **Land and Shoreline Use, Height/Bulk/Scale, Housing**

As a non-project action, no direct impacts to the built environment would occur as a result of the Plan Update amendments. However, their status should be reviewed with respect to potential land use and housing-related impacts.

The Plan Update would tend to reinforce trends encouraging denser infill growth within urban villages. The net result of these changes could be an increase in the ultimate density achieved in Othello's town center, especially if future actions are taken to further encourage growth near the light rail transit station. While the new and amended policies do not necessitate specific zoning changes or development activity, they could have a relationship to future growth by influencing future decisions that would encourage additional growth or different growth patterns near public transit facilities. Thus the area is generally suitable for additional infill growth, and the resulting land use patterns are not expected to generate significant adverse land use or housing impacts. Additionally, the proposed action would tend to reinforce the overall strategies for growth that the City has adopted, indicating a general consistency with the approach of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

City regulations and development standards will address the impacts of additional height, bulk and scale in the urban village as new structures replace existing stock of commercial and residential buildings, therefore anticipated increases in height, bulk and scale will likely be sufficiently mitigated. Because the Plan Update includes policies intended to encourage an increase in the supply of affordable housing, adverse impacts on the supply of housing opportunities are not likely to occur.

#### **Transportation, Public Services and Utilities**

As a non-project action, no direct impacts on transportation, public services, and utilities would occur as a result of the Plan Update. Potential indirect impacts share the intention of directing

new residential and commercial development into the residential urban village, which includes a station area overlay district. To the extent that the revised goals and policies of the Plan Update would, as intended, increase the number and density of housing, jobs and services in close proximity to the light rail station, it would reduce many new households' need to commute by automobile and possibly reduce the number of vehicles per household. Anticipated impacts on transportation, public services, and utilities from additional residential and nonresidential development that may result from the Plan Update will be partially mitigated due to the focus on increasing density in the urban village so that it offers a broader array of goods, services and employment opportunities in a compact area. As an indirect result of the Plan Update, a higher proportion of future growth should occur in urban villages like the MLK at Holly (Othello) Residential Urban Village where public services and utilities can be more efficiently delivered, and near the station where transportation service should be excellent and where delivery of public services and utilities are already expected to face increased demand. City regulations and programs, such as requiring transportation mitigation payments, will further mitigate potential adverse impacts.

**DECISION**

- [X] Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).
  
- [ ] Determination of Significance. This proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ [Signature on file] \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
William K. Mills, Senior Planner  
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