

CITY OF SEATTLE
ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

SEPA Threshold Determination
for the
2010 Comprehensive Plan Annual Amendments

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

Location of Proposal: The amendments relate to the City's Comprehensive Plan, which pertains to the entire City.

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

The proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan are summarized below:

A. Cargo Marine Terminal Element

Develop a new Comprehensive Plan element for port-related industrial uses including goals and policies to address freight mobility and land use conflicts related to port-related uses adjacent to other non-related land uses.

B. Vehicle Miles Traveled Reduction Targets

Establish a target(s) for reducing vehicle miles traveled in and through Seattle as a means of reducing carbon emissions.

C. Master Planned Community

Establish a designation for a “Master Planned Community” as a mechanism for reviewing development of very large, multi-block sites in urban centers where those sites are in single ownership or control, have potential to achieve urban density within a mixed-use development, and offer an opportunity to create a cohesive urban design throughout the entire development. Change the Future Land Use Map to contain a new category (Master Planned Community) and apply that designation to a portion of the Capitol Hill/First Hill Urban Center.

D. North Beacon Hill Neighborhood Plan Update

Revise Neighborhood Planning Element goals and policies to reflect work completed as part of the neighborhood plan update. (This proposal has been analyzed in a separate SEPA document.)

Revise Neighborhood Planning Element goals and policies, and change Future Land Use Map to show new urban village boundaries that reflect revised neighborhood priorities regarding zoning. (This proposal has been analyzed in a separate SEPA document.)

E. North Rainier Neighborhood Plan Update

Revise Neighborhood Planning Element goals and policies to reflect work completed as part of the neighborhood plan update. (This proposal has been analyzed in a separate SEPA document.)

Revise Neighborhood Planning Element goals and policies, and change Future Land Use Map to reflect new urban village boundary, potential zoning issues and other revised neighborhood priorities. (This proposal has been analyzed in a separate SEPA document.)

F. MLK @ Holly (Othello) Neighborhood Plan Update

Revise Neighborhood Planning Element goals and policies to reflect work completed as part of the neighborhood plan update. (This proposal has been analyzed in a separate SEPA document.)

G. Boundary Expansion for the 23rd @ Jackson Residential Urban Village

Amend the Future Land Use Map for a portion of the land in the Jackson Residential Urban Village, consistent with zoning recommendations from the Department of Planning and Development.

Public Comment

Proposed changes to the Comprehensive Plan require City Council approval. Public comment on the proposed amendments will be taken at an upcoming City Council Public Hearing.

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;
- additional information, such as analyses prepared by City staff; and
- the experience of DPD analysts in reviewing similar documents and actions.

Proposed amendments related to the Neighborhood Plan Updates in the North Rainier, North Beacon Hill, and MLK at Holly (Othello) neighborhoods went through environmental review in December 2009 and received Determinations of Non-significance.

ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Adoption of the proposed 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

Neighborhood Plan and Future Land Use Map Amendments, Including Changes to Urban Village Boundaries

A. Cargo Marine Terminal Element

Item A will have no direct impacts on the environment. In view of applicable 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. The proposed change will add goals and policies intended to maintain freight mobility and prevent land use conflicts concerning port-related uses. The focus is on protecting cargo marine terminal related uses by preserving industrial land where those uses are allowed and by ensuring that transportation policies will

support and encourage cargo marine terminal activity. Regulatory changes or individual projects that may result from the proposals will be subject to more focused environmental review.

B. Reduction in Vehicle Miles Traveled

Item B would establish numeric goals for reducing vehicle miles traveled in and through the city. As a non-project action involving a prospective policy statement, no direct impacts to the environment would occur. There is a basis for analyzing whether the new goal would result in meaningful differences in future development patterns that could generate significant adverse impacts to the natural environment. Because the new goal establishes a benchmark for measuring travel behavior that is already the subject of numerous existing goals and policies, minimal additional influence is anticipated on the relationship between the proposed goal and City or State highway and transportation decisions. The effect of programs and City decisions in support of achieving a reduction in trips and vehicle miles traveled could include greater emphasis on alternative modes of travel, such as public transit, ridesharing, and bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure, on programs promoting trip consolidation, and on compact, organized development patterns that can reduce reliance on vehicle trips. On this basis, the new goal would tend to avoid adverse environmental impacts that could occur due to dispersed, auto-oriented development and over-reliance on commuting by automobile.

C. Master Planned Community

Establish a designation for a “Master Planned Community” as a mechanism for reviewing development of very large, multi-block sites in urban centers where those sites are in single ownership or control, have potential to achieve urban density within a mixed-use development, and offer an opportunity to create a cohesive urban design throughout the entire development. Change the Future Land Use Map to contain a new category (Master Planned Community) and apply that designation to a portion of the Capitol Hill/First Hill Urban Center.

D. North Beacon Hill Neighborhood Plan Update

Revise Neighborhood Planning Element goals and policies to reflect work completed as part of the neighborhood plan update. (This proposal has been analyzed in a separate SEPA document.)
Revise Neighborhood Planning Element goals and policies, and change Future Land Use Map to show new urban village boundaries that reflect revised neighborhood priorities regarding zoning. (This proposal has been analyzed in a separate SEPA document.)

E. North Rainier Neighborhood Plan Update

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F. MLK @ Holly (Othello) Neighborhood Plan Update

Revise Neighborhood Planning Element goals and policies to reflect work completed as part of the neighborhood plan update. (This proposal has been analyzed in a separate SEPA document.)

G. Boundary Expansion for the 23rd @ Jackson Residential Urban Village

Amend the FLUM for a portion of the land in the Jackson Residential Urban Village, consistent with zoning recommendations from the Department of Planning and Development.

Items C, D, E, F, and G relate to changes to the Future Land Use Map, with corresponding changes to applicable neighborhood plan policies, that 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 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 areas. Items D, E and F have been analyzed in a separate SEPA document and do not require further analysis. Items C and G 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. If the proposals in items C and G lead to an increase in the development of residential and nonresidential development within urban villages served by transit, they could indirectly increase demand on the city's water resources and potentially increase discharges to water. If the proposals result in development of residential and limited nonresidential development, they could indirectly minutely increase demand on the city's water resources and potentially increase discharges to water. Regulatory changes or individual projects that may result from the proposals, however, will be subject to more focused environmental review.

Built Environment

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

A. Cargo Marine Terminal Element

As a non-project action, no direct impacts to the built environment would occur as a result of the Container Port Element proposal (Item A). The new and amended policies do not necessitate specific zoning changes or development activity. The proposed changes will add goals and policies intended to maintain freight mobility and prevent land use conflicts concerning port-related uses. The focus is on protecting cargo marine terminal related uses by preserving industrial land where those uses are allowed. Regulatory changes or individual projects that may result from the proposals will be subject to more focused environmental review.

B. Reduction in Vehicle Miles Traveled

Item B, as a non-project action, is not anticipated to have any direct impacts to the built environment. There is a basis, however, for analyzing whether the new numeric goals would result in meaningful differences in future development patterns that could generate significant adverse impacts to land use, the height, bulk and scale of structures, and housing in the city. Programs and regulatory changes that might indirectly result from this policy will seek to discourage activities that rely on vehicle trips while encouraging activities and development patterns that help reduce them. Discouraging vehicle trips, whether through pricing or regulation, may have the effect of increasing demand for land located where businesses and households can thrive with reduced reliance on vehicle trips. This increase in demand may lead to higher prices for commercial and residential space in these locations and greater pressure to increase allowed height and density in the future. The anticipated effect of programs and regulatory changes to reduce vehicle miles traveled will be to direct new growth into more urban areas of Seattle, which reinforces the growth management strategies in the City's Comprehensive Plan. Therefore, no significant adverse land use impacts are identified.

C. Master Planned Community

D. North Beacon Hill Neighborhood Plan Update

E. North Rainier Neighborhood Plan Update

F. MLK @ Holly (Othello) Neighborhood Plan Update

G. Boundary Expansion for the 23rd @ Jackson Residential Urban Village

As non-project actions, no direct impacts to the built environment would occur as a result of Items C, D, E, F, and G. However, their status should be reviewed with respect to potential land use and housing-related impacts.

Items C, D, E, F, and G would tend to reinforce trends encouraging denser infill growth within these urban villages and urban centers. The net result of these changes could be a relatively modest change in the ultimate density achieved in key parts of the identified areas, especially if future actions are taken to further encourage growth. However, in each case, these areas are

either already relatively dense urban areas or are located near existing or planned light rail transit stations. Thus they are 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 actions 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.

Transportation, Public Services and Utilities

A. Cargo Marine Terminal Element

As a non-project action, no direct impacts to transportation, public services, and utilities would occur as a result of the Container Port Element proposal (Item A). The proposed change will add goals and policies intended to maintain freight mobility and prevent land use conflicts concerning port-related uses. The changes are intended to ensure that transportation policies will support and encourage cargo marine terminal activity. Regulatory changes or individual projects that may result from the proposals will be subject to more focused environmental review.

B. Reduction in Vehicle Miles Traveled

Item B would add a numeric goal to the Environment Element for reduction of vehicle miles traveled in and through Seattle. If adopted, a key consideration is whether the numeric goals would change the effectiveness of existing City and community programs and regulations that seek to reduce vehicle trips and mileage. To the extent that numeric goals might make Seattle's efforts more effective, the proposal will necessarily affect demand on the existing transportation infrastructure. It would do this largely by reducing trips, consolidating necessary trips into less frequent trips (but organized to visit multiple destinations), and by shifting travel demand away from privately owned vehicles toward public transit, bicycling, and walking. Increased investment in public transportation and other alternatives will be required to sustain any reductions in vehicle trips and miles over time. Certain public services will need to be reorganized, and possibly dispersed across the city in order to bring them closer to customers. Some adverse impacts will be mitigated by the reallocation of spending from one economic model (centralized public services and workplaces, and single-purpose trips) to another (dispersed public services, telecommuting/remote offices, and multiple-destination trips). Progress toward meeting a numeric goal would be a rubric for evaluating the progress in meeting numerous existing goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan that support more efficient land use patterns, alternative transportation choices that reduce reliance on the private automobile, and a focus on moving people and goods instead of vehicles. The new goal is therefore not likely to have a significant adverse impact on transportation or the provision of public services.

C. Master Planned Community

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As non-project actions, no direct impacts on transportation, public services, and utilities would occur as a result of Items C, D, E, F, and G. Their potential indirect impacts share the intention of directing new residential development into areas with well-developed infrastructure, such as urban centers, station area overly districts, and urban villages. Directing new growth into existing urban centers and station areas reduces its burden on the existing transportation network. Increased development activity within urban villages and light rail station areas will likely increase demand for public services and utilities, but are also potentially likely to promote more efficient delivery of public services and utilities in comparison to growth that might otherwise occur outside of urban villages. As an indirect result of the listed proposals, a higher proportion of future growth should occur in urban centers and villages where transportation, public services and utilities can be more efficiently delivered, and in station areas 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: _____ Date: _____
William K. Mills, Senior Land Use Planner
Department of Planning and Development