

Growth Strategy



Introduction

Seattle's strategy for accommodating future growth and creating a sustainable and equitable city builds on the foundation of its many diverse neighborhoods and aims to create a better city by providing

- *a variety of housing options,*
- *locations for employment growth,*
- *walkable communities with good transit access,*
- *services and the infrastructure needed to support growth,*
- *respect for the natural environment and enhancements to the city's cultural resources,*
and
- *growth that enables all residents to participate fully in the city's economy and civic life.*

This Plan envisions a city where growth builds stronger communities, heightens our stewardship of the environment, leads to enhanced economic opportunity and security for all residents, and is accompanied by greater race and social equity across Seattle's communities.

This element of the Plan describes how the City goes about planning for growth and how it involves others in that planning. It also describes the City's urban village strategy—the idea that most of Seattle's growth should occur in the urban centers, urban villages, and manufacturing/industrial centers. This element also presents policies about urban design that describe how decisions about the location of growth should interact with the natural and built environments.

Other elements of this Plan describe mechanisms the City will use to achieve the growth vision. For example, the **Land Use element** describes how zoning and development regulations will control the location and sizes of new buildings in ways that help carry out the urban village strategy, the **Transportation element** describes the systems the City will provide to enable people and goods to move around the city, and the **Housing element** includes policies that will guide the types of housing the City will aim for and the tools the City will use to make it possible for people who work in the city to live here as well.

Community Engagement

Discussion

In addition to this Plan, the City also prepares more detailed plans and regulations that guide the specific activities of City departments. The City has a history of encouraging community participation in the development of City plans. In recent years, the City has been even more deliberate in reaching out to underrepresented communities so that their opinions and needs are reflected in the City's plans and programs. As the makeup of the city's population continues to change, the City will need to increase these outreach efforts to ensure that growing segments of the community are represented in the choices the City will make. Enhanced participation in planning and in decision-making can help create opportunities for everyone, regardless of race or means. It can also help balance how the benefits of growth are distributed across the city.

Between 2000 and 2010, the population of people of color grew more quickly than the total population in Seattle as a whole and within most urban villages. However, in some urban villages the pattern has been different. For example, 23rd and Union/Jackson, North Beacon Hill, and Columbia City saw substantial decreases in their populations of color.

Changes in Population 2000 to 2010

	Change in Total Pop.	Change in Pop. of Color	% Change in Total Pop.	% Change in Pop. of Color
Seattle total	45,286	24,240	8.0%	13.4%
Inside urban villages	30,544	15,883	17.1%	22.9%
Outside urban villages	14,742	8,357	3.8%	7.5%

Planning is a process that continues beyond the production of a document. It requires continual monitoring of conditions that the Plan was intended to affect. Over time, new people will move into the city and into individual urban villages, and the City will need to engage these new residents and business owners to test whether the Plan’s vision, goals, and policies continue to reflect the current population and circumstances.

GOAL

- GS G1** Continue to have meaningful opportunities for all people in Seattle to contribute their thoughts and aspirations to City processes that develop growth plans and related regulations.

POLICIES

- GS 1.1** Enlist Seattle residents and businesses to help prepare plans that guide growth, City government activities, and City services so that the outcomes reflect the public’s values and concerns.
- GS 1.2** Develop and implement practices to reach historically underrepresented communities and to aid their participation in decision-making processes.
- GS 1.3** Maintain an updating process for this Plan that is predictable and transparent to the public, with opportunities for public involvement.
- GS 1.4** Monitor development activity in urban centers and villages to track changes in the number of housing units, jobs, and population and evaluate whether development is consistent with this Plan.
- GS 1.5** Use information collected about growth, along with other information, to make decisions for further planning or for making investments that will meet the needs of residents and businesses.
- GS 1.6** Monitor development activity and other factors that will identify areas with high potential for displacement of marginalized populations and small businesses.

- GS 1.7** Develop and implement strategies that can limit displacement of marginalized populations.
- GS 1.8** Engage local communities, particularly in neighborhoods with marginalized populations, to identify and jointly address unique housing and community amenity or service needs.
- GS 1.9** Use relevant, respectful, and innovative ways to encourage broad participation in neighborhood and community activities and events.
- GS 1.10** Partner with other governments, schools, institutions, and community-based organizations to involve people of all backgrounds meaningfully in planning and decision-making that impact their communities.

Urban Village Strategy

Discussion

The urban village strategy is this Plan’s approach to managing growth. This strategy concentrates most of the city’s expected future growth in urban centers and urban villages. Most of these areas have been the commercial centers serving their local communities or even the larger city and region for decades. They are the places best equipped to absorb more housing and businesses and to provide the services that new residents and employees will need.

Urban centers and villages are almost like small cities within Seattle. They are complete and compact neighborhoods. Increasing residential and employment opportunities in urban centers and villages makes transit and other public services convenient for more people. It also makes providing these key services more efficient. This can be a benefit to transit-dependent populations and to those who rely on other community services. At the same time, locating more residents, jobs, stores, and services near each other will reduce people’s reliance on cars, limit traffic congestion, and decrease greenhouse gas emissions.

The urban village strategy takes the unique character of the city’s neighborhoods into account when planning for future growth. The places selected for absorbing the most growth come in various shapes and sizes, and they will serve somewhat different purposes. The following descriptions define the roles that four different types of areas will play in the city’s future:

Urban centers are the densest Seattle neighborhoods. They act as both regional centers and local neighborhoods that offer a diverse mix of uses, housing, and employment opportunities.

Hub urban villages are communities that offer a balance of housing and employment but are generally less dense than urban centers. These areas provide a mix of goods, services, and employment for their residents and surrounding neighborhoods.

Residential urban villages are areas of residential development, generally at lower densities than urban centers or hub urban villages. While they are also sources of goods and services for residents and surrounding communities, for the most part they do not offer many employment opportunities.

Manufacturing/industrial centers are home to the city's thriving industrial businesses. Like urban centers, they are important regional resources for retaining and attracting jobs and for maintaining a diversified economy.

The City intends for each of these areas to see more growth and change over time than other commercial locations or primarily residential areas, and together they will accommodate the majority of the city's expansion during this Plan's life span. The City will continue to work with its residents, businesses, and institutions citywide to promote conditions that will help each of its communities thrive, but it will pay special attention to the urban centers and villages where the majority of the new housing and jobs is expected. The policies in this Plan provide direction for that change and growth.

Because the City expects to concentrate public facilities, services, and transit in urban centers and urban villages, it must ensure that there are opportunities for all households to find housing and employment in those places, regardless of income level, family size, or race.

In addition to designating urban centers and villages and defining the desired conditions in these locations, the Plan addresses conditions in other areas, including large areas of single-family development, smaller areas of multifamily and commercial uses, and a few small industrial areas. These areas will also experience some growth, although generally in less dense patterns than the urban villages because these areas tend to lack some of the infrastructure needed for more dense development and some of these areas are not within easy walking distance of services.

GOAL

GS G2 Keep Seattle as a city of unique, vibrant, and livable urban neighborhoods, with concentrations of development where all residents can have access to employment, transit, and retail services that can meet their daily needs.

POLICIES

GS 2.1 Designate places as urban centers, urban villages, or manufacturing/industrial centers based on the functions they can perform and the densities they can support.

- GS 2.2** Encourage investments and activities in urban centers and urban villages that will enable those areas to flourish as compact mixed-use neighborhoods designed to accommodate the majority of the city's new jobs and housing.
- GS 2.3** Establish boundaries for urban centers, urban villages, and manufacturing/ industrial centers that reflect existing development patterns; potential access to services, including transit; intended community characteristics; and recognized neighborhood areas.
- GS 2.4** Coordinate planning for transportation, utilities, open space, libraries, and other public services to meet the anticipated growth and increased density in urban centers and villages.
- GS 2.5** Encourage infill development in underused sites, particularly in urban centers and villages.
- GS 2.6** Plan for development in urban centers and urban villages in ways that will provide all Seattle households, particularly marginalized populations, with better access to services, transit, and educational and employment opportunities.
- GS 2.7** Promote levels of density, mixed-uses, and transit improvements in urban centers and villages that will support walking, biking, and use of public transportation.
- GS 2.8** Use zoning and other planning tools to shape the amount and pace of growth in ways that will limit displacement of marginalized populations, community services, and culturally relevant institutions and businesses.
- GS 2.9** Distribute public investments to address current inequities, recognizing the need to also serve growing communities.
- GS 2.10** Establish urban centers and urban villages using the guidelines described in Growth Strategy Figure 1.

Growth Strategy Figure 1

Urban Center and Urban Village Guidelines

Characteristic	Urban Centers*	Hub Urban Villages	Residential Urban Villages
Land Area	Up to 1.5 square miles (960 acres)	At least 20 contiguous acres of land currently zoned to accommodate commercial or mixed-use activities	At least 10 acres of commercial zoning within a radius of 2,000 feet
Public Transit Access	<p>Within 0.5 miles of the existing or planned high-capacity transit station</p> <p>Existing or planned connections to surrounding neighborhoods by bicycle lanes and/or sidewalks</p>	<p>Transit service with a frequency of 15 minutes or less during peak hours and 30 minutes or less during off-peak hours, with direct access to at least one urban center</p> <p>Connected to neighboring areas and nearby public amenities by existing or planned bicycle lanes and/or sidewalks</p>	<p>Transit service with a frequency of 15 minutes or less during peak hours and 30 minutes or less during off-peak hours, with direct access to at least one urban center</p> <p>Connected to neighboring areas and nearby public amenities by existing or planned bicycle lanes and/or sidewalks</p>
Zoning and Use	Zoning that allows for a diverse mix of commercial and residential activities	Zoning that allows a range of uses, including a variety of housing types as well as commercial and retail services serving a local, citywide, or regional market, generally at a lower scale than in urban centers	Zoning that emphasizes residential uses while allowing for commercial and retail services for the village and surrounding area, generally at a lower scale than in hub urban villages
Growth Accommodation	<p>Zoning that permits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a minimum of 15,000 jobs within 0.5 miles of a high-capacity transit station an overall employment density of 50 jobs per acre, and an overall residential density of 15 households per acre 	<p>Zoning that permits at least</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 dwelling units per gross acre 25 jobs per gross acre 2,500 total jobs, and 3,500 dwelling units 	Zoning that permits at least 12 dwelling units per gross acre

*The urban center description was taken from King County Countywide Planning Policies.

- GS 2.11** Permit various sizes of urban villages based on local conditions, but limit sizes so that most places in the village are within walking distance from employment and service areas in the village.

- GS 2.12** Include the area that is generally within a ten-minute walk of light rail stations or very good bus service in urban village boundaries.
- GS 2.13** Provide opportunities for marginalized populations to live and work in urban centers and urban villages throughout the city by allowing a variety of housing types and affordable rent levels in these places.
- GS 2.14** Support convenient access to healthful and culturally relevant food for all areas where people live by encouraging grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and community food gardens.
- GS 2.15** Designate areas as manufacturing/industrial centers consistent with the following characteristics and with the Countywide Planning Policies:
- Existing zoning that promotes manufacturing, warehousing, and distribution uses
 - Zoning that discourages uses that pose short- or long-term conflicts with industrial uses, or that threaten to convert significant amounts of industrial land to nonindustrial uses
 - Zoning that strictly limits residential uses and discourages land uses that are not compatible with industrial uses
 - Buffers that protect neighboring, less intensive land uses from the impacts associated with industrial activity (provided by generally maintaining existing buffers, including existing industrial buffer zones)
 - Sufficient zoning capacity to accommodate a minimum of ten thousand jobs
 - Relatively flat terrain allowing for efficient industrial processes
 - Reasonable access to the regional highway, rail, air, and/or waterway systems for transportation of goods
- GS 2.16** Use zoning and other tools to maintain and expand existing industrial activities within the manufacturing/industrial centers.
- GS 2.17** Limit City-owned land in the manufacturing/industrial centers to uses that are compatible with other industrial uses and that are inappropriate in other zones, and discourage other public entities from siting nonindustrial uses in manufacturing/industrial centers.

Areas Outside Centers and Villages

- GS 2.18** Support healthy neighborhoods throughout the city so that all residents have access to a range of housing choices, as well as access to parks, open space, and services.
- GS 2.19** Allow limited multifamily, commercial, and industrial uses outside of urban villages to support the surrounding area or to maintain the existing character.
- GS 2.20** Plan for uses and densities on hospital and college campuses that are located outside urban centers and villages in ways that recognize the important contributions of these institutions and the generally low-scale development of their surroundings.

Distribution of Growth

Discussion

The City does not completely control where growth will take place. The City adopts zoning that allows certain types of development in particular locations, and the City can make certain places attractive to development by making investments or offering incentives in those places. However, most new development is the result of decisions made by private landowners or developers who choose where they want to build.

Guided by the urban village strategy, the City has adopted zoning that will lead the bulk of Seattle's future growth to take place in areas designated as urban centers and urban villages. The City's vision is that job growth will be concentrated in urban centers—areas that already function as high-density, concentrated employment cores with the most access to the regional transit network. The City will especially focus growth in urban centers and those urban villages that are within easy walking distance of frequent and reliable transit service.

Currently, jobs and households are unevenly distributed across Seattle. For instance, the four adjoining urban centers (Downtown, First Hill/Capitol Hill, South Lake Union, and Uptown) contain almost a fifth of the City's households and nearly half of the city's jobs—on less than 5 percent of the city's land. Downtown alone has about ten times more jobs than housing units. Future growth estimates show that these urban centers will likely continue to be major job centers.

Industrial job growth will continue to take place mostly within the City's two existing and well-established manufacturing/industrial centers. There will also be overall job growth in hub urban villages distributed throughout the city, which will put jobs and services closer to the surrounding residential population. Urban villages that contain very good transit service are expected to grow more than those without that service. Very good transit means either a light rail station or a RapidRide stop plus at least one other frequent bus route. Two urban villages—Rainier Beach and Othello—that have light rail stations also are at high risk of too much development displacing existing households or small businesses. The City wants these areas to benefit from growth and investment, but we also need to pay attention to how growth can increase the risk of displacing marginalized populations and small businesses. To mitigate the risk, the Plan assigns a growth rate to these urban villages that is the same as for the residential villages that do not meet the definition for very good transit service. As the City monitors urban village growth in the future, the smaller growth rates for these two urban villages will help us examine the potential for displacement. Growth Strategy Figure 4 shows the different categories of urban villages, along with their level of transit service.

More modest growth will occur in various places outside centers and villages, including along arterials where current zoning allows multifamily and commercial uses.

This Plan anticipates that over the next twenty years, Seattle will add 70,000 housing units and 115,000 jobs. These estimates represent the city’s share of King County’s projected twenty-year growth.

GOAL

GS G3 Accommodate a majority of the city’s expected household growth in urban centers and urban villages and a majority of employment growth in urban centers. (Figure 2 shows the estimated amount of growth for each urban center, and Figure 3 shows the estimated growth rate for different categories of urban villages.)

Growth Strategy Figure 2

Estimated Urban Center Growth 2015–2035

	Housing Units	Jobs
Urban Centers		
Downtown	12,000	35,000
First Hill/Capitol Hill	6,000	3,000
University District	3,500	5,000
Northgate	3,000	6,000
South Lake Union	7,500	15,000
Uptown	3,000	2,500
Manufacturing/Industrial Centers		
Duwamish	0	6,000
Ballard/Interbay	0	3,000

Growth Strategy Figure 3

Estimated Urban Village Growth Rates

	Expected Housing Growth Rate*	Expected Job Growth Rate*
Hub Urban Villages	40%	50%
With very good transit service**	60%	50%
With high displacement risk and low access to opportunity, regardless of the level of transit service	40%	50%
Residential Urban Villages	30%	N/A
With very good transit service**	50%	N/A
With high displacement risk and low access to opportunity, regardless of the level of transit service	30%	N/A

*Percentage growth above the actual number of housing units or jobs in 2015, except where limited by zoning capacity. No job growth rate is assigned to residential villages.

**Very good transit service means either a light rail station or a RapidRide bus service plus at least one other high-frequency bus route.

POLICIES

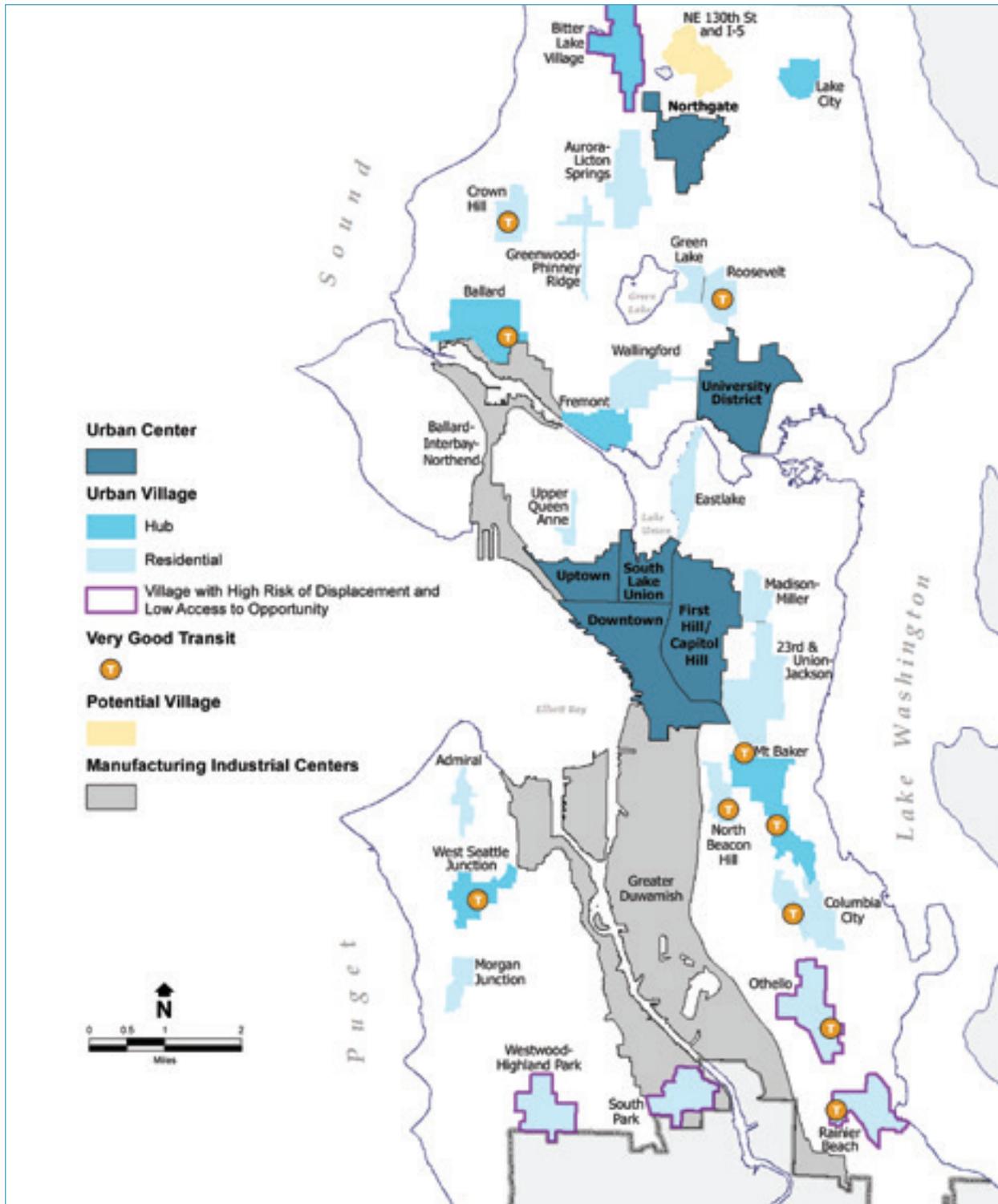
GS 3.1 Plan for a variety of uses and the highest densities of both housing and employment in Seattle’s urban centers, consistent with their role in the regional growth strategy.

GS 3.2 Base twenty-year growth estimates for each urban center and manufacturing/ industrial center on the following criteria:

- Citywide targets for housing and job growth adopted in the Countywide Planning Policies
- The role of the center in regional growth management planning
- The most recently adopted subarea plan for the center
- Level of transit service
- Existing zoning capacity for additional commercial and residential development
- Existing densities
- Current development conditions, recent development trends, and plans for private or public development, such as by major institutions

Growth Strategy Figure 4

Urban Centers, Urban Villages, Manufacturing/Industrial Centers



- Plans for infrastructure, public amenities, and services that could attract or support additional growth
- Access to employment for, and potential displacement of, marginalized populations

GS 3.3 Accommodate a substantial portion of the city’s growth in hub and residential urban villages.

GS 3.4 Work toward a distribution of growth that eliminates racial and social disparities by growing great neighborhoods throughout the city, with equitable access for all and with community stability that reduces the potential for displacement.

GS 3.5 Adjust urban center growth estimates periodically to reflect the most current policy guidance in regional and countywide growth management plans, or reexamine estimates as plans for the city’s urban centers are substantially amended.

Urban Design

Discussion

As Seattle evolves, thoughtful urban design can help both conserve and enhance the aspects of its physical environment that make it so appealing to residents and visitors alike. These aspects include well-defined and diverse mixed-use neighborhoods; compact, walkable scale; proximity to nature; and attractive parks, streets, and public spaces. In a flourishing city, urban design can help seamlessly integrate the new with the old, producing positive results while limiting the negative impacts of change. The policies in this element concern broad choices the City might make about where and how to develop.

For example, several Seattle neighborhoods are designated as historic districts in an effort to preserve their distinctive characters. The way the City builds and maintains major infrastructure, including parks and roads, will continue to define key public spaces and the connections between them.

The urban design policies described here outline the City’s approaches to regulating, building, and maintaining the city, while reflecting its diverse neighborhoods, populations, and natural features. The policies here are separated into three specific areas of focus: Natural Environment, Built Environment, and Public Spaces. More detailed direction for individual projects can be found in the Land Use Code’s regulations and in the City’s design guidelines.

The policies in this element are not intended to be used for reviewing individual projects. Rather, the City helps shape projects through zoning regulations and the design review program.

GOAL

- GS G4** Maintain and enhance Seattle's unique character and sense of place, including its natural setting, history, human-scaled development, and community identity, as the city grows and changes.

Natural Environment

POLICIES

- GS 4.1** Encourage the preservation, protection, and restoration of Seattle's distinctive natural features and landforms such as bluffs, beaches, streams, and remaining evergreen forests.
- GS 4.2** Design public facilities to emphasize physical and visual connections to Seattle's natural surroundings, with special attention to public vistas of shorelines, the Olympic Mountains, and the Cascade Range.
- GS 4.3** Encourage design that recognizes natural systems and integrates ecological functions such as stormwater filtration or retention with other infrastructure and development projects.
- GS 4.4** Respect topography, water, and natural systems when siting tall buildings.
- GS 4.5** Provide both physical and visual public access to streams, lakes, and Puget Sound.
- GS 4.6** Extend sustainable landscaping and an urban design approach to typically underdesigned sites such as surface parking lots, rooftops, and freeway edges.
- GS 4.7** Promote the use of native plants for landscaping to emphasize the region's natural identity and foster environmental health.

Built Environment

- GS 4.8** Preserve characteristics that contribute to communities' general identity, such as block and lot patterns and areas of historic, architectural, or social significance.
- GS 4.9** Design public infrastructure and private building developments to help visitors understand the existing block and street patterns and to reinforce the walkability of neighborhoods.
- GS 4.10** Use zoning tools and natural features to ease the transitions from the building intensities of urban villages and commercial arterials to lower-density developments of surrounding areas.
- GS 4.11** Design streets with distinctive identities that are compatible with a citywide system that defines differences between types of streets and that allows for different design treatments to reflect a particular street's function, right-of-way width, and adjoining uses.

- GS 4.12** Preserve, strengthen, and, as opportunities permit, reconnect Seattle’s street grid as a means to knit together neighborhoods and to connect areas of the city.
- GS 4.13** Design urban villages to be walkable, using approaches such as clear street grids, pedestrian connections between major activity centers, incorporation of public open spaces, and commercial buildings with retail and active uses that flank the sidewalk.
- GS 4.14** Design multifamily zones to be appealing residential communities with high-quality housing and development standards that promote privacy and livability, such as appropriately scaled landscaping, street amenities, and, in appropriate locations, limited commercial uses targeted for the local population.
- GS 4.15** Encourage designs for buildings and public spaces that maximize use of natural light and provide protection from inclement weather.
- GS 4.16** Encourage the use of land, rooftops, and other spaces to contribute to urban food production.
- GS 4.17** Use varied building forms and heights to enhance attractive and walkable neighborhoods.
- GS 4.18** Use groupings of tall buildings, instead of lone towers, to enhance overall topography or to define districts.
- GS 4.19** Consider taller building heights in key locations to provide visual focus and define activity centers, such as near light rail stations in urban centers and urban villages.
- GS 4.20** Limit the negative impacts of tall buildings on public views and on sunlight in public streets and parks by defining upper-level building setbacks and lot coverage or by using other techniques.
- GS 4.21** Locate tall buildings to respect natural surroundings and key natural features and to minimize obstructing views of these features, such as by having lower building heights near lakes or Puget Sound.
- GS 4.22** Encourage street widths and building heights that are in proportion with each other by reducing setbacks from the street and keeping reasonable sidewalk widths for lower buildings.

Public Spaces

- GS 4.23** Encourage innovative street design that expands the role of streets as public spaces and that could include use for markets, festivals, or street parks.
- GS 4.24** Promote well-defined outdoor spaces that can easily accommodate potential users and that are well integrated with adjoining buildings and spaces.
- GS 4.25** Design public spaces that consider the nearby physical context and the needs of the community.

- GS 4.26** Use the principles of crime prevention through environmental design for public spaces, where appropriate.

Annexation

Discussion

Small areas of unincorporated land lie immediately south of the Seattle city limits. The King County government currently administers services to these areas. However, the state's Growth Management Act (GMA) anticipates that all areas within the county's urban growth boundary will eventually be part of a city. Figure 5 shows the locations Seattle has identified as potential annexation areas.

GOAL

- GS G5** Eliminate pockets of unincorporated land abutting Seattle.

POLICIES

- GS 5.1** Cooperate with adjacent jurisdictions in order to reach equitable and balanced resolutions about jurisdictional boundaries for the remaining unincorporated areas abutting city limits.
- GS 5.2** Designate unincorporated land for potential annexation where the area has access, or can easily be connected, to City services, and the boundary-change agreements will result in an equitable distribution of revenues and costs, including asset transfer and the development, maintenance, and operation of facilities.
- GS 5.3** Consider annexation requests by the residents of unincorporated areas as a way for the City to meet regional growth management goals.
- GS 5.4** Support annexations of unincorporated areas to surrounding jurisdictions by taking part in public engagement efforts to determine local sentiment and in developing interlocal agreements related to annexations.

Growth Strategy Figure 5

Potential Annexation Areas

