



City Neighborhood Council

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DISTRICT COUNCILS:

- Ballard
- Central
- Delridge Neighborhoods
- Downtown
- East
- Greater Duwamish
- Lake Union
- Magnolia/Queen Anne
- North
- Northeast
- Northwest
- Southeast
- Southwest

October 30, 2007

City Councilmember
P.O. Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING – CONDITIONS FOR APPROVING PROPOSED FUNDING

Dear Councilmember:

The City Neighborhood Council enthusiastically supports the proposed addition of \$717,315 and reallocation of \$720,312 to be spent on neighborhood planning, but we suggest a somewhat different use of these funds than the Mayor intends. Without City Council conditions on this funding, the proposed “update” of the neighborhood plans could do more harm than good, will continue to neglect implementation of the 38 neighborhood plans, and will fail to address areas that do not have a neighborhood plan and want one.

A recent public records request has revealed an effort to take neighborhood planning in the wrong direction. One DPD memo states that City staff will “train and educate neighborhoods about growth, and their role in addressing climate change, sustainability, and other policy initiatives of the Mayor.” Another is the “Draft Neighborhood Plan Update Process and Staffing Strategy” (Sept. 5). These DPD documents were released because, based on them, decisions were made on how the Mayor’s proposed neighborhood planning funds would be spent. DPD should provide them to the City Council as background to the executive budget request, because they show that, without City Council conditions to prevent it, the neighborhood planning funds will be spent in ways that are contrary to Council intent or to the best interests of neighborhood planning.

Please consider taking the following steps:

1. Require that up to one half of the funds be made available as direct grants to neighborhoods so they can contract to conduct the neighborhood planning process using the inclusive, cost-effective

grassroots model that produced all of the current neighborhood plans. The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) has rejected with little or no discussion a central recommendation of two CNC letters to the Mayor (available at <http://seattle.gov/neighborhoodcouncil>). In its August 10 neighborhood planning letter, CNC observes that "City-funded contracting with Neighborhood Planning Groups to conduct planning activities worked well and should be continued." In its June 27 budget letter, CNC recommends that "some funds should be provided directly to neighborhood planning and stewardship groups so they can hire their own consultants and do their own outreach. Doing so empowers the community, and the plans that result are better, more widely supported, and more cost-effective than if these functions are performed exclusively by City employees."

2. Require that the funds be available to allow neighborhoods that do not currently have a neighborhood plan to develop one, whether or not they are an urban village. DPD's current position is that neighborhoods that are not designated as an urban village will not be allowed a neighborhood plan. Growth occurs outside urban villages too, so compliance with the Growth Management Act cannot justify a refusal to undertake new neighborhood plans; in fact, GMA's encouragement of neighborhood planning is not restricted to urban villages. And growth is not the only rationale for having a neighborhood plan. The existing neighborhood plans emerged from the grass roots, and none of them are limited to land use and zoning. They cover important livability issues such as pedestrian safety, public safety, noise, parks and open space, arts, schools, cultural diversity, and the needs of youth, seniors, and the disabled. Such concerns arise both inside and outside of urban villages, and in some cases may be more pressing outside an urban village; for example, non-urban villages have a greater concentration of children than do urban villages.
3. Require that the Approval and Adoption Matrices that the City Council passed by resolution as a part of the neighborhood plans will continue to have effect, and that any changes in them will require further City Council action. Require that results of the neighborhood planning updates that are not reflected in specific ordinances or resolutions will be represented in City Council amendment of the existing Approval and Adoption Matrices. In none of the documents that DPD provided the citizen volunteer who had made the public records request, is there mention that any substantial weight would be given to the existing Approval and Adoption Matrices (for each neighborhood plan, these are the specific City actions and agency assignments which the City Council adopted by resolution, with the Mayor signing). In fact, there is no mention that the updated neighborhood plans will any longer have an Approval and Adoption Matrix.
4. Prohibit the executive from imposing on the existing neighborhood plans a plan template that will identify a standardized format and topic content. In practice, the existing neighborhood plans do cover such issues, and carefully

crafted language already validated by stakeholders could easily be lost or misconstrued in the process of “reformatting.” But in legality, please note that at the Oct. 1 meeting of the City Council’s budget committee, DPD erroneously informed you that the Growth Management Act Hearing Board requires that neighborhood plans must contain the elements mandatory for the City Comprehensive Plan under the Growth Management Act. Exactly the reverse is the case, as Councilmember Steinbrueck correctly stated that day. Neighborhood or sub-area plans are not required by state law, regulations, or Hearing Boards to have the standard categories of Transportation, Land Use, Utilities, etc. that are required of Comprehensive Plans. The Central Puget Sound Growth Management Hearings Board has repeatedly made clear that “Neither RCW 36.70A.130(1) nor *WSDF III* [West Seattle Defense Fund v. City of Seattle III] stand for the proposition that subarea plans must contain, in every case, each of the mandatory comprehensive plan elements set out in RCW 36.70A.070 (footnote pertaining to *LMI* [LMI v. Town of Woodway] omitted). [*Tulalip II*, [The Tulalip Tribes of Washington v. City of Monroe Washington], 9313, 1/28/00 Order, at 11.]” See Digest of Decisions of Growth Management Hearings Board at page 514. The Digest can be accessed at <http://www.gmhb.wa.gov/central/CPSDigest6thEditionthroughFebruary12-2007.pdf>. The decision cited above was simply a continuation of the precedent established in an earlier case that “There is no GMA requirement that subarea plans contain *all* the mandatory elements required by RCW 36.70A.070. Thus, the [subarea plan] is not required to contain a housing element since the goals, objectives, and policies of the Housing Element in the County’s Comprehensive Plan apply and govern in the [subarea plan] area. [*MBA/Brink*, [Master Builders Association of Pierce County, Terry brink, et al v. Pierce County], 02310, FDO, at 29.]” See Digest at page 516.

5. Require that half of the neighborhood planning update funds go to the Department of Neighborhoods. At this point, very few of the funds would go there, even though the past neighborhood planning and stewardship were done by a Neighborhood Planning Office and DON. The district coordinators have primary responsibility for neighborhood plan implementation, but they lack sufficient staff support for this assignment, and the Mayor’s proposed budget does not add funds enough for them even to make up for inflation.
6. Require that at least one quarter of the neighborhood planning funds be spent on planning and/or coordinating implementation of the prior community-approved actions in the Approval and Adoption Matrices and other City commitments that emerged from the neighborhood plans. And require that the funds be spent in part to improve City staff training about and implementation of the neighborhood plans. The recent City Auditor report found a substantial shortfall that “...knowledge of plans among department personnel with related responsibilities was uneven, and diminishing with staff turnover and the passage of time. Neighborhood

plans are no longer a driving force in department operations....” (p. 28) and that “...newer employees who are charged with implementing neighborhood plans get little training regarding the plans and are simply not very familiar with them.” (p. 29)

Conclusion. The City Neighborhood Council (CNC) and its Committee on Neighborhood Planning have worked closely with the executive branch and City Council for eighteen years to enable and continue a vigorous Seattle program for neighborhood planning. Seattle’s innovations in neighborhood scale planning have generated considerable admiration, both in the U.S. and abroad. It would be sadly ironic if Seattle were to abandon that model just as the rest of the world is benefiting from it by our past example. This letter was authorized at the Sept. 24 CNC meeting and circulated in draft; it was then discussed, revised, and re-authorized at the Oct. 29 CNC meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Leman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chris Leman, Chair
City Neighborhood Council
cleman@oo.net

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Irene Wall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Irene Wall, Chair
CNC Neighborhood Planning Committee
iwall@serv.net

cc: District Councils
Neighborhood Planning and Stewardship Groups
Mayor, Deputy Mayor
Director, Department of Neighborhoods
Director, Department of Planning and Development