

Department of Planning and Development

Diane M. Sugimura, Director

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Councilmember Sally Clark, Chair, PLUNC
Councilmember Tim Burgess
Councilmember Tom Rasmussen

FROM: Stella Chao, Director, Department of Neighborhoods
Diane M. Sugimura, Director, Department of Planning & Development

DATE: February 11, 2008

SUBJECT: February 13 Committee Briefing: Updating Neighborhood Plans

Background

More than ten years have passed since neighborhood planning work started – a significant step in the implementation of Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan. Overall growth has generally been consistent with expectations that spurred the development of Neighborhood Plans, but the rate or concentration of change has varied by neighborhood.

Since then, many new citywide plans and policies have been adopted, such as the 2004 Comprehensive Plan with new growth targets, the Transportation Strategic Plan, sub-area transportation plans, and the Bicycle Master Plan. Understanding these new planning initiatives, their intersections, and their impact takes dedicated technical expertise to guide us. Additionally, we’ve seen major new public investments such as Sound Transit as well as significant private investment. Some current plans are more effective than others for guiding growth with such significant change.

The Proposal

The Mayor initially announced an update proposal in July 2007. Since then, the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) and the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) have reviewed this proposal with many community, business and civic groups to gain their feedback. We have also been working with an interdepartmental team that includes the Office of Housing, Parks and Recreation, Department of Transportation and others.

We want to build from the positive lessons learned from the initial neighborhood planning process. We are also very aware of the fact that we are not starting from scratch. We are



building on the existing plans. Consequently, we believe a relatively short – one year to prepare plan for Council review – well-conceived, efficient process is appropriate.

As our population has become more diverse, the perspectives of our communities have also become more diverse. In recent years, we've also learned much about the effect of growth on the health of our environment, particularly impacts on climate. Updates to the Neighborhood Plans provide an opportunity to expand our growth management strategy to include overarching, very urgent goals of: 1) inclusiveness; and 2) building a truly sustainable city through our neighborhoods – helping to reduce the city's contribution to climate change.

Continuing a Partnership with Neighborhoods

The updating process will be a partnership between the City and our neighborhoods. Neighborhood representatives, working with City staff, will identify issues and develop policy level guidance for addressing those issues.

- Promote sustainable neighborhoods
- Implement strategies for input from diverse constituencies
- Establish widely representative local planning committees
- Identify plan update issues
- Guide writing of the plan

The Sector Approach

We strongly believe in the importance of the sector approach. For necessary consistencies, we will use the same six sectors identified in previous planning processes. This allows us to address important issues that cross neighborhood boundaries (such as transportation corridors and park facilities), as well as the relationship among neighborhoods.

- Focus on one sector per year
- Review all Neighborhood Plans within a sector to determine which need to be updated, and to what extent
- Start with sectors that have experienced the most change (please see attachments)
 - Household and employment growth relative to targets and size of targets
 - Significant changes that have occurred since adoption of plans that were not anticipated by those plans, such as major public or private investments
 - Neighborhoods with recent significant planning activity (e.g., South Lake Union and South Downtown) will have lower priority

Proposed Plan Elements

In the previous round of neighborhood planning, there was no pre-determined format or list of basic topics to be covered. For example, one plan was focused on neighborhood character, transportation, and parks and open space. Housing was initially not included. With this round, we anticipate having more completeness among the plans in terms of important elements for each neighborhood to address.

- The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Comprehensive Plans to include: land use, transportation, housing, capital facilities, utilities, economic development, and parks and recreation
- Neighborhood Plans help implement the Comprehensive Plan, so we believe it is important to have some consistency in topics included in the various plans
- Beyond those issues required by the GMA, neighborhoods may identify additional elements such as public safety, social service/human needs, arts and culture, and urban design.

Public Engagement

An extremely important goal of the updating process is one of inclusiveness of a diverse population in the public engagement process ... to engage those who will be the future Seattle. City staff will identify diverse populations in each neighborhood and reach out to community leaders and groups.

- Develop varied strategies to effectively reach and engage those communities
- Include as many community members as possible

In engaging neighborhood members the City will:

- Clearly define the purpose and scope of the update process, and the outcome anticipated
- Clearly communicate process and schedule, and access points for the neighborhood
- Provide community members with information to understand the current plans and projected growth
- Provide on-going information to communities as the planning process develops

“Testing” a Public Engagement Process

Over the past six months DON and DPD staff implemented the following steps towards meaningful community engagement:

- Began to build relationships with under-represented groups
- Identified a diverse cross-section of age, ethnicity, culture, physical ability in neighborhoods
 - CNC, district councils, community councils, stewardship groups, City commissions and committees, environmental groups
 - Parent groups, ethnic clubs/organizations/coalitions, non-profit organizations, senior groups, youth groups, low-income housing residents
- Conducted more than 50 dialogues with targeted groups
- Collected comments over a six-month period regarding the proposed approach

Results ...

Two major themes emerged about how to engage people

- Theme 1 = Effective methods are multifaceted; employ multiple entry points for broad and specific groups; and are adequately resourced
- Theme 2 = Ensure clear and transparent communication loops that provide understanding, and acknowledging the history and importance of neighborhood

plans; clearly define update process, decision-making and timelines; and are accessible to all community members.

Recommendations for Neighborhood Engagement Process

- Work with trusted individuals, groups, and community-based organizations
- Convey clear expectation about role of diverse and under-represented groups
- Communicate value of neighborhood plans and City initiatives to people's daily lives
- Conduct outreach activities at a variety of venues – community events, churches, schools, etc.
- Provide outreach, translation/interpretation services according to the cultural needs of communities
- Allocate sufficient budget and staff resources for a meaningful engagement process
- Provide information and assistance (e.g. workshops) for community members on civic process
- Train City staff to enhance engagement and facilitation skills
- Use other City outreach work to inform and involve community in update process

Complete list of recommendations in “Community Feedback Report,” page 6.

A One-Year Process for Plan Updates: Milestones

Even before we begin the one-year work with the community in each sector, pre-planning work is essential. This includes gathering relevant City plans and policies; developing an almanac on household and employment growth, demographics, trends, services, zoning, etc.; reviewing existing plans and policies with community members and with City staff; and compiling accomplishments and “incompletes” from the original Neighborhood Plans.

- Conduct sector-wide orientation
- Identify key local groups and community leaders to be involved
- Develop engagement strategies tailored to community needs
- Establish a local planning committee for more intensive review work

Community members will work with City staff to

- Identify neighborhood-specific issues
- Analyze and select preferred direction
- Draft updates to plans

Validation and Adoption of Updates

- Work with local planning committee during year long process, with periodic broad community check-in opportunities
- Conduct formal validation process at the end of the process, through survey and/or large community meeting
- Council adoption of goal/policy changes by amending Comprehensive Plan
- Council adopts work program items via resolution

Implementation of Updated Plans

- Identify clear and realistic strategies in plans
- Neighborhood establishes priorities
- Review departmental work programs for possible additions and enhancements to existing programs, in order to help implement plan priorities
- May require additional funding
- Track implementation – accessible on-line database