

## CITY OF SEATTLE

## **ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

# **SEPA Threshold Determination for Rainier Beach Areas Rezones for Affordable Housing Development**

DRAFT

**Project Sponsor:** City of Seattle

**Location of Proposal:** Various parcels located in the Rainier Beach neighborhood. Map attachments to the SEPA checklist identify the specific boundaries of the rezone.

## **SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION**

The City of Seattle is proposing legislation to rezone five parcels located in the Rainier Beach neighborhood. Detailed mapping of these sites is provided in the SEPA checklist. These parcels are clustered in two areas – one located near Rainier Avenue South and South Cloverdale Street and one located near Rainier Avenue South and South Rose Street.

The three parcels located near Rainier Avenue South and South Cloverdale Street would be rezoned from NC2-55 (M) to NC2-65 (M1).

The two parcels located near Rainier Avenue South and South Rose Street be rezoned from a mix of LR3 (M), NC2-55 (M), and SF 5000 to LR3 (M1) and NC2-55 (M1).

A correction to the Comprehensive Plan FLUM is also proposed for a portion of the Rose St. cluster of parcels.

The following approval is required pursuant to SEPA - Environmental Determination - Chapter 25.05, Seattle Municipal Code.

**SEPA DETERMINATION:** [ ] Exempt [X] DNS [ ] MDNS [ ] EIS

## [ ] DNS with conditions

## [ ] DNS involving non-e

or involving another agency with jurisdiction.

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## **PROPOSAL BACKGROUND**

The proposed action includes information that describes the intent underlying the proposal, which is summarized here. The project applicant proposes incremental zoning changes to increase zoning capacity to moderately higher-intensity zones with the intention for these lands to potentially support greater densities or quantities of affordable housing and social services.

The Seattle Office of Housing in 2019 awarded resources to non-profit housing providers for potential future affordable housing development at both clusters of sites. Therefore, it is a very high likelihood that all or the vast majority of future housing constructed on these sites would be rent- and income-restricted affordable housing. Applications for Master Use Permit (MUP) and design review are pending for development of affordable housing buildings, a Muslim Housing Services referral office, and the Rainier Valley Community Food Center on property contained in this proposal. These applications correspond to Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections project numbers 3027659 and 3035046.

This is a non-project proposal. The legislation would modify the zoning of various parcels. Indirect impacts associated with future development proposals that could occur under the proposed development standards are the subject of the SEPA checklist and this decision.

## **ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

#### ***Relationship to Plans and Policies***

The parcels near South Cloverdale Street are located in the Rainier Beach Urban Village and are identified as “Residential Urban Village” on the Future Land Use Map. The parcels near South Rose Street are located less than a block north of the Rainier Beach Urban Village and are identified as a mix of “Commercial/Mixed Use Areas”, “Multifamily-Residential Areas”, and Single Family Residential Areas” on the Future Land Use Map. The proposal could also include a correction to the Future Land Use Map to change the designation for those areas currently designated “Single Family Residential Area” on a parcel that is currently split between multiple zones and designations.

There are numerous goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan, the Rainier Beach Neighborhood Plan, and other documents concerning zoning, housing, affordable housing, massing, transitions, commercial districts, and other subjects that could be relevant to this proposal. Some of these policies reference a need for more housing development, particularly affordable housing, and a preference for location in urban centers and villages and near light-rail stations. Other provide guidance on other factors that should be considered in changing zoning.

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Below are some, but not all, of the goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan that are relevant to this proposal:

- **GS 1.5** Encourage infill development in underused sites, particularly in urban centers and villages.
- **GS 1.7** 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 1.8** Use zoning and other planning tools to shape the amount and pace of growth in ways that will limit displacement of marginalized populations, and that will accommodate and preserve community services, and culturally relevant institutions and businesses.
- **GS 1.13** 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 1.23** Allow limited multifamily, commercial, and industrial uses outside of urban villages to support the surrounding area or to maintain the existing character.
- **GS G2** 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.
- **GS 2.3** Accommodate a substantial portion of the city's growth in hub and residential urban villages.
- **GS 2.4** 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 2.6** Work with communities where growth is slower than anticipated to identify barriers to growth and strategies to overcome those barriers.
- **GS 3.11** 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.
- **LU G1** Achieve a development pattern consistent with the urban village strategy, concentrating most new housing and employment in urban centers and villages, while also allowing some infill development compatible with the established context in areas outside centers and villages.
- **LU 1.1** Use the Future Land Use Map to identify where different types of development may occur in support of the urban village strategy.
- **LU 1.2** Promote this plan's overall desired land use pattern through appropriate zoning that regulates the mix of uses as well as the size and density of development to focus new residential and commercial development in urban centers and urban villages, and integrate new projects outside of centers and villages into the established development context.
- **LU 1.4** Provide a gradual transition in building height and scale inside urban centers and urban villages where they border lower-scale residential areas.
- **LU 1.5** Require Future Land Use Map amendments only when needed to achieve a significant change to the intended function of a large area.

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- **LU 7.1** Designate as single-family residential areas those portions of the city that are predominantly developed with single-family houses and that are large enough to maintain a consistent residential character of low height, bulk, and scale over several blocks.
- **LU 8.1** Designate as multifamily residential areas those places that either are predominantly occupied by multifamily development or are within urban centers or urban villages.
- **H G2** Help meet current and projected regional housing needs of all economic and demographic groups by increasing Seattle's housing supply.
- **H 2.4** Encourage use of vacant or underdeveloped land for housing and mixed-use development, and promote turning vacant housing back into safe places to live.
- **H 5.3** Promote housing affordable to lower-income households in locations that help increase access to education, employment, and social opportunities, while supporting a more inclusive city and reducing displacement from Seattle neighborhoods or from the city as a whole.

Two of these policies (LU 1.1 and LU 1.5) specifically reference the role of the Future Land Use Map in guiding future changes. One of the parcels that is proposed to be rezoned is currently designed as three distinct Future Land Use Map designations including "Single Family Residential". While the Comprehensive Plan suggests to "use the Future Land Use to identify where different types of development may occur in support of the urban village strategy", it also acknowledges that boundaries are likely to change and that some changes "can be made without a formal amendment or change to the map".

Given the location of these sites in or near the Rainier Beach Urban Village and the Rainier Beach light rail station and the circumstances of the sites and adjacent properties, this proposal considered to be generally consistent with these goals and policies.

Consequently, no adverse impacts related to existing plans or policies would result from the proposal.

***Land Uses and Development Patterns***

The proposal could allow minor changes in land use where it could allow commercial or mixed-use development in areas currently zoned for multifamily residential or multifamily residential in areas currently zoned for single-family residential. However, these uses are already generally present in the immediately surrounding areas. Both areas are located in areas generally identified as "Pearls" in the Rainier Beach Neighborhood Plan, which are identified as places that already contain a mix of uses and are appropriate in particular for retail and other ground-level uses.

Overall, this information suggests that the uses allowed under proposed zoning would be generally consistent with existing and desired land use and development pattern.

***Height/Bulk/Scale, Aesthetics, Shadows and Views***

The SEPA checklist notes that there could be incremental height, bulk, and scale impacts, particularly on the rear portions of the South Rose Street cluster of parcels, due to changes to the massing of potential future development under the proposal compared to development that might otherwise occur.

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The increase on the South Cloverdale Street parcels to a height of 65 feet would only result in 10 foot difference with adjacent parcels to the north and south but would increase the height difference with one adjacent parcel to the east that is currently zoned LR2 with a height limit of 40 feet.

The zoning changes on the South Rose Street parcels would allow for a more appropriate transition in zoning categories within the rezone area by reducing the amount of single-family zoning adjacent to NC2-55 zoning. At the same time, it would result in new zoning transitions between the rezone area and adjacent properties by placing LR3 zoning adjacent to single-family zoned properties to the north, south, and east. It would also shift the line between LR3 and NC2-55 zoning along Rainier Avenue South northward. These changes could result in minor additional shading on an adjacent apartment building and single-family homes.

Given the context of the area and existing transitions, these impacts are not likely to be more than moderate.

***Noise, Light/Glare***

The SEPA checklist identifies that an increased amount of development in the affected area could cause additional light and glare consistent with infill development. Additional noise associated with infill development could also result. This would cause only a minor impact. Differences in building massing allowed under the proposed alternative standards, compared to what would otherwise occur, would result in noise, light, and glare impacts that are small enough to be *de minimis*. No more than a minor impact with respect to noise, light, and glare from the proposal is expected.

***Housing***

The SEPA checklist suggests the proposed zoning envelopes could facilitate an estimated 425 housing units using general assumptions and that there is no existing housing in the affected areas that might be demolished.

The proposal would slightly increase the amount of housing that could be developed in this area and could increase the likelihood that affected lots would be redeveloped with housing thereby increasing the potential for greater production of housing compared to no action. Increases in housing overall have a net benefit on the affordability and availability of housing in the market as a whole. No direct displacement is likely to occur as no residential units currently exist in the rezone area. Potential future development would also be subject to Mandatory Housing Affordability requirements.

***Environmentally sensitive areas, Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources***

The SEPA checklist indicates that the affected area does not contain any of environmentally sensitive areas, although one exceptional tree has been identified. No city designated landmarks are known to be located on the property. No significant impacts on environmentally sensitive areas, areas eligible for government protection, or historic or cultural resources are expected to result from this proposal.

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***Transportation, Parking***

The checklist provides an estimate of the amount of additional housing that could result from the proposal. The proposal could have minor localized impacts on on-street parking. It could increase competition for on-street parking spaces to the extent it increases the size of new buildings, encourages redevelopment, or encourages development on small lots where it is more difficult to accommodate underground parking. In the context of the City's transportation policies, which generally support a broad range of transportation choices, localized parking impacts that could result from this proposal are not considered to be a significant adverse environmental impact.

***Public Services, Utilities***

The City's existing regulations requiring improvements to utilities at the time of development would not be altered by this proposal. Required utility work associated with potential future development projects under the proposal would likely be sufficient to address any localized needs for utility improvement. The range of potential impacts on emergency services, compared to those estimated as part of past studies, are not like to be discernably altered. No more than a minor impact on emergency services or utilities would result.

***Parks and Open Space***

The affected parcels meet goals in the 2017 Parks Gap Analysis for walkability to parks. Due to the very small amount of the incremental demand for park usage and the undefined timing and degree of additional demand on parks associated with the proposal, the overall impact on parks and open space is determined not to be significant.

**NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

***Plants & Animals, Air Quality, Earth, Water (Drainage & Water Quality), Environmental Health***

The proposal would not alter any Federal, State or City environmental protections. Existing regulations including the City's stormwater code, shoreline master program, and other regulations would address impacts to plants, animals, air quality, earth, and water at the time of future development. The magnitude of the potential impacts stemming from this proposal is determined not to be significant.

***Energy and Natural Resources***

The proposal would not alter any Federal, State or City energy standards or natural resource protections. Existing regulations including the building code, energy code, and other regulations would address energy impacts or impacts to natural resources at the time of future development. The magnitude of the potential impacts stemming from this proposal is determined not to be significant.

**DECISION**

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Based on a review of the SEPA environmental checklist including its attachments, and the analysis of impact described above the following threshold determination is rendered:

- [  ] 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: [On file] Date: 5/15/2020  
Brennon Staley  
Office of Planning and Community Development