



Seattle
Office of Planning &
Community Development

Land Use

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Northgate Regional Center Subarea Plan
AUGUST 2024

Prepared by Seva Workshop

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The indigenous community has a deep, longstanding, and ongoing relationship with the land in Northgate.** The Northgate area was originally inhabited by Coast Salish peoples. White settlers first arrived in the area in the 1850s. These settlements expanded during times when racial discrimination was rampant, and Northgate was long home to a predominantly White community. In the decades since, better legal protections for non-White homeownership have been in place, and the area has changed to better reflect regional diversity. Today, the Northgate Regional Center is home to over 8,000 individuals. Connections to its Coast Salish origins are subdued, and the subarea is instead characterized by large urban developments such as the I-5 interstate highway, transit station, and nearly vacant retail shopping center. Opportunities to improve connections to its indigenous roots and ethnically diverse current population include policies that strengthen environmental assets, expanded space for cultural gatherings, adding more art and design features that celebrate these connections, and business districts that make space for small and family-owned operations.

Northgate is situated as the northern gateway to Seattle, with strong regional transportation connections. As a Regional Center, Northgate is an important component of the region's vision for growth. Recent connection to the Link Light Rail strengthens this role and expands the subarea's capacity to provide access to opportunity for residents.

The City of Seattle hopes that its six (proposed seven) Regional Centers, including Northgate, will play a major role in accommodating future housing and employment growth, connecting communities to transit stations and public amenities. Growth has, however, stalled in Northgate in recent years, and the subarea lags behind its Seattle peers in attracting development and investment. Among the six existing Centers, Northgate has the highest proportion of land area dedicated to vacant sites and parking lots. Prospects for the neighborhood brighten with the addition of the Link Light Rail station. The light rail provides convenient service to students at the nearby North Seattle College and the equity-priority communities that live in Northgate and its surrounding neighborhoods. There is hope for a full redevelopment on the mostly vacant Mall site that provides an anchoring identity for Northgate, recent and incoming developments inclusive of affordable housing and childcare services, and the UW Northwest Hospital intends to expand its campus in the subarea.

Northgate has a cluster of everyday necessities and services that create a foundation for a healthy and sustainable urban environment. Engagement for this plan identified many assets that make up this foundation including access to high-capacity transit and to spaces, programs, and services such as the community center, library, medical offices, and retail.

Northgate’s land use history is steeped in auto-oriented design patterns and street lengths.

Retrofitting a walkable, transit-oriented neighborhood onto this footprint requires investments, refreshed design standards, and the ability to break up large blocks. Community input identified walkability, safety, and connectivity as key needs. Transformation on these interrelated issues will be gradual across the coming decades. Planning documents for Northgate have identified these issues going back 30 years, and gradual change has led to improvements such as the John Lewis Memorial Pedestrian Bridge. Important steps that can be implemented in the shorter term include an update to public realm standards in the Northgate Overlay District, prioritization of pedestrian and bike pathways that break up long blocks and address safety concerns, partnership with large landowners, and continued conversation with local communities to understand needs and priorities.

Development in Northgate currently lacks momentum due to shifts in market conditions and the loss of an anchor site.

Unlike some areas of Seattle, zoning capacity and regulations are not the key barriers to growth in the Regional Center. Capacity analysis highlights ample opportunity for Northgate to meet or exceed its growth targets. Development sites could push farther to maximize their allowed building envelopes. Public investments in pedestrian infrastructure and the activation and “greening” of key corridors could help build identity and set the stage for enhanced neighborhood success. Pockets of tight-knit communities and clusters of activity already exist in Northgate and would benefit from these revitalizations. Many properties in the subarea are in the process of redevelopment and, when completed, should add to the quality of experience Northgate offers.

CONTEXT

Located six miles north of Downtown Seattle, Northgate is one of six Urban Centers designated in Seattle’s 2015 Comprehensive Plan. The updated 2024 *One Seattle* Comprehensive Plan renames these “Regional Centers” and adds a seventh (Ballard, not shown below). This report will refer to these as “Regional Centers” unless specifically referencing the 2015 plan. The Northgate Regional Center includes 300 acres on both sides of Interstate 5. The neighborhoods of Licton Springs, Haller Lake, Pinehurst, Maple Leaf, Victory Heights, Lake City, and Green Lake are nearby.

Exhibit 1: Northgate and Seattle Regional Centers Map.



REGIONAL ROLE

Northgate acts as a gateway between Seattle and its northern neighbors of Shoreline and Lake Forest Park. The subarea is anchored by the Northgate light rail station and the new Northgate Station development (formerly known as the mall, and now includes the Kraken Community Iceplex). Directly adjacent to these central amenities are the City-owned Community Center and Library, which support these activity centers with programs and event spaces. To the northwest of the light rail station is UW Northwest Hospital, a critical employment hub for Northgate. Other retail, medical, and commercial uses take up most of the remaining Regional Center. Directly adjacent, but outside the official boundary of the subarea, is the North Seattle College campus, connected to the light rail station by the John Lewis Memorial pedestrian bridge.

Since 1992, Northgate’s transit center has been a hub for bus activity and the neighborhood’s proximity to I-5 offers strong vehicular access and connections in the region. In 2021, the light rail station opened as the northern terminus of the 1 Line. Upcoming extensions will connect to the northern suburbs of Shoreline, Lynnwood, and ultimately Everett. This transportation landscape makes Northgate an important hub of mobility for north Seattleites.

Historic Development Context¹

Prior to the presence of White settlers in the region, the city of Seattle was inhabited extensively by Coast Salish peoples for thousands of years. The Indians of the Eastern Puget Sound lived in relatively small, autonomous villages and spoke variations of the Lushootseed, one of the Coast Salish languages. At the time of the first White settlements around 1850, natives were living in more than 90 longhouses, in at least 17 villages, in modern-day Seattle and environs.

Waterways were central to the cultures and livelihoods of native people. "Duwamish" is the Anglo-Europeanized word which meant "people of the inside", *dx^wdəwʔabš*, referencing the interior waters of the Duwamish, Black and Cedar rivers. The Suquamish take their name from the Lushootseed phrase for “people of the clear salt water”, and the people living around Lake Washington were collectively known as *hah-choo-AHBSH* or *hah-chu-AHBSH* or *Xacuabš*, People of *HAH-choo* or *Xachu*, "People of a Large Lake" or "Lake People."

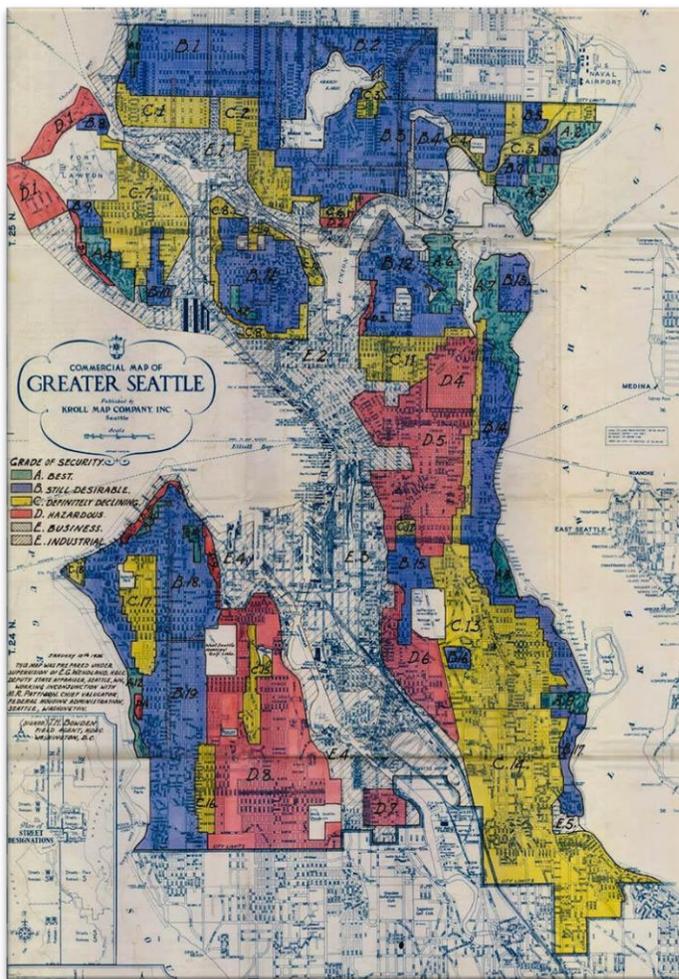
Major transportation corridors constructed during the 20th century fundamentally changed Seattle’s land use patterns and bisected many vibrant neighborhoods. These corridors included the Pacific Highway built in the 1920s (later renamed US 99 and then SR 99 after construction of I-5), the George Washington Memorial Bridge (the Aurora Bridge) completed in 1932, the elevated Alaskan Way completed in 1936 and subsequent double-deck Alaskan Way

¹ Sources for this history include: Draft “One Seattle” Comprehensive Plan, 2024; OPCD “Seattle Industrial & Maritime Strategy”, 2022; <https://www.historylink.org/File/3186>; <https://www.historylink.org/File/21296>; <https://www.seattlepi.com/local/seattle-history/article/Seattle-History-How-Northgate-Mall-shaped-the-13257409.php>; <https://www.historylink.org/File/9393>

Viaduct built in three phases from 1949 through 1959, and the Seattle Freeway (now I-5) constructed in the 1960s.

Settlement expansion in Seattle occurred at a time when racial discrimination in housing practices was rampant. Racially restrictive covenants dictated who was allowed to live in the Northgate neighborhood. Redlining maps, such as the one in Exhibit 2, show how lending institutions used their power to block non-White homeownership in north Seattle. While these early maps do not extend as far north as Northgate, restrictive neighborhood covenants reinforced racial exclusion for the residential developments in and around Northgate. This history of restriction set the stage for decades of race-based segregation where the residential neighborhoods surrounding Northgate, such as Maple Leaf and Victory Heights, were dominated by White Seattleites.²

Exhibit 2: Kroll Commercial Map of Greater Seattle, 1936.



This map from 1936 illustrates the racial segregation perpetuated by the mortgage lending industry. The blue areas, as seen in north Seattle, were designated “still desirable” and housed predominantly White communities. Residents in these neighborhoods received favorable lending rates. In contrast, the yellow and red areas were labeled “definitely declining” and “hazardous,” which discouraged banks from giving loans to residents in these areas. Coupled with racially restrictive covenants, these tools were effective at excluding BIPOC homeowners and were particularly discriminatory toward Black residents until they were outlawed under the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Northgate’s demographic history is shaped by this exclusion. Only in recent decades have these patterns shifted, as more BIPOC residents claim north Seattle neighborhoods as home.

The Housing Appendix of Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan takes a city-wide look at historical exclusion patterns and their impact on communities of color in Seattle.

² https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants_map.htm

After decades of slow development as a residential suburb for Seattle, a development effort spearheaded by Jim Douglas established Northgate as a regional retail center. The original Northgate Mall, an outdoor shopping center with a series of covered breezeways and extensive parking infrastructure, opened in 1950 and catered to the auto-oriented development style of the time. The mall sought to bring shoppers northward by featuring attractions such as the world’s tallest Christmas tree at the time of its opening. The Northgate area was annexed into Seattle in 1954.



The image at the top is an aerial photograph of the Northgate Mall site in 1949. In the foreground is 1st Ave N and a small tract of homes. I-5 had not yet been constructed and the surrounding neighborhood was sparsely populated.

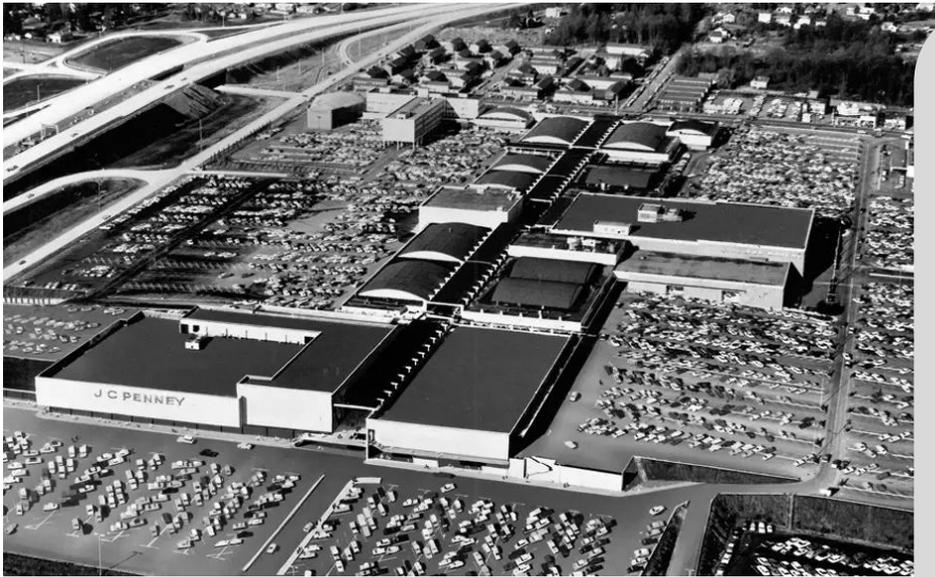
Below, the open-air nature of the original mall footprint is on display. This image is from 1950- the mall was sure to open in time for holiday shopping that year.

While plans are not finalized, the most recent schematic designs from the current owner of the mall site suggest a return to the open-air nature of the original mall development. Today, however, towers are proposed above ground floor retail to concentrate housing and shopping in the same location.



Image source: www.seattlepi.com

After the development of Northwest Hospital in 1960 and I-5 in 1969, the mall area expanded and more than doubled its footprint. Northgate continued its evolution and became an enclosed, climate-controlled space in 1974. The mall continued to evolve as anchor tenants changed and facilities were upgraded. The growing popularity of online retail led to the decline of the mall and, by 2010, plans were in place to close the mall and redefine the commercial and retail landscape of this area. The 2000s were also a time of change for the racial and cultural diversity of residents in and around the Northgate area. The maps in Exhibit 3 visualize the geographic shifts of Seattle’s populations of color by Census tract from 1990-2020. North Seattle neighborhoods became more racially diverse between 2010 and 2020.



This aerial photo is from 1965, demonstrating the evolving footprint of the mall site and addition of I-5 to the west.



In 1974, the mall was transformed to a fully enclosed and climate-controlled space. It remained in this format until its closing in 2021.

Image source: www.seattlepi.com

Exhibit 3: Percent People of Color by Census Tract in Seattle, 1990-2020.

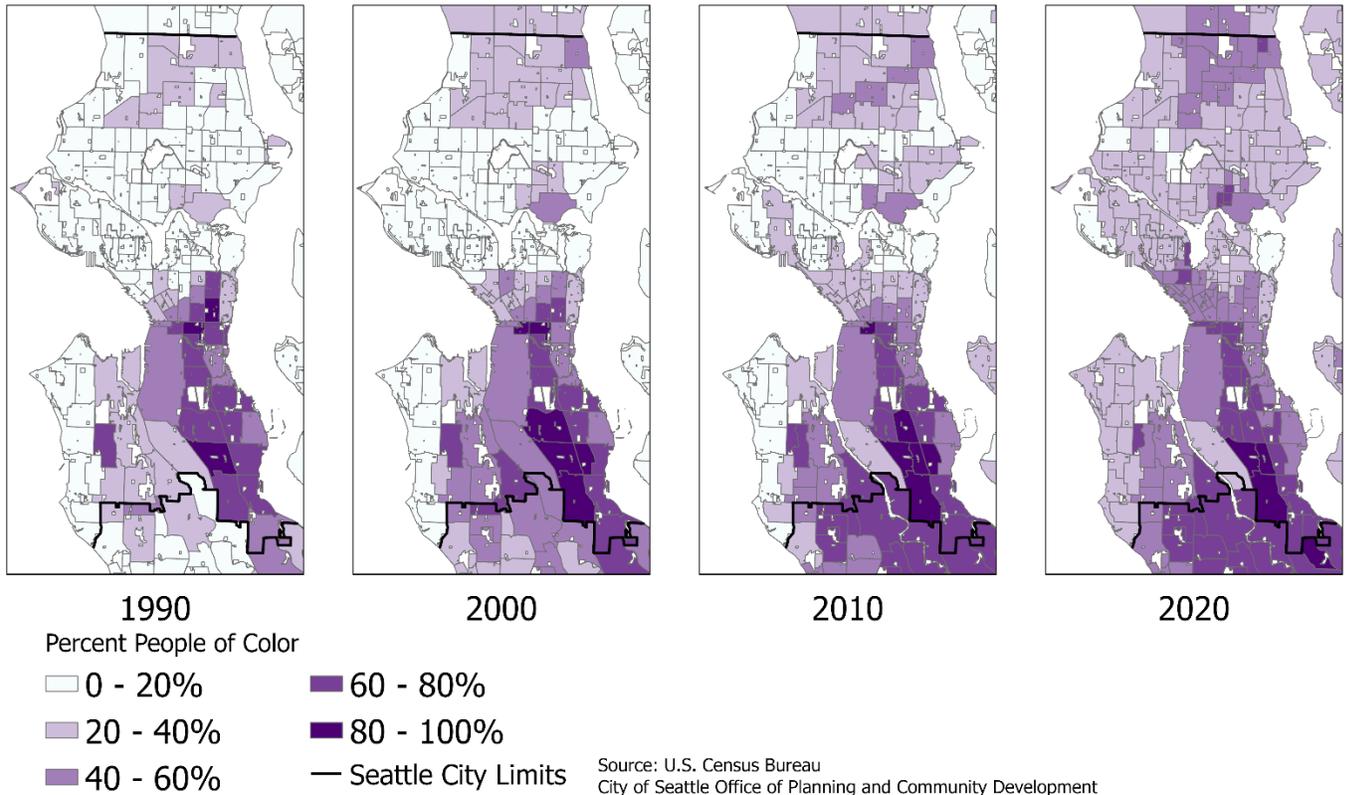
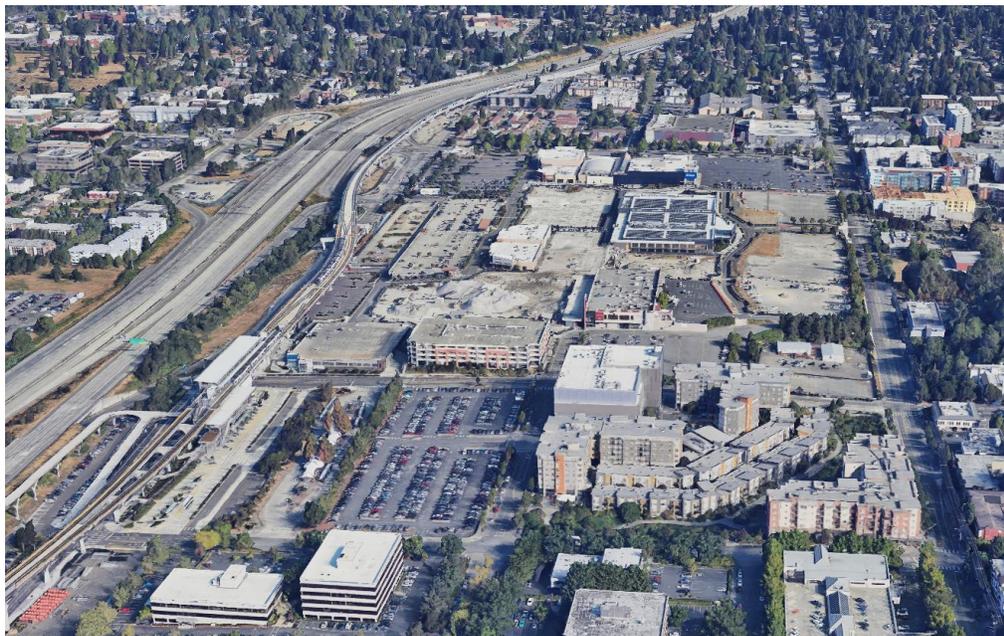


Image source: Draft “One Seattle” Comprehensive Plan, Housing Appendix, 2024.



This aerial photo is from Google Earth imagery, 2024. Most of the previous mall site has been demolished, the light rail station is integrated, and increased residential development surrounds the site.

Current Context

Today, Northgate is in a phase of transition and redevelopment. The introduction of the Link light rail station and the Kraken Community Iceplex has spurred a refreshed identity for the neighborhood. Development plans realize a vision for a mixed-use center where commercial development is complemented by office, housing, and community spaces. Redevelopment of the former mall site is underway, and existing plans incorporate a hotel, office sites, housing, retail, and a park. Existing land uses in the Regional Center boundary include a mix of residential, commercial, and institutional properties.³ Many lots remain vacant, however, and parking lots abound in the core of the Regional Center. This planning effort will build on the momentum of these redevelopment projects to establish a new vision for the future of Northgate.



Image Source: Chip Rountree, 2023.

Northgate 2023: Key Stats



Size: **412 acres**



Population: **8,486**



Housing Units: **5,004**



Jobs: **10,222**



Activity Unit Density: **45 au/acre**

Sources: Size calculated from King County Assessor data, 2023; Population from City of Seattle summarized OFM data, 2023; Housing Units from City of Seattle summary of King County Assessor data, 2023; Jobs based on ESD estimates for 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.

³ <https://www.simon.com/mall/northgate-station>

Planning Framework

The City of Seattle’s planning framework is set by the statewide Growth Management Act (GMA). Counties planning under the GMA are assigned growth targets, with allocations to cities made at the regional level through the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). PSRC’s regional framework for housing and job growth is then adopted by each of its four counties. Local comprehensive plans align with this growth strategy. See Exhibit 4. The Northgate Regional Center Plan nests under Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan, which outlines the citywide growth targets and neighborhood-specific targets. These allocations are important factors that guide investments in infrastructure and services, as well as land use policy development.

Exhibit 4: Planning Framework for Coordinated Statewide and Local Growth.

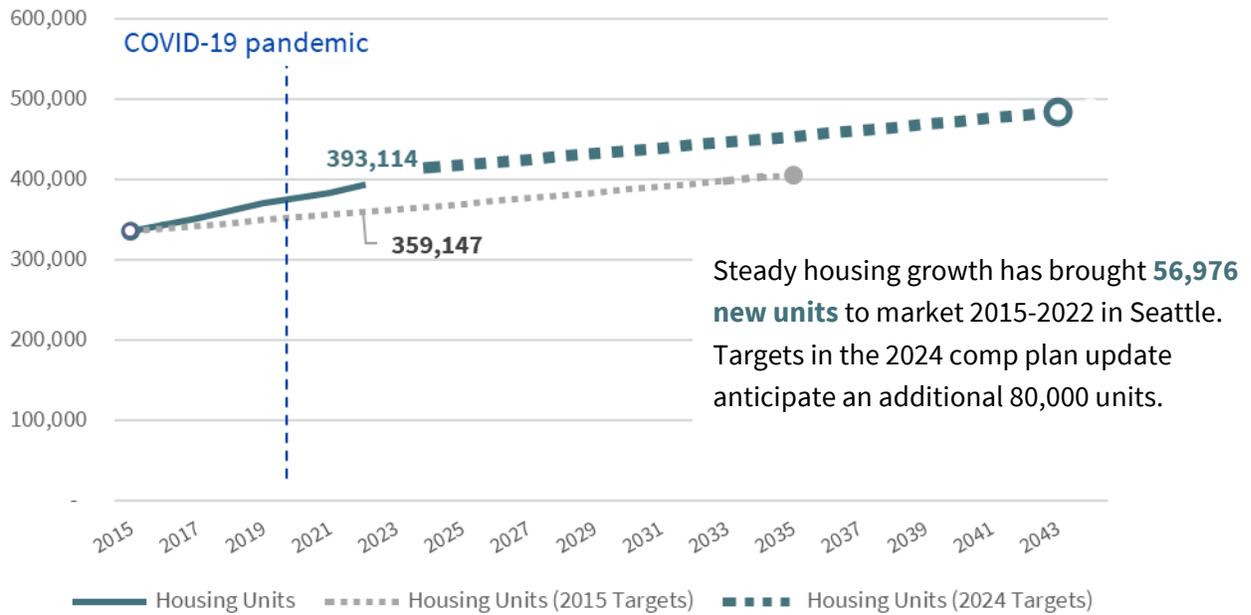


Image Source: PSRC, 2024.

With its light rail station and Regional Center designation, Northgate plays an important role in helping to achieve PSRC’s 65/75 goal. A cornerstone of achieving the greenhouse gas (GHG) targets established in VISION 2050 is for 65% of population growth and 75% of employment growth to occur within walkable access to high-capacity transit in regional growth centers. Furthermore, aligning growth with identified transportation corridors offers stability and clarity for business owners and developers to be able to concentrate investments in smart ways that support sustainability for generations to come. Smart growth in Northgate contributes to regional health by reducing the need for cars, increasing walkability, and cutting pollution.

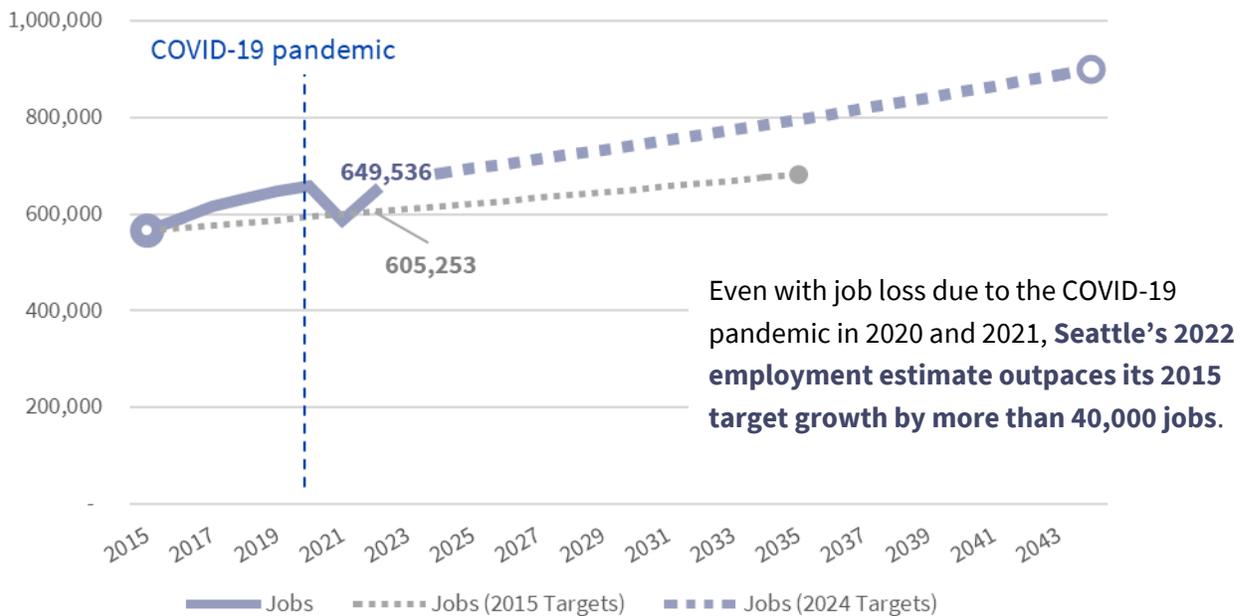
Seattle has outpaced its growth targets from the 2015 Comprehensive Plan. For both housing and jobs, Seattle has been growing at a faster rate than anticipated in 2015. Much of this exponential growth can be attributed to the explosion of the tech sector in South Lake Union. The 2024 Comprehensive Plan sets new growth targets for housing and jobs that align with higher expectations for future growth. See Exhibit 5 and Exhibit 6. Land use policy will be adjusted to align with these revised expectations and ensure adequate capacity for growth citywide.

Exhibit 5: Seattle Housing Units, Actual and Targets from 2015 & 2024 Comprehensive Plans



Note: Pace of growth from 2015 housing targets set based on a consistent CAGR to achieve 2035 targets.
Sources: City of Seattle “UCUV Housing Growth Report”, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.

Exhibit 6: Seattle Jobs, Actual and Targets from 2015 & 2024 Comprehensive Plans



Note: Pace of growth from 2015 housing targets set based on a consistent CAGR to achieve 2035 targets.
Sources: City of Seattle, 2023 “UCUV Job Growth Report”; Seva Workshop, 2024.

Seattle’s growth strategy is to develop a network of activity centers across the city where higher densities create the capacity needed to accommodate future population and employment growth.⁴ Northgate is one of seven proposed Regional Centers (though only six of these densest Centers are currently designated), where the highest intensities of future growth are expected to concentrate. The other existing Regional Centers are Downtown, First Hill/Capitol Hill, Uptown, South Lake Union, and the University District. Hub Urban Villages and Residential Urban Villages (as they exist in the 2015 version of the City’s Comprehensive Plan) add connective nodes of activity across the city’s geography. These designations align with investments for public transportation corridors and other planning efforts.

Since the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, all six of these Centers, except for Northgate, have outpaced the City’s overall growth rate for housing units. Housing units in South Lake Union have more than doubled over this timeframe and the adjacent Downtown subarea added 8,444 housing units. Overall, the six Regional Centers combine to account for 48% of all Seattle housing growth in this time period. See Exhibit 7.

Exhibit 7: Housing Units in Seattle and by Regional Center, 2015-2022.

| | Northgate | University District | SLU | Uptown | Downtown | First Hill/ Capitol Hill | All Regional Centers | All Seattle |
|-------------------------|------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| 2015 | 4,535 | 9,951 | 4,537 | 7,557 | 24,345 | 29,445 | 80,370 | 336,138 |
| 2016 | 4,535 | 10,256 | 5,564 | 7,623 | 24,675 | 30,521 | 83,174 | 342,799 |
| 2017 | 4,540 | 10,734 | 6,609 | 7,864 | 27,360 | 31,304 | 88,411 | 351,766 |
| 2018 | 4,509 | 10,927 | 8,534 | 8,023 | 28,143 | 32,678 | 92,814 | 360,258 |
| 2019 | 4,863 | 11,443 | 9,774 | 8,229 | 29,928 | 33,970 | 98,207 | 370,418 |
| 2020 | 4,871 | 12,049 | 9,774 | 8,588 | 30,732 | 34,758 | 100,772 | 376,161 |
| 2021 | 4,888 | 12,492 | 9,962 | 9,040 | 31,667 | 35,810 | 103,859 | 382,862 |
| 2022 | 4,992 | 12,747 | 11,151 | 9,207 | 32,789 | 37,048 | 107,934 | 393,114 |
| Change 2015-2022 | 457 | 2,796 | 6,614 | 1,650 | 8,444 | 7,603 | 27,564 | 56,976 |
| % Change | 10% | 28% | 146% | 22% | 35% | 26% | 34% | 17% |

Sources: City of Seattle summaries of permit data in “UCUV Growth Report”, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.

Job growth has been less consistent across the Regional Centers. Between 2015 and 2022, South Lake Union doubled its job count and Downtown and First Hill/Capitol Hill saw growth at pace with the citywide rate, while Uptown saw no net change and both Northgate and University District experienced employment loss. The three Regional Centers that experienced growth over this timeframe account for 87% of all new Seattle jobs 2015-2022. See Exhibit 8. A summary of today’s housing and jobs distribution across the city and its Regional Centers is shown in Exhibit 9.

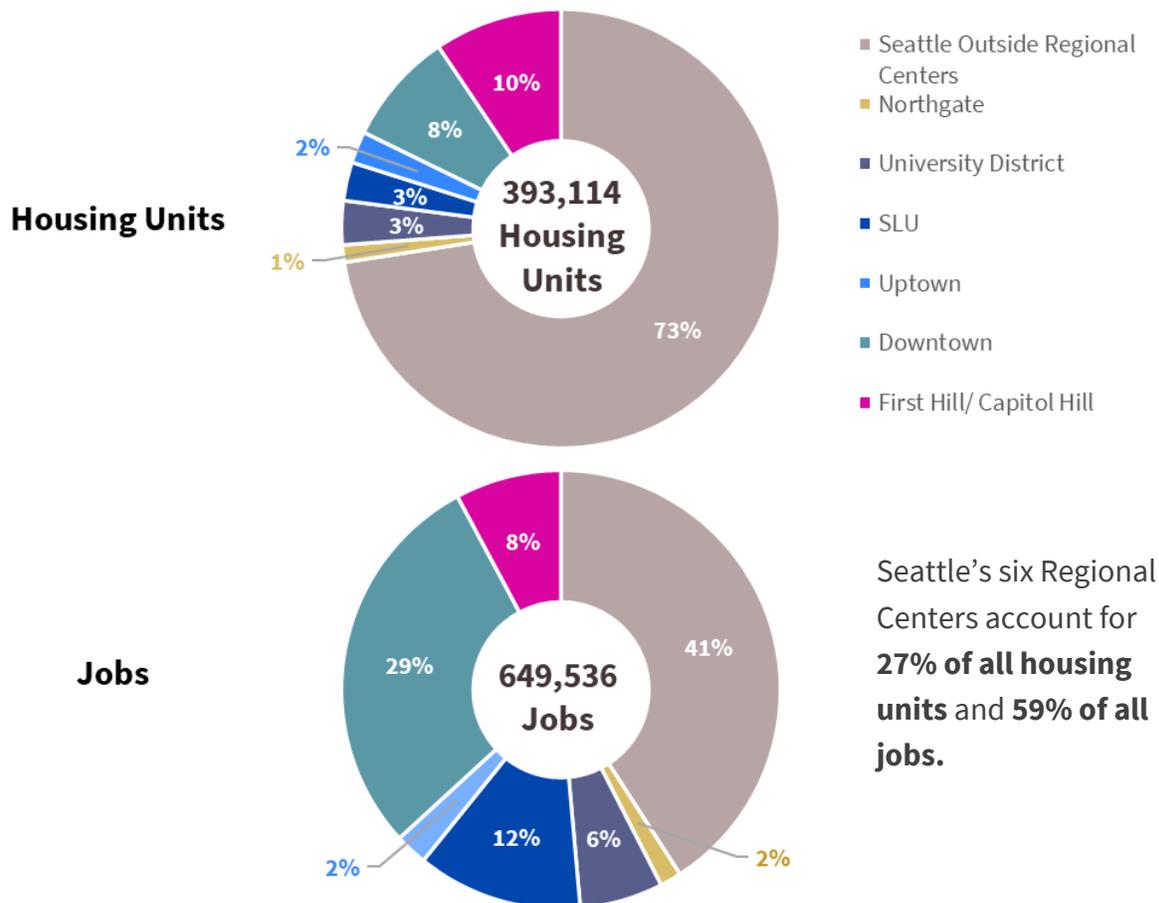
⁴ "Evolving Seattle's Growth Strategy", Seattle Planning Commission, 2020.

Exhibit 8: Jobs in Seattle and by Regional Center, 2015-2022.

| | Northgate | University District | SLU | Uptown | Downtown | First Hill/ Capitol Hill | All Regional Centers | All Seattle |
|-------------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------|------------|---------------|--------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| 2015 | 12,876 | 47,678 | 38,762 | 15,483 | 164,502 | 43,628 | 322,929 | 567,393 |
| 2016 | 13,327 | 48,355 | 44,060 | 15,541 | 171,833 | 45,554 | 338,670 | 590,124 |
| 2017 | 12,930 | 49,849 | 53,328 | 15,152 | 179,524 | 47,295 | 358,078 | 615,488 |
| 2018 | 12,759 | 45,233 | 62,414 | 15,638 | 188,243 | 47,755 | 372,042 | 631,727 |
| 2019 | 12,216 | 42,407 | 65,278 | 15,649 | 196,469 | 50,755 | 382,774 | 647,723 |
| 2020 | 10,883 | 41,589 | 76,773 | 15,340 | 200,029 | 51,454 | 396,068 | 658,939 |
| 2021 | 10,035 | 38,308 | 75,735 | 1,268 | 175,319 | 45,703 | 346,368 | 586,969 |
| 2022 | 10,250 | 39,834 | 79,328 | 15,477 | 188,258 | 50,867 | 384,014 | 649,536 |
| Change 2015-2022 | (2,626) | (7,844) | 40,566 | (6) | 23,756 | 7,239 | 61,085 | 82,143 |
| % Change | -20% | -16% | 105% | 0% | 14% | 17% | 19% | 14% |

Sources: City of Seattle summaries of ESD estimates, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.

Exhibit 9: Housing Units and Jobs for Seattle and its Regional Centers, 2022.



Sources: City of Seattle UCUV Growth Reports, 2022; Seva Workshop, 2024.

This Regional Center Plan is being developed in parallel with the City of Seattle 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update. The population and employment targets used in this Plan align with allocations from the City and County, falling under the overarching vision of PSRC’s VISION 2050 and Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan. It is one small piece of this larger framework for responsible and coordinated growth for the Puget Sound region. Seattle’s allocation is 80,000 housing units and 159,000 jobs in the 2024-2044 timeframe, though the Comprehensive Plan’s EIS studied additional housing units (up to 120,000).

In the 2024 Comprehensive Plan update, Regional Centers such as Northgate are referenced as places of regional importance due to their housing, office, retail, and/or cultural and entertainment uses. Policies specific to Regional Centers highlight the importance of allowing a wide range of higher-density housing types, non-residential uses (including most of the city’s office development), and adopting subarea plans that respond to the unique challenges and opportunities of each designated center.

For the 2024-2044 planning horizon, 46% of Seattle’s housing units and 61% of its job growth are allocated to its 6 Regional Centers. In 2015, Northgate was the smallest subarea in terms of both housing unit and job counts. By targets, the area is expected to remain the smallest of the Regional Centers for housing units but grow proportionally as a jobs center to exceed the employment levels of Uptown.

Northgate as a Native Neighborhood

The Native Neighborhood concept incorporates multiple nodes throughout Seattle that are places of healing and belonging. A Native Neighborhood is a safe space where Native and Indigenous People can gather to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions. Native Neighborhood spaces will provide the urban Native community with culturally relevant homes, gathering places, facilities for businesses, restaurants, daycares, elder care, programs, and health services.

There has always been interest in Northgate in relation to Seattle's Indigenous community. The neighborhood features the northernmost Link Light Rail station (as of this writing), making it accessible by many modes of transport. With a high concentration of Native Organizations and programs currently Downtown, there is a need for additional spaces that offer services for the Native Community in other locations throughout Seattle. Northgate provides bountiful opportunities to add such resources.

Building on Previous and Ongoing Work

Previous Planning Efforts

The Northgate Comprehensive Plan and Implementation Matrix- 1993 & 2001

The 1993 Northgate Comprehensive Plan charts a path for transitioning the “auto-oriented office/retail area” into a walkable, “mixed-use center of concentrated development”. The plan’s 16 policies lay the groundwork for many of today’s signature assets in the subarea – plans for a future light rail station; the library, community center, and park site; and the daylighting of Thornton Creek. This plan identifies 5th Avenue NE as the “Main Street” of the neighborhood and the corresponding design overlay district reinforced this with streetscape standards to enhance pedestrian experience.

The 2001 Implementation Matrix continues the work of the 1993 plan by outlining action steps that align with identified goals and policies. This workplan identifies the need for updates to the overlay district, amendments to density limits and affordable housing incentive programs, continued pedestrian and bike system enhancements, and establishing what is now Hubbard Homestead Park.

Northgate Public Art Plan – 2005

The Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs established an Artist-in-Residence in 2004/2005 to study and make recommendations for improving public art in Northgate. This artist, Benson Shaw, designed art for the Thornton Creek Water Quality Channel as part of this process – still on display today. The study area for the project was a broader boundary – aligning with the Northgate Overlay District, which includes neighborhoods of Haller Lake, Licton Spring, Maple Leaf, Victory Heights, and Pinehurst. The vision established in this plan is that new public art in Northgate should “celebrate the area’s emerging urban identity” and “be or show something remarkable, unexpected, and poetic”. The four goal areas for artists and artwork are to enhance

1. The pedestrian experience
2. Sense of place
3. Circulation or connection routes
4. Local or regional identity

The implementation plan identifies public agency partners (SDOT, SPU, SDPR, Sound Transit, King County Metro, WSDOT) and key areas for implementation focus. Key areas include Northgate Way (including concept drawings for the I-5 underpass and the intersection at 5th Avenue), 5th Avenue near the library, and the Thornton Creek Water Quality Channel and its connections to the local grid. All transit stations are also included. Many of the proposed projects have come to fruition in Northgate, while others remain unrealized.

Urban Design Framework – 2013

In 2013, OPCD created an urban design framework for Northgate. This effort was conducted in preparation for incoming light rail and a continuation of the 1993 plan for a transformation of the Northgate neighborhood into a denser, transit-oriented community. The key design principles identified were to:

- Provide landscaping, amenity, and accessibility enhancements along key corridors
- Incorporate generous public spaces, amenities, and art in future development
- Break up “superblocks” with a network of pedestrian-oriented connections
- Design buildings that reinforce the pedestrian realm
- Include environmental sustainability features into new developments
- Enhance transit service frequency and reliability

Many of the recommendations of this framework have come to fruition, such as the completion of the pedestrian bridge that links the North Seattle College campus to the light rail station and the development of affordable housing adjacent to the light rail station. Other components remain unrealized – such as completion of the “loop” concept by enhancing the I-5 underpass on Northgate Way and making significant pedestrian improvements on 5th Ave between 103rd and 105th St NE.

Native Neighborhood Community Study – 2022

This 2022 report is a collective effort by sləp̓iləbəx^w (Rising Tides) Indigenous Planning Group, the Na’ah Illahee Fund staff, and Seattle’s urban Native community. The work outlines a vision for Native Neighborhoods in the Seattle area, grounded in core values and community vision. Traditional values highlighted in the report are: relationship, respect, accepting only what you need, responsibility, reciprocity, and appreciation.

This report outlines urban visions that are co-created with Indigenous communities, guided by traditional sustainable values that connect people, nature, and the earth. When prioritized in planning decisions, these values and visions create places “of healing and belonging” for Indigenous communities to honor the legacy of the land’s original stewards. Supportive infrastructure that would help Northgate serve as a Native Neighborhood include:

- Housing access, affordability, and security
- Access to food, transportation, and affordable energy
- A “gardens everywhere” mindset
- Housing that fosters multigenerational living arrangements
- Residential environments that are safe, quiet, and peaceful

Current Planning Efforts in Progress

Seattle Transportation Plan Update & EIS

The Seattle Transportation Plan is the City of Seattle's long-term vision for the future of transportation in Seattle. The STP addresses mobility, access, and public space needs in a single document as a unified system. This effort incorporates several city initiatives like Seattle's Vision Zero, the Race and Social Justice Initiative, the Climate Action Plan, the Transportation Electrification Blueprint, and others. Additionally, the STP references plans created by other regional transportation agencies.

Seattle Parks and Open Space Plan Update

The City of Seattle's Parks and Open Space Plan (POS) was adopted in 2017 and is updated every 6 years, with the next major update planned for 2024. It provides an inventory of existing parks and open space, objectives for future actions, demand and need analysis including demographic and recreation trends, and recommended capital projects. In the Draft 2024 PROS Plan, Northgate is identified as a priority area for investments to improve access to parks and open space.

CITYWIDE LAND USE

This section explores Seattle’s proposed Future Land Use Map (FLUM), as well as existing conditions for land use across the city’s Regional Centers. The FLUM is currently in draft form, undergoing public review and comment. Anticipated adoption of Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan is in 2025.

Future Land Use

The Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map (FLUM) is a policy map of the 20-year vision of preferred land use patterns within the city. In the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, four land use area types implement the urban village strategy—Urban Centers (proposed to be renamed “Regional Centers” in the 2024 plan), Hub Urban Villages, Residential Urban Villages, and Manufacturing/Industrial Centers (MICs). Four other land use types—neighborhood residential areas, multifamily residential areas, commercial/mixed-use areas, and industrial areas—are meant to suggest specific uses outside of the urban villages. The FLUM also designates major institutions, cemeteries, and city-owned open space.

The future land use designations are implemented by a corresponding range of zoning districts and development regulations established in [Title 23 of the Seattle Municipal Code \(SMC\)](#). Zoning overlays also exist in certain locations, such as around major institution overlay districts and in master planned communities. Property located within an overlay district is subject both to its zone classification regulations and to additional requirements imposed for the overlay district. The overlay district provisions apply if they conflict with the provisions of the underlying zone.

Exhibit 10: FLUM and Implementing Zones, 2023.

| Future Land Use Designation | Typical Implementing Zones |
|--|---|
| <p>Urban Centers</p> <p>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.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Downtown (DH1, DH2, DMC, DMR, DOC1, DOC2, and DRC) ▪ Pike Market Mixed (PMM), Pioneer Square Mixed (PSM), and International District Mixed and Residential (IDM and IDR) ▪ Seattle Mixed (SM) ▪ Lowrise, Midrise, and Highrise Multifamily (LR3, MR, and HR) ▪ Neighborhood Commercial (NC2, and NC3) ▪ Commercial (C1 and C2) |

Sources: City of Seattle and BERK “One Seattle” Draft Plan EIS, 2023.

The City of Seattle is currently updating its Comprehensive Plan. One major shift proposed in this update is the term “Urban Center” changing to “Regional Center.” Additionally, Ballard has

been added as a seventh Regional Center. Naming categories for other centers have changed as well. The term “Urban Center” is also repurposed to describe a slightly less dense neighborhood type that serves an important citywide role. As the Comprehensive Plan is in draft form during the development of this subarea plan, the addition of Ballard as a Regional Center is not yet reflected in this document. Another change shown in the Future Land Use Map (FLUM), shown in Exhibit 11, is that there are no land uses for “multifamily residential” or “commercial/mixed-use areas” outside of identified centers. Instead, these areas are all designated “urban neighborhoods” which are defined as places outside of centers “appropriate for primarily residential development” although there are provisions for “mixed-use and commercial development along major streets along with at-home businesses, corner stores, and small institutions located throughout.”

Land area in the City of Seattle encompasses approximately 83.83 square miles (53,651 acres). The largest future land use designation category in the city is “urban neighborhood”, accounting for 55% of the city’s area. Another one-quarter of the city is designated as a center (26%) with 7% in Regional Centers, 14% in Urban Centers, 5% in Neighborhood Centers, and 11% in MICs. Of the remaining quarter of the city, 10% is designated as parks and open space, 1% is designated as major institution, and land designated as cemeteries or industrial areas outside the MICs account for less than 1% each.⁵

⁵ Draft EIS for One Seattle Comprehensive Plan, March 2024. Urban neighborhood calculation includes both “urban neighborhood” and “corridors” designations in the report.

Exhibit 11: Citywide Future Land Use Designations

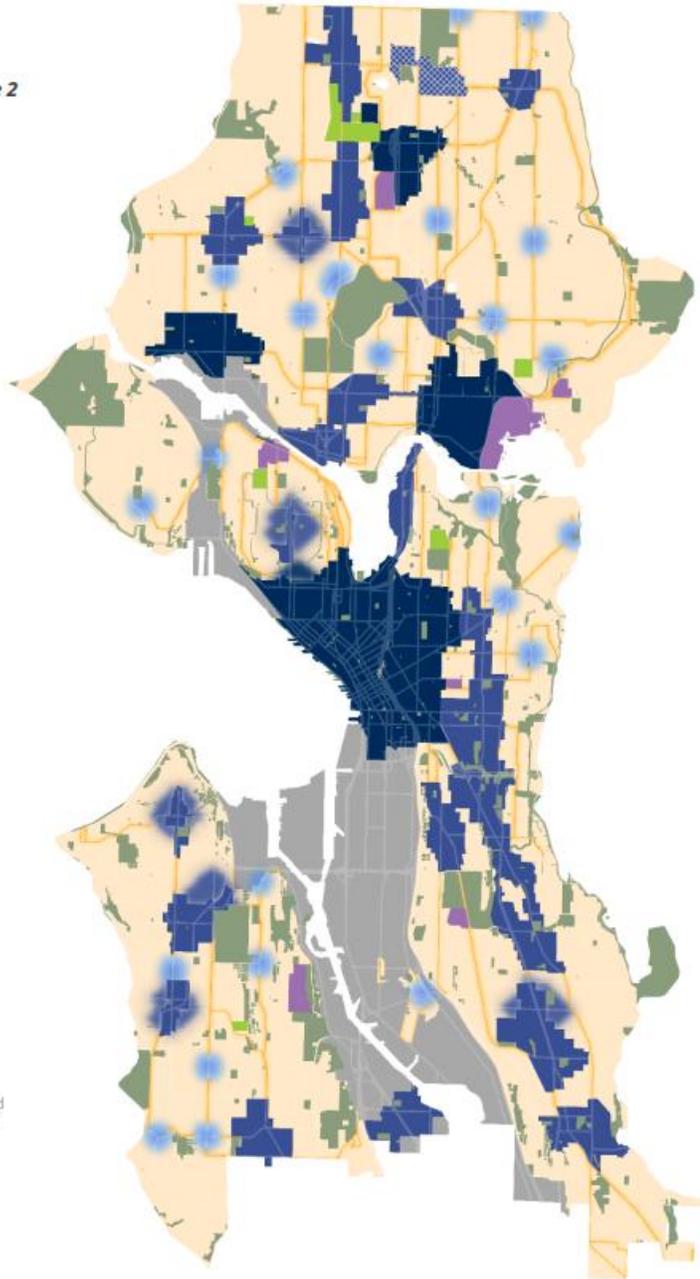
Future Land Use Map, Figure 2

Place types

-  Regional Center
-  Urban Center
-  Neighborhood Center
-  Manufacturing & Industrial Center
-  Urban Neighborhood
-  Expanded Regional or Urban Center
-  New Urban Center

Other areas

-  Industrial outside Manufacturing & Industrial Centers
-  Major Institution
-  Parks and open space
-  Cemetery
-  Frequent transit route
Frequent transit network, existing and future, along which zoning for higher density housing will be considered.



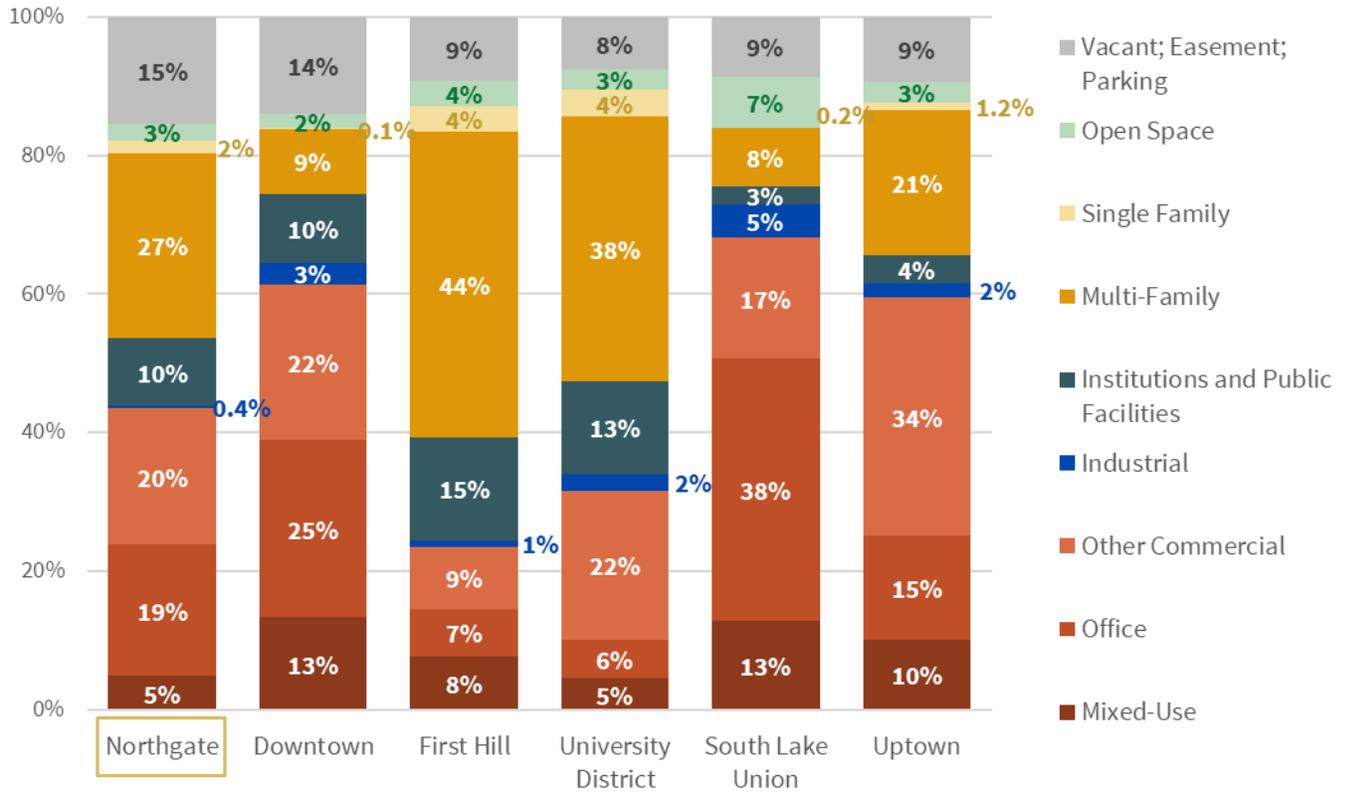
Sources: City of Seattle “One Seattle” Draft Plan, 2024 (most recent draft, as of this writing).

Existing Land Use for Regional Centers

There are currently six Regional (formerly Urban) Centers, six Hub Urban Villages, 18 Residential Urban Villages, and two Manufacturing Industrial Centers (MICs) in the city. The six Regional Centers (Downtown, Uptown, South Lake Union, First Hill/Capitol Hill, University District, and Northgate) and two MICs (Greater Duwamish MIC and Ballard–Interbay–Northend MIC [BINMIC]) are also designated PSRC Metro Regional Growth Centers (RGCs) and Employment MICs, respectively. These regionally designated centers are part of the regional growth strategy in VISION 2050 to focus growth in urban areas with access to transit.

The six Regional Centers represent the most densely populated areas in Seattle. Land use across these neighborhoods reflect a concentration of commercial and multifamily properties. Northgate stands out for its high percentage of vacant/parking lot uses (15%, the highest among the six areas). Its balance of multifamily, institutional, and commercial acreage falls within the regional center norms and most closely reflects the balance of uses in Uptown. Downtown, South Lake Union, and Uptown all have the highest compilations of commercial land uses, while First Hill, University District, and Northgate have the highest percentage of multifamily (non mixed-use) properties. This reflects the strong commercial identity of central Seattle and the more residential influence in the centers outside of this connected core. See Exhibit 12.

Exhibit 12: Land Use by Parcel Acreage Across Regional Centers, 2023.



Sources: King County Assessor as organized by City of Seattle, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.

NORTHGATE ZONING

As of this writing (prior to zoning changes stemming from the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan), zoning in Northgate is predominantly Neighborhood Commercial 3 (NC3) and Midrise (MR) with lowrise multifamily zones along the periphery and the Seattle Mixed zone around the transit station area. The hospital campus is covered with a Major Institution Overlay (MIO). Areas directly surrounding the regional center are lower density Neighborhood Residential zones. See table in Exhibit 13 for a summary of acreage and residential density by zone.

- **51% of the Northgate Regional Center is zoned Neighborhood Commercial (NC3).** NC3 zoning is intended for larger pedestrian-oriented shopping districts that provide a wide range of goods and services to the surrounding neighborhoods and a larger community or region. Compatible uses in these zones include housing, offices, and business support services. The height maximums for these parcels range from 55' to 145'.⁶
- **1% of the Northgate Regional Center is zoned NC2.** NC2 zoning is intended for moderately-sized pedestrian-oriented shopping areas. Compatible uses include housing and offices. There are only six parcels zoned NC2 in the subarea – three at 55' height and three at 75'.
- **7% of the Northgate Regional Center is zoned Seattle Mixed (SM).** The SM zone is intended to achieve the goal of a diverse, mixed-use community with a strong pedestrian orientation. The zone permits a wide range of uses and promotes density to encourage a mixed-use neighborhood. In Northgate, the light rail station and its adjoining parking lot, as well as office buildings to the south, are covered by this zone.
- **11% of the Northgate Regional Center is zoned MIO.** This covers the UW Medical Center. This zoning overlay gives special allowance for the needs and plans of major educational and medical institutions. The zone's intention is to balance the physical space needs of major institution campuses with the livability of adjoining neighborhoods. A master planning process is required as part of this designation.⁷
- **1% of the Northgate Regional Center is zoned Residential Small Lot (RSL).** This area is found in a two small strips: one to the northwest of the North Seattle College campus and the other at the far east of the subarea. RSL zoning is intended to support small scale development on lots within urban villages. Compared to other neighborhood residential zones, these areas have greater flexibility for accessory dwelling units. The height maximum is 30'.⁸
- **20% of the Northgate Urban Center is zoned for lowrise multifamily: LR1, LR2, or LR3.** These parcels encircle the subarea. LR zones are intended to support lower density

⁶ <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDCI/Codes/CommercialZoningSummary.pdf>

⁷ SMC 23.69 Major Institution Overlay District

⁸ <https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/SDCI/Codes/NeighborhoodResidentialZoningSummary.pdf>

multifamily housing types, such as cottage housing, townhomes, or small apartment buildings.⁹

- LR 1 zones have a maximum height of 30’ and max FAR of 1.0 (or 1.3 where MHA applies). LR1 zoning is considered most appropriate outside of growth areas.
- LR 2 zones increase the FAR maximum to 1.1 and, compared to LR1, townhomes and multifamily housing structures can be wider. Where MHA applies, FAR can go up to 1.4 and heights up to 40’. LR2 zoning is considered appropriate along neighborhoods with arterial streets and within growth areas.
- LR 3 zones extend the maximum height to 40’ for apartment buildings and the FAR maximum to 1.2 for cottage housing or townhomes and 1.5 for apartments. Where MHA applies, FAR is up to 2.3 and heights up to 50’. LR3 zoning is considered appropriate in multifamily neighborhoods with good access to transit and within growth areas.
- **9% of the Northgate Regional Center is zoned MR.** MR zoning is intended to provide concentrations of housing in pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods with convenient access to transit and jobs. In Northgate, MR parcels are found in scattered locations surrounding the NC3 core. The height limit is 80’ where MHA applies and 60’ without.

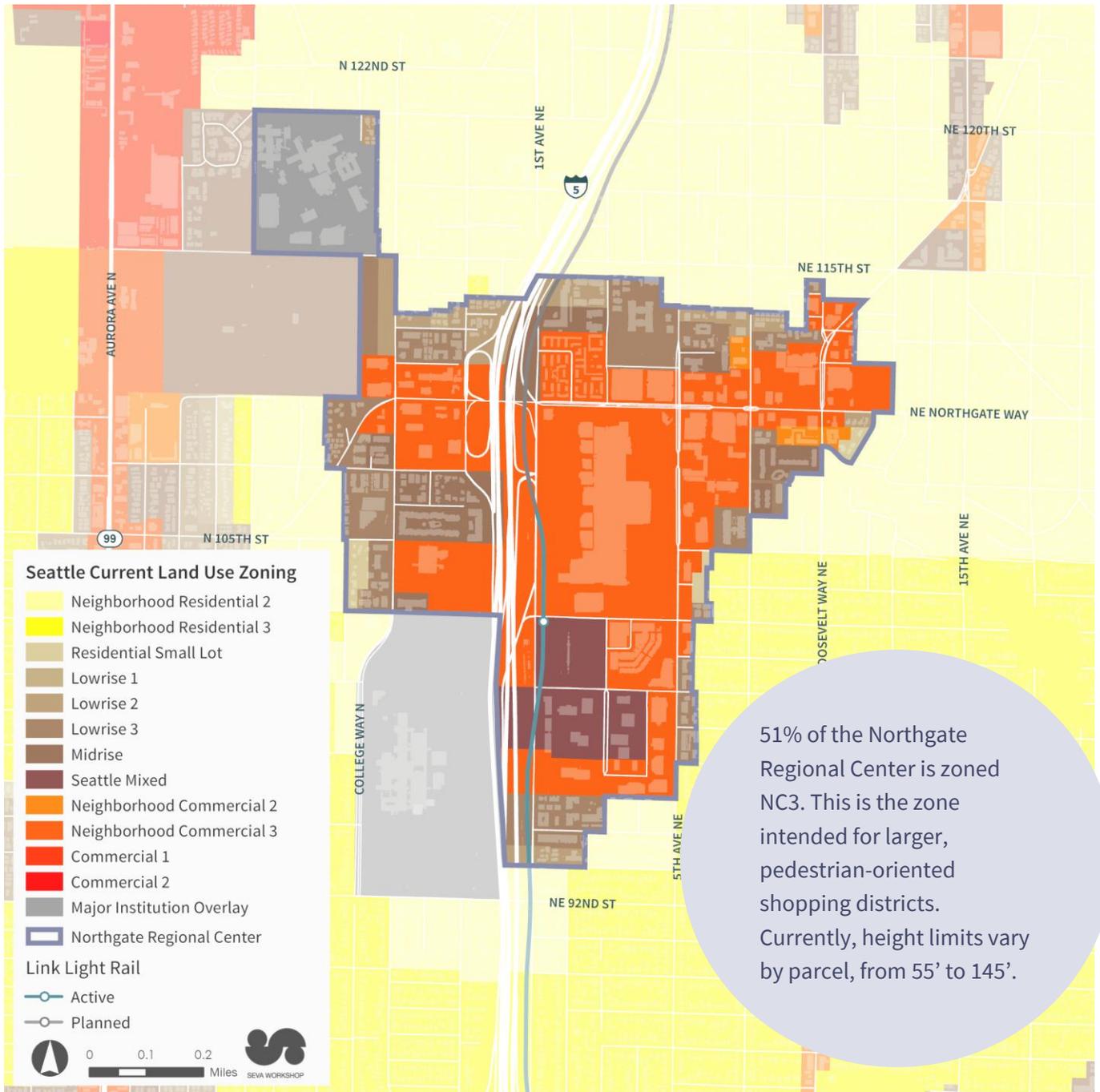
Exhibit 13: Zoning in Northgate by Acreage and Residential Density.

| Zone | Acreage | % Total | Total Housing Units | Residential Density (units/acre) |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Neighborhood Commercial 3 (NC3) | 154.1 | 51% | 2,240 | 14.5 |
| Neighborhood Commercial 2 (NC2) | 3.3 | 1% | 38 | 11.6 |
| Seattle Mixed (SM) | 21.4 | 7% | 0 | 0 |
| Major Institution Overlay (MIO) | 32.9 | 11% | 0 | 0 |
| Residential Small Lot (RSL) | 4.1 | 1% | 32 | 7.7 |
| Lowrise 1 (LR1) | 0.5 | 0.2% | 12 | 23.4 |
| Lowrise 2 (LR2) | 11.4 | 4% | 358 | 31.3 |
| Lowrise 3 (LR3) | 46.1 | 15% | 1,712 | 37.1 |
| Midrise (MR) | 25.8 | 9% | 1,502 | 58.1 |

Sources: King County Assessor, 2023; City of Seattle, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.

⁹ <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDCI/Codes/MultifamilyZoningSummary.pdf>

Exhibit 14: Northgate Zoning Map, 2023.



Sources: City of Seattle, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2023.

The Northgate Overlay District

Design standards for the subarea are detailed in the Northgate Overlay District guidelines - [SMC 23.71](#). This framework was established in 1993 and subsequently updated in 1996, 2000, and 2003, but has not been updated to reflect the recent major land use changes in Northgate. These guidelines apply to a larger geography surrounding the neighborhood core, as shown in Exhibit 15. The policies of the overlay district are designed to support pedestrian mobility, protect the residential character of residential neighborhoods, and support the use of the high-capacity transportation center. Some key elements of this overlay district include:

1. Designation of four street types with unique design standards: Major Pedestrian Street, Special Landscaped Arterial, Green Street Type II, and Green Street Type III.
2. Provisions for open space requirements for developments within commercial zones, based on building height.
3. Details for the creation of Transportation Management Programs (TMPs) at sites generating high frequency of anticipated trips.
4. Designation of transition areas, with unique development standards.

Within the Regional Center boundary, guidelines for three of the four major street types identified exist. Northgate Way and 5th Avenue have segments of the “Major Pedestrian Street” designation. 5th Avenue then continues to the south and this segment, along with connections along 103rd and 100th Street, are “Special Landscaped Arterials.” 3rd Avenue north of the mall is a “Green Street Type II” – this area connects between the existing residential development to the west and Hubbard Homestead Park to the east.



This photograph, taken from Google Streetview, captures NE Northgate Way between 5th Ave and 8th Ave, a designated Major Pedestrian Street. It has wider sidewalks, activated storefronts, and landscape buffers separating the sidewalk from the street. It still fronts 5 lanes of traffic, however, making protected crossings an important priority.



This photograph, taken from Google Streetview, captures the Green Street along 3rd Avenue. Wider sidewalks and enhanced landscaping contribute to a pedestrian-oriented feel along this pathway.

A broad overview of the street types defined within the Regional Center is provided below, with full detail to be found in the municipal code:¹⁰

- **Major Pedestrian Street:** On these primary corridors, a minimum of 60% of a lot’s frontage must be dedicated to active uses, such as retail, parks, or lodging. For the structure on the site, 80% of the street-level frontage must be activated. Building setbacks cannot exceed 10’ unless open space is provided. Businesses must have a pedestrian-oriented entrance, even if there is an additional entrance facing a parking lot. Parking cannot exceed 40% of the street frontage and should be located to the rear or side of a structure and screened from public view by decorative treatment. Sidewalks should be a minimum width of 12’ with trees planted to DoT standards. Street furniture and planting boxes are required adjacent to the street.
- **Special Landscaped Arterials:** These corridors, which lead directly to the light rail station and transit center, require the planting of street trees and either a 12’ sidewalk or a 6’ sidewalk with a 6’ planting strip. Other pedestrian improvements, as determined by DoT, can be requested – such as special pavers, lighting, or benches.
- **Green Street Type II:** Green streets give priority of circulation to pedestrians over other uses via treatments such as sidewalk widening, landscaping, traffic calming, or other features.

There are many streets within the boundary that do not have any additional design standards, leaving clear gaps in the quality of pedestrian experience. Notably, no streets west of I-5 are identified for improvement. This detracts from employee, student, and visitor walkability at the hospital and college campuses in this part of the subarea.

¹⁰ SMC 23.71



This photograph shows the sidewalk along 1st Avenue connecting the light rail station to Northgate Way. Some interventions have been implemented to improve the pedestrian experience, such as landscaping, but the proximity to the wide, high-speed roadway impairs pedestrian safety and increases exposure to roadway emissions. Additionally, the road lacks bike lanes, which creates unsafe conditions for cyclists.



This photograph shows Northgate Way at the I-5 underpass. This area is not currently included for street types in the design guidelines but is an essential component for completing a network of walkable or transit-oriented commuting for employees at the Northwest Hospital site. The wide street, narrow sidewalks, street noise, and lack of landscaping detract from the quality of a pedestrian experience.

NORTHGATE LAND USE

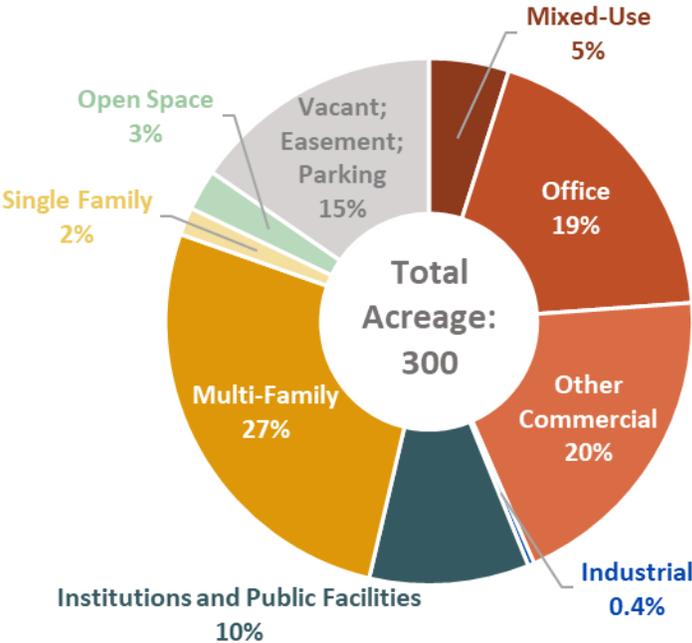
This section explores the current land use patterns in Northgate. It should be noted that categories are assigned to parcels based on predominant use, removing some detail nuance for the site. Still, assessment of this mix and balance of uses provides valuable insight into how this Regional Center is experienced today.

Existing Land Use Pattern

The Northgate Regional Center today consists primarily of commercial and mixed-use properties, followed by multifamily residential and institutional uses. There are also scattered sites with single family homes, industrial uses, and park/open spaces. See a breakdown of land use by the acreage of parcels in Exhibit 16.

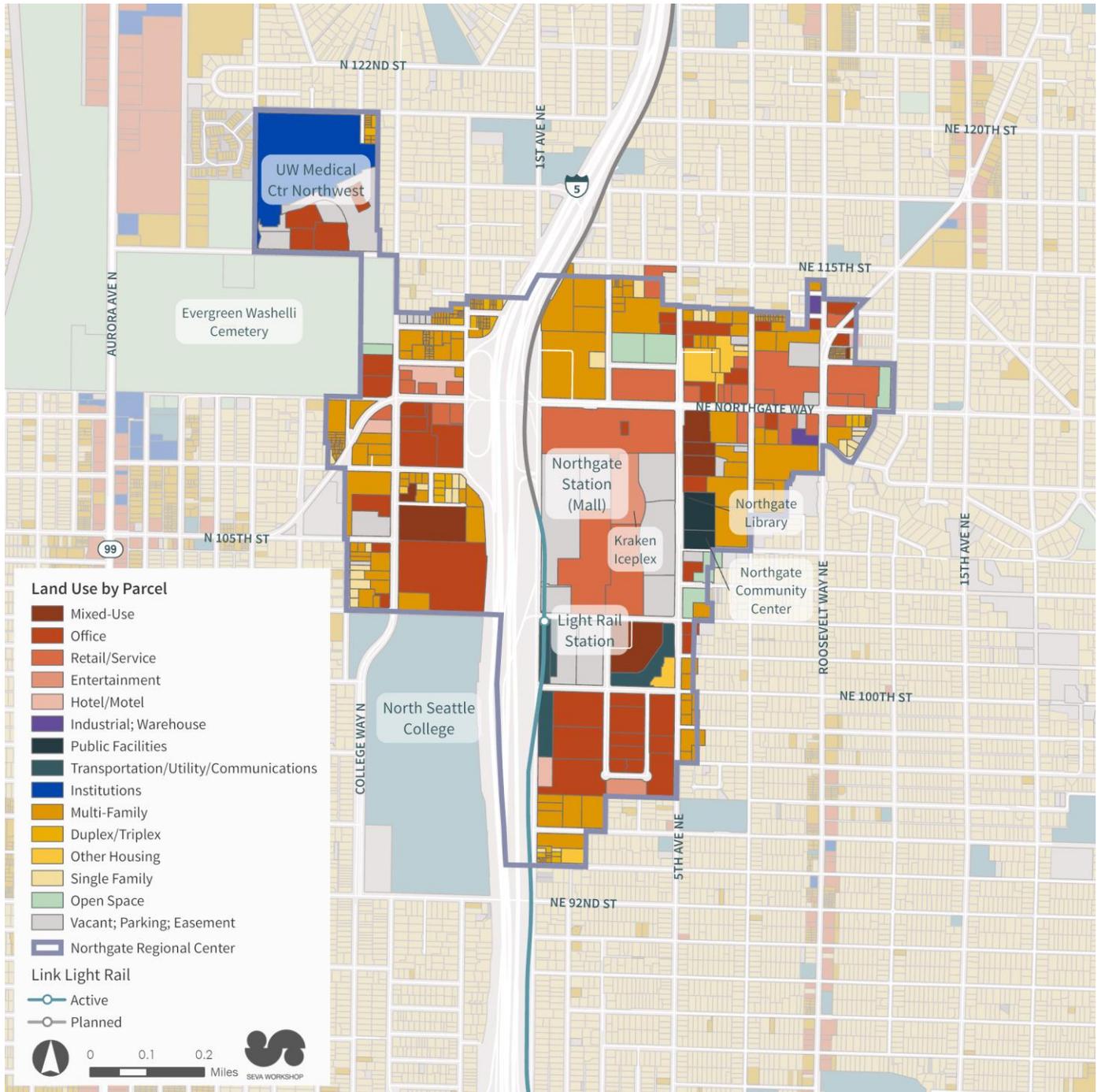
This Regional Center is anchored by a few key sites: the light rail station and adjoining transit center, the mall (now called Northgate Station and includes the Kraken Community Iceplex), and the UW Medical Center Northwest. Additional sites of community importance include the Northgate Library and Northgate Community Center. North Seattle College is also positioned directly adjacent to this Regional Center and is an important driver of pedestrian traffic, employment, and demand for housing units. These sites and land uses are mapped in Exhibit 17.

Exhibit 16: Northgate Land Use by Acreage, 2023.



Sources: King County Assessor, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.

Exhibit 17: Northgate Land Use, 2023.



Source: King County Assessor, 2023; City of Seattle, 2024; Seva Workshop, 2024.

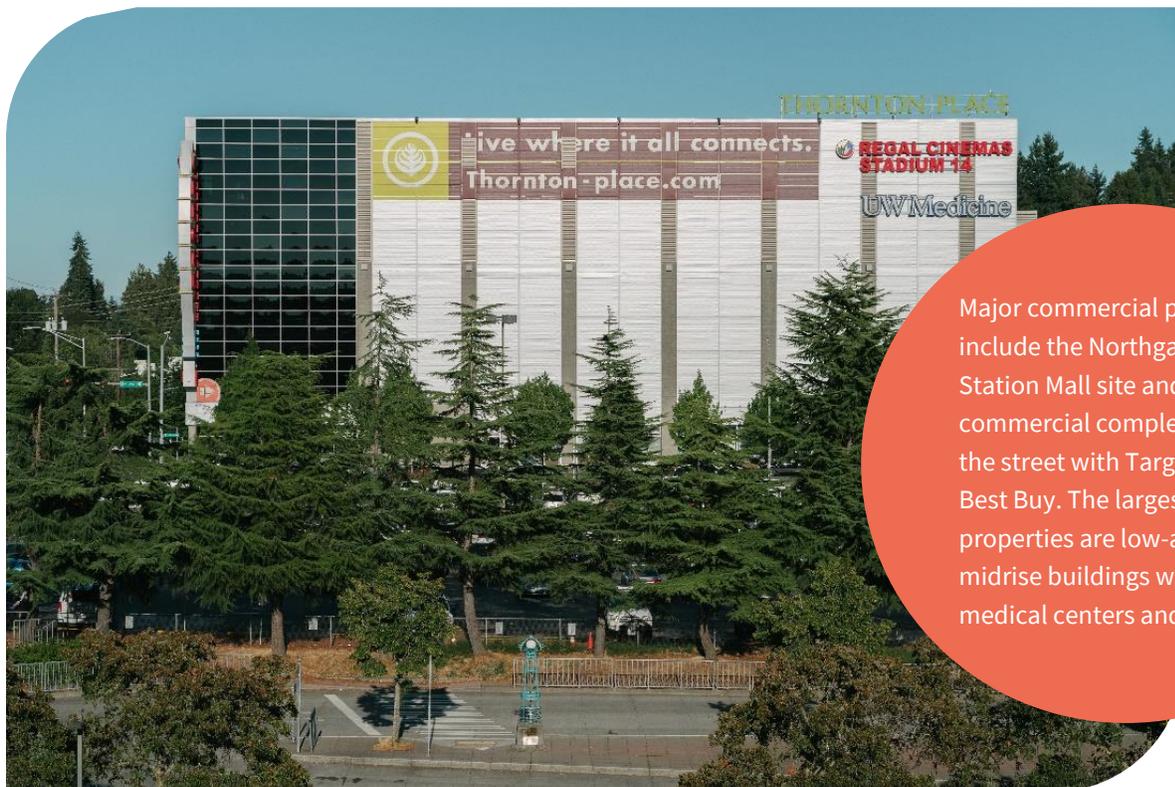
Commercial/Mixed Use

For decades, Northgate has served as a major retail and commercial hub in Seattle. There are 130 acres and 6.4 million square feet of commercial/mixed-use buildings in this Regional Center. This land use category includes commercial property for retail uses, office space, and multifamily buildings that incorporate mixed uses like ground floor retail, hotels, and entertainment uses. A summary table of these breakouts is in Exhibit 18. Office uses are the largest use by acreage while retail uses are the largest by building area.

Exhibit 18: Commercial Land Use Detail in Northgate, 2023.

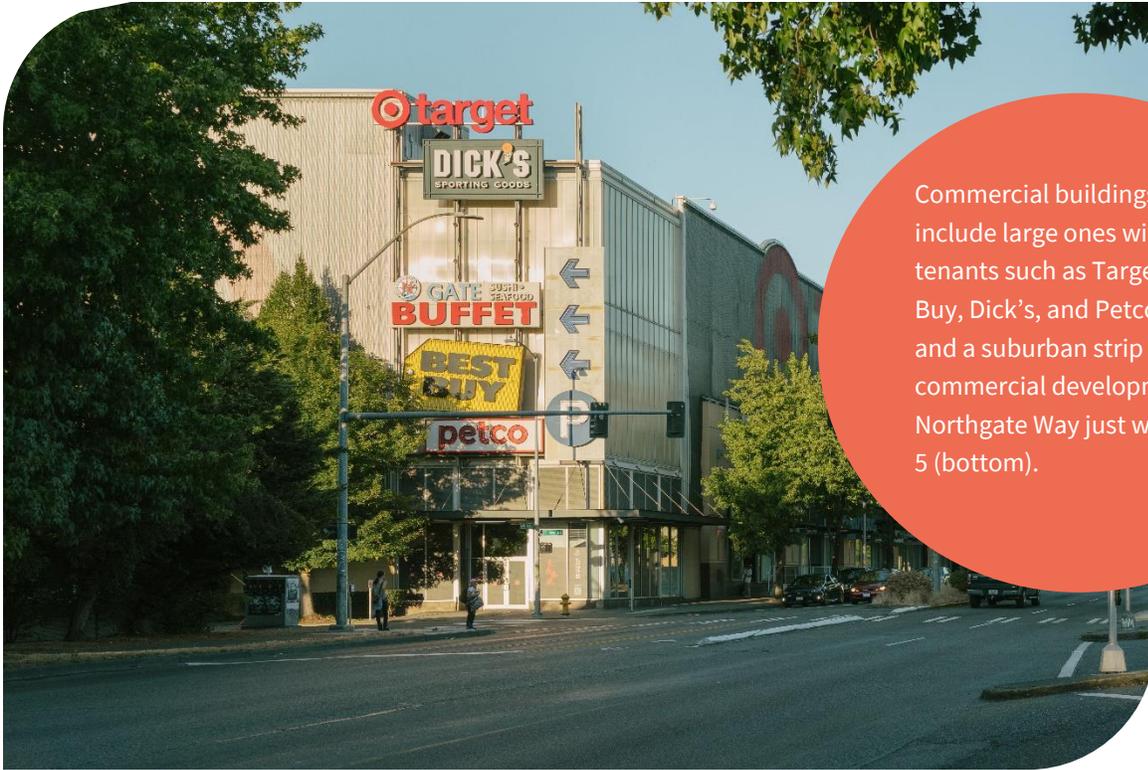
| | Parcel Count | Acreage | Building Square Footage (gross) |
|----------------|--------------|------------|---------------------------------|
| Retail/Service | 28 | 49 | 2,187,086 |
| Office | 43 | 57 | 1,848,125 |
| Mixed-Use | 8 | 15 | 1,767,064 |
| Hotel/Motel | 3 | 3 | 347,906 |
| Entertainment | 3 | 7 | 262,510 |
| Total | 85 | 130 | 6,412,691 |

Sources: King County Assessor, 2023; City of Seattle detail, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.



Major commercial properties include the Northgate Station Mall site and commercial complex across the street with Target and Best Buy. The largest office properties are low-and midrise buildings with medical centers and banks.

Photo credit Chip Rountree. Image is the movie theatre, located just east of the light rail station.



Commercial buildings include large ones with tenants such as Target, Best Buy, Dick's, and Petco (left) and a suburban strip commercial development on Northgate Way just west of I-5 (bottom).



Photo credit Chip Rountree, 2023.



Image is a Google Earth view of the Northgate Station Mall site, 2024. This site anchors the subarea, but it is currently undergoing redevelopment. Some destinations are open, such as the Iceplex and Barnes & Noble. Future plans for this site include a hotel, over 900 housing units, outdoor-oriented retail, office space, and a fitness center.



This image shows office buildings and a hotel site just south of the light rail station.

As noted earlier, the commercial/mixed use category includes multifamily residential developments that incorporate mixed uses into the site plan. A total of 1,162 multifamily units are included in this category for Northgate. A signature mixed-use multifamily commercial development in Northgate is Thornton Place to the east of the light rail station and movie theater. It has a mixture of condominiums, apartments, and commercial uses such as cafes and bistros, personal services, and a bank. The development includes a paved central plaza and restored access to Thornton Creek, which was uncovered as part of the project. Today, residents and visitors enjoy pedestrian connections to paved trails alongside the creek.



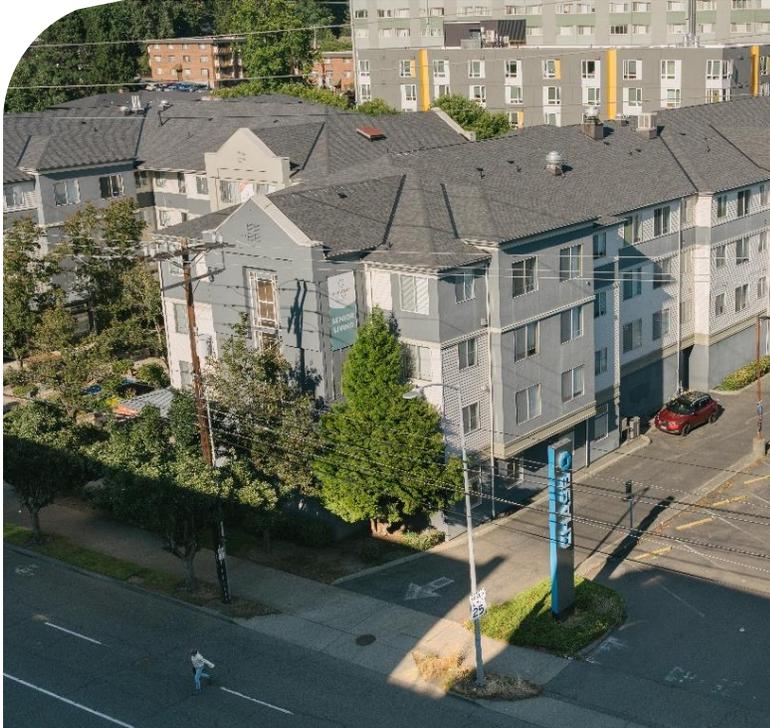
This mixed-use development features multifamily units connecting with pedestrian access to Thornton Creek waterway.

Image from Thornton Place website.

Multifamily

Northgate has 278 acres of multifamily property with 3,989 housing units in addition to the 1,162 multifamily units in the mixed-use category. This total also includes a 409-unit building that is currently under construction, located adjacent to the library and community center. This land use category includes townhome developments, 4-plexes, condominiums, and apartment buildings. The multifamily housing stock in Northgate is relatively new—over 90% of units in multifamily buildings were built in 1980 or later.¹¹ There are senior living facilities and affordable housing communities in the subarea, explored in greater detail in the housing report.

¹¹ King County Assessor data, as cleaned by City of Seattle, 2023.



Buildings in the foreground to the left are the Northgate Plaza Senior Living community with 118 units, located on 5th Ave NE across the street from Hubbard Homestead Park and adjacent to the mall site.

On the other side of Hubbard Homestead Park, the Northgate Apartments site has 207 units (shown below). It is a low-rise cluster of apartments on an 8-acre site with secluded courtyards for shared use. It was purchased by the Seattle Housing Authority in 2019.



Photo credit Chip Rountree, 2023.

Major Institution and Public Facilities

The Northgate subarea has 29 acres of land dedicated to major institution and public facility uses. The largest of these is the UW Medical Center to the northwest of the subarea—a 19-acre site with a hospital and medical office buildings totaling 10 buildings with over 600,000 square feet. The transit center site—inclusive of the light rail station and bus terminal—is also included under this category, as well as the library and community center properties. The Thornton Creek water channel, which also functions as an outdoor amenity, is owned by Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) and is included in this designation.

The UW Medical Center site is currently undergoing a master planning process to expand and further develop the medical campus site. The draft plan outlines a vision to expand the hospital capacity and potentially redevelop some of the older lower-rise buildings currently on the site. The expansion would more than double the square footage of the campus to approximately 1.6 million square feet. Current development plans are under review by the public and by City departments, as increases to currently allowed height standards are needed (up to 175' being requested).¹²



Photo of the Northwest Hospital Campus. The site is currently undergoing a master planning process that would more than double its current interior square footage. This expansion will also increase the employment capacity of the site and help Northgate achieve its job growth targets.

Image source: University of Washington Facilities Planning, 2024.

Vacant/Parking Lots

Fifteen percent (15%) of Northgate's land area, 46 acres, is currently vacant or used for parking. The largest parking lots surround the mall, light rail station, and UW Northwest Hospital campus. These large sites reflect the neighborhood's auto-oriented development and prioritized vehicular access to and from I-5. Those who arrive on foot or by bike have a harder time reaching

¹² <https://facilities.uw.edu/files/media/uwmc-northwest-draft-mimp-09.05.2023.pdf>

their destination as they traverse through these large lots. As Northgate continues to shift its identity from an auto-oriented shopping area to a transit-oriented, mixed-use urban neighborhood, planners will need to mitigate these impacts and improve connectivity and experience for those traveling by foot or bike. Beyond transportation impacts, the high volume of paved areas has negative environmental impacts such as runoff from impervious surfaces and heat island effects. These parking lots and vacant sites represent some of the areas more likely to be redeveloped in the coming years.



Photo credit Chip Rountree. Image looking south from Northgate Way toward the mall site with the Kraken Iceplex.

EXPERIENCING NORTHGATE

This chapter explores the assets and attractions that build Northgate’s identity, as well as the connectivity and block patterns that influence a person’s experience moving around in the subarea.

Community Assets

Northgate is home to many key community and cultural institutions, important neighborhood amenities, and gathering spaces. Considered community assets, these spaces promote cohesion, identity, and sense of space for a neighborhood. The maps in Exhibit 19, Exhibit 20, and Exhibit 21 identify an existing landscape of community assets, as understood by publicly available sources, as well as responses to this project’s community engagement. Locations identified in this map serve as a foundation for further building of neighborhood assets.

Strengths:

- Key gathering places include the **Kraken Community Iceplex, Northgate Library, and Community Center**. The spaces and programs in these places are valuable community assets.
- The **movie theater** serves as an asset for multigenerational entertainment.
- Community engagement identified **several well-loved restaurants, coffee shops, and bars that serve as neighborhood “third places.”** Some of the most popular places identified include Jewel Box Café, Watershed Pub, Red Robin, Family Donut, Bark Espresso, Stanford’s Restaurant, and Macrina Bakery, which are clustered in a few key corridors.
- There are four **assisted living facilities** in the subarea, well connected with nearby medical clinics.
- There are **six childcare centers** in the subarea, three of which are adjacent to the light rail station.

Gaps:

- The **mall closure creates** a central void in the subarea. The former shopping center served as a walkable, climate-controlled space where people of all ages and abilities could gather and pass time.
- There is a **lack of grocery options** for the southern and western portions of the subarea.

What are “third places”?

Third places are the “home away from home” spots in a community where someone might spend time when they aren’t at home or at work. They are seen as community assets for their ability to strengthen neighborhood ties and serve as venues for relationship building. They can be referred to as a “community living room” of sorts. During engagement, many individuals expressed that the old Northgate Mall served as a strong “third place” for this neighborhood, and they are now left waiting for something new to fill that gap.



- The portion of the subarea **west of I-5 lacks essential assets** such as grocery stores, childcare, assisted living, greenspace, and entertainment.
- There are **gaps in access to walkable greenspace**.
- The “third places” identified are predominantly daytime and early evening destinations. There is a **lack of nightlife and evening entertainment**.

Exhibit 19: Northgate Community Asset Mapping, Community/Institutional Places.

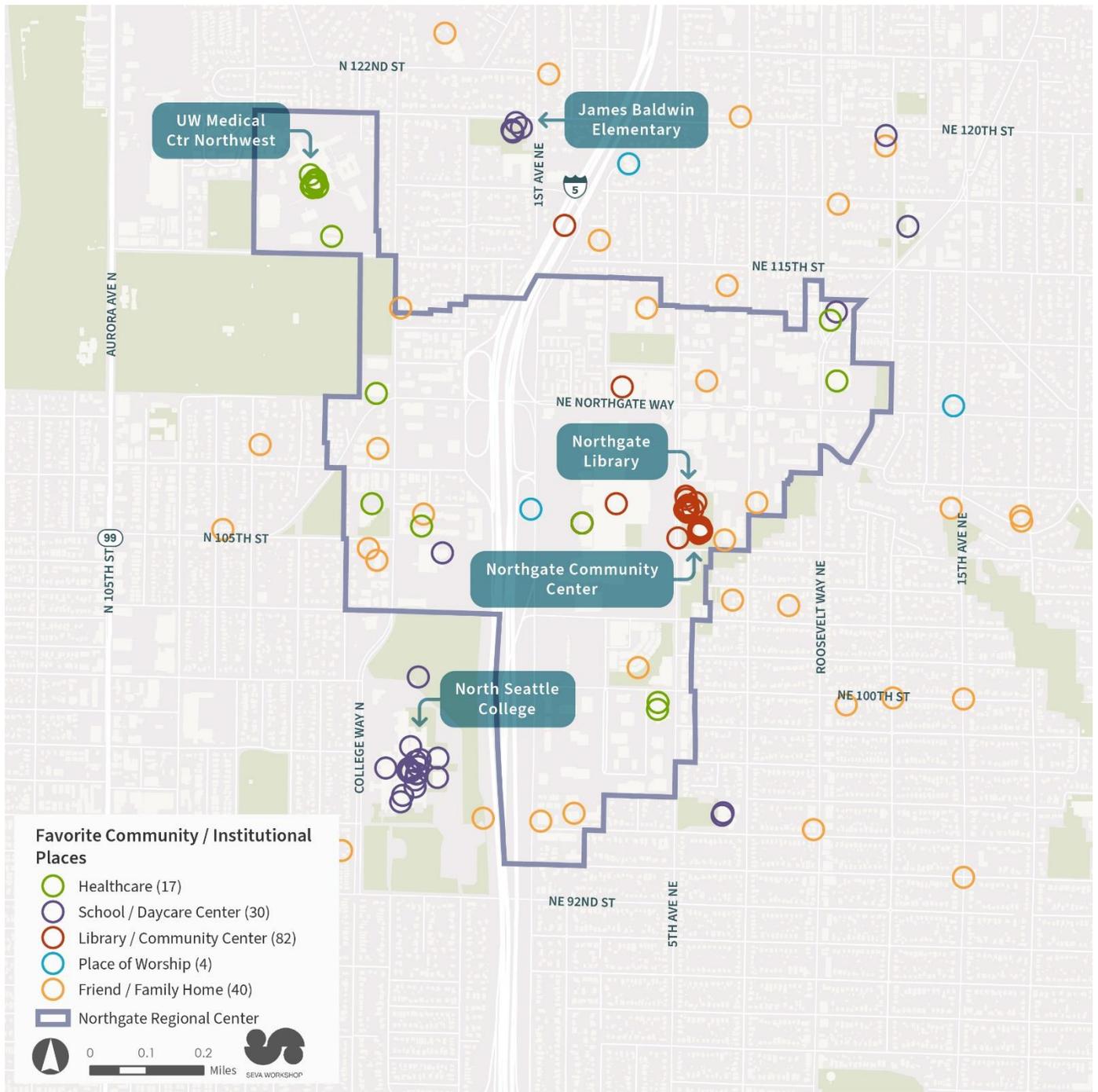
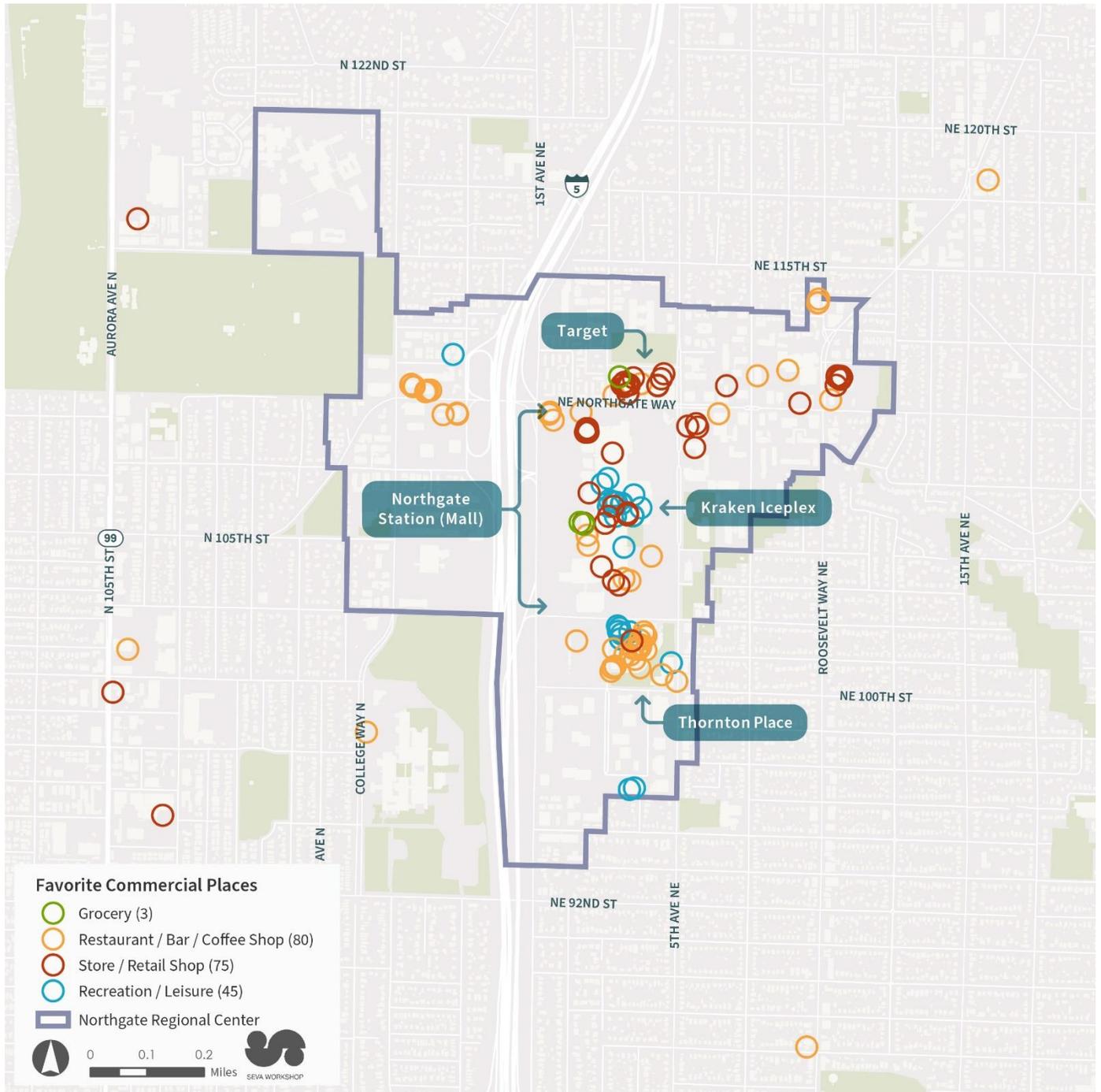


Exhibit 20: Northgate Community Asset Mapping, Public Realm/Infrastructure.



Exhibit 21: Northgate Community Asset Mapping, Commercial Places.





Beaver Pond is a natural site located directly adjoined to the Northgate Regional Center. Many survey respondents and engagement conversations mentioned this environmental asset as an important part of the neighborhood.

Image source: The Seattle Times “The enchanting world of beavers in King County — and how they might benefit a warming planet,” 2021.



Image of Hubbard Homestead Park, one of the few city-owned parks within the subarea. The park provides critical outdoor recreation space and a skate park for nearby housing developments, but could use investment for better tree cover, event programming, and facilities such as a playground.

Image Source: TIA International Photography, published by Seattle Parks and Recreation.

High Activity Attractions

These locations draw people into the neighborhood and can be used as building blocks for a complete neighborhood.

- **Northgate Light Rail Station.** The light rail station at Northgate draws nearly 9,500 people a day who use transit.¹³ This number will shift as further stations to the north connect to Northgate.
- **Northwest Hospital.** There are over 10,000 jobs in the Northgate subarea and approximately 2,000 of these (20%) are at the hospital campus.¹⁴ The current master planning process indicates a large expansion for this site's capacity.
- **Northgate Library and Community Center.** The public facilities serve as important resource hubs for surrounding neighborhoods.
- **The Kraken Community Iceplex.** This facility is a unique asset and amenity for the Northgate neighborhood. Once development is complete, it will be fully integrated with the mall site. The Iceplex draws in community members with its open skate nights, restaurants, and the ability to watch practice sessions of the professional Kraken hockey team.

While these gathering spaces draw people in, the neighborhood lacks activated public spaces, green spaces, and easily walkable streets. The assets listed above represent opportunities to improve the neighborhood and build on its strengths.

Connectivity

Northgate's street grid has many long street segments with a limited number of thoroughfares, limiting mobility for all travel modes. The street circulation pattern primarily consists of a limited number of north-south arterials (Meridian Ave N., 1st and 5th Aves NE, and Roosevelt Way NE) with two east-west arterials (Northgate Way and N 92nd Street) connecting to other neighborhoods. Northgate's blocks are long, often ranging from 650 to 1,300 feet in length. The table in Exhibit 22 summarizes all street segments from the Regional Center and the map in Exhibit 23 highlights each sidewalk segment by length category. PSRC defines a block length of 500 feet or less as "promoting walkability", shown in purple on the map.¹⁵ The purple segments are fragmented and account for under half (46%) of total street length in the subarea. The highest standard of pedestrian design limits block lengths to 300 feet. In Northgate only 40 segments or 10% of total street length meet this criteria. Long blocks, defined on the map as 501-800 feet in length and shown in yellow, make up one third of the network (33%). The longest blocks are over

¹³ Based on average weekday boardings in 2023, figures provided by SDOT (see transportation study)

¹⁴ <https://www.uwmedicine.org/locations/northwest-hospital>

¹⁵ https://www.psrc.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/pedestrian_oriented_design.pdf

800 feet in length, characterized as “automobile scale” and shown in orange. They account for 21% of the network in Northgate.

Surrounding residential areas have much smaller block sizes, allowing for greater connectivity and more direct route choices between destinations. The map in Exhibit 24 highlights the dispersion of buildings in Northgate. The adjacent neighborhoods have compact and complete blocks while the interior scale of the Regional Center is much wider. In addition to street segment length in Northgate, the existing grid has many incomplete blocks – when a full square or rectangle of street segments is not achieved. This compounds challenges for pedestrian connectivity and adds significant travel time to individual trips that require long detours.

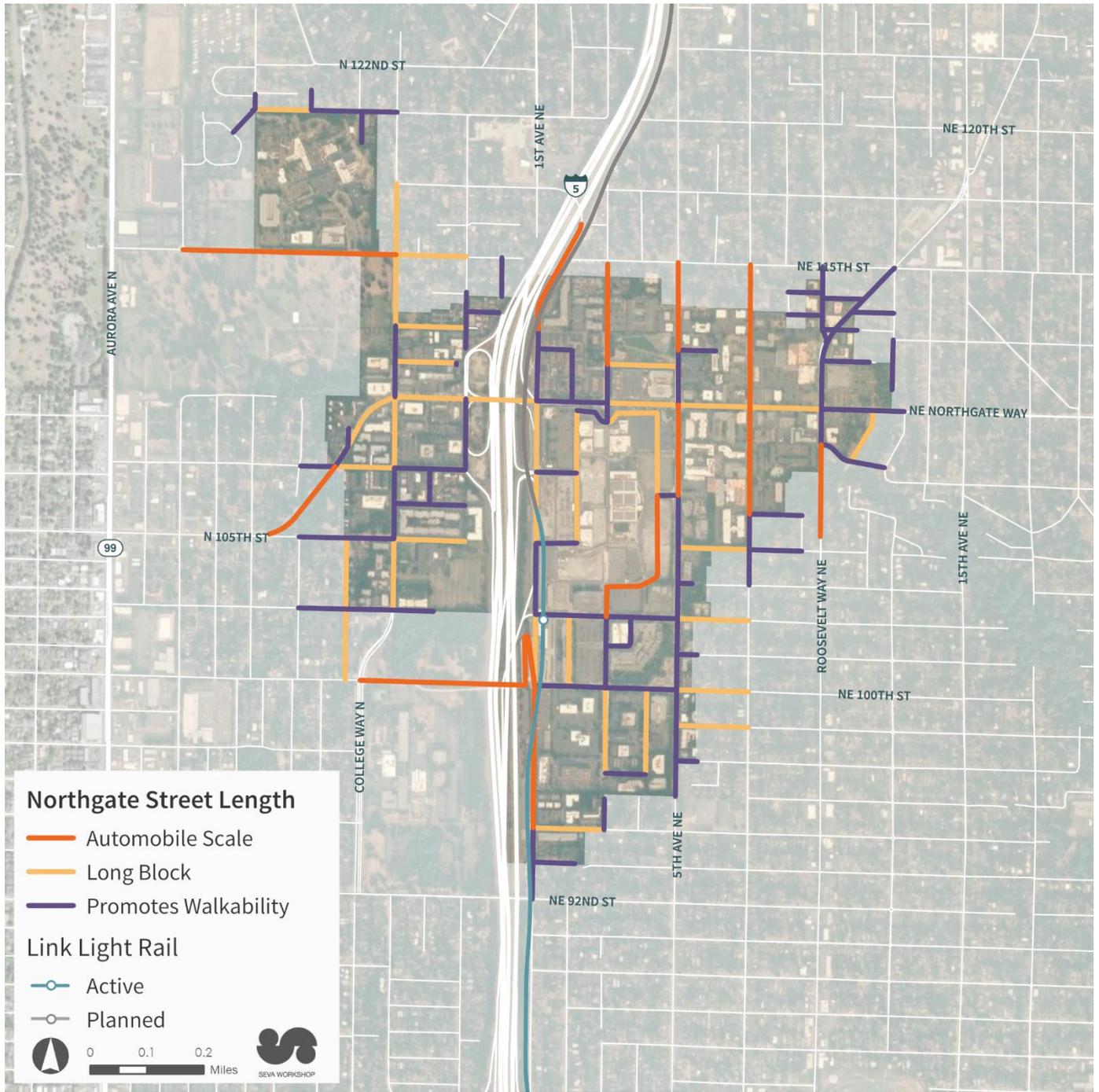
Even though most streets in the Regional Center have sidewalks and some have attractive features, the overall quality of the pedestrian experience is low. Most streets within the neighborhood boundary have sidewalks, but pedestrians experience mobility challenges due to the narrow widths and physical conditions of existing sidewalks, gaps in the network, limited landscaping and street furniture, and the presence of barriers such as I-5. Long distances between destinations and large parking lots between the street and buildings add to the mobility challenges for pedestrians and cyclists.

Exhibit 22: Street segment lengths and walkability standards in Northgate, 2024.

| Segment Length | Category | Count of Streets | % Total Streets | Sum of Street Lengths | % Total Length |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 300 feet or less | Promotes Walkability | 40 | 26% | 7,181 | 10% |
| 301-500 feet | | 67 | 44% | 24,908 | 36% |
| 501-800 feet | Long Block | 35 | 23% | 22,835 | 33% |
| 801-1,200 feet | Automobile Scale | 7 | 5% | 6,412 | 9% |
| > 1,200 feet | | 5 | 3% | 8,650 | 12% |

Sources: Seattle Street Network Database, 2024; Seva Workshop, 2024.

Exhibit 23: Northgate Street Length Map.



Sources: City of Seattle, 2024; Seva Workshop, 2024.

Exhibit 24: Northgate Buildings Figure Ground.



Sources: City of Seattle, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.

FUTURE GROWTH

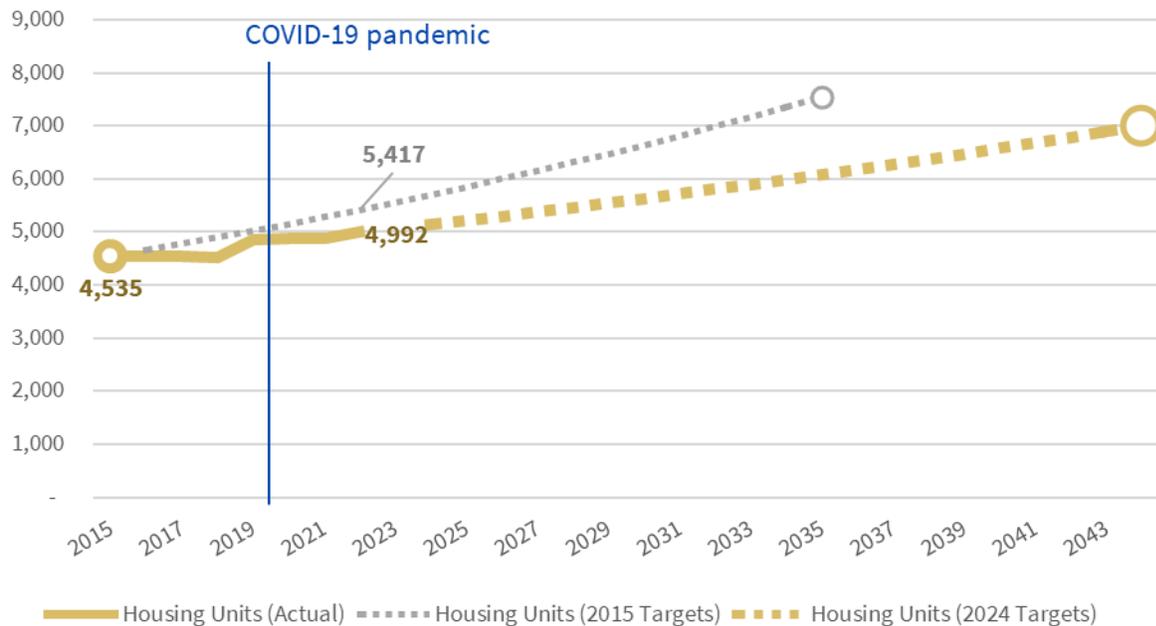
Looking forward, population and employment growth is planned for Northgate. This section summarizes Northgate’s growth 2015-2022, its targets for growth until 2044, and the Regional Center’s existing capacity for absorbing that growth under current zoning restrictions.

Population and Employment Targets

The 2023 activity unit density in Northgate is 45 au/acre. Growth targets for Northgate, as outlined in the draft 2024 Comprehensive Plan, would add 2,000 housing units and 2,500 jobs to the subarea. This growth supports PSRC’s VISION 2050 and Regional Growth Strategy. If these targets for 2044 are achieved, the activity unit density of the center will increase to 65 au/acre.

Northgate has been lagging behind its previously allocated growth targets. Current housing units are well behind the anticipated growth rates expressed in targets from the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, as shown in Exhibit 25. The 2024 Comprehensive Plan update assigned a more modest allocation of housing units to this Regional Center, and growth rates from recent years suggest that Northgate is on track to meet and even exceed this target. However, the new 2044 housing target falls well below Northgate’s previous target for 2035.

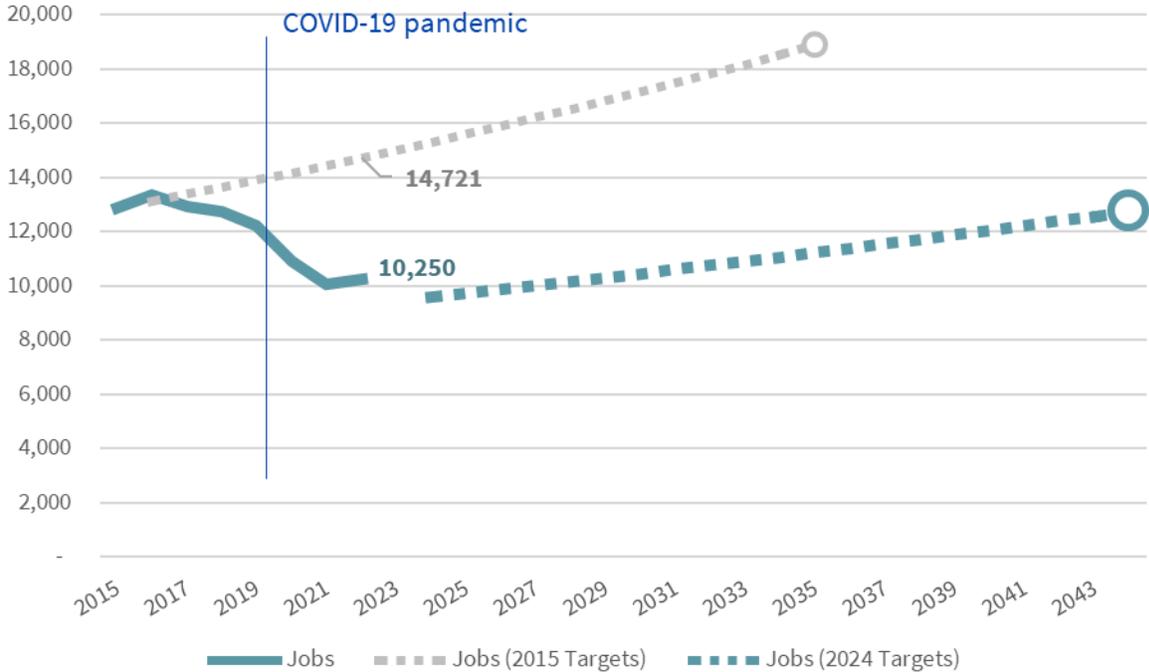
Exhibit 25: Northgate Housing, Actual and Targets from 2015 & 2024 Comprehensive Plans.



Sources: City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan Updates, 2015 & 2024; City of Seattle permit data in “UCUV Growth Report,” 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.

Employment has decreased in Northgate since 2015, from 12,876 jobs to 10,250 in 2022. The closing of the mall had a large impact on employment in Northgate, along with COVID impacts to retail and service sector employment. Revised employment targets for the subarea are much more modest and do not fully recover the job loss experienced since 2015. See Exhibit 26. The next chapter on [Land Use Capacity](#) highlights the existing zoned capacity of Northgate and identifies parcels that are currently underutilized. This Urban’s Center’s challenge will be to accelerate its pace of development and capture investment on currently underutilized sites.

Exhibit 26: Northgate Jobs, Actual and Targets from 2015 & 2024 Comprehensive Plans.



Sources: City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan Updates, 2015 & 2024; City of Seattle “UCUV Growth Report,” 2023; Seva Workshop, 2024.

Land Use Capacity

In preparation for its Comprehensive Plan update and alignment with King County Buildable Lands study, the City of Seattle updated its land capacity model in 2022. A key focus of this subarea plan update is to ensure that the identified Regional Centers have the available capacity for housing and jobs necessary to accommodate their growth targets. The table below summarizes the existing capacity in Northgate, along with the targets. **There is ample capacity to meet housing and job targets in the Northgate Regional Center under the existing zoning framework.**

Exhibit 27: Northgate Housing and Job Capacity and Targets.

| | 2022 | 2024-2044 Growth Target |
|----------------------------------|--------|-------------------------|
| Additional Housing Unit Capacity | 11,742 | 2,000 |
| Additional Job Capacity | 4,301 | 2,500 |

Note: Capacity shown for vacant or redevelopable parcels.

Sources: City of Seattle, 2022 for capacity model; City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan for Growth Targets; Seva Workshop, 2024.

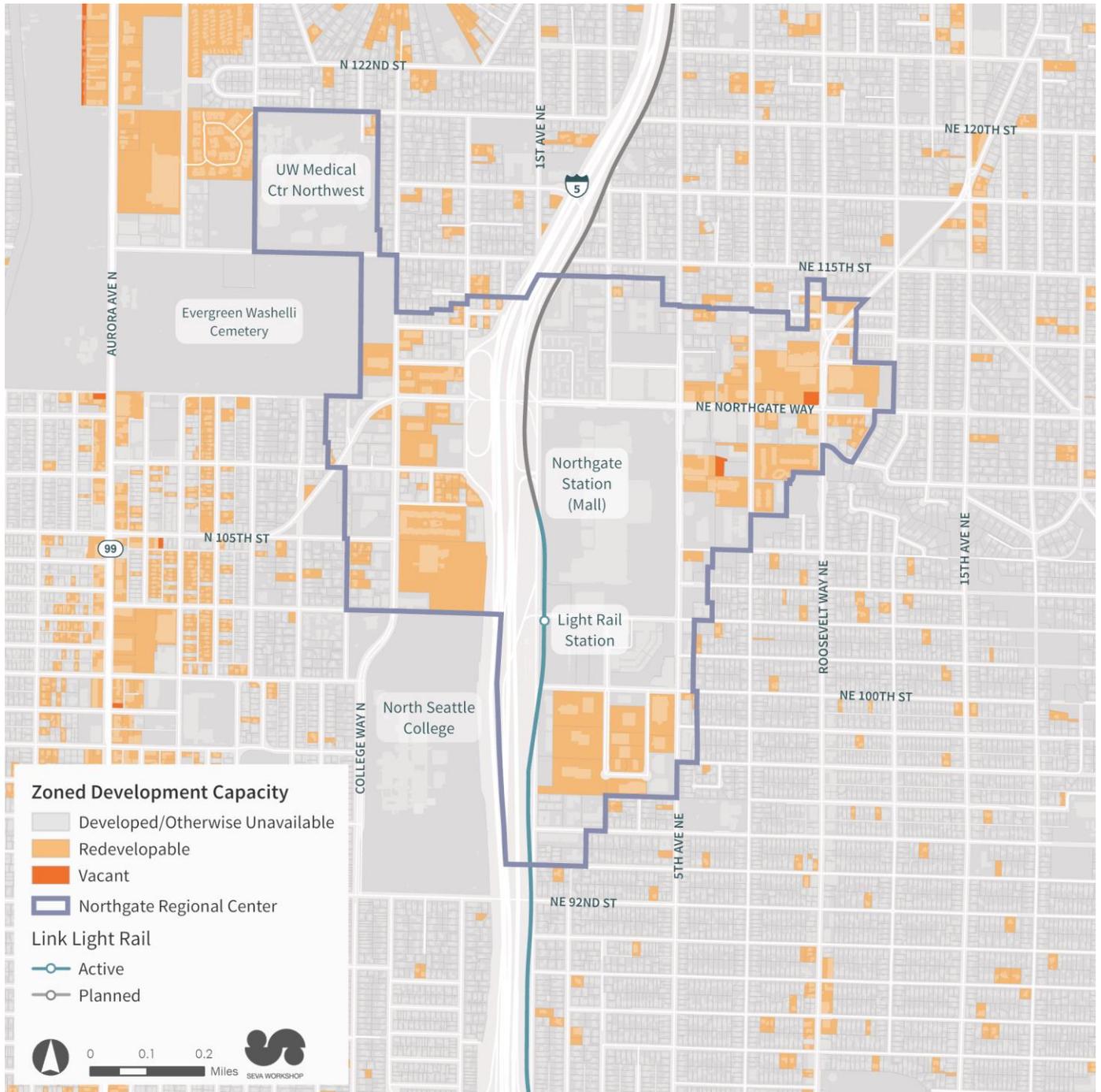
The map in Exhibit 28 identifies the parcels as “vacant” or “redevelopable” within the Northgate Regional Center boundary. Parcels are labeled “redevelopable” if they surpass the threshold of untapped zoned density and have ownership structures deemed compatible for redevelopment.¹⁶ This map identifies a lot of opportunity within Northgate to redevelop underutilized sites located in proximity to transit and amenities for higher density development styles. East of I-5, this includes sites directly south of the station and along Northgate Way. West of I-5, many sites between North Seattle College and the Medical Center are included as well.

Given the untapped potential of the subarea to date, it will be important to study the financial feasibility of various development styles that align with current zoning standards.

There are a few potential reasons for underproduction. This could be tied to a mismatch of regulations and expected revenue from buildings, land banking in anticipation of incoming light rail service (and corresponding land value increases), an unwillingness of existing owners to sell, or external market or environmental factors making the area less desirable to investors.

¹⁶ For example, parcels deemed unlikely to redevelop include public facilities, cemeteries, churches, landmarked structures, parks, schools, and institutional sites; sites built within the past 15 years; and condominium buildings. See <https://www.seattle.gov/opcd/population-and-demographics/zoned-development-capacity> for details.

Exhibit 28: Northgate Development Capacity Map, 2022.



Source: City of Seattle, 2022.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Existing zoning regulations, land use patterns, and community assets set the stage for thinking about growth, change, and the future success of Northgate. The following opportunities and constraints should be considered when setting a vision for the Regional Center.

Opportunities and Constraints

Key Opportunities

- **The Northgate neighborhood has ample capacity for redevelopment.** There are large parcels with dated buildings and/or large parking lots built during Northgate’s era of car-oriented development patterns and destinations. Today, these sites are well suited for a design shift toward a walkable, transit-oriented neighborhood.
- **The Northgate neighborhood has strong transportation connections** to Downtown Seattle and northern suburbs and acts as a hub for many surrounding neighborhoods. The subarea can play an increased role as the foremost North Seattle mixed-use center.
- **There are existing sites in the neighborhood that attract a wide pool of visitors.** Building on these key neighborhood amenities to develop cohesive experiences that meet a range of needs will be a key strategy for investment.
- **The Northgate Overlay District is already in place and designates higher design standards along key corridors.** This design framework can be updated to align with land use changes around the station area, build upon existing successful corridor development, and implement the future vision for the neighborhood.

Key Constraints

- **Development in Northgate is building upon a land use history steeped in auto-oriented design patterns and long street lengths.** Retrofitting a walkable, transit-oriented neighborhood onto this footprint will require investment, refreshed design standards, and the ability to break up large blocks.
- **The I-5 corridor runs straight through this neighborhood, directly adjacent to the light rail station.** This detracts from walkability, adds air and noise pollution, and restricts the density of development that can directly access this mass transit amenity.
- **The existing network of green space is limited, while surface parking lots abound.** Changes to development requirements and public land acquisition will be needed to “green” this urban neighborhood.
- **Several key sites in this neighborhood are already entitled.** Development plans in progress will contribute some positive shifts, but not the full range of public benefit that is desired via public realm improvements, open space, and affordable housing.

Connections to the Racial Equity Toolkit

At the onset of this planning effort, and as part of the Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) development, the project team identified eight key outcomes for the Northgate Regional Center. These were then updated after our visioning engagement efforts, which focused on conversations with the RET-identified priority communities. The list below summarizes some of the ways that existing land use in Northgate either supports the RET outcomes, or acts as a barrier.

Key Supports:

- Today, land values in Northgate are relatively low compared to other Regional Centers in Seattle. This could allow for greater flexibility in the pipeline of future development styles and price points.
- Design guidelines encourage an improved pedestrian realm along certain corridors.
- Northgate is home to important institutions such as a public library branch, community center, and hospital.
- The Kraken Iceplex partners with local organizations to offer community access and impact as a recreational facility for the neighborhood.
- Northgate offers local access to many clinics and healthcare services.

Key Barriers:

- Natural resource stewardship is in direct conflict with many of the ways the Northgate neighborhood has been designed.
- The urban and highly developed nature of the subarea leads to runoff that negatively impacts water quality.
- Large block sizes and wide intersections in many parts of Northgate detract from the human scale of pedestrian-friendly design. Existing commercial corridors are disconnected and difficult to access on foot.
- Many blocks are long with large buildings and parking lots or parking decks. Major infrastructure is heavy with concrete. Without proper sidewalk-facing treatments, these corridors detract from the attractiveness of the subarea.
- The design guidelines for street types are inconsistent and sparsely applied across the subarea.
- Infrastructure investments, planned and recently realized, are likely to increase land value. This leads to increased displacement pressure.
- The vacancy of the mall site leaves many waiting for more community “third places” to gather, particularly gathering spaces that offer free entry.
- There is a lack of access to fresh food, community gardens, and culturally specific markets.



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