

## Summary of Seattle Planning Commission Comments on the Draft Northgate Regional Center Plan

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4/10/2026

### Appreciation for the Plan

The Planning Commission appreciates the vision and themes created for the Northgate Regional Center Plan. The draft Plan consists of a very human-centered set of themes and goals that we recommend be echoed in future Regional Center plans. Additionally, we especially appreciate the clear incorporation of indigenous input evident in the draft Plan itself and supporting appendices.

### Housing Feasibility

The Commission is concerned that the housing economic feasibility study conducted for the draft Plan showed that key types of housing the City would like to encourage for housing diversity and affordability, such as multifamily apartment buildings and condominiums, are not feasible in current economic conditions. We had similar concerns related to the Downtown Regional Center Plan. We would like to see goals and policies established to add development incentives and streamlined permit processes that could move the studied types of housing toward feasibility.

### I-5 Mitigation

The Commission appreciates that the draft Plan acknowledges the challenges associated with building a cohesive Regional Center with a major highway dividing the area. We recommend the Plan include the following ideas to help mitigate the impacts of I-5.

We support Policy CC 2.1 and would like to see a focus on improving the sense of safety for people walking and rolling between either side of the highway whether the City chooses to improve the underpasses or create additional overpass connections.

In addition to improving safety through infrastructure and road design, the experience for people walking and rolling through I-5 underpasses could be improved by treating the spaces as a neighborhood gateway and creating a moment of delight for users. Consider design elements such as a "Welcome to Northgate" sign or murals like the one under Highway 99 on N 46<sup>th</sup> Street. The City could also commission a light sculpture or a sound sculpture that interacts with the freeway noise.

We would like to see the City work with WSDOT to improve or add sound barriers along I-5 to reduce noise pollution where it makes sense based on best practices.

We appreciate the inclusion of Policy LP 1.2 to create a buffer of plantings and trees along the highway to mitigate noise and air pollution, and we recommend that the City look to underutilized parking lots along the highway for opportunities to remove impervious surfaces and add green space and trees that can serve as natural barriers between the highway and neighborhood.

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## **Open Space**

The Commission supports Policy NS 3.2 to expand and improve outdoor opportunities for recreation and play as well as Policy LP 2.3 to increase opportunities for residents to spend time in parks and natural areas. We would like the City to do more to intentionally plan for acquisition of more open space for the public in this Center. The draft Plan's future land use map shows the current amount of open space in the regional center is 5% of the land and at the end of the 20-year life of the plan the City anticipates still having only 5% of land as open space (per the graph on page 98). We would like to see a policy that identifies a path to increasing this number.

The proposal to reduce block sizes in the Center by increasing the number of formal and informal connections across privately-owned land is an opportunity to generate additional public open space. The introduction of a more connected pedestrian grid should be prioritized and the spaces created as a result should be car-free and treated as a chance to add green space. We support policy CC 2.2 and would like to see clear incentives and policy controls to ensure this work moves forward over the life of the Plan.

Consider building on policy CC 3.2 and NS 3.2 to plan for a connected park path between existing parks and open spaces throughout the center as a way to weave neighborhood amenities with pedestrian infrastructure. A safe and easy to navigate pedestrian path could maximize the benefits of existing open space while addressing the disjointed feeling of moving through Northgate as a pedestrian.

Another opportunity for expanding access to open space and green spaces in the Center are Northgate's wetlands. Wetlands can pose a challenge for development but are great opportunities for human interaction with nature. Policies should ensure that critical areas are treated as an amenity to be protected and highlighted rather than blocked off and avoided.

For the development of privately owned public space, we support actions NS 3.1.3 and LP 2.3.2 but believe the language is too soft. The addition of public space with new development will drive how the neighborhood transforms from its current auto-centric urban form to a welcoming space for people. Ensuring public space is included within private developments should be elevated to the policy level and strengthened to create appropriate incentives for developers.

## **Parking and Transportation Demand Management**

To strengthen implementation of the Plan, the Commission would like to see the plan track, measure, and set goals around multimodal supply, parking, and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). The Plan should lead with a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategy that centers transit

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and mode shift. A key part of the toolbox for the TDM strategy is a corresponding parking strategy that considers both on and off-street parking.

We support Policy CC 2.5 and specifically would like to see action CC 2.5.1 completed. We recommend establishing a baseline parking supply for the Center and then setting a goal for right-sizing the amount of parking aligned with the desired mode shift trend for the area over time.

Once the baseline for the existing parking supply is established, we recommend treating existing parking as a well-managed resource and looking for ways to link underutilized parking in one location to parking demand from nearby housing or commercial developments. The Plan should include a strategy for improving utilization of existing parking while discouraging the development of new parking infrastructure.

When considering parking supply goals for Northgate, it is important to consider its role as a regional hub for transit and amenities like medical offices and North Seattle College. The Plan should focus on reducing parking in areas where it is underutilized but also work to mitigate hazards and improve safety for those walking and rolling in areas where parking is still necessary by addressing traffic flow and pedestrian safety.

### **Small Business Displacement**

The Commission supports Policy SA 1.2 and is particularly interested in the strategies the City will use to prevent small business displacement in the area. We suggest the Plan explore how the City could support community organizations that want to assist and incubate local businesses similar to the work of the Africatown Community Land Trust in the Central District.

The City should think boldly about how to support the small business community and the commercial viability of neighborhood spaces in the Center that we all use and enjoy. Seattle needs new ways to fund things like graffiti removal, public trash bins, free or low-cost meeting spaces, and sidewalk planters. Small business communities may not have the ability or economy of scale to fund these in small neighborhood commercial areas, so it needs to be an intentional focus of future implementation of the subarea plans. Perhaps a program through the Office of Economic Development could support and coordinate this work across multiple small neighborhoods.