



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

October 15, 2021

Seattle City Council Select Budget Committee Members,

This statement outlines the Seattle Planning Commission's serious concerns with the inadequate proposed community engagement budget for the upcoming Comprehensive Plan Major Update. The proposed budget allocates only \$150,000 to the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) over three years for outreach, engagement, and visioning with Seattle's diverse and vibrant communities. For a plan that intends to guide a new vision for the city's growth and development over the next 20 years while simultaneously reconciling decades of past harm caused by planning practices, \$150,000 is woefully insufficient. As stewards of the Comprehensive Plan, we are invested in a Plan that is developed through genuinely inclusive engagement, that addresses past harms, and sets a course for a Seattle in which all residents have the opportunities and pathways to thrive.

The community engagement budget for the previous major update process was between \$225,000 and \$250,000, an amount that proved to be limiting. The proposed budget asks OPCD to do more with less at a time when the needs of Seattle's communities are acute, and the engagement process needs to reach everyone where they are. New census data show that Seattle is larger and more diverse than before and we need more, not fewer, resources to capture a broad range of input. Engagement findings will also be crucial to capture the effects of the pandemic on communities, especially communities of color. Many publicly available quantitative data sources will not capture this information. OPCD hopes to improve upon the engagement process from the last major update while addressing the concerns raised in the recent Racial Equity Analysis of Seattle 2035 Comprehensive Plan and Urban Village Strategy completed by PolicyLink in summer 2021. The Commission applauds this intention and supports OPCD's goal of a more robust community engagement plan, yet we struggle to see how this is possible with just over half of the previous budget.

Consider, too, community engagement budget requirements for projects of a similar scale - can such a limited budget cover engagement needs such as translation services, collaboration with a wide variety of community organizations, and equitable engagement practices like compensation for community time and knowledge? The proposed budget cannot support a level of engagement and collaboration that all communities deserve, and it cannot meet the City's commitment to centering community in decision-making.

Many organizations and projects across the city are counting on this update of the Comprehensive Plan to serve as a vehicle for change that will influence a variety of policies and plans in the years to come.

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Seattle communities should have a Comprehensive Plan that they helped to create, which centers their respective goals for thriving, livable communities supported by policies that deliver their vision. Bringing more community members into a more meaningful process requires additional resources. Consider what OPCD and the community could achieve with additional funds. The City should not forego this critical and timely opportunity to transform the lives of all Seattleites through a fundamental update to its foundational Comprehensive Plan over a relatively small amount of money.

We urge City Council to increase the proposed community engagement budget for the upcoming Comprehensive Plan Major Update.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Executive Director, Vanessa Murdock, at vanessa.murdock@seattle.gov