Family-Sized Housing

An Essential Ingredient to Attract and Retain Families with Children in Seattle

A White Paper & Action Agenda from

The Seattle Planning Commission

January 2014

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About the Commission

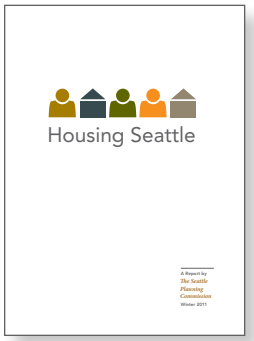
The Seattle Planning Commission, established by charter in 1946, is an independent, 16-member advisory body appointed by the Mayor, City Council, and the Commission itself. The Commission advises the Mayor, City Council, and City departments on goals, policies, and plans for Seattle's physical development.

The Commission provides stewardship for the vision in Seattle's Comprehensive Plan while it helps to inform ongoing housing, land use and transportation planning in the city. The members of the Commission are volunteers who bring a wide array of expertise and a diversity of perspectives to these roles.

+ Introduction

The Planning Commission's 2011 *Housing Seattle* report revealed gaps and disparities in how well Seattle's housing market serves different demographic groups. **The need for suitably sized housing affordable to low- and middle-income families was one of the most salient challenges identified in the Planning Commission's *Housing Seattle* report.**

In that report, we urged the City to promote and encourage housing production to address gaps in the market for families with children, stating: "Tools are needed to create more affordable housing units large enough to accommodate families with children. Seattle should provide incentives or requirements to produce more family-sized housing as redevelopment occurs."



***Housing Seattle* report**
Winter 2011

The Planning Commission is releasing this white paper to further illuminate the need for more housing that is suitably sized and affordable for families with children and to encourage City leaders to establish and fund an action plan to address this need. This white paper also provides an action agenda with specific recommendations to aid the City in developing such a plan.

+ Context

Seattle values and wants to attract more families with children.

The City's **Comprehensive Plan** contains an array of goals articulating Seattle's aim of attracting families with children and helping them thrive. One of these goals is to: **"promote households with children and attract a greater share of the county's families with children."** As stewards of the Comprehensive Plan, the Commission is committed to advancing these goals.

Benefits of Supporting Families in Cities and Urban Neighborhoods:

Reduced Costs for Households

Living where workplaces and other daily destinations are within walking distance or a quick transit ride can save families hundreds of dollars on transportation costs every month.

Public Health Benefits

Children and their parents need the health benefits that come with living in neighborhoods where they can bicycle, walk, and take transit to most of the places they need or want to go.

More Family Time

Living close to jobs and daily destinations reduces travel time and enables family members more time to spend with one another.

Greater Economic Competitiveness

Availability of housing suitable for families near major jobs centers enables Seattle's premier companies to compete more effectively for talent and boosts the city's overall economic health.

Reduced Environmental Footprint

Housing families in dense, urban neighborhoods uses land more efficiently, reduces sprawl, and assists in meeting climate action goals.

Furthering the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative

On average, low-income families and families of color tend to have larger family sizes than do other families, and more commonly include members of an extended family within a household. Policies that support family-sized and family-friendly housing are key to enabling Seattle to remain attractive and affordable to our region's growing communities of color.

A City That Is Good for Children Is Good for All

City neighborhoods that accommodate children are better for all residents.

Housing that is large enough to accommodate families with children is but one of the ingredients required to attract and retain families in Seattle's urban neighborhoods.

Other important elements include:

- **+ High quality public schools**
- **+ Safe neighborhoods**
- **+ Streets that are safe to walk along and cross**
- **+ Convenient, stroller-friendly transit**
- **+ Parks and indoor spaces for children to play and teens to gather**
- **+ Community centers with culturally relevant offerings for families**
- **+ Access to affordable childcare**
- **+ Grocery stores and family-serving retail**
- **+ The presence of other families with children**

In the late 2000s, the City launched the *Family-Friendly Urban Neighborhoods (FFUN) Initiative*.[1] In 2009, as part of this initiative, the City produced a report that identified many promising strategies not only for family-friendly housing, but also for neighborhood attributes essential for families.

The FFUN Initiative focused on Center City neighborhoods, but many of the ideas it generated could also be applied to other densely populated neighborhoods within Seattle.

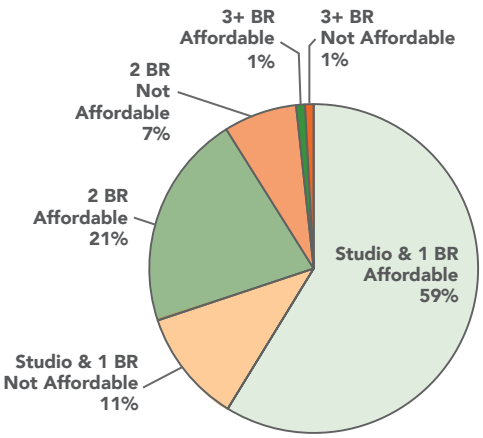
"Nothing signals a healthy, sustainable neighborhood like the presence of children."

Family-Friendly Urban Neighborhoods report, City of Seattle, 2009

Affordable, suitably sized housing for families is lacking in Seattle.

One of the most concerning findings from the Planning Commission's 2011 *Housing Seattle* report is that Seattle does not have enough housing that is suitably sized and affordable for low- and middle-income families.[2]

Market Rate Apartments in Seattle: Unit Sizes and Affordability at 80% of Area Median Income



Note: The rents and sales prices analyzed in the *Housing Seattle* report are from 2009. If the same analyses were updated with the most recent data available, the resulting statistics would differ somewhat. For example, the supply of affordable, family-sized apartments within Seattle's current housing market would likely look somewhat worse given that rents have increased substantially since 2009.[3]

In any case, the overarching conclusion would remain the same: Seattle does not have enough housing available and affordable for families with children.

+ **As of 2009, just 2 percent of market-rate apartment units in Seattle have 3 or more bedrooms, and half of that tiny fraction are affordable to low-income families. (See chart to left.)**
+ **Only 5 percent of the condominiums and single-family homes sold in 2009 were 3+ bedroom units affordable to families with a low-income; and less than 30 percent were 3+ bedroom units within the reach of middle-income families.**
+ **Detached single-family, duplex, and triplex rentals are an important, but limited source of family-sized housing affordable to low- and middle-income families.**
+ **Some market-rate units affordable at low- and middle-income levels are occupied by households with higher incomes. In contrast, subsidized units and otherwise income-restricted units are only available to income-eligible households. As such, income-restricted units play a critical role in enabling families with low incomes to access housing in Seattle.**

Families with children are a small share of Seattle's households overall...but a sizable demographic in many Seattle neighborhoods.

Despite Seattle's goals and aspirations to be a city for families with children, these households are a relatively small share of households in Seattle. City leaders have been concerned about Seattle's ability to retain and attract families with children since the late 1970s. Since 1980, census figures have shown that Seattle has one of the lowest shares of families with children[4] among major U.S. cities. Figures from the 2010 Census indicate that San Francisco is the only large city in the U.S. where families with children comprise a smaller percentage of households: roughly 19 percent of households in Seattle are families with children, about one percentage point higher than in San Francisco.

Within King County as a whole, about 29 percent of the households are families with children. In the portion of the county outside of Seattle, this climbs to 34 percent. All of the metropolitan and inner ring suburban cities surrounding Seattle have higher shares of households comprised of families with children than Seattle does.[5]

Although a relatively low percentage of households in the city as a whole are families with children, these families make up a substantial part of the demographic mix in many Seattle neighborhoods. In fact, in some Seattle neighborhoods outside of urban centers, the percentage of households that are families with children comes close to mirroring the percentages in surrounding cities. These neighborhoods are likely to continue attracting families with children as a sizable share of their households.

Furthermore, the number of families with children on a per acre basis is as high or higher in some of Seattle's more densely populated neighborhoods than it is in other neighborhoods in the city and surrounding communities.[6] (For maps showing the distribution of families with children in and around Seattle, see Appendix B, page 32.)

Population Density and Share of Households That Are Families with Children: Seattle and a Selection of Other Large U.S. Cities

	Population Density per Square Mile	Total Households	% of Households that are Families with Children
Los Angeles, CA	8,092	1,318,168	33.4%
Milwaukee, WI	6,190	230,221	33.4%
New York, NY	27,016	3,109,784	30.5%
Chicago, IL	11,844	1,045,560	29.6%
Baltimore, MD	7,676	249,903	27.9%
Denver, CO	3,915	263,107	24.7%
Portland, OR	4,347	248,546	24.5%
Minneapolis, MN	7,085	163,540	23.2%
Boston, MA	12,787	252,699	22.9%
Washington, DC	9,864	266,707	20.4%
Seattle, WA	**7,255**	**283,510**	**19.2%**
San Francisco, CA	17,169	345,811	18.0%

Source: 2010 Census, U.S. Census Bureau

Note: The table to the right lists several large cities in the U.S. and indicates the share of each city's households that are families with children. One insight from this table is that there are cities with greater population densities than Seattle that accommodate markedly higher shares of family households with children.

There are some promising signs in Seattle for families with children.

Underlying dynamics are multifaceted, but recent trends contain signals that Seattle's attractiveness as a place to raise a family is increasing and that more family-sized units will need to become available to meet demand.

+ **Enrollment in Seattle Public Schools' kindergartens started increasing rapidly in the last decade as more parents chose to stay in the city when their children reached school age. Seattle Public Schools' total enrollment surpassed 50,000 students this school year – a marked increase over years past. Enrollment is projected to be nearly 60,000 by the year 2020.**

+ **After falling for decades, the share of King County families who live in Seattle rose slightly between 2000 and 2010.[7] Whether Seattle can increase this share over the long run is unclear. This will depend in important ways on the policy decisions and investments that City and School District leaders make over the next few years.**

+ **Some of Seattle's more urban neighborhoods appear to hold growing appeal for families with children. Many census tracts in and around downtown – for example in South Lake Union, Uptown, and Pioneer Square – have seen large percentage (albeit small numerical) increases in families with children.**

Credit: Office of Housing

Attracting and retaining families is a citywide challenge, but one that varies greatly by neighborhood.

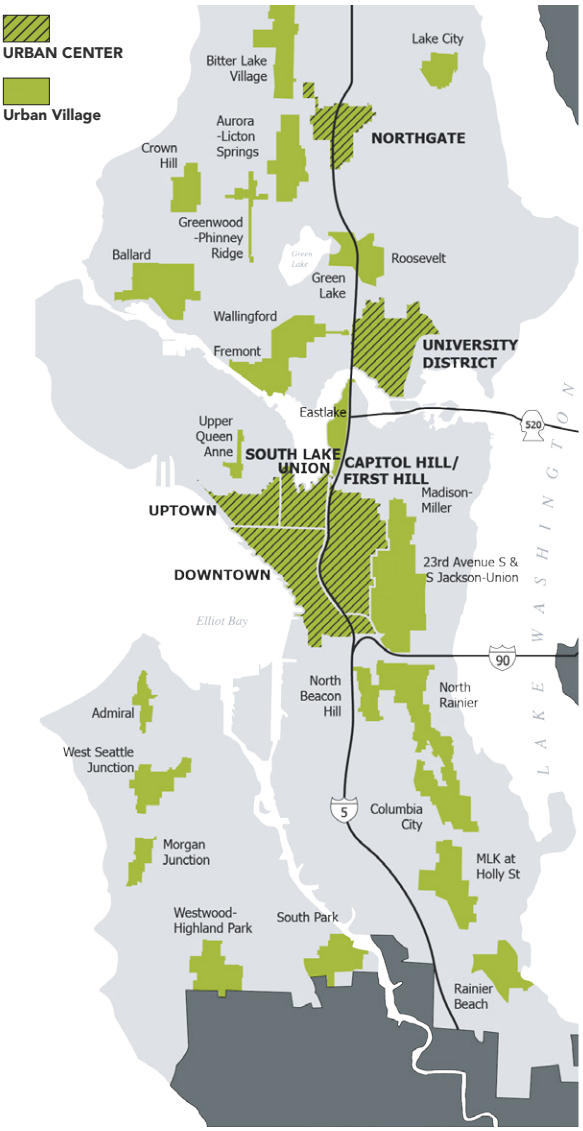
To meet this challenge, the availability of affordable, family-sized housing needs to increase in both lower-density and higher-density areas.

Seattle's Urban Village Strategy, which is laid out in Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, directs most of the city's growth to the urban centers and urban villages. Correspondingly, multifamily developments in these neighborhoods contain a large majority of the city's recently built housing. As this pattern continues into the future, family-sized units will need to become a greater part of the unit-mix in multifamily developments in these neighborhoods.

Comprehensive Plan amendments adopted in 2012 call for increased alignment of land use and public investment to foster strong neighborhoods within transit communities. Transit communities are complete, compact, connected places generally within a 10-minute walk to reliable, frequent transit.[8] Together, transit communities and areas designated as urban centers or urban villages will accommodate the majority of the city's

Credit: Catherine Benotto

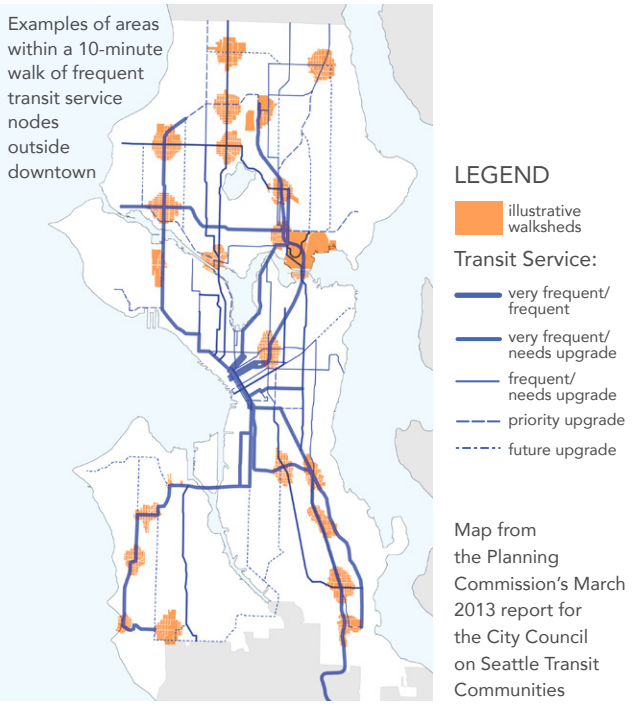
Urban Centers and Villages
Seattle *Comprehensive Plan*, 2005



Accommodating families in transit communities is essential given the mobility and livability advantages these communities provide and the key role they will play in Seattle's growth.

growth and receive priority for City investments. One of the myriad benefits families can derive from living in such complete, connected communities is the ability to save on household transportation costs.

Still, it is likely that a large share of the families coming to Seattle area will locate in single-family neighborhoods, and that many families who want to live within Seattle city limits will eschew the city's denser neighborhoods. Given this, and the fact that single-family zoning covers about 60 percent of the land in the city,[9] it will be important for some of Seattle's single-family areas to accommodate a wider variety of family-sized housing options. This will be key to enabling a greater number of families with children to access the neighborhoods in Seattle where prior generations of parents have raised their children.



Map from the Planning Commission's March 2013 report for the City Council on Seattle Transit Communities

Flickr: Oran Viriyincy

+ Actions

Action Agenda to Increase Housing Suitable and Affordable for Families with Children

Seattle needs to develop a concerted, multipronged action plan now to increase the supply and availability of family-sized housing for families with children at a wide spectrum of income levels.

The lack of affordable family-sized housing is a citywide challenge for Seattle. This is a challenge that Seattle needs to address with a host of different tools and resources across a variety of neighborhoods, both lower- and higher-density. The actions that we are proposing include broad citywide strategies, as well as some tools tailored for single-family neighborhoods and other tools tailored to more urban neighborhoods. Many of these tools could be further customized for specific land use zones and housing types.

With gaps in the availability of suitably sized housing confronting both low- and middle-income families, this is also a challenge Seattle needs to address at a variety of income levels. Tools and resources for affordable, family-sized housing products are limited. This is particularly true for housing serving moderate and middle-income families, as the bulk of publicly subsidized housing serves households with incomes no higher than 60 percent of Area Median Income.

To succeed in increasing the supply and affordability of family-sized housing, Seattle will need to focus a combination of tools on this issue and explore strategies the City has not yet tried. Bold action is required to encourage housing for all families who would like to call Seattle home. This action agenda provides our best thinking on the first steps needed to make this happen.

Action #1:

Adopt a formal definition of family-sized housing and family-friendly buildings.

A definition of family-sized, family-friendly housing is a basic step needed to promote the production and availability of more housing suitable for families with children. Such a definition can facilitate the development of policies, legislation, and programs; and provide a starting point for crafting design guidelines for designing family-friendly housing. The definition should identify the minimum characteristics of family-sized, family-friendly housing:

a **Family-sized, family-friendly housing UNITS contain two or more bedrooms** and include additional features critical for families, i.e., spaces where family members can gather for meals and other activities, and where children can play and engage in other activities such as homework; easy access to outdoor play and recreation space;[10] and sufficient storage space. Ideally, these housing units should be located in family-friendly buildings/developments.

Note: Given that the average size of families with children in Seattle is small, 2 bedrooms make sense as a *minimum* for defining "family-sized" housing in Seattle.[11] At the same time, *it is imperative that Seattle address the dearth of affordable 3+ bedroom units*; accordingly, the Commission's recommendations put a special emphasis on increasing the supply of 3+ bedroom units.

b **Family-friendly BUILDINGS or COMPLEXES** provide access to outdoor recreation space suitable for children where adults can appropriately supervise and easily view children (such as a private outdoor space, or a yard or patio directly connected to the unit); and/or common outdoor space within the development.[12] Family-friendly buildings and complexes are also safe for children, both within each unit, and in common spaces. Family-friendly, multi-unit buildings and complexes include a critical mass of family-sized units (e.g., at least 50 percent of units).

Family-friendly NEIGHBORHOODS

Identifying a set of minimum criteria or specific mix of ingredients that need to be present for a neighborhood to be considered "family-friendly" is worthwhile, although beyond the scope of this white paper. That said, it will be important for the City to consider the current or potential level of family-friendliness in an area to appropriately target many of the strategies the Commission recommends to increase the availability of family-sized housing. The safety of the neighborhood and presence of a quality, public neighborhood school within walking distance, and the presence of other families are among most important ingredients.

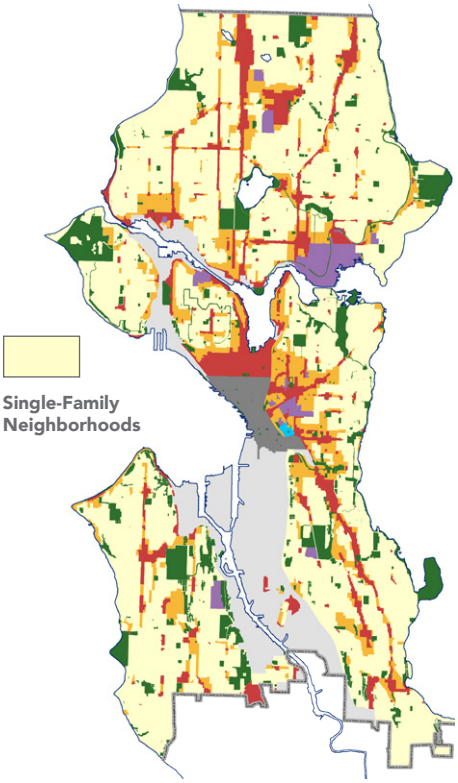
The most family-friendly neighborhood locations additionally include access to frequent transit, parks and community facilities, childcare services, libraries, bicycle paths, "complete streets," and grocery stores, and other family-oriented retail.

Action #2:

Allow added flexibility in single-family zoned areas with frequent, reliable transit and in other selected areas.

Many types of low-density housing provide attractive and affordable alternatives to traditional single-family houses. Allowing a broader mix of housing in single-family neighborhoods with frequent, reliable transit – and in selected areas near schools, parks, and other child-oriented infrastructure – would enable a larger number of families with a wider range of incomes to live in these neighborhoods.

Seattle: Simplified Zoning Map



For full version of this map, see Appendix B: Supporting Maps, page 35

a Allow a broader range of low-density housing in selected single-family areas. Tandem housing, duplexes and triplexes, cottage housing, and courtyard housing are specific housing types the City should allow in these areas. When built at modest densities to well-crafted development standards,[13] these housing types will expand the dwelling options available for families with children and blend in well in single-family areas.

b Allow single-family homes to have both an attached accessory dwelling unit (ADU) and a detached ADU. Both attached ADUs (sometimes referred to as mother-in-law units) and detached ADUs (backyard cottages) enable families to have extended family members close by or obtain rental income to enhance their financial security. Suitable lots with a single-family home as the primary unit should be able to include both an attached ADU and a detached ADU.

Action #3:

Foster a larger supply of family-friendly lowrise and midrise multifamily housing.

Rowhouses, townhouses, and lowrise to midrise stacked flats can provide affordable family housing options. However, with only about 10 percent Seattle's land zoned Multifamily, opportunities for these types of housing are limited. Increasing the amount of land available in Seattle for multifamily housing could spur the production of more family-sized housing if done specifically for this purpose.

The 2009 and 2011 updates to the Multifamily Code expanded the variety of multifamily housing types allowed, particularly in lowrise multifamily zones. The Planning Commission supported these changes but holds that some additional refinements to the Code should be made. With the reduced role of density limits, development standards and design guidelines are needed to encourage family-sized housing.[14] There are also some aspects where greater flexibility in the Code would assist the creation of a wider variety of family-friendly housing options.

a Rezone some areas of the city in order to encourage the production of family-sized multifamily housing. Expanding the amount of land available for lowrise and midrise multifamily housing (e.g., by rezoning some single-family to multifamily, or rezoning some lowrise to midrise multifamily) is key to increasing the potential for a larger and more varied supply of family-sized housing in the city.

+ **Employ new tools to help ensure that the development capacity added through rezoning actually yields a greater supply of family-sized housing.** For example, the City could explore a family-friendly multifamily zoning classification with specially designed development standards or a new zoning mechanism to increase development capacity in exchange for multifamily development that includes a critical mass of 2 and 3+ bedroom units meeting family-friendly development and design standards.[15]

+ **When identifying areas for family-oriented multifamily development, look at areas that are within walking distance of frequent transit where family-friendly investments already exist or are being made.** For example, the City should look at areas near schools, parks, family-oriented services and retail, and along tree-lined streets with slower traffic. Transit communities, in particular, should be prioritized for family-oriented multifamily development.

Left: Urban Trees by b9-architects photo: Andrew van Leeuwen
Right: Urban Canyon, b9-architects photo: William Wright
Far Right: Daybreak, Cohousing Development, Schemata Workshop

b Further refine the Multifamily Code and provide guidelines for designing family-friendly multifamily development. The City should refine the development and design standards in the code and provide detailed guidelines to encourage construction of family-friendly multifamily housing, particularly in lowrise and midrise zones.

+ Include development and design standards to encourage ground-related multifamily such as townhouses and rowhouses, which are appealing to families.

+ Amend lowrise development standards to allow stacked flats in rowhouses and similar forms of street-facing housing for the purpose of expanding family-friendly housing opportunities. Forms of housing such as stacked flat rowhouses and "triple-deckers" seen in other North American cities can offer households affordable family-sized living spaces and shared or semi-private backyards, while providing street-activating features such as stoops and porches.[16]

+ Modify Green Factor scoring, particularly in lowrise zones, to make it easier to incorporate shared outdoor play and recreational space within family-friendly multifamily developments.[17]

Action #4:

Ensure that bonus development provisions and incentive zoning programs work to encourage family-sized units.

Currently, these provisions and programs do not work well in encouraging construction of family-sized units, particularly those with 3 or more bedrooms. The City should modify bonus development provisions and programs to include as a priority the creation of units sized suitably for families, either citywide or in particular locations such as near to schools and in transit communities.

a Exempt larger family-sized units from calculation of Floor Area Ratio (FAR) or modulation restrictions. The majority of residential zones above single-family density have FAR limits on residential square footage. If a building or project provides a certain percentage threshold of units with three or more bedrooms, and meets a threshold for recreation space well suited to children, the City should regard the total area of the units with 3 or more bedrooms as "non-chargeable" to the FAR calculation. Some zones, such as Seattle Mixed in South Lake Union and Downtown zones do not limit FAR for residential, particularly when a building pursues the height bonus. Instead, these buildings are subject to bulk or modulation provisions that restrict the amount of residential. In such instances, the City should allow developments to exceed the average and maximum residential gross floor area per story if a certain percentage of units with 3 or more bedrooms are provided. Furthermore, bulk or modulation restrictions could be relaxed if these units with 3 or more bedrooms are provided. These bonus development provisions will need to be designed carefully to work as intended with specific building types and zones.[18]

Seattle Parks and Recreation

Catherine Benotto

b Provide a height bonus for buildings with family-friendly housing at ground- or podium-level. Including family-friendly, family-sized residential units at ground-level or podium-level should also provide for some flexibility in structure height. For example, if family-sized units comprise more than half of the floor area at ground- or podium-level, and those units have direct access to a suitable private outdoor amenity space, the City could exempt the story containing those units from counting toward the overall height limit for the structure.

c Use bonus provisions to encourage cooperative housing models. Cooperative housing models such as cohousing[19] offer some unique benefits to families and their children. Seattle's Comprehensive Plan policies already include fostering innovative housing models such as cohousing. One way to implement this policy is to allow increased FAR or an additional story of height for cohousing projects in which a majority of units are family-sized and amenity spaces are provided to facilitate regular sharing of meals, child care, and resources (e.g., common dining rooms, tool lending libraries, shared vehicles, or on-site community play spaces and gardens).

Catherine Benotto

d Recalibrate the City's Incentive Zoning program. Strengthen incentives for developers to include family-sized units as well as additional elements that make for family-friendly buildings/developments (e.g., easy-to-supervise play areas, childcare, etc.).

e Use funding generated through the City's Incentive Zoning program to support the rehabilitation and preservation of 2-bedroom units, and especially, 3+ bedroom units. Use fee-in-lieu revenues generated through incentive zoning to preserve family-sized units and provide for the long-term affordability of these units.

Catherine Benotto

Action #5:

Advance the creation of residential cores with ground-related housing in the city's most urban neighborhoods.

The Commission strongly supported the Residential Corridor zoning for the Eighth Avenue area of South Lake Union.[20] The zoning includes development standards that call for generous sidewalks, and other features to accommodate ground-related housing and create a pedestrian-friendly and quiet place for residents. These factors are appealing to families with children and have the potential to bring a diverse mix of residents.

a The City should seek additional opportunities to advance this kind of residential core concept inside the city's most urban neighborhoods.

8th Avenue Streetscape Concept DPD

Concept rendering for South Lake Union 8th Avenue Residential Corridor NBBJ / Studio 216

Action #6:

Ensure that the Multifamily Tax Exemption (MFTE) Program encourages the production of 2-bedroom and 3+ bedroom units.

One of the key recommendations the Commission has made regarding MFTE is that the program should contain stronger incentives for developers to include family-sized units in their projects.[21]

a **Re-calibrate the Multifamily Tax Exemption program to strengthen incentives for developers to build larger units that will better accommodate families with children.** In addition to strengthening incentives in the MFTE program to build 2-bedroom units, the City should introduce an additional level of incentive in the program for the development of 3+ bedroom units. One way to do this is to increase the AMI-based rent maximum for larger unit sizes while correspondingly reducing the AMI-based rent maximum for the smallest unit sizes as part of an overall recalibration of the program's affordability tiers.

GreenHouse Apartments in Seattle Credit: Office of Housing

Action #7:

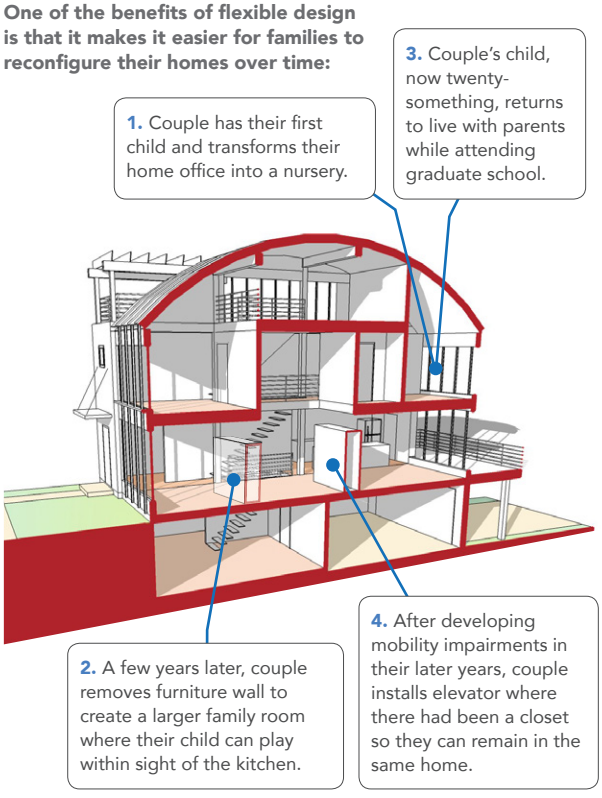
Encourage the creation of more family-friendly housing through innovative design and construction.

Flexible design and construction innovations can provide cost-effective avenues for accommodating families in response to changes in market demand or individual families' needs.

a Encourage flexible design in multifamily construction to facilitate the merger of smaller units into family-sized units. For example, incorporating knock-out wall panels[22] during multifamily construction can make it feasible to join pairs of small adjacent units later to form multi-bedroom units suitable for families. This could help promote a gradual evolution toward a greater diversity of unit sizes and households in these developments.

b Promote use of flexible housing concepts to accommodate families' changing needs. Concepts such as the "Grow Home" prototype[23] developed at the McGill School of Architecture, and customizable modular designs enable homeowners to reconfigure their homes as their family grows or their needs change.

One of the benefits of flexible design is that it makes it easier for families to reconfigure their homes over time:



www.PATHnet.org/concepthome

A Grow Home project in Montreal, Canada Avi Friedman

Action #8

In affordable housing programs, include a strong priority for families with children.

Income-restricted family-sized housing units play a critical role in enabling households with low incomes to access housing in Seattle. Families with two or more children and single-parent families are among the Seattle household categories with the greatest likelihood of experiencing severe rent burdens.[24]

Many low-income housing developers report that there is a seemingly unquenchable demand for units large enough to accommodate families. Among low-income households there is great demand for larger family-sized units with 3, 4, and even 5 bedrooms. Seattle's subsidy programs should address this challenge.

a Dedicate a portion of the City's affordable housing funding to units for families with children.

b Evaluate the potential to provide additional resources for homeownership assistance programs such as down payment assistance, revolving funds, and foreclosure prevention assistance. While doing so, continue to work with community partners delivering assistance to address programmatic barriers that can make participation in homeownership assistance programs difficult for some families (e.g., for larger families who need bigger units, or Muslim families who need to use Sharia-compliant mortgage products due to the prohibition in Sharia law against paying or receiving interest and fees).[25]

c Expand the City's affordable housing programs to more effectively incorporate cohousing models (rental, rent-to-own, limited equity) that include a critical mass of family-sized units.

d Expand the housing-related counseling services that the City funds to include appropriate assistance to one-person households, "empty nesters," and others considering moving out of larger family-sized units in order to "downsize." Such counseling can help generate win-win outcomes, assisting small households in finding housing that better suits their personal needs, financial resources, or living situation while making some additional units available to families with children.

Action #9:

Strengthen partnerships to align School District planning and capital investments with the City's planning for growth in family-friendly urban neighborhoods.

Enhanced coordination between the Seattle School District and the City will allow for better planning to accommodate future growth and serve families.

The Commission recognizes the importance of strong neighborhood schools in ensuring quality education and in influencing where families want to live. Strong neighborhood schools are one of the most important factors that generate the levels of housing-market demand from families needed to spur construction of family-sized housing within neighborhoods.

a **Seek involvement of the School District and other educational institutions in updating Seattle's Comprehensive Plan and in ongoing planning for family-friendly neighborhoods.** School planning efforts should be well aligned with and supported by the City's Comprehensive Plan. Ongoing collaboration between the City and schools is also vital for fostering family-friendly neighborhoods.

b **Advocate for school planning and capital investments for transit communities.** Living in a transit community provides families with school-age children greater mobility choices and easier access to neighborhood services. With the City planning to focus investments such as sidewalks and public open space in transit communities, these areas are likely to become increasingly desirable for families.

Credit: Susie Fitzhugh/Seattle Public Schools

Action #10:

Institute a family-oriented lens in updating Seattle's Comprehensive Plan and in ongoing policy and planning efforts.

Clear prioritization from City leaders and concerted planning by many City departments and offices – including Planning and Development, Transportation, and Housing – is needed to foster the conditions required for Seattle to attract and retain a diversity of families into the future. A family-oriented lens should be instituted across all City departments as a tool for ensuring that planning and policy initiatives address the needs and values of families and children.

a Identify policy changes for the 2015 major update of the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan lays out the city's 20-year vision for Seattle's future and sets the framework for how the city should grow.

Since the Comprehensive Plan's original adoption in 1994, the vision in the Plan has stressed retaining and attracting families with children. Correspondingly, the Plan has always contained goals and policies to encourage a variety of housing, including housing that is suitable and attractive to families, as well as affordable at a spectrum of income levels. (Examples of these goals and policies are provided in **Appendix A, page 31**.)

Reel Grrls

With Seattle expecting to add another 70,000 housing units in the next two decades, the major update of the Comprehensive Plan provides a pivotal opportunity to strengthen these policies and make changes to other policies that have presented unnecessary obstacles.

b Address the need for family-friendly housing and neighborhoods as a regular part of neighborhood and area planning efforts. This is essential for realizing the Comprehensive Plan's vision for Seattle to remain an inclusive community with a diverse mix of households.

c Ensure that key planning efforts, including transportation plans, and planning for parks and recreation, address the needs of families and children.

Transportation modal plans are examples of City plans in which families with children have important stakes. The Transit Master Plan identifies corridors and stations where infrastructure should be developed to ensure neighborhood access. The Pedestrian Master Plan and the draft Bicycle Master Plan Update (which is scheduled for consideration and adoption by City Council in early 2014) place a special emphasis on serving a diversity of ages. This emphasis should be preserved as the City implements these plans.

Transit also needs to work better for parents with young children (e.g., by making it easier to ride with a stroller, and by providing easily accessible storage space onboard). The City would serve families well by working with King County Metro and Sound Transit to better integrate the needs of families and children into transit planning on an ongoing basis.

Action #11:

Devote resources needed to further inform this Action Plan and steward its success.

The City and its partners have laid much of the groundwork needed to identify ways Seattle can be more supportive and attractive to youth and families. Examples include the work the City conducted in the late 2000s on "Family-Friendly Urban Neighborhoods;" the April 2013 conference on "Ingredients for Designing a Family-Friendly Downtown" organized by AIA Seattle and co-presented by the Planning Commission; and the current review of incentive zoning policies the City is conducting with the assistance of consultants and an Advisory Committee.

To properly inform and support the actions the Commission is recommending, the City will also need to:

a Conduct additional research on best practices in other cities, including those that require and/or encourage affordable, family-sized multifamily housing.

Examples from other cities:

+ **San Francisco** requires new residential development in districts that are well served by transit to include a minimum percentage of family-sized units.[26] **Vancouver, British Columbia** has mandated the provision of family-sized, family-friendly units in some major downtown developments.[27]
+ **Toronto, Ontario** and **Portland, Oregon** offer density bonuses to incentivize the inclusion of family-sized units in specific multifamily and high-density zones.[28]
+ **Portland, Oregon** used lessons learned through a 2007 design competition to compile a set of *Principles of Child Friendly Housing* and update the City's land use code to encourage the creation of courtyard housing as an appealing, affordable option for families.[29] An example of guidelines for higher-density family-friendly housing comes from **Vancouver, British Columbia**, which adopted its *High-Density Housing for Families with Children Guidelines* in 1992.[30]

Catherine Benotto

DCYF

b Adopt and monitor a goal for the net new number of family-sized housing units in multifamily housing. Tracking the development and availability of family-sized units (including 2-bedroom units as well as larger units) will help staff and policymakers determine if policies and codes need to be further adjusted. The composition of households – and the housing unit sizes suitable for these households – need to be taken into account when developing and tracking housing affordability goals. This is basic to ensuring that the housing needs of families with children and other larger households are properly considered.

c Research patterns and trends to more fully understand the changing characteristics and housing needs of families with children in Seattle and surrounding cities. In addition to more in-depth demographic analysis, this work should include a demand study, focus groups, and surveys to better understand housing preferences of families with children. Such research could, for example, help to identify any misalignment that may exist between the market for family-sized multifamily housing and developers' perceptions.

Allan Polendey

d Appoint family constituents to key housing, land use, and urban design advisory boards. Professionals with interest and experience in family-friendly development are important to include on boards and commissions such as Planning Commission, Design Commission, Design Review Boards, Housing Levy Oversight Committee; and on ad hoc boards advising City officials on the physical development of the city.

Credit: Office of Housing

Conclusion

It is time for Seattle to devote the resources and take the risks needed to foster a greater variety of housing so our city can remain a city for families of all incomes and sizes. The Planning Commission urges the City Council, the Mayor, and City departments to take up this action agenda. We are ready to lend our further expertise, support, and energy to help make this happen.

+ End Notes

From Context pages 2 – 8

1 Background on the Family-Friendly Urban Neighborhoods Initiative from the late 2000s is available on an archived webpage. http://wayback.archive-it.org/3241/20130513212017/http:/www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Center_City/CenterCityforFamilies/default.asp

2 The ***Housing Seattle*** report revealed that the families most likely to have difficulty finding housing they can afford in Seattle are larger, low- and middle-income families needing three or more bedrooms. The report considered households with incomes at or below 80 percent of AMI to be low-income, and households with income of 80 to 120 percent of AMI to be middle-income.

The *Housing Seattle* report analyzed 2009 data from multiple data sources. These sources include survey data on market-rate rental units compiled by Dupre+Scott Apartment Advisors, sales prices of single family homes and condominium units from the King County Department of Assessments, and information from the Seattle City Office Housing.

The *Housing Seattle* report and a companion *Technical Guide* can be found on the Planning Commission's website. The report gauged the affordability of housing units based on the commonly used standard that monthly housing costs should be no more than 30 percent of income. It evaluated affordability at various percentages of area median family income (commonly abbreviated "AMI"), as calculated and adjusted for household size by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The table below, excerpted from the *Housing Seattle* report, shows the maximum monthly housing costs considered affordable at various income levels in 2009.

For the for the Seattle-Bellevue area, the HUD-estimated annual Area Median Income (which HUD assigns to a family size of 4 persons) was $84,300 for 2009; and is $86,700 for 2013 (i.e., $2,400 higher than it was in 2009). To get a rough sense of income limits and affordable housing costs applicable to 2013, add $200 to the monthly incomes in the table above and $60 to the maximum affordable monthly housing costs above. Alternatively, see income limits and maximum affordable rents posted on the Seattle Office of Housing's website: http://www.seattle.gov/housing/development/limits_Multifamily.htm.

Monthly Household Income & Maximum Affordable Rent

	50% AMI		80% AMI		120% AMI	
	Income	Rent	Income	Rent	Income	Rent
1 Person / Studio:	$2,548	$738	$3,933	$1,180	$5,900	$1,770
1.5 People / 1 Bedroom:	$2,633	$790	$4,217	$1,265	$6,325	$1,898
3 People / 2 Bedroom:	$3,163	$949	$5,058	$1,518	$7,588	$2,276
4.5 People / 3 Bedroom:	$3,654	$1,096	$5,846	$1,754	$8,767	$2,630

Note: In this table, monthly income levels are expressed as a percentage of Area Median Income (AMI), and the housing costs shown refer to gross rent (i.e., rent plus the cost of basic utilities).

3 For example, the recent increases Seattle has seen in average market rents, coupled with the trend toward smaller unit sizes in new multifamily construction, suggest that the percentage of large apartment units affordable to low-income families is probably even a bit lower than it was in 2009.

4 The Census statistics cited on family households with children refer to family households in which there is one or more children under age 18 related to the householder. More information about the way the Census Bureau defines families and family relationships can be found at: www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/sf1.pdf.

5 See table below:

Total Households and Percentages That Are Families with Children
King County, Seattle and Selected Nearby Cities

	Total Households	% of Households That Are Families with Children
KING COUNTY	789,232	28.8%
Seattle City	**283,510**	**19.2%**
Balance of King County	505,722	34.1%
Selected Cities:		
Bellevue	50,355	29.7%
Renton	36,009	31.9%
Redmond	22,550	32.2%
Kirkland	22,445	24.3%
Shoreline	21,561	27.3%
Burien	13,253	29.4%
SeaTac	9,533	32.4%
Mercer Island	9,109	33.4%
Kenmore	7,984	33.0%
Tukwila	7,157	32.7%

Source: 2010 Census, U.S. Census Bureau

6 See Supporting Maps, page 32.

7 See table below:

King County and Seattle Families with Children

	1980	1990	2000	2010
King County Families with Children	163,806	185,240	212,834	226,954
Seattle Families with Children	47,195	47,378	49,834	54,337
Seattle's Share of County's Families with Children	**28.8%**	**25.6%**	**23.4%**	**23.9%**

Sources: 1990, 2000, and 2010 censuses, U.S. Census Bureau.

8 Section "C-6 Transit Communities" was added to the Land Use Element during the 2012-2013 Comprehensive Plan annual amendment process (Ordinance Number 124177). (As noted, most transit communities overlap with urban centers and urban villages, although this is not always the case.) See the Planning Commission's webpage for the Seattle Transit Communities report (November 2011) and other materials the Commission has produced to conceptualize and champion the creation of a strong citywide transit communities strategy: www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/. Click on "What We Do," then select "Transportation."

9 Research by Planning Commission staff in 2007 found that 57 percent of the land in Seattle is zoned exclusively for single-family homes; this was the fifth highest percentage among the 42 major U.S. cities that provided data. To facilitate comparison with other cities, the Commission's analysis factored out open space, water bodies, and land without a zoning designation. The 57 percent share of land the Commission found dedicated to single-family zones in Seattle is therefore somewhat lower than the 65 percent figure commonly cited.

From Actions pages 9 – 24

Action #1 – page 10

10 Ideally, kitchens and other key locations inside the unit should provide sightlines to outdoor play spaces.

11 Another part of the rationale for specifying 2 bedrooms as a minimum for family-sized housing in Seattle is that some families would not be able to afford larger units even if the market provided them. Furthermore, in areas of the city with the highest land prices (for example, South Lake Union and Queen Anne), policies are more likely to succeed in influencing production of small family-sized units rather than larger family-sized units.

Another note on defining family-sized housing units: it will be important to distinguish these units from other forms of housing such as microhousing, which contain the "micro" component sleeping generally intended to house individual, unrelated persons.

12 The need for onsite outdoor recreational space could potentially be reduced where there is easy access to nearby playgrounds or parks.

Action #2 – page 11

13 Seattle allows tandem and cottage housing types in Multifamily and certain Residential Small Lot (RSL) zones, but not in Single-Family zones (except as conditional uses in some planned developments). If the City adds flexibility to allow tandem and cottage housing in Single-Family zones, it may want to include somewhat different development standards to tap the potential of this housing time to provide some units large enough to accommodate a small family (e.g., for a single parent and a child). Seattle's Land Use Code details the use regulations and development standards that apply within different land use zones. The City's Department of Planning & Development provides a link to the full Land Use Code at: www.seattle.gov/dpd/codesrules/codes/landuse/default.htm and provides summaries of some key zoning types at: www.seattle.gov/dpd/codesrules/codes/zoning/default.htm.

Action #3 – page 12

14 Updates to Seattle's Multifamily Code in 2009 and 2011 increased flexibility in the way multifamily buildings can be designed, with a shift away from maximum unit density and the corresponding adoption of Floor Area Ratio as the main method for regulating bulk. As the Planning Commission noted in its March 2010 comments, the reduced role of density limits with the shift to Floor Area Ratio (FAR) limits has some potential to encourage smaller unit sizes in lowrise zones. Planning Commission letter, "RE: Comments on the Proposed Multifamily Code Update – Lowrise Zones" to Councilmember Sally Clark, Chair of the City Council's Committee on the Built Environment, March 22, 2010. www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/. Click on "What We Do," then select "Housing."

15 New strategies to encourage family-friendly multifamily housing could work along with affordability incentives when applied to areas covered by the City's current incentive zoning programs.

16 As noted, the construction of rowhouses in Seattle was made possible under the 2011 Multifamily Code update. However, the Code's definition for rowhouses does not allow for stacked flats; stacked flats are only allowed in apartments. Furthermore, the principal unit in a rowhouse can have only one accessory dwelling unit. Allowing stacked flats in street-facing designs such as rowhouses would broaden opportunities for constructing family-friendly units in the city. (Development standards may need to be included as part of the code revisions to encourages rowhouse flats large enough to accommodate families.)

Allowing an owner-occupant in a three-unit structure such as this to rent out the other two units would add to the attraction and financial viability of this housing form. For a discussion of stacked flats in townhouses and housing types such as triple-deckers, see "What happened to the three-decker," by Jacob Wegmann, a Master's thesis submitted to Massachusetts Institute of Technology Department of Urban Studies and Planning. http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/37424

Action #3b

17 Lowrise Multifamily Residential zones have a Green Factor score of 0.60 required, the highest requirement among the zones where Green Factor applies. At Green Factor scores in this range, required plantings substantially constrain any remaining space that might be usable for outdoor play and family recreation. www.seattle.gov/dpd/cityplanning/completeprojectslist/greenfactor/background/default.htm

Action #4a – page 14

18 Certain details, such as the maximum FAR increases that would be possible in the varying zones with FAR limits, will require further analysis. For example, in lowrise zones, the bonus area might be limited to the third bedroom only. The appropriate percentage of units with 3 or more bedrooms needed to trigger the incentive, and how this might vary by zone or housing type, would also need further study. So too would the amount and types of child-oriented recreational space (e.g., common, private, indoor or outdoor) needed to trigger the incentive.

Action #4c

19 Following is a definition of cohousing provided by Grace Kim, a Seattle Planning Commission member and architect whose firm designs urban cohousing communities: "An intentional neighborhood where people know and care about their neighbors. While everyone has their own private home (complete with kitchen, dining, living rooms as well as bedrooms), there are interior and exterior common facilities that facilitate regular community interaction. The residents are self-governing and the buildings are self-managed. Physical form can vary from site to site as can the ownership model."

Action #5 – page 16

20 See Planning Commission letter, "RE: Planning Commission supports South Lake Union Rezone Proposal," to Councilmember Richard Conlin, Chair of the City Council's Committee on the Built Environment, December 10, 2012. www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/ – click on "What We Do," then select "Neighborhoods."

Action #6 – page 17

21 See Planning Commission letter, "RE: Proposed Changes the Multifamily Tax Exemption Program," to Councilmember Nick Licata, Chair of the City Council's Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee, April 25, 2013. The letter is available on the Planning Commission's website: www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/ – click on "What We Do," then select "Housing."

Action #7a – page 18

22 Knock-out wall panels are panels within a portion of a wall that facilitate the installation of a doorway between adjacent units. The City of Toronto, Ontario has been exploring requiring the use of these panels in residential condominiums in order to help accommodate more families with children in multifamily development.

Action #7b

23 The Grow Home prototype was developed by the Affordable Homes program at McGill University's School of Architecture, and is described on the their website at http://homes.mcgill.ca/frame_proj_grow.htm. The Seattle-based non-profit Common Ground has reviewed a variety of cost-efficient housing models, several of which are flexible housing techniques than can accommodate the addition of children and other changes in household composition. http://commongroundwa.org/organization/NHMI-cost-effficient-models

Action #8 – page 19

24 This finding is from an analysis that the Office of Housing completed for the 2009 to 2012 Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development based on data from the 2006 American Community Survey. See Section 3.1.2. "Housing Market Analysis," at http://www.seattle.gov/humanservices/community_development/conplan/plan/CP_2009_final_Sec3.pdf.

Action #8b

25 Seattle and King County recently received a Fair Housing Assistance Program grant to partner with HomeSight, a non-profit agency to develop a Sharia-compliant mortgage product for Homesight to offer in the community. (See HUD News Release No. 2012-02-09; or the City of Seattle's 2012 Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER).)

Action #11 – page 22

26 Per Section 207.6 of the San Francisco Planning Code, a minimum dwelling unit mix is required in newly constructed buildings with 5 or more units in Residential Transit-Oriented, Neighborhood Commercial Transit, and other specified districts: either 40 percent of units must contain at least 2 bedrooms or a minimum of 30 percent of units must have at least 3 bedrooms. Also, see "Summary of the Planning Code Standards for Residential Districts," and "Eastern Neighborhoods Zoning Guide" at http://www.sf-planning.org/index.aspx.

27 "Families WILL Choose to Live Downtown, If We Design for Kids!," by Brent Toderian, Planetizen, September 24, 2012, http://www.planetizen.com/node/58567; and "Making kid-friendly cities: Lessons from two cities," by Gordon Price, and Rodrigo Reis, in Preventive Medicine, 50 (2010) S95–S96.

28 "The 'Manhattanization' of Toronto will change family-housing dreams," by Prithi Yelaja, CBC News, July 02, 2012, http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/the-manhattanization-of-toronto-will-change-family-housing-dreams-1.1137590; "Trading Density for Benefits: Section 37 Agreements in Toronto," IMFG perspectives, No, 2, 2013, Institute on Municipal Finance & Governance, University of Toronto, http://munkschool.utoronto.ca/imfg/uploads/221/imfg_perspectives___Moore_(feb_2013).pdf; See North Pearl District Plan, adopted in November, 2008, for discussion of applicable Zoning Code development bonus provisions, www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/268304.

29 Portland's 2007 Courtyard Housing Competition was part of a multi-pronged effort by the City to "retain families with children in the city's neighborhoods in the face of increasingly unaffordable conventional detached housing." Portland continues to maintain the http://www.courtyardhousing.org/ website to promote and inform future projects. Portland's Principles of Child Friendly Housing is also posted here: http://www.courtyardhousing.org/downloads/ChildFriendlyHousing.pdf.

30 The City of Vancouver's High-Density Housing For Families With Children Guidelines, adopted 1992, are available online: http://former.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/guidelines/H004.pdf. For more on what it takes to support families with children to live in urban neighborhoods, see materials from Sarah Snider-Komppa, former Planning Commissioner and recipient of AIA Seattle's Emerging Professionals Travel Scholarship – http://www.downtownfamilies.com/blog.html; and 2013 conference on Ingredients for Designing a Family-Friendly Downtown at http://www.aiaseattle.org/FamilyFriendlyDowntown2013.

Appendix A: Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies

This appendix shows a selection of the goals and policies in Seattle's Comprehensive Plan aimed at attracting and supporting families with children.

Housing Element Goals and Policies

Section A: Accommodating Growth & Maintaining Affordability

Policy H1: "Coordinate the City's growth management planning with other jurisdictions in the region in order to provide adequate regional development capacity to accommodate expected residential growth and anticipated demand for different types of housing.

Section B: Encouraging Housing Diversity & Quality

Goal HG4: Achieve a mix of housing types that are attractive and affordable to a diversity of ages, incomes, household types, household sizes, and cultural backgrounds.

Goal HG5: Promote households with children and attract a greater share of the county's families with children.

Goal HG11.5: Implement strategies and programs to help ensure a range of housing opportunities affordable to those who work in Seattle.

Policy H10: Reflect anticipated consumer preferences and housing demand of different submarkets in the mix of housing types and densities permitted under the City's Land Use Code. Encourage a range of housing types including, but not limited to: single-family housing; ground-related housing to provide an affordable alternative to single-family ownership; and moderate- and high-density multifamily apartments, which are needed to accommodate most of the growth over the 20-year life of this Plan.

Policy H11: Strive to make the environment, amenities and housing attributes in urban villages attractive to all income groups, ages and households types."

Policy H13: Accommodate and encourage, where appropriate, the development of ground-related housing in the city that is attractive and affordable to households with children.

Policy H14: Strive to have each hub urban village and residential urban village include some ground-related housing capacity.

Policy H18: Promote methods of more efficiently using or adapting the city's housing stock to enable changing households to remain in the same home or neighborhood for many years. Strategies may include sharing homes, accessory units in single-family zones, housing designs that are easily augmented to accommodate children ('grow houses'), or other methods considered through neighborhood planning.

Policy H20: Promote and foster, where appropriate, innovative and non-traditional housing types such as co-housing, live/work housing and attached and detached accessory dwelling units, as alternative means of accommodating residential growth and providing affordable housing options.

Section (C-2): Publicly Subsidized Low-Income Housing

Policy H41: Provide affordable housing for low-income families with children, recognizing that family housing requires greater subsidies due to larger household size, the need for play areas for children, and separation of parking and access roads from play areas.

Urban Village Element Goals and Policies

Section A: Urban Village Strategy

UVG15: Encourage development of ground-related housing, which is attractive to many residents including families with children, including townhouses, duplexes, triplexes, ground-related apartments, small cottages, accessory units, and single-family homes.

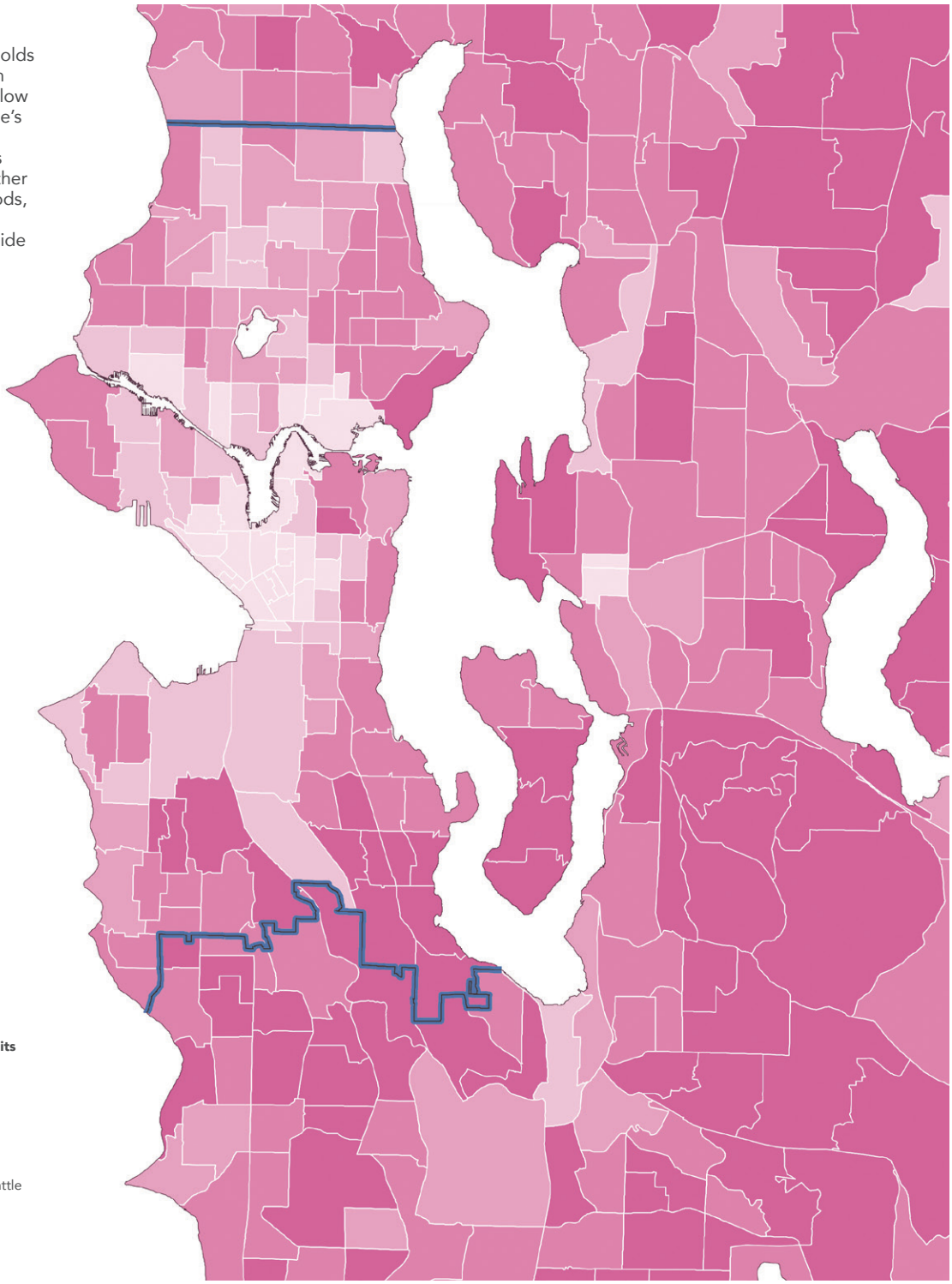
Note: The full *Comprehensive Plan* is available online, as is information on the work being done to update the Plan. See: www.seattle.gov/dpd/planning/compplan.

Appendix B: Supporting Maps

The maps in this appendix supplement the Context in the white paper and are intended to help readers visualize where family households with children are located and concentrated in and around Seattle.

Share of Households that are Families with Children

The share of households that are families with children tends to below in and around Seattle's centrally located urban centers, but is typically higher in other Seattle neighborhoods, as well as in most neighborhoods outside of Seattle.

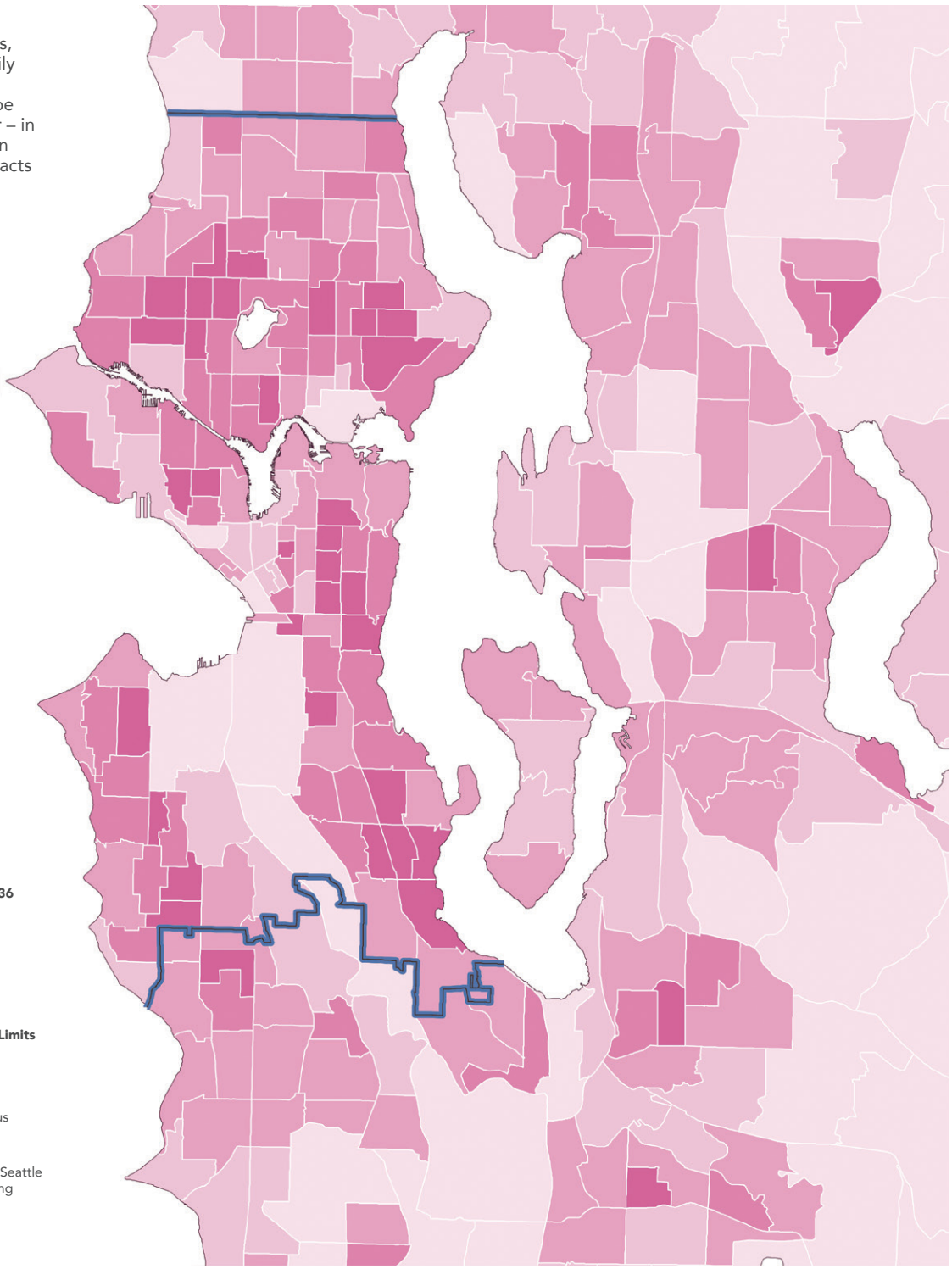


Data Source:
U.S. Census Bureau
2010 Decennial Census
100% Count data for
Census Tracts

Produced by: City of Seattle
Department of Planning
and Development

Number of Households Per Acre that are Families with Children

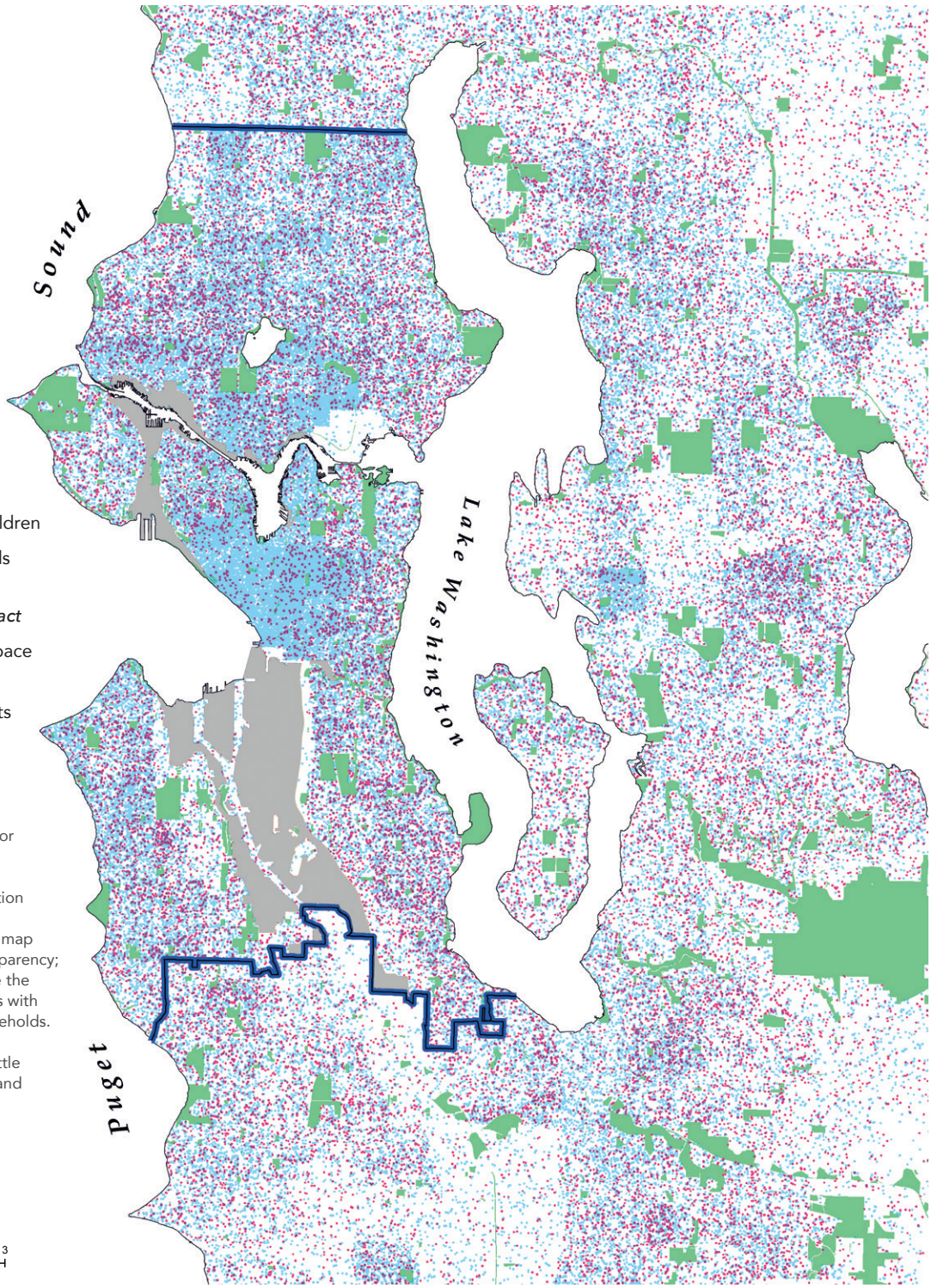
On a per acre basis, the density of family households with children tends to be as high – or higher – in census tracts within Seattle as it is in tracts outside of Seattle.



Data Source:
U.S. Census Bureau
2010 Decennial Census
100% Count data for
Census Tracts

Produced by: City of Seattle
Department of Planning
and Development

Density and Distribution of Families with Children and Other Households



LEGEND

- Families with Children
- Other Households

Each dot represents 5 households per tract

- Parks & Open Space
- Industrial Areas
- Seattle City Limits

Data Source:

U.S. Census Bureau
2010 Decennial Census
100 percent Count data for Census Tracts

Note: Locational distribution represented by dots is approximate. Dots in the map were rendered with transparency; thus, purple dots indicate the presence of both Families with Children and Other Households.

Produced by: City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development

N

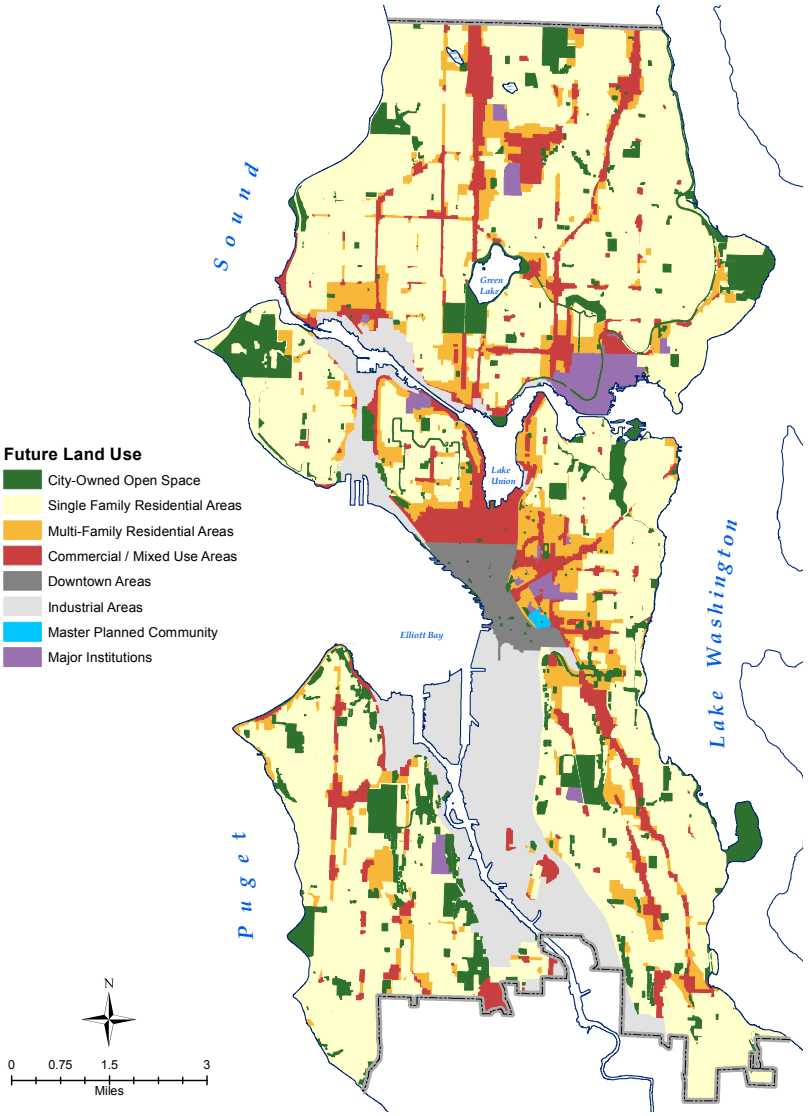
0 0.75 1.5 3
Miles

Seattle: Simplified Zoning Map

The **Density and Distribution** map on the preceding page shows how families with children are distributed in and around Seattle, and how their distribution compares to that of other households.

In areas of Seattle with the densest overall concentrations of households, families with children (magenta dots) are outnumbered by other households (blue dots).

However, the concentration of families with children in some of these dense urban neighborhoods is as high or higher than it is in many other neighborhoods in and around Seattle.



A simplified look at Seattle's zoning based on the Future Land Use Map (FLUM), provided for reference. Detailed zoning map at: www.seattle.gov/dpd/toolsresources/zoningmapbooks/default.htm.

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