



# City of Seattle

## Seattle Planning Commission

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June 29, 2012

Honorable Council President Sally Clark, Chair  
Yesler Terrace – Special Committee  
Seattle City Council  
PO Box 34025  
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

### **RE: Recommendations on the proposed redevelopment of Yesler Terrace**

Dear Council President Clark,

Yesler Terrace redevelopment presents a tremendous opportunity to benefit current and future residents, as well Seattle as a whole. We applaud the extraordinary work that City and SHA staff have done to craft a financially feasible proposal that incorporates many essential components of livability for a transit community that is uniquely Seattle.

The Commission supports the proposed legislation including the Land Use Code amendments, planned action ordinance, street vacation, parks reconfiguration, and Cooperative Agreement. This proposed legislation is consistent with the core values for redevelopment: one-for-one replacement housing, social equity, environmental stewardship, and economic opportunity. Additionally, it builds on the vision for Yesler Terrace that was adopted during the 2010-2011 Comprehensive Plan amendment process, which designated the area as a Master Planned Community.

The Planning Commission has been tracking the proposed redevelopment of Yesler Terrace since 2006, when the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) formed the Citizen Review Committee (CRC) that has provided consistent oversight of the project. During the past six years, we have provided feedback and recommendations to SHA and DPD staff in a variety of ways; a member of the Commission also serves on the CRC.

This letter provides the Commission's comments regarding the elements of the legislation that support redevelopment in a transit community. We also raise aspects of redevelopment beyond the scope of the proposed legislation that deserve Council's continued consideration.

### **Proposed legislation creates a complete, compact and connected transit community**

The redevelopment plan balances multiple objectives and meets the vision established by the Comprehensive Plan and the CRC. The points below outline key elements of the proposal that will leverage local investment in Yesler Terrace and help create a complete, compact and connected transit community.

- **Build on existing community assets:** Yesler Terrace has historically provided very-low income housing to many families and was among the first racially integrated public housing in the United States; redevelopment would continue to serve households who currently live here as well as create opportunities for many new families and jobs. The proposal would continue to provide opportunities for residents to grow their own food and operate home-based businesses, such as child care, would also preserve the community center and transform the Steam Plant, a historic landmark, into an education and training facility.
- **Avoid displacement:** SHA's plans to build new very-low income housing on the east side of Boren would make it easier for residents to move to new homes nearby rather than being displaced to other parts of the city or region. This phased approach to redevelopment will help avoid displacement of families and individuals who currently live at Yesler Terrace.
- **Create a mixed-income neighborhood:** In addition to one-for-one replacement of the homes currently provided at Yesler Terrace, the proposed redevelopment would accommodate many new households, at a range of income levels, and create a truly mixed-income neighborhood. SHA has successfully achieved this in the past at New Holly, Rainier Vista, and High Point. The proposed legislation includes important provisions related to the phasing of new development that would ensure new homes would be available for households at a variety of income levels throughout the build-out process.
- **Leverage regional investment in transit:** Planned investments will provide increased mobility for the people who will live and work at the redeveloped Yesler Terrace. In particular, the First Hill Streetcar will provide great transit connections between Yesler Terrace and the International District, Pioneer Square, and Capitol Hill. The proposed legislation would allow for appropriate heights and densities that create the proximity of residents, workers and visitors to support this important regional investment.

- **Improve connections within the neighborhood and to adjacent neighborhoods:** Proposed improvements to the street grid would make it easier for residents to walk or bike around the neighborhood and to adjacent neighborhoods. For example, the first phase of redevelopment would include a hillclimb that improves connections between Yesler Terrace and Little Saigon. It will also be important to create safe connections across Boren, which is a busy arterial and can be difficult for pedestrians to cross.
- **Balance the mix of uses:** A complementary mix of uses increases economic diversity and helps create a vibrant neighborhood. The proposed legislation strikes an appropriate balance between the amount and location of residential, commercial, retail, and community services.
- **Create more shared open space:** Changes to the zoning would allow for many more people to live and work at Yesler Terrace and the legislation would increase open space including three pocket parks totaling at least an acre in addition to a new park adjacent to the community center. Design guidelines would create a great pedestrian environment including pleasant sidewalks, street-level facades, and public open space.
- **Sustainability and the environment:** The redevelopment of Yesler Terrace provides a new opportunity to incorporate many lessons learned over the past 70 years about how to integrate buildings with the natural environment. The new buildings will create healthier living spaces for residents and green infrastructure will improve water and air quality.

### **Additional Considerations**

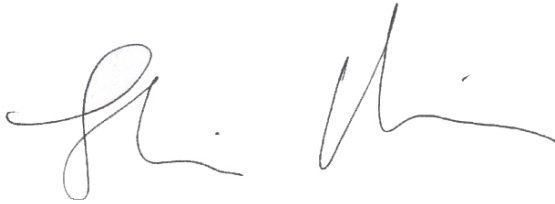
We would like to highlight the following issues, which although beyond the scope of the proposed legislation, merit further consideration from Council.

- **Potential impacts on surrounding business districts:** Redevelopment of Yesler Terrace could place significant pressure to increase rents for businesses in Little Saigon, which is a culturally significant neighborhood. The Commission understands that SHA has discussed potential impacts with the business community in Little Saigon; we would encourage the City and SHA to continue exploring how to preserve affordable retail space in this and other redeveloping communities.

- **Attract new families:** In our Housing Seattle report, the Commission found that few family-sized housing units are being built in multifamily developments, particularly for households with low incomes. While many of the new homes at Yesler Terrace would be for households with low and very-low incomes and would have three or more bedrooms, most new market rate housing is likely to have fewer than two bedrooms. This could discourage development of a community of diverse family sizes and incomes. We recognize that the demand for family-sized housing needs to be present before market-rate developers will build it. During the development of the proposal the Commission had a productive work session with DPD, Office of Housing, SHA and Heartland to better explore this topic. We recognize the challenges of influencing unit size in market rate housing mix for Yesler Terrace. One promising essential component that could help create a stronger demand for housing with more bedrooms would be to build strong partnerships with nearby schools – including Bailey Gatzert Elementary School, Pratt Fine Arts, and Seattle Vocational Institute – that could help make Yesler Terrace more attractive to families of all income levels.
- **Relocate utilities underground:** We recognize the additional expense required to relocate utility lines underground and that SHA will not be able to fund this. We also understand that SPU prefers to keep utility lines above ground to reduce maintenance costs, but above-ground utility lines impact the aesthetics of the neighborhood. Utility lines above ground are supported by poles that take up valuable space that could be better used to accommodate large street trees, landscaping or sidewalk cafes, features that promote walkability and livability. In addition, burying utilities underground, which could also support the potential district energy system, provides a more reliable distribution network to the neighborhood.
- **District energy:** One of the most unique opportunities for the redevelopment would establish a district energy system, which would heat buildings through a neighborhood-wide system. We understand that the Office of Sustainability and the Environment has recently chosen a firm to study the feasibility of this system and how it could be connected to Seattle’s 2030 District and/or the Capitol Hill EcoDistrict.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our recommendations regarding the proposed redevelopment of Yesler Terrace. We look forward to assisting you as the City implementation process advances. Please contact me or our Director, Barbara Wilson at (206) 684-0431 if you have further questions.

Sincerely,



Leslie Miller, Chair  
Seattle Planning Commission

cc: Mayor Mike McGinn  
Seattle City Councilmembers  
Daryl Smith, Ethan Raup, David Hiller; Mayor's Office  
Rebecca Herzfeld, Martha Lester, Traci Ratzliff; Council Central Staff  
Diane Sugimura, Marshall Foster, Gary Johnson, Dave LaClergue; DPD  
Rick Hooper, Maureen Kostyack; Office of Housing

**SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION RECORD OF DISCLOSURE & RECUSAL:**

- Catherine Benotto disclosed that her firm, Weber Thompson, designs projects and advises clients who might be interested in pursuing development projects at Yesler Terrace.
- Commissioner Luis Borrero disclosed that his firm, DRVE LLC, has a strategic partnership with Heartland, LLC, which is working on the Yesler Terrace project.
- Commissioner Josh Brower disclosed that his firm, Veris Law Group PLLC, represents single and multi family developers throughout the city of Seattle. He added that used to serve on the Advisory Board of Full Life Care (formerly Elderhealth NW), which works closely with SHA to provide housing and adult-day services to people suffering from dementia.
- Commissioner David Cutler recused himself from the discussion and vote on this matter.
- Commissioner Colie Hough Beck disclosed that the firm I work for, HBB, works with SDOT, SPU, Parks, and City Light on projects throughout Seattle. She added that her firm also work for private and public housing developers in Seattle.
- Commissioner Brad Khouri disclosed that his firm, b9 Architects, design single family and multi-family housing throughout Seattle and might in this neighborhood.
- Commissioner Jeanne Krikawa disclosed that she serves on the Yesler Terrace Citizen Review Committee, which will also submit a letter to City Council.
- Commissioner Amalia Leighton disclosed that her firm, SvR Design, is working on the infrastructure for the Yesler Terrace redevelopment project.
- Commissioner Chris Persons disclosed that his organization, Capitol Hill Housing builds affordable housing throughout Seattle and may develop replacement housing or on-site housing for the Yesler redevelopment.
- Commissioner Matt Roewe disclosed that his firm, Via Architecture, works on municipal planning and private development projects throughout Seattle and that he serves on the board of Capitol Hill Housing, which may develop replacement housing or on-site housing for the Yesler redevelopment.
- Commissioner Morgan Shook abstained from the discussion and vote on this matter.
- Commissioner Sarah Snider disclosed that her firm, LMN, does urban design and various types of architectural projects and works for clients who might be interested in pursuing development projects at Yesler Terrace.