

A Citizens' Guide through the Annals of Seattle Land Use—Part 1

Research & analysis donated by Anna Nissen, Nissen/Nissen Architect —a work in progress, 3/6/08

Seattle, Home to Over a Million People! — 1911 to the Present

Italics, except for document titles, are the words of the guide's author

September 7, 1911

Warning: this first one is stilted

Report of Municipal Plans Commission, Financial Summary

"At the onset it was essential to determine the range of the task and after considerable debate,... **it was decided that the plan should** embrace an area of about 150 square miles, which at 7,000 inhabitants per mile (sic)—an average density of population of American cities comparable in rate of growth to Seattle —would **provide for a population of slightly over a million inhabitants....**

[I]t was a matter which could be regarded only to the extent that, throughout its development, results should be obtained **with the least possible disturbance of existing conditions, while still securing,** in the course of twenty-five, fifty or a hundred years, **a consistent and harmonious city is all its various relations."**

July 27, 1923

Ordinance 45382 First Seattle Zoning Ordinance,

Foreword

"Ordinance No 40407,...enacted February, 1920...establishing a City Zoning Commission,...and provided further... to make a survey of the City of Seattle with a view for dividing the same into zones or districts, and report... a zoning or districting ordinance ...Mr. Harland Bartholomew*, a zoning expert of national reputation, was secured as special consultant, and under his direction a plan of procedure was outlined. Maps were prepared showing the location, height, and present use of all buildings in the city, and such other data as would be of value, such as topography, population density, trend and rate of growth of various districts, the area or percentage of lot occupancy and the assessed valuation [*income of residents*]."

* "**The Whole City Is Our Laboratory:**" Harland Bartholomew and the Production of Urban Knowledge. Joseph Heathcott, 2005; 4; 322 *Journal of Planning History*. "Bartholomew and his staff mobilized the rationale and legal instruments of planning to reimagine the city as a place of stable and predictable land uses and functions,...to consolidate property into large contiguous parcels of land, and to transform whole neighborhoods through redevelopment projects of unprecedented scale." p. 325.

October 20, 1954

Municipal News (Muni League)

Front page story: "It's Time for a New Zoning Ordinance"

"1923-1954

In 1923 two residential classifications were considered sufficient. People either lived in an apartment or in a "home." **The present ordinance permits too much building on too little land--as much as 90 percent building coverage permitted on an apartment lot. Of the total Seattle area (1950 city limits) zoned for apartments only 25 percent is being used for that purpose.**

...The 1923 ordinance was established without a plan and without the benefit of techniques and experience since gained for accurately measuring our land use needs. For example, properties adjacent to street car lines and major streets were zoned for business far in excess of the market potential."

April 1976

Vision of the City

The League of Women Voters, page 18

"...In 1956, makers of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan for land use zoned the City for densities that would accommodate the residences, offices and business of 1,000,000 people. Instead of reaching that level, the population declined by over 10 percent and now appears to be stabilizing at about 500,000. Professionals describe this situation as "overzoned." [*Seattle's current population as of April 2007 is 586,200 people*]

...The Seattle 2000 Commission recommended a reversal of "overzoning" policies and directed the City to resist auto-related pressures in neighborhoods. It advanced policies that would promote owner occupancy of property and preserve the existing housing supply. It favors expansion of streets and utilities only when the need clearly exists."

July 17, 1981

Summary of Multifamily Land Use Policies

Cover Memo: Councilmember Michael Hildt, Chair, Urban Development Committee

"I am very pleased that we were able to achieve the dual goal of enhanced housing development opportunities while preserving the scale and character of our neighborhoods...

Key features ...are:

1. Lift density limits...an artificial limitation which is the basis for the price of land...sometimes higher than can be achieved...and other times causes the land to be underutilized or requires lot assembly;...
2. Make it easier to build infill housing... and minimize the incentives to demolish existing housing;...
3. Allow slightly more density;...
4. Give incentives for ground-related housing;...
5. **Increase flexibility and cut red tape....—eliminate several traditional regulations: density limits, minimum lot size and lot coverage limits and replace them with development standards which allow greater bulk. Normally , one would expect to go through a design review process to achieve this bulk, however, the Policies provide...standards which allow a developer to achieve the bulk without requiring any design review."** *Attached: Resolution instructs Mayor Royer to proceed with the code writing.*

March 1989

Mayor's Recommended Revisions to the Multifamily Policies,

Cover Letter, Mayor Royer:

"...In 1982, we put in place new Land Use Policies and Code to guide multifamily development. The unprecedented development pressures experienced in **recent years have stretched the limits of the land uses provisions, requiring a full evaluation of the Policies and Code to ensure that the original intent is met.**"

May 1989

Citizens' Recommended Revisions to the Seattle Multifamily Land Use Policies,

Cover Letter, Working Group of the Seattle Neighborhood Coalition and the Seattle Community Council Federation:

"...**In 1988, the City Council passed an emergency ordinance establishing interim zoning in the "lowrise" multi-family zones. It called for the City to abandon the experimental "impact zoning" code and to install traditional controls to correct the excessive density, size, and unpredictability of the buildings in lowrise zones.** It also noted that many multi-family zones appeared to be incorrectly located under the adopted multi-family "locational criteria," which guide mapping of the zones, and called for corrections of those mismappings

Same Date

Citizens' Environmental Impact Statement Supplement Materials,

Citizens' analysis and chart of zoned housing capacities indicates the population housed by the 1989 alternatives might vary from a low of 1,145,000 people to a high of 1,269,000 people.

November 9, 1989

Citizens' Recommended Revisions to the Seattle Multifamily Land Use Policies,

(the lowly beginning of the "urban village strategy" – 1994 Comprehensive Plan)

"Policy 1: Purpose of the Multifamily Zones

"The overall objective of these policies is to set long range patterns for growth and change that conserve the diverse and individual characteristics of Seattle's cherished neighborhoods, and where appropriate, to produce, over time, new or revitalized neighborhoods of comparable merit. Explicit objectives are: (1) multifamily in-fill developments that respect the character and scale of already established neighborhoods; (2) new buildings, in those areas appropriate for extensive redevelopment, that when added together produce appealing new multifamily neighborhoods that create a sense of community, provide for stability, and are useful for the full length of their potential life cycle; (3) a diverse and resilient housing stock that will accommodate, without major displacement, a full range of household types; and (4) desirable housing for persons of all incomes through conserving existing housing resources and directing major redevelopment energies to transforming noncohesive, under-utilized areas adjacent to major transit hubs into pedestrian oriented neighborhoods."

December 18, 1989

Passage of Council's Multifamily Revisions: Ordinances 114887 & 114888

No online text available.

The following is the observation of the guide's author:

City Council rejected the Mayor's recommendations and passed its own Revision to the Multifamily Land Use Code. Councilmember Rice became mayor elect in late 1989, his aide Greg Nichols moved on to a new job as well.

The validity of the 1989 Council's work is hard to challenge. Preoccupation with land use

appeals virtually disappeared. For twenty years, Councils and neighborhoods dealt with other pressing issues.

Until today (2008), when an epidemic of townhouse construction (very rare in 1989) dominates construction in all the lowrise multifamily zones and can even be found in mixed use zones. The cause is three fold: renewed demand for in-city single family living (a reversal of the flight to the suburbs), excessive advantages granted townhouses to encourage their construction, and informal interpretations that further encourage townhouses sardine packed two rows deep onto sites, raising resale questions for purchasers, and fire safety and light and air questions for purchasers and neighbors.

July 25, 1994

City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan — Toward a Sustainable Seattle

Vision Resolution 28962:

B1. Seattle's Community Values

Community...The plan anticipates that residents and business people will collaborate with the City to find acceptable, desirable and innovative ways to achieve Seattle's goals through neighborhood planning

Environmental Stewardship. The natural and built environments are precious resources that should be preserved, protected and enhanced.

Economic Opportunity and Security. Citizens of Seattle want themselves, their children and others living in the city to enjoy the benefit of a healthy economy...in a manner that balances these benefits with other values.

Social Equity...Seattle citizens seek greater equity in the opportunity to benefit from, participate in and contribute to the life of the community.

2.... A Sustainable Seattle... Sustainability refers to the long-term social, economic, and environmental health of our community....without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The four core values [*above*]...are key components....

3. The Urban Village Strategy...combines small changes in the city's development pattern with a more complete and competitive intermodal public transportation system...planning tools to provide desirable and affordable housing, investment...to serve higher density neighborhoods and neighborhood-based decisions built upon local citizens' expressed priorities.

4. A City for Families...The City will make special efforts to keep Seattle attractive for children and families. These efforts will have the benefit of also making the community attractive to households without children.

November 1994

The Urban Village War,

Governing Magazine Volume 8, # 2, Page 51:

"Seattle Mayor Norm Rice had an irresistible idea: a city of the future where sprawl would be conquered and neighborhoods would thrive.... The resulting "urban village" proposal was an instant national hit when Rice unveiled it two years ago, and it has drawn consistent rave reviews from city planners and critics ever since then. Rice is always applauded when he takes to the road to present his ideas about "urban neighborhoods that actually address the needs and desires of families" and cities that "draw more people back into areas that have already been developed.".. The Growth Management [*Act of 1990*] was imposed upon us, but once we started, we had to develop something that was going to fit with Seattle's idea and opportunities....In other words, "urban villages." The term was invented more than 30 years ago by the sociologist Herbert Gans, in relation to Boston's North End.... Though the framework envisioned a neighborhood planning process, there were no organized forays into the city's

neighborhoods to talk about what each community wanted for itself. It was clear that the actual content was to be left up to the city's planners....The result was that his original purpose —to guide the city into a discussion about its future—disappeared in a series of vituperative spitting matches. ...Given the tumult, it's surprising the city council actually passed a plan that kept the core of Rice's proposal.... It cut the document itself to less than a third of its former size...It "clarified" that the plan provided for all modes of transportation, including the automobile. And, most important, it handed off some of the more controversial issues—such as the exact boundaries and growth targets for the individual villages—to the neighborhood planning process...."

Winter 1996-97

Urban Centers in the Central Puget Sound Region, a baseline summary

Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC):

"The centers strategy involves strengthening and revitalizing existing centers as well as encouraging development in suburban places that are emerging as new community and regional hubs....An urban center...doesn't have to be a noisy place dominated by concrete and towering buildings. The Vision 2020 urban center strategy includes downtowns, historic "streetcar" neighborhoods, main streets, and shopping districts, as well as suburban areas that are "growing up."... Vision 2020 suggests that communities fostering one or more urban centers work toward the following size and density thresholds. ...a maximum size of 960 acres, 10 to 20 Households per Acre [*6,400 to 12,800 per Square Mile*], and 15,000 to 300,000 employees

Seattle's 5 Centers

<u>urban center</u>	<u>1995 Households/Acre existing</u>	<u>2020 Households/acre planned</u>
First Hill Capital Hill—	23.8	30.0
Downtown—	13.1	29.5
Northgate—	10 .0	19.0
University	15.7	18.5
Uptown—	10.0	14.0

...Collectively urban centers currently are home to about 119,377 residents. This amounts to 3.9% of the regions' current population. [80% of which lives within the urban growth area (UGA). By 2020 somewhat over 16% of the population is expected to live in the designated urban centers, a five fold increase."

September 18, 1998

Land use Code Simplification —Issues and Options

Nancy Fox for City of Seattle

"...Following a multi-million dollar comprehensive rewrite of the Seattle Zoning Code [*beginning in 1977*], Seattle's land use code has grown to 790 pages in size with half again as many pages of Director's Rules. The study...is aimed at starting a dialogue....Based on this dialogue **the City will...identify resources needed to accomplish significant progress toward Land Use Code simplification....**"

March 2003

Monitoring Our Progress—Seattle Department of Construction and Land Use:

"Studies for the Comprehensive Plan looked at past trends and assumed that the average number of people occupying each housing unit (the household size) would shrink from 2.09 in 1990 to 2.03 in 2000. Instead, the average size of Seattle's households dropped only slightly to 2.08 in 2000. If household sizes continue to remain fairly constant, 41,000 fewer housing units would need to be built in Seattle between 1994 and 2002 to accommodate the projected population growth."

Appendix 1 & 2 of Monitoring Our Progress compare the net housing unit growth and jobs growth over the seven years (1995-2002) following adoption of 20 year growth targets (1995-2015). For the reality to be exactly on track all the percentages below would read 35% (7 yrs/20 yrs).

2002 —actual % of targets met (housing units ranked high to low)

<i>category</i>	<i>net housing units</i>	<i>jobs</i>
Centers		
<i>Uptown</i>	56%	-15%
<i>First/Capital Hill</i>	37%	52%
<i>Downtown</i>	32%	45%
<i>University</i>	31%	68%
<i>Northgate</i>	5%	21%
<i>All Urban Centers</i>	31%	44%
Villages		
<i>Wallingford</i>	200%	
<i>Eastlake</i>	76%	
<i>Admiral</i>	62%	
<i>Madison/Miller</i>	62%	
<i>23rd& Jackson</i>	60%	
<i>MLK @ Holly</i>	60%	
<i>Greenwood Phinney</i>	51%	
<i>Liction Springs</i>	37%	
<i>West Seattle Junction</i>	34%	
<i>Lake City</i>	34%	
<i>Remainder of Villages</i>	27% or less	
<i>South Lake Union (Hub)</i>	22%	132%
<i>All Hub Urban Village</i>	23%	37%
All Residential Villages	37%	
Outside Centers/Villages	32%	
Seattle Total	31%	51%
<i>BINMIC Industrial Center</i>		48%
<i>Duwamish Industrial Center</i>		72%

January 2005

Seattle Comprehensive Plan Update: (New 20 year targets projected for—2004 to 2024)

Appendix A center	HH/Acre 1995, existing	HH/Acre 1995 plan for 2020	HH/Acre 2004 existing	HH/Acre 2024 projected
First/Cap. Hill	23.8	30.0	25	28
Downtown	13.1	29.5	16	27
Northgate	10 .0	19.0	8	15
University*	15.7	18.5	9	12 * removes UW
Uptown**	10.0	14.0	15	19 **includes Seattle Ctr.
S. L. Union			4	27

[PSRC target in urban centers= 10 to 20 households per acre (per PSRC, Winter '96/'97)]

<u>Calculated from Appendix A</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>net new</u>
households in centers & villages	103,101 hh	141,531 hh	38,430 hh
households outside centers & villages	164,899 hh	173,469 hh	8,570 hh
households in Seattle	268,000 hh	315,000 hh	47,000 hh
population @ 2000 household size	557,440 people	655,200 people	97,760 people
population @ 2000 household size			.9% per year.

April 2007

source: Puget Sound Regional Council Trends (available on PSRC website) analysis by guide author:

Where Growth Actually Went During "The Selling of Seattle"

The chart below combines two April 2007 tables : 1) the 10 Cities in the 4 County Region with the Highest 2007 Population and 2) the 10 Cities with Greatest Jobs Growth 2005-2006. These cities are rated lowest to highest rate of population growth, followed by the jobs set ranked lowest to highest job rate . Note the population and job rates correlate at the lowest rates but at the highest rates cities appear either in the population column or in the job column.

Central Puget Sound Cities with the Highest Population or Greatest Jobs Growth

<u>City (with # of designated urban centers)</u>	<u>pop. increase 00-'07</u>	<u>pop. rate '00-'07</u>	<u>jobs rate 05-'06</u>
Seattle 6c *	+22,826	4.1% (.6%per year.)	+1.1%
Tacoma 2c	+8,144	4.2	+1.4
Bellevue 1c	+8,273	7.5	+4.7
Kent 1c	+7,136	9	+6
Everett 1c	+10,312	11.3	+6
Auburn 1c	+7,423	17.2	
Renton 1c	+10,238	20.5	+5
Marysville 0c (town)	+10,898	43	
Lake Stevens 0c (town)	+6,989	109.9	
Issaquah 0c (town)	+13,498	120.4%	
Federal Way 1c			+5.2
Lakewood 1c			+6.4
Tukwila 1c			+8.8
SeaTac 1c			+10.2%
increase less Seattle	+82,911		

2008

Proposed Multifamily Update,

Department of Planning and Development (DPD)

source: 11/25/07 DNS draft, inclusive of all supporting documents found on online.

(analysis, the work of the guide's author)

- *calls proposal an update of the 1984 (sic) code;*
- *ignores the 1989 overhaul of the 1982 code noted herein and twenty years of tested results;*
- *ignores existing revisions already incorporated in Seattle's Comprehensive Plan;*
- *ignores DPD's own interpretations as a source of the problematic townhouses;*
- *used Christmas Eve as appeal deadline for a Declaration of Non Significance (DNS). Whereas the 1982 and 1989 revisions had Environmental Impact Statements (EIS), and in the case of 1989, an additional supplemental (SEIS). The public can only conclude from this that the planners believe that out-of scale-development, on the face of it, is non significant, while fitting-in most likely has significant adverse environmental impacts;*
- *abandons both the "urban village strategy" of the Comprehensive Plan and the "centers strategy" of Vision 2020/40 for Central Puget Sound (state mandated plans);*
- *seeks to legislatively upzone the entire city and avoid due process;*
- *seeks to reinstall the planning disaster of 1982, a costly experiment that featured the same theme— "flexibility with limits"— except this time, limits are either removed outright or expanded*
- *to effectively remove, for example: all setbacks (yards) reduced to either 5' or 7' wide;*
- *ignores the City commissioned report in 1998 that documented the urgency of "significant progress toward Land Use Code simplification;"*
- *ignores efforts nationwide to reach public judgment —community by community— on simpler, more effective ways to shape the massing of buildings so that they again add up to urbane places with long term appeal and resilient lives that conserve investments, heritage, resources and*
- *natural affordability.*