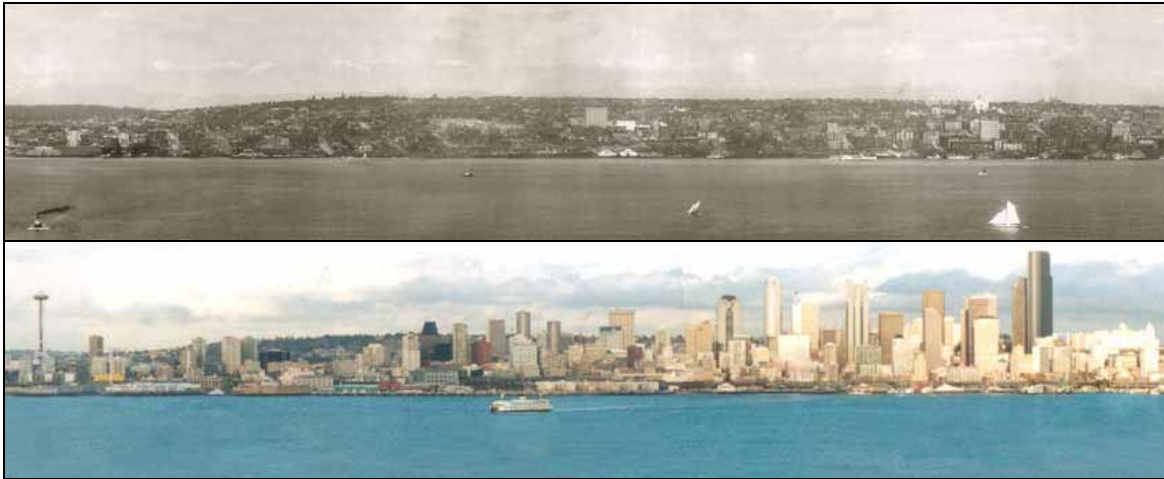


Planning Methods 1 – URP 5510
Final Project Report: A Peer City Analysis of Seattle



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AREAS OF ANALYSIS: CITY OF SEATTLE

Introduction

Seattle has seen tremendous growth and development over the past one hundred and fifty years. The roots of the town started as many other towns across the west: with the search for gold. The focus then shifted to the more prevalent natural resource in the area. The timber industry flourished in the Pacific Northwest giving rise to an economic base in the area. Remnants of the Victorian Era from the late 1800s are still present in the Downtown. Victorian Romanesque architecture can still be seen in the historic districts, such as Pioneer Square.

Downtown Seattle is far different than it was in the early 1900s. A large hill and tidal flats encompassed much of the downtown region then. With a series of regards such as the Denny Hill Regrade and the Jackson Street Regrade, the area was leveled and backfilled with earth to accommodate the construction of buildings. This makes the area very prone to earthquake damage, as it is vulnerable to liquefaction during such an event. A large role for city engineers, officials, and planners is to create a safe, sustainable epicenter for the region's commerce.

The 1970s economic times were hard on Downtown Seattle nearly destroying the Chinatown International District. Through many revitalization projects, construction booms, transit projects and a new Central Waterfront Project, Seattle has taken the steps necessary to promote business, commerce, recreation, tourism and urban living opportunities for both residents and visitors.

Seattle does have competition in the area as Portland has become the shipping hub for the region. Seattle, on the other hand, has become a large player in the aviation industry, the retail market, the cruise-ship market, and tourism. Seattle's Central Waterfront Project is an attempt to mimic Portland's waterfront district. The Alaska Way Viaduct is to be replaced by a tunnel. This is an attempt at creating an area that is pedestrian- friendly rather than a car- dominated roadway. With a strong comprehensive plan, Seattle's vision for a rich and vibrant downtown is well on its way to becoming a "must see" city.

Downtown Seattle Definition and Characteristics

Location – See Appendix A.1. For Map

The city of Seattle's growth and development has been largely impacted by its location on Puget Sound near the Pacific Ocean. The city has experienced growth from the time gold was discovered in the area in the mid 1800's. Being in the Pacific Northwest, the timber industry soon exploded with its abundance of large timber. Through the industrial age, Portland gained the advantage over Seattle as a shipping port. Seattle, on the other hand, has been a hub for the aviation industry. The Boeing Aviation Company has its roots in Seattle and has a large industrial base in the region. Because Seattle lies on the Pacific Rim, planners for the region need to address the effects of earthquakes in the region, as well as the Downtown area. Most large earthquakes occur on long fault zones around the margin of the Pacific Ocean. This is due to the fact that the Atlantic Ocean is growing a few inches wider each year, and the Pacific is shrinking as ocean floor is pushed beneath Pacific Rim continents.

The region's growth and development has been guided from a comprehensive plan. This twenty year policy plan develops a vision of how Seattle will grow in ways to promote a sustainable community that protects its citizen's values. The plan was adopted in 1994 in response to the state Growth Management Act of 1990. Seattleites understand that the prosperity of the city and the region as a whole depends on the community and the individual neighborhoods within the city. With this in mind, the comprehensive plan focuses on four major elements to achieve these goals. These core values are community, environmental stewardship, economic opportunity and security, and social equity.¹

The location of the downtown within the city of Seattle and its location in a regional sense provide a downtown area appealing to both businesses and the tourist industry. The seven districts of the downtown area; Denny Triangle, Belltown, the Retail Core, the West Edge, Pioneer Square, Chinatown International District and the Waterfront offer a wide array of opportunities for businesses and recreation. For example, the New Waterfront Project providing

¹ The City Of Seattle: "Seattle's Comprehensive Plan". November 4, 2006.
<http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/Planning/Seattle_S_ComprehensivePlan.asp>

a regional transportation network will generate additional economic, recreational, and job opportunities as millions of visitors from around the world will visit the Waterfront's many attractions.

Boundaries – See Appendix A.2. For Map

The city of Seattle's official boundaries are state highway 523 to the north, Puget Sound to the west, SW Roxbury Street to the south and Lake Washington to the east. The total area for the city is 90,688 acres. Forty one percent of the total acreage for the city is water, leaving only 53,622 land acres. This unique feature of the landscape provides for nearly one hundred fifty bridges within the city.

The downtown district is defined by Denny Way to the north, Elliot Bay to the west, South Brougham Way to the south, and Interstate 5 to the east, encompassing 1088 acres. These official boundaries were chosen in part due to the geographical location of the downtown area. The western boundary is Elliot Bay while the eastern boundary is an Interstate. The southern boundary of the downtown area is characterized as an industrial district built on mudflats and the lowlands of Elliot Bay. The area was dredged, straightened, and filled in the early 1900s. Due to much of the area having been built on landfill, it is prone to liquefaction and subsequently prone to earthquake damage.² Although no official reason for the definition of the Denny Way northern boundary could be found, an educated guess might be that the Queen Anne District and the Cascade District are primarily residential districts to the north of the Way. Denny Way is a main east – west artery clearly delineating the northern boundary of the downtown area. Denny Way is also the divider between north – south roads to the north and the southwest – northeast road layout within the downtown area. A discrepancy exists between the city of Seattle's definition of the Downtown area and what the Downtown Seattle Association describes as the Downtown area. The Downtown Association includes the neighborhoods of First Hill and the Pike/Pine District to the east of Interstate 5 where the city of Seattle defines the eastern boundary as Interstate 5.

² Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia: "Industrial District, Seattle, Washington". November 4, 2006.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_District%2C_Seattle%2C_Washington>

Characteristics – See Appendix A.3. For Map

Downtown Seattle consists of seven districts; Denny Triangle, Belltown, the Retail Core, the West Edge, Pioneer Square, Chinatown International District and the Waterfront. Each of these unique districts contributes to a Downtown Seattle that is the region's largest shopping area. Businesses, tourists and residents enjoy a downtown area that provides an opportunity for prosperity, recreation and an environment in which to live in.

Denny Triangle, according to the Downtown Seattle Association, is the future of Downtown Seattle. The district may soon be the fastest growing areas with expansion of housing, retail and office. The redevelopment of Denny Triangle will see new avenues of travel such as street cars and a monorail.³ The area has a unique program designed to provide a greater quality of life within the neighborhood. The Green Streets program places emphasis on the creation of urban landscapes, providing open space and pedestrian friendly streets to ensure an opportunity for a sense of neighborhood identity.⁴

Pioneer Square, described as an urban explorer's dream and the cultural heartbeat of the Pacific Northwest, is home to Seattle's oldest historic buildings. Pioneer Square features over twenty city blocks of Victorian Romanesque architecture, more than thirty fine- art galleries, over two hundred unique shops, and the entertainment epicenter of Seattle's nightlife.⁵ Representing the oldest part of the Downtown Seattle, the historic Victorian architecture is a major theme for the district. Exploring this Victorian area now gives us some insight into how Seattle began in the latter half of the eighteen hundreds.

The Retail Core is the place to be for upscale national and international retailers and restaurants. A recent construction boom in 1995 gave birth to Pacific Place, a five level, 335,000 square foot shopping, dining and entertainment center. This is part of a three block mixed use development in the Downtown Seattle Retail Core.⁶ The Retail Core, already a

³ Downtown Seattle Association. November 4, 2006. <<http://www.downtownseattle.com/content/visitors/DNThoods.cfm>>

⁴ Denny Triangle. November 5, 2006. <<http://www.dennytriangle.org/home.htm>>

⁵ Pioneer Square. November 5, 2006. < <http://www.pioneersquare.org/>>

⁶ Lasser, Terry J. "Building a Bridging Boom". Urban Land. February 2000. <http://www.pacificplacesseattle.com/art/11595_eprint.pdf>

vibrant and exciting shopping district, plans to be the epicenter of Downtown Seattle with the construction boom in the late 1990s.

For a true flavor of Downtown Seattle, the West Edge district has many fine eateries and boutiques. The district also contains many of Seattle's premiere landmarks such as the Pike Place Market, the Seattle Art Museum and Benarova Hall.

Belltown contains much of Downtown Seattle's residential base. The area offers some of the trendiest restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. Originally this area was a steep hill known as Denny Hill. As a massive project in the first decades of the twentieth century, the topographical feature was removed over a five year span. The city engineer at the time, Reginald Heber Thomson, had a vision of straight and level roads as opposed to the streets of San Francisco. As an interesting note in history, when property owners balked at selling, engineers carved around their lots, sometimes leaving houses stranded a hundred feet in air atop "spite mounds." These man-made buttes fell by 1911, giving Seattle a vast new area upon which to sketch its urban visions.⁷ In the mid 1970's the city approved new zoning ordinances for the construction of a new high rise residential district. As the area struggled economically, young artists, musicians and entrepreneurs took advantage of the area's low rental fees and established what we see today as a trendy mix of studios, cafes, and clubs.

The Chinatown International District nestled in the southern portion of downtown is the cultural hub of the American Asian community. Originally the area consisted of tide flats, but the 1910s Jackson Street Regrade filled the area with earth to allow for the construction of buildings. The Chinatown International District was born as immigrants from the east came to find work in the mines and on the railroads. An interesting note about the area is the African American influence. During World War II many African Americans settled in the area working for the war effort. An after-hour jazz scene exists from this influence. The area fell on hard times by the 1970s as the district was threatened by the construction of the Kingdome and Interstate 5. Many businesses had moved out of the area with nearly half of the area's hotels shut down. A movement from young Asian activists rallied under the banner of Asian American unity and fought to reclaim the area. They lobbied for low- income housing, set up bilingual social service

programs, and formed a public corporation to preserve and renovate historic buildings.⁸ This revitalized the area, bringing in college- educated professionals who took up residence and opened offices.

Downtown Seattle's Waterfront is one of the most exciting redevelopment areas today. The new Seattle Waterfront will reclaim the area by replacing the Alaska Way Viaduct with a tunnel to promote a pedestrian friendly area similar to Portland's Waterfront. The Central Waterfront Plan's influence on the downtown will be enormous. The plan calls for a total redevelopment of the Waterfront. It will improve mobility, increase tax revenues, create employment growth and increase tourism. It is expected that millions of visitors will visit the redesigned Waterfront's many new attractions. The plan will create a sustainable environment by improving water and air quality, restore shoreline, improve wildlife habitat, and reduce noise.⁹ The conceptual plan for the project and the adoption of a City Council Resolution is slated to be finalized in 2006 and projected for 2007, pending the selection of a consultant for a Public Realm Plan, preliminary cost estimates and public finance analysis. A detailed master plan will begin in 2008 with the beginning of the implementation of the project with utility relocation. This bold project will not only influence the downtown area but also will have a dramatic impact on the region as well as an impact on the State of Washington.

Zoning – See Appendix A.4. For Map

In May 2006 new downtown zoning legislation went into effect. Two major policy goals are intended for the new zoning. These goals are to promote affordable housing and to encourage smart growth in the downtown and the surrounding city. The zoning changes primarily affect Denny Triangle and a portion of Belltown. The major changes to the zoning ordinance include greater building heights, greater maximum floor area, new programs for affordable housing and environmentally sustainable housing, greater transferable development rights for historic structures downtown and tower spacing in some downtown areas.¹⁰ The new changes

⁷ Belltown.org. November 5, 2006. <<http://www.belltown.org/History>>

⁸ The Wing Luke Asian Museum: "Seattle's Chinatown-International District". November 11, 2006. <http://www.wingluke.org/international_district.html>

⁹ City of Seattle Government: "Summary of the Central Waterfront Brochure". November 11, 2006. <<http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/centralwaterfront>>

¹⁰ City of Seattle Government: "Downtown Zoning Changes". November 24, 2006.

according to the vision for the downtown commercial core and the Center City encourage residential housing outside the commercial core while creating more office development in the office core. The new regulations are expected to increase affordable housing by 60% over the current zoning regulations. Mayor Greg Nickels, the driving force behind the new legislation, is quoted as saying,

“The debate is no longer about how tall our downtown grows; it’s about how well we grow as a city. These changes will help shape the economic heart of this region, by creating affordable housing and livable urban neighborhoods. I want to thank the City Council for its thoughtful review and refinements. Together we’ve put together a plan that will truly make a difference in the lives of thousands of Seattle residents.”

Specific changes to the zoning ordinance for Belltown and Denny Triangle office buildings in the city core would increase from 450 to 700 feet, building heights in the commercial office core would increase from 360 to 600 feet, and residential high rises would increase from 240 to 400 feet while buildings near Pike Place Market would remain capped at 125 feet.¹¹ These zoning changes do not affect the Retail Core, Pioneer Square or the Chinatown International District.

Population

The city of Seattle, Washington has a very vibrant urban core that offers many amenities that are not available within other city centers. The unique geographical location of Seattle, on the Puget Sound and close vicinity to the Cascade Range, offers spectacular views of the water and mountains. The Center City offers over “42 acres of parks and open spaces in the immediate vicinity of Downtown . . . that’s 10 more acres than in 2004”¹² and are used by people from throughout the Seattle major metropolitan area. The hilly terrain within the city core also offers geographical interest within the downtown environment, while the waterfront location offers direct access to a number of islands via ferry boats. An additional draw to the downtown area is

<http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/Planning/Downtown_Zoning_Changes/Overview/>

¹¹ Seattle Channel: “In Depth Downtown Growth and Zoning”. November 25, 2006.

<<http://www.seattlechannel.org/issues/downtownGrowth.asp>>

¹² *State of Downtown 2006 information and data* (2006). Downtown Seattle Association. 5 Nov. 2006

<<http://www.downtownseattle.com/content/businesses/EconomicInfo.cfm/>>.

that the “Port of Seattle is the 20th-largest container port in the world”¹³ and provides for substantial industry and employment within the Puget Sound region of Washington. In addition to the Port of Seattle, there is also a substantial cruise industry based in downtown that accounts for more than “1,732 jobs in the region, \$208 million in business revenue, and \$5.8 million in state and local taxes in 2005”.¹⁴ The employment base within downtown Seattle accounts for 230,844 people by a count in 2003.¹⁵ Another major draw to downtown Seattle is an ever-increasing tourism industry. Last year there were over “11.1 million tourists, entertainment seekers, conventioners, and sports events attendees,”¹⁶ and an “AAA survey listed Seattle as the second-most popular domestic summer destination in the country for air travel behind only Orlando in 2004.”¹⁷ Finally, there are also an abundance of options for public transit, live-work situations, public facilities, street-level shops, and services for people wanting to reside and work within the downtown area of Seattle. Overall, the abundance of these different features, industries, and options provide for a highly desirable and dynamic downtown living area.

Seattle has a rapidly growing residential population and the downtown area is the fastest growing area of the city, with an estimated resident population of 46,484 people in 2000 and 54,582 people in 2005.¹⁸ This marks a 14.9% increase in the residential population and if growth continues along the same rate, the population could easily reach 62,714 people within the downtown area by 2010. The growth within downtown Seattle in the last fifteen years marks an average increase of about 65.3% for the “Center City population . . . compared with about a 12% growth rate citywide.”¹⁹ In comparison with other City Center populations, this is the largest ranked increase with 44 other major metropolitan demographics. The average age for downtown residents is 44 years old and “44% of all residents are 35 years old or younger” as of the 2000 Census and the average age for the 2005 Census was 42 years old.²⁰ This statistic has actually been declining as there have been more young people moving into the downtown region, as the draws are appealing to the younger professional audience. The opposite of this

¹³ *State of Downtown 2006*

¹⁴ *State of Downtown 2006*

¹⁵ *State of Downtown 2006*

¹⁶ *State of Downtown 2006*

¹⁷ *State of Downtown 2006*

¹⁸ *Demographics* (2006). Downtown Seattle Association. 5 Nov. 2006

<<http://www.downtownseattle.com/content/businesses/DTCComparison.cfm/>>.

¹⁹ *Demographics*

growth trend occurred when looking at the greater Seattle metropolitan area. It had a population of 563,374 people in the 2000 census and 536,946 people as of the 2005 census.^{21,22} This growth trend reflects a small decline of approximately 28,000 people within the last five years. The population had been projected by the city government to grow to 573,000 people by 2005 and then to 594,116 people by 2010.²³ This projected growth has obviously not occurred as suggested, but there has been a substantial amount of sustained and increased growth within the downtown area of Seattle. Reasons for some of the population decline within the greater Seattle metropolitan area can be attributed to high housing costs, lack of affordable housing, high costs of living, and general recessions within the economic markets within Seattle.

Within the Downtown Seattle residential bloc, there are approximately 7,964 families as of the 2000 Census, and that has grown to 10,206 families as of the 2005 Census.²⁴ This marks a 22% increase and could be projected to grow to 12,451 families by the 2010 Census. In addition to this growth trend within families, the same has been true for the number of housing units that are available and occupied. The total number of occupied housing units was 29,984 units by the 2000 Census, and that grew to 34,578 units by the 2005 Census, marking a 13% increase.²⁵ The growth within occupied housing units can be further broken down into looking at the numbers of owner occupied versus renter occupied units. As of the 2005 Census, there were 5,221 owner occupied units and 27,188 owner occupied units.²⁶ The rental market has a much stronger hold within the downtown Seattle market and equates to approximately 86% versus 14% of owner occupied units of a total 34,578 housing units, otherwise an almost 6:1

²⁰ *Demographics*

²¹ *Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights: Seattle city, Washington*. U.S. Census Bureau. 5 Nov. 2006

<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?_event=&ActiveGeoDiv=geoSelect&pctxt=fph&_lang=en&_sse=on&geo_id=16000US5363000&_state=04000US53>.

²² *Census 2005 Demographic Profile Highlights: Seattle city, Washington*. U.S. Census Bureau. 5 Nov. 2006

<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts?_event=&geo_id=16000US5363000&_geoContext=&_street=&_county=&_cityTown=&_state=04000US53&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=geoSelect&_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=160&_submenuId=factsheet_1&ds_name=DEC_2000_SAFF&_ci_nbr=null&qr_name=null®=&_keyword=&_industry=>>.

²³ *The Greater Seattle Datasheet: Demographics*. The City of Seattle. 5 Nov. 2006

<<http://www.seattle.gov/oir/datasheet/demographics.htm>>.

²⁴ *Demographics*

²⁵ *Demographics*

²⁶ *Demographics*

ratio.²⁷ This is due much in part to the high costs of living and housing within the greater Seattle area. As much of the population has declined within the greater Seattle area, the downtown area has grown because of the abundance of semi-affordable rental units. The majority of people choosing to live within Downtown Seattle are able to afford the costs of renting, but not the high costs of ownership for housing units. The average household income was \$57,275 as of the 2000 Census, and that increased slightly to \$58,406 as of the 2005 Census.²⁸ In comparison, the median household income was \$34,981 as of the 2000 Census and \$37,468 as of the 2005 Census.²⁹ The average household income increased only slightly by 3% and the median household income by 7%, both within the same five year timeframe. Finally, the median home price for the greater Seattle metropolitan region fluctuates from approximately \$325,000 to \$350,000 for a basic home. Even with the apparent lack of options for home-ownership, there are 3,361 new units currently under construction, and there are a projected 10,000 units to be added to the South Lake Union neighborhood by the end of 2020.³⁰ This addition of 13,361+/- units will greatly help to make the opportunity to live in downtown possible for many others, and may offer greater opportunities for home-ownership.

Overall, the Downtown area of Seattle is a highly desirable location because it “excels in livability with a mild climate, a wide range of housing options, arts and culture, sports, entertainment, an abundance of shops and restaurants and easy access to outdoor recreational activities during any season”.³¹ The overall population of Seattle is a very ethnically, professionally, and educationally diverse demographic. Around “33% of Downtown residents age 25+ have a Bachelor’s Degree or higher”³² and that means that 1/3 of the people residing in the Downtown area have some level of higher education, which adds to the diversity. It is more dynamic and diverse, as there are such a range of options and amenities to those who choose to reside in Downtown Seattle.

²⁷ *Housing* (2006). Downtown Seattle Association. 5 Nov. 2006

<<http://www.downtownseattle.com/content/businesses/Housing.cfm>>.

²⁸ *Demographics*

²⁹ *Demographics*

³⁰ *Housing*

³¹ *The Greater Seattle Datasheet: Quality of Life*. The City of Seattle. 5 Nov. 2006

<<http://www.seattle.gov/oir/datasheet/quality.htm>>.

Development

The average annual vacancy rates and rental square footage rates have fluctuated moderately over the last few years in the downtown Seattle area, depending upon the different types of markets evaluated. The different markets range from retail, residential, to commercial office space. These markets comprise the living and working situations for people within the downtown areas of Seattle.

The Seattle area has been identified as one of the top retail markets. The retail market in downtown Seattle in 2005 had a vacancy rate of 5.9% for 3.5 million square feet of total retail space, with an average retail lease rate of \$20.77 per square foot.³³ Experts say that the Puget Sound region is “one of the tightest in the nation for shops and restaurants looking for space . . . It’s difficult to find property available for development in the Puget Sound area, with its hilly terrain, lakes, and wetlands.”³⁴ The retail market within the Puget Sound region has been able to maintain a total vacancy rate of less than 2.0% over the last year, and this is in part due to very little new construction or development and an increasing demand for commercial retail spaces by visitors and residents.³⁵ The projections for the end of this year anticipate a growth rate of 2.9% on lease rates, making the year end price \$23.38 per square foot.³⁶ The retail market within Seattle is very healthy but competitive with relatively low vacancy rates and moderate lease prices for the spaces. The projections for the market within the next few years certainly make it a desirable investment for any developers interested in the Puget Sound region.

The commercial office market is very healthy within downtown because of its centralized location, convenient access to public transit, and beautiful views. The commercial office market accounts for 45% of the office market for the greater Seattle metropolitan area. It has a total of 36,806,396 square feet, and a lease rate of \$24.45 per square foot in 2005.³⁷ More than

³² *Demographics*

³³ *Retail* (2006). Downtown Seattle Association. 5 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.downtownseattle.com/content/businesses/Retail.cfm>>.

³⁴ *Retail*

³⁵ *Retail*

³⁶ *Retail*

³⁷ *Office Space* (2006). Downtown Seattle Association. 5 Nov. 2006

<<http://www.downtownseattle.com/content/businesses/OfficeSpace.cfm>>.

250,000 people work in downtown Seattle, though the vacancy rate for commercial office space increased from 13.29% to 13.65% in 2005, with an available 141,564 square feet.³⁸ The vacancy rate for commercial office space is relatively similar when looking at the greater metropolitan market where the vacancy rate dropped from 15.59% in 2004 to 13.47% in 2005, with an available 2,212,806 square feet.³⁹ The office market lease rates have decreased a bit from \$24.62 per square foot because of market competition in the greater Seattle metropolitan area.⁴⁰ Office space within Seattle has gradually increased over the last five years, and the largest increases have occurred within the Downtown and Southend areas. The Central Business District (CBD) has traditionally had the lowest vacancy rates for the office market in greater Seattle, but the vacancy rate in 2004 in Pioneer Square was even lower at 11.35%.⁴¹ In past years, the Pioneer Square and Waterfront areas have experienced the greatest vacancy rates, but this is no longer the case as these areas have become increasingly desirable. The five year averages for vacancy rates are as follows: “CBD 11.19%, Denny Regrade 14.58%, Pioneer Square 14.05%, and Waterfront 16.04%.”⁴² The potential opportunity to live and work in Downtown greatly helps to attract people because of competitive market rates for commercial office space leases, availability of space, and the general amenities of being in Downtown Seattle.

The residential market within Downtown Seattle is a healthy market that is continuing to grow rapidly, as discussed in the above **Population** section. The residential market has a wide range of vacancy rates from 0.0% to 14.3%, depending on what type of housing and in what neighborhood it is located.⁴³ The wide range of vacancy rates in the residential market can be easily explained by factors such as physical location, the economics of the surrounding neighborhood, access to public transit, and surround amenities. The average rental square footage rates also range in the same manner as the vacancy rates, for the same reasons. The rental rates go from \$.96 per square foot to \$2.27 per square foot within the downtown area.⁴⁴ The downtown neighborhoods that provide the majority of housing options are Central Seattle,

³⁸ *Office Space*

³⁹ *Office Space*

⁴⁰ *Office Space*

⁴¹ *Office Space*

⁴² *Office Space*

⁴³ *Housing* (2006). Downtown Seattle Association. 5 Nov. 2006

<<http://www.downtownseattle.com/content/businesses/Housing.cfm>>.

⁴⁴ *Office Space*

Belltown, Capitol Hill or Eastlake, First Hill, Madison or Leschi, Magnolia, and Queen Anne. The overall residential vacancy rate for greater Seattle was around 6.0% and is comparable to some of the two-bedroom, two-bathroom units around the downtown area that have similar rates.

There have not been a great number of major shifts in the types of developments that are found in downtown Seattle in the past years. If anything, the housing growth has slowed a bit, and the number of actual housing units being constructed has been gradually declining since 2000.⁴⁵ The types of units being constructed are primarily lofts, condominiums, apartments, and limited town homes. The slowing of construction has meant that the downtown region has been *densifying* in the past few years, and that has only added to the boom of population and rising prices for affordable units or home-ownership options. The status quo has been maintained in some ways primarily because of the physical geography of the Puget Sound region. The downtown area is already well- defined and is entirely bounded by water on one side. The opportunities for the downtown area to expand or change in any large physical ways are very difficult at best. The changes in transportation equally reflect the attitude of maintaining the status quo within the downtown region in the sense that there are a number of large roadway and viaduct projects that need to be addressed, just so as to provide outside access to the downtown area.

Retail

Marcus and Millichap Real Estate Investment Brokerage Company named Seattle the “hottest retail market for investment in the country for the next three years.” Within Seattle’s Center City, there is over 3.5 million square feet of retail space with a low rate of 5.9% vacancy, which has diminished from 7.3% in 2003.⁴⁶ The average retail lease rate is \$20.77 per square foot, which has jumped from \$15.53 in 2003.

The downtown retail neighborhoods are divided into six neighborhoods: Seattle CBD, Denny Regrade, Pioneer Square, Waterfront, South Lake Union, and Uptown. The CBD makes up nearly three-quarters of the total retail area, as illustrated from the chart below.

⁴⁵ *Housing*

⁴⁶ Downtown Seattle Association. November 7, 2006. www.downtownseattle.com/content/businesses/Retail.cfm

Retail Area by Neighborhood

Seattle Neighborhood	Total Retail Percentage
Seattle CBD	74%
Pioneer Square	11%
Denny Regrade	8%
Waterfront	3%
South Lake Union	2%
Uptown	2%

There are over 1800 retailers located within the Center City area, including department stores, local boutiques, furniture galleries, and specialty shops. Five of the most active retail markets include Westlake Center, Pacific Place, Rainier Square, Pike Place Market, City Center.

In the 1990s the city collaborated with private and public partners to redevelop major sections of the downtown, which included Westlake Center, Pacific Place, and a few other smaller commercial centers within downtown Seattle. The city wanted to create an atmosphere that attracted people seven days a week at all times of the day. Cultural events were brought in to attract people at night.

Martin Smith Development Company thinks Pioneer Square has not even reached its full potential yet. With the new Seattle Seahawks Stadium bringing in over 67,000 people per game, Smith believes the retail and residential potential is great. Smith Development is looking to collaborate with other Pioneer Square landowners to build as many as 2,200 housing units. These developers say wherever there is new residential built, the retailers will follow.

Seattle is endowed with several high-tech industries, including biotechnology, aerospace, and manufacturing. Some of the mentionable companies that are located in Seattle are Corbis, Boeing, Washington Mutual, Safeco Insurance, Amgen, and Microsoft. Because of Seattle's well-funded medical research centers, it has grown into a national hub for bioscience research.

Seattle's workforce is young, well-educated, and well-paid and find the downtown core to be "an extremely attractive place to live, work, and play."⁴⁷ As a historically vital business hub, Seattle

⁴⁷ City of Seattle, Department of Economic Development. October 29, 2006. www.seattle.gov/economicdevelopment/

draws upon its strengths to capitalize upon other industries, such as retail. Additionally, Seattle's tourism and film and music industries work together to bring in thousands of tourists and production companies, who also drive the retail market.

Mayor Greg Nickels is also committed to developing neighborhood business districts and has provided over \$464,000 in grants to community organizations in order to maintain a healthy economy. Included in this program is improving access to neighborhood businesses for areas that surround downtown Seattle. Advocates of this program believe mixed-use development will not only create a retail demand in close proximity to residential and commercial uses but will also combat urban sprawl.

In 2003, the Retail Mix Committee was developed to encourage neighbors to shop on Broadway. A retail survey was completed to find out which stores were lacking that discouraged neighbors from shopping on Broadway. A branding campaign was executed to stimulate activity on Broadway, and the city expanded its storefront grant program to Broadway, providing matching grants for exterior storefront improvements.⁴⁸ This neighborhood revitalization project has been possible through coordinated improvements of public safety measures, sidewalk improvements, parking changes, residential zoning changes, and adjusting height limitations. The key to creating retail demand and success is redevelopment of all aspects of the neighborhood to encourage uniform and concurrent growth of all areas.

The city also encourages "high performance buildings" to achieve increased retail sales. Studies have shown that improving natural lighting, or adding "high benefit lighting," in buildings increases sales revenues by as much as \$1.75 per square foot per year. Additionally, these high performance buildings make energy consumption levels lower than traditional buildings, contributing to lower energy costs. Staples, for example, has participated in the EPA Green Lights and Energy Star Program and has an annual savings of \$985,425 and a utility bill reduction of 6.5%.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ City of Seattle, Department of Planning and Development. November 15, 2006. www.seattle.gov/DPD/stellent/groups/pan/@pan/@plan/@proj/documents/Web_Information/dpd_000835.pdf

⁴⁹ City of Seattle, Department of Sustainability and Environment. November 7, 2006. www.seattle.gov/light/conservesustainability/studies/cv5_ss.htm

Parking

Downtown Seattle has 58,567 public parking spaces available for both on and off-street parking. There is an average of 2.1 parking spaces per 1000 square feet of office and retail space. Seattle is replacing a majority of the 9,000 traditional single-space parking meters with new pay stations that serve an entire block. This makes parking easier because drivers can pay with debit or credit cards now. Another convenient benefit is being able to utilize unexpired time in a different location.⁵⁰

The Puget Sound Regional Council of Governments produces a bi-annual report on off-street parking in the Greater Seattle area, with specific information on the Seattle CBD. The 2006 report has not yet been released. In 2004, it was reported that the Seattle CBD had 54,035 parking stalls in surface lots available for public use, which amounted to a decrease from 2002 findings, with 54,998 parking stalls. This decrease may be explained by surface parking lots that undergo redevelopment to residential or commercial infill.

Parking in Seattle's CBD surface lots is the most expensive, with parking costs at \$7.40 an hour and \$15.72 a day. Parking occupancy has been decreasing since 1996, with about 63.9% occupancy rates in 2004. Only 12.8% of the parking lots are non-pay lots, and 87.2% of lots are pay lots.⁵¹

Seattle Municipal Code delineates the city's desire to maintain as much open space as possible in the downtown area through land use regulations. The code suggests that additional office developments will increase the need for open space to be enjoyed by the office workers, but by the same token, these developments take away from the open space, creating overcrowding. Twenty square feet of open space is required for every 1,000 square feet of gross office space.⁵² While this particular legislation does not directly discourage construction of surface parking lots, it hints at preserving as much open green space as possible for the public's

⁵⁰ City of Seattle, Department of Transportation. November 16, 2006. www.seattle.gov/transportation/parking/paystation.htm

⁵¹ Puget Sound Regional Council of Governments. 2004 Parking Inventory for the Central Puget Sound Region. November 22, 2006. www.psrc.org/data/surveys/parking04.pdf

⁵² Seattle Municipal Code; Title 23 Land Use Regulations, Division 2 Authorized Uses and Development Standards; Chapter 23.49-Downtown Zoning; Subchapter I General Provisions

general welfare, and it certainly alludes to the city's attitude towards allowing available space going towards parking lots instead of parks or plazas.

Located within the Seattle Municipal Code for Specific Environmental Policies is legislation to protect against the destruction by surface parking lots, including air quality, construction impacts, drainage, earth, energy, environmental health, height, bulk and scale, historic preservation, housing, land use, light and glare, noise, and parking. It is the city's policy to "minimize or prevent adverse parking impacts associated with development projects."⁵³ Decision makers may "condition a project to mitigate the effects of development in an area on parking...Parking impact mitigation for projects outside of downtown zones may include... transportation management programs, parking management and allocations plans, incentives for the use of alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles, such as transit pass subsidies, parking fees, and provision of bicycle parking space."⁵⁴ Additionally, Seattle Municipal Code tries to minimize construction impacts upon the environment. Decision makers in these processes may elect to require "an assessment of noise, drainage, erosion, water quality degradation, habitat disruption, pedestrian circulation and transportation, mud and dust impacts."⁵⁵

The City of Seattle, in an attempt to minimize the need for parking stalls, has promoted a carpool parking program, which provides access to HOV lanes, reduced parking costs, and incentive dollars. After 3 months of participating in the program, the carpool earns \$50 bonus dollar and after 6 months, an additional \$100. The average monthly cost of parking for a single driver is \$270, while a rider in a 2-person carpool pays \$135, and a rider in a 3-car carpool pays \$90 a month. Additionally, members of a carpool receive 8 free taxi rides a year in case a rider is not able to coordinate timing on one particular day or another.⁵⁶

Public parking surface lots are managed by private companies, such as Republic, Central Parking Systems, or U-Park. There is no government agency that administers or manages the parking lots. Therefore, parking costs are driven by market demand and have been consistently increasing over the past 10 years.

⁵³ Seattle Municipal Code Title 25- Environmental Protection and Historic Preservation, Chapter 25.05, Subchapter VII

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Downtown Seattle Association, Employer Commute. November 22, 2006.
www.downtownseattle.com/content/businesses/EmployerCommute.cfm

Policies and Politics

Alcohol Impact Areas

In 1997, various communities around Seattle complained to the Washington Liquor Control Board, explaining particular behaviors and criminal activity were linked with alcohol consumption and sales. The local officials argued that the quality of life and taxing of public resources demanded a solution. These areas accounted for most of the alcohol-related calls to police and fire departments.⁵⁷ The creation of Alcohol Impact Areas (AIA) made mandatory alcohol sales restrictions, which could restrict businesses from selling particular liquors within the AIA or restrict the hours for alcohol sales. If the Board recognizes an AIA, then local jurisdictions have more time to review liquor license applications and renewals for businesses and decide to deny re-issuance. Adopted in July 1999, the Liquor Control Board named Pioneer Square, the rest of downtown Seattle, and nearby urban neighborhoods as AIAs.

Minimum Wage

In 1998 voters passes a Washington initiative 668 to increase the minimum wage every year along with inflation. In April 2005, the State minimum wage was \$2.20 more than the federal minimum wage requirement. It is currently \$7.35/ hour, creating quite a high job demand in Seattle.

Affordable Housing

The Multi-family Notice of Funding Availability program provides “capital and operating funds to support the preservation or development of affordable multi-family rental housing.”⁵⁸ Approximately \$15 million is awarded per year. Part of the Homebuyer NOFA program is to assist families and individuals who are earning at or below 80% of area median income to become homeowners.

⁵⁷ City of Seattle, Mayor's Office. November 22, 2006. www.seattle.gov/mayor/pdf/2005_accomplishment_web_final.pdf

⁵⁸ City of Seattle, Department of Housing. November 7, 2006. www.seattle.gov/housing/development/NOFA.htm

The Multi-family tax exemption program gives developers a property tax exemption for up to ten years in exchange for a certain number of housing units being affordable for “modest-income” households. This program encourages construction of multi-family housing and rehabilitation of vacant or underutilized buildings. This increases the supply of low-income housing for families and individuals who otherwise would not have access to the Seattle market.

The SeaGreen Affordable Housing Program was developed to “promote energy conservation, operational savings and sustainable building practices in affordable multi-family housing projects.”⁵⁹ Some of the guiding principles for Seattle’s Affordable Housing are:

- Cost-effective to build, durable and practical to maintain
- Results in a high quality, healthy living environment
- Reduces utility costs to residents
- Enhances the residents’ connection to nature
- Protects the environment by conserving resources, including energy, water, and materials
- Advances the health of local and regional ecosystems

Seattle officials recognize allowing the market to dictate the housing prices will lead to economically segregated neighborhoods and lower living standards for those families who cannot afford higher cost housing. As such, the city is committed to providing low-cost housing by creating incentives to developers and eight programs to assist homebuyers.

New Downtown Zoning Legislation

As part of Mayor Nickel’s “Center City Seattle” strategy, on May 12, 2006, new zoning legislation went into effect for the central office core and adjoining areas, including Denny Triangle and Belltown. Some of the changes to zoning include allowing greater building heights, greater maximum floor area, new market-rate housing producing more affordable housing, greater development for environmentally sustainable construction, greater transferable rights for

⁵⁹ City of Seattle, Department of Housing. November 7, 2006. www.seattle.gov/housing/SeaGreen/default.htm

historic structures, tower spacing required in some areas.⁶⁰ It is predicted that by 2024 Seattle will have gained 100,000 new residents and 84,000 new jobs, with the majority of the growth occurring in the Center City area. The zoning changes promote two major policy goals: promoting sustainable housing and encouraging “smart growth” in the city.⁶¹

Compare/Contrast to Downtown Denver

Differences

Seattle has been very proactive in changing zoning legislation to update zoning codes to promote affordable housing and encourage smart growth in the downtown area. The new downtown zoning legislation went into effect in May 2006. The major changes to the zoning ordinance include greater building heights, greater maximum floor area, new programs for affordable housing and environmentally sustainable housing, greater transferable development rights for historic structures and tower spacing. This progressive approach contrasts the Denver Downtown where no major recent zoning changes have been adopted in the approach of providing more affordable housing.

Seattle recently constructed a shopping center, called the Pacific Place, with five levels and covering 3 city blocks. It has shopping, dining, and entertainment within this center, and as a mixed-use development, it brings residential and commercial locations into close proximity with retail. Conversely, Denver’s retail is definitely not in the core of the city, with the two major shopping centers being Cherry Creek Mall (4 miles away) and Park Meadows Mall (17 miles away). The Pavilions on the 16th Street Mall and the Tabor Center do not have the populations to necessitate or sustain a shopping center, especially considering the target radius for regional malls is five miles. Despite having the convention center crowd and the office workers in downtown, these two malls have yet to see the enormous success that Cherry Creek and Park Meadows have continued to enjoy.

⁶⁰ City of Seattle, Department of Planning and Development. November 13, 2006. www.seattle.gov/DPD/Planning/Downtown_Zoning_Changes/Overview

⁶¹Ibid.

The city of Denver's topography is flat and ready to build. Seattle on the other hand is a city of hills. Within the China International District, there were tidal flats that needed to be filled in the early 1900s before any construction could commence. Additionally, before development, Belltown and Denny Triangle were a large hill that the city wanted to level in order to have straight streets. It took quite a large effort to remove the residents at the time, but eventually Seattle was able to reconstruct the landscape to make it useable land.

Seattle has a remarkably pedestrian-friendly downtown core with the majority of arts and music, office, retail, restaurants, and entertainment located in a close vicinity that allows individuals to walk between sites. Denver, conversely, is quite spread out with the art museum at the far end of Civic Center Park, the restaurant area in Lower Downtown, the Pepsi Center and Invesco Stadium bifurcated by Speer Boulevard, and retail along the 16th Street Mall.

Similarities

During the last decade Denver has striven to become a trendy and fun downtown, while Seattle also continues trying to bring tourists, recreational opportunities, and new businesses to the area. Seattle is really pushing to revitalize the waterfront area just as Denver has worked to improve the Lower Downtown area.

Seattle opened its Washington State Convention and Trade Center in 1988 and has been generating sales revenues since then for the surrounding area. Additionally, there are several other convention centers within close vicinity to the downtown core, making Seattle's convention industry quite strong. Denver is now also trying to capture a piece of the convention market with its recently completed renovation, recognizing the tremendous revenue possibilities for quite little effort.

Learning Programs

Alcohol Impact Areas (AIA) are a project that was created out of a demand by local officials to curb the proliferation of public intoxication. A neighborhood that is deemed an AIA has the authority to restrict alcohol sales during specific times of the day and the types of alcohol sold.

Although Denver has a tough problem with intoxicated vagrants, there is still no program to alleviate this burden.

With the progressive zoning changes in Downtown Seattle, Downtown Denver may have to reassess their program to create more affordable housing as well as their Green Streets program. This program places an emphasis on the creation of urban landscapes, providing open space and pedestrian friendly streets to ensure an opportunity for sense of neighborhood identity.

Seattle can boast having one of the largest numbers of working green building professionals of any major metropolitan city within the United States. King County has long had a commitment to establish, educate, and pursue sustainability within the built environments throughout Seattle. Seattle has historically had one of the highest numbers of LEED certified projects within the U.S. and has established regulations requiring minimum levels of certification from the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) for any public buildings within King County. The city of Denver recently established its own green building initiative, known as Greenprint Denver. Much of the initiative and legislation has been based on the pioneering efforts of cities such as Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington. The intent of Greenprint Denver is very similar to the city of Seattle's initiative and requires minimum levels of LEED certification from the USGBC.

Policy Recommendations

Centralize the major attractions into a walkable setting. As mentioned above, Denver is not a terribly pedestrian-friendly city. It is difficult to get from one location to another without needing a car.

Provide tax incentives for Denver film industry. As Seattle has seen, the film industry generates large amounts of sales tax revenue, especially from large production films. When production crews film on-site, they eat out at least three meals a day, order catering, stay in hotel rooms, rent cars, borrow lighting, sound, and tech-crews. All of these needs are provided by local businesses that benefit from the film. Providing tax incentives to production companies entices

film companies to come to Denver to shoot. Colorado and the Denver metro area already are endowed with the beautiful scenery to attract production companies; all that is lacking are film incentives.

Update zoning ordinances. Denver could surely benefit from the progressive zoning changes that Seattle has taken to improve recreational, business, tourist and urban living opportunities.

Summary

Given the importance of curbing urban sprawl, Seattle has taken great strides to develop municipal codes designed to preserve and protect as much open space as possible and to maximize use of already developed areas and sites. Seattle is confronted with the problem of being situated in an environmentally sensitive area, given all the surrounding bodies of water. Unfortunately, Seattle's wisdom comes from lessons learned. In recent years, the city has taken action to protect the endangered Chinook salmon from extinction. Overdevelopment along the riverbanks has disrupted the spawning patterns for these fish. Changes to zoning ordinances now permits greater height and maximum floor area allowances, so instead of developing further outward, developers can construct larger buildings in already developed areas.

Seattle is also in stride with the rest of nation in terms of developing a sophisticated mass transit system. Seattle has in addition to the traditional bus lines, a monorail, a lightrail, commuter rails, and ferry boats to bring people into and out of the city core. Great efforts are being made to extinguish single-occupancy vehicles from being the norm. As global warming takes a front seat in most government offices, Seattle officials actively are doing their part to reduce consumption. Sustainability and growth management are certainly the order of the day. Through a strong effort in policy- building within the government of Seattle, sustainable design, Green Streets, zoning changes, and a twenty- year comprehensive plan sets the stage for Downtown Seattle to become a premier destination city for tourists and recreational enthusiast.

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APPENDIX A: SECTION 2 - MAPS OF THE CITY

A.1: Location Map

Source: <http://lib.utexas.edu/maps/world_cities/Seattle.jpg>

A.2: Boundary Map

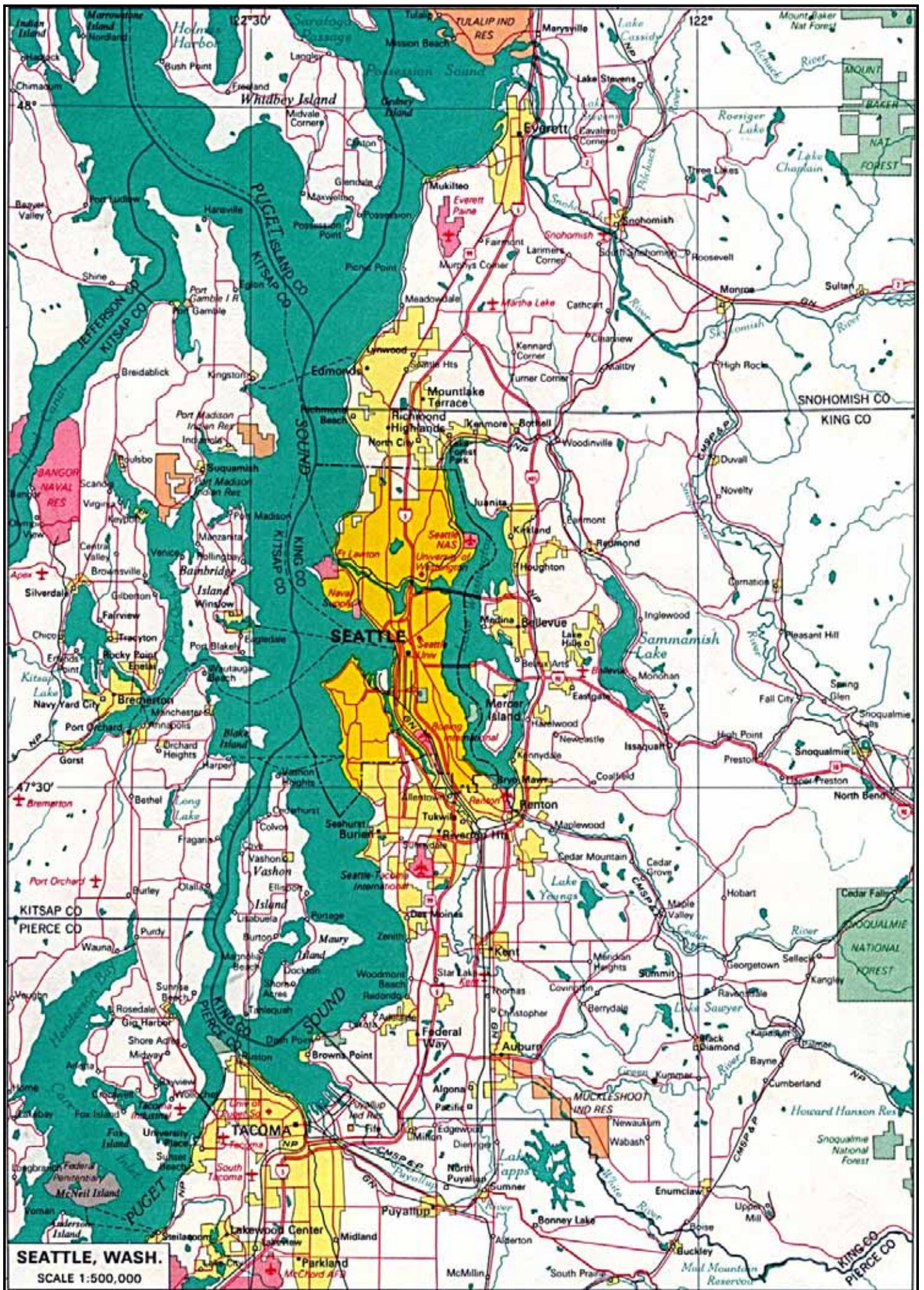
Source: City of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan: Future Land Use Map

A.3: Characteristics Map

Source: <<http://www.downtownseattle.com/images/transient/Maps/WebMapEconProfileAreaLarge.gif>>

A.4: Zoning Map

Source: <http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/Planning/Downtown_Zoning_Changes/Overview/>



SEATTLE, WASH.

SCALE 1:500,000

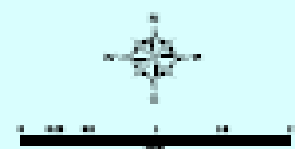


City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan

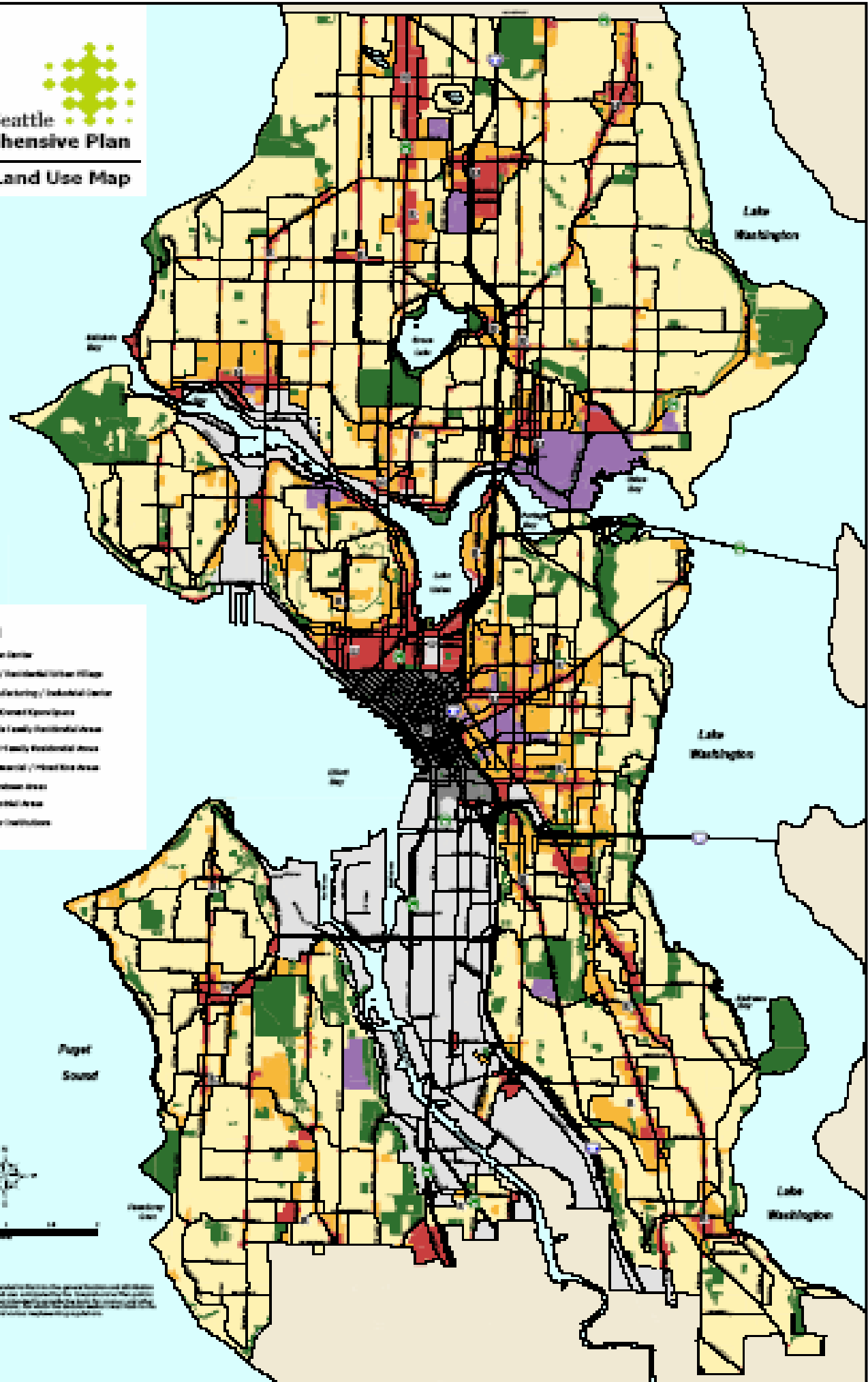
Future Land Use Map

Legend

- Urban Center
- Urban / Residential Center Village
- Manufacturing / Industrial Center
- City Forest OpenSpace
- Single Family Residential Area
- Multi-Family Residential Area
- Commercial / Mixed Use Area
- Community Area
- Industrial Area
- Water Infrastructure

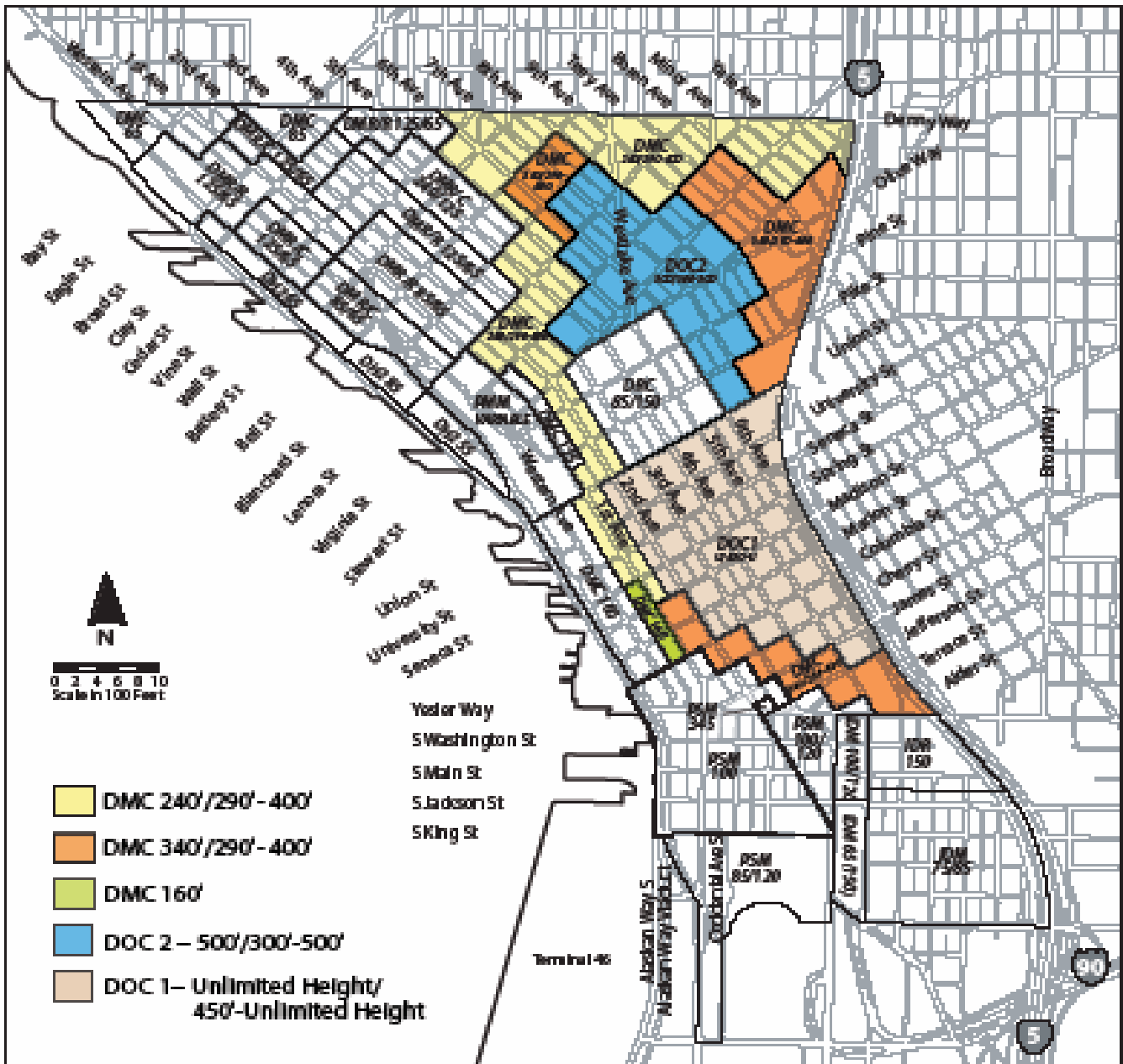


This map is a conceptual illustration of the future land use plan. It is not a legal document and should not be used for legal purposes. The City of Seattle reserves the right to change the land use plan at any time without notice.



Downtown Zoning Adopted by City Council

April 3, 2006



- DMC 240' /290' - 400'
- DMC 340' /290' - 400'
- DMC 160'
- DOC 2 - 500' /300' - 500'
- DOC 1- Unlimited Height /450' - Unlimited Height

New Zoning	Base FAR	New max. FAR	New Height Limits
DOC 1	6	20	Non-residential Uses: Unlimited Residential Uses: Base height 450' Height with bonus unlimited
DOC 2	5	14	Non-residential Uses: 500' Residential Uses: Base height 300' Height limit with bonus 500'
DMC 340' /290'-400'	5	10	Non-residential Uses: 340' Residential Uses: Base height 200' Height limit with bonus 400'
DMC 240' /290'-400'	5	7	Non-residential Uses: 240' Residential Uses: Base height 200' Height limit with bonus 400'

