



# City of Seattle

Edward B. Murray, Mayor

## Office of Planning and Community Development

Diane M. Sugimura, Interim Director

### Responses to the Seattle City Council Confirmation Questions

From Sam Assefa

May 11, 2016

**1. The Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) was established by Mayor Murray in 2015. As a new department, you will have an exciting opportunity to shape its goals and operations. What are your goals for the office? How will you measure success?**

My primary goal for the new office is to position staff and operations to effectively implement the objectives outlined by the Mayor for OPCD: Coordinate an integrated approach to planning with all City departments by aligning resources and investments; ensure that planning and development is distributed equitably, consistent with the Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI); and work with Seattle neighborhoods through effective community engagement.

Some of my major goals for 2016 and 2017 include:

- Establish a clear vision for the office and its core values in alignment with OPCD's objectives;
- Lead the organizational transition within OPCD's staff to build our capacity to serve the Mayor, Council, and the public through our work program priorities;
- Complete high-profile projects that are underway, such as the update to Comprehensive Plan (*Seattle 2035*), the implementation of the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA), and integration of Race and Social Equity Goals and Policies into OPCD's work plans and priorities;
- Build on the strong relationships already formed with neighborhoods, businesses, and City departments to coordinate investments;
- With Department of Neighborhoods (DON), identify roles and practices that will help both departments coordinate effectively around inclusive and comprehensive community engagement;
- Strengthen relationships and collaborations with relevant City departments such as DON, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI), Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Office of Sustainability & Environment (OSE), Office of Economic Development (OED), Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), Parks, and others to align priorities and resources, improve communications across departments, and better coordinate decision making across silos;
- Forge strong partnerships with Seattle's underserved communities to ensure that race and social justice are meaningfully integrated into all of our work; and
- Communicate in a timely manner with the Mayor and Council to ensure that priorities for key projects are aligned and potential conflicts minimized.



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Among the actions I would take to achieve success in 2016, are the following:

- Evaluate work products for consistency with core values and achievement of OPCD goals.
- Implement a highly functional organizational structure at OPCD to help us achieve goals efficiently.
- Review the coordinated and inclusive community outreach and engagement strategies for various OPCD initiatives together with DON, and identify what was learned, what worked well, and what should be revised and/or improved going forward.
- Support the adoption of *Seattle 2035*.
- Complete the development of OPCD's first RSJI work plan.

**2. Seattle has experienced significant growth recently. Much of this reflects positively on our strong economy, natural beauty and quality of life. However, this growth has contributed to the displacement of low-income communities and communities of color from Seattle. How will you approach managing growth and investment while protecting Seattle residents and businesses who are at risk of displacement?**

The Comprehensive Plan outlines new race and social equity policies aimed at protecting communities at risk of displacement. OPCD's work plan priorities will be informed by the objectives outlined in the plan. This includes continuing to monitor the potential for displacement through equity indicators, and tracking growth and displacement issues to target planning and investment.

In 2016, OPCD will complete the Equitable Development Implementation Plan and work with the community to help evaluate feasibility and develop implementation strategies for several place-based targeted actions intended to address displacement and access to opportunity for neighborhoods with the highest level of chronic and more recent displacement risk. Those actions, in collaboration with other agencies, institutional and philanthropic partnerships, include the following:

Rainier Beach & Othello

- *Rainier Beach Innovation Center* – an equitable and anti-displacement strategy for a transit-oriented development based on education, employment, and entrepreneurship.
- *Southeast Seattle Economic & Opportunity Center* – focused on education, job training and resources to start and keep small businesses.
- *Multicultural Community Center* – opportunity to create a shared space for many cultures, providing an anchor for the community.

Central Area

- *William Grose Center for Cultural Innovation* – a hub for entrepreneurial resources to support cultural preservation and innovation in the creative economy in the heart of the African American community.

Chinatown/International District/Little Saigon

- *Landmark Project* – gathering place for the regional Vietnamese community in the Little Saigon business district.



- *Equity Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) for Affordable Commercial Space* – consider and potentially pilot a program that would allow property owners to sell TDRs in improving market neighborhoods.

**3. The 2035 Comprehensive Plan included Seattle’s first displacement risk analysis. Some other cities do displacement analyses on area wide or zone wide upzones. Would you consider an approach like this?**

I greatly appreciate your interest in displacement. This, along with information on access to opportunity, is a major concern of mine, as I see the growing equity gap in this city.

I’m pleased Seattle has stepped forward with a cutting edge equity analysis. I have briefly reviewed the Equitable Development Implementation Plan and the Growth and Equity report. All areas of the city have been analyzed using a multi-layered analysis – 14 criteria for the Displacement Risk Index, and another 11 criteria for the Access to Opportunity Index. The value of this methodology is that not only do we get a score for a geographic area for both Displacement and Access, we can look at what factors went into that score, learning much more about the inequities and the potential mitigation needed in a geographic specific area. This is important since there could be two areas with the same overall score, one of which has mid-range scores for many criteria, and another one that has high scores for some aspects and low scores for other factors, and thus average out to be in the middle. Therefore, using the disaggregated data is important.

We can use this information not only to evaluate upzones but also to identify appropriate mitigation strategies for achieving a more equitable city. We will need to be careful in terms of how we view displacement. An area of low displacement does not necessarily mean all is good. It may mean that low-income individuals and households may not be subject to displacement in this area because they cannot afford to live there today.

As part of the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, we will be monitoring growth and tracking specific equity indicators, working closely with the Seattle Planning Commission. This will be a very deliberate process, as described in the Equitable Development Implementation Plan:

*OPCD is designing a set of equitable development indicators that will become a core and ongoing component of an expanded program to monitor displacement and community well-being. OPCD staff will compile and analyze monitoring data and present the Annual Equitable Development Monitoring Report, providing essential information to community members and aiding City officials in making policy and budget decisions.*

I believe that demand for housing is the primary but not the only reason people face displacement. By upzoning in specific areas consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, we are able to encourage such development in areas with the infrastructure, services and amenities to accompany that growth. I look forward to further discussions with you on this.

**4. This Council is particularly interested in ensuring all residents and workers of Seattle are able to participate in the decisions that affect them. OPCD will be working with the Department of Neighborhoods to build a better and more effective approach to community engagement. Please discuss how you will lead this effort to foster meaningful engagement,**

**particularly with historically under-represented communities or those communities with barriers to participation in engagement?**

I will work closely with DON to develop effective community participation. This priority touches all planning initiatives, especially as we engage with underrepresented groups, such as immigrant and refugee communities.

One area I plan to explore will be how to incorporate a number of effective and innovative engagement tools I have used successfully in the past. One of them, "The Planning Game," is an interactive approach to community engagement in land use planning and urban design. I co-created this "game" while in San Francisco and it proved to be a very effective tool in educating lay audiences about complex issues and necessary tradeoffs involved in land use planning. It provides participants effective tools to make informed decisions and offer meaningful input. Another engagement tool is a blend of traditional methods such as design workshops, and digital events involving the arts community in creative and fun ways, where people of all ages, races, abilities, backgrounds, and incomes feel welcome and meaningfully engaged.

I admire the fact that the City of Seattle, with leadership from DON, is working to create systems to help us effectively engage with a diversity of people and communities. It is also my belief that effective engagement must be tailored to the interests, values, and cultural particulars each community offers. This requires real relationships with groups and individuals. It requires us to engage in honest dialogue with local leaders, create opportunities for local leadership, and follow-through on our commitments as a whole City government. I see this happening through Seattle's government, and I am eager to provide leadership from within OPCD.

- 5. In the 1990s, Seattle completed almost 40 neighborhood plans. Since that time, the demand from residents for updated plans has exceeded the City's resources to update the plans, particularly in high growth areas. Given our limited capacity for full-scale, multi-year neighborhood planning, how will you prioritize neighborhood plan updates and is there a way to meet our planning needs in a less resource- and time-intensive way for those areas without an updated plan?**

Nearly half of the original 40 plans or key portions of the plans have been updated since the 1990s. However, I understand that the City is continually updating and tailoring planning methods. In recent years DPD/OPCD has worked in many communities to update neighborhood plans (Bitter Lake, Othello, Rainier Beach, etc.). In other areas we have concentrated on specific objectives within a planning area. Examples include a focus on the health of commercial nodes along 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue or facilitating transit-oriented community development in a portion of the U District. In other areas of the city, targeted work has been completed to address very specific challenges, such as design and conservation strategies in the Pike/Pine area.

Ten years after the plans were adopted, the Seattle Planning Commission conducted an extensive analysis of the plans. What they learned is that the goals and policies of the plans completed in the late 1990s are still largely applicable. What has changed over time are the community-identified strategies to implement the plans. It is also important to recognize the changes that have taken place in the city since the nineties, and how our population has changed. For example, we are a city of renters (more than 50 percent), and new people moving in are younger and more diverse.



A major goal now is to make sure the planning process includes a very broad spectrum of residents, businesses and cultures. As you recognize, a special effort is needed to make sure traditionally underrepresented populations are also brought into the discussions. This is important and it takes time.

The Mayor, in establishing OPCD, directed the office to integrate land use, zoning, and design issues with all the other planning work of other departments and agencies. The goal is to create more comprehensive, relevant, and actionable plans for communities. The office is working closely with DON on integrated outreach strategies. With the implementation of HALA, we will also be discussing with Council how we work with neighborhoods over the next 18 months to implement the Mandatory Housing Affordability provisions.

In terms of prioritizing future planning efforts, we will use a data-driven approach to determine where the greatest needs and disparities exist. We will continue to monitor displacement risk and access to opportunity, particularly in high risk and low access areas, along with impacts to marginalized populations. We will also look for opportunities to leverage City investments and market demand for development that is occurring in some neighborhoods.

A solid community planning and implementation process is resource intensive. I look forward to discussing with you and with a variety of departments ideas for how we can plan more efficiently and how we can continue to update our practices to meet our collective goals.

**6. As Seattle grows, a constant issue has been in the design of our built environment, particularly in areas where new development is integrated into established neighborhoods. How can we better balance our need for infill development and goals of preserving the character and history of our communities?**

Seattle's rapid growth mirrors what is happening in other cities. Growth brings many opportunities, but it can also create unintended impacts. Growth can fuel the economy of the city. Smart-growth cities such as Seattle help improve the quality of the environment by consuming fewer resources and producing less waste and carbon emissions per capita. Higher density neighborhoods can integrate amenities that meet the lifestyle needs of both young and old.

However, growth can also disrupt established neighborhoods and threaten their unique physical characteristics. This means departments such as OPCD and SDCI, developers, and the design community have a responsibility to explore ways to ensure that new infill development creates community benefits, including enhancing the character of established neighborhoods as those neighborhoods change.

In 2015, Council requested an evaluation of the current neighborhood-based Design Review Program in response to community concerns about design outcomes. Subsequently, a 16-member Advisory Group provided a set of recommendations to improve the design review process. The HALA Advisory Group also made recommendations for improvements to make the process more efficient.

To balance the need for infill development while protecting neighborhood character, a 2017 work priority for OPCD includes working closely with SDCI to implement improvements to the Design Review Program. The two departments have jointly prepared the following recommendations:

- Require early and ongoing engagement with local communities;
- Establish Design Review thresholds based on project characteristics and increase opportunities for administrative Design Review;

- Update the Boards' composition and structure; and
- Update Design Review thresholds based on market factors and need.

I've had a chance to review the Design Review program and plan to sit down with OPCD and SDCI to learn more about the current process and issues. I will explore with staff what I can contribute based on lessons learned from my recent experience implementing the Boulder Design Excellence Initiative aimed at addressing similar concerns. The Initiative is intended to support a broad community discussion about what is and is not working with the current design review process. The program also evaluates built projects to determine the extent to which desired outcomes are being achieved regarding quality of design and neighborhood character.

- 7. Sustainability has been a core value of Seattle's Comprehensive Planning efforts since 1994. As we look forward for the next twenty, fifty or one hundred years, we will need to be more aggressive to proactively address climate change through adaptation and mitigation. What strategies will you prioritize so that Seattle will meet its climate change goals and prepare for climate change impacts?**

We need to prioritize and exemplify the community's sustainability values articulated in the Comprehensive Plan as we grow. In partnership and coordination with other City departments such as OSE, SDCI, and Parks, OPCD will work to implement planning policies that improve the quality of the environment and the resiliency of the city. Some of these include:

- Creating opportunities for better urban design and development patterns;
- Maximizing opportunities for infill developments to conveniently locate new homes and businesses in pedestrian-friendly and transit rich locations; and
- Focusing policies and investments to minimize the negative environmental impacts on marginalized populations, and provide them with increased access to natural systems.

- 8. One of Mayor Murray's stated goals for the department is to better coordinate planning with other City departments, such as Parks, Seattle Department of Transportation, Economic Development and the DON. How will you work with these departments to ensure integration of investments and services with growth?**

One of the most effective ways to better coordinate planning and align priorities is to foster good communication and relationships between the leaders of the various departments. This is critical not only for establishing a common understanding of the Mayor's and Council's planning priorities, but also for better understanding of each department's key initiatives, priorities, and challenges. A unified leadership team with common buy-in and a shared vision for planning goals and investment priorities is a fundamental foundation for building trust and minimizing "silo" thinking within each organization.

To ensure a well-integrated approach to service and investment delivery, I will:

- Build strong working relationships with department heads through formal and regular coordination meetings as well as through informal and out-of-office social interactions;



- Encourage and create opportunities for OPCD staff to have similar interactions with other department staff;
- Assign staff to coordinate work programs between City departments to leverage programs and investments as we plan our future work program priorities; and
- Work with the leadership of departments to identify opportunities to collaborate around common projects and to create a sense of shared mission with all of our work.

**9. The Office of Planning and Community Development reports to the Mayor's office, however they also receive feedback and direction from City Council. How will you balance these two sources of direction, particularly if there are conflicting priorities?**

We do have to work hard to balance priorities. I recognize there are occasions when there will not be agreement between the Executive and Council, either in substance or priorities. I will listen carefully and discuss the issue with the Mayor and his staff. We will develop options to work through the differences, whether they are related to a commitment of resources or the timing of a work item.

I am aware of a current example of an agreement where OPCD/SDCI staff provided technical assistance at meetings and in developing Councilmember-sponsored legislation. Council handled media responses, sponsored the public meetings, and will be the sponsor of proposed legislation. Getting to that point also required some agreements on timing. Another option might be for staff to work with Council consultants, providing technical assistance and knowledge of City codes.

I also look forward to regularly reporting to Council's Planning, Land Use, and Zoning (PLUZ) Committee to share information, answer questions, and receive feedback related to the work of OPCD. Finally, I anticipate receiving direction from Council through means such as Council's Letter of Expectations for new department directors, as well as budget Statements of Legislative Intent (SLIs).

**10. Seattle and all its departments are guided by the Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI), which is a citywide effort to end institutionalized racism and race-based disparities in City government. Like many cities, we have significant disparities which result directly from systemic racism, both in our history and in our current policies and practice. Discuss your priorities for how OPCD will contribute to this initiative to confront and address historic and current inequities.**

To address race-based disparities, a key starting point for OPCD will be to make sure that affected communities have a seat at the table and are meaningfully engaged on planning issues that affect their lives. As discussed in question 4, OPCD will continue to work to engage historically underrepresented communities in meaningful ways so that their voices will be heard. From the work of Diane Sugimura and Nora Liu, OPCD now has a strong foundation in this area, which I plan to build upon by facilitating future collaboration with DON as well as the Seattle Office for Civil Rights.

Key priorities for OPCD will be to address some of the recommendations outlined in the RSJI's Equitable Development Initiatives. These include helping to create:

- Strong business districts that provide culturally specific goods and services for its diverse community;
- Housing that meets financial and family size needs of the community; and
- Places of community gathering, where people can come together, to problem solve, to celebrate, to reinforce cultural identity.

**11. Seattle has been growing rapidly for several years. As we know, development is cyclical and we most likely will soon see a slowdown in the market or our economy. Discuss your approach to planning and managing a Planning Department during an economic or real estate downturn.**

As a primarily General Fund office, we will definitely be affected by the economy or a real estate downturn. In my experience, planning addresses numerous challenges that are presented by all economic conditions, and my hope is that the City will continue its commitment to both planning and community engagement throughout various economic cycles.

From an internal perspective, once we are aware of an impending downturn, we should be mindful of any new hiring if it appears reductions in staff will be forthcoming. We should look at how we are organized and how we do our work. We may also be able to coordinate resources with other departments to share resources for outreach and engagement activities. Some departments may have non-General Fund resources that would still be available during a downturn, such as SDOT or the Office of Housing. Additionally, we can assess our in-house practices for efficiencies, such as relying on electronic communications.

Externally, an economic or real estate downturn can also be a time to take a pause and review the information collected from our monitoring work. If we are not achieving our goals and not developing as we had anticipated, a downturn may be a good time to make changes to Land Use Code provisions. It is often easier to have a discussion about change when development activity has slowed down.