

Director's Report and Recommendation

Neighborhood Design Guidelines for the Mount Baker Residential Urban Village and the Pike/Pine Urban Center Village

April 4, 2017

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

The proposal is a legislative action to amend Section 23.41.010.B of the Seattle Municipal Code approving new neighborhood design guidelines for the Mount Baker Town Center and augmenting existing Pike/Pine neighborhood design guidelines to add specific guidelines applicable to the Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District.

The purpose of the Mount Baker Town Center and Pike/Pine Neighborhood Guidelines is to provide supplemental guidance to the overarching city-wide design guidelines. As such they are an important tool for the Design Review Boards in their review of proposed new development. These guidelines provide neighborhood specific design direction with the goal of fostering urban design excellence in new multifamily and commercial projects.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Background

The Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) completed two sub-area planning initiatives: 1) amendments to the Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District (adopted 2014), and 2) the Mount Baker Town Center Urban Design Framework and rezone (adopted 2011). Each initiative included recommendations to develop or revise neighborhood design guidelines. This proposal submitted for City Council review and action includes revised Pike/Pine Neighborhood Design Guidelines and new Mount Baker Neighborhood Design Guidelines.

Pike/Pine Neighborhood Design Guidelines. Neighborhood design guidelines for the Pike/Pine Urban Center Village were originally adopted in 2000 as a key implementation strategy of the Pike/Pine Neighborhood Plan. Through this plan, residents, businesses, and property owners in the neighborhood outlined a vision to guide the future development of the neighborhood as a mixed-use, pedestrian environment, accessible by efficient public transit, while maintaining the unique development character that is key to the neighborhood's success. The neighborhood relies on the design guidelines as an important tool to promote new development that is compatible with the existing built context and that enhances the neighborhoods' pedestrian scale and unique character.

The Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District was established in 2009, and applies to all commercially zoned portions of the district. The purpose of the Conservation Overlay District is to promote appropriately-scaled development and encourage new projects to retain existing, older structures defined as character structures (pre-identified buildings that have been in existence prior to 1940). New structures accommodate different functions than existing character

structures and have different design needs. New structures must address those needs in a manner reflecting the unique character of the Conservation Overlay District.

The Pike/Pine Neighborhood Design Guidelines were amended in 2010 to respond to the increased emphasis on the conservation of existing building resources in the area. The guidelines were amended again in 2013 as part of an effort to standardize the format for all neighborhood design guidelines.

Mount Baker Town Center Neighborhood Design Guidelines. The initial North Rainier Neighborhood Plan was completed in 1999. A decade later new opportunities, including the new light rail service, prompted a plan update. Beginning in March of 2009, community members began working to update the North Rainier Neighborhood Plan. The result of this work was summarized in January 2010 in the North Rainier Neighborhood Plan Update document. Creating a vital, pedestrian friendly, transit oriented Town Center was a central theme of the initial neighborhood plan and continues to be a neighborhood priority. The Mount Baker Town Center is envisioned as a vibrant neighborhood core that concentrates housing, commercial uses, services, and living-wage employment opportunities--a hub that is well served by light rail and other comfortable and convenient travel options.

Over the course of the two-year neighborhood plan update process, a broad cross section of the community engaged with planners in a variety of ways. From hands-on workshops and smaller scale interactive meetings with community-based organizations to online updates and questionnaires, the community had many opportunities to engage and stay involved. Reaching a broad range of those who live and work in North Rainier, including those who have been historically underrepresented in the planning process, was a primary objective of the plan update process. During 2009, the community expressed their views at eleven neighborhood and City-sponsored meetings and events in North Rainier. From this process, ten Goals with corresponding Policies and Strategies emerged in the Neighborhood Plan Update, including a strategy that called for the creation of neighborhood design guidelines.

In May of 2010, the North Rainier community and the City of Seattle formed a Town Center action team to assist in the implementation of goals, strategies, and action items identified in the recent neighborhood plan update. In September, this team met to further define this vision and make specific recommendations on how to change the physical form of the neighborhood to make the Mount Baker Town Center more vital, walkable, and economically successful. Based on these discussions, the former Department of Planning and Development prepared a draft Urban Design Framework that provided a blueprint for how the physical elements of the neighborhood plan update can be realized. This document focused on building massing, land uses, building design, streetscape design, and conditions for sustainability. The draft Urban Design Framework was finalized in September 2011. The Urban Design Framework's analysis and recommendations provided the basis for developing the proposed Mount Baker Town Center Neighborhood Design Guidelines. In June 2014 City Council passed Ordinance 124513 to rezone areas within the North Rainier Hub Urban Village to allow more density consistent with the town center vision.

OPCD Proposal and Analysis

Pike/Pine Neighborhood Design Guidelines. Since the adoption of the Pike/Pine Conservation Overlay District in 2009, the area has experienced unprecedented development activity, in terms of both the number and size of projects. This condition put the new development standards and supporting design guidelines to the test, exposing areas in need of additional attention to clarify the intent of the regulations and provide better guidance for reviewing projects. Clearer guidance was needed for reviewing departures from development standards related to retaining character structures in a new project, to allow for flexible design solutions that could better achieve neighborhood conservation objectives. To respond to these issues, adjustments to the development standards in the Code were adopted in 2014. Supplemental design guidelines in this proposal were developed to complement and support these changes.

In the proposed revisions to the guidelines, additional background information is provided to better illustrate the different types of buildings in Pike/Pine and how specific buildings contribute to the character of the District (the Code defines these buildings as “character structures”). Consistent with the amended provisions of the Code, additional language is proposed in the design guidelines to indicate how best to retain the features of a structure that are most important to maintaining the neighborhood’s special character. The Code currently provides incentives for projects to retain character structures and identifies standards that must be met to use these incentives.

In practice, as numerous projects have been reviewed and built over the years, there has been a great variety of design solutions proposed to achieve the intended outcomes of the prescriptive standards in the Code, with varying degrees of success. The revised guidelines clarify the acceptable range of design approaches to achieve the intended outcomes the Code. Additional guidance is provided to ensure that the larger “incentive” projects not only provide good design solutions for incorporating character structures, but that they also fit into the established neighborhood context and contribute to a desirable new neighborhood scale. New background information is also incorporated into the guidelines to identify neighborhood plan proposals that are relevant to the discussion of project design issues related to specific streets and sub-area locations within the neighborhood.

Mount Baker Town Center Neighborhood Design Guidelines. The new Mount Baker Town Center Design Guidelines were developed to promote the community’s goal of effective transit-oriented development integrated into the neighborhood context. This goal has been expressed through the 2009 North Rainier Neighborhood Plan Update, the 2010 North Rainier Action Plan and the 2011 Mount Baker Town Center Urban Design Framework.

The rezones approved in 2014 allow taller and more dense development in the general vicinity of the Mount Baker light rail station. The new Mount Baker Neighborhood Design Guidelines will inform the design review process to ensure that new development spurred by the rezoning will respond to the vision for the Mount Baker Town Center. These neighborhood specific guidelines are organized around the themes and of the citywide Seattle Design Guidelines:

Context and Site

CS1. Natural Systems and Site Features

CS2. Urban Pattern and Form
CS3. Architectural Context and Character
Public Life
PL1. Public Space
PL2. Walkability
PL3. Street-Level Interaction
PL4. Active Transportation
Design Concept
DC1. Project Uses and Activities
DC2. Architectural Concept
DC3. Open Space Concept
DC4. Exterior Elements and Finishes

Guidelines are tailored to existing conditions and how new development can help implement the vision Mount Baker Town Center. Some examples are guidelines that speak to the area's steep topography; views of local destinations; opportunities for gateways; more pedestrian-oriented streets, sites and buildings; and making pedestrian travel to/from transit easier, visible and more comfortable.

Comprehensive Plan and Neighborhood Plan Consistency

The Mount Baker Town Center Design Guidelines are consistent with the goals and policies of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, the North Rainier Neighborhood Plan Update (2009), the North Rainier Action Plan (2010) and the Mount Baker Town Center Urban Design Framework (2011).

The revised Pike/Pine Design Guidelines are consistent with the goals and policies of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, the Pike/Pine Neighborhood Plan, and the Pike Pine Conservation Overlay District.

RECOMMENDATION

OPCD recommends approval of the new Mount Baker Town Center Neighborhood Design Guidelines and the revised Pike/Pine Neighborhood Design Guidelines. This action will provide the Design Review Program with clearer direction to implement the community's vision for the built and natural environments. The design guidelines reflect the values and expectations held by the community for multi-family and commercial building design excellence. In making the proposed recommendations to amend the provisions of the City's Land Use Code and in preparing the proposed design guidelines, OPCD has considered comments from citizens, affected departments, and other agencies and interests. These comments, as well as all environmental documentation that was prepared relevant to the proposed amendments, are available upon request.