

## **Director's Report and Recommendation**

# **Neighborhood Design Guidelines for the South Lake Union and University District Urban Centers**

**June 18, 2018**

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### **PROPOSAL SUMMARY**

This proposal is a legislative action to amend Section 23.41.010.B of the Seattle Municipal Code, approving revised neighborhood design guidelines for the South Lake Union Urban Center and the University Community Urban Center.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide supplemental guidance to the overarching city-wide design guidelines. Neighborhood specific design guidelines are an important tool for the Design Review Boards in their review of proposed new development. The guidelines provide direction with the goal of fostering urban design excellence in new multifamily and commercial projects.

### **BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS**

The Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) worked with other City Departments (Departments/Offices of Construction and Inspections, Housing, Parks, Transportation, Economic Development, Police, Arts & Culture, Neighborhoods) and community stakeholders to complete two sub-area planning initiatives. These initiatives resulted in development of an Urban Design Framework for both the South Lake Union and University District Urban Centers, and a rezone to allow new building types in each neighborhood (South Lake Union in 2013, and the University District in 2017). At the time the rezone was adopted for each neighborhood, a companion resolution was also adopted that recommended that their respective design guidelines be revised to reflect new development standards. This proposal submitted for City Council review and action includes revised South Lake Union Neighborhood Design Guidelines and University District Neighborhood Design Guidelines.

#### South Lake Union Neighborhood Design Guidelines

Neighborhood design guidelines for the South Lake Union Urban Center Village were originally adopted in 2005 following its designation as an Urban Center the previous year. Through the planning process, 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, and preserving connections to its maritime past. Design guidelines for South Lake Union are intended to promote new development that is

compatible with the existing built context and that enhances the neighborhoods' pedestrian environment and unique character.

In 2013, the City Council adopted new zoning standards for the South Lake Union Urban Center that greatly increased building height limits and included new standards to improve livability at the ground level. While guidelines for South Lake Union were reformatted in 2013 as part of an effort to standardize all neighborhood design guidelines, the 2013 amendments did not offer additional guidance for application of new development standards in project design. Today's proposed guideline amendments carry forward ideas from the South Lake Union Urban Design Framework that informed the 2013 zoning code amendments.

#### Public Engagement – South Lake Union

As noted above, the South Lake Union Design Guidelines update is the final product of a multi-year planning process that also resulted in the update of the South Lake Union Neighborhood Plan, the South Lake Union Urban Design Framework, the South Lake Union Height and Density EIS and substantial changes to development regulations in the neighborhood.

In developing these guidelines, the City continued its partnership with the South Lake Union Community Council to ensure the proposed guidelines reflect the community's vision for development. Many of the ideas and concepts were the result of earlier outreach efforts which included creation of stakeholder groups, convening of 6 design charrettes, and four open house events. In preparing updates to the guidelines, the City worked with the South Lake Union Planning and Policy Committee to review and comment on drafts and held meetings with the South Lake Union Community Council Board of Directors for review and comment on the final proposal. City Staff also worked with King County Metro to ensure that the guidelines provide appropriate guidance on the potential for establishment of a co-development bus layover facility in the future. During the SEPA process, notice emails announcing the availability of the draft guideline update and the opportunity to review and comment were sent to South Lake Union contact list of several hundred community stakeholders. One comment was received.

#### University District Neighborhood Design Guidelines

Neighborhood design guidelines for the University Community Urban Center Village were originally adopted in 2000. Beginning in 2011, City planners worked with the community to identify priorities that can be addressed by land use planning and urban design. While guidelines for the University District were reformatted in 2013 as part of an effort to standardize all neighborhood design guidelines, the 2013 amendments did not offer additional guidance for application of the identified priorities in project design. In 2017, the City Council adopted new zoning and development standards for the University Community Urban Center that increased building height limits and included new standards to improve the pedestrian experience at the ground level.

Planning was based on an inclusive community process, with participation by residents, business owners, the University of Washington, social service providers, and the faith community. City planners worked closely with the Urban Design Committee of the U District Partnership (UDP) in development of the Urban Design Framework Plan and zoning legislation that responds to a new light rail station being developed in the neighborhood.

After implementation of the new zoning and development standards, planners continued to work with the UDP Urban Design Committee in a series of working sessions and open house events on the development of the proposed updates to neighborhood design guidelines. The revised guidelines carry forward many of the ideas of the University District Urban Design Framework Plan that informed the 2017 zoning code amendments.

#### Public Engagement – U District

The process of engaging community in development of proposed updates to the U District guidelines commenced with a Community Kick-Off Open House event in March of 2017. The kick-off event was intended to inform the broader community of the work and to extend an invitation to attend a series of workshop sessions to those who were interested in a more hands-on experience. A series of four topic-related workshop sessions was conducted between April and November of 2017. These workshop sessions were punctuated by a mid-term Community Open House event in June 2017 on “Key Themes” and culminated with an open house on draft guidelines in November 2017.

The workshop sessions and open house events were supported by UDP staff who arranged for meeting space and refreshments. Workshop agendas were developed by City staff with input from UDP Board member Urban Design Committee Co-Chairs. Workshop meetings were open to the public and advertised on OPCD and UDP websites and via respective listserves.

During the SEPA process, notice announcing the availability of the draft guideline update and the opportunity to review and comment was sent to the UDP for distribution and links to the draft guidelines were uploaded on OPCD’s webpage. No comments were received during the official SEPA comment period.

#### ***OPCD Proposal and Analysis***

##### South Lake Union Neighborhood Design Guidelines

Since new development standards were adopted in 2013, the area has experienced unprecedented development activity both in the number and size of projects. This rapid development with a new set of development standards has shown areas in need of additional attention to clarify the intent of the regulations and provide better guidance for reviewing projects and granting departures. The proposed guidelines offer additional clarification for development standards that require mid-block pedestrian connections, ground level open space, preservation of character structures, podium design and tall building design. The

guidelines allow for flexible design solutions that will better achieve neighborhood objectives and the intent of the 2013 rezone. In addition, the proposed revisions to the guidelines' specific subareas are identified and guidance is provided about how buildings are to relate to the public realm in each subarea.

### University District Neighborhood Design Guidelines

The character of the University District has changed significantly since the adoption of the existing neighborhood guidelines in 2000. With the anticipated opening of the University District light rail station in 2021, interest in developing transit-oriented mixed-use buildings within walking distance of light rail has resulted in many new project proposals of greater intensity and density. The new zoning and development standards that were adopted in 2017 allow for highrise development which is not addressed in the existing guidelines. The proposed guidelines offer additional detail and direction for creating design excellence when developing structures through use of development standards requiring upper level stepbacks, mid-block pedestrian connections, ground level open space, preservation of character structures, and use of podium design and tall building design. The guidelines also provide guidance for the relationship of new development to character areas and corridors, green streets, gateways and placemaking corners.

### ***Comprehensive Plan and Neighborhood Plan Consistency***

The South Lake Union Neighborhood Design Guidelines are consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan (2017), the South Lake Union Urban Center Plan (2007) and the South Lake Union Urban Design Framework (2010).

The University District Neighborhood Design Guidelines are consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan (2017), University Community Urban Center Plan (2015), and the University District Urban Design Framework Plan (2013). The Comprehensive Plan Neighborhood Plan Element, University Community goals and policies include the following:

- UC-G6** A community that builds a unique physical identity on its historical and architectural resources, attractive streets, university campus, and special features.
- UC-G12** A community where the historic resources, natural elements, and other elements that add to the community's sense of history and unique character are conserved.
- UC-P2** South of 50th and west of 15th, encourage high-quality development with a variety of building types, enhancing a vibrant mixed-use area with excellent proximity to the University and to the Sound Transit Light Rail station.
- UC-P23** Seek to preserve and enhance the following design characteristics within the community: pedestrian orientation and visual interest to the pedestrian, high-quality, human-scaled design details in larger buildings, streetscape continuity on commercial corridors, integration between the UW campus and the surrounding community,

buildings with attractive open space and low-rise multifamily development that fits with the design character of adjacent single-family houses.

**UC-P24** Enhance gateways into the University Community, especially at NE 45th St and Seventh Avenue NE, NE 50th Street at Roosevelt Avenue NE, NE 45th Street at 15th Avenue NE, the Sound Transit light rail station, the “landing” of the University Bridge at NE 40th Street, 25th Avenue NE at NE 55th Street, and NE 45th Street at 25th Avenue NE. “Gateways” means visual enhancements that signify entries into the community, such as improved landscaping, signage, artwork, or architectural features.

**UC-P37** Support public safety through urban design.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

OPCD recommends approval of the South Lake Union and the University District 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 community’s values for design excellence for multi-family and commercial buildings. In making the proposed recommendations to adopt updated 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.