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THE DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT: Success Stories from the Regional Growth Centers

Puget Sound Regional Council .......... August 2003

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Or visit our Website ...................... www.psrc.org/projects/growth/toolkit/index.htm

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I. Overview

Around the world and in the United States, more and more people are moving to cities. They come for economic opportunity, the chance to find a better job. They come for vibrancy, to enjoy entertainment, diversity, and distinct experiences. And, they come for connection, a chance to free themselves from long commutes, to know their neighbors. For these reasons and more, an urban renaissance is taking place.

This urban renaissance is also occurring in the cities in the central Puget Sound region. This is significant given that many believe that downtowns are fully developed and lack the amenities needed to attract growth. Signaling a change from the 1980s, when most growth occurred in suburban areas, the region’s downtowns are for the most part keeping pace. Between 1990 and 2000, the region grew by 19% in population and the region’s designated growth centers grew by 21%. And, while these centers account for only 2.4% of the region’s urban land area, they contained almost 29% of the jobs in the region’s urban areas, having grown by more than 18% over the last 5 years.

Regional Growth Centers

The region’s long-range growth strategy envisions growth occurring in the urban growth area (UGA) and in dense concentrations within the UGA, called centers. Centers are relatively small areas where housing, employment, shopping, and other activities are in close proximity. They range from established downtowns to emerging suburban crossroads.

Since they were first recognized in the 1995 VISION 2020 report, the Regional Council has periodically taken a quantitative look at the regional centers — there are 21 growth centers and 8 manufacturing/industrial centers in the four-county region — to report on data trends. This includes analyzing population, housing, employment and other key indicators of growth.

To complement the thorough analysis of data trends in the centers, the Development Toolkit is focused on understanding why, and how, some of the regional growth centers have been successful in attracting growth. The goal is to find common themes or strategies that might be replicable and could be shared with other jurisdictions in the region. To learn more, use the links at the top.

“This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering...
”
— William Wordsworth
Composed Upon Westminster Bridge
September 3, 1802
II. About the Project

In 2002, the Regional Council released the 2002 Regional Growth Centers report, which tracked more than a dozen indicators for each of the regional growth centers. Policy makers in the region were impressed with the progress that some of the centers had made in reaching their goals, but posed some additional questions, such as: why are some centers more successful than others, what tools or techniques did they use, and how did they build public support? They asked Regional Council staff to research the details to better understand each center’s “story.”

Methodology

The purpose of the research was defined as “seeking replicable lessons regarding tools and strategies being used to promote centers development.” Staff selected six centers to profile: Bellevue, Bremerton, Everett, Kent, Renton, and Tacoma Downtown. These six centers were selected because they present a diverse set of situations that is representative of the whole set of centers.

The project included three components — background research, data analysis, and interviews.

- **Background research**: To best understand the tools, strategies, and actions that were being employed, Regional Council staff reviewed a diverse set of documents. This included comprehensive plans, marketing studies and brochures, newspaper articles, and city and downtown-related websites. Staff also conducted site visits, driving every street in each center. Developing the background research reports was the primary responsibility of the graduate students and intern.

- **Data analysis**: This component was focused on compiling and analyzing data that complemented the basic growth data analyzed in the monitoring report. Regional Council staff looked at the following measures: renter-occupied and owner-occupied housing units, rental prices, family and non-family households, car ownership, and age cohort data. Different from the monitoring report, Regional Council staff collected and compared data for the center to data for the respective city and county. The purpose of this comparison was to provide context to changes in the center, and to assess to what extent growth was being focused into the center.
• **Interviews:** Interviewees reviewed the findings of the background research, adding perspective and filling in the details. They also provided opinions as to which of the strategies and tools found in the background research had the most impact. Regional Council staff held 2 to 4 interviews for each center, with 1 to 4 persons at each interview. Interviewees consisted of city planning and economic development department staff, chamber of commerce staff, reporters, business and land owners, public facilities district staff, economic development council staff, and elected officials.

To accomplish the work, the Regional Council recruited two University of Washington Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs graduate students. The students, joined by one Regional Council intern, participated in the project as part of the school’s Public Service Clinics program. This program allows students to work for public agencies as part of their requirements for graduation.
III. Tools & Actions

After analyzing the data and talking to interviewees, a common theme emerged — specific tools or regulations do not make successful centers (although they do matter). Rather, dedicated, committed, and creative leaders and citizens make successful centers. These leaders were credited with having the skills to implement the community’s plan by being smart and inclusive.

Perhaps the seminal point in the project came when an economic development official offered “The answer for [how to develop your center] is the book *All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten*.¹ Collaborate and deal with each other. After that, its all just technical stuff.” Hence, the first lessons are about partnerships.

- **Two heads are better than one.** The greatest successes came from collaboration - public to public, public to private, and private to private, and more. Bremerton’s waterfront development, long in the planning stages, is now underway because the city has partnered with the county, the housing authority, a private developer, the transit agency; in fact, every component of the development has a minimum of two partners. Renton partnered with a developer to build Metropolitan Place, sharing the costs of the infrastructure, based on another partnership with the County to develop a parking garage. Time and again, we heard that multiple forms of partnering — sharing money, developing common visions, or even simply speaking in the same language — are critical to success.

- **This isn’t rocket science.** The economic development official was also right that it is actions more than technical tools that make the difference. Kent’s area-wide early environmental assessment (a programmatic EIS) for Kent Station is widely heralded but interviewees said that it was the previous actions of securing the rail station and the Regional Justice Center that put them in a position to use the tool, and so were of greater importance. Tacoma’s “eight weeks or your money back” permitting process is making a difference; however, interviewees said that it was a change in City Council priorities and staff phone calls that got development rolling. While specific tools have played a part, and so are mentioned, they were always secondary to people picking up the phone to call others who could help make the vision a reality. When the right team is assembled, the rest does seem to be “just technical stuff.”

Over the past ten years visions evolved for each center. Each ensuing plan projected the center taking on a more prominent role — usually both in a residential and commercial sense. The visions could be called nothing less than bold — more jobs, more shops, more people, and more infrastructure. These plans were clearly based on a significant amount of investment. The second set of lessons are about money.

- **There’s no such thing as a free lunch.** Great communities have great things in them. Bellevue has its downtown park and library. Bremerton is building an ice skating rink and naval museum. Everett is building a special events center. All have impressive sidewalk and landscaping improvement programs. The research was clear: the public and private sectors are spending a lot of money on amenities and attractions. They point to them with pride, seeing them both as milestones and as strategic investments that will make their center flourish.

- **The pump must be primed.** Every interviewee believed that public funds need to be part of the front money. Jurisdictions must invest if they expect the private sector to invest. Some referred to it as setting the table. Kent purchased a 20-acre site and prepped it for development. Renton built sidewalks, utilities, and a plaza to secure its Metropolitan Place development. Tacoma cleaned up the Thea Foss Waterway. In each center, jurisdictions are investing, sharing the risks, and trying to smooth the way for the private sector. One challenge that many interviewees noted was determining what level of investment was truly needed to get private money to start flowing.

The rest of the lessons are no more technical than the first ones. Interviewees said there are no silver bullets, just a lot of hard work, collaboration, and commitment.

- **Build support by delivering on promises and projects.** Jurisdictions have created public support for focusing growth into the center using a variety of methods. Bellevue remains committed to the center, the existing boundary, and this provides assurance to the community that there will be less growth in the single-family neighborhoods. Renton’s neighborhood program, with a liaison for each neighborhood and funds for neighborhood projects and activities, helps maintain support for focusing on the center. Together with delivering high-quality public projects, keeping promises and sharing resources top the support-building list.

- **Know your role.** Not every growth center — whether traditional downtown or suburban shopping mall — is going to be a world class destination. Bremerton’s role has changed over the years, creating a need to reconsider the strategy for the center. The new strategy does not build on retail, rather it builds on amenities, downtown destinations, and creating residential opportunities for those commuting to other counties. Everett’s historic
downtown is also being reconsidered, with a new special events center, government campus expansion, and multi-use multimodal transportation station. These projects involved an honest assessment of the area’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and helped set benchmarks, manage expectations, and create goals that could be met.

• **Bite off what you can chew.** Focus on projects and actions that can be completed. When the voters did not back its downtown park proposal, Bellevue separated the projects into phases. After the first phase was complete, and was well received, voters were willing to support the next phase. Kent defines this point. First came the Regional Justice Center, then the commuter rail station, and now their centerpiece, Kent Station, is readying for construction. Nothing seems to breed future success better than current success. And, in most markets, nothing slows future development more than recent failures.

• **Don’t be shy.** Bragging about your center is no longer considered bad manners. Every center has a marketing program in place or under development. Everett has “Great Thinking. With A View.” Renton is “Ahead of the Curve.” Tacoma is “America’s #1 Wired City.” Taking a chapter from the private sector, public agencies are becoming full partners in the marketing game. Talking up your center takes the form of business improvement districts, downtown partnerships, main street programs, community events, and more.

• **Sidewalks are too expensive to roll up at night.** The goal of being a 24-hour place (with daytime and nighttime activities) is on every center’s wish list. While none are there yet, interviewees offered that they are working towards going from being a 12-hour place to a 16-hour place. Bremerton is trying to stretch its downtown hours with an ice rink and a playhouse. Kent has a very successful Starbucks for the morning hours and is actively seeking a movie theatre for the evening. Jurisdictions are not in the night-life business, but are using the tools they have to make things attractive so that private businesses will want to add to the mix and stretch the hours of local activity even more.

• **Walk loudly and carry a small stick.** All the interviewees supported an incentive-based, as opposed to a regulatory, approach. Bellevue has an incentive to foster mid-rise multifamily housing — buildings that are more than 50% residential are allowed substantial extra height. Tacoma successfully lobbied the legislature to create a multifamily tax abatement program and uses it extensively. All of these incentives fit hand-in-glove with the partnering approach.

The final lesson, which seemed obvious, was considered by interviewees to be perhaps the most important.

• **Rome wasn’t built in a day.** Implementing the vision is a long-term endeavor. Some communities started planning for their downtown prior to the growth management act, and are only now seeing the fruits of their efforts. Bremerton has had plans to develop the waterfront area for years; finally, the project is under-construction. Everett’s downtown planning began before the Act; they too are now seeing major projects such as the multimodal station and special events center happen. These cities demonstrated a
commitment to overcome day-to-day issues and stay focused on the vision. They stressed flexibility and adjustments to recognize changing markets and trends, but they kept their eye on the vision.

This commitment has done many things — created benchmarks to measure success, helped create community support during the ups and downs of the economy, and provided security to the private sector that their investments were supported in the long-term.
IV. Regional Growth Centers

VISION 2020 is the central Puget Sound region’s adopted long-range growth, transportation, and economic strategy. A central goal of VISION 2020 is to foster a regional growth pattern that focuses development into urban growth areas (UGA), and increases the portion of jobs and housing that occurs in regional growth centers within the UGA. In the central Puget Sound region, 21 regional growth centers have been designated by countywide planning organizations.

Centers are relatively small areas where housing, employment, shopping, and other activities are in close proximity. They come in a variety of sizes and types, ranging from large, established downtowns that serve major portions of the whole region, to emerging suburban crossroads. The term “regional growth center” is used to differentiate centers that are designated for regional purposes from those that have a more local focus.

The Development Toolkit project focused on six centers:

- Bellevue
- Everett
- Kent
- Renton
- Tacoma

These six centers, shown in blue on the adjoining map, were selected because they present a diverse set of situations that are representative of the whole set of centers, with some growing fast and others developing more slowly.

The following center “stories” are meant to complement the thorough inventory of center-related data compiled as part of the 2002 Regional Growth Centers report. The data on each of the center pages references changes between 1990 and 2000, except for employment, which references changes between 1995 and 2000.
Bellevue Regional Growth Center

Located on the east side of Lake Washington across from Seattle, Bellevue was a small farming community until the 1940s, when the first roadway spanning Lake Washington was built. Today, the city is the third largest in population in the Puget Sound region.

Bellevue's downtown has undergone significant changes in the last dozen years. The city was fortunate to have a plan prior to the passage of the Growth Management Act, and they built on it, maintaining and strengthening the vision of a strong presence for the downtown.

Bellevue has a number of key accomplishments in the downtown area:

• Large park with pedestrian promenades and fountains.
• Numerous mid-rise multifamily housing developments which create whole new neighborhoods.
• King County Regional Library.
• Bellevue art museum.
• Major roadway and streetscape improvements throughout the downtown.
• Pedestrian promenade, breaking up a super-block to link Bellevue Square Mall, the art museum, the Galleria mall, and the improved transit center.

Key strategies used by the city are the provision of height bonuses for developments that contain predominantly residential units, front-end public investments in cultural amenities, and improvements to parking regulations.

The city kept a strong focus on retaining the existing geographic boundary for the urban center to minimize real estate speculation, to help focus growth, and to help preserve nearby single-family neighborhoods. The city was aided by a strong private sector effort, with an active downtown development association, and an active chamber of commerce.

At about 430 acres, the center accounts for only about 2% of the city’s land. However, it was the focus of a significant portion of the city’s growth.

• Around 6% of the city’s population growth was focused in the center, with the largest demographic segment being the 50-64 age group.
• Around 14% of city’s housing growth was focused in the center, with about three-quarters of the center’s housing growth being in rental units.
• Around 34% of city’s employment growth was focused in the center, with almost two-thirds of the employment growth being the Financial, Insurance, Real Estate & Services sector.

A wide range of opinions emerged during the interviews. Some felt the city was successful primarily because of its location, while others felt public actions and investments, such as development of the park and library, had a major effect. Most felt the market had been strong enough that indirect incentives, such as efficient
government, clean streets, and strong public involvement were sufficient in the 1990s, but that direct incentives would be necessary in the future.

Most interviewees felt that focusing growth into the center would continue in the future because projects had been financially successful, consumer tastes continued to support downtown living, and because of the protection it provided single-family neighborhoods.

As the center and city evolve, a number of challenges remain: creating housing that is affordable to a wide variety of people who work in the center, continuing to break up the superblocks to improve mobility, and creating parking management programs in order to both decrease the need for surface parking and to encourage pedestrian activity.

For more information, visit the following regional growth center related sites:

- City of Bellevue  
  http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/
- Planning & Community Development  
  http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/page.asp?view=1051
- Downtown Implementation Plan  
  http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/page.asp?view=3623
- Bellevue Downtown Association  
  http://www.bellevuedowntown.org/
- Bellevue Chamber of Commerce  
  http://www.bellevuechamber.org/
- 2002 Regional Growth Centers Report, Bellevue Profile  
Bremerton Regional Growth Center

Bremerton has the largest concentration of jobs and residents in Kitsap County. Bremerton’s population has fluctuated due to military build-ups and reductions.

Bremerton’s downtown has undergone significant changes in the past decades, as much of its retail base shifted to the Kitsap mall in the Silverdale area. The city has endeavored over the years to envision a new role for the downtown, and to position it as a destination where residents of the city and county can come for cultural and other entertainment opportunities.

One component of efforts to revitalize the downtown has been to take advantage of its waterfront access. A number of years in the making, a series of major improvements and developments are now under construction (or in the final planning stages) along the waterfront and throughout the downtown. Some of these key accomplishments include:

- Major improvements to the ferry terminal, with improved bus access facilities.
- Government center, which will hold congressional as well as county offices.
- Waterfront conference center.
- A few renovations of existing buildings, to break large floor plans into smaller, more-leaseable units.
- Planning for a parking garage that will be used by shipyard employees during the day and by others at night under a managed-parking program.
- Planning for a Park and Bremerton Naval Museum, which will buffer the new waterfront developments from the naval shipyard activities.

Key strategies used by the city are public investments and partnering. The city’s “Downtown Revitalization Plan” includes over 10 major projects, with a total investment of almost $150 million public dollars, leveraging an additional $90-100 million in private dollars.

All of these are scheduled to be completed by 2007, and each includes a series of public and private partners.

The city is also looking at smaller steps that can make a difference in the “feel” of the downtown, including streetscape improvements, some changes to on-street parking, and fostering an arts district that includes galleries, and possibly artist live/work spaces. The city’s efforts have been aided by a strong economic development council, as well as by an active transit agency.

At almost 1,200 acres, the center accounts for nearly 8% of the city’s land. The center did not fare particularly well in the 1990s, with losses in population and housing, although there was some employment growth.

- The center population declined more than the city, with most of the decline being those in the over 65 age group. Some growth did occur in the 35-49 and 50-64 age groups.
- The number of housing units in the center declined while it increased in the city. While the ratio of owners and renters remained stable, rents increased slightly.
- One area where the center did well was in attracting jobs, experiencing more than double the rate of job growth as the city as a whole. The center continues to hold over half of the city’s jobs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bremerton Regional Growth Center Change, 1990-2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population ...........................................-10.7%, -790 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing .....................................................-7.0%, -275 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment ...........................................11.6%, +664 jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Income .......................................28.0%, +$6005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Wage ...............................................21.0%, +$6713</td>
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</table>
Interviewees were fairly united in their assessment that downtown Bremerton had finally turned a corner, and that it was significantly improving. Most felt that city government - the past and current administrations - had and are continuing to play a significant role. Every interviewee agreed that what the city needed now were strong boosters, and that this spirit was found at City Hall. Surprisingly, regulatory reform and the creation of new public incentives for developers seemed to be somewhat of an afterthought - most felt the process was fair and they seemed satisfied.

A major factor in assessing and planning for Bremerton is the fact that a relatively small group of landholders control a significant portion of downtown land. Interviewees had differing opinions as to the role and involvement of this group, but there was a lot of agreement that relations between this group and other downtown stakeholders had improved significantly in recent years. Interviewees believed the current set of mostly-public projects were likely to be the catalyst needed to make these landholders, and other private interests, reinvest in downtown.

As the center and city evolve, a number of challenges remain: creating office space for private businesses to increase day-time workers in the center and capture some of the intellectual talent that currently commutes across the water, attracting residents to live in the new waterfront condominiums about to be constructed, securing the “fast ferry” to speed up commutes, and continuing to work with some of the long-time property owners who control a significant portion of the land in the center.

For more information, visit the following regional growth center related sites:

- City of Bremerton
  http://www.ci.bremerton.wa.us/
- Community Development Department
  http://www.ci.bremerton.wa.us/display.php?id=436
- “Bremerton On The Rise Article”
  http://www.ci.bremerton.wa.us/articles.php?id=46
- Bremerton Chamber of Commerce
  http://www.bremertonchamber.org/
- Downtown Revitalization Projects
  http://www.bremertonmainstreet.org/?zone=&id=13&sid=5Lxf7bTbhElv2uoFz6k3D7GmAkTO
- 2002 Regional Growth Centers Report, Bremerton Profile
Everett Regional Growth Center

Everett has the largest concentration of jobs and residents in Snohomish County. The city includes a large historic central business district, a major port, and one of the state’s largest industrial centers. The city has continued to try to diversify its economy as can be seen in the arrival of electronics corporations and increasing numbers of service industries.

The 1990s were a quiet time for development in downtown Everett, despite a long history of planning efforts. While some downtowns attracted residents, downtown Everett remained a place to work but not to live. The late 1990s and early 2000s started to see this change, as residents throughout the region began looking at downtown living options.

Seeking to capitalize on this, Everett looked hard at its regulations and incentives, and can now point to a number of key accomplishments:

- Everett Station, a multimodal, multi-use transportation hub immediately adjacent to the center.
- Adoption of a plan to leverage the Everett Station investment with zoning changes to foster development.
- Multi-use special events center.
- New 4-year college with over 300 students enrolled
- Major streetscape improvements, including upgrading the underlying utilities, and curb bulbs at all the major intersections.

Key strategies used by the city include public financing and tax abatements. The city authorized the use of a multi-family tax abatement program, financed streetscape improvement and beautification projects, and worked closely with the Public Facility District (PFD) to pay for a new special events center, which is to house a professional hockey team and provide space for other uses.

At Everett Station, the city was not willing to settle for a transportation-only facility, and successfully pursued adding a number of new uses to the building, including educational facilities and workforce training organizations. The city was aided by the PFD on some projects, and benefited from having a number of organizations interested in downtown development and marketing.

At almost 470 acres, the center accounts for only about 2% of the city’s land.

- Around 2% of the city’s population growth was focused in the center, with all of the growth being in the 35-49 and 50-64 age groups.
- Around 6% of the city’s housing growth was focused in the center, with nearly all of the new households being renters. Rents continue to be more affordable in the center than the city as a whole.
- Around 16% of the city’s employment growth was focused into the center with half of the employment growth in the government and education sector. Wages and incomes grew faster in the center than in the city as a whole.

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### Everett Regional Growth Center Change, 1990-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>+433 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>+454 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>+1031 jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Income</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>+$8582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Wage</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>+$6633</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviewees in Everett were confident that the downtown was now poised for redevelopment. While acknowledging that downtown had missed the boom of the 1990s, interviewees described the investments made during that period — wider sidewalks, street medians, curb bulbs, public art, and sewer and water upgrades — as having set the stage for future private investment. A lot of credit was given to city government — the past and current administrations — for forming partnerships to develop the special events center, securing the multimodal transportation station and integrating it into the downtown, and for downtown beautification efforts. Private sector interviewees were confident that value had been created, and that downtown was now a more secure investment.

As the center and city evolve, a number of challenges remain: coordinating and integrating the large number of organizations planning for the downtown, strengthening the housing focus in the center, more aggressively planning for the areas surrounding the major public investments so they truly become catalysts for private investment, and addressing the proliferation of residential buildings converting to commercial uses.

For more information, visit the following regional growth center related sites:

- City of Everett
  http://www.ci.everett.wa.us/
- Planning & Community Development
  http://www.everettwa.org/cityhall/default.asp?sectionid=4&parentid=14
- Development Sites
  http://www.ci.everett.wa.us/business/default.asp?sectionid=7&parentid=3&subid=0&subid2=0
- Everett Area Chamber of Commerce
  http://www.everettchamber.com/
- Downtown Everett Action Committee
  http://www.countyconnection.net/sites/index.cfm?siteid=199
- Downtown Everett Association
- 2002 Regional Growth Centers Report, Everett Profile
Kent Regional Growth Center

Located midway between Seattle and Tacoma along the Interstate 5 corridor, Kent has the sixth largest concentration of jobs and residents in the region. One of the oldest cities, Kent had shifted from its agricultural roots and, by the 1970s, warehousing and distribution had become increasingly important as part of Kent’s industrial development. In the past few decades, Kent has been transformed from a small, primarily residential and agricultural community into a major employment and population center for South King County.

Kent, and its downtown, continued to develop during the 1990s, with the city annexing major pieces of land, and the downtown siting major public projects. During this time, the city was careful to protect the character of its historic downtown core.

These activities have borne fruit, and the city now has a number of key accomplishments in its downtown:

- Sound Transit Commuter Rail station with an adjacent 4-story parking garage wrapped with artwork.
- King County Regional Justice Center, a major regional court complex.
- Numerous pocket parks and artistic wall murals.
- Five new multistory housing developments for senior citizens.
- Purchase of a 20-acre parcel between the Justice Center and Rail station, and subsequent adoption of a Planned Action Ordinance to guide development on the site.

Key strategies used by the city are public investments, early environmental review, and effective advocacy for the siting of regional facilities. The building blocks at the north end of the center, the Justice Center, 20-acre site, and transit station effectively create a whole new downtown - purposefully adjacent and connected to the existing one. Not forgetting the smaller details, the city has an active parks department that has beautified the center through pocket parks and wall murals. And, recognizing the asset it had in its historic character, the city developed a strong historic preservation program. This was complemented by a downtown non-profit agency that implements the national Main Street program, and promotes the downtown through special events, and marketing. Recently, the focus has shifted to working with real estate agents and brokers.

At just over 300 acres, the center accounts for only about 1.5 percent of the city’s land. Because of the large number of annexations, analyses assessing the focusing of growth are skewed and are therefore not provided. For the center, the data shows the following:

- Population growth was virtually all in the over 65 age group.
- All of the households added were renters, with rents remaining more affordable than in the city as a whole.
- Employment declined in the center while it was growing in the city as a whole.
- Wages grew at the same rate as the city as whole, while incomes grew slower in the center.

Interviewees believe Kent is on the cusp of a downtown boom, given the large and small investments made during the 1990s. Kent Station is entering into its final planning stages, which has created a lot of

Kent Regional Growth Center Change, 1990-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>+372 persons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>+382 units</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>-2.89%</td>
<td>-86 jobs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Income</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>+$4396</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Wage</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>+$10,887</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Puget Sound Regional Council
optimism; however some were concerned about its impact on existing downtown businesses. Interviewees spoke positively about the influx of seniors in the downtown during the 1990s, but many expressed the need to diversify the age mix to support the evening uses envisioned for Kent Station. Interviewees noted how important the commuter rail station was for downtown, but stressed the need for more frequent service.

As the center and city evolve, a number of challenges remain: addressing the “backlash” against rental units in the center (and in other parts of the city as well) since rental units are usually part of the mix in downtown areas, diversifying the age mix for new residents while still strongly supporting the existing seniors, and continuing to aggressively pursue housing and other 24-hour type uses in the new Kent Station development.

For more information, visit the following regional growth center related sites:

- City of Kent  
  http://www.ci.kent.wa.us/

- Kent Station Plans  
  http://www.ci.kent.wa.us/KentStation/default.htm

- Kent Downtown Partnership  
  http://www.ci.kent.wa.us/EconomicDevelopment/downtown/KDP.htm

- Kent Chamber of Commerce  
  http://www.kentchamber.com/

- Kent Regional Justice Center  
  http://www.metrokc.gov/kcsc/rjc.htm

- 2002 Regional Growth Centers Report, Kent Profile  
Renton Regional Growth Center

Renton, located at the southern end of Lake Washington and near Sea-Tac Airport, has grown from a small, compact town between the Cedar and Green River Valleys to a mid-sized suburban city, with stable residential neighborhoods, a strong industrial base, and a growing commercial/office sector.

Renton’s downtown spent the early 1990s focused on planning and developing a vision, making the city ripe for development when the market hit its peak. Part of this was having bold leaders, both elected and staff. The key accomplishments downtown include:

- Metropolitan Place mixed use development, including the public plaza, and shared parking garage.
- Numerous mixed use housing developments.
- Transit center.
- Performing Arts Center.
- New restaurants and business.

Key strategies used by the city include a city business plan, partnerships, and public investments. With the creation of a new Economic Development department, the city established a “City Business Plan.” Every employee gets a copy of the plan, knowing it is also used in the employee evaluation process. The plan contains a vision and mission statement, and five goals that are shown in annotated form. By defining the goals in a concise manner, and using them in employee evaluations, the city is able to create clear expectations and get all its staff working to implement the vision.

Partnership and public investments are central components in the Metropolitan Place story. Deciding car dealerships were no longer the best use of downtown land, the city offered land with good freeway visibility to the car dealers who had long anchored downtown. To make the land swap work, the city discounted the cost of the necessary street vacations from the price of the land. The city then selected a preferred developer to build the mixed-use buildings. The developer had requirements of its own, including the city building a public plaza and securing a multi-story parking garage. These actions leveraged the transit center investment, creating a dense, mixed-use neighborhood directly within the existing downtown. This innovative public-public-private partnership, complemented and supported by a number of other private city-marketing initiatives, has set a standard that subsequent developments in Renton are now seeking to emulate.

At about 550 acres, the center accounts for almost 5% of the city’s land, however almost half of the center is the Boeing plant. Because population and housing growth currently can’t be sited on the Boeing land, the data describing what percentage of city growth was focused in the center does not fully show the true change in the area. For the center, the data shows the following:

- Around 5% of the city’s population growth was focused in the center, with most of the growth in the 35-49 and the over 65 age groups.
- Around 4.5% of the city’s housing growth was focused in the center. Almost all of the households added were renters, despite the fact that rents are now higher in the center than in the city as a whole.

### Renton Regional Growth Center Change, 1990-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>+401 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>+156 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>+3178 jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Income</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>+$6959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Wage</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>+$11,006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Around 26% of the city’s employment growth was focused into the center; underscoring the presence of Boeing, almost two-thirds of the growth was in the manufacturing sector.

Interviewees in Renton shared a common belief that the city had followed a “can do” approach during the 1990s. Some offered that the downtown had been in a do-or-die situation, and bold actions were taken out of necessity. Most thought the lessons in Renton were about leadership and creativity. Interviewees stressed that the city had adopted a “business” model, speaking private sector language and using private sector goals. Long-time city staff referred to the change as “refreshing,” suggesting that the results spoke for themselves as to the effect of the change.

As the center and city evolve, a number of challenges remain: continuing to position themselves to address changes at Boeing, participating in regional transportation planning, and using the same creative regulatory approach towards future development, such as in the South Renton Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan area.

For more information, visit the following regional growth center related sites:

- City of Renton  
  http://www.ci.renton.wa.us/
- Economic Development, Neighborhoods, & Strategic Planning  
  http://www.ci.renton.wa.us/index.htm
- City’s Business Plan Goals  
  http://www.ci.renton.wa.us/ftp/bspl03.pdf
- Renton Community Marketing Campaign  
  http://www.rentonmarket.com/
- 2002 Regional Growth Centers Report, Renton Profile  
Tacoma Regional Growth Center

Tacoma, located halfway between Olympia and Seattle, is the region’s second most populous city and is the seat of Pierce County. Tacoma provides many modes of transportation, plentiful natural resources, economical power sources, and a deep, sheltered harbor, all of which have contributed to Tacoma’s development as a successful industrial center. Today Tacoma continues its tradition as a hub for trade, with the Port of Tacoma among the most important in the nation and the Pacific Rim.

Downtown Tacoma saw significant residential declines and general deterioration over the past decades, but has made a tremendous recovery in the past dozen years. The recovery took place within the context of infill development, brownfields reclamation, and adaptive reuse.

Tacoma has a number of key accomplishments in the downtown area:

- Environmental clean-up of Thea Foss waterway and construction of pedestrian promenade.
- New University of Washington branch campus which continues to expand.
- Glass Museum, with an art-filled pedestrian bridge to downtown, new Tacoma Art Museum, and the State History Museum.
- Renovation of the historic Rialto and Pantages theatres.
- A soon-to-be finished light rail line, with connections to regional and interstate rail at the new Tacoma Dome park and ride station and garage.

Key strategies used by the city are a shift in focus towards economic development, tax incentives, and partnering. After a new set of City Council members were elected in the late 1990s, the city shifted its priorities from public safety to economic development. The city kicked this new approach off by talking to developers to learn what they thought would help make the city attractive for development. Based on these discussions, the city initiated an “8-week or your money back” permitting process to add certainty to the permitting process. The city also focused strongly on financial tax credit incentives, such as multi-family tax abatements and federal Community Revitalization Deduction credits.

At over 1000 acres, the city accounts for over 3 percent of the city’s land.

- Around 4% of the city’s population growth was focused in the center, with most of the growth in the 35-49 age group.
- Around 2% of the city’s housing growth was focused in the center. All of the households added (between 1990 and 2000) were renters, with rents remaining more affordable in the center than in the city as a whole.
- Over 35% of the city’s employment growth was focused into the center, with almost half being in the Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, and Services sectors.
- Wages and incomes grew at a similar rate in the center as in the city as a whole.
Interviewees in Tacoma described the central message of the city’s success as a product of the city’s focus on assuring a return on private investment, and on creating value, not process. The downtown struggled in the 1980s and early 1990s, setting the stage for a change in the city council’s focus from concentrating on public safety to economic development. Interviewees described this change as a watershed event, leading to the creation of an economic development department, and a shedding of a “zone it and they will come” attitude, to a more proactive and collaborative approach. Private sector interviewees described the city as a full partner who shared their goals.

As the center and city evolve, a number of challenges remain: addressing the significant number of vacant parcels and dilapidated buildings, creating more connections between the waterfront and the uphill portion of the downtown, and sustaining the proactive development focus and marketing.

For more information, visit the following regional growth center related sites:

- City of Tacoma
  [http://www.cityoftacoma.org/10Home/default.asp](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/10Home/default.asp)
- Tacoma Chamber of Commerce
  [http://www.tacomachamber.org](http://www.tacomachamber.org)
- UW Tacoma
- Thea Foss Development Authority
- Tacoma Museum of Glass
  [http://www.museumofglass.org/s99_home.jsp](http://www.museumofglass.org/s99_home.jsp)
- 2002 Regional Growth Centers Report, Tacoma Profile
v. Conclusions

Stakeholders involved in the development of regional growth centers are a skilled and knowledgeable group. This report hardly begins to tap their combined experience and wisdom. They are making things happen in an environment of limited budgets, tight deadlines, complex regulations, and an involved and watchful public.

A number of interviewees offered that they didn’t often have the opportunity to step back from the day-to-day challenges to look at the larger picture. When they did, they were proud of the results. All of the centers now provide something for their residents that did not exist a short time ago — including museums, parks, libraries, quality living opportunities, and more.

That is not to say that all issues have been addressed. Interviewees did not believe they had all the answers, or tools, to address parking issues, affordable housing, attracting families, social equity, and more. However, some felt that some of the problems being faced today would resolve themselves as the centers grow and become more diverse.

Interviewees also raised another issue — maintaining the level of commitment, the discipline, and the focus on developing the center. However, most were optimistic because, as one interviewee put it, “[Developing your center] is much too important to let politics get in the way.”
VI. Resources

Below are links to PSRC and other organization’s center related web sites & reports. This list is not comprehensive, but provides a starting point to learn about each of the centers. Additional links can be found on the toolkit centers page.

PSRC Resources and Reports

- Development Toolkit Slideshow
- Central Puget Sound Regional Growth Centers 2002 Monitoring Report
  http://www.psrc.org/projects/monitoring/rgc.htm
- Designation Criteria for New Regional Growth Centers
  http://www.psrc.org/projects/growth/criteria.htm
- University of Washington Student Reports. (Note: these papers represent the views of the authors, not necessarily those of the Regional Council)
  - Bellevue and Bremerton — UW Report
  - Kent and Tacoma — UW Report
  - Everett and Renton — Intern Report
- VISION 2020 — the Regional Growth, Transportation and Economic Strategy
- Puget Sound Regional Council Membership Directory
  http://www.psrc.org/about/members.htm
- Puget Sound Regional Council Useful Links
  http://www.psrc.org/links.htm
- Developing Your Center: A Step-by-Step Approach PSRC May, 1996

External Resources and Reports

- Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington (MRSC)
  http://www.mrsc.org/
• Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED)
  http://www.cted.wa.gov/
• More people are making their homes in urban centers — not just in Seattle: Seattle Times, June 30, 2002
  http://archives.seattletimes.nwsource.com/cgi-bin/textis.cgi/web/vortex display?slug=homedowntown30&date=20020630&query= More+people+are+making+their+homes+in+urban+centers+%97+not+just+in+Seattle+

**Related Law and Policy**

• Washington State Growth Management Act
  http://www.ocd.wa.gov/info/lgd/growth/law/index.tpl