

PSRC PLAN REVIEW REPORT & CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION



DOWNTOWN KENT SUBAREA PLAN

November 12, 2020

DOWNTOWN KENT

Downtown Kent was designated as a regional growth center by PSRC in 1995. The city of Kent adopted the Downtown Subarea Action Plan (DSAP) in 2013, and the plan addresses PSRC regional growth center subarea plan requirements. PSRC staff worked with city staff in preparation of this report.

The regional center is located in the Duwamish/Green River Valley and has long functioned as the commercial center of the city since the early 1900s. The subarea action plan offers opportunities to cultivate mixed use and dense development as a response to considerable planned growth. In the plan, the city addresses the growing community by prioritizing a walkable environment within the center and beyond and ensures diversity in land use and urban form. Kent has a rich history of downtown planning, beginning with the 1966 John Graham Plan. The Downtown Subarea Action Plan builds off a long history of planning, including the 1997 Downtown Strategic Plan.

REGIONAL GROWTH CENTERS CERTIFICATION

VISION 2040 includes DP-Action-17 (p. 98) that directs jurisdictions with regional growth centers and/or manufacturing/industrial centers to develop subarea plans for those centers. This expectation has been in place since 2003 and is required for all new regional centers. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) and local governments have worked together to develop an overall process for reviewing and certifying that regional center plans are consistent with VISION 2040, the Regional Transportation Plan, and the Adopted Policy and Plan Review Process.¹

In 2018, PSRC adopted the Regional Centers Framework Update. VISION 2050, an update to VISION 2040, is anticipated to be adopted in fall 2020. The Regional Centers Framework calls for review of centers in 2025, following local plan updates. All regional growth centers are expected to have subarea plans adopted and updated to be consistent with the Framework and VISION 2050 by that time. Certification of a subarea plan now reaffirms the planning work for the regional growth center is consistent with VISION 2040 and is an opportunity to identify whether any additional planning work is required by 2025.

CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION

Based on the review of the Kent Downtown Subarea Action Plan, the following action is recommended to the PSRC Growth Management Policy Board, Transportation Policy Board, and Executive Board:

The Puget Sound Regional Council certifies that the Kent Downtown Subarea Action Plan addresses planning expectations for regional growth centers.

¹ The specific requirements for center planning are provided in [PSRC's Plan Review Manual](#), and the process is also described in [VISION 2040, Part IV: Implementation](#). Certification of the jurisdiction's comprehensive plan for consistency with the regional transportation plan, regionally established guidelines and policies, and Growth Management Act requirements for transportation planning is completed through a separate board action.

Review of Regional Growth Center Planning

The remainder of this report contains a summary of the PSRC review of the Downtown Subarea Action Plan. Under each heading, the scope of the certification review, as guided by the [Plan Review Manual](#) and [Regional Center Plans Checklist](#), is listed in high-level bullets. Discussion in each topic area highlights exemplary provisions of the plan, as well as issues identified through the certification review where future work on the part of the city may more fully address VISION 2040, the Regional Transportation Plan, and center planning requirements. Future work should be considered as jurisdictions update local plans in 2024 to be consistent with VISION 2050 and the Regional Centers Framework.

The review contained in this section follows the format and content established in the Regional Center Plans Checklist, covering the seven major categories (center plan concept, environment, land use, housing, economy, public services, and transportation).

Center Concept

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following center concepts:

- Vision for the center**, including a commitment to compact, pedestrian and transit-oriented development.
- Identification of the area** designated as a regional growth center and relationship to other plans.
- A **market analysis** of the center’s development potential.

DISCUSSION:

The Downtown Subarea Action Plan effectively addresses the Center Concept requirements.

- The vision for the Kent regional growth center is clear, well-articulated and centered around building a “dense, mixed-use urban center” with measures to cultivate economic vitality, multi-modal transit opportunities, and diverse housing choices. The vision also emphasizes well-designed open spaces and sustainable, low-impact development techniques.
- The center is identified in the city’s comprehensive plan and its relationship to VISION 2040 and King County’s Countywide Planning Policies is described.
- The City has established a plan to monitor market conditions and development potential. The plan builds on market study work from 2010 and 2011 and continues to take this information into account with the current plan and future updates.

Environment

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following environmental policy topics:

- Critical/environmentally sensitive areas**, including inventories and relevant policies and programs.
- Parks and open space**, including public spaces and civic places, and provisions to encourage accessible open space.
- Innovative stormwater management** policies and programs.
- Air pollution and greenhouse gas emission reduction** policies and programs.

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Subarea Action Plan effectively addresses many of the Environment requirements.

- The plan provides an inventory of critical and environmentally sensitive areas in and adjacent to the regional center. The plan also documents FEMA flood zones and inventoried creeks, rivers, and wetlands.

The plan promotes low impact development techniques to improve water quality and maintain the natural hydrology in Policy ES-4. The City also adopted a Planned Action EIS covering portions of the downtown area to encourage development in the center while ensuring environmental impacts are considered upfront.

- ☑ The plan provides a detailed inventory of existing parks and open/public spaces within the Downtown area and includes several policies that strengthen pedestrian and bike connections to these recreational facilities and promote cultural events and public art projects within these open spaces.
- ☑ Policy ES-2 encourages best management practices to maintain the successful integration of environmental stewardship in city projects, and Action ES-3.1 advocates for the wise use of renewable natural resources and the incorporation of technology that reduces atmospheric pollutants.

Land Use

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for center plans to address the following land use topics:

Defined boundaries and shape for the center that are compact and easily walkable.

Residential and employment growth targets that accommodate a significant share of the jurisdiction's growth, as well as residential densities and building intensities with capacity to accommodate these levels of growth.

Mix, distribution and location of existing and future land uses described and mapped. Encourage a mix of complementary uses.

Design standards for pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented development and other transit-supportive planning that orients land uses around transit.

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Subarea Action Plan effectively addresses many of the Land Use requirements.

- ☑ The plan calls for proactive development regulations that aim to encourage medium and high density development through increasing allowable building heights and amending both the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Plan Map and the Zoning Districts to ensure diverse urban land uses.
- ☑ The plan provides a detailed description of existing land uses through dividing the regional center by uses and characteristics to create distinct districts. The plan includes placemaking policies and zoning changes to promote a mixture of office, retail and housing.
- ☑ Detailed and intentional policies and actions within the Urban Design Element create a vision of a Downtown that prioritizes pedestrians with well-designed infrastructure and a rich architectural fabric.

The following comments should be considered in future review of the subarea policies:

- ☐ While there is a strong emphasis on a positive pedestrian experience in the Land Use and Urban Design elements, consider strengthening policies to promote transit-oriented development (TOD) and other forms of transit-supportive planning. PSRC's [Growing Transit Communities Strategy](#) contains guidance for implementing equitable TOD policies and programs.

Housing

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following housing policy topics:

Existing and targeted housing units.

Tailored provisions for a variety of housing types, affordable housing, and special housing needs.

Implementation strategies for addressing housing targets and goals.

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Subarea Action Plan effectively addresses some of the Housing requirements.

- The housing goal aims to create high-density housing affordable at all income categories as well as housing choices for those with special needs.
- Policies encourage infill development and reuse to increase efficiency when acquiring adequate residential sites.

The following comments should be considered in future review of the subarea policies:

- Kent's leadership in the regional housing action plan under HB 1923 shows a dedication to addressing housing affordability challenges within the city. It is proactive to work with several other South King jurisdictions to address housing regionally. The DSAP should be strengthened by tying this regional housing work to the center and recognizing that the center plan is an opportunity to identify market-based affordable housing strategies, utilize the multifamily tax exemption (MFTE) program, and adopt other tools that increase the share of affordable housing. As Kent is anticipating a large share of the city's overall growth to occur in the center, it is important that the center plan demonstrates how to meet housing needs for various income levels, including affordable, subsidized, and special needs housing needs.

Economy

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following economy policy topics:

Key sectors and industry clusters in the center.

Economic development policies and programs for the center.

DISCUSSION:

The Downtown Subarea Action Plan effectively addresses many of the Economy requirements.

- The City's Planned Action Ordinance and the DSAP Planned Action EIS incentivize economic development by providing a more streamlined process for future development.
- Policy E-4 strives for a balance of housing and employment opportunities through the use of a variety of economic development tools.

Public Services

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Center Subarea Plan Checklist calls for center plans to address the following public services topics:

Local capital plans for infrastructure, such as sewer, water, gas, electric and telecommunications, including financing and strategies to ensure facilities are provided consistent with planned growth.

DISCUSSION:

The Downtown Subarea Action Plan effectively addresses some of the Public Service requirements.

- ☑ The Plan includes a core focus to invest in updating infrastructure to accommodate the planned residential and employment growth.

Transportation

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following transportation policy topics:

Integrated multimodal transportation network, including pedestrian and bicycle facilities, as well as linkages to adjacent neighborhoods and districts.

Regional high-capacity transit, local transit and coordination with transit agencies.

Complete streets provisions for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, vehicles, and – where appropriate – freight.

Context-sensitive design provisions for transportation facilities.

Environmentally friendly street treatments (green streets).

Level-of-service standards and concurrency provisions tailored for the center to encourage transit.

Parking management strategy that addresses supply of parking, on-street parking and mitigating effects of parking.

Mode-split goals.

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Subarea Action Plan effectively addresses many of the Transportation requirements.

- ☑ The plan highlights the incorporation of level-of-service standards to aid in the growth of medium to high density development.
- ☑ The plan emphasizes the importance of pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between Downtown and the adjacent neighborhoods.
- ☑ The plan prioritizes designing secure and safe pedestrian connections within the Regional Center and adjacent neighborhoods.
- ☑ The plan calls for considering urban design and placemaking elements to beautify the streets.
- ☑ Recognizing the importance of parking management, the plan directs the city to conduct a parking study to ascertain parking needs for all users.

The following comments should be considered in future review of the subarea policies:

- ☐ The plan could be strengthened by acknowledging existing and future transit access and adding more policies and actions that support coordination with transit agencies and include High Capacity Transit.
- ☐ To complement the plan's land use policies that support pedestrian-oriented development, the city should reference or include policies for Complete Streets or Green Streets Initiatives in the center plan.

Conclusion

PSRC thanks the city for working through the plan review and certification process for the center subarea plan. The Kent Downtown Strategic Action Plan effectively addresses the requirements of the Regional Center Plan Checklist, demonstrating consistency with VISION 2040, and is recommended for certification. The adopted Regional Centers Framework calls for review of centers and center plans again in 2025, following the adoption of VISION 2050 and local plan updates. In 2025, PSRC review will ensure that center plans, center growth targets, and local comprehensive plans have been updated to be consistent with VISION 2050 and the Regional Centers Framework.

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