

Regional Growth Center Plan Certification Report City of Lakewood Downtown Subarea Plan

February 12, 2026



The Lakewood Regional Growth Center is located in Pierce County and was designated as a regional growth center by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) in 1995. The city’s vision for Lakewood’s Downtown regional growth center is a dense mix of business, commercial, and cultural activity targeted for employment and residential growth, served by high-capacity transit and major public amenities. The center comprises the entire central business district (CBD) and most of the district surrounding Sound Transit’s Lakewood commuter rail station.

PSRC conducted a certification review of the City of Lakewood Downtown Subarea Plan. Lakewood originally adopted their center plan in October 2018 and most recently updated the plan in January 2025.

Certification Action

The Puget Sound Regional Council certifies the City of Lakewood Downtown Subarea Plan addresses planning expectations for regional growth centers.

The remainder of this report contains a summary of the PSRC review of the Lakewood plan and recommendations for future work to advance consistency with VISION 2050.

About Regional Growth Centers Certification

VISION 2050 directs jurisdictions with regional growth centers and/or manufacturing/industrial centers to develop subarea plans (DP-Action-8 and p. 80). This expectation has been in place since the PSRC Executive Board adopted the Plan Review Process in 2003. The review process is required by the [Regional Centers Framework](#) to certify existing plans and when designating new regional centers.

VISION 2050, the Regional Transportation Plan, and PSRC’s Adopted Policy and Plan Review process call for PSRC to review and certify these subarea planning efforts.¹ The [Regional Centers Framework](#) specifies review of centers in 2025, following local comprehensive plan updates. All regional centers are expected to have adopted subarea plans that meet the

¹ The specific requirements for center planning are provided in [PSRC’s Plan Review Manual](#), and the process is also described in [VISION 2050: 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.



requirements of the Regional Centers Framework and VISION 2050. Certification of a subarea plan affirms the planning direction for the regional center is consistent with VISION 2050 and is an opportunity to identify any additional planning recommendations to better align with regional policy.

Review Findings

The plan includes many aspects that meet requirements for a regional growth center plan, including:

- A clear vision and guiding principles for the downtown core based on a robust public engagement effort informing the three subarea districts: Colonial, Town Center and East District.
- Actions to accommodate an additional 2,257 housing units and 7,369 jobs in the downtown core.
- An implementation plan to adopt a hybrid form-based code that combines design elements with traditional zoning to regulate development downtown. Standards for the use of overlay districts, building frontage standards, and a simplified list of allowed land uses are included in the subarea plan.
- Goals for expanding green space and for new parks to improve public spaces with programming, such as continuing a successful farmer's market.

The 2019 certification report (attached) provides a full description of the center plan highlights.

Based on review of the plan, the city should consider the following comments in future updates to the regional center plan:

- The city should review the regional center boundary to ensure the center is a compact and walkable shape.
- While housing requirements have been addressed through the comprehensive plan and 2018 subarea plan, the city should consider updating documentation of existing and future housing units in the regional growth center. The documentation should include a breakdown of housing type, affordability, and special housing needs.
- Regional growth centers are critical locations to encourage affordable housing and provide opportunities for all. PSRC encourages the city to continue to work with regional partners to implement housing strategies to support affordable housing development in the center.
- The city should consider adding policies or strategies that support the reduction of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions
- While the city analyzed the impacts of residential and employment growth targets in the Final Planned Action Environmental Impact Statement, the subarea plan does not



reference the growth targets. In future amendments, policies and strategies should more clearly demonstrate how additional growth will be accommodated.

Conclusion and Next Steps

PSRC found the Lakewood Downtown Subarea Plan to be substantially consistent with planning requirements for regional growth centers.

PSRC encourages the city to address areas identified for additional work in upcoming plan updates and other planning efforts.

PSRC is available to provide assistance with future plan updates. Find additional planning resources on [PSRC's Plan Review webpage](#). For additional information regarding this certification report, please contact Nancy Ferber at nferber@psrc.org or (206) 464-6179.



PSRC PLAN REVIEW REPORT & CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION



LAKWOOD DOWNTOWN SUBAREA PLAN

January 31, 2019

BACKGROUND

A major emphasis of the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) is the need to coordinate local, regional, and state planning efforts. Within the central Puget Sound region, local governments and the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) have worked together to develop an overall process for reviewing local, countywide, regional, and transit agency policies and plans for compatibility and consistency. VISION 2040, the Regional Transportation Plan, and the Adopted Policy and Plan Review Process call for PSRC to review and certify subarea planning efforts of jurisdictions with designated regional centers.¹ This process also provides an opportunity to coordinate and share information related to local and regional planning.

VISION 2040 includes an action (DP-Action-17 and p. 98) for jurisdictions with regional growth centers and/or manufacturing/industrial centers to develop subarea plans for those centers. This expectation has been in place since the PSRC Executive Board adopted its Plan Review Process in 2003 and is required for designation of new regional centers under the Designation Procedures for New Centers and the Regional Centers Framework. The following report addresses planning requirements and expectations for regional growth centers.

DISCUSSION

The Lakewood City Council adopted the Lakewood Downtown Regional Growth Center (RGC) Subarea Plan in October 2018. The RGC consists of approximately 315 acres and includes the Town Center, Colonial, and East Commercial districts. The subarea plan included an amendment to decrease the boundary size by 223 acres, to create a more compact center where investment and commercial and residential growth could be focused. Downtown Lakewood was designated as a regional growth center by PSRC in 1995. The city completed the subarea plan to address PSRC regional growth center subarea plan requirements and submitted the plan to PSRC. PSRC staff worked with city staff in preparation of this report.

CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION

Based on the review of the Lakewood Downtown Regional Growth Center Subarea 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 Lakewood Downtown Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan addresses planning expectations for regional growth centers.

The remainder of this report contains a summary of the PSRC review of the Lakewood Downtown subarea 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. PSRC recognizes that the timing and mechanism for addressing each of the comments will vary

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.

based on the jurisdiction, its resources and plan update process, and the nature of the comment. The recently adopted update of the Regional Centers Framework calls for review of centers and center planning in 2025, and PSRC may provide additional guidance or review in the future, consistent with the updated Framework.

Review of Regional Growth Center Planning

BACKGROUND

The success of regional centers lies at the heart of VISION 2040 and the Regional Growth Strategy, and jurisdictions with regionally designated centers are expected to conduct subarea planning for these areas. Subarea planning efforts are reviewed for consistency with the Regional Center Plans Checklist. The review contained in this section follows the format and content established in this 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: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The Lakewood Downtown Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan effectively addresses the center concept provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan envisions the center transitioning from an auto-oriented commercial hub to a vibrant pedestrian-oriented urban area with civic amenities, public gathering spaces, and mix of uses including housing choices, entertainment, restaurants, and retail. The plan recognizes the need for a more connected, walkable street grid network.
- ☑ The plan describes the center, its relationship to citywide planning, and broader county context for the center and its development market.
- ☑ The plan recognizes the significance of having an active community partnership or organization to advocate for the plan, and a strategy is included to create a Downtown Plan Advisory Commission to assist in implementation efforts.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The city should consider the following comments through future amendments to the comprehensive plan or subarea plans:

- ☐ While the plan recognizes that downtown Lakewood is a Regional Growth Center, more emphasis on the center's role in fulfilling the regional goals in VISION 2040 and the Regional Growth Strategy could help set the center apart from other regional retail and commercial hubs. The plan should demonstrate the benefits of being designated as a Regional Growth Center, as this could assist in attracting the desired public and private investments and redevelopment projects.

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: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The Lakewood Downtown Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan effectively addresses the environmental provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan inventories the existing critical and environmentally sensitive areas and includes policies to protect groundwater quality and supply and incorporate low impact development (LID) principles in stormwater design.
- ☑ The plan recognizes the lack of parks and open space in the center and includes policies to support the creation and maintenance of parks, open space, and public gathering spots. The plan envisions the creation of a Green Street Loop that will connect open spaces and cultural resources.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The city should consider the following comments through future amendments to the comprehensive plan or subarea plans:

- ☐ The city should consider adding policies or strategies that support the reduction of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

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: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The Lakewood Downtown Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan effectively addresses the land use provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan shrinks the boundary of the RGC to focus commercial and residential growth in a more compact area. Concurrent with the adoption of the plan, zoning changes were adopted to rezone all properties within the center to Center Business District (CBD) zoning, which allows much higher densities (100 units per acre) and a mixture of uses.

- ☑ The plan details the importance of placemaking and includes several policies and strategies that support the creation of quality public spaces and community events that foster social cohesion and community pride.
- ☑ The plan includes strategies to conduct a parking study and consider parking management techniques such as shared parking and parking maximums.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The city should consider the following comments through future amendments to the comprehensive plan or subarea plans:

- ☐ While the city analyzed the impacts of residential and employment growth targets in the Planned Action Environmental Impact Statement and selected an alternative that accommodates a significant share of Lakewood’s growth, the plan does not reference the growth targets. In future amendments, policies and strategies should more clearly demonstrate how additional growth will be accommodated.
- ☐ The plan emphasizes the importance of transitioning the neighborhood design from being auto-oriented to pedestrian-oriented. The plan could be strengthened by including policies or strategies that support a transit connection from the center to the nearby commuter rail station. Adding policies or strategies that support transit-oriented design, especially as transit options are expanded in the center, could be beneficial as well.

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: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The Lakewood Downtown Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan effectively addresses the housing provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan describes existing housing units and includes policies that encourage a mixture of housing types for all incomes.
- ☑ The plan recognizes that there is currently a lack of housing in the center and includes strategies to promote multifamily development, including revised zoning and development standards (which have been adopted) and tax abatement programs.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The city should consider the following comments through future amendments to the comprehensive plan or subarea plans:

- ☐ The plan’s supplemental Existing Conditions Report demonstrates that Lakewood’s housing stock is largely renter-occupied, and a significant portion of the population earns lower wages, compared to other parts of Pierce County. The city has already taken important steps to address housing preservation by enacting a Rental Housing Safety Program that preserves existing rental units. Citywide zoning incentives have also been adopted to promote senior and affordable housing. The city is commended on these housing programs and is encouraged to continue expanding and targeting housing incentive programs to ensure the center’s anticipated growth includes affordable housing options.

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: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The Lakewood Downtown Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan effectively addresses many of the economic provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan describes the local market as dominated by retail trade. A market study was completed as part of the planning process and included recommendations to sustain and grow employment within the center.
- ☑ Through coordination with business owners in the area, the plan identifies strategies to support economic development, such as developing a business attraction and retention program and providing resources to entrepreneurs and small businesses, to support the local economy.
- ☑ The plan includes a policy to prioritize and market catalytic sites that are opportunities for public-private partnerships and redevelopment that could encourage future investments in the neighborhood.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The certification review did not identify any major areas for improvement of the plan to better align with regional centers expectations on the economy.

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: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The Lakewood Downtown Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan effectively addresses many of the public service provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan describes the existing services and level of service standards for electricity, sanitary sewer/wastewater, water, solid waste, stormwater management, public safety services, and other community services and ensures capacity exists for the expected growth.
- ☑ The plan encourages energy efficient development of public services, including the use of energy-saving building materials and site designs.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The certification review did not identify any major areas for improvement of the plan to better align with center planning expectations on public services.

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: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The Lakewood Downtown Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan effectively addresses many of the transportation provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan emphasizes the need to create a new street grid system, comprised of pedestrian-oriented multimodal public streetscapes. A green street loop road is proposed to connect potential public spaces.
- ☑ The plan includes several parking-related strategies and notes that as redevelopment occurs, there is an opportunity for the city to become more active in regulating, providing, and managing parking to meet the plan’s goals.
- ☑ The plan includes a policy to emphasize pedestrian and bicycle connectivity and transit use within the center, and a strategy is included to work with transit providers.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The city should consider the following comments through future amendments to the comprehensive plan or subarea plans:

- ☐ The plan could benefit from recognizing the close proximity to the Lakewood Sounder Station and identifying policies and strategies to link the center with the high capacity transit station.
- ☐ As called for in VISION 2040 (DP-Action-18), the city should consider adopting mode-split goals. This is an important step and will be a key approach to implement and monitor the city’s objectives for transit, bicycle, and pedestrian use in the center. The city is encouraged to work with Pierce Transit on developing mode split goals to provide viable alternatives to single-occupant vehicle travel in the center. PSRC has produced [additional guidance](#) about setting mode split goals that the city may find helpful in this work.

Conclusion

PSRC staff thanks the city for working through the plan review and certification process for the center subarea plan. PSRC is available to provide assistance for future plan updates. The adopted Regional Centers Framework calls for review of centers and center planning again in 2025, and PSRC may provide additional comments or guidance for center planning as part of that work. Additional planning resources can also be found at <https://www.psrc.org/our-work/plan-review>. If the city has questions or needs additional information, please contact Andrea Harris-Long at 206-464-6179 or aharris-long@psrc.org.