

Kent

Incorporated in 1890, downtown Kent has its roots as a small commercial center catering to the local farming and forestry economy. Through several decades, downtown Kent was overshadowed by newer, auto-oriented commercial areas such as the Westfield Southcenter Mall and Kent’s East Hill. Recognizing the historic downtown’s potential, city officials participated in the countywide process in which they sought and received designation of the downtown area as a regional growth center. The city also developed a strategic plan and actions to actualize its vision for downtown as a vibrant urban center. By encouraging increased development, making significant public investments in infrastructure and public facilities, promoting good urban design, and improving streets and sidewalks, the city hopes to reestablish downtown Kent as the cultural, social and economic center of the Kent area.

Most of the center’s land is taken up in commercial and retail uses, though some developable land still exists, and many downtown buildings remain underutilized. Community shopping, housing, recreational, medical and civic functions are located in the center, along with some light industry. Other attractions include extensive public art, the Asian Sister City pavilion, and several churches. Kent Station, the King County Regional Justice Center, and ShoWare Center have brought new life to the center, and are expected to act as a catalyst for further redevelopment. The center has an active farmers’ market, as well as several festivals throughout the year.

Acreage, Density & Mix of Activity

Kent is among the smallest regional growth centers in terms of total gross acreage (292 acres) with a net developable acreage of 197 acres (67% of gross acres). In terms of its role in the city overall, downtown Kent contains 2 percent of the city’s land area, 2 percent of the population, 2 percent of the housing, and 7 percent of the employment. Compared to centers as a whole, Kent has among the smallest number of total activity units (5,728), with mostly employment-oriented activity (74% jobs/26% residents) and moderate density of activity (19.6 units per gross acre).

Urban Form

Kent’s average parcel size is 0.5 acres, which is smaller than the average size for growth centers. Kent provides a walkable pedestrian environment, with a partially complete network of sidewalks (83% coverage) and small blocks with a 3.6 acre average size.

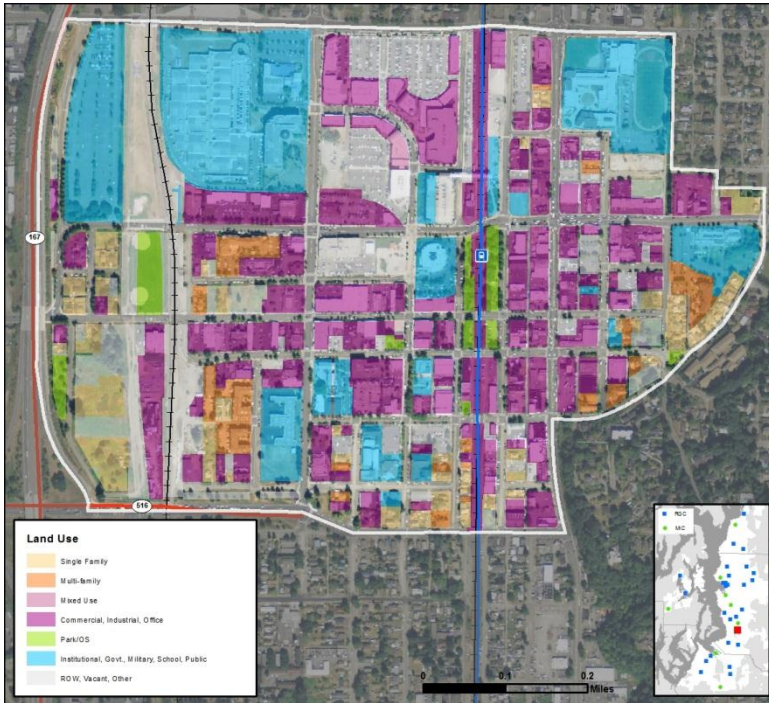
The presence of amenities is an important aspect of urban form. Kent has a somewhat limited set of urban amenities (108 total amenities / 0.37 amenities per gross acre). Food/Drink (38%) and Public/Civic Services (35%) represent the largest amenity categories, with specific concentrations in Restaurants, Healthcare and Clothing/Shoes.

2010 Summary Statistics

Land Use	
Gross acreage	292
Average block size (acres)	3.6
Average parcel size (acres)	0.5
Mix of Uses	
Population/Employee ratio	.35 : 1
Population+Employee/acre	19.6
Population	
Total population	1,486
Population density/acre	5.1
Change (2000–2010)	602
Housing	
Total housing units	600
Housing unit density/acre	2.1
Change (2000–2010)	-42
Employment	
Total employment	4,242
Employment density/acre	14.5
Change (2000–2010)	188
Transportation	
Housing access to transit	100%
Employee access to transit	100%
Work-based mode share	
SOV / HOV	81% • 8%
Walk & Bike / Transit	4% • 7%

Urban Amenities

Food & Drink	
Restaurants	25
Grocery	3
Cafes & Bars	8
Home Supplies & Services	
Pet Supplies	-
Laundry & Haircuts	6
Home supplies	-
Clothing & Shoes	11
Banks	9
Arts & Recreation	
Spectator Sports	-
Fitness & Outdoors	1
Electronics & Toys	1
Bookstores & Libraries	2
Arts & Culture	1
Public & Civic Services	
Social Services	8
Schools & Childcare	5
Police, Fire, Postal, City Hall	2
Pharmacy	1
Healthcare	22
Residential Care Centers	3



Land Use

Kent contains a diverse set of current land uses that are weighted more towards commercial (37%) than residential (12%) in terms of total net land area. The major land uses are commercial (28%), institutional (30%), industrial (9%) and vacant developable (8%).

Demographics

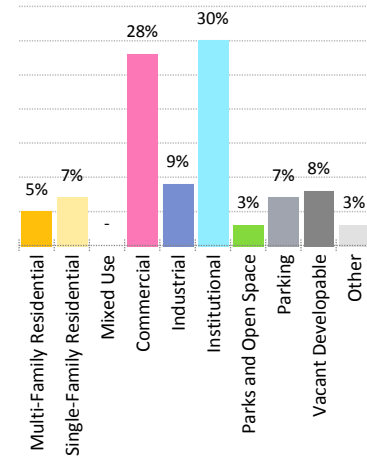
The total population in the Kent regional growth center is 1,486, and grew by 602 residents from 2000 to 2010. This increase can be largely attributed to a growth in institutionalized population housed at the Regional Justice Center. The center has older residents than the region as a whole, with a small share of youth (5%) and among the highest shares of seniors (24%). The age of residents is predominantly 35-64, followed by 18-34 (70% for both age groups combined). At 31 percent, Kent's racial diversity is greater than the region's 27 percent share of non-white residents. The groups with the highest shares in Kent are White (69%), African American/Black (18%), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (6%). Twelve percent of residents identify as Hispanic.

Employment

The total employment in Kent is 4,242, and it increased by 188 jobs from 2000 to 2010. The major industry sectors are Services (44%) and Government (35%). Some of the largest employers in this center are federal, county and municipal government such as Social Security Administration, Norm Maleng Regional Justice Center, King County Library, and Kent City Hall, as well as Green River Community College.

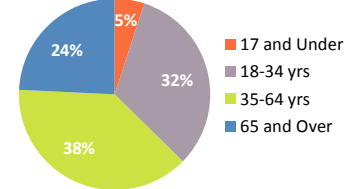
Current Land Use

(197 net acres)



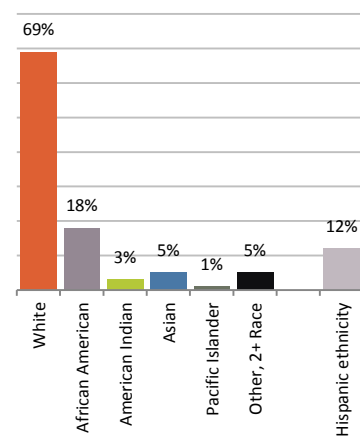
Age of Residents

(1,486 residents)



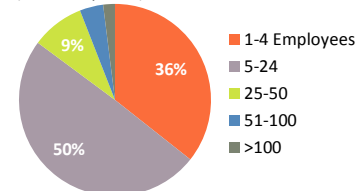
Racial/Ethnic Composition

(1,486 residents)



Size of Businesses

(220 workplaces)



Housing

Kent has 600 total housing units in its center, with a density of 2.1 housing units per gross acre. From 2000 to 2010, housing decreased by 42 units (7% decrease). Based on Census Block Group data, Kent has a large share (47%) of single family and 2- to 4- unit multifamily housing and a significant share of 5- to 19- and 20+ unit multifamily (53%). In terms of unit affordability, Kent's owner-occupied housing tends to be significantly less expensive than the region as a whole (based on Census Block Group data). The center's share of units under \$300,000 is 60 percent, whereas the region's share is 38 percent. The center's share of units over \$500,000 is 2 percent, whereas the region's is 25 percent.

Transportation

For work-based trips, the Kent regional center's travel characteristics are somewhat different from the region as a whole, with more single-occupant (SOV) and fewer transit trips. The region's single-occupant vehicle (SOV) share is 76 percent, while the center's share is 81 percent. The region's non-SOV mode share is 24 percent, with 10 percent in transit and 5 percent in walk/bike. The center's non-SOV share is 19 percent, with 7 percent in transit and 4 percent in walk/bike. Total daily trips from downtown Kent are slightly focused on destinations in regional centers (18% of all trips); this includes trips that stay within the center (6%) and trips that go to other centers (12%).

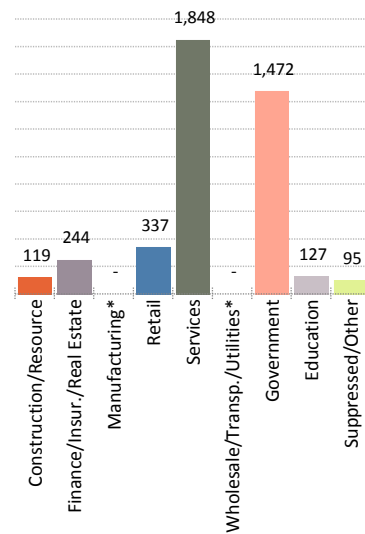
In terms of employee access to transit, the Kent center has complete access, with 100 percent of employees within a 1/4 mile walk of transit. For residential, the Kent center has complete access, with 100 percent of housing units within a 1/4 mile walk.

Plan Overview

Kent's *Downtown Strategic Action Plan* was first adopted in 1998 and updated in 2005 to define a vision for its regional center. The plan is based on a market/planning study and was adopted to guide implementation of the comprehensive plan. The plan focuses on several key strategies, including connecting and unifying downtown features, defining special activity districts, identifying areas for redevelopment and infill, encouraging housing development, and enhancing civic identity. Public improvements, design guidelines, and development target area actions are identified for each of the seven downtown districts. The document is structured around strategic actions to encourage development and implement key improvements to achieve an overall vision for the center. In 2012, Kent completed Phase I of an economic profile for the city, including the downtown area. The data will be useful as the city completes an update of the Downtown Subarea Action Plan in 2013. A Planned Action Ordinance was completed in 2005 that helped encourage development of Kent Station. Part of the Downtown Strategic Action Plan update will be to renew the Planned Action Ordinance and add an infill exemption.

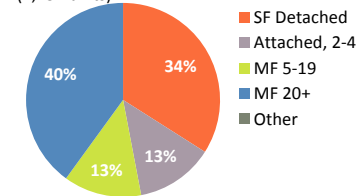
Jobs by Sector

(4,242 jobs)



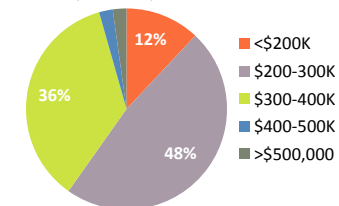
Housing Units by Type

(1,732 units)

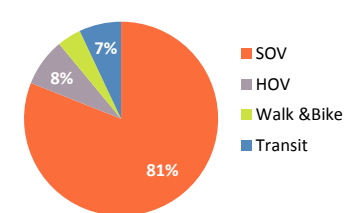


Value of Owner-Occupied Units

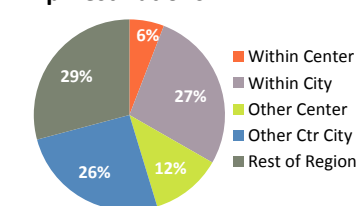
(324 units)



Mode Shares



Trip Destinations



Comparison to Center Plan Checklist

The city's primary center planning document was reviewed to evaluate the extent to which the plan addresses topics in the PSRC Regional Center Plan Checklist. This policy-level review of the current plan is intended both to provide preliminary assessment of consistency of the plan with center guidelines and to evaluate the Regional Centers Checklist for any potential improvements.

The plan addresses many components of the Regional Growth Center Plan Checklist. The plan includes a variety of implementation actions to ensure success of the center and encourage a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly place. The plan presents a clear vision for the downtown to be pedestrian-oriented, offer a mix of uses, serve as a regional transportation hub, and promote livability. For example, the plan proposes extending existing design standards to address Historic Core District, Central Avenue Corridor District, and Smith and Fourth corridor to encourage pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented development. The document provides a blueprint for phased investment in infrastructure, civic buildings and open space.

The plan meets many of the existing expectations of the Regional Growth Center Plan Checklist; however, there are aspects that the plan does not address or that could be strengthened in future updates. Residential and employment growth targets and mode split goals have not yet been incorporated into the plan. While emphasizing economic variety and vitality in downtown and attracting downtown businesses, the plan doesn't yet include a detailed discussion of the economic role of the center and key sectors or clusters. The plan includes a significant discussion of public infrastructure improvements, undergrounding utilities, and need for upgrades, but does not discuss financing or fully address capital facilities located downtown. The plan includes some provisions addressing stormwater, but does not yet comprehensively address other environmental topics included on the checklist.

Planning Challenges

As noted by the city in its May 2011 presentation to the Growth Management Policy Board, as well as a 2011 survey, Kent center's challenges include maintaining pedestrian orientation while managing auto, truck and rail traffic, growing comparable projects in the community to overcome market perceptions, building confidence in the downtown residential market, funding infrastructure improvements, and aggregating parcel ownership.

Kent has employed strategies to address challenges and to plan for the success of the center. Regulatory mechanisms include reduced parking requirements and flexible development standards with unlimited building height. Incentives and investments include enabling Multifamily Tax Exemption; adopting a Planned Action Ordinance; reduced traffic impact fees; structured, city-owned, and shared parking; infrastructure improvements; and sales of city properties with development agreements.