

# Seattle Downtown

Founded in 1869, the City of Seattle is the leading commercial, cultural and advanced technology center of the U.S. Pacific Northwest, and a major port city for trans-Pacific and European trade. With a 2010 population of more than 608,000, the city is the region’s largest and most diverse in terms of population, economic activity, and transportation options. The city has designated six regional growth centers—Downtown, First Hill/Capitol Hill, Northgate, South Lake Union, Uptown Queen Anne, and the University Community—to accept significant planned population and employment growth. Four of the city’s regional growth centers – Downtown, First Hill/Capitol Hill, South Lake Union, and Uptown Queen Anne adjoin one another. At less than four square miles, the concentration of regional growth centers contains significant amount of current development and capacity for future growth. The Ballard-Interbay and Duwamish manufacturing/industrial centers also adjoin this cluster of regional growth centers.

Seattle’s largest regional growth center is its Downtown center, including the city’s historic central business and retail districts. Seattle’s Downtown emerged as the region’s transportation hub in the 1800s and has grown over many decades into the region’s primary center. The center includes historic areas such as the Pioneer Square Historic District, the International District, and the Pike Place Market. Downtown amenities include the Westlake Center Mall, Pacific Place Mall, the flagship Nordstrom department store, the Downtown Transit Tunnel, the Seattle Art Museum, the Benaroya Symphony Hall, numerous theaters, galleries, stores, hotels, and Port facilities on the central waterfront. The Downtown regional growth center saw large-scale reinvestment in civic and public facilities over the last decade, including the Central Library, Federal Courthouse, Waterfront Sculpture Garden, and City Hall.

Downtown Seattle can be viewed as a collection of distinct districts with varying architectural character, function, and purposes. The southern portion of the center is made up of Pioneer Square and the Chinatown International District, the oldest parts of the city. Both districts retain much of their historic building stock, characterized by brick and masonry buildings of 3-6 stories developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, fine grained street networks, and structures with mixed uses, typically retail at the ground level and office and residential uses in upper stories. After a period of decline following World War II, Pioneer Square today contains a variety of office, entertainment, social service, and cultural uses, and has become an important gallery district for the region’s arts community. Century Link Field and Safeco Field were developed just south of Pioneer Square, bringing large numbers of sports fans to the area. The Chinatown International District lies just to the east of Pioneer Square. It is characterized by a sizable elderly population, significant low-income households, and a large number of affordable housing units. The district contains primarily small businesses as well as significant social service and community development organizations, and serves as the primary regional hub for Asian-Pacific American commerce and culture.

## 2010 Summary Statistics

Land Use	
Gross acreage	934
Average block size (acres)	2.1
Average parcel size (acres)	0.4
Mix of Uses	
Population/Employee ratio	.19 : 1
Population+Employee/acre	172.6
Population	
Total population	25,920
Population density/acre	27.8
Change (2000–2010)	6,117
Housing	
Total housing units	19,185
Housing unit density/acre	20.5
Change (2000–2010)	7,461
Employment	
Total employment	135,285
Employment density/acre	144.8
Change (2000–2010)	-30,640
Transportation	
Housing access to transit	100%
Employee access to transit	98%
Work-based mode share	
SOV / HOV	40% • 6%
Walk & Bike / Transit	20% • 34%

## Urban Amenities

Food & Drink	
Restaurants	420
Grocery	70
Cafes & Bars	113
Home Supplies & Services	
Pet Supplies	3
Laundry & Haircuts	57
Home supplies	7
Clothing & Shoes	99
Banks	83
Arts & Recreation	
Spectator Sports	2
Fitness & Outdoors	22
Electronics & Toys	11
Bookstores & Libraries	12
Arts & Culture	17
Public & Civic Services	
Social Services	79
Schools & Childcare	18
Police, Fire, Postal, City Hall	4
Pharmacy	10
Healthcare	194
Residential Care Centers	15

Just to the north of these historic districts lie city and region’s primary government and municipal campuses, containing the county seat, city, county and federal courts, and government offices. This part of downtown, which blends into the city’s financial district, is characterized by a dense grid of modern and historic high-rise office buildings built along the downtown’s large, high volume north south arterial avenues. Further north lie the city’s major retail district in the blocks surrounding Westlake Park, followed by the redeveloping neighborhood of Belltown, which has become an important residential area with 5-6 story condominium and apartment buildings, with vibrant ground level specialty retail and entertainment uses. The Denny Triangle at the northeast area of the center has also seen significant recent growth, including a proposed high-rise office complex for Amazon.

Several major infrastructure projects are beginning and underway in downtown Seattle, including the seawall and waterfront redevelopment, and replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct with tunnel.

**Acreage, Density & Mix of Activity**

Seattle Downtown is among the largest regional growth centers in terms of total gross acreage (934 acres) with a net developable acreage of 529 acres (57% of gross acres). In terms of its role in the city overall, Seattle Downtown contains 2 percent of the city's land area, 4 percent of the population, 6 percent of the housing, and 29 percent of the employment. Compared to centers as a whole, Seattle Downtown has the largest number of total activity units (161,205), with predominantly employment activity (84% jobs/16% residents) and the highest density of activity (172.6 units per gross acre).

**Urban Form**

Seattle Downtown's average parcel size is 0.4 acres, which is significantly smaller than the 1.1-acre average size for growth centers. Seattle Downtown provides a walkable pedestrian environment, with a complete network of sidewalks (99% coverage) and very small blocks with a 2.1 acre average size.

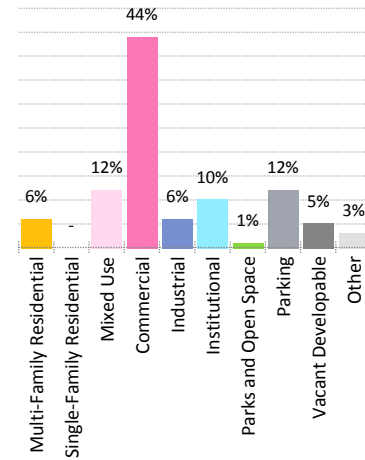
The presence of amenities is an important aspect of urban form. Seattle Downtown has a very robust set of urban amenities (1,236 total amenities / 1.32 amenities per gross acre). Food/Drink (53%) and Public/Civic Services (24%) represent the largest amenity categories, with specific concentrations in Restaurants, Healthcare, Cafes/Bars, and Clothing/Shoes.

**Land Use**

The major land uses in Seattle Downtown are commercial (44%), mixed use (12%) and institutional (10%). About 72 percent of the center’s 529 net acres are in employment-related use, including mixed-use buildings. Approximately six percent of the land in the center are exclusively residential uses.

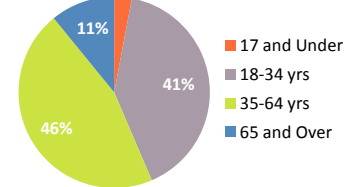
**Current Land Use**

(529 net acres)



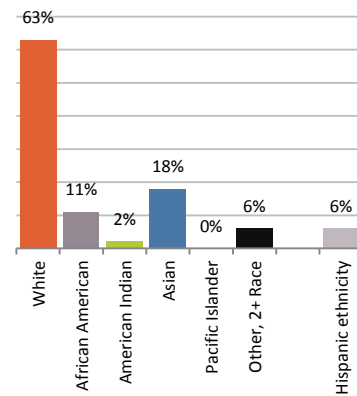
**Age of Residents**

(25,920 residents)



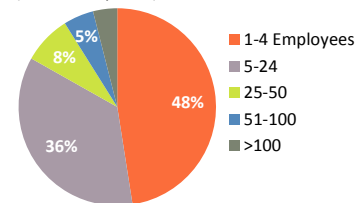
**Racial/Ethnic Composition**

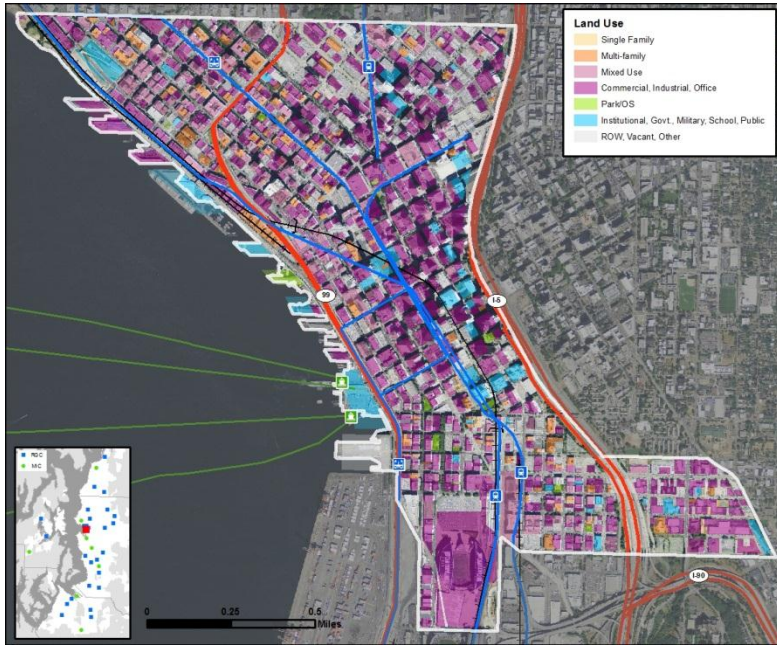
(25,920 residents)



**Size of Businesses**

(5,599 workplaces)





### Demographics

The total population in Seattle Downtown is 25,920, and has grown by 6,117 residents over the past 10 years. While seeing an overall population increase, the center also saw a significant reduction of 1,586 group quarters population. The center has more working age residents than the region as a whole, with small shares of youth (3%) and seniors (11%). The age of residents is predominantly 35-64, followed by 18-34 (87% for both age groups combined). At 37 percent, Seattle Downtown's racial diversity is greater than the region's 27 percent share of non-white residents. The groups with the highest shares in Seattle Downtown are White (63%), Asian (18%), and then African American/Black (11%). Six percent of residents identify as Hispanic.

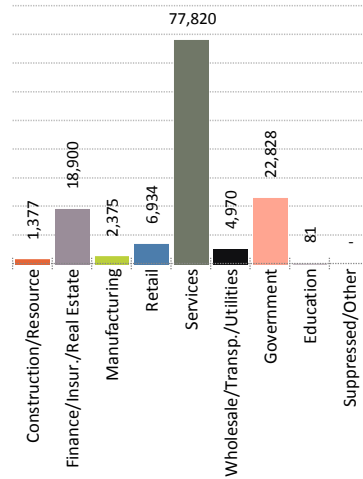
### Employment

The total employment in Seattle Downtown is 135,284, which has decreased by 30,640 jobs over the past 10 years. The major industry sectors are Services (58%), Government (17%) and Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (14%). Seattle Downtown employment emphasizes major office headquarters, professional services, government, and high-tech.

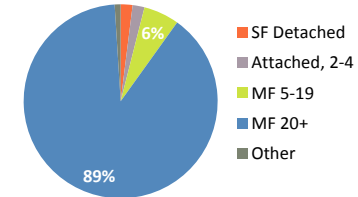
### Housing

Seattle Downtown has 19,185 total housing units, with a density of 20.5 housing units per gross acre. Over the past 10 years, housing has grown by an impressive 7,461 units (64% increase). Based on Census Block Group data, Seattle Downtown has a negligible share (4%) of single family and 2- to 4- unit multifamily dwellings and a dominant share of 5- to 19- and 20+ unit multifamily (96%). In terms of unit affordability, Seattle

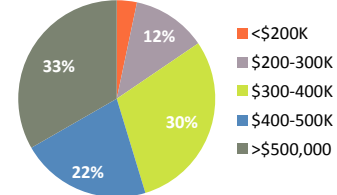
### Jobs by Sector (135,284 jobs)



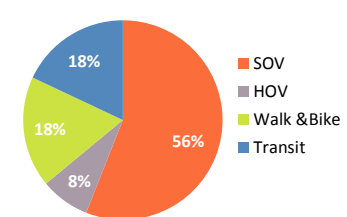
### Housing Units, by Type (17,528 units)



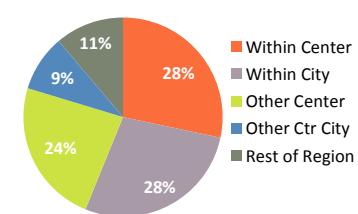
### Value of Owner-Occupied Units (2,664 units)



### Mode Shares



### Trip Destinations



Downtown's owner-occupied housing tends to be slightly more expensive than the region as a whole (based on Census Block Group data). The center's share of units under \$300,000 is 15 percent, whereas the region's share is 38 percent. The center's share of units over \$500,000 category is 33 percent, whereas the region's is 25 percent.

### Transportation

For work-based trips, the Seattle Downtown regional center's travel characteristics are significantly different from the region as a whole, with dramatically fewer single-occupant vehicle (SOV) and significantly more transit and walk/bike trips. The region's SOV share is 76 percent, while the center's share is 40 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 60 percent, with 34 percent in transit and 20 percent in walk/bike. The total daily trips from Seattle Downtown are highly focused on destinations in regional centers (52% of all trips); this includes trips that stay within the center (28%) and trips that go to other centers (24%).

In terms of employee access to transit, Seattle Downtown has complete access, with 98 percent of employees within a 1/4 mile walk to a transit stop. For residential, Seattle CBD has complete access with 100 percent of housing units within a 1/4 mile walk.

### Plan Overview

Seattle dedicates a section of the Neighborhood element of its comprehensive plan to the Downtown center. Through its neighborhood planning process, Seattle developed neighborhood plans for each of its regional growth centers. Though the plans were recognized as the vision and goals of neighborhoods, only the subset of policies adopted in the Neighborhood element of its comprehensive plan are considered adopted city policy. Policies included in the element are based on the neighborhood plans developed for the five downtown sub-districts of Denny Triangle (1998), International District (1998), Pioneer Square (1998), Commercial Core (1999), and Belltown (1998). The Neighborhood element includes general goals and supportive policies for Downtown as a whole and policies and maps focused on the specific subareas.

### 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. Both the Urban Village element and the relevant section of the Neighborhood element were reviewed for this analysis. 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.

Seattle has a framework in place to guide development in the city's multiple center types. Goals and policies established in the Urban Village element in Seattle's comprehensive plan are applicable to all six of Seattle's regional growth centers. Urban Village policies address a number of aspects of the Regional Growth Center Plan Checklist. The element describes the centers in a regional context. Policies call for compact mixed-use places and transportation improvements to support walking, transit and demand management. The element calls for directing compact growth in centers and accommodating a range of economic activity. Policies focus on directing new investments in infrastructure and services to areas expected to receive additional growth and providing housing choices, accessible open space and employment opportunities. Urban centers are characterized by the presence of public facilities and human services; parks, open spaces, street designs and recreational facilities; and neighborhood design guidelines. Mode split goals, employment and residential growth targets, and a description of capital facilities for each regional growth center are described elsewhere in the comprehensive plan.

The Neighborhood element – Downtown section comprehensively addresses many aspects of the Regional Growth Center Plan Checklist. The element includes a map of boundaries, a vision for the center embodied in overarching goals, and a map of planned uses. In addition to describing open space in the center, the element establishes policies to maintain and enhance open space. For example, the Denny Triangle section includes policy to “strive to accomplish goals for open space as defined for urban center villages, such as one acre of village open space per 1,000 household.” The Downtown policies include many transit-supportive and pedestrian-friendly design elements. The element supports a mix of uses and compact development in the Downtown center.

Housing diversity and affordability are comprehensively addressed, including specific strategies to consider when establishing or preserving affordability levels. Transportation policies are addressed, including green streets, parking management, coordination with transit service providers, design for nonmotorized travel and establishing a multimodal network.

The plan meets many of the existing expectations of the Regional Growth Center Plan Checklist, though there are aspects that the plan does not address or that could be strengthened in future updates. The city notes that several topics not directly addressed in the center plan, such as a market analysis and development capacity, are addressed through other planning documents. A stronger emphasis on the environment could be incorporated in the plan. This could include policies addressing stormwater, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Given the element's policy focus, it provides a limited amount of information on the existing conditions, such as descriptions of industry sectors or clusters and the mix, distribution, and location of existing uses in the center.

#### **Planning Challenges & Implementation Strategies**

Seattle has employed strategies to address challenges and plan for the success of its centers. These include incentive zoning, ongoing zoning amendments to increase development capacities, flexibility in mixing of uses, transit oriented communities planning, no minimum parking requirements, and a parking maximum for office uses Downtown.