

PSRC PLAN REVIEW REPORT & CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION

TACOMA MALL NEIGHBORHOOD SUBAREA PLAN

October 25, 2018



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 Tacoma City Council adopted the Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Regional Growth Center (RGC) Subarea Plan in May 2018. The RGC consists of 575 acres and includes the Madison, Northwest, Lincoln Heights, and Mall districts. The subarea plan included an amendment to the boundary to increase the size of the center by 90 acres. Tacoma Mall 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 Tacoma Mall Neighborhood 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 Tacoma Mall Neighborhood's 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 Tacoma Mall Neighborhood 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

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.

requirements. PSRC recognizes that the timing and mechanism for addressing each of the comments will vary 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 Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan effectively addresses the center concept provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan vision focuses on transformation of the center into a compact, pedestrian-friendly urban mixed-use neighborhood with access to healthy lifestyle choices, a diverse mix of housing and job options, and efficient multimodal transportation options. The plan emphasizes environmentally conscious planning to protect the South Tacoma Aquifer.
- ☑ The plan clearly describes the center, its relationship to citywide planning, and broader county context for the center and its development market.
- ☑ The plan provides significant detail about growth opportunities and market potential for development in the center. An Economic Comparative Analysis was conducted in October 2017 to support the subarea planning process.

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 center concept.

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 Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan effectively addresses the environment provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan discusses short-term actions to implement the area-wide stormwater management strategy. The entire subarea is in the South Tacoma Groundwater Protection Area, and the plan prioritizes actions such as constructing green stormwater infrastructure and integrating stormwater systems to enhance water quality.
- ☑ The plan describes the benefits of tree canopy coverage on stormwater management, air quality, and greenhouse gas emission reduction and includes a goal to achieve 25% tree canopy coverage by 2040. Near-term actions in the plan such as building “green streets” and increasing tree plantings help ensure this goal is met.
- ☑ The plan describes the existing parks and open spaces in the neighborhood and includes actions for expanding the recreational opportunities, with the intent of having a park in each of the four districts, achieving accessibility for all residents. The plan also recommends the construction of a multimodal loop road to connect the four districts and green spaces.

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 environment.

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 Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan effectively addresses the land use provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan expands the boundary of the RGC to correspond with neighborhood boundaries and provide for transition from the RGC to the adjacent South Tacoma candidate manufacturing/industrial area (MIC). Concurrent with the adoption of the plan, zoning changes were adopted to rezone properties from Light Industrial (M-1) to Urban Center Mixed-Use (UCX) and Commercial Industrial Mixed-Use (CIX).
- ☑ The plan includes detailed actions to develop and implement the urban form guidelines for each subarea district in the center, emphasizing the need to focus density in specific locations and alter standards to transition the scale of buildings. The city adopted code changes related to land use, zoning, and height changes concurrent with the subarea plan adoption to catalyze development consistent with the plan recommendations.
- ☑ The plan provides detailed information about redevelopment opportunities and future densities and growth scenarios in the center. The subarea plan supports efficient use of urban land and a more vibrant regional center through accommodating future growth.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

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

- ☐ Through the subarea planning process, the city amended the RGC boundary, adding 90 acres from the adjacent South Tacoma manufacturing/industrial area. The plan includes policies and zoning code revisions to transition between the regional growth center and candidate MIC. The city should continue to take steps to address changes through planning for the manufacturing/industrial center to ensure a smooth transition between the two areas.

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 Tacoma Mall Neighborhood 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 scenarios for residential development in the center.
- ☑ The plan discusses the city's goal for at least 25% of housing growth to be affordable to households earning 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) or less and notes that many of the neighborhood residents earn less than 50% of the AMI. As a result, the plan includes a goal for 25% of new construction be affordable to households earning less than 80% of the AMI, and 12.5% of new construction be affordable to households earning less than 50% of the AMI. The plan also distinguishes that overall, 50% of the neighborhood's housing stock (existing and new construction) should be affordable to households earning less than 80% of the AMI and 25% should be affordable to households earning less than 50% of the AMI.
- ☑ The plan recommends establishing a mandatory inclusionary zoning requirement in the Madison District to increase the share of affordable housing in the neighborhood, and inclusionary zoning code provisions were adopted concurrent with the plan.

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 housing.

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 Tacoma Mall Neighborhood 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, noting that few residents (3%) are employed in the area. The plan encourages the expansion of the local employment opportunities with a focus on professional employment in the Mall district and local artisan and creative culture jobs in other neighborhood districts.
- ☑ Through extensive coordination with business owners in the area, the plan identifies ongoing actions to support economic development, such as supporting business owners and making code revisions to streamline the permitting process. An up-front Planned Action Environmental Impact Statement was conducted as part of the subarea plan as an incentive for future investments in the neighborhood.
- ☑ The plan identifies “catalyst 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 Tacoma Mall Neighborhood 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. The plan also includes a goal to ensure the availability of utilities at appropriate levels of service to support the existing and planned development.
- ☑ The plan includes actions to work with utility and public service providers as partners to proactively serve growth and redevelopment in the subarea. The plan also considers the visual impact of public services and utilities and includes actions for minimizing the appearance of infrastructure, encouraging co-location when feasible.

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 Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan effectively addresses many of the transportation provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan provides clear references to planned improvements in the regional growth center as described in the city's comprehensive plan.
- ☑ The plan describes existing transit service and goals to continue working with transit providers to serve growth in the center. Policies cited in the plan focus on identifying a new transit center location, adding Tacoma Mall as a stop on the Sound Transit express bus service route, advocating for light rail service to the neighborhood, and exploring feasibility of a Sounder station along the existing rail corridor adjacent to the neighborhood.
- ☑ The plan emphasizes the need to complete the street grid system and create a multimodal loop road to connect the four districts. Parking management strategies are also included.
- ☑ The plan includes policies to encourage mode shift, such as commute trip reduction programs and other transportation demand management measures. Concurrent with the plan, the city has adopted zoning code revisions that significantly reduce onsite parking requirements as a way to accomplish mode-shift goals.

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 transportation.

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 206-464-1179 or aharris-long@psrc.org.