

# Regional Growth Center Plan Review Certification Report



## Greater Downtown Kirkland

April 27, 2023

The Greater Downtown Kirkland Regional Growth Center is comprised of the Moss Bay neighborhood, encompassing the historic center of Kirkland, and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area, the area surrounding a future Sound Transit Stride bus rapid transit station. Planning for the center seeks to leverage regional transit investments to connect to the historic downtown area and continue to develop as a well-connected, mixed-use area. The city addressed regional growth center planning requirements through two separate subarea plans: the Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan, updated in December 2021, and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area Plan, adopted in June 2022.

## Regional Centers Certification

VISION 2050 directs jurisdictions with regional growth centers and/or manufacturing/industrial centers to develop subarea plans for those centers (DP-Action-8 and p. 80). 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. VISION 2050, 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.<sup>1</sup>

The [Regional Centers Framework Update](#) calls for a review of centers in 2025, following local plan updates. All regional 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 affirms the planning work for the regional center is consistent with VISION 2050 and is an opportunity to identify any additional planning work required by 2025.

## Certification Recommendation

Staff reviewed the subarea plans and found that planning is consistent with the VISION Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center Plans. 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 Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area Plan address regional growth center planning expectations for the Greater Downtown Kirkland center.**

The remainder of this report contains a summary of the PSRC staff review of the Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area Plan. Under each heading, the scope of the certification review, as guided by the [Plan Review Manual](#) and the [VISION 2050 Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center Plans](#), is listed in high-level bullets. Discussion in each topic area highlights the plans, as well as issues identified through the certification review where future work on the part of the city may more fully address VISION 2050, the Regional Transportation Plan, and center planning requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.



# Review of Regional Growth Center Planning

## Background

The success of regional centers lies at the heart of VISION 2050 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 VISION 2050 Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center Plans. The review contained in this section follows the format and content established in this tool, covering the seven major categories (center plan concept/regional collaboration, environment and climate change, land use/development patterns, housing, economy, transportation, and public services).

## Center Plan Concept (Vision)/Regional Collaboration

### SCOPE OF REVIEW

The VISION 2050 Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center Plans 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 center and relationship to other plans.

**A market analysis** of the center's development potential.

**Equitable engagement process** with community and relevant stakeholders.

**Coordination** with tribes, ports, military installations, special purpose districts, and adjacent jurisdictions.

**Prioritization of services and access to opportunity** for people of color, people with low incomes, and historically underserved communities.

**Prioritization of local investments** in the center.

### WHAT'S IN THE PLANS

The Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area Plan work to advance regional policies and objectives for the center plan concept:

- ☒ The plans envision the center as an important place to the region, with continued growth as a desirable place to live, work, and visit. As a central location between many centers in King County, the plan envisions connections to major regional investments, from transit to trails, to other regional centers.
- ☒ The equity analyses conducted for the plans guided the city to ensure the planning process was inclusive of community members who have not typically been involved. These expanded outreach strategies led to plans that help ensure equitable and inclusive outcomes.
- ☒ The plan assesses the market potential of the center and includes policies to support economic growth.

### DISCUSSION

The certification review found the plans to be generally aligned with the regional centers' expectations on center concept.



## Environment and Climate Change

### SCOPE OF REVIEW

The VISION 2050 Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center Plans calls for subarea plans to address the following center concepts:

- 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.
- Avoidance and/or mitigation of environmental impacts** for vulnerable populations.
- Electric transportation infrastructure**, such as charging stations for industrial equipment.
- Retrofitting of existing buildings** to reduce building energy use.
- Minimize gaps in equitable access** to parks and open spaces.

### WHAT'S IN THE PLANS

The Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area Plan work to advance regional policies and objectives for environment and climate change:

- ☒ The plan recognizes the role of transportation and land use on greenhouse gas emissions. The mode shift goals and Green Innovation Strategy provide a framework for reducing emissions and increasing sustainability.
- ☒ Future development in the center allows the city to encourage publicly accessible parks and sustainability components. The city's encouragement of this practice and focus on equitable park access will minimize gaps in equitable access to parks.

### DISCUSSION

The certification review found the plans to be generally aligned with the regional centers' expectations on environment and climate change.

## Land Use/Development Patterns

### SCOPE OF REVIEW

The VISION 2050 Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center Plans calls for subarea plans to address the following center concepts:

- 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.
- Center's role in achieving VISION 2050's goal** of attracting 65% of regional population growth and 75% of employment growth to centers and high-capacity transit station areas



## WHAT'S IN THE PLANS

The Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area Plan effectively address the land use/development pattern provisions of the VISION Consistency Tool. Highlights include:

- ☑ The growth targets identified for the center are consistent with the criteria for Urban Regional Growth Centers in the Regional Centers Framework and support the goal of VISION 2050 in attracting 65% of regional population growth and 75% of employment growth to centers and high-capacity transit areas.
- ☑ The achievement of a “10-minute neighborhood” to meet daily needs within a short walk, is apparent throughout the center’s planning. The plan encourages the infill of underutilized parcels, especially parking lots, to recognize the increased efficiency that could come from new, mixed-use spaces.

## DISCUSSION

- Regional growth centers criteria call for a round or square shape with compact boundaries to promote walkability and access throughout the center. Greater Downtown Kirkland’s is an irregular shape to include both the historic downtown and future BRT station area at NE 85th Street, with a notable change in elevation between them. The city’s continued work in planning for connections between these distinct subareas will be critical for fostering a thriving and cohesive center where the western portion is able to benefit from upcoming high-capacity transit investments. Implementation of the subarea plans should ensure the development of a stronger pedestrian and transit connection in order for the center to be successful.
- The growth targets for 2035 in Greater Downtown Kirkland reflect the zoned capacity numbers in the area. The city should update growth targets for the regional growth center in its 2024 comprehensive plan. Growth targets should reflect achievable market demand over the next 20-year period, not solely zoned development capacity.

## Housing

### SCOPE OF REVIEW

The VISION 2050 Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center Plans calls for subarea plans to address the following center concepts:

- Existing and targeted housing units** by type, affordability, and special needs housing.
- Tailored provisions for a variety of housing types, affordable housing, and special housing needs.**
- Implementation strategies** for addressing housing targets and goals.
- Reduce the risk** of residential displacement.

## WHAT'S IN THE PLANS

The Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area Plan work to advance regional policies and objectives for housing:

- ☑ The plans include opportunities and strategies to foster the development of affordable housing that meets the needs of different income levels. For example, the city’s incentive zoning requirement will require that at least 10% of all new multifamily units are affordable. Other measures include the creation of a density bonus program for affordable housing and increasing housing supply.
- ☑ The development of middle-density housing encouraged by the center planning will expand housing capacity for moderate income households and provide additional housing types and options for current and future residents. This will be enhanced by the development of flexible form-based code standards currently in development.
- ☑ The city is working with ARCH (A Regional Coalition for Housing) in partnership to invest resources, produce affordable housing in the center, and identify legislative changes that could make additional affordable housing tools available in the center.



## DISCUSSION

- Meeting the housing needs of all households at a range of income levels is integral to promoting health and well-being and creating communities livable for all residents. Regional growth centers represent a critical opportunity to address citywide goals for affordable housing and leverage market demand. Therefore, it is important to understand what current and future housing needs are in the center. Regional centers designation requires documentation of housing needs, including the total existing housing units, breakdown by type, affordability (including subsidized housing), and special housing needs. Future housing needed within the regional growth center should be included as part of the city's housing needs assessment, and future updates to the neighborhood plans should more explicitly document existing and planned housing. This should demonstrate how housing targets and goals will be met, not only citywide, but within the regional center, and how partnering with housing organizations and community groups can help to address current and future housing issues.

## Economy

### SCOPE OF REVIEW

The VISION 2050 Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center Plans calls for subarea plans to address the following center concepts:

- Key sectors and industry clusters** in the center.
- Reduce the risk** of commercial displacement.
- Expand access** to economic opportunity.

### WHAT'S IN THE PLANS

The Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area Plan work to advance regional policies and objectives for economy:

- ☑ The plans provide information on the key sectors and industry clusters in the potential center. Planning also includes a market study that shows there is substantial market demand for the planned growth anticipated in Greater Downtown Kirkland. The industries in this area, mainly technology, and future education opportunities, are unique in comparison to Totem Lake to avoid conflicts in achieving identified growth targets.

## DISCUSSION

- While the city is looking to change the type of development in the station area, considerations of commercial displacement should take place to ensure that the needs of existing small businesses are addressed. Future updates to the center plans should address mitigation strategies for commercial displacement in the face of major planned changes to the built environment.



## Transportation

### SCOPE OF REVIEW

The VISION 2050 Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center Plans calls for subarea plans to address the following center concepts:

**Integrated multimodal network 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 street 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.**

### WHAT'S IN THE PLANS

The Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area Plan work to advance regional policies and objectives for transportation:

- ☒ Investments in transit, pedestrian and bicycle systems, and mixed-use development increase transportation options and help the city achieve the center's mode split goal down to 45% of trips as drive alone.
- ☒ Coordination between the city, Sound Transit, and WSDOT as regional investments in bus rapid transit have potential to significantly increase transportation options for residents, commuters, and visitors to the center.

### DISCUSSION

The certification review found the plans to be generally aligned with the regional centers' expectations on transportation.

## Public Services

### SCOPE OF REVIEW

The VISION 2050 Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center Plans calls for subarea plans to address the following center concepts:

**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.

### WHAT'S IN THE PLANS

The Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area Plan work to advance regional policies and objectives for public services:

- ☒ The plan describes existing services and planning provisions along with a goal of anticipating and planning for needed public facilities, services, and infrastructure as the center grows.



## DISCUSSION

The certification review found the plans to be generally aligned with the regional centers' expectations on public services.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

PSRC thanks the City of Kirkland for working through the plan review and certification process for the center plan. The Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Station Area Plan effectively address the requirements of the VISION Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center Plans, demonstrating consistency with VISION 2050, and are recommended for certification. The adopted Regional Centers Framework calls for the review of centers and center plans following the adoption of local plan updates. In 2025, PSRC review will ensure that center plans, center growth targets, and local comprehensive plans have been updated consistent with VISION 2050 and the Regional Centers Framework.

For additional information regarding this certification report, please contact Maggie Moore at [mmoore@psrc.org](mailto:mmoore@psrc.org).

