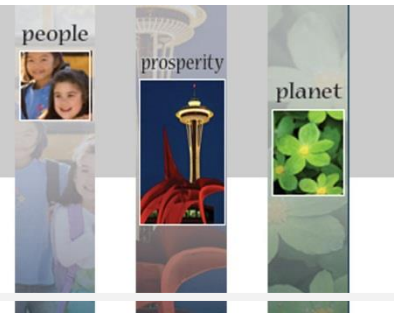


REGIONAL DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION REPORT

REVIEW OF REGIONAL GROWTH CENTER APPLICATION



CITY OF ISSAQUAH
MARCH 18, 2015

OVERVIEW

On January 30, 2015, PSRC staff received an application from the City of Issaquah for designation of a 461-acre, urban core-zoned area of the city as a regional growth center, pursuant to the designation criteria adopted by the PSRC Executive Board in September 2011. PSRC staff has reviewed this request, along with additional information provided by the city. The PSRC staff recommendation for Executive Board action is as follows:

The Executive Board should approve the designation of the proposed Issaquah Regional Growth Center.

BACKGROUND

Regional centers are a core component of VISION 2040's regional growth strategy for accommodating and managing urban growth in the central Puget Sound region. VISION 2040 emphasizes a regional structure composed of central places characterized by a compact, pedestrian-oriented form, quality urban design, and frequent transit connections. Cities with regional growth centers are expected to accommodate a significant portion of the region's residential growth (53 percent) and employment growth (71 percent). Because centers serve as an organizing framework for an efficient multimodal transportation system and are targeted to accommodate significant growth, they are given priority for local and regional infrastructure investments. The region currently has 28 designated regional growth centers in 19 cities and one center located in unincorporated Kitsap County.

Focusing growth into centers has been a key strategy in the central Puget Sound region since the 1990 version of VISION 2020. The 1990 VISION called for the establishment of a hierarchy of centers and provided a center typology. Center planning became more refined in the 1995 update of VISION 2020; it included suggested criteria for identifying different types of regional and local centers and manufacturing/industrial centers.

In 2002, designated regional centers and the corridors that connect them became the policy focus in the regional Policy Framework for PSRC's Federal Funds, and part of the primary criteria in the Economic Development District's Public Works Program. Based on the heightened importance of centers and the lack of consistent designation procedures across the region, the Growth Management Policy Board developed and the Executive Board adopted the Designation Procedures in June 2003. The [Designation Procedures were revised in 2011](#) to address updated policy guidance adopted in VISION 2040. Other than the minimum thresholds, the criteria, including the VISION 2040 and centers planning expectations, are intended to be

met generally, with each application evaluated using the information and responses to the criteria provided by the applicant.

The City of Issaquah has submitted an application for the designation of its proposed center as a regional growth center. PSRC staff evaluated the application and an initial draft of this report was submitted to the city for review and comment. The following sections summarize PSRC's evaluation of the application.

EVALUATION

A. Eligibility and Designation

To be considered for designation as a regional growth center, applicants must meet four basic eligibility requirements: 1) The proposed center must be within an urban growth area, 2) it must be identified as a candidate regional growth center within the local jurisdiction's comprehensive plan, 3) it must be identified as a candidate regional growth center in the countywide planning policies, and 4) the jurisdiction must have adopted an ordinance or resolution requesting PSRC to designate it as a regional growth center and authorizing the jurisdiction's staff to submit an application.

1. Location of the proposed center within an urban growth area:

The proposed center is located within the City of Issaquah and the urban growth area (see *Figure 1*).

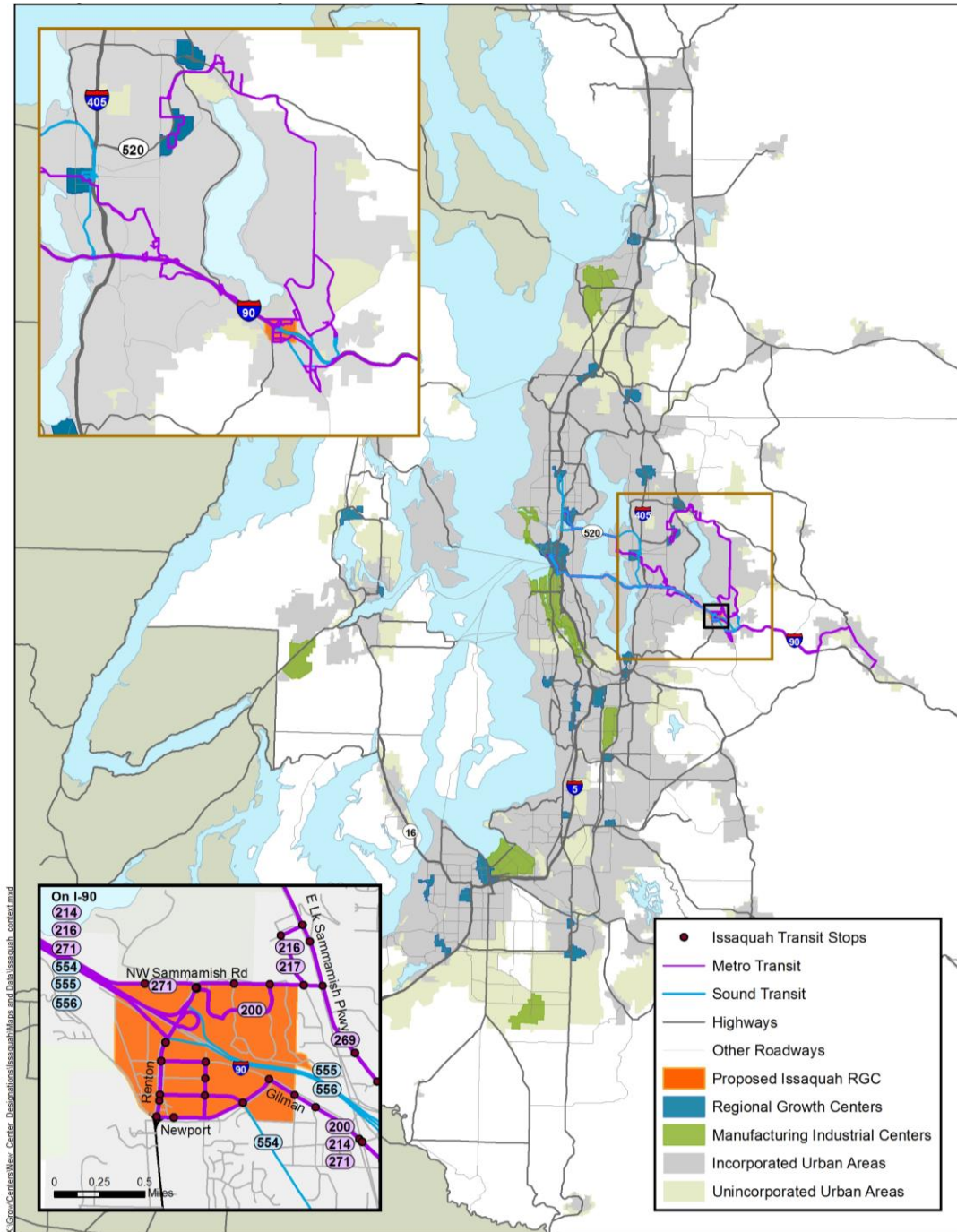
2. Designation in the local jurisdiction's comprehensive plan:

The Central Issaquah Plan, adopted on December 17, 2012, identifies the proposed regional growth center in UC Policy A1 (see Attachment A). The plan states that the Central Issaquah Urban Core, the proposed center, is a candidate for regional growth center designation because:

- a) It is planned for dense, compact, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development.
- b) The size, shape and planned growth are consistent with the regional center criteria established in the King County Growth Management Planning Council, in the Countywide Planning Policies, and by the Puget Sound Regional Council.
- c) Such designation is consistent with the vision for Central Issaquah established in the Central Issaquah Plan, Issaquah's comprehensive plan, the Mountains to Sound Greenway and the Cascade Agenda.
- d) Such designation is consistent with Sound Transit's plans to extend high-capacity transit to Issaquah.
- e) Regional growth centers receive priority funding for transportation infrastructure to support planned growth.

The plan includes many land use, transportation, urban design, and other policies to support the proposed regional growth center. For example, UC Policy A2 states: "Adopt Development and Design Standards to promote pedestrian oriented development, ensure quality and sense of permanence and create a sense of place."

Figure 1. Proposed Issaquah Regional Growth Center



3. Designation through a countywide planning policy process:

At its September 2013 meeting, the Growth Management Planning Council acted to designate Central Issaquah as an Urban Center in the King County Countywide Planning Policies. Through a ratification process of King County and its cities, the proposed center was formally designated as an Urban Center on April 1, 2014 (see Attachment B).

4. Request for regional growth center designation:

On September 2, 2014, the Issaquah City Council adopted Resolution No. 2014-14 requesting PSRC to designate the proposed center as a regional growth center (see Attachment C). The resolution also authorizes the Mayor of Issaquah to submit a designation application.

B. Designation Criteria

In addition to fulfilling the eligibility requirements listed above, applicants for regional growth center designation must demonstrate conformity with the criteria addressing three main issues: 1) compatibility with VISION 2040, 2) minimum required existing and planned activity levels and sufficient zoned development capacity, and 3) a commitment to center planning expectations.

1. Compatibility with VISION 2040

Issaquah's proposed regional growth center is consistent with and supportive of VISION 2040 policies for centers and compact communities. The proposed center is directly connected to the regional highway system and served by local and regional transit. The city envisions most of its future residential and employment growth to occur in the proposed center.

The plan for Issaquah's proposed center includes goals and policies that support the type of compact, pedestrian-oriented community envisioned by the multicounty planning policies. The existing mix of uses, which includes retail, professional services, parks and open space, and other uses, is supported and fostered by the plan goals and policies. Housing and additional recreational uses will be added to the center to balance the mix of uses. The development envisioned by the plan will be guided by a strategy that will strengthen the existing neighborhoods and communities. The city continues to develop a multimodal transportation system to support current and future residents, businesses, and visitors.

VISION 2040 REGIONAL GROWTH CENTERS POLICIES

MPP-DP-5: *Focus a significant share of population and employment growth in designated regional growth centers.*

MPP-DP-6: *Provide a regional framework for designating and evaluating regional growth centers.*

MPP-DP-7: *Give funding priority - both for transportation infrastructure and for economic development - to support designated regional growth centers consistent with the regional vision. Regional funds are prioritized to regional growth centers. County-level and local funding are also appropriate to prioritize to regional growth centers.*

For a complete summary, see [VISION 2040 & Centers Topic Summary](#)

2. Required Activity Levels

i. Existing Levels of Activities

The designation criteria for new regional growth centers require a minimum existing activity level of 18 activity units (population + employment) per gross acre. The proposed Issaquah center has approximately 9,000 jobs in its 461 acres. It does not yet have any housing. This translates to an existing density of 19.5 activity units per gross acre.

Compared to the designated regional growth centers in 2012, Issaquah's proposed center would have a higher overall existing activity unit density than 10 other designated centers. Issaquah anticipates substantial growth for this center, which would result in a higher future activity unit density.

ii. Target Levels of Activities

The designation criteria for new regional growth centers require a minimum targeted activity level of 45 activity units per gross acre. The city's target for the proposed center is 85.9 activity units per gross acre. Because the stated target in the plan is effectively the same as the capacity, PSRC staff will work with the city to clarify this set of planning assumptions. The stated target/capacity is adequate to accommodate 45 activity units per gross acre.

Population and Employment

	Existing	Target	Capacity
Housing	0	7,185	7,186
Population¹	0	16,023	16,025
Employment	9,000	23,555	23,555
Pop. + Employment (Activity Units)	9,000	39,578	39,580
Activity Units/Acre²	19.5	85.9	85.9
Designation Criteria	>18	>45	≥target

¹ Population per HH assumption = 2.23

² Acres in proposed center = 461

iii. Zoned Development Capacity

The designation criteria for new regional growth centers require zoned capacity that can adequately accommodate targeted levels of growth. The current zoned development capacity density is 85.9 activity units per acre, the same as the stated target.

PSRC's designation criteria require a description of tools and strategies that a city will employ to support its longer-term vision for growth and development in the center. These tools and strategies should also be designed to help avoid near-term development types and densities that might preclude longer-term objectives. The city has several such tools and strategies that support the longer-

term vision of the center. For example, the city adopted new Development and Design Standards that require minimum densities, reduce parking requirements, streamline permit review and the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) process, include incentives for redevelopment, and provide density bonuses.

3. Commitment to Center Planning Expectations

The regional growth center designation criteria include a commitment to meet expectations for center planning through regional guidance provided in the *Growth Center Plan Checklist* in PSRC's *Plan Review Manual*. Topics in the checklist include center planning/vision, environment, land use, housing, economy, public services, and transportation. Jurisdictions with regional growth centers are required to adopt a center subarea plan as part of their comprehensive plan no later than two years after designation. The city has already adopted a center subarea plan that largely meets center planning expectations.

i. Center Plan Concept (or Vision)

Issaquah's vision for the center, described below, is consistent with VISION 2040.

With implementation of the Central Issaquah Plan, the proposed center will evolve from a place known primarily for strip malls and office buildings into a cohesive neighborhood that is widely recognized as a vibrant and livable town center by:

- *Integrating environmental features, such as creeks and natural views into the plan to ensure they retain the unique qualities that make Issaquah special for future generations.*
- *Adding housing to the area in a variety of types and affordability levels, including new mixed-use projects on existing commercial sites, to accommodate people of all income levels and all stages of life.*
- *Maintaining an exceptional quality of life for Issaquah residents by promoting environmental sustainability, improving architectural design, integrating development with the natural setting, and creating new public spaces such as parks, plazas, pedestrian corridors, and streetscapes.*
- *Improving vehicle, transit and pedestrian mobility in the area and ensuring that Central Issaquah residents, workers, and visitors are served by the essential services required for daily living.*
- *Seeking development to complement Central Issaquah's existing businesses and capitalize on the desirable location, livability, existing infrastructure, unique natural setting, transportation links, and significant redevelopment potential to support the continued economic success of those who live and invest in Issaquah.*
- *Employing innovative approaches for economic development and growth management, such as financial incentives and public/private partnerships to help the community achieve the Central Issaquah vision.*

The city adopted the Central Issaquah Plan, the subarea plan for the proposed center, into the comprehensive plan in 2012. The plan and additional planning to date, as described in the application packet, is consistent with center planning expectations in VISION 2040 and countywide planning policies.

The city provides a market analysis for Central Issaquah. The analysis focuses on the evaluation of the market for TDR, and finds that a TDR program could help achieve additional density and public benefits in the center.

ii. Environment

The proposed center contains critical and environmentally sensitive areas such as Issaquah and Tibbetts creek. The city has plans and policies to protect and enhance critical and environmentally sensitive areas.

The proposed center currently contains approximately 19.7 acres of parks and open space. In addition, three of Issaquah's largest public parks, Tibbetts Valley Park and Confluence Park to the south, and the Lake Sammamish State Park to the north, are adjacent to the proposed center. The Central Issaquah Plan and Development and Design Standards support the enhancement and expansion of parks and open space within the proposed center.

The Central Issaquah Plan has a policy to improve stormwater quality over current conditions. The city is pursuing innovative stormwater mitigation by looking at stormwater management for the center holistically, considering regional facilities, and participating in the Building Cities in the Rain project.

The city has policies, plans, and programs to improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Some of these programs include the Green Power Community Challenge, commute trip reduction options, Bike to Work month, green building strategies, commercial and residential compost and recycling services, and electric vehicle charging stations, among others.

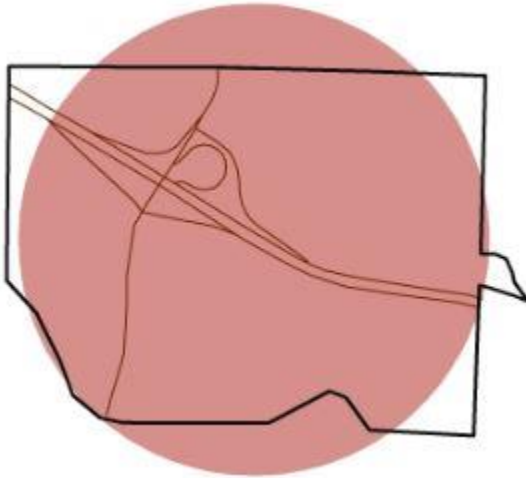
iii. Land Use

The regional growth center designation criteria recommend that a center be compact and walkable, which allows most locations within the center to be pedestrian-accessible from a central transit hub. A roughly round or square-shaped center is considered ideal for walkability and access, although many centers in the region deviate from this ideal shape.

The proposed center is roughly square-shaped, with most areas within a half-mile of the subarea's center (see Figure 2). About half of the center is within a half-mile from the Issaquah Transit Center. I-90 bisects the center north-south and SR 900 bisects it east-west. While these state facilities provide convenient auto and bus access, they may provide challenges to nonmotorized mobility and community cohesion within the center. Issaquah is addressing these challenges with nonmotorized connections described in the transportation section below.

The intent of the zoning for the proposed center, Urban Core, is to provide a dense, vibrant, pedestrian-friendly urban environment. The zoning designation

Figure 2. Proposed Center and Half-Mile Radius Walkshed



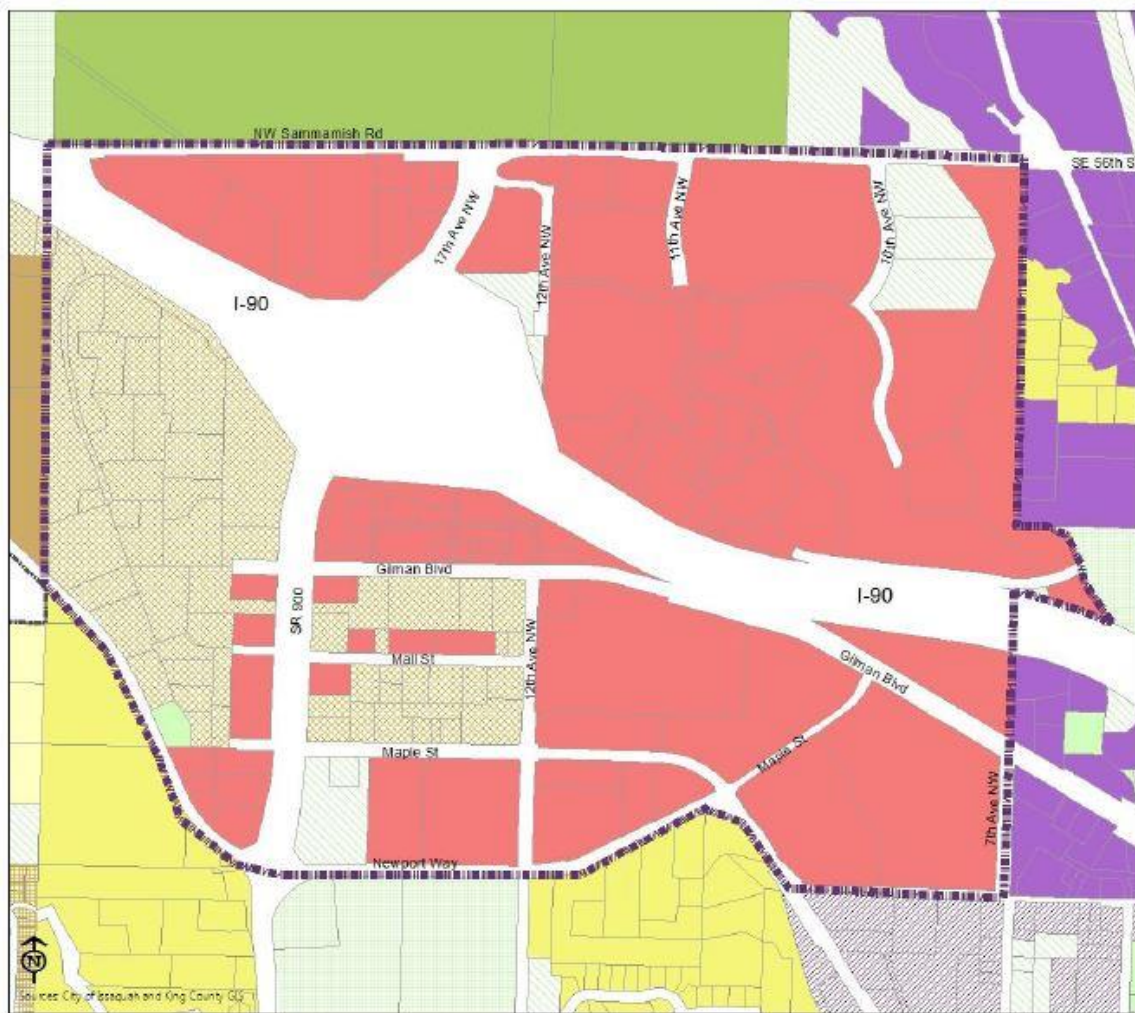
allows for a complementary mix of office, commercial, civic, entertainment, recreational, and residential uses with active first floors that provide pedestrian interest (see Figure 3). The city adopted design standards to guide the proposed center's development. The purpose of the Central Issaquah Development and Design Standards is to:

"...implement the Central Issaquah Plan, inspiring an animated and connected urban community where pedestrians are priority, requiring buildings and open space that are openly inter-related, designing sites that make a positive contribution to the Public Realm, attracting and retaining businesses that complement the Central Issaquah vision, and ultimately, creating a place where people of all income levels and diversities are drawn to live, work and play. These Standards promote the construction of developments that will have an appealing and visually engaging Public Realm in order to encourage social interaction, outdoor activity and a pedestrian orientation, and encourage redevelopment of Central Issaquah to a more sustainable, compact, mixed use area."

Issaquah has established citywide residential and employment growth targets to accommodate a share of the region's population and employment growth, as adopted in King County's countywide planning policies. Issaquah currently has no residents in the proposed center. Progress towards the adopted targets in the center will help create a better jobs-housing balance. In 2012, the regional growth centers as a whole had 2.67 jobs for every resident.

When a newly designated regional growth center is in a jurisdiction other than a Metropolitan City or Core City, this triggers a reclassification of that city from its former regional geography category. Pending center designation by the Executive Board, the city will be reclassified in the next update of VISION 2040,

Figure 3. Proposed Issaquah Regional Growth Center Zoning



Proposed Center: Zoning

- UrbanCore
- Community Facilities-Facilities
- Community Facilities-Recreation
- Community Facilities-Open Space
- Single Family-Estates - 1.24 du/ac
- Single Family-Suburban - 4.5 du/ac
- Mixed Use Residential
- Village Residential
- Mixed Use
- Urban Core
- Urban Village - East Village
- Urban Village - Rowley
- Lake Sammamish State Park

which will occur in advance of the next local targeting process and periodic update. For purposes of subarea planning, the city should continue to use its existing adopted growth target until new targets are established through the next countywide target update process. Once new targets are established, capacity in the center must be sufficient to accommodate the target.

iv. Housing

The proposed center currently does not contain housing. The city's goal for the proposed center is to accommodate 7,185 new housing units. The city's vision for housing accommodates diverse income levels, activities, amenities, open spaces, gathering places, recreation, and mobility options that all contribute to a 24/7 self-sustaining community where people aspire to live, work and play. The Central Issaquah Plan has strategies to address housing creation and housing affordability through a mix of land use designations, development regulations and incentives, direct public investments, and other public and private approaches.

v. Economy

The primary industry clusters in Central Issaquah include: healthcare services, retail services, administrative services, software and other publishing, and computer and electrical equipment manufacturing. Future job growth is anticipated to locate in Central Issaquah, and the comprehensive plan has policies to support economic development in the proposed center. In addition, the city developed an Economic Development Strategic Plan in 2014. The four goals of the plan are business retention, business recruitment, workforce housing/development, and vibrant community.

vi. Public Services

Substantial growth has already occurred in the proposed center, and public utility plans have been updated to accommodate planned growth. The proposed center is served by transit and other multimodal facilities (see below). Funding for additional infrastructure and public services to support growth is provided in part by traffic and park impact fees and bicycle/pedestrian mitigation fees.

vii. Transportation

The city's comprehensive plan, Central Issaquah Plan, Walk + Roll Issaquah, complete streets program, concurrency program, impact fees, mitigation fees and parks plan all contain policies, maps, programs, and strategies for implementing and funding a comprehensive multimodal transportation network. Sidewalks and bicycle facilities already serve much of the proposed center, and policies and design standards require sidewalks and streetscape amenities. The city has plans for two additional crossings over I-90 to better connect the two sides of the center: an urban shared path at Maple Street and a 12th Street overcrossing. An urban shared path already exists on SR 900. The Central Issaquah Plan contains provisions to encourage context-sensitive design and the development of complete and green streets.

The Issaquah transit center is within the proposed center. Four King County Metro Transit bus routes and two Sound Transit Regional Express routes serve the

proposed center (see Figure 1). Sound Transit's Regional Transit Long-Range Plan includes a light rail extension to Issaquah.

The city adopted new level-of-service standards, concurrency provisions, traffic impact fees, parks impact fees, and bike/pedestrian mitigation fees to implement the Central Plan vision. This adoption includes a new level-of-service (LOS) standard tailored to encourage transit. The LOS standard pursues a 10 percent increase in non-motorized transportation modes that translates to an approximate mode split of 26 percent in the Central Issaquah area.

The Central Issaquah Plan has goals and policies to establish parking requirements based on urban rather than suburban densities and needs. The city is developing a citywide parking management plan.

SUBAREA PLAN REVIEW

Jurisdictions with regional growth and manufacturing/industrial centers are expected to include a subarea plan for their centers with (or as part of) their comprehensive plan. PSRC developed a regional center plan [checklist](#) to clarify VISION 2040 subarea planning expectations and to assist jurisdictions in developing, updating, or amending their center plans.

The Central Issaquah Plan is the subarea plan for the proposed center. Although the planning area for Central Issaquah is larger than the proposed center, the plan clearly describes and delineates the proposed center, which is referred to as the urban core. If designated by PSRC's Executive Board, the center will receive "provisional" status. This status will exist for up to two years, until the subarea plan is certified by PSRC's Executive Board.

This Regional Designation Recommendation Report does not include an analysis of the subarea plan for PSRC certification purposes. Based on reviewing the application for regional growth center designation, at least two items will need to be addressed in an updated subarea plan. The subarea plan will need to clarify growth targets and plan horizon years for the proposed center to ensure consistency with Issaquah citywide growth targets. In addition, as required by the regional center plan checklist, the city will be expected to include a parking management strategy in the plan. PSRC staff is available to work with the city on these and other subarea plan expectations.

After two years, if an adequate center subarea plan has not been adopted and submitted for review and certification, a "provisional" center will lose its status as a regional center. At the discretion of the Growth Management Policy Board, however, the jurisdiction may be given additional time to work with PSRC staff to address outstanding issues and meet the planning expectations. If expectations cannot be met, the center will lose its regional designation.

CONCLUSION

The proposed center meets all minimum eligibility requirements for center designation and satisfies the designation criteria adopted by the PSRC Executive Board. The proposed center is compatible with VISION 2040's centers concept and multicounty planning policies. The proposed center meets minimum standards for current and planned employment and housing concentration, and the city has demonstrated a commitment to center planning expectations. Development and redevelopment within the proposed center has the opportunity to accommodate growth within a centrally located area that is well served by transportation and other public facilities, and its designation as the region's 29th regional growth center would give further support to the city's efforts to shape a vibrant and successful urban community. PSRC staff recommends that the proposed Issaquah Regional Growth Center be approved as a provisionally designated regional growth center.