Agenda Item #8

SOUND COMMUNITIES
SOLVING FOR HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AT SCALE

The Puget Sound region is moving forward with the most expansive and transformative investments in high capacity transit in its history. Scores of light rail stations, bus rapid transit lines, heavy rail improvements and new ferries routes will come online over the next 20 years. These investments in transit will provide critically needed mobility to the additional 1.8 million people expected here between now and 2050. Communities now have the rare opportunity to look ahead and ensure thoughtful planning and investment enables the production of housing to ensure the region gets the most out of these public investments in transit and at the same time critical meet economic, environmental, and equity goals.

Local governments are doing their best to balance the multitude of competing needs with limited resources to plan and execute at a larger scale over a longer time horizon. In response, a group of community leaders has been brainstorming ways to complement and support the work of transit agencies and local governments. This effort, called Sound Communities, seeks to promote the development of complete, walkable, equitable and inclusive neighborhoods at scale across the Puget Sound region in concert with the region’s historic investment in transit.

A potential approach is to form a region-wide public entity that would receive, acquire, and own land around transit hubs. In exchange for public benefits, this entity would lease or transfer land for the purpose of ensuring strategic production and distribution of housing types, with a focus on affordability, at a scale commensurate with the anticipated regional shortfall.

Sound Communities is initiating a comprehensive process that will engage a broad array of stakeholders in this conversation. We hope to have participation in this process from all sectors of society (public sector, non-profits, business interests, and of course citizens whose community is at stake). The University of Washington will serve as the convening institution and Sound Communities will retain professional facilitators, consultants, and legal counsel to support the process. Sound Communities has received $150,000 in funding from the Washington State Department of Commerce, which will provide the resources needed to retain a consultant and additional professional support.

A concept for the future light rail station area at Kent/Des Moines includes offices, retail spaces and over 7,000 affordable and market-rate residential units ranging from apartments to town houses. Image: UW College of Built Environments

A concept for the future light rail station area at Kent/Des Moines envisions a complete, walkable neighborhood with parks, open spaces and community amenities. Image: UW College of Built Environments