



## Town Center Visioning Public Hearing #3

Wednesday March 30, 2016

### Transcript

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Lisa K. Hutchinson  
CART Provider

JON: Good evening, everyone.

Welcome to our third and final public hearing, presented by our Joint Commission. Like to thank everyone for coming tonight.

We look forward to hearing what everyone has to say.

I have some comments here.

I'm going to -- my name is Jon Friedman. I'm the chair of the Planning Commission here. I would like to start this evening with a note about who we are and why we're having this hearing.

You all know why we're having this hearing. And we are members of either the Planning Commission or the Design

Commission. And we were requested by the city council as a Joint Commission to tackle a vision and code updates for Town Center.

We are here tonight hoping for your feedback on the draft Comprehensive Plan vision, goals, policies related to the Town Center, as well as the draft Development and Design Guidelines and rules related to the Town Center.

So, we began our work back in October. And we are hoping to finish by the end of April.

As I said, tonight is the last of three public hearings.

And in addition, we do encourage public input online at any time.

So, the city council felt that after all the work so far, the combined input of both our commissions would be beneficial to help this project.

The Planning Commission is required by law to provide its recommendations on the subject before council enacts changes to the land use code. The Design Commission is not required to participate, but the Design Commission reviews, approves, denies most major Town Center projects, so they are vital to the process, and the input I can tell you has been really helpful.

The whole point of this effort is to increase the

likelihood that future development in Town Center better reflects what we want as a community.

And I need to -- I would like to make three points before turning it over.

First, we are an advisory body to the city council.

The council may accept our recommendations or they can change them.

Second, we are trying to encourage input from the community.

You can -- a simple email to [TownCenter@mercergov.org](mailto:TownCenter@mercergov.org) will get to us. The email address is on the agenda handout.

Third, we haven't made any recommendations yet. We are still deliberating. So, again, thank you for coming here tonight and sharing your thoughts and ideas.

Scott's presentation will share with you some proposals for the most significant changes to the Comprehensive Plan and Design Guidelines.

His presentation will last about 15 minutes. Then we'll move directly to the public comment portion of the meeting.

Our Joint Commission won't be discussing anything tonight.

We're here solely to listen, and we'll be

discussing all of the public comments we've received to date, both verbal and written at future meetings.

My thanks to Scott and his team for all the great work they're doing to support us.

And I was written down to say that, but I really do want to thank Scott Greenberg. We've asked for a lot of things from them and they've had a lot of work to do on top of what their other duties are.

So, Scott.

SCOTT: Thank you very much.

Before I begin, I would like to introduce the elected officials in the room.

We have Mayor Bassett right over there.

Councilmember Dan Grausz here somewhere. Was here.

AUDIENCE: He's outside.

SCOTT: He's outside.

Councilmember Benson Wong.

Councilmember Dave Wisenteiner.

Any other councilmembers I missed?

Okay.

And then I would like to thank my staff and city staff for being here, Alison VanGorp who has coordinated all the meetings and kind of coordinated communication and helped with all the boards, been invaluable.

Travis Saunders and Shana Restall from the planning division who have helped with a lot of the technical aspects of this project.

Kirsten Taylor, assistant city manager, who has helped with support.

And is Steve Lancaster here? Right there. In front of Kirsten, Steve Lancaster, our interim city manager, who has also been very supportive throughout this process.

So, what I wanted to start with is there are two items up for public hearing: Comprehensive Plan policies and the city's development code.

And I wanted to start with what is the difference between the two of them.

So, Comprehensive Plan is defined under the state Growth Management Act as a generalized land use policy document.

It can be specific, but the idea is it sets your land use policy for the city.

On the other hand, a development code are actually the controls or rules that are placed on the use of land.

When you see policies, they may not be very specific and you're wondering where's the detail that makes that happen. Well, that occurs in the code.

Comprehensive Plan contains goals which are very

broad-reaching policies, which are a little bit more specific.

Provides vision and direction.

And is not regulatory.

And the other hand, the code is regulatory and it is the law.

If you have ever done a building project and you hear us talk about the code, you come to our counter, you have to meet the code, that's the 40-something-page document that's over here on the table that the commission is considering recommending to the council.

Tonight's hearing on the Comprehensive Plan is policies and goals related to the Town Center.

It is part of the mandated Comprehensive Plan update required by the Growth Management Act that had a deadline of June 2015.

The city council decided to delay adoption of the Comprehensive Plan update to allow this Town Center process to finish.

So ideally, in June the city council would adopt the updated Comprehensive Plan, that work that had already been recommended from the Planning Commission back at the end of 2014, plus the newer updated Town Center policies.

And I would like to say Mercer Island is not alone,

at least in King County, not having our plan adopted.

There's at least a handful of other cities that have not had their plan adopted yet.

The development code addresses Town Center-related regulations. In planner-speak, it's MICC 19.11, Mercer Island City Code, Chapter 19.11, where most of the changes occur. There's a few definitions in another section that might be amended.

The development code includes both mandatory items: The developer shall do X. And some discretionary items. The Design Commission has a lot of authority under the city code when reviewing Town Center projects to make a project better, but they are given some specific guidelines in the code with which to work with.

So the code also includes some of those guidelines to help the Design Commission do their job.

In terms of process, we started this back in 2014. I'm not going to go through the whole process. Most of you are aware of it.

We are toward the end right here.

So what will end up happening next is we have the third public hearing tonight. The tentative schedule for future meetings is the Joint Commission has a meeting scheduled next Wednesday, April 6, where they will talk

about what they've heard from all of you, what they've read in emails and other correspondence that has been sent to them. They'll start digging into those Comprehensive Plan policies and the development code, and giving staff direction on how to change those documents.

At the end of the process, either April 20 or April 27, they will have a recommendation to the city council for Comprehensive Plan policies and development code update.

You notice they are taking April 13 off because of spring break, so they also get a break at this time of year.

Once this package gets to the city council, right now the city council -- the three meetings that are currently scheduled, their regular council meetings, are May 2 and 16. These are Monday nights at 7:00 at city hall. And June 6. Actually, the May 2 meeting might start at 6:00 p.m. with the study session on this topic. So check the city's Web page for more information on when those meetings will be held.

There is a deadline that we're shooting for to not miss. That is, most of you know, the Town Center moratorium ends June 15.

So, council is trying to get something adopted before the moratorium expires. Otherwise, the council would either have to let the moratorium expire or extend the



moratorium for another -- some period of time.

So, let's start with the vision.

What's before you on the screen is the vision that the Joint Commission prepared based on feedback they had received from the old stakeholder group and from the community.

And it is really seven points.

I'm not going to read through this.

But this is kind of the foundation of all the work with the Comprehensive Plan and development code, is this vision.

It is aspirational.

It talks about what Mercer Island Town Center should be.

When we say "should be" the time frame we're looking at is 20 years, so by 2035 or 2036.

I mentioned that the Comprehensive Plan has a series of goals. Talks about mixed use, diversity of uses, human-scale building types, active pedestrian from the retail core, a variety of housing forms at various price points.

It is to be convenient and accessible to all ages and abilities.

Multiuse streets, meaning streets that work for

bicyclists, pedestrians, strollers, cars, buses, all modes of transportation.

Town Center should have -- be easy to walk around.

Should have ample parking.

And have good multimodal and pedestrian access to transit.

Outdoor spaces, the public spaces, the private spaces should be inviting and accessible.

We have a goal for energy efficiency and sustainability and supporting economic development activities.

One of the main concepts that came out of the stakeholder group was the notion that if building heights were going to be taller than two stories, the community ought to get something back in return.

We currently have a two-story base height limit under our current code, and this whole concept is in our current code, but to a much lesser extent.

The stakeholder group recommended expanding that concept so that the community would receive more benefits for increased height.

The Joint Commission has been working on fine-tuning that a little bit.

There's a little bit more work to do on that.

But some of the things that are being proposed in exchange for additional height are some of the things you saw on these boards, including having the upper floors of buildings above three floors stepped back so you don't necessarily have a flat facade.

That being said -- well, actually, let me summarize this slide and I'll get to more detail on that in a minute.

Some of the other things that we'll talk about is affordable housing. One of the proposals is for a mandatory affordable housing set-aside.

Green building sustainability is something that would be required.

Walk-off parking so you can park in a parking garage once, and be able to leave that building to do your shopping or go to your doctor's office, wherever you want to go, without having to move your car or have fear of your car being towed.

Smaller retail spaces: The design standards we have would require smaller retail spaces, at least streetfront spaces, which makes those spaces more affordable for small retailers rather than big retail spaces.

A lot of discussion about through-block connections. So, some of our blocks are very long and there's a desire to have connections for people to walk

through those blocks, through these projects that might get built. So there are some requirements related to through-block connections.

And enhanced landscaping is another one.

The Joint Commission has been considering building height for the Town Center. I know that's a major topic of conversation among all of you and in the community as well as with the commission.

So, just to kind of set the stage here, our current code, this is the height map for our current code.

The dark purple is really hard to see on here.

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

SCOTT: Sorry.

So, the dark purple more toward the northern area is five stories, and then there is some lighter purple here, four stories, four stories, and then there's a three-story area down here.

The stakeholder group recommended keeping that somewhat similar. There were some changes to it. And that's what we call Alternative A.

And then the stakeholder group asked us to analyze and look at an Alternative C which would essentially keep new five-story buildings north of 27th and everything south of 27th would be three stories.

The Joint Commission had a discussion at their last meeting about their preferences at this point between Alternative A and Alternative C, just given what they've heard and seen so far.

And as some of you know who attended that meeting, the Joint Commission had a little stronger preference for Alternative A at this point than Alternative C. But that's not a decision. That hasn't been made yet.

So that's still on the table. That's something we're still looking at.

There's been a question about: Well, what happens to our residential capacity? How many housing units could still be built under either of these scenarios? So under our current code over the next 20 years, our projection is there could be a little under 800 units, 787 units, built. We have the capacity for that under the current zoning.

Under Alternative A, that capacity gets reduced by 9% to 714 units.

And under Alternative C, that would be a 25% reduction in housing units that could be built compared to current code.

So, under either Alternative A or C, the number of housing units, the density would not increase. It would actually decrease.

One of the big changes is how to measure building height.

So, right now today, we measure building height from what's called average building elevation.

So if you imagine that this is the footprint of your building and maybe it's on a slope, and you have walls going in and out, we take a measurement at the midpoint of each of those walls and do a weighted average and we come up with a number. And that number is essentially the middle of the property. Not in all cases, but essentially that.

Right now a builder can go to the maximum height limit from that one point. That's how the Legacy building, the one that's under construction now, looks like a 6-story building from the front. It's because they were able to take advantage of the slope and their average building elevation is actually somewhat higher than the street.

In order to rectify that, we are proposing to add an additional requirement that no single facade, no face of the building, can exceed that maximum height limit either.

And I have some graphics to show you in a minute.

The current code height limits are over here, ranging from 65 to 18 feet and the proposal reduces that just by a couple of feet to 63 feet, down to 51, et cetera.

So this shows you what the current code would

allow.

So this is kind of the section through what might be considered that Legacy or Hadley building where this would be 76th and this would be the west property line.

So, right now they are meeting a 65-foot height limit with what they have.

Under the proposed code, there would need to be a break right about there because the 63-foot height limit in front of the building would also apply.

So what this does is it really focuses on sloping sites where we could have a higher building face because of the sloping sites.

Another concept that we've looked at is upper-floor step-backs. And basically on this drawing there's a 45-degree angle up above the second floor, so no part of the building can come forward from there.

But if we did that, we would end up with somebody called it a Mayan temple or a Devo hat of buildings throughout the Town Center where every floor got shrunk on each side equally, and that visually probably wouldn't look very good.

So the idea was to come up with some sort of flexibility to allow a builder to come out a little bit more to the street, beyond this 45-degree angle, but then they

would have to cut back. So here's where they would come out to the street or have a flat facade, but then they would have to provide some amount of open space.

Some amount of open space, courtyard space, at the bottom of the building. I don't have a better graphic to show that. We are currently working on what that might look like for the code.

Retail uses become a point of some discussion. We had a consultant present to the Joint Commission some of his findings regarding retail usage on Mercer Island.

Some of his finding is that there's limited demand for retail use here on the island just because of our proximity to other markets. Think of Factoria, Bellevue, Seattle.

But there's a national trend. You actually could see that pretty clearly on one of the graphics on the retail board.

The national trend, which Mercer Island is part of that trend, is that we're seeing more local-serving retail uses with a focus on experience. So it's not enough just to have a pizza restaurant anymore. You have to have a pizza restaurant with some character in order to survive. Or where the inside has -- maybe it's wood-fired pizza rather than oven pizza, that sort of thing.



And what does the space look like? What does it feel like? Is there outdoor space to eat at? That's an example.

Another thing that we're seeing on a national trend is quite a bit more spending online. And the chart in the back shows that Mercer Island's spending on online goods far exceeds what we're spending on hard goods overall -- not overall, but if you compare with other retail uses, we're spending I think it was about -- you would expect a population of about 60,000 instead of 22,000 or 23,000, given the level of spending Islanders have on online purchasing.

One thing that's important to clarify is there's been a lot of discussion about what our consultant said. And the consultant did say that the projected residential growth, from either of the alternatives, is unlikely to support significant additional demand for retail and restaurant tenants.

But that doesn't mean that the growth won't be of benefit to existing retail and restaurant tenants and those new tenants that choose to locate here on Mercer Island.

The point is that if we have 700-something-odd more housing units in the Town Center over 20 years, that's not going to lead to a doubling, tripling, whatever number you

want to use, of retail and restaurant uses.

It will strengthen the performance of existing businesses and add some vibrancy.

Vibrancy is not just having a retail use.

It's having the people walking around the Town Center that provide a lot of that vibrancy.

Another one of his findings is that limiting office uses, as we're doing currently in some areas of Town Center, does not harm retail.

In fact, there is some thought that having office uses, especially on the second floors or upper floors of buildings, actually helps retail because you're providing a customer base for those retailers.

The city currently has regulations that we call the 60/40 rule that basically says that either 60 or 40%, depending on certain circumstances, of ground floors on certain streets have to be devoted to retail, restaurant, or personal service uses.

What our consultant found is that regulation has not created an opportunity for more retail tenants.

It has led to some more vacant spaces. Not a lot, but there are marginally more vacant spaces. And in the economic term, there is some avoidance behavior. So, in other words, building owners are filling those spaces with

things that they can get in there to have a full space. So, for example, we're seeing more fitness facilities coming into the Town Center.

One could argue about whether that provides vibrancy or not to the Town Center.

But that's what he was finding.

The Joint Commission listened to that report and is considering reducing the area proposed for required ground floor retail. This is the map that came out of the stakeholder group, except for the circle. The areas in red would be primary retail. The areas in orange would be sort of a secondary retail street.

And the Joint Commission's really talking about shrinking that down to something in this area. The exact boundaries haven't been determined. But kind of a central core of retail.

That doesn't mean retail uses can't go down here where Rite Aid is. It's just they would not be required.

And I think my last couple slides here are on parking. We have another consultant who did a parking study, presented it at the Joint Commission I think it was last week. And some of their finding is that as a whole, we have sufficient parking in the Town Center to meet our current demand. On-street parking is limited, as many of

you know. But even though it's limited, it's not being utilized at its full capacity.

In other words, there are on-street stalls available for parking.

Off-street parking is highly utilized on some properties during the peak period. Peak period is I think it's 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. or noon to 3:00 p.m.

The areas in red here, so that's a little center where the Chamber of Commerce is located.

This is Tabit Square in orange.

This is the Mercer and Starbucks.

These are examples of where the parking has really high utilization during the peak period.

And what they observe was off-street parking requirements, in other words, what the city's requiring for parking on these projects, exceed the observed demand. And that potentially could lead to overbuilding of parking, which has a whole host of other potential negatives in terms of costs and what the land is being used for. Is there a better use for the land other than parking.

Some of the things the Joint Commission is considering is we've heard a lot and most of us have experienced trying to squeeze even a compact car into some of these buildings that have parking garages. So our

consultant did a little bit of analysis and found out that our parking standards for stall sizes and aisle widths are much less than WSDOT standards.

They looked at one city, the city of Redmond, and their standards are fairly new, and they have larger parking stall requirements in terms of sizing.

So that's one thing they're considering, is increasing the size of parking stalls and the size of aisle widths.

They're looking to have the residential parking requirements more specific. Right now it's one up to three stalls per housing unit and there's no guidance on when to pick one or when to pick three. So our consultant is doing a residential parking study right now and then we'll come back with some recommendations to us.

The commission last week talked about their desire at this point to keep commercial parking at the same rate that is being required today. But then also increase the allowance for shared parking. So when residents leave in the morning, businesses and shoppers can use some of those residential stalls and residents can use the business stalls at night. It's basic tenant shared parking.

So with that, I will turn it back over to Chair Friedman who will go through some of the rules for the

public hearing.

JON: Thank you, Scott.

So, we are now going to start our public hearing.

Do we have a list?

So just a few ground rules.

First one, and I know most of you know these already, but the first one will be please name -- this is being recorded, so name and address for the record.

Also, please, if you would limit your comments to three minutes. Do we have a light? Does it show up there?

SHANA: It flashes.

JON: Do I know?

SHANA: No. I can give you a hint.

In the past we've been pretty liberal about the time frame, but this time what I would like to do is when we reach the time limit, I'm going to ask that you wrap it up and give you about another 10, 15 seconds and then ask for the next person.

We just want to make sure that we're fair in giving everybody the same amount of time, please.

Comments should be addressed to the entire commission. Please refrain from addressing any particular commissioner.

Audience members should refrain from applause or

disapproval of any individual's comments.

And, please, now would be a good time to silence cell phones.

And please limit conversations in the audience as well just out of respect to the person speaking.

So what I'm going to do is I'm going to call two names to begin and if we have a seat maybe in front there that the person who is sort of on deck can be there, and then we'll just call one up to fill that seat on deck, that would be great.

So, we will start with the first two. Dick Winslow and then after Dick, if Geoff Spelman can come take a seat up-front, we can get started.

DICK WINSLOW: Dick Winslow, 3761 77th Avenue Southeast, Mercer Island.

I'll begin by saying that we can disagree but still be friends.

Disagreement is an important part of a real relationship.

For example, I periodically disagree with my wife, sometimes vigorously.

But we're still friends and we've been married for 46 years.

Three items. First, building height. It seems

that as a result of this extremely lengthy visioning process, the proposed height for most buildings is encouraged to be more than two stories.

It seems that you have effectively up-zoned much of the Town Center.

I don't understand how this could have happened, especially given the two moratoriums which have prohibited building above just two stories without specific approval.

This may not be what some of you intended, but that's the effect of these posters over here.

Second, zoning code versus what you actually allow. What is the purpose of the zoning code if you all, including the city council, approve something like the Legacy building? That building is almost identical to the standard Soviet style building which is notorious throughout the Western world, including in Russia.

I have been there and I know what Soviet buildings look like.

Third, threats from attorneys. I really resent that attorneys and others can stand up here and say that under the Growth Management Act there is a mandate or a requirement for a certain number of spots in every community. It's true there are numbers, but the GMA is quite a flexible instrument. And in practice, it allows



communities to discuss with relevant authorities what they have actually been able to do.

Whenever you're feeling threatened or being threatened, just remember that no Design Commission members, Planning Commission members, or city councilmembers have ever been jailed because their communities did not meet GMA proposed standards. (Laughter.)

In closing, I repeat my three main points.

First, leave the default building height firmly at two stories. Not more.

Second, don't allow over the two stories unless there's a striking benefit to the public.

And for goodness' sake, don't ever approve anything like the Legacy building again.

Third, don't bow to threats from attorneys who actually are not interested in whether or not you'll be jailed, but are simply hired by developers and large real estate owners to scare you into doing what they want.

Please, be good stewards of our lovely, wonderful community.

Thank you.

JON: Thank you.

So, on deck, William Justen.

GEOFF SPELMAN: Thank you very much. I'm Geoff

Spelman. I live at 4250 90th Avenue Southeast here on Mercer Island for the last 250 years (laughter), or 25 years. Sometimes with the rain it just seems longer.

Question number 1 which I'm asking rhetorically, not expecting an answer.

But earlier in this process the city's consultant from Florida made a strong pitch that the current code was insufficient, and that what we needed was a much more prescriptive code. And it looks to my eye that the code that you've spent your hard time working on looks an awful lot like the existing code, with certain significant changes I might address. But it doesn't seem at all like the prescriptive code that the Florida consultant was all excited about. I'm a little surprised that we've spent this much energy and this much time and we have a code that where the difference is 39 feet versus 38 feet, I'm not quite sure why we've spent all of your good time doing this.

Regarding affordable housing, I'm a big proponent of affordable housing. I've spent a large part of my career on affordable housing, building it, managing it. And there's a disagreement between what's in your draft code and some of the stuff in the back of the room, but I would say that you're moving in the right direction, but you have a long way to go before these requirements are meaningful.

The idea that you would only apply it to the top floor is, when you are giving someone a third floor and a fourth floor, seems crazy. I mean, if you look out the door, there's a low-income housing emergency going on in this community, and we're only talking about, if you believe the thing in the back of the room, 15% of the fifth floor and the fourth floor perhaps. I would urge you to be much more aggressive on that.

Regarding the fee-in-lieu-of providing affordable housing, the idea that that decision would be left to the city's development official is a mistake waiting to happen. And I take nothing -- I don't mean any disrespect to any particular individual, but if you don't have in writing exactly how that number's to be determined beforehand, I'll let you in on a secret: It's not going to be a very big number. There's going to be a really little number.

As much as I support the affordable housing bonus, I think that you should put a lot more effort into open space and the public open space, and trying to make sure that the new development, which is to be allowed, will help to support the financial cost, the capital cost of that new space.

And I'm out of time. Thank you.

JON: Thank you.

Next on deck, John Hempelmann, please.

WILLIAM JUSTEN: Good evening, I'm William Justen. My residence is at 1521 Second Avenue in Seattle.

I'm here speaking on behalf of a colleague, Leon Cohen, who is a resident and a commercial property owner in Town Center.

I've been working with Leon for the last three years on a small piece of property that's the Freshy's place that used to be a gas station.

There's another triangle next to it that appears to be part of the same property. For some reason, the north boundary of Town Center cuts through that as two little triangles, rather than following the street grid which would be the more normal way of doing it, going up to 24th.

So, we've prepared a Comprehensive Plan amendment, a SEPA checklist, and a zoning checklist so that could be zoned in the Town Center.

And we've discussed that with city staff over the last three years before the moratorium and during the moratorium, hoping that this opportunity may be the right timing for that to be considered in the Comprehensive Plan and zoning work that you're doing. It's a small piece of that Town Center part.

If those two little triangles are put together,

there's actually an opportunity to create a meaningful project at that northwest gateway into Town Center. Right now it doesn't look like much and the two triangles are so inefficient as far as building parking or building on that, that if they are put together, they create a triangle and they would work quite well for a moderate size, much smaller than the surrounding buildings, but a moderate-sized mixed-use project that would have all underground parking which would be desirable and some extra parking that could be used for resident commuters as well.

So that's what we're really trying to do. As far as overall comments on the Comp Plan, I think that tweaks in the height are fine. But in Seattle, I'm working on the Grand Bargain, which is part of our Housing and Livability Affordability plan. And part of what Seattle has done is give developers actually greater height, more floor area, to provide the inclusionary housing.

Here you're taking really a tougher stand but I think achievable, which is pretty much keep the zoning as it is and include that affordable housing.

So it's not quite a trade-off, but I think -- it's challenging, but I think it's achievable as we looked at it.

The step-back and the daylight plane concept does trouble us.

It's either Mayan temple or it will dictate a new architectural form that really doesn't reflect the context of the buildings that are there now.

Whether you like it or not, they are the context that should be enhanced and recognized.

The pedestrian. What we have found in numerous cities we've worked in is that having a strong street plane where the pedestrians are for retail and activity is the best way to have vitality at the street and safety, public safety. So, holding that street edge is really important.

Thank you very much.

JON: Thank you.

Robert Thorpe on deck.

JOHN HEMPELMANN: Good evening. My name is John Hempelmann. The address is 524 Second Avenue in Seattle.

First of all, thank you for what you're doing. I know you're all highly paid to be sitting there meeting after meeting.

But you all care about the city, and everybody in the room cares about the city and wants the same thing, a vibrant, eclectic, fun place downtown that works for everybody.

So, let's have that be the starting point.

I have been working in the region for over 50 years

and been visiting friends and family here for over 50 years, and so I love Mercer Island just like you do.

I have also had the chance, working with the Urban Land Institute to see communities all over the country that have had the opportunity to build vibrant downtowns around high-capacity transit.

Some people call it transit-oriented development. But it is a huge boon to every community that can get a heavy rail or a light rail station.

There is a huge buzz in Seattle right now over what's going to happen because of the new light rail to Capitol Hill and the U-District. If you have not ridden that line, ride it and you'll see the benefit of it.

I have got specific recommendations to you. I can't give them all to you tonight in the time allotted.

I do have a letter which I'll give to staff, and also have copies to hand out, where you can read very specific recommendations.

Let me highlight a few.

Certainly don't down-zone your downtown. It will lead to stagnation or worse.

You need to be smart about how the downtown grows, but you have to let it grow if it's going to be vibrant.

Secondly, provide incentives for the many

incentives that will work.

And don't speculate about that.

I was impressed at an earlier meeting to see you have expert opinion from both outside independent experts and from developers.

Development is driven by the numbers and by the markets. And so be rigorous about vetting the numbers so what you want make sure pencils. As I say, run the numbers. Make sure it works.

I would not assign different heights to different properties in the downtown. First of all, the area is too small to do that in a rational way and it wouldn't be fair to do so.

Like William Justen, I think it would be inappropriate at this point in your city to have the daylight plane or the setback. Again, that works in larger communities, but not in small spaces like you've got.

Strongest recommendations are: Activate your streets with everything from sidewalks and gathering places and landscaping and overhead protection. That's what will make for a vibrant downtown.

Almost every community that I visited, and I visited hundreds of them in my ULI work, has up-zoned a quarter mile or half mile around their light rail or heavy



rail stations.

I don't know of one community in America that, being given the benefit of high-capacity transit, has down-zoned it, and I certainly hope that doesn't happen here.

JON: Thank you.

Bill Lowe.

ROBERT THORPE: Robert Thorpe.

I think you skipped one.

JON: He's on deck.

You're up.

ROBERT THORPE: That was good. I think the mayor put you up to that.

Good evening. I'm Robert Thorpe, 2737 Southeast 78th Street.

I provided a handout for you.

I have spoken before.

I talked about how far you have come. And I think again I want to comment about three comments I heard at the last meeting.

Somebody said that attorneys and planners are here because of developers.

I would respectfully disagree with Mr. Hempelmann.

We both served on ULI, served on ULI sustainability

committee. I'm the affordable housing representative there.

We've taught classes. We've done this and traveled to cities.

My firm's done over 40 downtown plans, like DuPont, North Bend, Snoqualmie. And we've also worked on the other side of the aisle, on due process, on taking, on condemnation.

So we see the balance of environment.

I was the one that helped write the coordinates for the water course regulations.

And I -- it took me back, because when I was here in the early '70s, we were doing the shoreline plan, the downtown plan. We were having meetings like this for three years.

I want to thank everybody here, staff and everybody. You have put in an incredible effort. I think you've come a long way.

What I want to say is what I said before, is that I think as planners and designers, you've come to a place. I totally agree with keeping the two stories and requiring the bonuses.

And not just the three points, the plazas and the parking, and the affordable housing. You got to keep the affordable housing.

And office, you can't have it.

The site's too small, do fee-in-leu for parking or for that.

We've come up with plans where the McDonald's and the Kings can have a 40-foot strip.

We're tying it to what's going in with New Seasons on board.

You now have 25 property owners. The whole city, they have everybody -- we have everybody speaking saying you're doing a good job.

Three things I want to point out.

There's been a big thing on the island about protecting the single-family areas.

It's become so difficult that even some legally platted lots, it's becoming almost impossible to get permits for.

If you want to protect those areas and keep your critical areas and that, keep your greenbelt, put your development in the downtown area.

You'll keep the quality, why we love this island, why we like the parks. So it's a balancing act.

Do the development here.

I would agree with the three bonuses and the seven points.

So, in closing the one thing that does not work is the wedding cake approach. I was wrong on that. Joe Tovar's told you that, everybody else and the developers. You can't do apartments.

You can do them with office.

Use the modulation.

And finally, there were three points made by people. I thought they were really salient points.

One of the people with the planning and legal background said if we do this right, if we don't down-zone, we're clearly beating growth management, and it's not a taking. A little bit later one of the members said: So we're not talking about legal issues, we're just talking about planning.

I respectfully disagree.

There is the concept of due process. There is the concept of taking. And I think that's a factor here.

Where you're going, those issues be off the table.

The last point I wanted to make, somebody I think said it the best. That person said this panel and the council in trying to pick stories, three, five, seven, we should not pick winners and losers.

That's not your job or the council's. Make it an even play all the way through the whole entire thing. Give

everybody the same opportunity.

JON: Got to wrap it up.

ROBERT THORPE: Let your Design Guidelines be stronger and get what you want. Thank you.

JON: Thank you.

Susan Morrison on deck.

WILLIAM LOWE: Good evening.

My name is William Lowe. I'm senior vice president of real estate for Gull Industries, 3404 Fourth Avenue South, Seattle.

I wanted to agree with the first speaker. I apologize, I don't know their name. But I think we can have a conversation, discussion, and even though we may not agree, we can still be friends -- still be friendly. Although, after I have difficult conversations with my wife, she tells me I'm still wrong, so I don't know how that will work here.

So, I do -- I've made my comments here before, but I appreciated the staff's review of the recommendations from the -- my brain's gone -- the initial recommendations. And what I appreciated was one of the comments was vibrancy, that the community wanted a vibrant Town Center.

Well, I think you don't have vibrancy if you don't have density. If you look at the vibrant areas in our

metropolitan area, they are not Fall City or North Bend. It's -- if you want vibrancy, you need to have some density.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you go crazy, but I have to agree with the concept of keep the zoning of five stories for the Town Center area. It doesn't make sense to distinguish between properties and penalize some and yet give the others the benefit of the full -- the full benefit of the five stories.

The other thing I wanted to comment on, there was a comment made about retail in the Town Center and how the recommendation would have smaller retail space so they would be more affordable. As a person that's done commercial real estate and retail real estate for years, smaller retail actually is not more affordable.

Smaller places are more expensive on a square foot basis than larger spaces.

It doesn't mean you shouldn't provide them, but there's a fallacy saying smaller spaces are more affordable. They are not.

But you still need to provide them because again, you want to front that part -- you know, that element of your community.

But don't use the reason that it is less expensive as the reason. So again, appreciate your time, and I know

you have a very difficult task. Thank you.

JON: Thank you.

On deck, Roberta Lewandowski.

SUSAN MORRISON: Greetings. I'm Susan Morrison, 3453 74th Avenue Southeast.

My issue is, I'm very excited about the idea that Mercer Island would be a destination city, of so many wonderful ideas presented.

My only question is: If people are coming on the light rail, how are they going to get to any of the other things that we have proposed? We have no transportation just on the island.

So, I really want you to think about transportation. How are people going to get from the light rail to the services, to our places like the JCC on one end of the island, and there's a school down there, and how are they going to get to Mercerdale Park.

It's not walkable, so what are they going to do? If we have the light rail, we're going to have to think about how are people getting from one place to another and also how we are going to get from whatever parking is available, as we've heard, that there is plenty of parking, but how are we going to get from those parking spaces to the light rail if we don't have some kind of an island shuttle

that will help us to get in the different places.

So I think that you have accessibility. If people don't have cars or they have disabilities, how are they going to get around? They need to have some public way to get from one place to another, and that will bring vibrancy and that will bring people that want to work here or live here or attend the different activities that we propose.

Also, I'm thinking about the young people. I'm on the advisory board for Youth & Family Services.

And the young people the other night were talking about healthy activities for young people, but, I mean, really, are the parents going to really always be taking them someplace? I don't think that's very healthy. And as a parent, I don't really want to do that. I have my own life to live.

So I think if we have some kind of inner-island transportation, they go to parks, they can go to places to eat, whatever they want to do, but they can do that independently.

And I think that will be a very nice vibrant and inclusive place to live if we think of all the people on the island who need to get from here to there.

Thank you.

JON: Thank you.



Ira Appelman is on deck.

ROBERTA LEWANDOWSKI: Hello. My name is Roberta Lewandowski, 4740 86th Avenue Southeast, Mercer Island.

Thanks for the opportunity to speak.

I'm sure you're getting ready to wrap this up.

But I just want to say I like Alternative A or the existing code. I like the energy in the downtown that has come from the transformation I've seen in the last 20 years. I like the streetscape that's changed as properties have developed. And the Town Center could be nice with three-story buildings, but it really will slow down the transformation.

And I get more of what I want from the taller buildings. For example, more choice in housing. It's not just about affordability. It's having a place where you don't have to take care of your house and yard. And sure, my husband says: "Hire it done. Hire it done." Just try. Just try to get somebody.

I like that you can live in a unit that was less maintenance. But I also like the relative affordability. I know, you know, \$1800 a month doesn't sound that affordable, but you can afford that if you make \$40,000 to \$50,000 and you can't rent a house for that on the island or buy anything.

So I think that's real important that -- to be a place for some affordability and also for people who are still single or are newly single, empty nesters, people who have lost their spouse, that they can stay on the island, not have to keep their big house.

About the code, I like the -- I thought there was a lot more specificity, which I like, in the stuff I'm worried about, which I want better building materials and that's spelled out, more Northwest materials, which is spelled out.

Lots of pictures, which helps more than the words, because I'm not sure I can always read the codes, but I think the pictures help explain what you've wanted.

I just want to -- I'm a little worried about the specificity, because I think the Town Square building is the best building on the island of the new buildings, and I want to make sure you could get that building with this code.

When I look around the region, I see all these buildings in Bellevue, Seattle, Redmond, Kirkland. They have in, out, in, out, in, out, really tacky and cheap looking, whereas Island Square has a lot of variation in the facade, a lot of variation in the materials. It doesn't look like a cookie-cutter design.

Finally, I am worried about the affordable housing rules in this version of the code. I don't know why the

code wants to force large units. I have rented apartments around the world that are 400 square feet, 500 square feet, that are nicer than the thousand square foot condo I had on Mercer Island.

You have to realize there are a lot of us that are single households. 30% is the last I read.

We don't necessarily need a thousand square feet, so why make the affordable units have to be bigger than 400?

I would like you to look at that again.

So, thanks.

JON: Thank you.

Up next, Jon Graves.

IRA APPELMAN: Ira Appelman, 4436 Ferncroft Road.

It will come as no surprise to any members of the commission that I'm not impressed with your process.

I asked you at the beginning to do a study of why things went wrong with the previous process.

And you didn't do it. I think you're -- the same things are happening wrong with your process.

With all due respect, I affectionately call your process a sham and a scam.

The first, the sham: Islanders have overwhelmingly said they are against big buildings. The only reason why we're here is because Islanders reacted to the Hines

building when it was put in the report. That's the only reason we're here.

Otherwise, this thing was done in -- you were done in the summer of 2014.

You've said, and this is the sham, that Alternate C, which does reduce stories south of -- to three, south of 27th, that you're seriously -- you've told people you're seriously considering that, but you aren't.

At the January 23 this year, council retreat, Scott Greenberg was pressed on that by Councilmember Dave Wisenteiner and he basically said that you would not consider something like that.

A week ago Scott just told us that you were carefully considering it, but you weren't.

Here quotes from that meeting. Richard Weinman said, quote, thought -- said that C was, quote, weird, a weird hybrid of suburban and urban. And he said it was a nonstarter.

Bryan Cairns said of Alternative C that it was, quote, at odds with reality.

And Lara Sanderson said that it was unethical. And it kept her up at night to consider C. It was illegal, a spot one zone. If we didn't get five stories now, we'll get 78 stories later.

You have not considered down-zoning -- or not down-zoning, but three stories south of 27th, which you claimed you were.

The scam is that you're doing everything possible to come up with excuses why we should have five stories. Whether it's affordable housing, all the amenities that nobody's really asked for, at least not many have asked for. The big thing they've asked for is that the building not be so tall, and you're not considering that at all. You're talking about how articulation or step-backs are going to make -- are going to fool the public into thinking the buildings aren't that big, which isn't going to fool the public.

Nobody really has asked for vibrancy. That's the developers and the people they've hired.

People didn't work -- didn't move to the island for vibrancy. This is my 53rd year on the island. I haven't heard people talk about vibrancy. They moved here to escape vibrancy.

JON: Thank you.

After Jon Graves, Curtis Brown, please.

JON GRAVES: Jon Graves. Jon Graves Architects, 3110 Ruston Way, Tacoma, Washington.

I'm here on behalf of my clients, James Cassan, who

is working with our team towards a hotel for the old Travelodge site.

So I've gotten a chance throughout the duration here to follow the commission's efforts towards putting some refined regulations together. I applaud your efforts.

I think it's very difficult to manifest regulations that are going to address everybody's concerns.

I'm going to try to use my time practically here.

I still think -- I know you're wrapping things up. I still think there are a few items here that need some attention that perhaps may be a little bit too rigid.

And I think the step-backs are workable, but still need to be careful about that, and I'll get to my recommendation in a minute.

The -- with the paseo, the height of the building, all of those things have been articulated with what you have drafted.

I think in the last efforts what I would recommend that you do is look at exceptions, look at means for flexibility which you can add to these regulations, so that if you're after the intent, you can achieve it.

There's going to be some problems with the rigidity of some of the things that I read in your draft that may simply kill projects or mitigate any value that otherwise

would be preferable.

My -- some quick examples: City of Seattle uses the LEED program to actually increase the -- another floor on many of the buildings and many of the districts.

The incentive to provide affordable housing, maybe that is mandated because it sounds very important to you, but perhaps it also is a mechanism to achieve a bonus or a credit.

Flexibility. I'm working on a trapezoidal site. There are some things about step-backs that are adverse to working with straight geometries. Potentially there may be some credits, some points, some mechanisms to allow everyone to achieve the same goals. Don't be too rigid with what you got on your -- in your regs. You're going to fight yourself in the end.

So, maybe the last efforts here are to add some exceptions or some credits or bonuses to what you have drafted that will help you achieve what you have worked so diligently towards.

Again, there are still some things. I would say take a look at the paseo. It's probably too wide in your regs for one tenant to -- or one owner to absorb into its project. It may kill some things. Certainly it is questionably impacting our project.

The step-back regulation: Take a look at the impacts to that reg and how it may ultimately be mitigated if there are some problems that may end up compromising design. Thanks.

JON: Thank you.

JON GRAVES: Appreciate it.

JON: After Curtis Brown, Leon Cohen, please.

CURTIS BROWN: Hello. Curtis Brown, 7015 80th Avenue Southeast.

So, we are the generation that gave away the north end of Mercer Island. We lost our small-town character. And it all happened in about the past five or six years.

We sat back and allowed the city council to go crazy with this agenda.

What are 90% of the Mercer Islanders doing right now? They are at home. They are putting kids in jammies, and feeding and homework and bedtime. They did not move here for urban density.

Please, I urge us to remember those folks.

They are at home raising their kids, paying their mortgage. They are not being involved. And that includes me.

So, the city council agenda appears to be: Pack as many people onto Mercer Island as possible.



They want to pave Kite Hill.

They want to modify the zoning to increase the building sizes, allow our streets to turn into canyons with five-story buildings on each side. How many little kids want to ride their bicycle down to 31 Flavors with that stuff going on?

We're changing the zoning to allow single-family lots to have separate stand-alone structures for mother-in-laws/slash rentals.

We're supporting efforts to create this big bus-turnaround. We're giving away our negotiated rights to use the express lanes in favor of mass transit.

Why would the city council want this?

It's green.

It limits urban sprawl.

It limits our carbon emissions.

We can now take the bus to work and walk.

And besides, political leaders in Bellevue and King County and Seattle are pushing the same agenda and pulling our leaders up with them.

This is not popular stuff with the majority of Mercer Islanders.

So our city councilmembers use code words like vibrant, or they say it's for the arts, or it's low-income

housing.

A year ago a large group of people formed an effort to resist paving Kite Hill, which is located by the community center, to turn it into a park-and-ride.

Our eyes became open to the much larger effort by the city council to increase density on Mercer Island in general.

This group became very vocal. Many gathered together. Some people started Save our Suburbs, and others showed up to councilmembers once they became aware.

As an appeasement to calm the group down, the city recommended forming a committee to look at the issue. This became the Town Center visioning process.

The town council selected its members, framed the scope and the discussion points, and gave us a choice between super tall buildings and extra super tall buildings.

The process is political cover.

It validates and reinforces itself.

High growth efforts.

We want one-story buildings and two-story buildings that protect the kid and family friendly nature of our downtown.

JON: Have you wrap up.

CURTIS BROWN: The city council opposes

anti-density efforts harshly. They deny efforts to put anything on the ballot that has to do with density.

More people show up to the polls than city councilmembers --

JON: Have to have you sit down now.

Thanks.

Cohen.

After Leon, Bryce Caldwell.

LEON COHEN: Good evening. Thank you for having me speak.

Here are some points that I put together supporting the rezone of the small triangle property corner of Northeast 24th and 76th Avenue into the Town Center.

At this time, not many know that the small piece of property on the corner is owned by the city. Including the small triangle piece of property in Town Center zoning, the same zoning as the adjacent triangle piece, could create a rectangular parcel that could accommodate a moderate-scaled mix-use project including efficient below-grade parking and including island resident and commuter parking.

At this time, the corner lot has not a bench, garbage can, and is not used to its potential.

As a citizen and a business owner of Mercer Island, I would appreciate the mixed use the project offers,

including ambience and attractive walks for bikers, joggers, to travel into the city from the park on the lid and from across the street.

This is the type of development that would read and say: This is a gateway to our city. After all, comprehensive plans suggest making it easy and should compel folks to travel into Town Center.

By a rezone, this small triangular lot into Town Center, it would put the property on the county real estate tax rolls that would be, in turn, bring income to the city of Mercer Island and to our school districts as well.

Many parking stalls would be added for citizens to use when shopping and walk-off parking as well.

It would clean up the hazardous waste site, converting an old gas station into citizen-friendly mixed-use building.

So I thank you very much for considering 2411's request for including this small unused lot into Town Center. And we have sent you a comprehensive rezone and the SEPA checklist.

We've done a lot of the work, and hopefully it wouldn't be -- I know it's a lot of work but, I mean, a lot of it has been done. And look at your attachments when you have time. And appreciate you considering it fully.

In addition, please exercise diligence in reviewing the stairstep wedding cake concept that's been talked about a lot tonight.

It's very costly when it comes to plumbing and electrical and HVAC considerations.

In addition, the 12- to 15-foot sidewalks, like in, for example, in Seattle, say the Public Market in Seattle, very busy area, they don't have that large of sidewalks.

They don't have 12- to 15-foot and it seems to work good.

So, thanks again and good evening.

JON: Thank you.

And after Bryce, Nancy Spaeth.

Is Bryce Caldwell?

Going once. Nancy Spaeth.

JON: After Nancy will be John Houlihan.

NANCY HEWITT SPAETH: Hi. I'm Nancy Hewitt Spaeth.  
I live at 8320 Southeast 34th Street.

And I have been on Mercer Island for 36 years.

I bought property here. Got my contractor's license and built my own house.

I come from a family of developers and pioneers who started towns, named passes in the Cascades, and we've been around for a while.

I was sitting at Bennett's the other day on Tuesday, actually, taking an old doctor friend there for lunch. And we sat outside for the first time in I can't think how long. And enjoyed the sun. When I looked to the southeast, I could see the trees on the hill. When we held our faces up, we had sunshine on them. We were basking in the beautiful sun.

And I started to think if there were a five-story building across the street, I wouldn't be able to see the trees on the hill. I wouldn't be able to bask in the sun. Those are things that make our town lovely and livable.

I moved here because I didn't want to be in the city.

So I could go to Bellevue. I could go to Seattle if I want to do that.

You are welcome to go look at the house that I built. It's at 6474 East Mercer Way.

I am sticking with two to three stories. I can't imagine sitting at Bennett's without the sun.

Thank you.

JON: Thank you.

After John, be Julie Sarkissian.

Hang on one sec, John.

Do we have another list, another sign-up sheet?

ALISON: One more person.

JON: If anybody else would like to address the Joint Commission, see Alison with the sign-up sheet and we'll get that going.

Sorry, thanks.

JOHN HOULIHAN: No problem.

Thank you and good evening. John Houlihan. Here on behalf of Dollar Development. Their address is 2737 78th Avenue Southeast.

As you know, we're the proponents of a new hotel project and Dollar also owns other commercial property within the Town Center.

I reviewed a draft code.

As it matures a little better, a little more, after public comment, we'll provide some more detailed comments on the specifics of the code. I just want to touch on some issues tonight.

Midblock connections is currently drafted. They are 20 feet wide, but the code is unclear as to whether that 20 feet has to be on both sides of the property line.

We think the 20 feet should be shared between the abutting property owners.

There's provisions about the activation of those midblock connections, which aren't really clear as to how

they apply to commercial uses versus residential, and do you actually need ingress and egress to those pedestrian pass-throughs.

I suggest that you think more of those as greenways, rather than retail corridors.

And then a significant legal issue with respect to the current draft of the code is how those pedestrian cut-throughs are dealt with on a property-owner perspective.

I think as drafted, you probably violate the Washington State Constitution for a taking.

So I would encourage you to look at those issues and perhaps rather than have them being mandatory, is to keep them as an incentive that may address the takings issue.

On the daylight plane concept, it's difficult to apply for commercial -- apply to commercial developments.

I don't think there's any jurisdiction in Washington that uses it for commercial developments. A few use it for residential developments.

It may be worthwhile to assess an FAR calculation linked to incentives.

And if you do use the daylight plane, it should only apply to the front-streeted -- the frontage on the street, not through the pedestrian pass-throughs.



Height limits: We would be in favor of a uniform five-story height limit throughout the Town Center as a maximum height, and that obviously coupled with incentives to obtain the public benefits that you're looking for.

With respect to the affordable housing requirements: To provide and focus on a fee in lieu for developers to provide and aggregate funds to perhaps larger affordable housing projects that the city could be a proponent of.

The public space requirements: To maintain flexibility for the smaller sites and also provide a fee-in-lieu option so that you may be able to aggregate those fronts for larger public open space.

The retail limitations: I think you've heard from various consultants and developers on your panels that it's difficult to predict or force or direct the retail market. And to maintain flexibility within the code for required retail on the ground floor I think is critical to allowing the retail market to develop over time.

And just one final comment. I am a lawyer. We're not here to threaten you. We're not here --

JON: Have to wrap it up.

JOHN HOULIHAN: -- to tell you how to do things.

But an interesting observation --

JON: John, I got to have you sit down.

JOHN HOULIHAN: Sunshine on Bennett's is on our development. Five stories. Thank you.

JON: Is Julie Sarkissian here?

After Julie, Bart Dawson, please.

JULIE SARKISSIAN: Well, I just want to speak up perhaps for the silent minority who is looking forward to an evolving Town Center.

I never thought I was moving here just to do jammies and things like that.

I will say that I was disappointed that we couldn't figure out a way to have parking for light rail. I am kind of seeing myself getting old and creaky and really want to use public transportation. Somebody else has made that point.

I was really hoping that we could develop some better retail opportunities. I think as transportation becomes more difficult, we really will rely on our Town Center services more, and as we get old. I'm dealing with an old mother, so (laughter) I'm thinking about that quite a bit.

It's been very educational to listen to the presentations tonight and just know that some of us are looking forward to the future and not trying to stay in the

'50s. Thank you.

JON: Thank you.

After Bart Dawson, Helen Vinding.

BART DAWSON: Yes, I'm Bart Dawson, 8812 Southeast 77th Place in Mercer Island.

I've been scribbling a lot because I learned a lot from what I picked up from the Web site just yesterday or the day before.

Thank you for considering two alternate plans for building height in Town Center.

I strongly support something like Plan C. It's the right thing to do for Mercer Island today and into the future.

I was going to have some comments on the Vision Statement. It's very unclear where you find it.

I think Scott's going to address that.

My bottom line concern is that the final Vision Statement and the Comp Plan contain the words developed in the stakeholder meetings, and you've heard me say this before: We envision a Town Center that will embody the small-town feel that residents love about Mercer Island.

I don't know if anybody wants to do a thumbs up or thumbs down on that, but I think that is better than the vision words that you came up with. Somewhere put that in

there, please.

In general, I think that the draft of the Town Center standards imagine a much grander build-out than is needed at Mercer Island.

Basically, I think you need a core retail area that can be traveled in less than a five-minute walk. I think you are considering too much mixed retail. We need more just residential zoning.

On page 5 of the Design Guidelines, the minimum retail in-fill or minimum storefront in the ordinance of 30 feet is just too large. Stores that seem consistently least include those in Tabit Square which have 22- or 24-foot store widths; stores near Roberto's which have 16-foot storefronts or 32; and on the south side of the Mercer which have 24-foot wide store modules.

All of these stores are less than 50 feet deep.

In contrast, stores near Island Books are vacant. These stores are mostly 20 feet wide, but they have depths of 100 feet or so.

Island Books' front width is 28 feet wide.

Asking for a minimum width stores of 30 feet is just a mistake.

I wondered if 30 feet is a shopping mall standard width.

I think the allowable facade width of 120 feet shown on page 25 is just too wide.

Probably okay for a 60-foot tall building in an urban environment.

When subareas with actual names were eliminated, we lost the city plan for where we would take our automobiles for gasoline or service in the future.

On page 4 in the table of permitted and conditional uses, please add another line for the use called "Service Stations." I checked and service stations is defined in the code 19.16.

Thank you.

JON: Thank you.

After Helen, Bonnie Godfred.

HELEN VINDING: Hi. My name is Helen Vinding. I live at 6935 Southeast 34th Street.

I have a problem with what's going on for the planning. I don't understand why there's a general assumption that we must go beyond the two or three stories.

I don't see a need for it and I think there's an overwhelming desire, of ordinary people, not to go taller.

I don't think that your job is to be fair to the developers and to the people who are coming in to build out the island or the downtown area.

I think your job is primarily to be fair to the people, the ordinary people, who don't have a big voice.

I wanted my neighbors to come and hear what's going on here. Every single one of the people that I approached said: We're not being heard. We're being worn down. There's no point. They don't respond to us. They will not hear us. We don't have money. We don't have influence. We'll just stay home.

That's the impression that many people have of what you're doing. You're responding to the people who claim that vibrancy is density. No, it's not. No, it's not. It's not what people are seeking.

A through-block is a desirable alternative to open air? No, it's not. You don't need a fluids engineering degree to know what happens with the wind in these through-blocks.

You have only to look around and see. Do you see the sun? No, you don't.

You look down at those tall buildings. They are not attractive and they are not pleasant. They are moneymakers for the developers. There's no question.

And the people asking for "give a little bit, include this," they are not the people who are living here. They are not the people to whom you ought to be answering.

I know you're working hard. I know that there's not a whole lot of patting on the back going on here, but your job is first and foremost to listen to the people who aren't here, because I think it's very, very clear what they are asking for. They're saying: Leave the city height limit lower. Don't go up to five stories. It's too much. It does not make for a pleasant living.

A green wall is a very attractive thing. There's no question. But it does not replace a tree or open space.

Getting to bank a building, by whatever term you take it, doesn't make it lower, doesn't do the job. What people want is lower buildings. There's no question.

People are watching. People are listening.

I hope you'll listen too. Thank you.

JON: Thank you.

After Bonnie, Christine Oaks.

BONNE GODFRED: Bonnie Godfred, 2920 74th Avenue.

I would like to agree with both Bart and Helen that it would be lovely to see you leave some lower buildings in our Town Center.

But it does seem predetermined that we're going to be five stories.

It wasn't clear to me from Scott's presentation of the unit numbers -- I mean, are we talking about the entire

Town Center being five stories?

I happen to agree with the gentleman who has been to Russia. That sounds very similar to what you see in Moscow.

But, if we're going to have five stories, can we at least please have some amenities downtown that make it livable. I'm probably the number one online shopper. Amazon thinks I'm gold. But there's nowhere to shop on Mercer Island.

If you want to go to QFC, there's nowhere to park. And I don't know where you found your parking consultant, but he should try parking on Mercer Island.

Before the last two apartment buildings opened, I was able to park on 80th. I could park on 74th. There is no parking. You can't park on the Sunset Highway. No. All I can do is park in QFC, Walgreen's, and Rite Aid, none of which have walk-off parking, so I'm violating their property rights, but I don't have any other choice.

So, back to the five stories and some amenities.

Could we perhaps have wider streets? Wider sidewalks? Something to allow us to have some sun.

And I would like to say about Mr. Cohen's remark about his little green triangle: That is the most heavily used piece of grass on Mercer Island. I'm a frequent



customer of Freshy's. I don't get Freshy's from Amazon. But every apartment owner within a two-block radius walks their dog to that triangle, because you're not requiring anyplace for dogs to poop and pee. And I would say half of the people in those units have dogs. Most of them very large. Lots of poop and pee.

Anyway, just to be brutal.

The other problem with downtown is the only nice restaurant, and I'm excluding pizza parlors by personal preference, is Bennett's, and the only way to park at Bennett's is on a vacant lot which will soon be a hotel, so I suspect we'll lose Bennett's. And this is not progress.

This is a large, high density group of people who will ride the light rail, and then the residents of Mercer Island will go to Bellevue and Seattle. And I think that's too bad.

Thank you.

JON: Thank you.

After Christine, Gordon Iwata.

CHRISTINE OAKS: I'm Christine Oaks, 2423 71st Avenue Southeast on First Hill. We've lived in Mercer Island for about 12 years now.

I think I speak for a lot of people who were mentioned earlier who are in absentia and taking care of

their families and not always able to come to these meetings. They're very difficult to get to.

I think a lot of the younger- to middle-aged parents unfortunately are often so busy living life and attending events for their kids and driving their kids, they don't have time to get to these meetings.

But I would absolutely wholeheartedly underscore the comments of the people who said that this is first and foremost a family community. And I think that people who choose to live here have come here for a reason. And the reason is that they are not wanting to live in an urban landscape. They have choices and places they could do that in the city. And they have deliberately chosen to come to an island that is kind of an oasis from that. It's the perfect kind of melding of those things.

You have access to the city, and you have access to Bellevue, but you don't have to live in all that that urban vibrancy involves. And that's a whole lot of crowding. It creates noise. It creates high volume. It brings in, to the extent that we become a destination in and of ourselves, it brings in strangers to the island. This is a place where people like to have their children wander, bike-ride, play in the parks. Those things all start bringing in outside influences that have no connection to Mercer Island. So, I

think we need to realize that in taking out a project like this, we're not just building buildings. We're creating a character. And this place has a very definite character.

And to build it up and to make it more dense makes the character change.

And many of us came here looking for a very specific thing. A lot of the testimony we heard from tonight were from people who have no idea and no investment and no part of that character. They don't live here. They are not part of the community. They are hired guns coming to represent clients who may have business interests here.

But your priority responsibility is to us as residents. And I think first and foremost we need to step back and think: What is this as the Mercer Island community and how do these outsiders enhance the community now, into the future? But we have a community that has a very specific feel and any outsiders should conform to us, not the other way around.

Thanks for all your time you're putting into this.

JON: Thank you.

GORDON IWATA: I'm Gordon Iwata. I live at 2257 80th Avenue Southeast.

My wife and I have lived there since 1991, so this is our 25th year there. I wanted to say that this is a

great opportunity and responsibility you have to make advisory recommendations to the city council on Town Center development.

You have the ability to make mid-course corrections to the current code that better reflect the true cost of impacts and to create a plan for the future of the Town Center.

I'm thinking back and looking at the momentum that has taken us to this point, beginning in large part over concerns from our community over regional growth that will affect Mercer Island.

Many of us participated so we could let you know of our vision for the Town Center. As I understand it, the Joint Commission was formed to gather citizen input, gauge the interests of Mercer Islanders, and then to reflect the best plan for our city.

It is good that residents have participated and comments have been documented. I see that approximately 250 comments are on record and the majority of those favor less height and a small-town feel.

I learned of the recent soft vote from the commission favoring Alternative A for more development.

I question how you have arrived at this choice, given the published input.

Does your methodology give more weight to builders and developers than to residents?

In the interest of transparency, I hope you will provide us all with an explanation.

We approached this process under the assumption that our voices would be respected.

Also, I understand there is a hybrid plan being considered. What exactly is this plan? In closing, I would say let's not rush this process. Let's get this right the first time.

Thank you.

JON: Thank you. I don't have anyone left --

ALISON: Got one more.

JON: One more.

And if anyone else would like to comment, Alison can take your name and so we have it on print here.

And anyone else who wants to comment, please see Alison now, get your name on the list, and we'll go from there, so --

So next is Cy Baumgartner.

CY BAUMGARTNER: 4851 90th Place Southeast. I've been around here for 37 years.

But this morning was really the most important day. This morning I went on a five-mile walk at Alki

Island -- Alki Beach, I should say, with 63 retired professional people, two or three of whom are in the room tonight.

And I can only tell you this. Won't take me three minutes.

I would say about 99% of them want a three-story height on all buildings on Mercer Island.

(Applause.)

And they also want to be able to get through the Town Center on a five-minute walk.

Thank you.

JON: Thank you.

Paul Manner.

PAUL MANNER: Thanks. Sorry about that. That's bad writing. I'm a physician, so, you know, it's part of the territory.

So, thanks for your attention.

And I appreciate how hard it must be to impress such a diverse set of needs and wants.

I thought I would start by just saying -- telling you why I came to Mercer Island from Washington, D.C., ten years ago.

And the reasons I came were for schools, I came for the open spaces and the parks, and the privacy and the

quiet.

I like the idea of being an oasis.

I was close to the city in geography, but I was far away in spirit.

Now let me tell you the reasons I did not come to Mercer Island.

I didn't come here for the thriving nightlife.

I didn't come here for the hustle and bustle.

I didn't come here for the high-end shopping opportunities.

Those reasons hold true today.

I have heard this from various folks that have been here about why we need to develop the Town Center to make it look like everywhere else.

Well, we need retail: What we've heard from independent consultants, an increasing density and turning the downtown of Mercer Island into Sea-Tac isn't going to do anything at all.

We need to broaden our tax base: Well, we also know that the tax revenues from the existing developments, which have radically changed the face of the north end of this island, have been minimal, and this has been in spite of the fact that there have been increased demands on the infrastructure in our schools. And in fact, on average,

Mercer Island is probably paying more in taxes and getting less in terms of infrastructure and services as a result of these developments than before.

We need to get with the program and contribute because otherwise the people in Seattle won't like us: Okay. We're already doing more than our fair share in terms of addressing growth. We're already as densely packed as many of the communities around us. We are more densely packed than Redmond. Than Bellevue. Than Medina. Than Madison Park. And I hope we're not doing this because we're waiting for a kind word from a bunch of hipsters on Capitol Hill.

That ain't gonna happen until rapture, so there's no point in trying.

We need to work with developers or they won't come here: Let's get real. We're not a small town in Nebraska that just lost the feed store and there's no retail around for 20 miles. Okay? This is a high-end high-value site, and we can afford to be choosey. Okay?

Developers are like trains. You miss this one, there's another one comin' along a couple hours later.

AUDIENCE: Here, here.

PAUL MANNER: Don't worry about it.

And to that guy, I'm sorry, I don't know if he's



still here, but said that we should have a half-mile border around high -- high-density trains or whatever. That's my house, okay? You don't come here and tell me that you're going to take over my house for a bunch of trains. What the hell is with that?

Let's take our time. Let's do this right. Okay? Because once the developers, the lawyers, the architects, the hired guns are gone and they've laid their little strip down, we're the ones that have to live with it. Okay? We're the ones that live here. We're the ones that should get priority.

Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

JON: Thank you.

So, I want to make sure we have anyone who wants to speak has the opportunity to speak.

AUDIENCE: May I add one sentence to what I said? Because I forgot.

JON: We need to limit it to one time.

AUDIENCE: I didn't use my whole three minutes. I had it written down, forgot to say it.

JON: Have to limit it to one time. Sorry.

AUDIENCE: I'll read hers.

JON: Okay, sure.

AUDIENCE: Can I read it after you?

(Laughter.)

MARCIA DAWSON: Marcia Dawson.

I'm speaking for someone else. My own words here, out loud. Her writing.

She said: Flower pots, shrubs, and statues won't replace the trees on the hill and the sun on our faces.

JON: Thank you.

AUDIENCE: Well put.

JON: Thank you all for coming tonight.

We do have the next meeting -- Scott, just so that --

SCOTT: Next Wednesday at city hall.

JON: Next Wednesday at city hall is our -- 6:00 is our next meeting.

So, anything further from staff wants to add?

Again, thank you all for coming.

We do take these comments and we appreciate everything that was said tonight.

Thanks again.

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Lisa K. Hutchinson

CART Provider