



City of Tacoma
Community and Economic Development Department

Agenda Item
PH-1

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Peter Huffman, Manager, Planning Division

SUBJECT: Downtown Plan Update

DATE: September 25, 2008

The Planning Commission is scheduled to conduct a public hearing on October 1, 2008 on the proposed amendment to *Destination Downtown*, which is the downtown element of the City's Comprehensive Plan. The proposed amendment is a part (i.e., Application No. 2008-10) of the *Proposed Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Regulatory Code for 2008*, but has been conducted on a separate track.

Notice of the public hearing has been widely distributed and posted on the City's website (www.cityoftacoma.org/planning). A public review document has been compiled, containing the draft Downtown Plan, a staff analysis report, as well as the associated environmental determination. The public review document, printed with a light purple cover (a.k.a. the "Purple Book"), has also been disseminated for required review, posted on the City's website, and made available at all branches of the Tacoma Public Library. Commissioners should bring their copy of the Purple Book to the next meeting for use and reference at the public hearing.

An Informational Session was conducted on September 24th, at 5:00 p.m., in the Council Chambers, to provide interested citizens an opportunity to learn more about the proposed amendment.

Attached is a staff report which summarizes the proposed amendment, review criteria and process, public participation and the notice provided for the public hearing. If you have any questions, please contact Peter Huffman at 591-5373 or phuffman@cityoftacoma.org.

PH:ds

Attachment



2008 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND LAND USE REGULATORY CODE

STAFF REPORT TACOMA PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING OCTOBER 1, 2008

A. SUBJECT:

Adoption of an amendment to the City of Tacoma's Comprehensive Plan by updating and modifying the downtown element, *Destination Downtown*. (Application No. 2008-10).

B. BACKGROUND:

Each year, proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and/or Land Use Regulatory Code are considered by the Planning Commission and City Council. Tacoma's Comprehensive Plan is the City's official statement concerning future growth and development. The Growth Management Act (GMA), with few exceptions, requires that all proposed Plan amendments be reviewed concurrently and no more frequently than once each year. This is usually referred to as the "annual amendment" whereby individual Comprehensive Plan amendments are considered together.

C. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND LAND USE REGULATORY CODE AMENDMENT PROCESS:

Periodic review and evaluation are important in order that the Comprehensive Plan and the implementing development regulations maintain their effectiveness. Changing conditions and community needs may necessitate amendments. Amendments can include modification to the existing policies of the Plan, the addition of new policies or the deletion of policies within the Plan as well as changes to the narrative text. Changes to development regulations can include text revisions, the addition or deletion of regulations and changes to zoning classifications for certain properties on an area-wide basis. As new Plan elements are developed, amendments to previously adopted plan elements also may be necessary. All amendments to the Comprehensive Plan are reviewed simultaneously so that the cumulative effect can be considered.

Amendments may be proposed by City staff, the City Council, private individuals, Neighborhood Councils, and other organizations or entities. The deadline for submitting an application for amendment is the last business day of the year for consideration in the following year; however, applications are accepted at any time.

One application for an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan was submitted in 2007 by a private party. In addition, five other Comprehensive Plan amendments were initiated by City staff (primarily from the Planning Division of the Community and Economic Development Department) including the proposal to update the Downtown element (Application No. 2008-10). The other amendments to the Comprehensive Plan were the subject of a separate public hearing held on September 3, 2008. The proposed amendments to the Downtown element that are the subject of this hearing are summarized in Section D of this report.

In accordance with the adoption and amendment procedures in the Tacoma Municipal Code (Chapter 13.02.045), the following criteria are used by the Planning Commission in determining if a Plan amendment or a change in development regulations is warranted:

- An obvious technical error exists in the pertinent Comprehensive Plan or regulatory code provisions;

- The amendment is consistent, or will achieve consistency, with the Comprehensive Plan's goals or policies;
- Circumstances related to the proposed amendment have significantly changed, or a lack of change in circumstances, has occurred since the area or issue was last considered by the Planning Commission;
- The needs of the City have changed which support an amendment;
- The amendment is compatible with existing or planned land uses and the surrounding development pattern;
- Growth and development, as envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan, is occurring faster, slower or is failing to materialize;
- The capacity to provide adequate services is diminished or increased;
- Plan objectives are not being met as specified, and/or the assumptions upon which the Plan is based are found to be invalid;
- Transportation and/or other capital improvements are not being made as expected;
- Substantial similarities of conditions and characteristics can be demonstrated on abutting properties that warrant a change in land use intensity or zoning classification; or
- A question of consistency exists among the elements of the Comprehensive Plan or between the Comprehensive Plan and RCW 36.70A (Growth Management Act), the *County-wide Planning Policies for Pierce County* or multicounty planning policies, or the development regulations of the City.

The Planning Commission may also consider other factors as warranted including if additional information has become available since the Plan element or development regulation was last adopted or amended.

Proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan are developed pursuant to the procedures and requirements of Chapter 13.02 of the Tacoma Municipal Code as summarized above. Once an amendment has been determined to be warranted by the Planning Commission using the above criteria and other factors, Planning Division staff, under direction of the Planning Commission, conduct needed analysis and prepare the draft amendments for public review and comment.

Proposed amendments are subject to the requirements of the State Environmental Policy Act and the Growth Management Act. The amendments to the Comprehensive Plan receive detailed review by the Planning Commission and public hearing(s) are held to receive citizen comment. After further review, the Commission makes a recommendation to the City Council. The Council will review the proposed amendments, hold a public hearing, make modifications as may be necessary and adopt, or decline to adopt, the proposed amendments.

D. SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT:

Following is a brief summary of the proposed update to the Downtown element (Application No. 2008-10).

Amendment Application No. 2008-10 proposes revisions to the text describing the vision for the downtown area and updates goals, policies and graphics in the downtown element of the Comprehensive Plan. Specifically, the Destination Downtown overall goals and general policies as set forth in Chapter 12 of the City's Comprehensive Plan are to be replaced in their entirety.

However, the District policies as set forth in Chapter 12 of the City Comprehensive Plan need to remain in place to provide a planning foundation for the current downtown zoning districts and their implementing development regulations. Downtown zoning districts and their implementing regulations will be reviewed and most likely amended in 2009 to better implement the new goals policies and recommended actions. The District policies may be rescinded or amended at that time. The new goals and policies have been determined to be consistent with the existing District policies, providing additional detail as appropriate.

The proposed amendment is intended to facilitate future development of the Downtown mixed-use center consistent with the growth strategy outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. The downtown area has experienced a period of significant public and private investment that has been described as a renaissance of the area. While these investments have spurred tourism and renewed interest in living, working, shopping, dining and playing downtown, there is still a need to attract large scale employers and vibrant retail and develop better transportation alternatives. The proposed update provides a working tool to clarify the vision for downtown and to use the vision for overarching guidance for implementation strategies, projects and ongoing initiatives. The proposed amendment seeks to bring together a myriad of interdependent actions and planning to create the necessary synergy for a healthy, vibrant downtown.

The downtown plan update is intended to:

- Coordinate land use, transportation, economic development and parking strategies
- Create a walkable downtown through application of best practices such as “complete streets”
- Establish urban design principles with an emphasis on the public realm
- Link economic vitality and environmental quality through an awareness of the regional effects of growth management, land use and transportation decisions
- Link land use policy and economic revitalization strategies
- Define “character areas” and opportunities within them for catalyst projects and near term actions
- Suggest zoning and regulatory changes for future consideration
- Lay the groundwork for responsibly increasing density while creating a high quality environment that retains downtown Tacoma’s character

The updated Downtown Plan is organized around four chapters each on a separate theme. The four themes are: A Balanced Healthy Economy, Achieving Vitality Downtown, Sustainable City, and a City of the Arts. Each chapter includes goals and policies as well as implementation actions which are to be considered in the near, mid and long term. A strong emphasis is placed on circulation and mobility throughout the document. The draft Plan proposes street typologies which could serve as the basis for future street design and streetscape improvements. A focus on the pedestrian is strongly recommended to create a walkable downtown that is safe, clean, attractive and inviting. Finally the draft Plan identifies “character areas” and proposes a vision for each of these areas along with policies, actions and design principles that are in concert with the unique character found in each area. The character areas are:

- the **Commercial Core** where the emphasis would be on the International Financial Services Area and improvements that would activate the street edge to create a more friendly pedestrian environment in concert with new high rise development

- the **St. Helens** neighborhood where policies would support the emerging retail corridor and proposed revisions to the height and FAR bonus would support the growing high density residential neighborhood
- the **Union Station** area where greater integration of the campus is proposed and opportunities are indentified to capitalize on the Prairie Line/Water Ditch trail as well as the reuse of City property in the area
- the **Brewery/Nob Hill District** where emphasis is on retaining the historic, eclectic character using new tools for preservation and support is given for the emergence of a new gateway area, Nob Hill, at southern most edge of downtown
- the **Hillside** area, sandwiched between Yakima and Tacoma Avenue, should redevelop as a transition area between downtown and Upper Tacoma with predominately mid-rise residential uses.

E. GENERAL INFORMATION:

1. Evaluation of Plan Amendments

The proposed changes to the Downtown element amending the Comprehensive Plan were reviewed using factors contained in the Tacoma Municipal Code and as set forth in summary in Section C herein. Other information also was used including the Downtown Economic Strategic Plan produced by AngelouEconomics for the City this year, past planning documents including the Downtown Streetscape Study, the 1998 R/UDAT report, the Thea Foss Design and Development Plan, and the Tacoma Dome Area Plan, current studies and initiatives including the Tacoma City Center Parking and Mobility Strategy, the Mixed Use Center and Urban Design Review projects and the master plan update for the UWT campus. The Commission also received a summary of comments from two community meetings concerning the proposed update to the Downtown element.

2. Environmental Evaluation

Pursuant to WAC 197-11 and Tacoma's SEPA procedures, a Preliminary Determination of Environmental Nonsignificance was issued on September 10, 2008. This preliminary determination, SEPA File Number: SEP2008-40000119984 was made based upon a review of a completed environmental checklist. The City will reconsider the preliminary determination based on timely public comments regarding the checklist that are received by October 10, 2008 and unless modified, the preliminary determination will become final on October 17, 2008.

3. Public Review Process

During the development of the draft Plan, interviews were conducted with individuals and stakeholder groups which were coordinated with the consultants developing Downtown Economic Strategic Plan. These interviews included residents, business owners, employers, non profit organizations, development interests, cultural organizations and others. Follow-up meetings also occurred as the draft plan took shape.

A joint Open House for the Downtown Plan Update and the Downtown Economic Strategic Plan was held on June 24, 2008. The purpose of the open house was to inform the public about the planning process and engage in a dialogue about first ideas. A second Open House was held on July 30, 2008 to receive feedback on policy choices for transportation strategies, urban form, design, sustainability, housing and others. Public comments from these meetings were shared with the Commission.

The proposed update to the Downtown element was presented to and discussed by the Planning Commission at their meetings, which are open to the public. The Commission reviewed the proposed changes and authorized the distribution of the Downtown Plan Update for public review and comment on September 3, 2008. The draft Downtown Plan Update, the staff report which analyzes the proposed amendment for consistency with the criteria listed in Section C herein and a copy of the preliminary environmental determination and completed checklist were compiled into a single document. This document was made available for public review at all branches of the public library and at the office of the Community and Economic Development Department. The document was also posted on the City's website and made available on CD-ROM upon request.

An informational public meeting was held on September 24, 2008. The purpose of this meeting was to provide a more detailed explanation of the draft Downtown Plan Update and to answer any questions about the proposed changes. Notice of this meeting was included in the public hearing notice and advertised in *The News Tribune* on September 17, 2008.

4. Notification

Notice of the Planning Commission's public hearing was distributed to Neighborhood Council board members, other neighborhood groups, business district associations, civic organizations, environmental groups, development interests, adjacent jurisdictions, the Puyallup Tribe, other government agencies, major employers and institutions, City and State departments, and other known interested individuals or groups. Notice was also provided to taxpayers of record for properties within the downtown study area. In addition, the notice could also be viewed and downloaded at the Planning Division's website (www.cityoftacoma.org/planning).

The notice stated the purpose of the public hearing, information pertaining to the environmental determination and where additional information could be obtained. Advertisement of the public hearing was published in *The News Tribune* on September 17, 2008.

F. COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission accept all oral and written testimony and hold the record open until **5:00 p.m. on Friday, October 10, 2008** and that the Commission evaluate all testimony given at the public hearing and any written comments received as part of the record prior to making a recommendation to the City Council.

