



FIG. 1-1 Stadium High School, a historic landmark, has served Tacoma Public Schools for more than a century.

01

INTRODUCTION

North Downtown Tacoma is poised for a great future, and the goal of this Subarea Plan is to help make that future a reality. Rich with cultural and assets and robust infrastructure, North Downtown has unmatched potential to become a thriving, livable urban center that brings opportunity to local residents and businesses while promoting a sustainable future for the City and region.

OVERVIEW

This Subarea Plan is one of the two main components of the North Downtown Subarea Plan & EIS Project. The intent of the project is to develop an innovative area-wide long-range plan for the north end of downtown Tacoma, and to complete the pre-development environmental review that will identify how to address environmental and community issues, ultimately reducing development uncertainties and risks for future projects and defining implementation timelines.

The North Downtown Subarea Plan & EIS Project was funded by a \$50,000 grant from the State Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB). Bates Technical College is partnering with the City of Tacoma as the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) co-lead agency for the North Downtown Subarea Plan and EIS (this approach emulates the 2013 South Downtown Subarea Plan, for which the City partnered with the University of Washington Tacoma).

The North Downtown Subarea is comprised of the north half of the Downtown Tacoma Mixed-use Center (MUC) and the Stadium MUC. The City has designated 17 Mixed-Use Centers (MUCs) as targeted areas for accommodation of growth. The Subarea also makes up the northern half of the Tacoma Downtown Regional

Growth Center, as designated by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). The City of Tacoma is required by the State Growth Management Act to plan for 60,000 new jobs and 70,000 additional people in Tacoma by 2030, with a focus on accommodating growth in Regional Growth Centers.

The 520-acre North Downtown Subarea encompasses Tacoma's downtown commercial core and extends north to include Wright Park, St. Helens and the Stadium District. The Subarea consists of a mix of high-rise and mid-rise commercial and residential uses as well as smaller-scale neighborhood residential areas. North Downtown has numerous significant community amenities, including Wright Park, Old City Hall, Bates Technical College, Stadium High School, the Commerce Street Transit Hub, and two Historic Districts.

The Subarea Plan

The Subarea Plan is intended to provide innovative planning and policy interventions to help North Downtown achieve its significant potential for community and economic development, an outcome that will deliver a broad range of equitable social and environmental benefits at both the local and regional scales. The Plan will serve as a statement of the City's

FIG. 1-1 NORTH DOWNTOWN CONTEXT



commitment and direction for these areas and as a resource for potential investors, property owners, the community, and other public agencies.

Proposed implementation actions in the Subarea Plan will address economic and business recruitment, arts and cultural promotions, historical preservation objectives, complete street typologies, multi-modal transportation plans and projects including streetcar, bike, and pedestrian facilities, sustainability measures, and identify catalytic projects for City and privately owned properties.

The Subarea Plan supplements current Tacoma policies governing the environment, land use, economics, transportation, design resources, parks and recreation, public services, and utilities. The Plan supports the City's Comprehensive Plan, while focusing on issues and opportunities at a scale that is responsive to the Subarea's specific needs.

The Environmental Impact Statement

The City of Tacoma is preparing a non-project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the North Downtown Subarea Plan. A non-project EIS involves a cumulative environmental impact and mitigation analysis for the entire Subarea, rather than piecemeal analysis on a project-by-project basis. The non-project EIS eliminates the need for subsequent environmental review associated with project-specific development proposals that comply with the Subarea Plan's development regulations. As such, the non-project EIS provides developer certainty and predictability, thereby streamlining the environmental review process and furthering the goals of the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)¹ and the GMA.

The non-project EIS is subject to RCW 43.21C.420, known as "Transit Infill Review." Recognizing that RCW 43.21C.420(5)(a) and (b) include a sunset provision, the City is also proceeding under RCW 43.21C.031 (planned action) and RCW 43.21C.229 (infill exemption),

to provide additional SEPA tools if provisions in RCW 43.21C.420(5)(a) and (b) expire.²

The North Downtown Subarea Plan EIS analyzes the impacts associated with future development in the Subarea, including additional development and increases in employment and population that are anticipated to 2030. The preliminary 2030 growth targets analyzed in the EIS are 30,000 new jobs and 30,000 additional people and up to 26 million square feet of new residential and commercial space floor space.

Mitigation Strategy

In the near term, the Subarea Plan does not require extensive up front mitigations for potential impacts of growth and redevelopment. However the Plan does specify future mitigations that are triggered as buildout in the Subarea occurs over time.

Currently in North Downtown there is sufficient utility infrastructure, transportation capacity, and open space to serve anticipated growth likely for the next 5 to 10 years. Within this timeframe, requirements for mitigations placed on private development would not only be unnecessary, but also could have the unintended consequence of creating a financial barrier to redevelopment.

The Subarea Plan recognizes that the long-term levels of buildout being considered would eventually require improvements in infrastructure and amenities to serve significantly higher numbers of residents and employees in North Downtown. To address the future needs of a growing community, the Plan proposes monitoring systems and development thresholds for transportation investments and affordable housing, and phased-in impact fees to fund open space.

Lastly, as documented in the EIS, Public Utilities and Public Services can be expanded to meet the anticipated

¹ SEPA is the State Environmental Policy Act (Chapter 43.21C RCW). Regulations that implement SEPA are called the SEPA Rules (Chapter 197-11 WAC).

² For background see "Using SEPA to Encourage Economic Development and Sustainable Communities" by Jeremy Eckert, Environmental & Land Use Law, June 2011.

demands of the future buildout in North Downtown as needed over time.

Other Downtown Subareas

The City of Tacoma has also recently engaged in Subarea Plan & EIS projects in the South Downtown Subarea, and the Hilltop Subarea, that, together with North Downtown, comprise Tacoma’s entire downtown Regional Growth Center. By planning for all three of these Subareas in a coordinated fashion, the City hopes to provide a unified plan of action that will leverage synergies and promote the most positive outcomes throughout downtown.

The South Downtown Subarea Plan and EIS was adopted by the Tacoma City Council in December 2013. Adoption of the Hilltop Subarea Plan and EIS is anticipated in April 2014.

Timeline

The North Downtown Subarea Plan & EIS project was initiated in May of 2013, and a scoping meeting was held in June of 2013. Research, data compilation, stakeholder engagement, and development of the Draft Subarea Plan and Draft EIS were ongoing through early 2014. The Draft Subarea Plan and Draft EIS will be formally issued in April of 2014. The Final EIS, as well as the Final Subarea Plan and its implementing ordinances, will be drafted in mid 2014, and it is anticipated that the final Plan and EIS will be approved by Council in late 2014.

PLANNING PROCESS

This North Downtown Subarea Plan project team worked closely with property owners, businesses, residents and community members to ensure that the priorities of these key stakeholders are represented in the outcomes of this project.

Stakeholder Focus Groups

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

Surveys

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

Community Open House

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

VISION

The following identified Vision elements and themes are the result of a collaborative effort between North Downtown stakeholders, City staff, and the consultant team:

- *Center of Opportunity:* A thriving, equitable, urban, mixed-use community that offers a robust range of opportunities for education, transportation, housing, health care, business, employment, shopping, and recreation.
- *Open Spaces and Natural Systems:* An environmentally-responsive urban center which values its green spaces and strives to maintain and enhance existing open spaces, parks, recreational opportunities, view corridors, community gardens, and the connections between each while carefully adjusting to local terrain conditions.
- *Cultural and Heritage District:* A community that respects and preserves the mix of historic characteristics and vibrant business of all types while encouraging and celebrating the rich mix of cultures and heritages.
- *Place-Based Identity:* An integrated component of the greater City that capitalizes on its unique characteristics to successfully blend and support exchange between business districts, sustain connections to surrounding neighborhoods, leverage regional assets, and project a compelling identity to the region and beyond.
- *Urban Livability:* A Downtown Core area with significant economic development potential, incentives, and requirements to ensure that greater intensity of use has long term positive impacts on livability.
- *Partnerships to Promote Economic Vitality:* A community that actively pursues and supports public-private investments in order to address the needs and concerns of the business owners, residents, and visitors while at the same time supporting the arts, culture, tourism, infrastructure improvements, international trade, and social services for all segments of the population.

- *Walkability and Transportation Choices:* A community that will maintain and enhance the existing development fabric and capitalize on the extensive local and regional transit system within the subarea to support walkability, a variety of transportation modes, and future infrastructure improvements.
- *Promote Education and Lifelong Learning:* A community that embraces its educational heritage by supporting and growing educational opportunities and facilities for all members of society at all educational levels.

The Vision for North Downtown is a vibrant, equitable urban center that offers a rich spectrum of opportunities to live, learn, work, and play. To achieve that Vision, the primary goals of the North Downtown Subarea Plan & EIS are to catalyze economic development and sustainable urban growth. North Downtown has the potential to accommodate intense development in its commercial core, which will leverage existing urban infrastructure and transit assets. However, measures must be taken to assure that development occurs in a way that supports urban livability. This planning effort proposes innovative strategies to help North Downtown achieve its potential for economic development in a way that will maximize net environmental and community benefits.

Over recent decades, Tacoma has seen relatively low levels of economic development, which has resulted in a variety of negative impacts on downtown neighborhoods, including underutilized properties, deterioration and loss of historic structures, and limited economic opportunity for residents and employers.

Redevelopment is the critical step to realizing North Downtown’s potential to provide equitable livability and a diverse, thriving economy while minimizing environmental impact. This point of view is endorsed by a wide range of public policy spanning the federal, State, regional, County, City, and neighborhood levels, and is supported by countless studies on “smart growth.” Building upon the Subareas’s significant assets to

cultivate vibrant, compact, transit-rich districts will help the City of Tacoma and the surrounding region achieve established goals for smart and sustainable growth.

Redevelopment in North Downtown should create the following: infill projects that improve the quality of the public realm, open spaces and revitalized streetscapes that increase the livability and walkability of urban neighborhoods, strengthened physical and visual connections to the Foss Waterway and Commencement Bay

The goal of the Subarea Plan is to build upon the character of North Downtown’s varied districts - commercial core, neighborhood residential, historic, and arts/cultural - to promote and enable diverse housing choices and employment opportunities, thriving urban institutions, amenities that attract visitors as well as residents, and a mix of uses that includes the essential elements of livability.

New jobs and housing in North Downtown will expand the customer base for existing businesses and increase opportunities for residents to benefit from the Subarea’s concentration of urban amenities and infrastructure.

Goals and Recommendations

The North Downtown Subarea Plan is intended to be an action-based plan, and is crafted to focus on proposing tightly defined goals and recommendations with direct connections to achieving tangible results that will further North Downtown goals. The goals and recommendations actions are highlighted throughout the document in appropriate topical sections. To provide an overview of this action-based approach, all of the Subarea Plan’s the goals and recommendations are listed in Table 1-1.

TABLE 6-1 NORTH DOWNTOWN GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	
GOAL ED-1	XXXXXXXXXX
RECOMMENDATION ED-1	XXXXXXXXXX
RECOMMENDATION ED-2	XXXXXXXXXX
RECOMMENDATION ED-3	XXXXXXXXXX update and expand table
RECOMMENDATION ED-4	XXXXXXXXXX
RECOMMENDATION ED-5	XXXXXXXXXX
HISTORIC RESOURCES	
RECOMMENDATION HR-1	XXXXXXXXXX
RECOMMENDATION HR-2	XXXXXXXXXX
RECOMMENDATION HR-3	XXXXXXXXXX
RECOMMENDATION HR-4	XXXXXXXXXX
RECOMMENDATION HR-5	XXXXXXXXXX