

# NEIGHBORHOOD COMPLETENESS

## Element Overview

The goals and policies in the Design and Development Element convey the City’s intent to:

- Promote neighborhood, site, and street design that supports the 15-minute neighborhood concept.
- Guide building designs that meet the needs of current and future Tacomans and respond to local context.
- Support well-connected neighborhoods with safe, comfortable, convenient, and equitable mobility access for people of all ages and abilities.
- Create public spaces that promote a sense of community and support the goals of community health and sustainability.
- Foster a welcoming and dynamic community through creative expression and historic and cultural preservation.
- Promote energy and resource efficient neighborhoods and buildings and encourage the integration of nature into the built environment.

### Why does this matter?

Development and design shape how Tacoma looks and functions. Past development, in combination with the natural landscape, has shaped how the city is experienced. Future development, and responsiveness to built and natural heritage, has the potential to create a better, healthier, more efficient and more pleasant Tacoma. New development and redevelopment can promote vibrant, accessible urban places for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds, while also enhancing natural resources, providing aesthetically pleasing experiences, protecting health and safety, and promoting resilience. As a metropolitan city that is expected to accommodate a significant share of regional growth, Tacoma faces design and development challenges, as well as opportunities. The policies in this chapter encourage neighborhood design and development that respects context, preserves historic and cultural resources, engages innovation and creativity, reduces carbon emissions, improves resource efficiency, minimizes risk from natural hazards, limits impacts to wildlife and natural systems, and integrates nature into the urban environment.

## Proposed Amendments

### Structure and Content

- Connect to the 15-minute city concept through ideas of human scale design, safety, equitable access to opportunity, comfortable experience of everyday life for all ages and abilities, resilience, cultural identity, health and contextual design.

- Reduce redundancy with other elements but identify cross-connections to transportation (public realm), historic preservation (cultural identity), environment (health) and urban form (comfort, real and perceptions of safety, and access to opportunity).
- The current chapter is focused on buildings and sites. Propose to orient policies around broad urban design topics at three policy scales of neighborhood, site, and public realm. These urban design topics consist of neighborhood development pattern; connectivity; built form; public space; culture, heritage and creative expression; and environmental health and resiliency. Some policies will identify opportunities and challenges related to specific development pattern areas (see discussion below of the re-positioning of the *Historical Residential Pattern Areas* information).
- Align with Transportation and Mobility Plan (TMP) on streets, curb management, and public realm activation.

## Language

- Propose renaming to “Neighborhood Design”
- Remove harmful and/or clearly define vague language that can otherwise be used to exclusionary ends. For example, avoiding vague language like “neighborhood character” or using “community member” instead of “citizen.”

## Policy Framework

The Design and Development Element supports numerous goals and requirements of the Growth Management Act. The Design and Development Element is a companion to the Urban Form Element. Where the Urban Form Element more directly relates to the allocation of population, housing, and employment across the City and the strategy for accommodating and connecting growth and public facilities and services, the Design and Development Element is focused more on the experiential components of neighborhoods and community design. Similar to the Urban Form Element this chapter specifically responds to the following GMA goals:

- Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.
- Reduce sprawl.
- Utilize urban planning approaches that promote physical activity and reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled.
- Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled.
- Promote economic opportunity for all citizens and promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses and recruitment of new businesses.
- Retain open space and green space, enhance recreational opportunities, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities.
- Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures, that have historical or archaeological significance.
- Protect and enhance the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.

- Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards.
- Adapt to and mitigate the effects of a changing climate; support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled; prepare for climate impact scenarios; foster resiliency to climate impacts and natural hazards; protect and enhance environmental, economic, and human health and safety; and advance environmental justice.
- Protect the quality and quantity of groundwater used for public water supplies.
- Consider environmental justice in goals and policies, including efforts to avoid creating or worsening environmental health disparities.
- Where applicable, review drainage, flooding, and stormwater runoff in the area and nearby jurisdictions and provide guidance for corrective actions to mitigate or cleanse those discharges that pollute waters of the state, including Puget Sound or waters entering Puget Sound.

## **Growth Management Act Goals and Policies (RCW 36.70A)**

Washington State’s Growth Management Act establishes a vision for well-being, natural system function, and economic viability that depends on cities and urban development patterns which are complete, connected, and compact. The structure, goals and policies of this Element align with the importance of supporting precisely those urban development patterns—places that efficiently use urban land and infrastructure, are walkable, cycling- and transit-supportive.

## **VISION 2050**

Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) supports urban design priorities to encourage desired outcomes. Specifically, Vision 2050 Multi County Planning Policies (MPPs) include:

*MPP-DP-9 Support urban design, historic preservation, and arts to enhance quality of life, support local culture, improve the natural and human-made environments, promote health and well-being, contribute to a prosperous economy, and increase the region’s resiliency in adapting to changes or adverse events.*

The structure, goals and policies of this Element would support above listed three-part set of strategies.

*MPP-DP-15 Design communities to provide safe and welcoming environments for walking and bicycling.*

The structure, goals and policies of this Element focus on pedestrian orientation, access and connectivity, public realm design, and support for active transportation as a significant focus.

## Addressing Priority Outcomes

In the first phase of the comprehensive planning process, the project team identified key outcomes that assess a baseline of wellbeing across a community. The selected outcomes reflect the key themes for this plan update: equity, public health, sustainability, opportunity, and safety. Outcomes were evaluated geographically, comparing results across eight Tacoma neighborhoods.

The **Design & Development** element addresses these priority outcomes:

1. **Climate impacts, Urban Heat Index.** Residents across Tacoma experience urban heat differently depending on where they live and if their neighborhoods have more impervious surfaces and less tree cover. Neighborhood design can mitigate the climate impacts from urban growth by prioritizing responsive site and building designs, urban forestry, landscaping, on-site access to open space and green roofs. Public Realm strategies can support improved tree canopy as well as incorporating innovations in stormwater management to better respond to climate change-induced rainfall events.
2. **Walkable Neighborhoods.** The City of Tacoma produced an analysis in 2021 focused on walking access, and integrates several walkability inputs, including distance to schools, parks, trails, commercial businesses and transit stops. Neighborhood design can help close the walkability gap in neighborhoods with low walkability scores.
3. **Perception of Safety.** Community safety is a broad concept that addresses much more than levels of police service and the factors that contribute to a sense of safety may include sidewalks, lighting, prevention, after school activities, restorative justice, and more. Perceptions of safety in Tacoma vary by district, race and ethnicity, and household income. The design and development of neighborhoods can improve the perception of safety by implementing building, site, and public realm design approaches that help increase social interaction and cohesion, a positive sense of identity and pride in place, as well as public and shared spaces that are designed to provide passive surveillance and support situational awareness.
4. **Historic Preservation.** Historic preservation is recognized as an important tool to mitigate negative impacts that rapid change can impose upon a neighborhood and enhance an area's "sense of place." This Element broadly supports preservation citywide as well as the specific outcomes relates to thematic representation and distribution of landmarks and districts.

## Community Input

The Project Team compiled qualitative data from nine community visioning workshops and categorized it into overarching themes representing community priorities for Tacoma's growth over the next 25 years. Additionally, the Project Team reviewed community input gathered through previous engagement activities.

Notable to this Element's goals and policies, community input solicited online by Urban Design Studio Staff yielded distinct priorities for Urban Design Project Review program design. Several

representative open-ended comments are included below. Other engagement activities that occurred between 2016 to present day were included in the Tacoma Existing Engagement Gap Analysis report.

Residents love the distinct character of the city's neighborhoods and want design and development to reflect local history, context, and cultures. Tacomans also want more greenery in their neighborhoods, including trees, planter boxes as traffic barriers or on sidewalks, native plants, local food growing in community gardens or food forests.

Engagement from the Comprehensive Plan also suggests there is concern for the lack of cleanliness and street maintenance in their neighborhoods. Community members felt that a lack of cleanliness was contributing to the decline of one business district and a decrease in visitors to the area. Input included references to trash, graffiti, potholes, deterioration of buildings and neglect in business areas, absence of appropriate lighting at night especially for pedestrians with disabilities, and the need for sidewalk landscaping and tree cover.

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**“Communities with increased tree canopy report lower levels of crime and less speeding. Adding to our tree canopy is the easiest way to create safer neighborhoods for all.” Ideas Wall Comment**

**“I want our streets to be fully connected corridors of mixed use and not isolated islands of walkability.” Ideas Wall Comment**

**“Adaptive reuse of structures for more housing... adds and retains character of the neighborhood.” Urban Design Online Open House**

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**“[Places] to gather - something we're short on in Tacoma. Again, in a city that's wet most of the year, semi-sheltered seating. I know this is an issue for folks because of unhoused people camping on such spots. But we need them, period.” Urban Design Online Open House**

**...[M]ake sure ... [implementation] doesn't cripple our ability to grow, change, innovate, and someday be a leader in housing and urban design in one of the most beautiful places in the PNW!” Urban Design Online Open House**

# 03

# Complete Neighborhoods

## COMPLETE NEIGHBORHOODS GOALS

- **GOAL CN-1** Tacoma's neighborhoods provide a complete, comfortable, enjoyable experience of everyday life for people of all ages and abilities
- **GOAL CN-2** People can move within and throughout Tacoma's neighborhoods with ease and efficiency.
- **GOAL CN-3** Buildings in Tacoma's neighborhoods respond to and enhance the distinctive qualities of its location, while accommodating growth and change.
- **GOAL CN-4** Neighborhood public spaces are welcoming, functional, accessible, and inclusive while responding to local context and community goals.
- **GOAL CN-5** Tacoma's neighborhoods reflect the diverse cultures and heritages that are part of the city and serve as a venue for community creative expression.
- **GOAL CN-6** Tacoma's neighborhoods are sustainable, resilient, and resource efficient, contributing to environmental health.

# Complete Neighborhoods

# 03

## 3.1 Introductory Context

### What is this chapter about?

The goals and policies in this chapter convey the City's intent to:

Encourage complete and well-designed neighborhoods that reflect human-scale design, safety and comfort, equitable access to opportunity, resilience, and cultural identity.

- ▶ Promote strong connections within neighborhoods, facilitating walkable connections between buildings, streets and the public realm and easy access to transit and transportation corridors.
- ▶ Support more compact, walkable, and pedestrian-scaled commercial districts.
- ▶ Guide the local physical form of development with attention to historic, cultural, and natural resources as well as scenic view preservation.
- ▶ Create inclusive and welcoming public and open spaces, integrating nature into the built environment and supporting the goals of community health and sustainability.
- ▶ Promote cultural and creative vitality in the city through local opportunities for expression and community-building.
- ▶ Contribute to the city's overall environmental health and resiliency through opportunities to reduce carbon emissions and promote energy and resource efficient neighborhoods and buildings.

### Why is this important?

Neighborhood design shapes how Tacoma looks and functions for people. Past development, in combination with the natural landscape, has shaped how the city is experienced. Future development, and the treatment of built and natural heritage, has the potential to create a better, healthier, more efficient and more pleasant Tacoma. As Tacoma sets its vision toward supporting 15-minute neighborhoods and transit-oriented communities, new development and redevelopment can promote vibrant, accessible urban places for people of all ages and abilities, while also enhancing natural resources, providing aesthetically pleasing experiences, protecting health and safety, and promoting resilience.

#### Book I: Core Policy Elements

- 1 Introduction + Vision
- 2 Growth Strategy
- 3 Complete Neighborhoods**
- 4 Environment + Watershed Health
- 5 Housing
- 6 Transportation
- 7 Economic Development
- 8 Parks + Recreation
- 9 Public Facilities + Services
- 10 Historic Preservation
- 11 Engagement + Administration

#### Contents

- 3.1 Introductory Context
- 3.2 Goals + Policies
- 3.3 Priority Actions

Tacoma is a metropolitan city that is expected to accommodate a significant share of regional growth forecasts. Investing in complete and compact neighborhoods is a core strategy to accommodate that growth. However, the concept of complete neighborhoods doesn't mean that every neighborhood should be the same. The policies in this chapter encourage neighborhood design and development that celebrates the uniqueness of the places and communities in Tacoma by respecting context, preserving historic and cultural resources, engaging in innovation and creativity, and integrating natural and built features in the urban environment.

## What we heard

Communities across the city have been engaged on related themes for existing neighborhood planning projects and school and station areas for transit projects. Across neighborhoods, residents consistently stated that they love the distinct character of the neighborhoods and want the design to reflect local history, context, and cultures. Tacomans also want more greenery in their neighborhoods, including trees, planter boxes as traffic barriers or on sidewalks, native plants, local food growing in community gardens or food forests. Residents enjoy colorful art in the streetscapes and comfortable places to sit and rest. Existing engagement showed high levels of support for small business, arts, and creative spaces in local neighborhoods.

At community visioning workshops and online discussion boards, residents mentioned concern for the lack of cleanliness and street maintenance in their neighborhoods. They worry that a lack of cleanliness is contributing to the decline of a business district and a decrease in visitors to certain areas like West End and Downtown. Input included references to trash, graffiti, potholes, deterioration buildings and neglect in business areas, absence of appropriate lighting at night especially for pedestrians with disabilities, and the need for sidewalk landscaping and tree cover. This engagement also reflects the support for pedestrian-friendly streets and connected neighborhoods with safe and comfortable access to daily necessities.





Concerns related to crime, gang activity, drugs, and gun control have been raised by the community. Traffic violence is a major concern in Tacoma. This is evident from Vision Zero engagement where 47% of respondents said they or someone they were close to have been involved in a serious crash in Tacoma. Outside of Vision Zero engagement, pedestrian safety and motorist speed is also frequently raised as a concern.

## How does this chapter address key themes?

Neighborhood design policies are an important tool to ensure a balance between preserving and honoring the special differences (e.g., cultural heritage, economic clusters), while ensuring equity on the essential outcomes (e.g., air quality, urban heat, safety) across neighborhoods. This chapter offers city-wide guidance with flexibility to be responsive to local context, and an emphasis above all on the human experience of living, working in and visiting a neighborhood. **(Equity)**

Urban neighborhoods are commonly labeled as either “safe” or “unsafe.” This distinction can produce concrete outcomes for health, economics, and access to opportunity. Feeling safe is a complex concept with concerns that vary by neighborhood, race and ethnicity, and household income. The design and development of Tacoma’s neighborhoods, taking into account local preferences, can reduce instances of crime, traffic accident rates, and improve the feeling of being safe. Examples of such design features might include building and site design approaches that encourage an active, well-lit public realm and improved sight lines for drivers and pedestrians. Other neighborhood design elements that can contribute to community safety include sidewalk quality, protected bike lanes, clear pedestrian crossings, high quality public spaces, and more. **(Safety and Access to Opportunity)**

The City of Tacoma produced an analysis in 2021 focused on walking access, and integrates several walkability inputs, including distance to schools, parks, trails, commercial businesses and transit stops. More compact neighborhoods and inviting streetscapes and pathways encourage walking and rolling, offering both personal health and environmental health benefits. City of Tacoma studies also found that residents across Tacoma experience urban heat differently depending on where they live and if their neighborhoods have more impervious surfaces and less tree cover. Neighborhood design can mitigate the climate impacts from urban growth by prioritizing urban forestry, landscaping, on-site access to open space and green roofs. **(Public Health and Sustainability)**



“Communities with increased tree canopy report lower levels of crime and less speeding. Adding to our tree canopy is the easiest way to create safer neighborhoods for all.”

“I want our streets to be fully connected corridors of mixed use and not isolated islands of walkability.”

**-IDEAS WALL COMMENT**



**EQUITY**



**SAFETY**



**OPPORTUNITY**



**PUBLIC HEALTH**



**SUSTAINABILITY**

## What are some baseline conditions and opportunities?

### STREET NETWORK

The street network plays a critical role in determining how well neighborhoods in Tacoma can transition into complete neighborhoods, where essential amenities like grocery stores, schools, parks, and public transit are accessible within a 15-minute walk or bike ride.

Street patterns in Tacoma are shaped by its geography, historical development, and urban planning choices. The city features several distinct street patterns influenced by its location along Puget Sound, its hilly terrain, and its historical growth as a port and industrial hub. Its street network is often interrupted or rerouted by its natural features, including steep hills, ravines, and shorelines along Commencement Bay. Bridges, such as the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, and infrastructure like Interstate 5, add to the complexity.

Exhibit 26. Street Network Patterns, Citywide



Some specific features include:



**Grid Network**

The street network in Downtown Tacoma follows a traditional grid pattern, typical of cities developed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This layout is relatively pedestrian-friendly and dense. The grid system promotes connectivity, walkability, and accessibility. Short blocks and direct routes make it easier to reach amenities quickly.



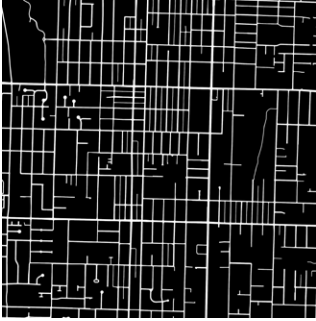
**Adapted Grid**

The Hilltop neighborhood and Central Tacoma extend the grid system but adapt it to the area's hilly topography. Streets follow the contours of the land in some places, leading to slight variations and less rigid grids.



**Curved and Traditional Grid Streets**

North Tacoma combines a mix of street patterns with some curved streets in areas like the Ruston Way waterfront. Proctor and Stadium Districts have more structured grids, while the roads near Point Defiance Park and along the shoreline deviate into curvier designs to match the natural terrain. The street grid in areas such as the Stadium District is very well connected and blocks tend to be fairly short, supporting a highly walkable environment.



### Industrial Network

The street pattern here includes wide streets and long blocks dominate to accommodate trucks, warehouses, and railroads.



### Suburban Street Patterns

In West Tacoma, suburban street patterns emerge with cul-de-sacs, winding roads, and subdivisions. This layout is typical of post-World War II suburban development, prioritizing residential privacy and car access over pedestrian connectivity. The disrupted street grid limits route directness and creates a sense of privacy within these neighborhoods.

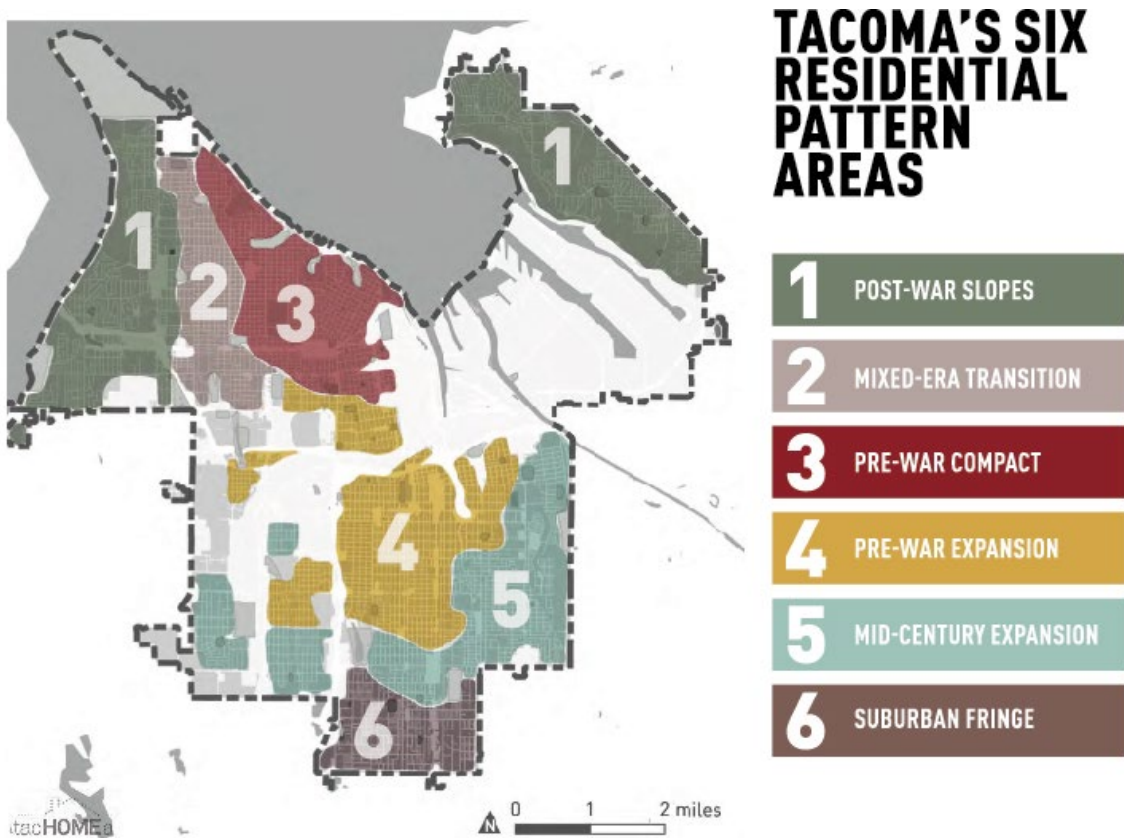


### Hybrid Layouts

In the Eastside and Northeast Tacoma, street patterns are a mix of grids and curvilinear streets. The street grid begins to shift in this area, and blocks become longer, limiting more walkable route directness. Newer developments closer to the Port of Tacoma or areas like Browns Point often feature suburban layouts, while older areas retain grid influences.

## Transitioning to a 15-minute City

Tacoma’s neighborhoods are reflective of the diversity of its residents and rich history, each with a distinct character that contributes to the overall city mosaic. Tacoma’s neighborhoods have a variety of identities created by differences in elements such as the size and arrangement of streets, buildings, and open spaces, as well as how and with what they were constructed. These diverse identities and design features mean that realizing the vision of the 15-minute city will require different investments and approaches in neighborhoods across the city.



## EXISTING RESIDENTIAL PATTERNS

The city has six residential pattern areas based on key physical features, including (1) natural environment, (2) block structure, (3) intersection density, (4) era built, and (5) intensity of land use.

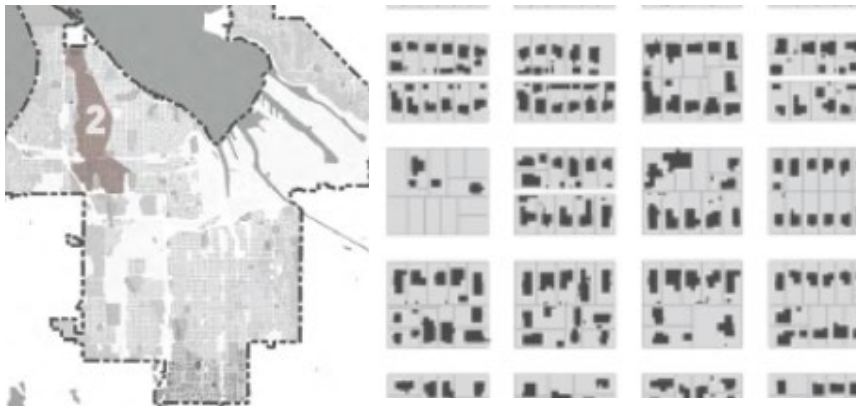
### Pattern Area 1: Post-War Slopes

These areas were primarily developed during the post-war period and is characterized by the prevalence of garages, curvilinear streets, and cul-de-sac development. Houses tend to be ranch, double-ranch, or more contemporary building styles, often with garages more prominently situated at the front of the structure and facing the street, as alleys are rare. Many homes have long frontages and are typically 1-1.5 stories as the area includes view overlays.



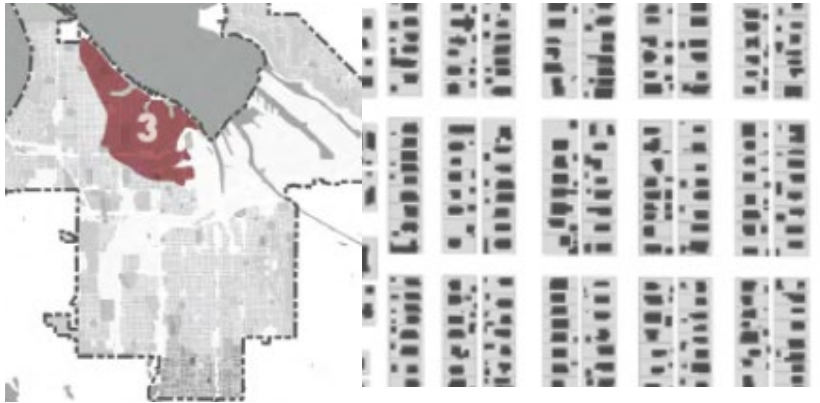
### Pattern Area 2: Mixed-Era Transition

This area contains a generous mix of pre-war and post-war housing, including a mix of mid-century homes. However, much of the area includes alleyways, with the garages often located at the rear of the property facing the alley. This area holds few large or land-use intensive homes. Though this area shares many street grid characteristics with Pattern Area 3, sidewalks are sometimes undeveloped.



**Pattern Area 3: Pre-War Compact**

This area represents some of the densest neighborhoods in Tacoma, containing homes ranging from pre-1900 to the current era. The street grid is very well connected and blocks tend to be fairly short, supporting a highly walkable environment. This area has a variety of pre-zoning non-conforming lot sizes, prevalent alleyways, many large historic homes, and a mix of residential types and non-residential uses blended within the historic fabric. A significant portion of this area is built on dramatic slopes with home designs emphasizing views of Commencement Bay and Puget Sound.



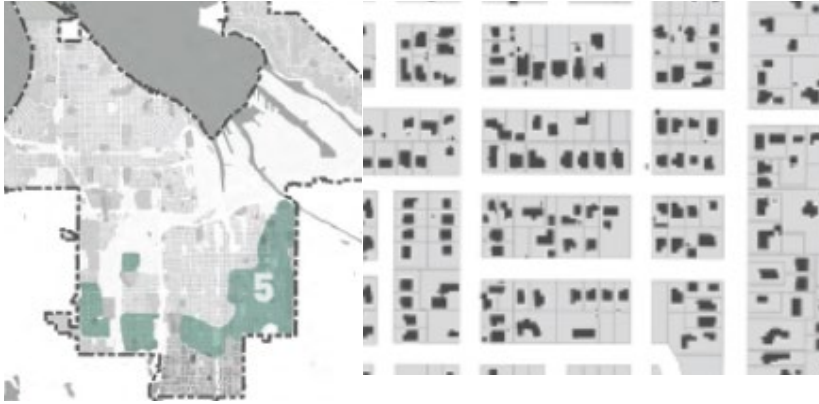
**Pattern Area 4: Pre-War Expansion**

This area contains a large share of historic homes, but at a similar time period as in Pattern Area 3, but typically smaller in size. Homes in this area are primarily bungalow style or reference this type of modest residential design. Land is developed less intensely and though neighborhoods are walkable within themselves, they tend to be discontinuous, as they are edged by large, busy thoroughfares. Blocks are longer than in other historic neighborhoods. This Pattern Area is generally on flat land, and the prominence of alleyways allows for garages to be located at the rear of the property. Some neighborhoods have also relocated powerlines into the alleyways creating a clear line of sight.



**Pattern Area 5: Mid-century Expansion**

This area contains a general mix of residential styles, though mid-century homes are fairly common. These post-war homes frequently emphasize garages, and though alleyways exist throughout, though to a lesser extent, they are used less than in other areas.



**Pattern Area 6: Suburban Fringe**

This area is comprised of a disrupted street grid. In some cases, blocks are 3-4 times the size of blocks in compact, historic areas. While there are some historic homes interspersed in this area, much of the development is post-war. Some residents benefit from large, nearly rural lots. Some blocks have been developed as Planned Residential.

Developments, with new, similar-styled, but closely developed homes. This area has some flag lot and pipe stem development to make use of space within extremely deep blocks. This area tends to be auto-oriented due to its less-connected streets.



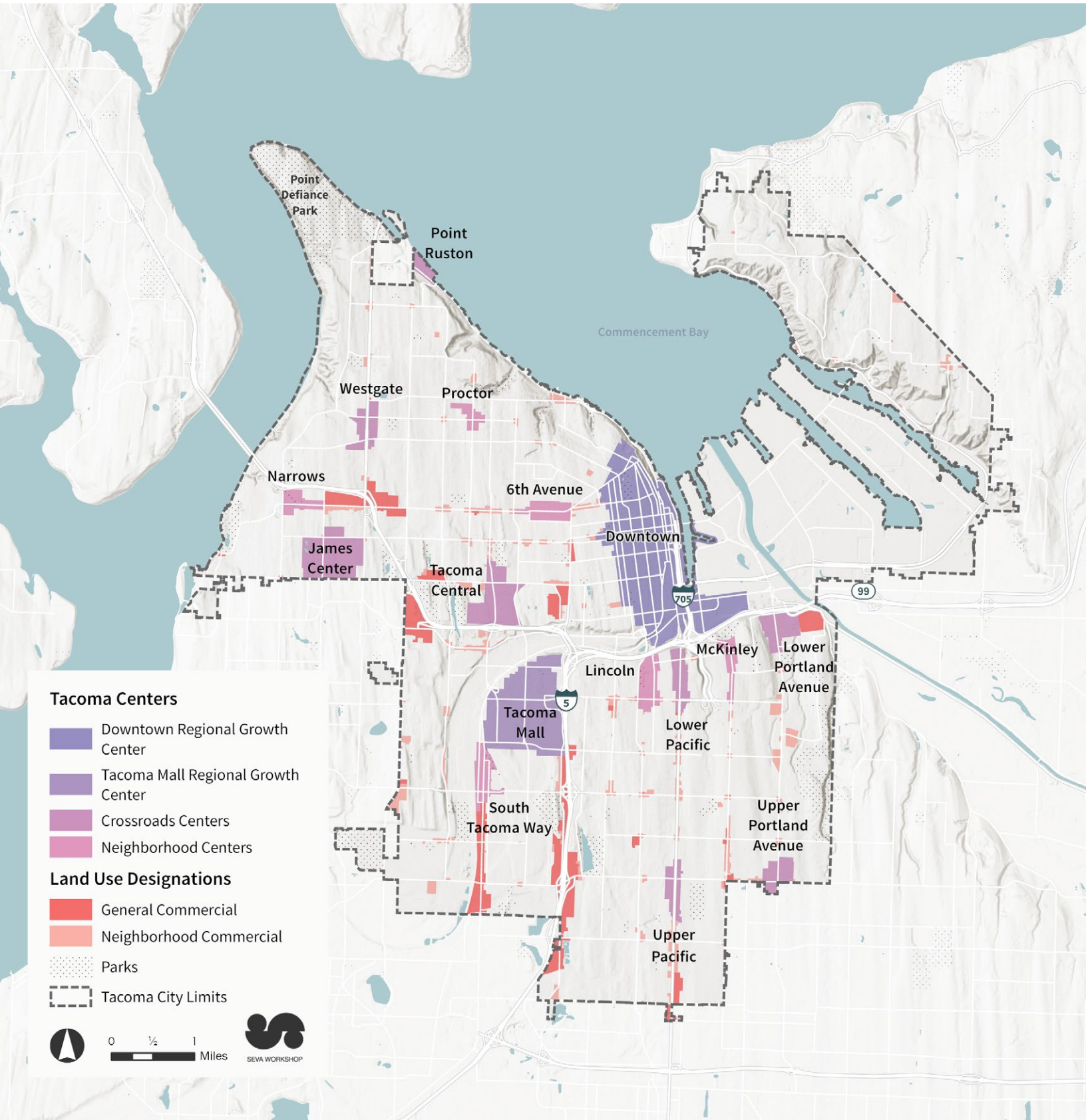


## EXISTING COMMERCIAL, RETAIL AND INDUSTRIAL PATTERNS

Tacoma has a diverse range of commercial areas shaped by its industrial roots, streetcar system, and employment hubs. Existing uses and development patterns vary widely within the City’s diverse commercial districts. Walkable, lively business districts with neighborhood serving amenities and essentials are foundational to the 15-minute city vision. Like the city’s housing stock, commercial districts will also need a range of diverse investments to ensure they are aligned with the 15-minute city vision.

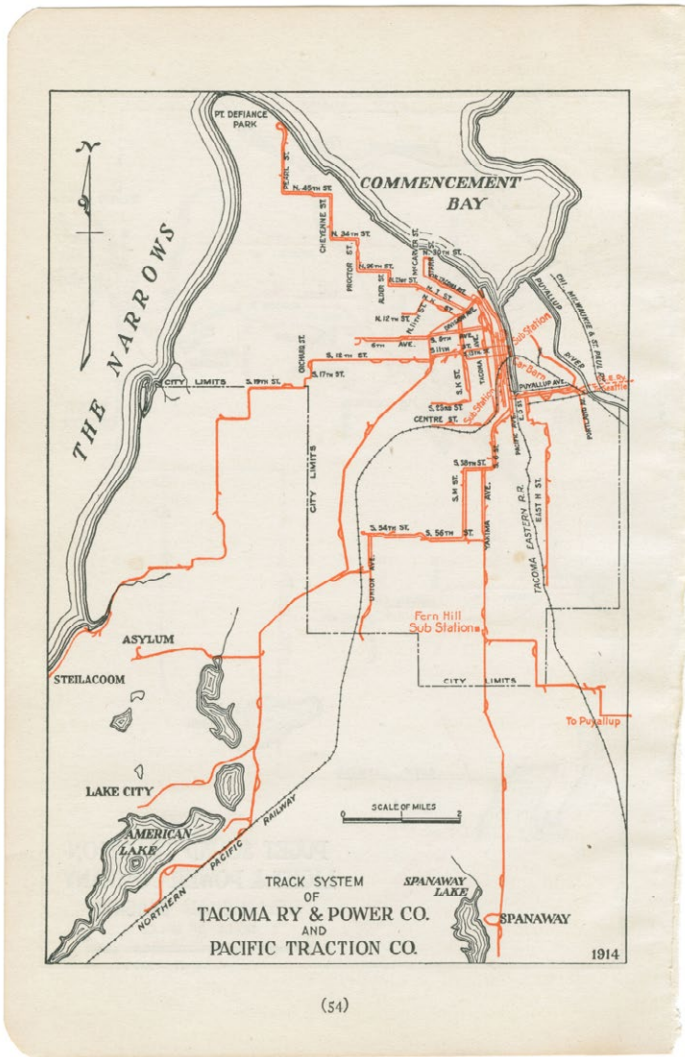


Exhibit 27. Tacoma Mixed Use Centers and Commercial Land Use Designations



In many ways, historical patterns of walkable business districts offer a local model of human scale, walkable districts. Tacoma's streetcar system, which operated from the late 19th century until the 1930s, played an important role in shaping the city's commercial districts. These lines connected residential neighborhoods to employment centers, fostering the development of localized commercial hubs. The decline of the streetcar system and the rise of automobiles shifted the focus toward car-centric areas like the Tacoma Mall, but many historic streetcar-era districts—such as Proctor, Sixth Avenue, and Lincoln—continue to thrive as walkable, community-oriented spaces.

Map of the Tacoma streetcar system in 1914

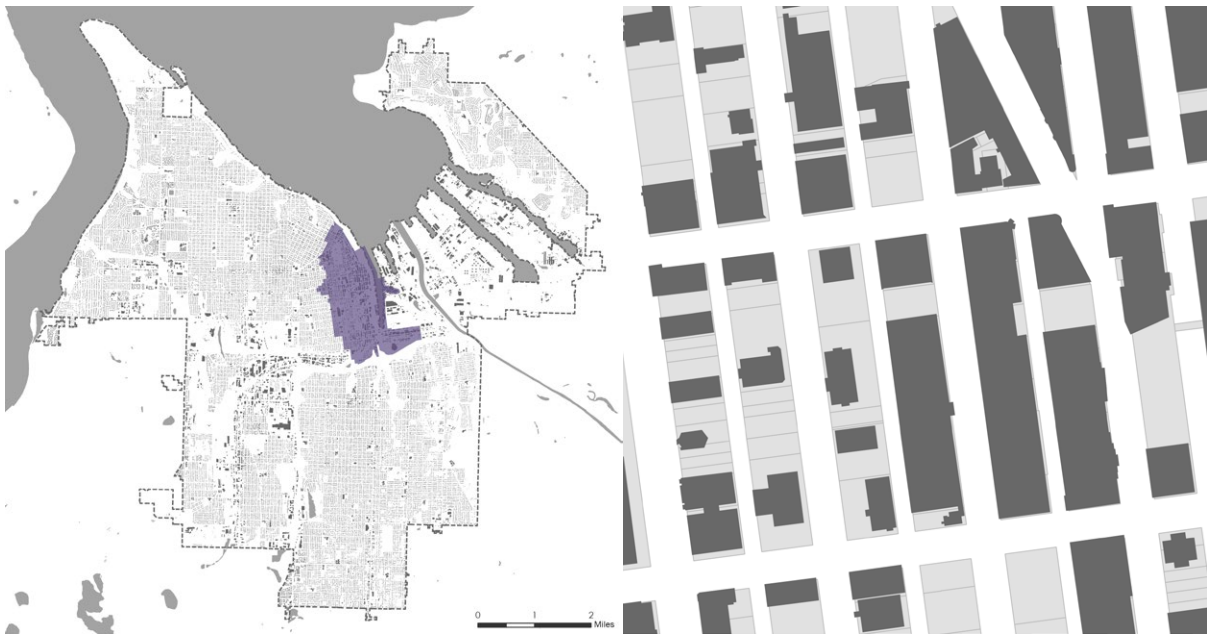


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## CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

Downtown Tacoma serves as the city’s central business district, with office buildings, government institutions, retail shops, cultural landmarks (like the Museum of Glass, Tacoma Art Museum, and theaters), and higher education institutions, such as the University of Washington Tacoma. Downtown’s mix of historic and modern buildings reflect its historical roots as a port city, its industrial heritage, and its modern vision as a hub for retail, office, arts, and culture. The streetcar network connected Downtown to surrounding neighborhoods, making it a bustling center for commuters from residential areas.

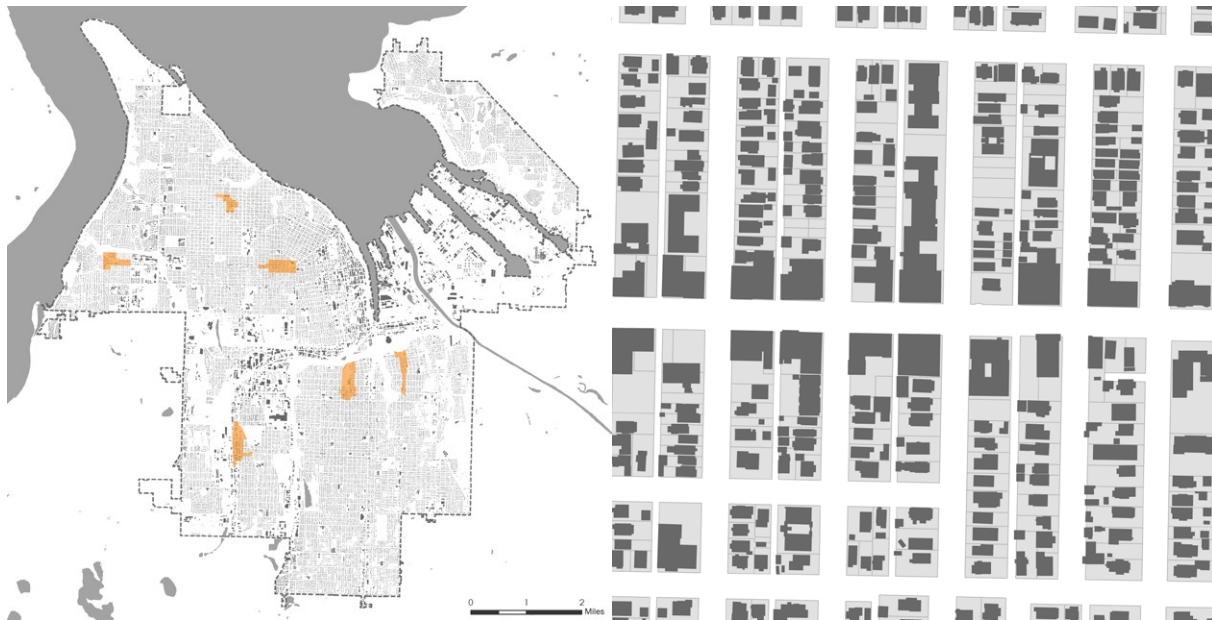
Downtown Tacoma is designed to be walkable, with wide sidewalks, street trees, and a grid street layout. The compact size of blocks and mixed-use developments make downtown accessible and easy to navigate on foot.



### NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS DISTRICTS

Many of the city’s existing neighborhood commercial areas emerged as key stops along the streetcar lines in the early 1900s. Originally streetcar suburbs, these compact commercial districts offered easy access to Downtown while maintaining local amenities like grocery stores and small businesses for residents who preferred a more walkable, community-oriented environment. These typically featured mixed-use buildings with ground-floor retail and upper-floor residences. The districts around Proctor, Stadium, Sixth Avenue, Lincoln among others are examples of these types of commercial districts.

These commercial areas are denser and more compact and typically clustered around historic streetcar stops or at major intersections along streetcar routes. Development can be linear or nodal - arranged in a linear pattern along the streetcar line or form compact, mixed-use nodes. Building heights are typically two to three stories, maintaining a comfortable scale for pedestrians. Closely spaced storefronts create a sense of enclosure and human scale that can add to the comfort of pedestrians. Areas with historic buildings can feature buildings with ornamental details, such as brickwork, cornices, and awnings.

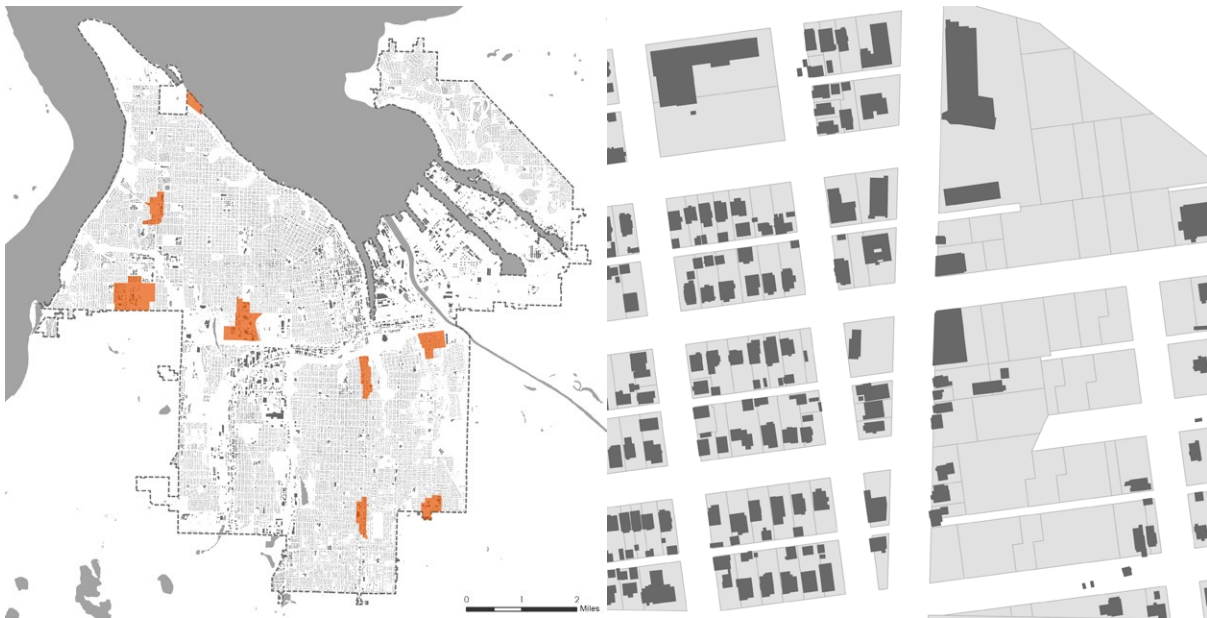


## SUBURBAN COMMERCIAL STRIPS AND MALLS

This typology represents car-oriented areas with shopping plazas or strip malls, such as those built during the 1950s-1970s. This includes the Tacoma Mall, a regional shopping destination with major department stores, chain retailers, and restaurants, and other commercial districts spread throughout the city. These areas with the rise of car-centric suburbanization and the decline of streetcar-based shopping districts. It represents Tacoma's post-war shift toward suburban retail patterns.

Commercial strip malls across the city are typically arranged in a linear pattern along major arterial roads or highways, maximizing exposure to passing vehicles. Most buildings are one or two stories tall. Buildings often have uniform facades, with simple and functional designs to minimize construction costs. Structures are set back from the street, creating space for parking in front of the buildings. Designed primarily for vehicle access, these commercial areas often feature large surface parking lots that dominate the layout. Numerous driveways provide direct access to parking lots, often creating interruptions in pedestrian pathways. Sidewalks and crosswalks may exist but are often disconnected or secondary to vehicle access.

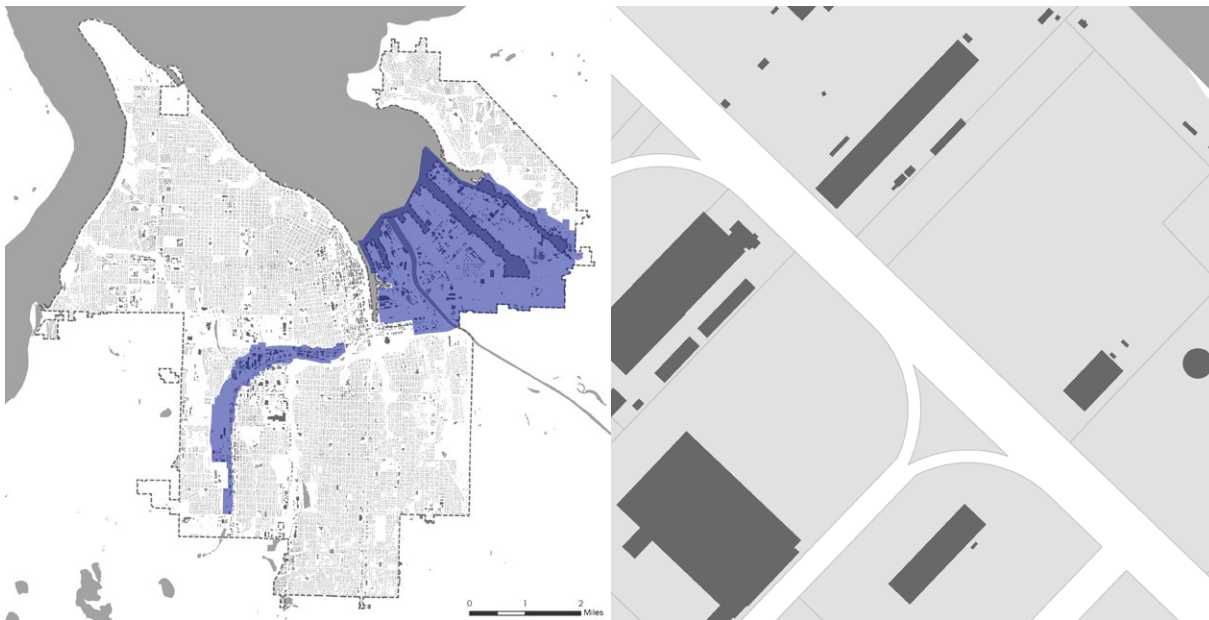
Surface parking is a defining feature of these areas, with parking areas often located between the street and buildings. Large areas of asphalt can create a "sea of parking," with minimal landscaping or public gathering spaces. Landscaping is sparse, typically confined to small islands or buffer zones along the road. Large expanses of asphalt and minimal tree cover contribute to urban heat buildup.



## INDUSTRIAL HUBS

Industrial hubs in Tacoma are located in the Tideflats and South Tacoma. Anchored by the Port of Tacoma, the Tideflats area is dominated by shipping, logistics, and heavy industry, including container terminals and manufacturing facilities. The streetcar system once played a role in transporting workers to and from industrial jobs here. South Tacoma Way is a hub for light manufacturing, trade, and retail auto sales. It includes a mix of auto dealerships, small retail stores, and industrial businesses. This area developed as an industrial corridor and later became known for its concentration of auto-related businesses. It was connected to Downtown and other districts by streetcars as well.

Both areas reflect characteristics typical in industrial areas. Lots are typically larger and include wide expanses of parking or outdoor space to accommodate storage. Large open yards for truck parking, material storage, and loading/unloading bays are common. Buildings are functional, with simple forms and limited ornamentation, and feature utilitarian elements like loading docks. Buildings are often painted in muted, neutral tones like gray, white, or beige. Streets are designed to accommodate large trucks, container vehicles, and forklifts, with turning radii and intersections suited to heavy transport. There is relatively minimal infrastructure for pedestrians, with few sidewalks or public spaces. Landscaping is often sparse, limited to smaller areas to mitigate pollution and noise.



# COMPLETE NEIGHBORHOODS

Existing neighborhoods in Tacoma offer many examples of urban design elements that are important to replicate to achieve the vision of 15-minute neighborhoods. Some examples include:



**HUMAN SCALE**

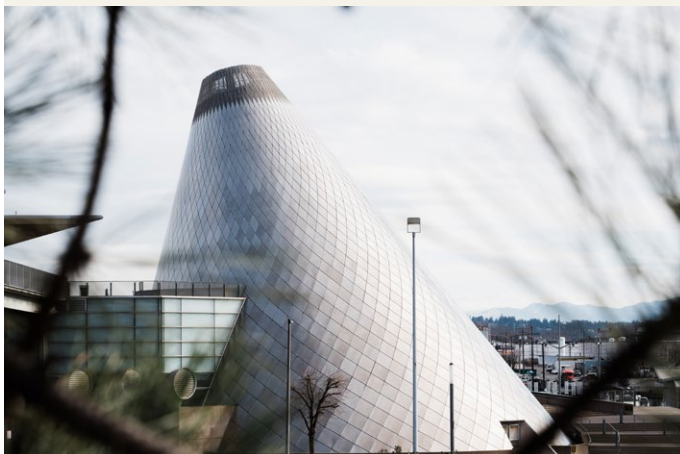
Another key design element of complete neighborhoods is design that matches the size and proportions of humans. Given the importance of walkable places in the 15-minute city vision, neighborhood design should be based on physical elements that correspond to the speed at which humans walk. Building details, street furniture, street trees, and continuous active ground floor uses such as cafes, stores and housing are all examples of elements that can make neighborhoods more human-scaled and comfortable for people. Public spaces that attract people also play a role.

Building design and orientation can also affect human scale. The arrangement of buildings, especially the ground floors, visually defines streets and other public spaces. Spaces where the height of vertical elements is proportional to the width of the space between have an “outdoor room” like quality that can enhance the experience for people.



**IMAGEABILITY**

Imageability refers to the quality of a place that makes it unique and memorable. Distinct views, historical buildings, landmarks, and public art are some examples of elements that make places more imageable. A goal of the 15-minute city is to create neighborhoods that are distinct, memorable and reflect the rich diversity of the city’s history and residents.



**VISUAL RICHNESS**

Neighborhoods should also have rich visual environments to make them more comfortable and complete. Variety in the number and kinds of buildings, diverse architectural styles, landscape elements and signage can all add to the visual richness of neighborhoods. Many of Tacoma beloved neighborhoods reflect this quality.



# HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Goals and policies in this element encourage actions that can make Tacoma's neighborhoods a more welcoming place for all communities.

"As a first generation immigrant myself, after creating a series about first generation Italian immigrants, I wanted to give visibility, through my photography, to the diverse population of individuals living in Tacoma and surrounding areas, who were born in another country."

## PHOTOGRAPHY AND STORIES FROM ALICE DI CERTO

### MASAHIRO (MASA), JAPAN

MASAHIRO (HIS FRIENDS CALL HIM MASA), WAS BORN IN SAITAMA JAPAN. IN HIS PRE-TEEN HE WENT TO LIVE IN SAO PAULO BRAZIL, WHERE HE ATTENDED PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL AND PART OF HIGH SCHOOL.



**RAZMIG, ARMENIA**

RAZMIG WAS BORN IN BEIRUT, LEBANON. HIS GRANDPARENTS SURVIVED THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE IN 1915 PERPETRATED BY THE OTTOMAN TURKS. TURKEY, THE SUCCESSOR OF THE OTTOMANS, TO THIS DATE DOES NOT RECOGNIZE/ NOR ADMITS THESE HORRIBLE ATROCITIES.

**JARED, KENYA**

JARED WAS BORN IN WESTERN KENYA BUT SPENT MOST OF HIS ADOLESCENCE IN NAIROBI, WHERE HE WENT TO PRIMARY, SECONDARY SCHOOL AND LATER EARNED HIS BACHELOR OF EDUCATION WITH EMPHASIS IN MATH.

**KIRTI AND SURTIDA, TANZANIA**

KIRTIDA WAS BORN IN TANZANIA (AT THE TIME CALLED TANGANYIKA), WHERE MOST OF HER FAMILY HAS LIVED FOR 100 YEARS. SURTIDA WAS BORN IN DAR ES SALAM, TANZANIA, WHERE SHE LIVED THROUGH THE END OF HIGH SCHOOL. SHE ATTENDED AN INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL WHERE SHE STUDIED FLUTE AND SAXOPHONE.

# Goals and Policies Organization



**Goals and Policies in this chapter are organized at three scales.**



**NEIGHBORHOOD**

How can you design neighborhoods to be responsive to community needs and advance the larger citywide vision of 15-minute neighborhoods?



**SITE**

How should specific sites be designed so that it relates well to the neighborhood?



**PUBLIC REALM**

How does the design of buildings, streets and public spaces feel at the eye level and work well for people?

## 3.2 Goals + Policies

**GOAL CN-1:** Tacoma’s neighborhoods provide a complete, comfortable, enjoyable experience of everyday life for people of all ages and abilities.



### NEIGHBORHOOD

**Policy CN-1.1:** Design and create clean, attractive buildings, public spaces, and streetscapes at human-scale within neighborhoods to make them comfortable and enjoyable for people year-round and across different times of the day and night.

**Policy CN-1.2:** Ensure all neighborhoods have gathering places for community activity and social connections. This includes public seating, both indoors and outdoors. Encourage co-location of businesses and services adjacent to these spaces that relate to and promote the use of the space for all ages and abilities.

**Policy CN-1.3:** Encourage diverse non-residential uses, particularly those related to community members' daily needs, within walking distance of residential areas to support complete neighborhood goals.

**Policy CN-1.4:** Enhance the walkable, smaller-scale character of neighborhood commercial areas outside of Mixed-Use Centers and increase opportunities for more people to live within walking distance of these neighborhood anchors while preserving the unique features of these areas.

**Policy CN-1.5:** Promote safety throughout the day and night with good lighting and clear sightlines along streets, parks, and other public spaces and design that considers safety and crime prevention.

**SITE**

**Policy CN-1.6:** Promote building and site designs that enhance the pedestrian experience, with windows, entrances, pathways, natural lighting, and other features that provide connections to the street environment.

**Policy CN-1.7:** Incorporate accessible pedestrian pathways through sites to improve walkable connections to neighborhood amenities and essentials.

**PUBLIC REALM**

**Policy CN-1.8:** Ensure that all Tacoma neighborhoods offer a variety of well-designed public and semi-public areas including sidewalks, streets, pathways, courtyards, plazas, and parks that promote community goals such as connectivity, social interaction, and active living.



**GOAL CN-2: People can move within and throughout Tacoma's neighborhoods with ease and efficiency.**

**NEIGHBORHOOD**

**Policy CN-2.1:** Encourage land uses and street system design within neighborhoods that support multimodal options, intermodal transitions, and opportunities to reduce private vehicle trip frequency and distances.

**Policy CN-2.2:** Expand investments in programming and reduce regulatory hurdles to allow street space to be used for mobility as well as play, events or markets, and as social space.

**Policy CN-2.3:** Enhance the pedestrian experience throughout Tacoma, through public and private development that creates accessible and attractive places for all. Prioritize areas where walkability conditions need the most improvement.

**Policy CN-2.4:** Enhance safe, accessible, and low-stress, pedestrian and bicycle access from residential areas to better connect the area with nearby designated mixed-use centers, commercial areas, and community destinations.

**Policy CN-2.5:** Expand or enhance street, sidewalk, and trail system to make connections to Downtown Tacoma and other major destinations.

**Policy CN-2.6:** Plan investments that improve bicycle and pedestrian access from neighborhoods to the waterfront.

**Policy CN-2.7:** Preserve and extend established patterns of connected street grids. Introduce a system of compact blocks (300-400 feet in block face length) where opportunities to do so are feasible

**SITE**

**Policy CN-2.8:** Integrate accessible and efficient paths from buildings to transportation facilities and networks.

**Policy CN-2.9:** Encourage site design that limits driveways and supports non-auto uses.

**Policy CN-2.10:** Establish new or extend adjacent street grid and block patterns with the redevelopment of large site.

**PUBLIC REALM**

**Policy CN-2.11:** Incorporate internal networks of accessible pedestrian pathways with elements for shade, seating, and visual interest to provide those who are walking or rolling with comfortable alternate routes to streets with higher volumes and speeds of motorized vehicles.

**Policy CN-2.12:** Make it easier to navigate the city's network of public spaces by adding wayfinding systems and encouraging visible building features such as corner treatments or others.

**Policy CN-2.13:** Limit future street vacations until such time as the City can review and determine which undeveloped rights of way must be maintained and improved to promote enhanced walkability and non-vehicular route directness.

**Policy CN-2.14:** Provide midblock crossings, particularly along designated Pedestrian Streets, to improve route directness and facilitate a safer pedestrian experience.

**GOAL CN-3: Buildings in Tacoma’s neighborhoods respond to and enhance the distinctive qualities of its location, while accommodating growth and change.**

#### NEIGHBORHOOD

**Policy CN-3.1:** Encourage development that fills in vacant and underutilized gaps within the established urban fabric, while preserving and complementing historic resources and neighborhood context.

**Policy CN-3.2:** Reduce and minimize visual clutter related to billboards, signs, utility infrastructure and other similar elements. Prioritize undergrounding of utilities in designated centers, scenic areas, and along high frequency transit corridors.

**Policy CN-3.3:** Develop design guidelines for certain areas subject to Urban Design Project Review, to account for their particular characteristics and urban design vision.

**Policy CN-3.4:** Pursue a façade improvement loan program and tenant improvement loan program to support business district revitalization.

**Policy CN-3.5:** Maintain and enhance the streetcar era pattern of street-oriented buildings wherever present.

**Policy CN-3.6:** Encourage multi-unit residential development located along the bluffs overlooking downtown to take advantage of the view opportunities.

#### SITE

**Policy CN-3.7:** Encourage well designed buildings and site design across the city to enrich neighborhood appearance, identity and improve quality of life.

**Policy CN-3.8:** Promote site design and building massing that minimizes the impacts of vehicular access and parking lots on pedestrian safety and the visual environment and maximizes public access to light and air.

**Policy CN-3.9:** Encourage both public and private development to create new and preserve existing public views of Mount Rainier, Commencement Bay, Tacoma Narrows, bridges, gulches, the Downtown skyline and other landmark features.

#### PUBLIC REALM

**Policy CN-3.10:** Maintain public views of prominent landmarks and buildings that serve as visual focal points and wayfinding features within streets or that terminate views at the end of streets.

**Policy CN-3.11:** The following scenic views over public property and rights-of-way are recognized as publicly beneficial to Tacoma. Other public views which can be demonstrated to have a similar value to the public may also be considered Public Views:

- a. Views from Stadium Way of Commencement Bay, Browns Point and Mount Rainier
- b. Panoramic views from Ruston Way of Commencement Bay, Vashon and Maury Islands, Mount Rainier, and the Olympics
- c. Views from N Stevens St of Mason Gulch, Commencement Bay and Browns Point
- d. Views from Marine View Drive of the Port, Commencement Bay, and Downtown Tacoma



- e. View from Norpoint Way of the Port, Commencement Bay, and Downtown Tacoma
- f. Views from Narrows Drive of The Narrows, bridges and Gig Harbor
- g. Views from designated viewpoints within Point Defiance Park
- h. Views of downtown, Commencement Bay and the Cascades from McKinley Hill
- i. Views of the Cascades from East Grandview Drive

**Policy CN-3.12:** Explore implementation tools and actions to achieve site designs that are sensitive to important public views.

**Policy CN-3.13:** Consider a building's architectural design and programming, setbacks, and presence along pedestrian streets to ensure a cohesive and vibrant public realm.

**Policy CN-3.14:** Encourage design features along the ground floors that create a human-scaled street wall and an engaging interface for pedestrians.

**GOAL CN-4:** Neighborhood public spaces are welcoming, functional, accessible, and inclusive while responding to local context and community goals.

#### NEIGHBORHOOD

**Policy CN-4.1:** Encourage the development of public and semi-public spaces that support community goals such as promoting active lifestyles throughout the year, heat mitigation, and cultural expression.

#### SITE

**Policy CN-4.2:** Encourage new development to integrate features, elements, and furnishings such as entry courts, seating, planting, and lighting, to create a seamless transition experience to the public realm.



**Policy CN-4.3:** Encourage buildings and open space designs that leverage proximity and provide continuity to existing public gathering places.

#### PUBLIC REALM

**Policy CN-4.4:** Maximize the sense of available continuous inclusive public space by aligning individual site orientations, building setbacks, and design language.

**Policy CN-4.5:** Create opportunities for play and expand programming and amenities that support play for all ages and abilities across Tacoma's neighborhoods.

**GOAL CN-5:** Tacoma's neighborhoods reflect the diverse cultures and heritages that are part of the city and serve as a venue for community creative expression.

#### NEIGHBORHOOD

**Policy CN-5.1:** Enhance and celebrate significant places throughout Tacoma with symbolic features or iconic structures that reinforce local identity, histories, and cultures and contribute to wayfinding throughout the city. Wherever possible, engage artists to create context sensitive additions that enhance these places.

Consider these especially at:

- a. High-visibility intersections
- b. Attractions
- c. Bridges
- d. Rivers
- e. Viewpoints and view corridor locations
- f. Historically or culturally significant places
- g. Neighborhood boundaries and transitions
- h. City-owned facilities
- i. Corridor ends, shifts in street grids



**Policy CN-5.2:** Ensure new development strikes a balance between embracing innovation and change alongside responsiveness to the context of existing neighborhoods.

**Policy CN-5.3:** Create the conditions for healthy and culturally relevant food access in neighborhoods year-round, including support for community gardening, temporary and mobile food access points, and concessions at city-owned and other public facilities.

#### SITE

**Policy CN-5.4:** Encourage the protection and adaptive re-use of existing building and places, including bridges, that contribute to the distinctive character and history of Tacoma's evolving urban environment, regardless of historic designation.

**Policy CN-5.5:** Support and leverage the use of vacant and/or underutilized buildings and facades for creative expression and activities that transform spaces and re-engage community.

#### PUBLIC REALM

**Policy CN-5.6:** Maintain the City's 1% for Art program for all new capital improvement projects, per TMC 1.28B. Public art incorporated into transportation projects should support other goals of this plan.

**Policy CN-5.7:** Incorporate established activities and expand opportunities for cultural and economic activities into the programming and the design of public spaces.

**Policy CN-5.8:** Activate public spaces and parks with locally relevant and accessible programming. Strive to serve the unique needs of youth, elders, and community members with disabilities without having to leave their neighborhood.



**Policy CN-5.9:** Engage artists and culture bearers to integrate art in the design of public spaces and buildings and consider them early in the planning phase to ensure the biggest impact.

**Policy CN-5.10:** Leverage any undeveloped or underutilized public rights-of-way as places for public art and creative expression.

**GOAL CN-6:** Tacoma's neighborhoods are sustainable, resilient, and resource efficient, contributing to environmental health.

#### NEIGHBORHOOD

**Policy CN-6.1:** Seek opportunities to minimize environmental impact at a district scale by considering the collective use of technologies, techniques, and materials across multiple development sites and projects.

**Policy CN-6.2:** Encourage flexibility in the division of land, the siting and design of buildings, and other improvements to reduce the impact of development on environmentally sensitive areas, maintain natural landforms, retain native vegetation, protect tree canopy and heritage trees, and preserve open space.

**Policy CN-6.3:** Preserve, enhance, and connect the city's network of habitat areas and corridors, streams, parks, and tree canopy.

**Policy CN-6.4:** Incorporate climate resilience when designing public spaces and parks. Consider heat resilience strategies and resilience hubs in neighborhoods.

#### SITE

**Policy CN-6.5:** Encourage use of technologies, techniques, and materials in building design, construction, and removal that result in the least environmental impact over the life cycle of the structure. These include, but are not limited to, the use of renewable resources, efficient use of water, low-impact stormwater management, and reduction of urban heat island effects.

**Policy CN-6.6:** Encourage use of vegetation and greenery throughout the development, including on rooftops and infrastructure.

**Policy CN-6.7:** Ensure that new building and site development practices protect and promote environmental health and ecosystem services, such as pollutant reduction, carbon sequestration, air cooling, water filtration, and reduction of stormwater runoff.

**Policy CN-6.8:** Encourage rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of buildings, especially those of historic or cultural significance, to conserve natural resources, reduce waste, and demonstrate stewardship of the built environment.

**Policy CN-6.9:** Promote seismic and energy efficiency retrofits of historic buildings and other existing structures to improve public safety, reduce carbon emissions, and save money.



**PUBLIC REALM**

**Policy CN-6.10:** Encourage durable and sustainable materials in public spaces.

**Policy CN-6.11:** Help people stay cool and safe outdoors by increasing tree canopy and expanding access to parks, green spaces, and cooling centers especially in areas identified as particularly vulnerable to the effects of urban heat islands.

**Policy CN-6.12:** Improve the livability and air quality in places and streets with high motor vehicle volumes. Encourage landscaped front setbacks, street trees, and other design approaches to buffer residents from street traffic.



### 3.3 Priority Actions

ACTION STEP	LEAD DEPARTMENT
Develop Urban Design Project Review design guidelines for specific types of Mixed-Use Centers (e.g., Neighborhood Centers Crossroads Centers)	PDS, Urban Design Studio
Expand the Reduced Parking Area to areas with high-levels of transit service, including the T line.	
Preserve historic bridges that cross the gulches. In particular, maintain the lighting standards and plaques on the North Proctor Bridge that crosses over Puget Gulch.	
Pursue a façade improvement loan program and tenant improvement loan program to support the business district revitalization.	