

Changes hidden in the Mayor's proposed "update" of the Comprehensive Plan

If adopted, the Mayor's proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments would devastate Seattle's neighborhoods. Fortunately, the decision on whether and how to change the Comp Plan is really up to the City Council; at the end of this document are the Councilmembers' e-mails and other contact information.

Following are some of the most significant features of the current Comp Plan's balanced policies and goals which the Mayor proposes to delete or denature. A goal (those with a G) or a policy (those without a G) is deemed deleted if no similar language survives.

Eliminates current protections for affordable housing and neighborhood character. The Mayor proposes to eliminate the Comp Plan's neighborhood planning element, and to eliminate almost all references to neighborhood concerns. For example, the Mayor would delete policy LU11: "In order to maintain the character of Seattle's neighborhoods and retain existing affordable housing, discourage the demolition of residences and displacement of residents, while supporting redevelopment that enhances its community and furthers the goals of the Plan."

Eliminates the Comp Plan's neighborhood focus and neighborhood planning. By deleting the current Comp Plan's entire neighborhood planning element, the Mayor would repeal Seattle's internationally recognized program of grassroots neighborhood planning. He would repeal many other neighborhood-friendly policies and goals such as goal LUG2: "Foster neighborhoods in which current and future residents and business owners will want to live, shop, work, and locate their businesses. Provide for a range of housing types and commercial and industrial spaces in order to accommodate a broad range of families and individuals, income groups, and businesses."

Allows wholesale upzones without regard for local conditions, preferences, and plans. The Mayor would delete policy LU81: "Limit building heights to establish maximum heights, maintain scale relationships with adjacent buildings, and limit view blockage." He would delete policy LU3: "Establish rezone criteria and procedures to guide decisions about which zone will provide the best match for the characteristics of an area and will most clearly further City goals". And he would delete policies LU1, LU5, LU76, LU164 that currently direct that zoning, rezoning, and conditional use changes reflect community preferences, and be consistent with neighborhood plans. Effect of deletion: Ignores community preferences and eliminates the neighborhood planning process.

Removes current expectations for yards, landscaping, and trees. The mayor would delete policy LU34: "Limit the maximum amount of lot area covered by a structure to maintain compatibility with the scale and character of an area, to provide an adequate proportion of open area on a site relative to the area occupied by structures, and to provide occupants with sufficient access to light and air, as appropriate to the intended character and use of an area"; he would delete policy LU39 to "preserve and enhance the City's physical and aesthetic character and environment by preventing untimely and indiscriminate removal or destruction of trees" and to provide incentives to property owners for tree retention; he would policy LU41 for street trees; and he would delete policy UV39 to enhance the tree canopy and understory in urban villages.

Eliminates any balance or sanity in parking policies. The Mayor proposes to delete goals LUG6, LUG6.1, and TG17 and policies LU20, LU49, LU, LU50, T-39, T-40, and T-46 that currently direct that parking policies "account for local objectives," recognize parking as a part of "moving people and goods," consider "access to local businesses," "parking spillover into residential areas," and "truck access and loading," and not "introduce serious safety problems or blighting influences" but rather "achieve vitality of urban centers and urban villages" and "preserve Seattle's competitive position in the region." While deleting those goals and policies, the Comp Plan "update" would introduce two new policies: LU63 to "rely on market forces" for onsite parking and T40 to give higher priority in the allocation of street space to "greening" (e.g. on-street parks) over "storage" (the City's new negative term for parking).

How to contact the City Council

It is urgent to contact the City Councilmembers, who will make the final decision this fall. Be sure to communicate with the City Councilmembers individually, rather than by a collective e-mail or letter (which is far less likely to be heeded). The City Council e-mail addresses are currently as follows: sally.bagshaw@seattle.gov, tim.burgess@seattle.gov, deborajuarez@seattle.gov, bruce.harrell@seattle.gov, rob.johnson@seattle.gov, mike.obrien@seattle.gov, lorena.gonzalez@seattle.gov, lisa.herbold@seattle.gov, and kshama.sawant@seattle.gov. You can also reach City Councilmembers by letter at 600 Fourth Avenue, 2nd floor, P.O. Box 34025, Seattle, WA 98124-4025, or by fax at 206-684-8587. Please cc the Eastlake Community Council at info@eastlakeseattle.org, so we can keep you in the loop as these debates continue to heat up.