

Urgent opportunity to write to and speak before the City Council as it may act on the Mayor’s disastrous proposals for Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan—Mon., Oct. 17 , 2 p.m. at City Hall, 601 Fifth Avenue (public comments start promptly at 2 p.m.). And whether or not you can come, please send a message soon to each Councilmember (addresses below). The Council mustn’t go along with the Mayor’s Comprehensive Plan “update” that would repeal the current Plan’s commitments to public involvement, balanced growth and transportation. The Council should take the time for evening hearings and to restore key policies that the Mayor’s proposal would repeal.

Background. Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan is important because it shapes our neighborhoods and travel patterns and because laws and regulations must conform to it. Currently the Plan recognizes driving and parking as important to the transportation system. It directs that 37 “urban villages” (the biggest business districts outside of downtown plus their nearby apartment/condo zoning) are to grow, but with the livability and scale of a village, planned with residents and other stakeholders. And it maintains the stability of single family areas, even those within the urban villages.

This longstanding consensus would be upended by a radical “update” that the Mayor and his allies are quietly pushing the City Council to adopt this Monday, Oct. 17 (for agenda, click [here](#); for the legislation, click [here](#). It could be adopted by the City Council this Monday, Oct. 17 yet even now is not fully available for public review. It’s really a new plan, lacking current protections for transportation balance, neighborhood livability and public consent. Here’s what the Council needs to do:

Don’t eliminate current balance in land use. The urban villages where developers most want to build would become sacrifice areas for unbridled growth, reducing their incentive to invest in those that lack growth and want it. All would lose current protections for balance with livability, abandoning the Plan’s commitments to village-like scale. The legislation also includes new threats to single-family zoning.

The Mayor would eliminate the Plan’s tailoring of land use and transportation to neighborhood conditions and concerns, repealing this priority: “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.”

Don’t destroy neighborhood planning. Seattle’s acclaimed grassroots neighborhood planning process would be “eviscerated,” according to a committee of the City Neighborhood Council, an official advisory body. The Mayor would replace the commitment to “give all community members the opportunity to participate” with having bureaucrats decide who can participate in planning for their own neighborhood.

Don’t eliminate current brakes on rezones and conditional uses. Stopping these special exceptions is one reason the state requires cities to have and obey a comprehensive plan, but the Mayor wants to facilitate them by repealing the requirements to “maintain scale relationships with adjacent buildings,”

to “limit view blockage”, and to be compatible with surrounding conditions and uses, a neighborhood’s plan, and local preferences.

Don’t abandon current policies to promote yards and large trees in new projects. And contrary to its green rhetoric, the City Council may repeal commitments that new developments include meaningful yards, landscaping, and trees that grow large. Lost would be policies “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,” to prevent “untimely and indiscriminate removal or destruction of trees” and provide incentives to property owners for tree retention.

Don’t adopt an ideological arterial and transit level of service. The Comp Plan’s current level of service by different modes on arterials is the “ratio of measured traffic volumes to calculated roadway capacity,” and for transit is the ratio of bus and rail volumes to calculated capacity. But the Mayor wants to replace those levels of service with one that rates bus, rail, carpool, bicycle, and pedestrian travel simply by its ratio to drive-alone trips.

By rating travel as positive only if by bus, rail, bike or foot, and pitting these modes against driving in a zero sum, this new level-of-service would make the “war on the car” official policy. Wondered why Seattle has master plans for transit, bikes, pedestrians, and freight, but none for cars? The new Comp Plan would be the master plan for cars--and not in a good way.

Don’t remove from the Plan its current protections for parking. The proposed new “update” would remove from the Comp Plan would also replace the current balanced parking policies with ones making it difficult and expensive to park or load. Left unprotected would be neighborhood businesses (especially small locally owned ones), elders, families with children, and people with disabilities.

The City Council must reject the Mayor’s proposal to repeal the following 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”; “preserve Seattle’s competitive position in the region”; “achieve vitality of urban centers and urban villages”; and don’t “introduce serious safety problems or blighting influences.”

The Council should also resist the Mayor’s effort to have onsite parking and loading spaces “rely on market forces” rather than wise regulation; and to give higher priority in the allocation of street space to “greening” (e.g. on-street parks) over “storage” (the new dismissive term for parking and loading).

Do better outreach. State law requires that comprehensive planning be done with extensive and truthful public outreach, with notice to property owners and others likely to be affected. The requirements for amendments are looser, and the Mayor frames this almost entirely new plan as merely an amendment. Except for efforts to build a cheering section, there’s been a minimum of outreach, with few public meetings or hearings, especially outside the business day.

The Mayor let the City Council down with gross lack of transparency. This “update” would furtively repeal most of the Comprehensive Plan, and many of the additions would make matters worse. It’s as if, in the name of “updating” the Constitution and Bill of Rights, everything was replaced with something from another country--and not a good one.

While highly profitable to builders, the social and economic dislocation brought by this pro-growth and anti-car “update” will boomerang on growth itself. The public’s support evaporates if change feels overwhelming and not balanced by livability, good sense, and involvement.

Final thoughts to Councilmembers: These are unbalanced and unvetted proposals. First do no harm! Don’t rush the changes through when you should be focusing on the biennial budget. Inform the public what would be lost by the wholesale repeals and hidden tricks. Hold several evening hearings, and consider and respond to public comments. Then do an authentic update early next year after you’ve taken time to understand and improve what is before you. There is not space here to mention all the deletions and changes that are of concern; see the detailed analyses by the Eastlake Community Council and by a committee of the City Neighborhood Council.

How to contact the City Councilmembers. Be sure to communicate with the nine City Councilmembers individually, rather than by a group e-mail or letter (which is far less likely to be heeded). And please send a copy to the Eastlake Community Council at info@eastlakeseattle.org. Doing so alerts ECC to your concerns so we can keep you informed and involved about follow-up. The City Council e-mail addresses are as follows: sally.bagshaw@seattle.gov, tim.burgess@seattle.gov, rob.johnson@seattle.gov, bruce.harrell@seattle.gov, lisa.herbold@seattle.gov, mike.obrien@seattle.gov, lorena.gonzalez@seattle.gov, deborajuarez@seattle.gov, and kshama.sawant@seattle.gov. You can also reach the 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.