

URBAN CENTER BACKGROUND REPORT

CHAPTER 3



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URBAN CENTER REQUIREMENTS

The Growth Management Act's (GMA) overall goal is to "encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner" (RCW 36.70A.020(1)). A major component of the State, regional, and County goals and policies is to reduce the conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development. A primary way to achieve this objective is to plan urban centers to accommodate the majority of growth, while still providing equitable, well-connected, and amenity-rich centers.

The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) and King County provide framework goals and policies to guide the development of these urban centers in a financially, physically, and environmentally sustainable manner.

Puget Sound Regional Council

PSRC's VISION 2050 calls for the creation and enhancement of existing Urban Centers with a mix of uses and activities connected by efficient transportation networks. Centers are the cornerstone of VISION 2050 and the Regional Growth Strategy, as guide regional growth allocations, advance local planning, inform transit service planning, and represent priority areas for federal transportation funding. SeaTac's Urban Center has been a designated Regional Growth Center by PSRC since 1995.

PSRC's Plan Review Manual contains guidance and requirements in the Regional Center Plans Checklist that addresses planning expectations for Centers' subarea plans. Per this guidance, Growth Centers shall address the following topics in the comprehensive plan, goals and policies, and/or within the subarea plan for the Center itself:

- Affordable housing, including housing targets, needs assessment, affordable housing goals, and strategies to encourage new housing production with long-term affordability.
- Displacement risk analysis and strategies to prevent or mitigate displacement.
- Transit access, including transit service, transit-dependent populations, and safe and connected pedestrian and bicycle networks.
- Equitable community engagement.
- Access to opportunity, including employment and education opportunities and neighborhood quality of life.
- Environmental justice impacts.
- Specific transportation planning investments, programs, and resources identified.
- Availability of public services, like K-12 education, to meet needs of households with children.

PSRC conducts monitoring of performance measures for individual centers, including tracking progress towards growth targets and mode split goals, tracking implementation actions, and/or tracking other measures consistent with the designation requirements noted above. As part of this ongoing monitoring, PSRC develops and regularly updated a profile for every Center. The following section provides a summary of some of the demographic, job, housing, and transportation data within SeaTac's Urban Growth Center Profile.

Demographics from PSRC’s Regional Growth Center profile on SeaTac’s Urban Center

- **SeaTac’s Urban Growth Center is approximately 885 acres in size, with a population of approximately 12,580 people in 2022.** The Urban Center’s highest age group is 35 to 49 years old, at about 26%; closely following by ages 18 to 34 (24.8%) and those under 17 years old (24.1%).
- **The Urban Center’s highest race and ethnicity group in 2022 is Black or African American, making up approximately 35% of the population.** Non-Hispanic white and Hispanic or Latino follow with approximately 22.7% and 21.9% of the population, respectively.
- **The income bracket most prevalent within the Urban Center is households with incomes between \$20,000 and \$35,000, at 17%.** This income bracket is considered under the 30% of the average median income (AMI) of King County. The income brackets of \$35,000 to \$50,000 (30% AMI) and \$50,000 to \$75,000 (~50% AMI) are also prevalent in the Urban Center, with 16% and 16.9% of the population in these ranges respectively.

Housing

- SeaTac’s Urban Center currently has approximately 5,170 housing units.
- Moderate-density and high-density housing are the most prominent housing types in the Urban Center, with 25.6% and 25% of the housing stock in the Urban Center respectively.

Table BR3.1 below summarizes the housing by type within the Urban Center.

TABLE BR3.1 – HOUSING BY TYPE TRENDS			
TYPE	2012	2017	2022
SF detached	25.5%	20.1%	19.5%
Moderate-low density	22.1%	18.3%	21.9%
Moderate-high density	18.3%	21.3%	25.6%
High density	21.1%	31.5%	25.0%
Other	13.0%	8.7%	8.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Source: Puget Sound Regional Council’s Regional Growth Center Profile on SeaTac, published 2024.			

Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map: Urban Center and Urban Villages

City of SeaTac



Land Use Data Effective Jan 1 2025

Land Use Inside the Urban Center

- Urban Residential Medium
- Urban Residential High
- Urban Residential High-Mixed Use
- Urban Village Medium
- Urban Village High
- Urban Commercial High

Land Use Outside the Urban Center

- Residential Low
- Residential Medium
- Residential High
- Neighborhood Village Medium
- Neighborhood Village High
- Commercial Low
- Commercial High

Land Use Citywide

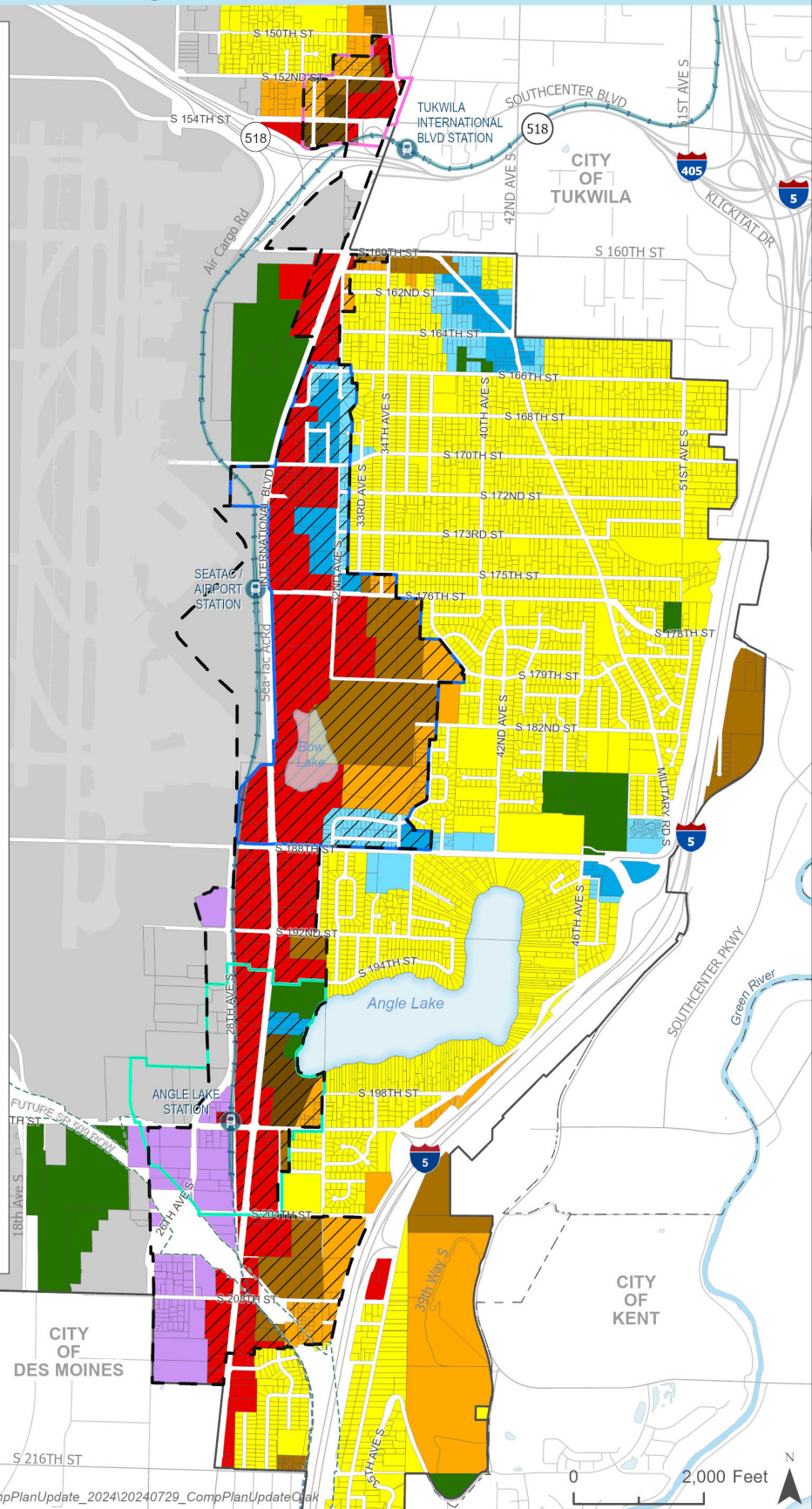
- Regional Business Mix
- Industrial
- Airport
- Park
- Urban Center Boundary
- City Center Overlay District
- S 154th Station Area Overlay District
- Angle Lake Station Area Overlay District

City Boundary

- City of SeaTac
- Other Cities

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Prepared by the City of SeaTac. All rights reserved. This product has been compiled from the best available data. No warranty is expressed or implied as to accuracy, completeness, or fitness for any specific use. Not to be used for purposes of legal description or definition. Not a substitute for a professional survey. Sources: City of SeaTac, King County, Sound Transit, WSDOT, NearMap (2023).

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Map BR3.1. Urban Center Land Use Map

Jobs

- There are approximately 21,070 jobs within the Urban Center, the vast majority of which, approximately 59%, are wholesale, transportation, and utility-related jobs.

Table BR3.2 below summarizes the jobs by sector within the Urban Center.

TABLE BR3.2 – JOBS BY SECTOR		
Construction / Resources	*	*
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	690	3%
Manufacturing	*	*
Retail	70	0%
Services	6,700	32%
Wholesale, Transportation & Utilities	12,330	59%
Government	120	1%
Public Education	0	0%
Total	21,070	100%
* Employment data is suppressed		
Source: Puget Sound Regional Council's Regional Growth Center Profile on SeaTac.		

Transportation

- Overall, the Urban Center saw a decrease in residents driving alone of approximately 5% from 2012 to 2022.
- This correlates with the approximate 5% increase in residents working from home, when comparing 2012 and 2022.

TABLE BR3.3 – MODE OF TRAVEL TO WORK TRENDS			
TYPE	2012	2017	2022
Drove Alone	60.8%	59.4%	55.1%
Carpooled	21.3%	9.3%	15.9%
Transit	11.5%	17.6%	9.2%
Bike	0.1%	0.7%	0.0%
Walk	3.9%	9.9%	9.9%
Work from Home	2.4%	2.5%	7.7%
Other	0.1%	0.7%	2.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Source: Puget Sound Regional Council's Regional Growth Center Profile on SeaTac, published 2024.			

Existing Activity Units

To align with PSRC’s Regional Growth Center guidance, RGC’s must plan to accommodate a certain minimum density of jobs and housing called “activity units.” Per PSRC, an activity unit is a person or a job. According to PSRC’s, “Urban” type Regional Growth Centers, like SeaTac’s shall have a minimum existing density of 18 activity units per acre. With SeaTac’s Urban Center’s size of 855 acres, the existing population being 12,580, and existing job count being 21,070, the current activity units for SeaTac’s Urban Growth Center is approximately 39.36 activity units per acre.

SeaTac Urban Center/RGC Activity Unit Requirement Summary Activity Unit Calculations

- **Size:** 885 acres
- **Population:** 12,580
- **Jobs:** 21,070
- **Minimum activity units per acre for “Urban” centers:** 18 activity units per acre
- **SeaTac RGC activity units (2024):** 39.26 activity units per acre

Urban Growth Center Strategy, Targets, and Capacity

Demographics from PSRC’s Regional Growth Center profile on SeaTac’s Urban Center

PSRC’s regional growth strategy requires that the majority of the region’s growth is focused within designated Regional Growth Centers that are classified within two type categories: Urban and Metro (SeaTac’s RGC is classified within the “Urban” category, and is referred to as the “Urban Center,” rather than RGC.) Additionally, PSRC’s strategy requires that Centers should accommodate at least 65% of the regional population growth and 75% of the regional job growth.

SeaTac’s citywide growth strategy aligns with the regional growth strategy by planning to accommodate at least 65% of the City’s anticipated population growth and 75% of the City’s anticipated job growth by 2044 within the city’s RGC/Urban Center. The table below demonstrates how SeaTac’s Urban Center’s adopted growth targets and zoned capacity meets these RGC targets.

TABLE BR3.4 – SEATAC URBAN CENTER EXISTING CONDITIONS, ALLOCATED GROWTH TARGET, AND ZONED CAPACITY			
Growth Targets	Existing (Baseline) Conditions	Adopted Growth Center Target	Zoned Development Capacity (meet or exceed target)
Population	12,580	9,402	10,741
Housing Units	5,170	4,031	4,605
Employment	21,070	6,983	6,991*
* While the SeaTac International Airport lays outside of the Urban Center, it is an integral part of the City’s and the Urban Center’s job market. The airport expects to see an additional 4,900 jobs by 2044; and with the addition of these jobs to the Urban Center’s zoned capacity, the total capacity for 2044 is 11,891 jobs.			

The Urban Center's zoned capacity utilizes the City's citywide Land Capacity Analysis (Appendix BR5.A) as well as the City Center specific Market Analysis Report (Appendix BR3.A). The City Center Market Analysis identified six key takeaways in its analysis:

1. Multifamily, hospitality, and commercial parking garages, potentially alongside retail space, are the likeliest near-term development opportunities in the City Center.
2. As the City waits for key underutilized sites to redevelop, it could establish interim or temporary uses such as food cart pods or parklets.
3. The profitability of existing uses and lack of underutilized land in the City Center contribute to high land prices that could impact development feasibility. High land prices exacerbate the feasibility challenges already present due to rising material and labor costs as well as interest rates.
4. Current softness in the office market makes it unlikely that new office space will be built in the near term.
5. Sites with the highest redevelopment potential are generally those with relatively low land values, typically under \$60 per square foot, especially those near the Airport Station.
6. If redevelopment occurs in a pattern that does not fit the needs of the district's diverse communities, there could be increased risks of economic and cultural displacement of residents and potentially businesses. Implementing anti-displacement policies for businesses and residents will help avoid significant negative impacts of new development.

Growth Targets and Capacity with the Urban Center Subareas

The Urban Center contains three subareas - City Center, Angle Lake Station, and 154th Station Area, which are described in the Subarea section below. While not required by the PSRC, the City has taken further steps to identify the capacity for each subarea, also referred to as urban villages, and adopt growth targets for each one. The capacity and growth targets for each subarea, and the areas within the Urban Center outside of the subareas, are detailed in Table BR3.5 below.

Planned Activity Units Versus Existing Activity Units

Planned Activity Units differ from the existing 18 activity units requirements, noted above, as the planned activity units is measuring the Urban Center's capacity for activity units, whereas the existing units only measures the activity units currently existing.

Planned Activity Units

According to PSRC's guidance, Urban-type RGCs shall plan for densities of at least 45 activity units per acre. With SeaTac's Urban Growth Center's size of 885 acres, the existing population and zoned capacity being 23,321, and existing and zoned capacity job count being 28,061, the planned activity units for SeaTac's Urban Growth Center is approximately 58.10 activity units per acre.

Planned Activity Units With Airport Jobs

SeaTac's proximity to the SeaTac International Airport plays a pivotal role in SeaTac's Citywide job count, as it provides over half of the City's available jobs currently, in 2024. However, Puget Sound Regional Council staff have confirmed that Airport-related properties are outside of the City's Urban Center. As the Airport plays a pivotal role in the City's

employment numbers, the City's Urban Center activity units were also calculated with entirety of the SeaTac Airport; the following outlines the Urban Center's activity units while incorporating the jobs provided by the entire airport.

- With SeaTac's Urban Center's size of 885 acres, the existing population and zoned capacity being 23,321, and existing and zoned capacity job count being 32,961 (with the addition of the airport jobs), the planned activity units for SeaTac's Urban Center is approximately 63.60 activity units per acre.

King County Guidance

King County provides guidance for the development of regional growth centers within the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs). Along with the objective to focus housing and employment growth in these areas, other guiding principles include:

- Evaluate potential physical, economic, and cultural displacement of residents, particularly for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color communities; immigrants and refugees, low-income populations; disabled communities; and other communities at greatest risk of displacement; and use a variety of strategies to mitigate these risks.
- Encourage infill and redevelopment, and the adaptive reuse of existing building and underutilized land.
- Promote high-quality design and site planning throughout the Urban Growth Area.
- Promote high levels of connectivity, including walking, bicycling, and transit to promote health and well-being.
- Provide a land use pattern that allows for a diverse range of uses, promoting the creation of smaller centers or activity nodes where housing, employment, and service opportunities are available in a compact form.

SeaTac's Urban Center goals and policies were developed consistent with these guiding principles.

SUBAREAS

SeaTac's Comprehensive Plan also includes three Subarea Plans, which are similar to Comprehensive Plans in that they address a variety of topics (e.g., land use, transportation, urban design) but apply to a specific geographic area of the City. SeaTac's adopted Subarea Plans include those for the City Center, South 154th Street Station Area, and Angle Lake Street Station Area. All three subareas are located within SeaTac's Urban Center and are recognized as "urban villages" in this Plan's citywide growth strategy, that not only anchor the Urban Center, but also serve as central community hubs or small "downtown" service centers for adjacent residential and business communities

City Center Urban Village

The current subarea plan for City Center, City Center Plan, was adopted December, 1999, although portions of the City Center Plan were amended through the 2010 Comprehensive Plan Amendment Process. Additionally in February 2020, City Council adopted the City Center Plan Update Phase 1 Vision Report, which established an updated growth and development vision for SeaTac's central airport business district and neighborhood as a "global gateway to the Pacific Northwest" and an active, enticing, and walkable urban place.

The City is developing a subarea plan to refine and implement the updated vision, and anticipates its adoption in 2025. The subarea plan will update the goals and objectives for short- and long-term development and investment in the City Center to reflect the changes made as part of the 2024 periodic update of the comprehensive plan, including revisions to various strategies intended to better support the transition of the area into a more transit-oriented, equitable, and complete urban village.

South 154th Street Station Urban Village

The South 154th Street Station Area Action Plan, adopted December 2006, provides a framework for the development of a mixed use, transit-oriented center in the area adjacent to Sound Transit's Tukwila International Blvd. (S. 154th St.) Light Rail station. The plan seeks to highlight the proximity to the light rail station by encouraging new business and services opportunities provided to residents, and opportunities for new housing. Two large mixed use apartment projects constructed just before adoption of this plan largely implement the envisioned urban village core, and the City is continuing to assess how City-owned parcels can be used to further SeaTac's goals for the area

Angle Lake Station Urban Village

The Angle Lake District Station Area Plan, adopted July 2015, provides a framework for development of the area adjacent to Sound Transit's Angle Lake Light Rail station. Like the South 154th Street station area plan, this plan seeks to optimize the district's close proximity to the light rail station and envisions the creation of a transit- and pedestrian-oriented, culturally diverse, center with convenient access to jobs, services, and open space. As of Fall 2024, multiple mixed use developments and hundreds of apartment units were under construction in locations close to the Angle Lake station.

Urban Village Growth Capacity

SeaTac's three urban villages occupy approximately 563 acres of land within the Urban Center (around 66% of the Urban Center's 885 total acres). The citywide growth strategy calls for most growth to be focused within the Urban Center and a majority of future housing and commercial growth to be directed within the urban villages (see Land Use and Urban Center elements for specific policies).

The table below shows that:

- The urban villages, combined, have the land use capacity to accommodate a majority of the Urban Center's 2044 population and housing unit targets, in line with the citywide growth strategy; and
- While the urban villages can accommodate some, but not a majority of the Urban Center's 2044 job target, the citywide growth strategy is focused on directing the majority of the Urban Center's commercial development, such as hotel, office, retail/restaurant uses, within the urban villages, not job growth.

TABLE BR3.5 – URBAN CENTER GROWTH TARGETS AND URBAN VILLAGE GROWTH CAPACITY (2020-2044)				
SeaTac Urban Center			Urban Villages (City Center, S 154th station area and Angle Lake station area)	
Growth Targets	Existing (Baseline) Conditions	Adopted Growth Center Target (2044)	Growth Capacity (2044)	Growth Capacity as % of Urban Center Total Target
Population	12,580	9,402	8,860	94%
Housing Units	5,170	4,031	3,799	94%
Jobs	21,070	6,983	3,699	53%