

Hillside Development Council

October 1, 2008

Comments on the Proposed Downtown Plan Update

Background: On April 1, 2008 the Hillside Development Council released its “Vision for the HDC Area”. The “Vision” was provided to Peter Huffman, Eric Anderson, City Staff, City Councilmember’s and has been available online at our web site. As stated in this document the boundaries of the area are: South 17th Street to South Tacoma Way and A Street to Court F. Our comments are based on our “Vision” document, highlighted in **blue** and our letter to the City dated June 26, 2008 regarding the Prairie Line Trail, highlighted in **brown**. Complete copies of both documents are attached.

There are four major areas where we feel the proposed Downtown Plan Update must be improved. These are presented below in the chronological order we feel they need to be addressed:

Number 1

Section 3.3B on page 71 addresses the Sound Transit D to M Street connector. Property acquisition, design and engineering are already underway on this project. By the time the Downtown Plan is accepted, construction could be underway. Planning for this project cannot wait. The Economic Development Department must place this as one of their top priorities rather than hoping that the Citizens and Public Works partnering with Sound Transit will be able to craft the best solution.

Number 2

“21st Street should be improved from Pacific to Yakima Avenues and be designated as the primary access route for travelers moving east-west. A convenient, free-flowing transition from 21st Street to Yakima Avenue then to 19th Street must be developed. This street requires attention to grades, widening and replacing the roadbed and sidewalks, and assigning traffic priority- all accomplished in a visually attractive manner.”

The importance of 21st Street from Pacific Avenue to Tacoma Avenue is ignored in this document. On the page 47 map, the section of 21st Street between Tacoma and Yakima Avenues is marked for a street upgrade but that is the only mention in this document. The language contained in our “Vision” document relating to 21st Street must be included in the Downtown Plan Update.

Number 3

“Tacoma Avenue should be developed as the broad, landscaped thoroughfare it was intended to be with four lanes for traffic and without angle parking.”

Although Tacoma Avenue is mentioned throughout the document the main focus is on page 94. The wording of “Limited Driveway Access” as written would hinder existing businesses and limit future development on this important arterial. Because Fawcett Avenue is designated as a “Cycling Boulevard” and because Yakima Avenue also is a major cycling arterial, even more vehicular traffic will be using Tacoma Avenue as a major North-South route through Tacoma. Tacoma Avenue already has ample sidewalks and parking strips to create a pedestrian friendly space. Therefore the updated Downtown Plan should treat Tacoma Avenue as a four lane arterial, removing the angle parking and not including other “street furniture” in future plans.

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Number 4

“Height restrictions should be considered in relationship to the structure and fabric of the area”

The proposed Downtown Plan does not address height restrictions within the area we represent. We feel that Jefferson Avenue is a natural boundary between the “historic” portion of our neighborhood and the newer, mostly undeveloped part. This portion of our neighborhood has much in common with the Downtown Core and is home to future development by the University of Washington Tacoma. Height restrictions in the area West of Jefferson Avenue need to ensure that future growth is not impeded.

There are two other issues we feel that the Downtown Plan Update should address:

It is our view that at this time this agreement with 20 ft right of way as explained to us would present extreme economic hardship to all the privately held properties to the east of that right of way. It would:

- ***Limit access at the rear of these building from Hood St. from 21st St. to what would be 26th St. that have had access both from Holgate and Hood St for over a hundred years.***
- ***Sale of pieces of the right of way to various property owners would disturb this historic access causing property to devalue and businesses to move or make major investments to shift their entrance points.***

The Downtown Plan Update fails to address the problem on Hood Street although the Prairie Line trail is addressed on pages 61 and 70. Specifically on page 61 there is mention that this area should be a “sunlight access priority area” yet by the City failing to prevent the ‘land locking’ of properties owners will be forced to develop the property to recoup their investment rather than by leaving Hood Street as a street. The plan must include steps to obtain the full width of the right of way from BNSF.

“The Jefferson Avenue and Market Street corridor should become the high density spine for the district as well as the whole of Tacoma’s downtown. The City owned property bound by Jefferson and Tacoma Avenues, 21st and 23rd Streets could become the home for a large anchor tenant.”

City owned properties within our area provide the catalyst for future development. Unwillingness on the part of the City to develop the property they own has held the area back. This Downtown Plan should address this issue and consider the need for parking, transportation and other infrastructure developments to spur on the vitality of the neighborhood.