

## The Livable U District Coalition Opposes Adoption of Seattle 2035.

Livable U District (LUD) is a true grass roots ad hoc coalition of University District renters, homeowners, small businesses, organizations and their supporters committed to preserving both the livability and affordability of Seattle's University District. Dozens of individuals and organizations have thus far endorsed LUD's position statement found at [livableudistrict.com](http://livableudistrict.com). (Attached)

Serious livability problems exist in the U District right now that will be increased by the goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan. These include unmanageable traffic congestion, a lack of open space, loss of tree canopy, loss of existing affordable housing and historic buildings, public safety issues, insufficient parking for residents and businesses, and a growing homeless population lacking services and shelter. Seattle 2035 lacks the teeth to address these problems.

The Comprehensive Plan focuses growth in Urban Centers and Urban Villages and targets the University District for massive upzoning. A draft U District upzone Ordinance is poised for council adoption after Seattle 2035 is approved. But rezoning before putting in place necessary infrastructure and livability measures will merely layer greater density over existing problems, making them harder to solve.

Over the last two decades, the City has failed to live up to the guidelines contained in the original 1994 Comp Plan and the intent of the Growth Management Act that infrastructure should keep pace with growth. It is mystifying and inexcusable that Seattle has not adopted a framework of developer impact fees to help pay for providing better streets, schools, open spaces, and public services. **As a first priority, the city must develop and adopt legislation requiring impact fees** to ensure that developers pay their fair share of the costs of growth.

Seattle must preserve the natural environment: it must have publically controlled open space and street trees, and green grassy parks and playfields --- not just painted asphalt or concrete. Seattle 2035 does not value parks and green spaces nearly as much as it should. It abandons the former goal of establishing one acre of open space for every 100 residents, and instead resorts to vague statements about seeking "new strategies" to take advantage of limited open space opportunities. But – just think of how many parks could have been acquired or improved if only Seattle had been imposing open space impact fees for the last 20 years?!

The Livable U District Coalition urges the Council to Suspend Action on Seattle 2035, re-think and re-work the policy direction it contains, and Tackle First Things First.

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## Livable U District - Additional Information

### Current Affordability & Livability

For many decades the U District has been an affordable area not only for students and UW staff, but also for long time residents, seniors and others. Low rents for many small businesses also provide a diversity of inexpensive ways for residents, students, and workers to eat, drink, socialize, and shop.

### Drastic U District Changes & Its Impacts

The UW plans, in cooperation with developers and City of Seattle staff, to upzone (allow larger buildings) in the District. It will allow building heights up to 320' and create a high-tech Innovation District that will bring in multiple, expensive high-rise office towers in the heart of the District's current residential neighborhood.

This will destroy current U District benefits and create the following problems:

- Directly eliminate about 500 low-income units.
- Increase land values that will eliminate the affordability of another 1,000 units and increase property taxes.
- Force the current small businesses out of their storefronts because of increased rents from higher land values.
- Increase traffic, while *reducing* the amount of parking.
- Change the neighborhood from a community of residents and small shops to an expansion of the UW campus and UW and corporate office buildings.
- Will strain already over-stressed public services & infrastructure.

### First Things First

The upzones will significantly increase problems that already exist in the U District, such as unmanageable traffic congestion, a lack of parking, lack of open space, loss of tree canopy, and loss of existing affordable housing and historic buildings. Under existing zoning, including planned and permitted structures, the U District exceeds 150% of its City-assigned growth target for 2024. Necessary infrastructure is not keeping pace. Seattle should address the current problems and put First Things First.

### Follow the Money

The main promoters of the upzones are those who will benefit financially from them: the UW, large property and business owners on the University District Partnership Board, and its committees, the City of Seattle, and developers.

### Affordability

According to the 2013 Heartland report done for the City: "69% of the total households [in the U District] earn less than \$50,000" and "65% of the apartments were built before 1990," which means that they are generally the more affordable market rate apartments.

Yet already "a new group of higher end market developments are being developed in the U District" and the City, UW, developers, etc. are pushing for commercial highrises significantly higher than South Lake Union, and residential highrises where, according to one local developer, tenants "would need salaries of at least 80k to afford." In short, U District rents would skyrocket, not be more affordable.

### Density

While it may not appear so, Seattle is already quite densely populated. For cities over 200,000, Seattle is the fifth densest city west of the Mississippi and will soon overtake Los Angeles as the fourth densest.

The U District's population already exceeds its 2024 growth targets, which, according to past Comprehensive Plans, means the District should halt development until necessary infrastructure can be built to keep up.

### Open Space

While most in the community want more open space and tree canopy to create a more livable U District, proponents of the high-rise upzoning want something different. For example, Scott Soules, who owns buildings/land near where open space has been proposed, says "... urban public parks and spaces in Seattle are centers for crime and anti-social behavior ...." An Urban Land Institute report recommends that the city count as "open space" areas *inside* with the retail shops in the tower the UW plans to build over the new light rail station. The upzone ordinance and proposed Comp Plan would allow redefining open space to include privately owned areas that would be open to the public only during regular business hours.

### Parking

The City's target growth in the U District is 2,000 people through 2024. With current planned and permitted units exceeding 3,100, developers of those units provide parking for less than half that number. This 1,600 fewer parking spaces than units is more than the street parking in the entire U District core. This only increases both community traffic congestion and individual parking aggravation.