

UNIVERSITY PARK COMMUNITY CLUB

Office of Planning and Community Development
Att. Mr. Dave LaClergue
700 5th Ave
Suite 1800
Seattle WA, 98124

Via e-mail

RE: U-District Rezone Ordinance

15 July 2016

Dear Mr. LaClergue,

Our University Park Community Club members have been following the discussions around the U-District Urban Design proposal with great interest. We are not directly located within the planning area, but urban design decisions will affect the quality of life in all U-District neighborhoods, including University Park.

The Draft Recommendations dated May 27, 2016 list four major planning goals: Zoning Changes, Development Standards, Affordable Housing Requirements and Amenities. Unfortunately the emphasis of the proposal is on zoning changes, softened by new development standards. This falls far short of the comprehensive planning effort we expect. We therefore cannot support this proposal unless other issues are adequately addressed.

We and other groups and individuals have repeatedly pointed out the shortcomings of the present plan, as previously presented in the U-District Urban Design EIS, but so far most of our comments have been ignored.

A truly Comprehensive Plan would take into consideration increased and expanded amenities, which are needed as growth occurs. These amenities are part of the necessary infrastructure and must be incorporated in the plans, including appropriate funding mechanisms. It has finally been impressed on the planners that affordable housing is one of these amenities, but this was addressed only after the Mayor convened the HALA Advisory Committee in late 2014 in response to Seattle's housing crisis, and the HALA Committee issued its recommendations in 2015. The inclusion of the "Grand Bargain" for affordable housing is now used as an example of how important growth issues are being addressed as part of upzones, but it camouflages the fact that other amenities have fallen by the wayside, and at best, are mentioned as possibilities in the U-District Urban Design proposal. We need a REAL BARGAIN to also address and fund other infrastructure needs through impact fees.

The fact that Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) requirements have been added to the original plan shows, that if there is political will, it is possible to go beyond just an upzone and take a broader view of urban design. This concept should be expanded, but it requires leadership and better collaboration between City Departments and other agencies, which still operate too much in their own silos.

Issues that should have been addressed include the following:

1. A comprehensive mobility plan for the U-District. This must include good pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between Light Rail, buses, neighborhoods and the University of Washington. It also must address freight mobility, private car circulation and parking, including disability parking. Only fragments of such a plan exist.

2. Public Open Space near the core of the U-District. This has repeatedly come up as a high priority for the neighborhood and would address the documented open space deficiency. The potential funding for this amenity comes from incentive zoning fees, but these are inadequate, and the present plan all but assures that this vision will never come true.

3. Public Schools and Family Housing. The lack of public schools is well known, but there is no path forward to improve this situation. There is talk about encouraging the construction of larger units for families, however, in the end it is up to the developers to decide, and unfortunately, direct experience shows that studios and single bedroom units are financially more attractive. Of course without appropriate living space for families, we do not need any schools.

4. Housing Affordability. The MHA legislation is a step in the right direction, but it is insufficient and too generous to developers. One-to-one replacement of existing affordable units must become mandatory.

5. Social Services and Health Care. We have another crisis here, and homelessness and substance abuse are getting worse. Funding for the growing need for care facilities and programs, and their operation is not addressed in the upzone proposal, but should be.

6. Other services such as police and public utilities must also keep pace with the population increase. An upzone must include funding to expand the necessary infrastructure.

It should be noted that all these issues were addressed as part of the Guiding Principles developed for the U-District Urban Design Framework in 2013. An upzone must fit into this framework and provide funding resources to achieve the desired goals. There must also be ongoing monitoring and control to assure that the framework goals are indeed met.

The present uncontrolled growth of Seattle must be replaced by a focused and channeled approach, where a major portion of the increased property value flows back to the public in the form of improved amenities. Despite being mentioned as a major plan component, support for these amenities is mostly missing in the U-District Urban Design proposal.

Conspicuously absent in the planning is the fact, that as part of its 2018 Master Plan, by 2034 the University of Washington expects to increase its campus population by around 20,000, and add 6 million square feet of new construction, half of which in the West Campus area. This will add more pressure on the U-District infrastructure, in addition to the population and job increases projected in the EIS.

In summary, the U-District Urban Design Proposal is incomplete and if this legislation proceeds as presently proposed, known existing problems will be exacerbated. It must be modified to include the missing parts mentioned in our letter.

With best regards,



Ruedi Risler, UPCC President

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cc. all Seattle City Council Members, Mayor Murray