

CITY OF KIRKLAND: DOWNTOWN STRATEGIC PLAN

Phase 1: Community Conversation Summary July 16, 2007

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND VISIONING

The City of Kirkland and the Downtown Kirkland Advisory Committee sponsored a Community Conversation for residents to provide early feedback that will guide the Downtown Strategic Plan. The meeting was held on Monday, July 16, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Kirkland Teen Union Building. The meetings were advertised on the City's website, in utility bills, on posters and flyers in the community, through a press release distributed to all local papers, and through local organizations including the Chamber of Commerce and the Kirkland Downtown Association.

Approximately 80 members of the public participated. Mayor Lauinger and DAC co-chairs Mike Nelson and Jeff Trager introduced the project purpose, scope, and timeline. DAC members led small groups in a discussion of the following questions:

- What are Downtown Kirkland's most notable strengths?
- What challenges does Kirkland face?
- What opportunities are available to the City?
- How do you envision Kirkland in 5-10 years?

After the small group discussions, representatives from each group reported the highlights of their conversations to the rest of the Community Conversation participants. Comments made in small group conversations were recorded on flip charts by volunteer facilitators. A complete summary of the comments is attached. Numbers in parenthesis indicated when a comment was made multiple times.

Key Themes

During the small group sessions, group members discussed what they felt were Downtown Kirkland's strengths, challenges, opportunities, and vision for the future. In general, participants care about downtown and consider it an important part of Kirkland's identity. Participants consider Lake Washington and downtown's access to natural beauty as an important part of what makes downtown a special place for residents and for tourists. Other strengths include the human-scale dimensions of the area and walkability, safety and friendly character, and high quality of life based on civic and commercial amenities, including restaurants and retail, parks, the library, and the Kirkland Performing Arts Center. Traffic and parking are considered significant challenges for downtown Kirkland. Participants were also concerned about the high rents and high retail turnover in the downtown.

Participants' vision for downtown is a more vibrant version of the existing downtown. They envisioned that the downtown would retain its identity and character while providing opportunities for appropriately scaled development. Many participants would like to see the downtown develop in a bowl or tiered fashion, limiting building heights in the core, with increasing heights further from the water. Participants were interested in strategies to encourage and support more vibrant and stable retail development, including services for residents and tourists. Many groups also mentioned expanding opportunities for downtown office space. Participants were interested in improving connectivity for pedestrians and cars between the Lake and Parkplace to expand the downtown footprint.

What are Kirkland's Most Notable Strengths?

Good Geographic Location, Parks, Open Spaces, and Natural Surroundings

- Natural surroundings: lakes, parks (2)
- Appreciate Peter Kirk Park for its open space and waterfront and playfields (3)
- Enjoy waterfront and accessibility to the Lake (5)
- Good parks and open spaces: Waverly, Marina, Carillon (3)
- We are the waterfront of the eastside
- Green

Accessibility and Scale

- Walkability, pedestrian friendly, for example Lake Street to Fish Café and Kirkland Parkplace to Central Avenue (6)
- The one block of Park Lane is great to walk on
- Good freeway access from downtown
- Mobility
- City is scaled to humans (3)
- There is great boat access from the marina
- Strategic location/accessibility
- User friendly, easy parking/free parking, access, street side parking

The Community, Quality of Life, Amenities

- Community members are interested and involved (2)
- Responsive city government (3)
- Access to good public transit system; good transit center
- Diversity of facilities for sports, entertainment, and retail
- Well-maintained parks/facilities, i.e. the maintenance of flowers (2)
- Good schools
- Kirkland is kid and family friendly
- Safe community
- Library (2)
- Restaurants (3)
- There are great businesses and amenities in downtown including the bookstore, a place to hang out, the marina, hotels, QFC, the Kirkland Performing Arts Center and others
- Parkplace is great to have near downtown
- Good community facilities, including the senior center and town center (3)
- Enjoy a variety of amenities including movies, galleries, tennis courts, swimming pool, the Argosy (2),
- Pets Persona
- Pet friendly (2)
- "Not Bellevue"
- Mixture of generations
- 24-hour population
- Art-sensitive community, i.e. the art center (3) and public art, (2) art center, and the Kirkland Performance Center (2)
- Diversity of population
- Enjoy City and downtown events including summer concerts, the Lights of Christmas, the 4th Parade (7)
- Draws tourism (2)

The City's Charm, Historic Feel, and Small-Town Atmosphere

- Historic buildings
- Quaint, unique village atmosphere (2)
- Enjoy the small-town scale (2)
- Unique, resort-like atmosphere
- Historic buildings add to the charm of the City (2)
- Urban village "home town" appeal
- City is open because of low rise buildings and is not canyon-like
- Height limits
- Restrict building regulations to a 3-story max for buildings – to maintain current density and scale

What Challenges does Kirkland Face?

Traffic and Parking

- There are pedestrian versus traffic conflicts
- Traffic (3)
- We need to understand where traffic comes from
- Kirkland is a "cut through" for I-405 traffic
- Need a restricted north-south corridor
- Reroute traffic to alleviate congestion and minimize rush hour traffic (3)
- No traffic light at 3rd Street and Kirkland Ave
- Need more parking supply and more free parking
- Parking is challenging, perhaps hidden or underground parking (6)
- Reach an agreement about putting a lid on Marina Park parking
- Downtown is dealing with construction issues related to traffic including noise, water, and air pollution

Pedestrian Issues

- Some pedestrian crossings feel unsafe, especially at 3rd Street (2)
- Sidewalks are narrow and in need of repair
- Keep it pedestrian-friendly

Commercial Areas, Business Mix, and Diversity

- Rents are too high, and that affects the diversity of businesses (2)
- Limited variety of retail
- Has ambiance – shopping, family – window shop, but no necessities – limited shopping
- Need a mix of viable businesses
- Household goods are not available downtown
- There is no anchor retail, nothing to draw people in
- Downtown has difficulty securing national tenants
- Downtown needs more offices
- Multiple owners of property and buildings
- There is a lot of retail turnover in the downtown

Safety

- There is loitering at the transit center
- Downtown has too much vandalism, crime, loud motorbikes (3)
- There are problems with late-night rowdy behavior and irresponsible drinkers
- Not enough police

Preserving Kirkland's Atmosphere and Personality

- Create a balance between vitality and sleepiness
- There is no central city gathering spot; is Lake and Central the right location?
- Preserving small town historic building feel is a challenge
- Need to develop an identity and market our strengths (2)

Managing Growth and Development, Balancing Old and New

- Old buildings/conditions
- Too many services vs. retail
- Ensure balance of the village feel, including height and views, and businesses that can succeed
- Need to decide how much development is enough
- Pressure to increase height of buildings, but we need to restrict building heights (3)
- Maintain views
- "Canyon" effect – too many high rise buildings (2)
- Balance between people and cars
- Limit bulk and height of buildings through zoning while also enhancing central Kirkland, west of 3rd
- The City's back is turned from the water
- Parkplace redevelopment
- Struggling downtown business, perhaps because of a lack of retail diversity (3)
- Examine the Design Review Board's policies and zoning related to new retail space; are they appropriate for Kirkland?

Funding for City Projects

- The City needs to find funding to support projects

What Opportunities are Available to the City?

General Development Opportunities and Principles

- Encourage green development
- Sustainable community
- More trees
- Facelift for downtown
- Work with landlords and/or provide low interest loans to renovate buildings (2)
- Change zoning code to three stories/limit building heights (2)
- Reconsider the existing height limits
- More office space
- Be flexible with development while keeping city character
- Pedestrian friendly
- Pedestrian mall
- Retail in alley
- Controlled growth (zero, limited growth, height restrictions)
- Infill redevelopment
- Incorporate a broader foot print for downtown
- Develop from Lake to Kirkland Parkplace

Specific Strategic Development Opportunities

- There are many redevelopment opportunities including Parkplace, Antique Mall, and Marina Park
- Redevelopment of underutilized properties, including Parkplace and many of the surface parking lots

- Antique Mall site redevelopment (2)
- Marina is a huge asset; continue with what's working
- Redevelop Parkplace; we must be careful, prudent, and wise
- Extend Park Lane another block
- Increase height of Parkplace
- Redesign and add more office and residential space in Parkplace (3)
- Put the "parking" back in ballpark; consider putting a parking lot below Peter Kirk Park

Address Parking and Traffic Challenges and Increase Connectivity

- Lake and Central City Square with underground parking
- Redevelop Marina Park to allow more pedestrian zones and more parking
- Shut down Lake Street to traffic so it is pedestrian only
- Review the proposed facility at 3rd street, consider an overpass
- Plan for increased traffic and noise
- Extend parking hours to allow for more retail business activity
- Create a linkage between the Lake and Kirkland Parkplace
- Open Lake Street to the Lake
- Better use of the Lake – access, walkways
- Explore a plaza at Lake and Central (2)
- Link Peter Kirk Park to Park Lane to Marina Park
- Build a walkway over the water

Protect the City's Historic Feeling

- Preserve old buildings
- Historic value of buildings lends charm to the City (2)

Provide a Place for Residents to Work, Shop, Live, and Play

- Encourage year-round activities
- Encourage events downtown
- General store within walking distance
- Kirkland ball parks redevelopment with parking below
- Promote tourism

Build on Tourism Opportunities

- Make Kirkland more of a destination town
- Attract more rainy weather visitors
- Look at developments like the Redmond Town Center
- More signage announcing "Now in Kirkland" – roads and marina entries

Citizen Involvement and City Government

- Get more people to participate
- Raise taxes to pay for projects
- Active City involvement in redevelopment

How do you Envision Kirkland in 5-10 Years?

Vibrant, Diverse Retail Activity

- Night life for mature audiences/adults over 40 (i.e. Jazz clubs)
- More arts activity
- Practical retail
- Healthy vibrant downtown
- All the services you need will be downtown
- Establish upscale retail businesses as destination (2)
- Retail that supports household needs
- Build a full size QFC with household goods
- Diverse retail businesses
- Perception of too many banks and spas; decrease the number of salons and restaurants (3)
- Caps on like businesses
- More necessity and destination retail
- Unique retail (no strip mall businesses); more and diverse retail businesses (2)
- Landlords and tenants living in harmony
- Self-sustained community
- More variety of retail
- Lots of storefronts
- Retail ground – 1 floor/residential upper
- Good mix office and residential
- Permanent Farmers Market
- Healthy retail
- I want Penney's back

Tourism

- Successful tourism business year-round

Retain Kirkland's Identity

- Same as it is now
- No skyscrapers like Bellevue
- Encourage a small village feel
- Tweak downtown but do not wholly redevelop
- Cohesive identity
- Keep downtown as is; limit construction
- No new construction
- It will look like Kirkland
- Preserve character of city

Community

- More police presence – on streets and out of cars
- All age community-oriented celebrations
- Keep downtown family friendly
- Safe

Increase Connectivity and Connect Downtown to the Lake

- Downtown more connected to the Lake
- Revisit Lake Shore Plaza project
- Develop Marina Park in conjunction with vision of downtown and as a commercial draw (2)
- Connectivity from Parkplace to the Lake
- More parking structures but keep them out of sight
- Reorient buildings toward the Lake
- No buildings between Lake and Central to open corridor to the Lake
- Pedestrian friendly
- Pedestrian oriented and more walkways (2)
- Create some areas closed to automobile traffic in downtown
- Reduced traffic

Parking

- Parking underground/stacked
- No surface parking
- More parking garages
- Parking lot under Peter Kirk Park
- Plenty of visible parking (underground or screened)

Development Standards, Height Limits

- Bowl effect: building heights decrease as you move towards the Lake
- Gracefully accommodate a higher density population and traffic flow by high rises around the core, not in the core; the core is between Central Kirkland Ave and west of Peter Kirk Park
- Downtown core height limit to 4 floors
- Core of downtown should have no cars and have a height limit
- Limit height to 1999 standards
- Low buildings, 3-story max for downtown
- Improved design without increased height
- Parkplace should have 8 floors on 6th street and be tiered to 3 to 4 floors as you approach Peter Kirk Park
- Build green
- Optimize land use
- Noise absorbing pavement

Development Opportunities

- Central square for downtown
- Pedestrian-only street (Lake Street or Central Way?)
- Antique Mall could become Central Plaza
- New north-south arterial
- Water-centric, pedestrian friendly, small, historical city character with tiered-down buildings
- More office space
- Develop an infill core area bounded by Lake Street and Main Street and Central and Kirkland Avenues, with linkages to Parkplace and with a central park
- Need high wage office jobs to support retail stores (Microsoft, Google)