

# CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

## COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

9611 SE 36TH STREET | MERCER ISLAND, WA 98040

PHONE: 206.275.7605 | [www.mercerisland.gov](http://www.mercerisland.gov)



## PLANNING COMMISSION

**TO:** Planning Commission

**FROM:** Alison Van Gorp, CPD Deputy Director Adam Zack, Senior Planner

**DATE:** July 20, 2022 Meeting Date: July 27, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Comprehensive Plan Update  
Land Use Element – First Draft

**Attachments** A. First Draft Land Use Element

### PURPOSE

To get the Planning Commission's comments on the first draft of the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan (Attachment A).

### STRIKEOUT/UNDERLINE FORMAT

The draft Land Use Element in Attachment A shows all proposed amendments in strikeout/underline format. This is a way to track changes made to the original document in the current draft. Strikeout/underline format can be difficult to read at times, but it is valuable because it maintains the original text. Text that is proposed to be deleted is ~~struck out~~ and new text is underlined. An example is provided below.

**Original Text:** The Land Use Element is one piece of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Strikeout/Underline:** The Land Use Element is ~~one piece~~ the second element of the Mercer Island Comprehensive Plan.

**Clean Amended Text:** The Land Use Element is the second element of the Mercer island Comprehensive Plan.

Elsewhere in the draft Land Use Element there are places where additional edits are expected when either new data are available, or another planning document is finished. These are noted in the attached draft with **bold text and green highlighting**. The note text will be deleted before the final draft.

### PUBLIC COMMENTS

Please submit written public comments or questions on the Land Use Element by 4:00 PM on August 31. Please send comments to [comp.plan@mercerisland.gov](mailto:comp.plan@mercerisland.gov). Public comments submitted by the deadline will be provided to the Planning Commission at their next meeting scheduled for September 28.

## BACKGROUND

The City of Mercer Island is updating its comprehensive plan as part of the periodic review required by the WA Growth Management Act (GMA). The periodic review will be a targeted “surgical” update, focusing on those technical updates required to maintain compliance with the GMA. The existing Land Use Element already meets most of the GMA requirements and only requires limited technical amendments during this periodic review.

## LAND USE ELEMENT

The Land Use Element is a component of the Comprehensive Plan that establishes goals and policies to guide City decision making regarding regulation of land uses. The Land Use Element is made up of goals, policies, and a Land Use Map. Goals state the objectives that the policies are intended to achieve. The Policies establish direction for how the City will work to achieve the goals. The Land Use Map identifies the locations for future land uses throughout the City. Each of these three components are discussed below.

### Goals

The goals in each element state the purpose behind the policies. They are statements of the intention behind policies adopted in the Comprehensive Plan. For example, Land Use Goal 5 states the goal for housing in Town Center as follows:

“Encourage a variety of housing forms for all life stages, including townhomes, apartments and live-work units attractive to families, singles, and seniors at a range of price points.”

The goals of the Comprehensive Plan state the objectives the City aims to achieve. In the above example, a key part of the goal for housing in Town Center is a mix of housing types so that Town Center can accommodate the housing needs for diverse household configurations. The policies that follow detail the different ways the City will achieve this goal.

### Policies

The policies that follow each goal establish the strategies for achieving that goal. For example, Land Use Policy 5.1 states one of the City’s positions on regulating housing in Town Center in pursuit of Goal 5 as follows:

“Land uses and architectural standards should provide for the development of a variety of housing types, sizes and styles.”

This policy statement then informs decisions the City makes regarding how residential uses are regulated in zoning code (Title 19 Mercer Island City Code (MICC)). Specifically, if the City eventually decides to amend the zoning code in a way that would affect housing in Town Center, this policy will help ensure that those amendments continue to allow diverse housing forms. Goal 5 has five associated policies. Where there are multiple policies that address the same goal, all policies are considered together in the decision-making process.

### Land Use Map

The Land Use Map is a key piece of the Land Use Element because it links the policy statements and goals in the element with specific areas. Places throughout the City are designated for different land uses on the Land Use Map based on the policies established in the Land Use Element. The Land Use Map provides an important foundation for zoning because it designates which areas are planned for specific categories of uses. In this way, it informs which areas will be zoned for different types of land uses. For example, areas

designated for single-family residential uses on the Land Use Map will in-turn be zoned under one of the single-family residential zones established in the development code.

Compared to the Zoning Map, the Land Use Map is less likely to be amended regularly because it is adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan, which can only be amended once a year. The Zoning Map, which is adopted as part of the development code, can be amended by the City Council at any time. The Land Use Map is one mechanism that ensures that as the Zoning Map is amended the Land Use Element remains the stable foundation for making those decisions.

#### Growth Targets

The primary purpose for updating the Land Use Element is to incorporate the new growth targets to extend the Comprehensive Plan's planning period to the year 2044. King County sets housing and employment growth targets for towns and cities throughout the County in the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs). The 2044 housing growth target is 1,239 housing units. The employment growth target is 1,300 new jobs by 2044. The GMA requires that Comprehensive Plan must allow sufficient development capacity to accommodate the growth targets. To that end, King County prepared the 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report to determine the development capacity in cities throughout the County. The 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report found that the Mercer Island Comprehensive Plan allows sufficient development capacity to accommodate the growth targets. Because the existing Comprehensive Plan allows enough development capacity to accommodate the City's growth targets, the City can focus on a surgical update to the Land Use Element.

#### Implementation and Unified Development Code

One of the principal ways the Land Use Element is implemented is through the adoption of the Unified Development Code (UDC). The City's UDC is codified in [Title 19 MICC](#). The UDC establishes the land use regulations that translate the high-level policy direction in the Comprehensive Plan into standards that all new development must conform to. The policies in the Comprehensive Plan give direction for how the UDC should regulate different uses in different areas of the City.

In the Goal 5/Policy 5.1 example above, the City is stating that Town Center should be the location of diverse housing types to accommodate diverse households. That policy direction is then translated into the UDC in the form of standards and regulations that allow for multifamily, mixed-use, and townhomes. That goal is further realized when new development occurs consistent with the UDC, which in turn is based on the policies in the Land Use Element. The UDC is a key tool to ensure that the Land Use Element goals, policies, and land use map are made manifest in the built environment.

#### **SCOPE OF WORK**

The City Council approved a scope of work for the Comprehensive Plan periodic review with [Resolution 1621](#). The adopted scope of work for the Land Use Element primarily focuses on the technical amendments needed to update the growth targets and maintain GMA compliance. Table 1 lists the Land Use Element tasks listed in the scope of work. The amendments in the first draft of the Land Use Element were based on the scope of work tasks listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Land Use Element Tasks from the Comprehensive Plan Scope of Work.**

<b>Task Number</b>	<b>Task Description</b>	<b>Required or Local Choice</b>
LU-1	Revise Land Use Element Section III to incorporate new growth projections	Required
LU-2	Add policy to Land Use Element Goal 18 to adopt the City Stormwater Management Plan by reference	Required
LU-3	Update capacity discussion in Land Use Element Section III to incorporate forecasted growth in population and employment.	Required
LU-4	Update Figure TC-1 with new map, relocate figure to be under Goal 2. Include policy referencing Figure TC-1	Local Choice
LU-5	Review Town Center policies under Goal 2 to be consistent with the 2021 commercial use requirements update, including 'no net loss' of commercial land in Town Center policy.	Local Choice
LU-6	Add policy(s) to Land Use Element Goal 14 regarding preserving existing commercial use square footage in Town Center.	Local Choice
LU-7	Adopt Climate Action Plan by reference in Land Use Element Section V, Goal 28	Local Choice
LU-8	Review and, if necessary, amend climate change policies in response to the Climate Action Plan	Local Choice
LU-9	Revise symbology of Figure 1 Land Use Map to optimize the map for web viewing	Local Choice
LU-10	Review Land Use Goals and Policies for consistency with planning actions taken since the previous update.	Local Choice
LU-11	Add a goal and policy(s) regarding the creation of a parks zone to the Land Use Element.	Local Choice

The majority of scoped tasks the Land Use Element are technical updates to incorporate the updated growth targets and extend the 20-year planning period to the year 2044. The other tasks are amendments to ensure consistency with other planning efforts undertaken since the previous Comprehensive Plan update. For example, Town Center policies were added to reflect the recent regulatory changes directed at preserving commercial square footage in Town Center.

#### **PLANNING COMMISSION FEEDBACK**

The July 27 Planning Commission will be a briefing on the initial draft of amendments. Staff is requesting written comments on the initial draft from members of the Planning Commission no later than the end of the day on August 31. Staff will compile all individual comments for the Planning Commission to discuss at their next meeting in September.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

The Planning Commission can consider the comments on the Land Use Element at their September meeting.

## **2 LAND USE ELEMENT**

### ***I. INTRODUCTION***

Mercer Island prides itself on being a residential community. As such, most of the Island's approximately 6.2 square miles of land area is developed with single family homes. The Island is served by a small Town Center and two other commercial zones which focus on the needs of the local population. Mixed-use and multifamily developments are located within the Town Center. Multifamily development also rings the Town Center and the western fringe of the smaller Commercial Office Zone.

Parks, open spaces, educational and recreational opportunities are highly valued and consume a large amount of land. The Island has 472 acres of park and open space lands including small neighborhood parks and trails as well as several larger recreational areas, including Luther Burbank Park and Aubrey Davis Park above the Interstate 90 tunnel. One hundred fifteen acres of natural-forested land are set aside in Pioneer Park and an additional 150 acres of public open spaces are scattered across the community. There are four elementary schools, one middle school and a high school owned and operated by the Mercer Island School District. In addition, there are several private schools at the elementary and secondary education levels.

Arts are integral to Mercer Island's identity, vitality, heritage, and shared values. The City of Mercer Island is committed to supporting and sustaining rich and diverse cultural and arts experiences and opportunities for the community. In 2018, the City incorporated the Arts and Culture plan as an appendix to the Comprehensive Plan incorporating the goals and policies in the Arts and Culture Plan into the City's Comprehensive Plan.

The community strongly values environmental protection. As a result, local development regulations have sought to safeguard land, water and the natural environment, balanced with private property rights. To reflect community priorities, development regulations also attempt to balance views and tree conservation.

### ***TOWN CENTER***

For many years, Mercer Island citizens have been concerned about the future of the community's downtown. Past business district revitalization initiatives (e.g., Project Renaissance in 1990) strove to overcome the effects of "under-capitalization" in the Town Center. These efforts sought to support and revitalize downtown commercial/retail businesses and devised a number of recommendations for future Town Center redevelopment. Growing out of previous planning efforts, a renewed interest in Town Center revitalization emerged in 1992—one looking to turn the 33-year-old downtown into the vital economic and social center of the community.

In 1992 the City of Mercer Island undertook a major "citizen visioning" process that culminated in a broad new vision and direction for future Town Center development as presented in a document entitled "Town Center Plan for the City of Mercer Island," dated November 30, 1994. The City used an outside consultant to help lead a five-day citizen design charrette involving hundreds of Island residents and design professionals. This citizen vision became the foundation for new design and development standards within the Town Center and a major part of the new Comprehensive Plan that was adopted in the fall of 1994. At the same time, the City invested about \$5 million in street and streetscape improvements to

create a central pedestrian street, along 78th Avenue and route the majority of vehicular trips around the core downtown onto 77th and 80th Avenues. Specific new design and development standards to implement the Town Center vision were adopted in December of 1995. The Mercer Island Design Commission, City staff and citizens used these standards to review all Town Center projects until 2002.

In 2002, the City undertook a major planning effort to review and modify Town Center design and development guidelines, based on knowledge and experience gained from the previous seven years. Several changes were made in the existing development and design standards to promote public-private partnerships, strengthen parking standards, and develop public spaces as part of private development. Another goal of the revised standards was to unify the major focal points of the Town Center including the pedestrian streetscape of 78th Avenue, an expanded Park-and-Ride and Transit Facility, the public sculpture garden, and the Mercerdale Park facility. As a result, the following changes were made to the design standards:

- Expanding sidewalk widths along the pedestrian spine of 78th Avenue between Mercerdale Park on the south and the Sculpture Garden Park on the north;
- Identifying opportunity sites at the north end of 78th for increased public spaces;
- Requiring that new projects include additional public amenities in exchange for increased building height above the two-story minimum; and
- Increasing the number of visual interest design features required at the street level to achieve pedestrian scale.

The changes to the design and development standards were formulated by a seven-member Ad Hoc Committee composed of citizen architects, engineers, planners and several elected officials. Working for three months, the Ad Hoc Committee forwarded its recommendations to the Planning Commission, Design Commission and City Council for review. The revised Town Center Development and Design Standards (Mercer Island City Code chapter 19.11) were adopted by City Council in July 2002 and amended in June 2016. They will continue to implement the Town Center vision.

The effects of the City's efforts to focus growth and revitalize the Town Center through targeted capital improvements, development incentives and design standards to foster high quality development are now materializing.

Between 2001 and 2007, 510 new housing units, and 115,922 square feet of commercial area were constructed in the Town Center. Between 2007 and August 2014, 360 new housing units, and 218,015 square feet of new commercial area were constructed.

In 2014, the City began a process to review the vision, Comprehensive Plan policies and development and design guidelines for the Town Center. This effort involved several stakeholder groups, 15 joint meetings of the Planning and Design Commissions and hundreds of public comments.

During 2004, the City engaged in a major effort to develop new design standards for all non-single family development in zoning districts outside the Town Center. This effort also used an ad-hoc process of elected officials, design commissioners, developers, and architects. The design standards for Zones Outside of Town Center were adopted in December 2004. These standards provide new direction for quality design of non-residential structures in residential zones and other multi-family, commercial, office and public zones outside the Town Center.

Updates to this document were made in 2014 to comply with the Countywide Planning Policies, including updated housing and employment targets.

In June 2020, the City Council enacted a moratorium on major new construction generally in the southeast quadrant of the Town Center. This moratorium temporarily prevented submittal of development applications while the City considered potential updates and amendments to development regulations within the Town Center, including requirements for ground-floor commercial use and for preserving existing commercial square footage. The City Council adopted new Town Center regulations and resolved the moratorium in 2022. The new regulations established commercial use standards for street frontage, a minimum floor area ratio for commercial uses along specific street frontages, and a standard of no net loss of commercial square footage. The principal purpose of the new development regulations is to support commercial uses in Town Center.

## *SUSTAINABILITY*

Mercer Island has a proud tradition of accomplishment toward sustainability. One of the earliest efforts was the formation of the Committee to Save the Earth by high school students in the early 1970s. Through the students' fundraising, the construction and opening of the Mercer Island Recycling Center (Center) was realized in 1975. The self-supported Center was well-patronized by Islanders and, during its many years of operation, it prevented millions of pounds of recyclable materials from ending up in the landfill while contributing to the development of a sustainability ethic on Mercer Island.

In 2006, a grassroots effort of Island citizens led the City to modify the vision statement in its Comprehensive Plan to include language embracing general sustainability, and in May 2007 the City Council committed to a sustainability work program as well as a specific climate goal of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 80 percent from 2007 levels by 2050, which was consistent with King County and Washington State targets. Later in 2007, the City Council set an interim emissions reduction goal (often called a "milepost") for City operations of five percent by 2012.

In 2012, the City convened a Sustainability Policy Taskforce, a City/community partnership, to recommend sustainability policies to the City. The City Council adopted its recommendations including dedicated staffing, incorporation of recommendations into City planning documents, development of a Sustainability Plan, and legislative actions to foster sustainability. The City's Sustainability Manager was hired in 2013.

Numerous community groups have contributed to sustainability accomplishments in the ensuing years, and many are still active, such as IslandVision, a nonprofit organization that had encouraged and supported sustainable practices on Mercer Island and helped launch an annual Earth Day fair called Leap for Green. In 2017, Sustainable Mercer Island (SMI) emerged as an umbrella group to help coordinate various initiatives on Island and to advocate for county and state-level climate measures. It has also helped organize and publicize solarize campaigns, youth environmental education, public outreach, advocating for bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and many other activities. Some are doing research, and many are volunteering with national and local organizations working to solve the climate crisis. One volunteer leads the very successful Green Schools program for the Mercer Island School District, supported by King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks. SMI fosters waste reduction, recycling, and conservation by students and schools. IslandVision, a nonprofit organization, encourages and supports sustainable

practices on Mercer Island. It provided to the City, in 2018, a technical analysis of GHG sources on Mercer Island and recommended strategies to reduce GHG emissions.

From 2010 to 2019, with the entire community's sustainability in mind, the City has implemented a wide range of outreach programs, efficiency campaigns, alternative energy initiatives, land-use guidelines, and other natural resource management measures designed to minimize the overall impacts generated by Island residents, for the benefit of future generations. Due to the 20-year horizon envisioned by this Comprehensive Plan, it is especially appropriate to include measures that address the long-term actions needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, ideally in collaboration with other local governments. Actions that the City will take in the management of its own facilities and operations are addressed in the Capital Facilities Element of this Plan. In 2018, the City continued to promote and support sustainable development, through the development of green building goals and policies for all residential development.

### *CLIMATE CHANGE*

Climate change has far-reaching and fundamental consequences for our economy, environment, public health, and safety. Cities have a vital role in mitigating and adapting to climate change both individually and by working collaboratively with other local governments. Current science indicates that to avoid the worst impacts of global warming we need to reduce global GHG emissions sharply.

In 2008, the City created a Climate Action Task Force which was charged with developing a climate action plan for the City and community. The resulting plan called for tracking emissions and the formation of a City/community partnership which was called the Green Ribbon Commission. It was tasked with identifying strategies to reduce GHG emissions. Notable outcomes were the successful promotion of Puget Sound Energy's Green Power Program, which generated funds to cover the cost of the solar array the City installed at the Mercer Island Community and Events Center, and the 22 Ways emissions reduction campaign.

Leap for Green Sustainability Fair spearheaded by IslandVision and co-developed with the City is a vital instrument to educate and encourage engagement in sustainability. In addition to food and entertainment, the fair offers activities for kids and adults, demonstrations and displays of environmentally friendly ways of living, sustainability vendors, and more. The fair was not held in 2019 due to budget constraints.

The City has been very active in addressing climate change and has received national recognition for its efforts. In 2013, the City was recognized by the EPA as a Green Power Community of the Year for its very successful Green Power sign-up campaign for residents and for its commitment to local solar power generation. It was awarded Sol Smart Gold Designation from the Department of Energy in January 2018 for meeting stringent and objective criteria targeting removal of obstacles to solar development including streamlined permitting. As of January 2018, there were 184 known solar installations in the City, higher per capita than any other Eastside City. The City offers same-day permitting for most solar installations and most require only an electrical permit. The City has also installed electric vehicle charging stations, banned plastic bags, successfully piloted bike share and ride hailing services, and contracted with PSE for energy from a new windfarm to power 100 percent of City facilities, among many other actions.

The Capital Facilities Element includes a summary of the City's actions to reduce its own carbon footprint.

In 2014, King County and cities formed the innovative King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C) to coordinate and enhance local government climate efforts. Mercer Island was a founding member and remains a very active participant. The K4C has charted opportunities for joint action to reduce GHG emissions and accelerate progress toward a clean and sustainable future. Mercer Island, through K4C, seeks opportunities to partner on outreach to decision-makers and the public, adopt consistent standards and strategies, share solutions, implement pilot projects, and cooperate on seeking funding resources. In 2016, Mercer Island, along with King County and other partners in K4C, was recognized with a national Climate Leadership Award from EPA. In 2019, the City Council passed Resolution 1570, which adopted an updated version of the K4C Joint Climate Commitments.

~~Community GHG emissions have been inventoried and reported to K4C and the public when possible, though 2016 through 2019 data have yet to be entered. The major sources of GHG on Mercer Island have been found to be passenger car travel (estimated at 40 percent of total) and building energy consumption (48 percent residential plus commercial).~~

~~With many good efforts completed and underway, it is necessary to take further action in order to meet GHG reduction targets, both in our households and in our community.~~

~~Beginning in 2018, the City assessed the City's strengths and weaknesses in supporting sustainability using the STAR Communities framework. Information from this assessment, along with the measures discussed above, and others under consideration, will be identified in more detail in a rolling six-year Sustainability Plan, to be adopted in 2019, which will guide the City's internal and external actions while taking into account the interrelated issues of climate change, population change, land use, public infrastructure, transportation choices, natural resources management, equitable services and accessibility, arts and community, public health and safety, human services, and economic development.~~

In 2018 and 2019, the City added goals and policies to the Land Use Element that support climate change planning with Ordinances 18-13 and 19-23. These ordinances established Goals 26 through 29. This included a goal and policies that referenced the STAR Community Framework as a means for assessing the City's sustainability efforts. During the 2024 periodic review, goals and policies referring to the STAR Community Framework were amended to reflect that this framework was absorbed into the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED for Cities program.

Beginning in 2022, the City began composing a Climate Action Plan. The Climate Action Plan establishes strategies for the City to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled to address climate change. Those strategies are an important step to move the City forward in its response to the changing climate. Where needed, goals and policies were amended or added to this Land Use Element to support the strategies in the Climate Action Plan, including **Note: A list of amendments made in response to the Climate Action Plan will be inserted here**

## **II. EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

### **TOWN CENTER**

The Town Center is a 76-acre bowl-shaped area that includes residential, retail, commercial, mixed-use and office-oriented businesses. Historically, convenience businesses — groceries, drugstores, service stations, dry cleaners, and banks — have dominated the commercial land uses; many of them belonging to larger regional or national chains. Retailers and other commercial services are scattered throughout

the Town Center and are not concentrated in any particular area. With a diffused development pattern, the Town Center is not conducive to "browsing," making movement around the downtown difficult and inconvenient for pedestrians, physically disadvantaged persons and bicyclists.

Mercer Island's downtown is located only three miles from Seattle and one mile from Bellevue via I-90. I-90 currently provides critical vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian access to the Town Center as well as the rest of the Island. Regional transportation plans anticipate future development of a high capacity transit system in the I-90 corridor. In light of recent and potential future public transportation investments in the I-90 corridor and in keeping with the region's emerging growth philosophy, redevelopment and moderate concentration of future growth into Mercer Island's Town Center represents the wisest and most efficient use of the transportation infrastructure.

As required by the Growth Management Act of 1990, the Land Use Element presents a practical and balanced set of policies that address current and future land use issues. An inventory of existing land uses (Table 1) and a forecast of future development and population trends (Section III.) provide a backdrop for issues and policies. Subsequent sections IV and V address major land use issues and policies for the Town Center and non-Town Center areas.

**Note: Table 1 requires additional information from the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). Staff expects to get this information from PSRC before the next Planning Commission touch on the Land Use Element. This table will be updated with that information once it is provided.**

**Table 1. Town Center Land Uses & Facts Snapshot (May 2015)**

Total Land Area	76.5 acres
Total Net Land Area (excludes public right-of-way)	61.1 acres
Total Floor Area (includes all uses)	2,385,723 square feet (20% office, 15% retail, and 65% residential)
Total Floor Area - Ratio	0.90
Total Housing Units	1,532
Total Net Residential Density	25 units/acre (Approx. 75 units/acre on sites with residential uses)
Total Employment	3,993 <sup>1</sup>

Notes: This table includes one mixed-use project currently under construction as of May 2015 (i.e., Hadley).

<sup>1</sup>This information is provided by the PSRC and is derived from Census data.

### *AREAS OUTSIDE THE TOWN CENTER*

Single family residential zoning accounts for 88 percent of the Island's land use. There are 3,534 acres zoned for single family residential development. This compares to 77 acres in the Town Center zones, 19 acres for Commercial Office zone, and 103 acres in multi-family zones (Table 2). City Hall is located in a Commercial Office zone, while other key civic buildings such as the Post Office and the Main Fire Station are located in the Town Center and City Hall. Many of the remaining public buildings, schools, recreational facilities and places of religious worship are located in residential or public zones.

**Table 2. Land Use Zones and Acreage (2014)**

Zone	Acreage
Business - B	2.85
Commercial Office - CO	19.45
Multifamily - MF-2	42.03
Multifamily - MF-2L	7.73
Multifamily - MF-3	53.73
Public Institution - P	284.31
Planned Business - PBZ	13.89
Single Family - R-12	77.44
Single Family - R-15	1277.04
Single Family - R-8.4	779.36
Single Family - R-9.6	1399.98
Town Center - TC	77.16

Note: Figures above include adjacent right-of-way.

~~Approximately 95 percent of all residential land on Mercer Island is currently developed. Over the last 30 years, most public facilities have been re-constructed, or have planned additions, in sufficient quantities to serve current and projected populations. This category includes schools, parks and recreation facilities, streets and arterials, and fire stations. In 2015, the City constructed a new fire station on Southeast 68th Street to increase service capacity for the south end of the island. Northwood Elementary School was constructed in 2016, adding to the Mercer Island School District's capacity. Future re-investments in these facilities will primarily improve the reliability and function of the community's "infrastructure" rather than adding significant new capacity. [Refer to the Capital Facilities Element for a more in-depth discussion of public facilities.]~~

~~Single family residential zones designate a number of different lot sizes and densities including 8,400 square feet, 9,600 square feet, 12,000 square feet and 15,000 square feet. Of the 3,534 acres in these zones, approximately 145 remain unimproved. Most unimproved lots are small parcels and/or are platted building lots within previously developed neighborhoods. Some additional capacity exists in larger lots which can be subdivided. However, during the planning horizon, the City expects an average of roughly six subdivisions a year, the majority of which will be short plats of four or fewer lots. Residential zones in the City are primarily zoned for single-family residential development. There are four minimum lot sizes in single-family zones, ranging from 15,000 square feet, 12,000 square feet, 9,600 square feet, and 8,400 square feet. Existing single-family development is mostly made up of established neighborhoods constructed in the latter-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Most lots in the single-family zones are already subdivided and few are undeveloped. New development in the single-family zones is typically demolition of an existing home and replacement with a newer home.~~

The most densely developed neighborhoods are found on the Island's north end. This includes East Seattle and First Hill as well as neighborhoods immediately north and south of the I-90 corridor and areas along the entire length of Island Crest Way.

The least densely populated neighborhoods are ones with the largest minimum lot size and are designated as Zone R-15 (15,000-square-foot minimum lot size). These neighborhoods, generally located along East and West Mercer Way, contain the greatest amount of undeveloped residential land and often contain

extremely steep slopes, deep and narrow ravines and small watercourses. Because environmentally sensitive areas often require careful development and engineering techniques, many of these undeveloped lands are difficult and expensive to develop.

Generally, Mercer Island's oldest neighborhoods are situated on a fairly regular street grid with homes built on comparatively small lots 40 to 60 years ago. Interspersed among the older homes are renovated homes and new homes that are often noticeably larger. Newer developments tend to consist of large homes on steeply pitched, irregular lots, with winding narrow private roads and driveways. Many residential areas of Mercer Island are characterized by large mature tree cover. Preservation of this greenery is an important community value.

Most Mercer Island multi-family housing is located in or on the borders of the Town Center. However, two very large complexes straddle I-90 and are adjacent to single family areas. Shorewood Apartments is an older, stable development of 646 apartment units. It was extensively remodeled in 2000. North of Shorewood and across I-90 is the retirement community of Covenant Shores. This development has a total of 237 living units, ranging from independent living to fully assisted living.

There is one Commercial/Office (CO) zone outside the Town Center. It is located along the south side of the I-90 corridor at East Mercer Way and contains several office buildings, including the Mercer Island City Hall. In the summer of 2004, the regulations in the CO zone were amended to add retirement homes as a permitted use with conditions.

For land use and transportation planning purposes, Mercer Island ~~has not been~~ designated as an Urban Center High Capacity Transit community in the Puget Sound Regional Council's Vision 202050. This designation recognizes the importance of the localities with high-capacity transit service as a place to focus new development due to the excellent access to employment centers, educational institutions and other opportunities. As such, Mercer Island will ~~not share in the major growth of the region, but will~~ continue to see new employment and residential development, most of which will be concentrated in the Town Center. Employment will continue to grow slowly and will be significantly oriented towards serving the local residential community. Transit service will focus on connecting ~~the~~ Mercer Island to other metropolitan and sub-regional centers via Interstate 90 and the region's high capacity transit system, including Sound Transit's East Link Light Rail.

### **III. GROWTH FORECAST**

#### **RESIDENTIAL AND EMPLOYMENT 20-YEAR GROWTH TARGETS**

The King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) establish growth targets for all of the jurisdictions within King County. The CPPs were initially adopted in 1992, and have been amended several times since then. Elected officials from King County, the cities of Seattle and Bellevue, and the Sound Cities Association meet as the Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC). This Council makes recommendations to the County Council, which has the authority to adopt and amend the CPPs. ~~During 2012, the GMPC worked with an inter-jurisdictional team of King County Planning Directors to determine an equitable distribution of the growth targets throughout the County. It was agreed that the City of Mercer Island would plan to accommodate 2,000 new housing units and 1,000 new jobs between 2006 and 2031. GMA requires jurisdictions to plan for 20 years of forecasted growth, so the growth target time horizon was extended out to 2035 (see Table 3). King County amended the CPPs in 2021, updating the growth targets for cities and towns throughout the County. The updated growth targets extended the planning horizon through~~

the year 2044. Table 3 shows the City of Mercer Island's housing and employment growth targets for 2024 through 2044.

**Table 3. Growth Targets**

<b>Housing Growth Target (in units)</b>	
Original Housing growth target (in dwelling units), 2006— 2031 2024 – 2044	<del>2,000</del> <u>1,239</u>
Adjusted growth target, 2006—2035	<u>2,320</u>
<b>Employment Growth Target (in jobs)</b>	
Original Employment growth target (in jobs), 2006—2031 2024 – 2044	<del>1,000</del> <u>1,300</u>
Adjusted growth target, 2006—2035	<u>1,160</u>

### EMPLOYMENT AND COMMERCIAL CAPACITY

According to the Puget Sound Regional Council, as of March 2012~~20~~ there are approximately ~~6,622~~ 7,325 jobs on Mercer Island. The City's development capacity is analyzed in the ~~analysis completed to inform the 2014 King County Buildable Lands Report~~ 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report. That report shows that Mercer Island has the capacity for a total of ~~2,373~~ new jobs, well in excess of the 1,160 sufficient development capacity to accommodate the 2044 employment and housing growth targets for which Mercer Island must have sufficient zoned land to accommodate.

Table 4 summarizes employment capacity findings from the 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report. The 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report provides capacity for zones grouped by the type of land use. These categories are commercial and mixed-use. Mixed-use zones are those that allow both commercial and residential development. The City of Mercer does not have any zoned industrial lands.

**Table 4. Employment Capacity 2018 – 2035.**

<b>Land Use</b>	<b>Vacant / Redevelopable</b>	<b>Floor Area Capacity</b>	<b>Square Feet per Job</b>	<b>Job Capacity</b>
Commercial	Vacant	<u>10,000</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>52</u>
	Redevelopable	<u>50,000</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>242</u>
Mixed Use	Vacant	<u>20,000</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>119</u>
	Redevelopable	<u>100,000</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>479</u>
Total	Vacant	<u>30,000</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>171</u>
	Redevelopable	<u>150,000</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>721</u>
	Jobs in Pipeline	=	=	<u>70</u>
	Totals	<u>180,000</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>962</u>

Source: King County 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report.

Note: The 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report evaluates employment capacity for 2018 through 2035. If the study period were extended through 2044, there is sufficient capacity to accommodate the 1,300-job growth target.

## RESIDENTIAL GROWTH

The Comprehensive Plan contains three types of housing figures: a capacity estimate, a growth target, and a housing and population forecast. Each of these housing numbers serves a different purpose.

### Housing Capacity.

As required in a 1997 amendment to the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.215), recent growth and land capacity in King County and associated cities have been reported in the ~~2014 King County Buildable Lands Report~~ 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report.

The capacity estimate identifies the number of new units that could be accommodated on vacant and redevelopable land given existing development and under current zoning. The capacity estimate is not a prediction of what will happen, merely an estimate of how many new units the Island could accommodate based on our current zoning code, the number and size of vacant properties, and some standard assumptions about the redevelopment potential of other properties that could accommodate additional development.

~~According to the 2014 Buildable Lands Report, the City of Mercer Island has the capacity for 2,004 additional housing units on properties designated for residential uses through new development on vacant lands and/or through redevelopment of underutilized lands. Based on zoning and redevelopment assumptions done in 2012 for the Buildable Lands Report, about 614 new housing units could be accommodated in single family zones, 143 new housing units could be accommodated in multifamily zones and 1,247 units could be accommodated in the Town Center.~~

~~Redevelopable land in the Town Center was determined based on an analysis of those parcels which currently have an improvement to land value ratio of .5 or less and are not in public or utility ownership. Additionally, townhomes and condominium properties were not considered redevelopable, and only those properties allowing two and one half residential units or more are included in the analysis. Future assumed densities for this preliminary figure were based on the density of recently permitted projects (2/3 mixed-use, 1/3 commercial only). This methodology used in the 2014 Buildable Land Analysis is a similar methodology used in the 2007 Buildable Lands Report.~~

According to the 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report, the City of Mercer Island has development capacity to accommodate 1,429 new housing units. Most of the housing development capacity is in medium-high and high-density residential zones, including Town Center. Table 5 summarizes residential capacity findings from the 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report. The 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report provides residential capacity in five categories based on assumed density: very low density (2.6 – 3.3 dwellings per acre), low density (4.6 – 6.1 dwellings per acre), medium-low density (2.6 – 3.3 dwellings per acre), medium-high density (22.7 dwellings per acre), and high density (100.6 – 167 dwellings per acre). The assumed densities are based on the achieved density in each zone.

**Table 5. Residential Development Capacity.**

<u>Assumed Density Level</u>	<u>Vacant / Redevelopable</u>	<u>Assumed Densities Assumed Densities (low/high units per acre)</u>	<u>Net Developable Acres</u>	<u>Capacity in housing units</u>
<u>Very Low Density</u>	<u>Vacant</u>	<u>2.6/3.3</u>	<u>32.05</u>	<u>85</u>
	<u>Redevelopable</u>	<u>2.6/3.3</u>	<u>85.97</u>	<u>35</u>
	<u>Subtotal</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>118.02</u>	<u>120</u>
<u>Low Density</u>	<u>Vacant</u>	<u>4.6/6.1</u>	<u>21.12</u>	<u>98</u>
	<u>Redevelopable</u>	<u>4.6/6.1</u>	<u>107.54</u>	<u>138</u>
	<u>Subtotal</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>128.65</u>	<u>235</u>
<u>Medium Low Density</u>	<u>Vacant</u>	<u>22.7</u>	<u>0.45</u>	<u>10</u>
	<u>Redevelopable</u>	<u>22.7</u>	<u>1.13</u>	<u>0</u>
	<u>Subtotal</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>1.58</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>Medium High Density</u>	<u>Vacant</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
	<u>Redevelopable</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>43.7</u>	<u>535</u>
	<u>Subtotal</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>43.7</u>	<u>535</u>
<u>High Density</u>	<u>Vacant</u>	<u>100.6/167</u>	<u>0.54</u>	<u>91</u>
	<u>Redevelopable</u>	<u>100.6/167</u>	<u>23.47</u>	<u>437</u>
	<u>Subtotal</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>24.01</u>	<u>528</u>
<u>All Zones</u>	<u>Vacant</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>54.16</u>	<u>284</u>
	<u>Redevelopable</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>261.81</u>	<u>1,145</u>
	<u>Total</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>315.97</u>	<u>1,429</u>

Source: King County 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report.

### Housing Targets.

As mentioned above, the City has a King County Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) 203544 housing target of 2,3201,239 new housing units. The housing target represents the number of units that the City is required to plan for under the Growth Management Act. The housing target is not necessarily the number of units that will be built on Mercer Island over the next two decades. Market forces, including regional job growth, interest rates, land costs, and other factors will have a major influence on the number of actual units created.

### Housing and Population Forecast.

**Note: The housing and population forecast section requires additional information from the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). Staff expects to get this information from PSRC before the next Planning Commission touch on the Land Use Element. This section will be updated with that information once it is provided.**

The third type of housing figure contained in the Comprehensive Plan is a local housing forecast. Table 4 contains a housing unit and population forecast for 2010 through 2030 conducted by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), using a parcel-based land use model called UrbanSim, based on existing zoning and land use designations.

PSRC anticipates an increase in housing units at an average annual growth rate of approximately 0.25 percent between 2010 and 2040. This represents an increase of approximately 453 housing units and 1,495 people over 30 years.

The Housing Unit and Population forecasts are informed estimates based on several factors such as growth trends for new single family and accessory dwelling units over the last several years, Puget Sound Regional Council forecasts of future household size, transportation systems and demand modeling, and real estate market fluctuations.

~~Given the uncertainty of future market forces, periodic reviews of housing and population forecasts should be made to evaluate the future growth assumptions. Adjustments to this forecast will also be necessary if the projections on household size and population growth vary significantly from those forecasted. Planning staff predict that PSRC's multifamily unit growth estimates for the period through 2030 are likely to be surpassed as early as 2020. This prediction is based on the established pattern of larger, mixed use developments adding 100–200 units at a time to the City's multifamily housing supply and projects that are now in the development pipeline. The City will continue to monitor housing unit, population growth and market trends, and adjust land use, transportation, and capital facilities planning as necessary prior to the next major Comprehensive Plan update in 2023.~~

### Housing Density.

**Note: The housing density section requires additional information from the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). Staff expects to get this information from PSRC before the next Planning Commission touch on the Land Use Element. This section will be updated with that information once it is provided.**

The average allowed density in the City of Mercer Island is more than 6.2 dwelling units per acre. This figure is based on the proportional acreage of each land use designation (or zones) that allows residential development, the densities permitted under the regulations in place today for that zone, and an assumption that the average practical allowed density for the Town Center is 99.16 units per acre. Since there is no maximum density in the Town Center and density is controlled instead by height limits and other requirements, the figure of 99.16 units per acre represents the overall achieved net density of the mixed-use projects in the Town Center constructed since 2006.

**Table 4. 2010-2030 Housing Unit and Population Forecast**

Year	Overall Household Size	SFR Units	Multi-family Units	Total Increase in units per decade	Total Housing Units	Population
2010 (Census)	2.48	6,873	2,236	N/A	9,109	22,699
2020 (Forecast)	2.54	7,201	2,257	349	9,458	24,991
2030 (Forecast)	2.53	7,349	2,266	157	9,615	25,243

2010 household size data obtained from the 2010 Census. All other data is from PSRC, using their 2013 Forecast parcel-based land use model using Urban Sim.

#### ***IV. LAND USE ISSUES***

##### ***TOWN CENTER***

- (1) The Town Center land designated for commercial retail, service and office uses is much larger than the local population can support. This has contributed to a historical pattern of relatively low private investment in downtown properties. Consequently, the Town Center consists of many one story strip centers, surrounded by vast parking lots (FAR of only 0.23); a typical suburban sprawl-like development.
- (2) In 1994, the City made significant street improvements in the Town Center, which have resulted in a more pedestrian-friendly environment. However, more needs to be done on the private development side to design buildings with attractive streetscapes so that people will have more incentive to park their car and walk between shopping areas.
- (3) The Town Center is poorly identified. The major entrance points to the downtown are not treated in any special way that invites people into the business district.

##### ***OUTSIDE THE TOWN CENTER***

- (1) The community needs to accommodate two important planning values — maintaining the existing single family residential character of the Island, while at the same time planning for population and housing growth.
- (2) Accessory ~~housing~~dwelling units are allowed by City zoning regulations, and offer a way to add housing capacity to single family residential zones without disrupting the character.
- (3) Commercial Office and PBZ zones must serve the needs of the local population while remaining compatible with the overall residential character of the community.
- (4) Ongoing protection of environmentally sensitive areas including steep slopes, ravines, watercourses, and shorelines is an integral element of the community's residential character.
- (5) View protection is important and must be balanced with the desire to protect the mature tree growth.
- (6) Within the bounds of limited public resources, open space and park land must be preserved to enhance the community's extraordinary quality of life and recreation opportunities.
- (7) There is a lack of pedestrian and transit connections between the Town Center, the Park and Ride, and Luther Burbank Park.

**V. LAND USE POLICIES**

**TOWN CENTER**

Town Center Vision	
Mercer Island Town Center Should Be ...	
1.	THE HEART of Mercer Island and embody a small town character, where residents want to shop, eat, play and relax together.
2.	ACCESSIBLE to people of all ages and abilities.
3.	CONVENIENT to enter, explore and leave with a variety of transportation modes.
4.	WELL DESIGNED with public spaces that offer attractive settings for entertainment, relaxation and recreation.
5.	DIVERSE with a range of uses, building types and styles that acknowledge both the history and future of the Island.
6.	LOCAL providing businesses and services that meet every day needs on the Island.
7.	HOME to a variety of housing options for families, singles and seniors.

**GOAL 1:**

Create a mixed-use Town Center with pedestrian scale and connections.

- 1.1 A walkable mixed-use core should be located adjacent to a regional transit facility and be of sufficient size and intensity to create a focus for Mercer Island.

**Land Use and Development**

**GOAL 2:**

Create a policy and regulatory structure that will result in a diversity of uses that meets Islanders' daily needs and helps create a vibrant, healthy Town Center serving as the City's business, social, cultural and entertainment center.

- 2.1 Use a variety of creative approaches to organize various land uses, building types and heights in different portions of the Town Center.
- 2.2 Preserve existing quantity of commercial square footage in Town Center as new development occurs.

**GOAL 3:**

Have a mixture of building types, styles and ages that reflects the evolution of the Town Center over time, with human-scaled buildings, varied height, setbacks and step-backs and attractive facades.

- 3.1 Buildings taller than two stories may be permitted if appropriate public amenities and enhanced design features are provided.

- 3.2 Locate taller buildings on the north end of the Town Center and step down building height through the center to lower heights on the south end, bordering Mercerdale Park.
- 3.3 Calculate building height on sloping sites by measuring height on the lowest side of the building.
- 3.4 Mitigate the "canyon" effect of straight building facades along streets through use of upper floor step-backs, façade articulation, and similar techniques.
- 3.5 Buildings on larger parcels or with longer frontage should provide more variation of the building face, to allow for more light and create the appearance of a smaller scale, more organic, village-like development pattern. Building mass and long frontages resulting from a single user should be broken up by techniques such as creating a series of smaller buildings (like Island Square), providing public pedestrian connections within and through a parcel, and use of different but consistent architectural styles to create smaller building patterns.
- 3.6 Building facades should provide visual interest to pedestrians. Street level windows, minimum building set-backs, on-street entrances, landscaping, and articulated walls should be encouraged.

**GOAL 4:**

Create an active, pedestrian-friendly, and accessible retail core.

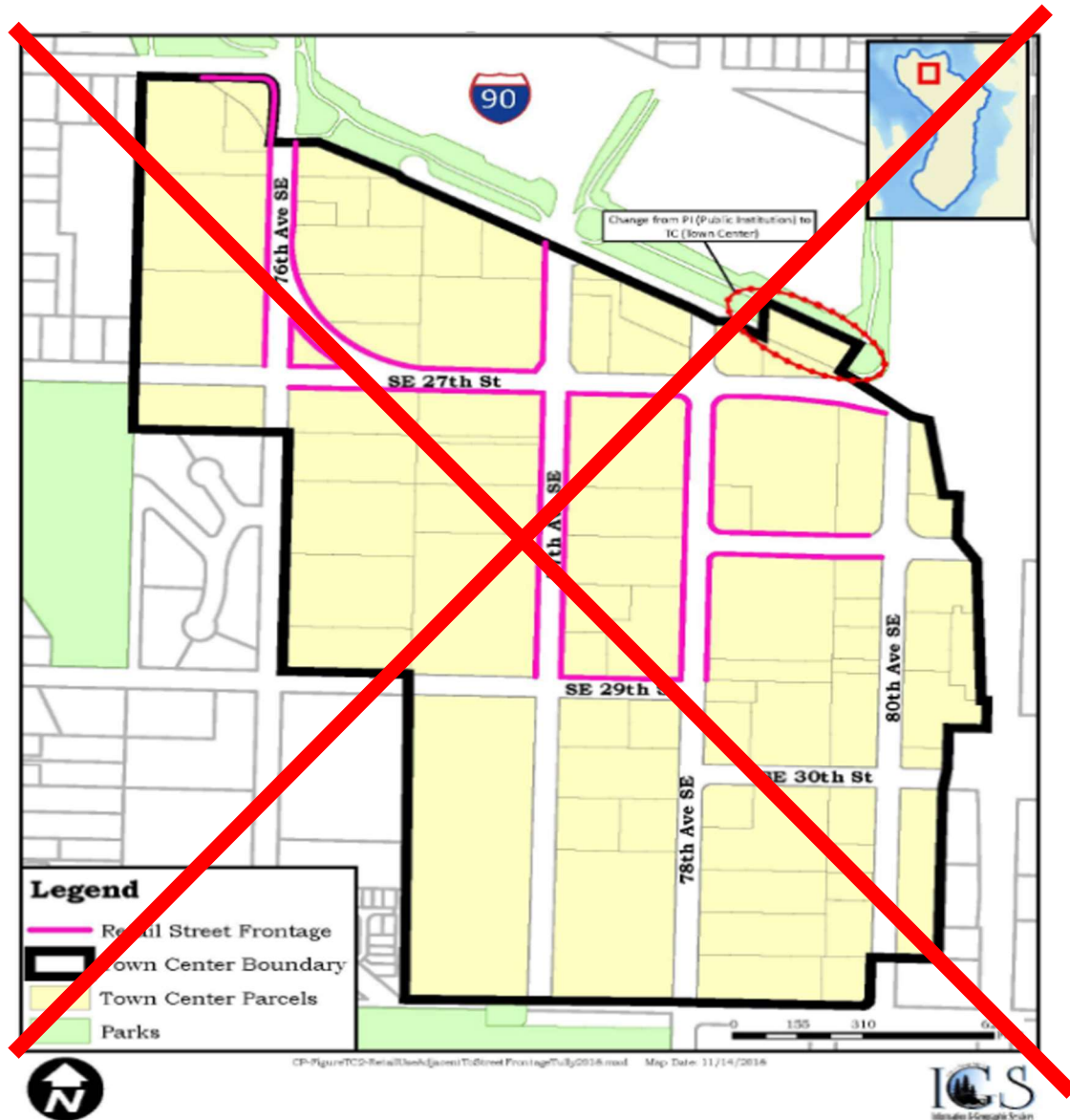
- 4.1 Street-level retail, office, and service uses should reinforce the pedestrian-oriented circulation system.
- 4.2 Retail street frontages (Figure TC-1) should be the area where the majority of retail activity is focused. Retail shops and restaurants should be the dominant use, with personal services also encouraged to a more limited extent.

**GOAL 5:**

Encourage a variety of housing forms for all life stages, including townhomes, apartments and live-work units attractive to families, singles, and seniors at a range of price points.

- 5.1 Land uses and architectural standards should provide for the development of a variety of housing types, sizes and styles.
- 5.2 Encourage development of low-rise multi-family housing in the TCMF subareas of the Town Center.
- 5.3 Encourage the development of affordable housing within the Town Center.
- 5.4 Encourage the development of accessible and visitable housing within the Town Center.
- 5.5 Encourage options for ownership housing within the Town Center.

**Figure TC 1. Retail Use Adjacent to Street Frontages**



**NOTE: Figure TC-1 "Pink Lines Map" should be struck from the Land Use Element. It will be adopted in development code and is not needed in the Comprehensive Plan itself.**

### Circulation and Parking

#### GOAL 6:

Be convenient and accessible to people of all ages and abilities, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users and motorists.

**GOAL 7:**

Town Center streets should be viewed as multiple-use facilities, providing for the following needs:

- Access to local businesses and residences.
  - Access for emergency vehicles.
  - Routes for through traffic.
  - Transit routes and stops.
  - On-street parking.
  - Pedestrian and bicycle travel.
  - Sidewalk activities, including limited advertising and merchandising and restaurant seating.
  - Occasional special events and outdoor entertainment.
- 7.1 All Town Center streets should provide for safe and convenient multi-modal access to existing and future development in the Town Center.
- 7.2 Design streets using universal design principles to allow older adults and individuals with disabilities to "stroll or roll," and cross streets safely.
- 7.3 78th Avenue SE should be the primary pedestrian corridor in the Town Center, with ample sidewalks, landscaping and amenities.
- 7.4 77th Avenue SE should serve as the primary bicycle corridor connecting the regional bicycle network along I-90 and the planned light rail station with Mercerdale Park and the rest of the Island south of the Town Center.

**GOAL 8:**

Be pedestrian-friendly, with amenities, tree-lined streetscapes, wide sidewalks, storefronts with canopies, and cross-block connections that make it easy to walk around.

- 8.1 Provide convenient opportunities to walk throughout Town Center.
- 8.2 Create safe pedestrian routes that break-up larger City blocks.

**GOAL 9:**

Have ample parking, both on-street and off, and the ability to park once and walk to a variety of retail shops.

- 9.1 Reduce the land area devoted to parking by encouraging structured and underground parking. If open-air, parking lots should be behind buildings.
- 9.2 Encourage improved access to transit, bicycle, pedestrian and shared parking facilities to reduce trip generation and provide transportation alternatives, particularly for secondary trips once users reach the Town Center.

- 9.3 Consider a range of regulatory and incentive approaches that can increase the supply of public parking in conjunction with development proposals.
- 9.4 On and off-street parking should be well-lit, convenient and well-signed so that drivers can easily find and use parking.
- 9.5 Develop long-range plans for the development of additional commuter parking to serve Mercer Island residents.
- 9.6 Prioritize parking for Mercer Island residents within the Town Center.

**GOAL 10:**

Prioritize Town Center transportation investments that promote multi-modal access to regional transit facilities.

**GOAL 11:**

Promote the development of pedestrian linkages between public and private development and transit in and adjacent to the Town Center.

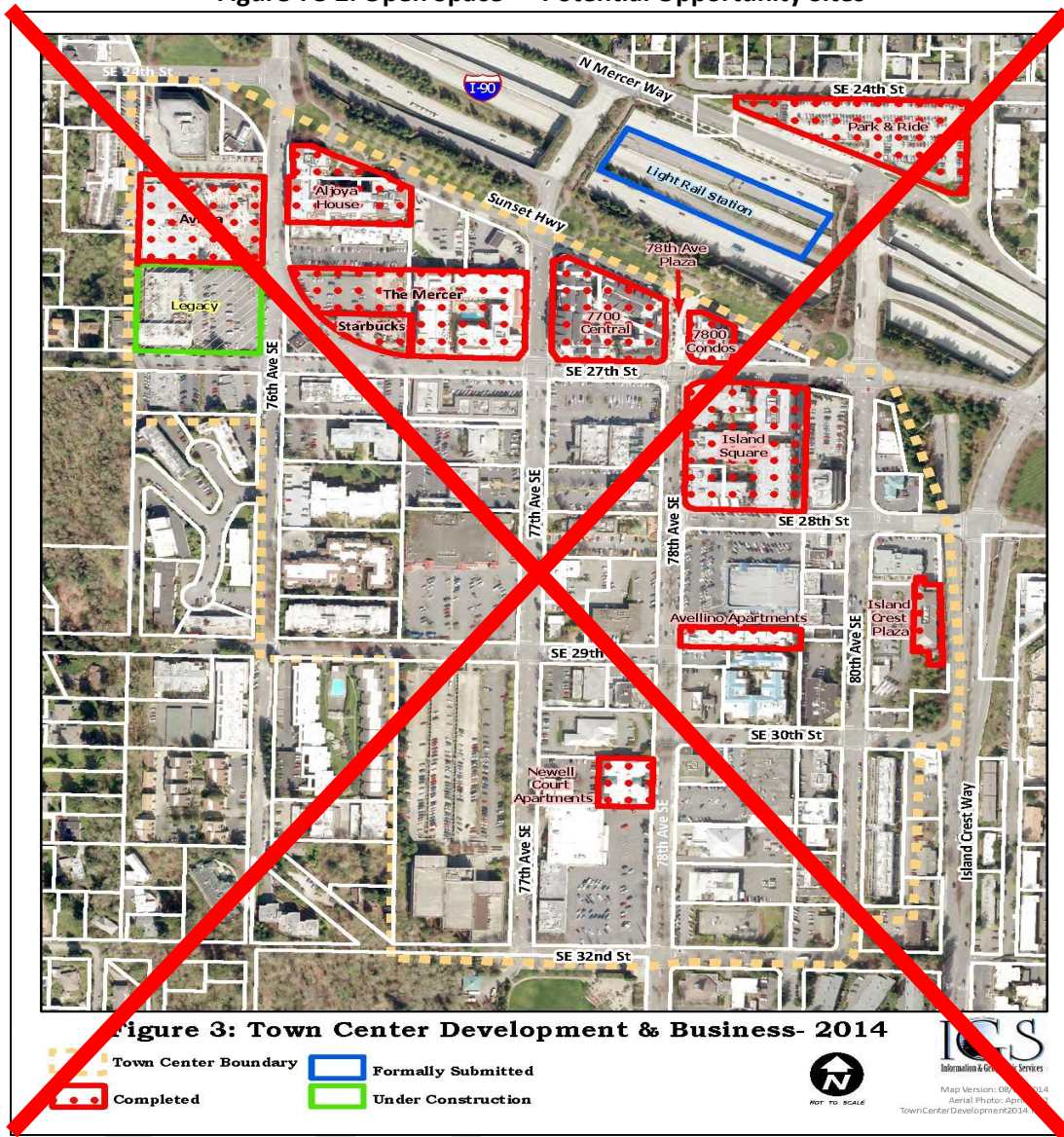
**Public Realm**

**GOAL 12:**

Have inviting, accessible outdoor spaces with seating, greenery, water features, and art that offer settings for outdoor entertainment and special events as well as for quiet contemplation.

- 12.1 Outdoor public spaces of various sizes in Town Center are important and should be encouraged.
- 12.2 Encourage the provision of on-site open space in private developments but allow development agreements and payment of a calculated amount of money as an option to dedication of land. In addition, encourage aggregation of smaller open spaces between parcels to create a more substantial open space.
- 12.3 Investigate potential locations and funding sources for the development (and acquisition if needed) of one or more significant public open space(s) that can function as an anchor for the Town Center's character and redevelopment. Identified "opportunity sites" are shown in Figure TC-2 and described below. These opportunity sites should not preclude the identification of other sites, should new opportunities or circumstances arise.

Figure TC-2. Open Space — Potential Opportunity Sites



**Note: The existing Figure TC-2 adopted by Ord 16-07 was codified with the wrong map (scrivener's error). The correct map will be inserted into the next draft.**

Sustainability Green Building

**GOAL 13:**

Town Center buildings should meet a high standard of energy efficiency and sustainable construction practices as well as exhibiting other innovative green features, above and beyond what is required by the existing Construction Code.

### Economic Development

#### GOAL 14:

Support the further economic development of Mercer Island, particularly in the Town Center.

**NOTE: Policies under Goal 14 will be reviewed for consistency with the Economic Development Element once a draft of that element is prepared.**

- 14.1 Develop an Economic Development Plan, engaging internal and external resources as appropriate.
- 14.2 Establish the Town Center as an active and attractive commercial node, including the use of gateways, wayfinding and signage, and links to transit.
- 14.3 Maintain a diversity of downtown land uses.
- 14.4 Support economic growth that accommodates Mercer Island's share of the regional employment growth target of ~~1,228~~<sup>1,300</sup> new jobs from 2006~~24~~<sup>40</sup>, by maintaining adequate zoning capacity, infrastructure, and supportive economic development policies.
- 14.5 Investigate formation of a business improvement area (BIA), or other mechanism authorized by state law, to help promote Island businesses, to support Town Center activities, and to finance improvements and amenities.
- 14.6 Identify a staff person who will help coordinate economic development activities.
- 14.7 Support public and private investment in existing properties, infrastructure, and marketing to help maintain longstanding businesses and attract new ones.
- 14.8 Create a healthy and safe economic environment where Town Center businesses can serve the needs of Mercer Island residents as well as draw upon broader retail and commercial market areas.
- 14.9 Proactively and persistently engage residents, community organizations, and businesses in a collaborative effort to establish a strategy for Mercer Island economic development.
- 14.10 Ensure that new development in Town Center maintains existing commercial square footage as new development occurs.

### *OUTSIDE THE TOWN CENTER*

#### GOAL 15:

Mercer Island should remain principally a low density, single family residential community.

- 15.1 ~~Existing land use policies, which strongly support the preservation of Preserve existing conditions in the single-family residential zones, will continue to apply. Changes to the zoning code or development standards will be accomplished through code amendments.~~
- 15.2 Residential densities in single family areas will generally continue to occur at three to five units per acre, commensurate with current zoning. However, some adjustments may be made to allow the development of innovative housing types, such as accessory dwelling units and compact courtyard homes at slightly higher densities as outlined in the Housing Element.
- 15.3 Multi-family areas will continue to be low rise apartments and condos and duplex/triplex designs, and with the addition of the Commercial/Office (CO) zone, will be confined to those areas already designated as multi-family zones.
- 15.4 As a primarily single family residential community with a high percentage of developed land, the community cannot provide for all types of land uses. Certain activities will be considered incompatible with present uses. Incompatible uses include landfills, correctional facilities, zoos and airports. Compatible permitted uses such as education, recreation, open spaces, government social services and religious activities will be encouraged.

**GOAL 16:**

Achieve additional residential capacity in single family zones through flexible land use techniques and land use entitlement regulations.

- 16.1 Use existing housing stock to address changing population needs and aging in place. Accessory housing units and shared housing opportunities should be considered in order to provide accessible and affordable housing, relieve tax burdens, and maintain existing, stable neighborhoods.
- 16.2 Through zoning and land use regulations provide adequate development capacity to accommodate Mercer Island's projected share of the King County population growth over the next 20 years.
- 16.3 Promote a range of housing opportunities to meet the needs of people who work and desire to live in Mercer Island.
- 16.4 Promote accessory dwelling units in single-family districts subject to specific development and owner occupancy standards.
- 16.5 Infill development on vacant or under-utilized sites should occur outside of critical areas and ensure that the infill is compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods.
- 16.6 Explore flexible residential development regulations and entitlement processes that support, and create incentives for, subdivisions that incorporate public amenities through the use of a pilot program. The use of flexible residential development standards should be used to encourage public amenities such as wildlife habitat, accessible homes, and sustainable development.

**GOAL 17:**

With the exception of allowing residential development, commercial designations and permitted uses under current zoning will not change.

- 17.1 The Planned Business Zone uses on the south end of Mercer Island are compatible with the surrounding single family zone needs. All activities in the PBZ are subject to design review. Supplemental design guidelines have been adopted.
- 17.2 Commercial uses and densities near the I-90/East Mercer Way exit and SE 36th Street are appropriate for that area. All activities in the CO zone are subject to design review and supplemental design guidelines may be adopted.
- 17.3 Inclusion of a range of residential densities should be allowed when compatible in the Commercial Office (CO) zones. Through rezones or changes in zoning district regulations, multi-family residences should be allowed in all commercial zones where adverse impacts to surrounding areas can be minimized. Housing should be used to create new, vibrant neighborhoods.
- 17.4 Social and recreation clubs, schools, and religious institutions are predominantly located in single family residential areas of the Island. Development regulation should reflect the desire to retain viable and healthy social, recreational, educational, and religious organizations as community assets which are essential for the mental, physical and spiritual health of Mercer Island.

***NATURAL ENVIRONMENT POLICIES*****GOAL 18:**

The protection of the natural environment will continue to be a priority in all Island development. Protection of the environment and private property rights will be consistent with all state and federal laws.

- 18.1 The City of Mercer Island shall protect environmentally sensitive lands such as watercourses, geologic hazard areas, steep slopes, shorelines, wildlife habitat conservation areas, and wetlands. Such protection should continue through the implementation and enforcement of critical areas and shoreline regulations.
- 18.2 Land use actions, storm water regulations and basin planning should reflect intent to maintain and improve the ecological health of watercourses and Lake Washington water quality.
- 18.3 New development should be designed to avoid increasing risks to people and property associated with natural hazards.
- 18.4 The ecological functions of watercourses, wetlands, and habitat conservation areas should be maintained and protected from the potential impacts associated with development.

- 18.5 The City shall utilize best available science during the development and implementation of critical areas regulations. Regulations will be updated periodically to incorporate new information and, ~~at a minimum, every eight years~~ as required by the Growth Management Act.
- 18.6 Encourage low impact development approaches for managing stormwater and protecting water quality and habitat.
- 18.7 Services and programs provided by the City with regards to land use should encourage residents to minimize their own personal carbon footprint, especially with respect to energy consumption and waste reduction.
- 18.8 The City's development regulations should encourage long term sustainable stewardship of the natural environment. Examples include preservation and enhancement of native vegetation, tree retention, and rain gardens.
- 18.9 Outreach campaigns and educational initiatives should inform residents of the collective impact of their actions on local, county, and state greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals.
- 18.10 The Stormwater Management Program Plan is hereby adopted by reference.

### ~~PARKS AND OPEN SPACE POLICIES~~

#### **GOAL 19:**

Protect and enhance habitat for native plants and animals for their intrinsic value and for the benefit of human health and aesthetics. Regulatory, educational, incentive-based, programmatic, and other methods should be used to achieve this goal, as appropriate.

- 19.1 Designate bald eagles as a Species of Local Concern for protection under the Growth Management Act. Identify additional Species and Priority Habitats of Local Concern referencing best available science and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Priority Habitats and Species List. Determine how best to protect these species and habitats.
- 19.2 Encourage the inventorying of native plants and animals on Mercer Island and the habitats that support them. As part of this effort, identify pollinators and the native plants they depend upon.
- 19.3 Evaluate and enhance the quality of habitat to support the sustenance of native plants and animals with the appropriate balance of ground, mid-level, and tree canopy that provides cover, forage, nectar, nest sites, and other essential needs. In addition to parks and open spaces, preserve and enhance habitat in conjunction with residential, institutional, and commercial development and in road rights-of-way.
- 19.4 Critical areas and associated buffers should consist of mostly native vegetation.
- 19.5 Plants listed on the King County Noxious Weed and Weeds of Concern lists should be removed as part of new development and should not be planted during the landscaping of new

- development. Efforts should be made to reduce or eliminate, over time, the use of these plants in existing public and private landscapes and in road rights-of-way. New plantings in road rights-of-way should be native plants selected to benefit wildlife and community environmental values.
- 19.6 Important wildlife habitats including forest, watercourses, wetlands, and shorelines should be connected via natural areas including walking paths along forested road rights-of-way.
- 19.7 Community tree canopy goals should be adopted and implemented to protect human health and the natural environment and to promote aesthetics. Encourage the conversion of grass to forest and native vegetation. Promote the preservation of snags (dead trees) for forage and nesting by wildlife.
- 19.8 Consider a community effort to establish new wetlands in recognition of the historical loss of wetlands.
- 19.9 When considering the purchase of land to add to community open space, prioritize the purchase and preservation of wetlands and stream headwaters.
- 19.10 Promote the use of soft shoreline techniques and limitations on night lighting to provide shallow-water rearing and refuge habitat for out-migrating and lake-rearing endangered Chinook salmon. Encourage the removal of bulkheads and otherwise hardened shorelines, overwater structures, and night lighting, especially south of I-90 where juvenile Chinook are known to congregate.
- 19.11 Promote the reduction of nonpoint pollution that contributes to the mortality of salmon, other wildlife, and vegetation. This pollution consists of pesticides, chemical fertilizers, herbicides, heavy metals, bacteria, motor oils, and other pollutants and is primarily conveyed to surface water features by stormwater runoff.
- 19.12 Promote the preservation of organic matter in planting beds and landscapes including leaves, grass clippings, and small woody debris. Encourage the import of organic material to landscapes including wood chips and finished compost to reduce water and fertilizer use and to promote food production for wildlife.
- 19.13 Promote awareness and implementation of the American Bird Conservancy's bird-friendly building design guidelines which prevent bird mortality caused by collisions with structures.
- 19.14 Promote awareness and implementation of the International Dark-Sky Association's methods to reduce the excess lighting of the night sky that negatively affects wildlife, particularly birds. Consider seeking certification as an International Dark-Sky Community.
- 19.15 Consider participation in the National Wildlife Federation's Community Wildlife Habitat Program. Encourage community members to seek certification of their homes as Certified Wildlife Habitat and consider seeking certification of Mercer Island as a Wildlife-Friendly Community.

- 19.16 Promote the establishment of bird nest boxes in parks and on private property for species that would benefit. Remind pet owners of the very significant bird mortality related to cats and to keep them indoors.
- 19.17 Promote wildlife watering.

### PARKS AND OPEN SPACE POLICIES

#### **GOAL 20:**

Continue to maintain the Island's unique quality of life through open space preservation, park and trail development and well-designed public facilities.

- 20.1 More specific policy direction for parks and open space shall be identified in the Parks and Recreation Plan and the Pedestrian and Bicycle Facility Plan. These plans shall be updated periodically to reflect changing needs in the community.
- 20.2 Acquisition, maintenance and access to public areas, preserved as natural open spaces or developed for recreational purposes, will continue to be an essential element for maintaining the community's character.
- 20.3 View preservation actions should be balanced with the efforts to preserve the community's natural vegetation and tree cover.
- 20.4 Future land use decisions should encourage the retention of private club recreational facilities as important community assets.
- 20.5 Provide recreation and leisure time programs and facilities that afford equal opportunities for use by all Mercer Island residents while considering the needs of non-Mercer Island residents.
- 20.6 Provide a system of attractive, safe, and functional parks, and park facilities.
- 20.7 Preserve natural and developed open space environments and trails for the benefit of all existing and future generations.
- 20.8 Provide a broad representation of public art through cooperation with the Mercer Island Arts Council.
- 20.9 Funding for existing facilities should be a top priority and should be provided at a level necessary to sustain and enhance parks, trails and open space consistent with the Parks and Recreation Plan, the Trails Plan and the Capital Facilities Element.
- 20.10 Promptly investigate open space acquisition opportunities as they become available.
- 20.11 Pursue state and federal grant funding for parks and open space improvements.

- 20.12 Pursue a trail lease agreement from the Washington State Department of Transportation to allow for the development of an I-90 Connector Trail to establish a pedestrian connection between Luther Burbank and Town Center.
- 20.13 Support the conservation of private property on Mercer Island through the use of conservation tools and programs including, but not limited to, the King County Public Benefit Rating System and Transfer of Development Right programs.
- 20.14 Establish a Park zone and development regulations to preserve and enhance public park land for the enjoyment of all Mercer Island residents, visitors, and future generations.

## *GREEN BUILDING*

### **GOAL 21:**

Promote the use of green building methods, design standards, and materials, for residential development, to reduce impacts on the built and natural environment and to improve the quality of life. Green building should result in demonstrable benefits, through the use of programs such as, but not limited to, Built Green, LEED, the Living Building Challenge, Passive House, Salmon Safe, or similar regional and recognized green building programs.

- 21.1 Eliminate regulatory and administrative barriers, where feasible, to residential green building.
- 21.2 Develop a green building program that creates incentives for residential development and construction to incorporate green building techniques.
- 21.3 Evaluate requiring the use of green building techniques for new construction and development of subdivisions as a component of a green building program.
- 21.4 Educate and provide technical resources to the citizens and building community on Mercer Island regarding green building as a component of sustainable development.
- ~~21.5 Conduct annual tracking of new, or significantly remodeled, structures verified under various green building programs on Mercer Island and incorporate statistics into the City's sustainability tracking system and performance measures.~~

## *DISASTER PLANNING AND RECOVERY*

### **GOAL 22:**

Maintain and enhance current community emergency preparedness and planning efforts, and provide for long-term recovery and renewal.

- 22.1 Periodically review and update the City's emergency management plans.
- 22.2 Identify, and implement, necessary enhancements to the City's emergency planning and preparedness program.

- 22.3 Coordinate with, incorporate, and support, the emergency management preparedness and planning efforts of local, regional, state, and national agencies and organizations, with attention to impacts on vulnerable populations.
- 22.4 Maintain current local community emergency preparedness programs, including volunteer coordination, City staff drills, and community outreach and education programs, with attention to impacts on vulnerable populations.
- 22.5 Adopt regulations and programs to mitigate and control hazards that are created by a natural event. For example, the creation of a new landslide hazard area resulting from a naturally occurring slope failure.
- 22.6 Continue to develop an action plan to expedite development review following an emergency event.

## *ARTS AND CULTURE*

### **GOAL 23:**

Support the arts on Mercer Island.

- 23.1 Support implementation of and encourage community involvement in accessible, high quality performing, visual and literary arts programs, projects, and events.
- 23.2 Provide educational art opportunities through Parks & Recreation curriculum.
- 23.3 Maintain a citizen Arts Council, which is advisory to the City Council and that spearheads arts programming and partnerships.
- 23.4 Promote cooperation and local partnerships between the City of Mercer Island and artists, arts providers, nonprofit organizations, urban designers, architects, developers, and others to help improve the quality of the built environment.
- 23.5 Coordinate and collaborate with the local school district to broaden accessibility and awareness of local art opportunities and to further art education.
- 23.6 Coordinate and collaborate with local, regional, and national arts organizations, and through public and private partners to integrate art into the community via permanent installations and special events.
- 23.7 Assess community art needs through community engagement and public involvement.
- 23.8 Implement a creative district and accountability strategy to complement and enhance overall City economic development strategy and to foster a thriving creative economy.
- 23.9 Support:

- 23.9.1 Efforts to secure space for art and cultural activities;
  - 23.9.2 The establishment of a community maker space;
  - 23.9.3 Opportunities for housing and/or live/work space for artists; and
  - 23.9.4 A multidiscipline-oriented community arts facility.
- 23.10 Maintain a parity of public space for art and cultural activities when existing public art and cultural activity space is modified or eliminated.

**GOAL 24:**

Nurture public art on Mercer Island.

- 24.1 Encourage diversity in public art.
- 24.2 Maintain current and encourage new spaces for public art placement.
- 24.3 Maintain and preserve the current collection and encourage the acquisition of additional public art.
- 24.4 Encourage the incorporation of public art in town center development design and site features.
- 24.5 Maintain requirement that at least one percent of qualifying capital improvement projects' costs are set aside for public art acquisition, repair, and maintenance.
- 24.6 Make an effort to include public art into and surrounding transportation projects.
- 24.7 Welcome and support community involvement in public art processes.

*Historic Preservation*

**GOAL 25:**

Preserve Mercer Island's Heritage.

- 25.1 Promote awareness and appreciation of Mercer Island's history and historic resources.
- 25.2 Support efforts to secure space for the preservation of Mercer Island's historical and cultural heritage and related archival materials.
- 25.3 Promote public engagement with culture and heritage organizations.
- 25.4 Support the curation of historical exhibits in the community.

*STAR-Climate Change*

**Note: This section will likely need more significant restructuring and amendments to align with the Climate Action Plan. After getting initial feedback from the Planning Commission, staff will work with Ross Freeman to draft additional revisions. Those amendments will be provided for review and discussion at a future commission meeting.**

**GOAL 26:**

Use the STAR Community framework, or a similar assessment framework, to help develop the City's sustainability practices and to determine the effectiveness of such practices.

- 26.1 Assess the effect of proposed Comprehensive Plan or development regulation amendments on sustainability.
- 26.2 Assess the effect of proposed City programs on sustainability.
- 26.3 Assess the City's existing strengths and weaknesses in supporting sustainability, using the STAR Communities framework or similar assessment framework, and identify desired programs or policies supporting sustainability.

**GOAL 27:**

Reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions.

- 27.1 Establish and support annual data gathering, and reporting on, Collect data and report on Mercer Island GHG emissions annually. Document progress toward emission reduction targets and progress consistent with King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C).
- 27.2 Partner with the King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C) and the community to mitigate climate change.
- 27.3 Provide public information and support to individual and community efforts to mitigate climate change.
- 27.4 Evaluate and prioritize actions to reduce GHG emissions.
- 27.5 Encourage the reduction of emissions from passenger vehicles through the development of zero- or low-greenhouse gas emitting transportation options and by reducing single-occupancy vehicle trips.
- 27.6 Promote an energy-efficient built environment by:
  - 27.6.1 Focusing development where utility and transportation investments have been made;
  - 27.6.2 Promoting the use of renewable and zero- and low-GHG emitting energy sources;
  - 27.6.3 Encouraging the use of carbon-efficient building materials and building design; and

276.6.4 Mitigating urban heat island effects by expanding tree canopy and vegetation cover.

276.7 Promote renewable power generation in the community.

**GOAL 287:**

Develop and implement a Climate Action Plan.

287.1 The Climate Action Plan is hereby adopted by reference.

**GOAL 298:**

Adapt to and mitigate local climate change impacts.

298.1 Prioritize the prevention of climate change.

298.2 Develop an adaptive response to expected climate change impacts on the community.

298.3 Increase carbon sequestration through expanding tree canopy and vegetation cover.

## **VI. ACTION PLAN**

**GOAL 3029:**

To implement land use development and capital improvement projects consistent with the policies of the comprehensive plan.

3029.1 To focus implementation of the Comprehensive Plan on those issues of highest priority to the City Council and community: Town Center development, storm drainage, critical lands protection, and a diversity of housing needs including affordable housing.

3029.2 To create opportunities for housing, multi-modal transportation, and development consistent with the City's share of regional needs.

3029.3 To make effective land use and capital facilities decisions by improving public notice and citizen involvement process.

3029.4 To continue to improve the development review process through partnership relationships with project proponents, early public involvement, reduction in processing time, and more efficient use of staff resources.

3029.5 To continue to improve the usability of the "Development Code" by simplifying information and Code format; eliminating repetitious, overlapping and conflicting provisions; and consolidating various regulatory provisions into one document.

3029.6 Mercer Island has consistently accepted and planned for its fair share of regional growth, as determined by the GMPC and the King County CPPs. However, build out of the City is approaching, ~~and could occur before 2035 or shortly thereafter.~~ In the future, the City will

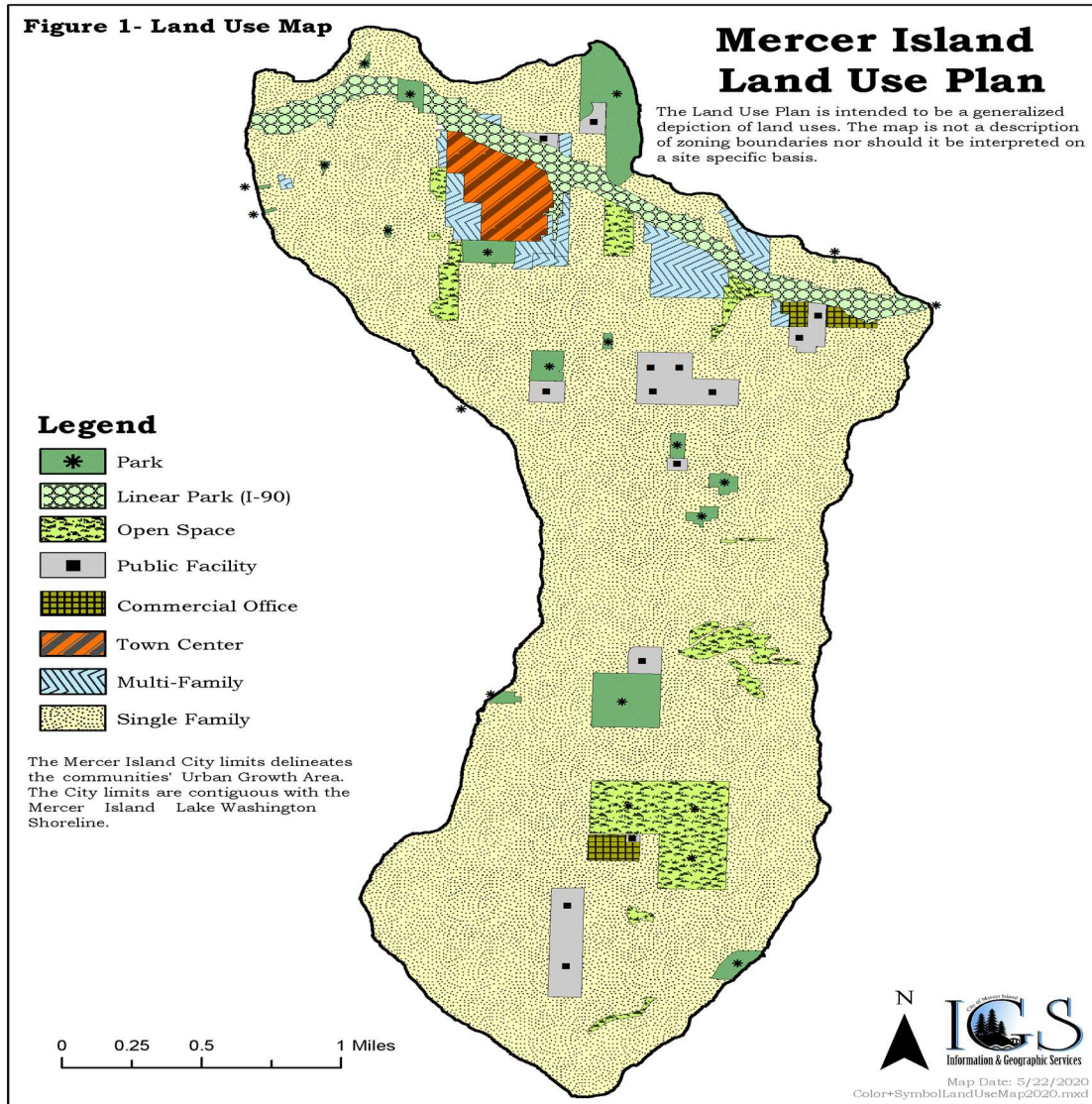
advocate for future growth allocations from the GMPC which will be consistent with its community vision, as reflected in the Comprehensive Plan and development regulations; environmental constraints; infrastructure and utility limitations; and its remaining supply of developable land.



### VII. LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

Land Use Designation	Implementing Zoning Designations	Description
Park	PI R-8.4 R-9.6	The park land use designation represents land within the City that is intended for public use consistent with the adopted Parks and Recreation Plan.

	R-12 R-15	
Linear Park (I-90)	PI	The linear park (I-90) land use designation primarily contains the Interstate 90 right-of-way. The land use designation is also improved with parks and recreational facilities (e.g., Aubrey Davis park, I-90 Outdoor Sculpture Gallery, etc.) adjacent to and on the lid above the Interstate 90 freeway.
Open Space	PI R-8.4 R-9.6 R-12 R-15	The open space use designation represents land within the City that should remain as predominantly unimproved open space consistent with the adopted Parks and Recreation Plan.
Commercial Office	CO B	The commercial office land use designation represents commercial areas within Mercer Island, located outside of the Town Center, where the land use will be predominantly commercial office. Complementary land uses (e.g., healthcare uses, schools, places of worship, etc.) are also generally supported within this land use designation.
Neighborhood Business	PBZ	The neighborhood business land use designation represents commercial areas within Mercer Island, located outside of the Town Center, where the land uses will be predominantly a mix of small scale, neighborhood oriented business, office, service, public and residential uses.
Single Family Residential (R)	R-8.4 R-9.6 R-12 R-15	The single family residential land use designation (R) represents areas within Mercer Island where development will be predominantly single family residential neighborhoods. Complementary land uses (e.g., private recreation areas, schools, home businesses, public parks, etc.) are generally supported within this land use designation.
Multifamily Residential (MF)	MF-2 MF-2L MF-3	The multifamily residential land use (MF) represents areas within Mercer Island where the land use will be predominantly multifamily residential development. Complementary land uses (e.g., private recreation areas, schools, home businesses, public parks, etc.) are generally supported within this land use designation.
Town Center (TC)	TC	The Town Center land use designation represents the area where land uses consistent with the small town character and the heart of Mercer Island will be located. This land use designation supports a mix of uses including outdoor pedestrian spaces, residential, retail, commercial, mixed-use and office-oriented businesses.
Public Facility	C-O PI R-8.4 R-9.6 R-15 TC	The public facility land use designation represents land within the City that is intended for public uses, including but not limited to schools, community centers, City Hall, and municipal services.



**Note: Figure 1 will be updated to optimize the map symbology for web viewing. No changes to land use designations will be made.**