

URGENT NEED TO REBALANCE MAYOR'S REVOLUTIONARY COMP PLAN "UPDATE"

Mayor Murray and his agencies have proposed an “update” of Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan which is in reality a revolutionary new plan that would unleash devastating new construction upon the neighborhoods that are zoned multifamily or single family, especially the 37 neighborhoods that the Comprehensive Plan since 1994 has designated as urban villages. The Mayor's proposed "update" for the Comprehensive Plan would add major new growth expectations for all of these urban villages while removing protections that currently ensure them some semblance of village-like livability.

And to make matters worse, the Mayor is proposing that Seattle take more growth than it is current expected to by regional targets, which already have Seattle accepting as its share of growth more new construction per acre and per capita than any other city in the state. Further increasing these already unsustainable growth targets would have huge negative consequences for Seattle’s livability. It is a decision that must not be considered without the City government leveling with the public about what it is proposing, and listening--not forcing a foregone conclusion.

Among the urban villages, the Comp Plan distinguishes three categories based roughly on level of density, with the least dense being the residential urban villages (examples are Eastlake and Wallingford). Other categories of urban villages are the hub urban villages (examples are Fremont, Ballard, and Lake City) and the urban centers (examples are the University District, South Lake Union, and Capitol Hill).

Officially terming these neighborhoods as “urban villages,” as the Comprehensive Plan has done since 1994, was a promise that while growth would come, it would be no more than is consistent with the intimacy and charm of a village. The commitment was that growth would only be such that the qualities of a village would be maintained; that urban problems like crime, noise, traffic danger, etc. would not be worsened by growth; that public investments would bring amenities like parks, sidewalks, etc.; and that the growth expectations for urban villages would be scaled back if livability would otherwise be sacrificed by growth.

But with the “update” the Mayor is proposing, the Comp Plan would be transformed into an engine of growth at any cost. Many if not most items in the current Comprehensive Plan that protect sustainability, livability, and public participation would be either weakened or entirely deleted. Seattle would be left unrecognizable as the city of neighborhoods it has been praised for over the past century. Emblematic of the loss of balance in this “update” is that the Comp Plan would no longer even be titled “Toward a Sustainable Seattle,” as it has been since being adopted in 1994.

Without acknowledging it to the public, the Mayor's "update" would redefine the current Comprehensive Plan “urban village strategy” as no longer to balance growth with livability, but now to mean pushing growth at any cost into the urban villages, dishonoring the current policy of balancing growth with village-like qualities. In an Orwellian reversal of meaning, the "urban village strategy” would now deny to these neighborhoods the balancing protections that they now enjoy in the current

Comp Plan. The “urban village strategy” thus would become an all-purpose excuse for density without limits. Meanwhile, the Comp Plan would also push unprecedented new growth into single family neighborhoods.

A failure of transparency. To see the proposed Comprehensive Plan “update” and the huge sales job being done, search on the web for Seattle 2035. With all the City hype about the Mayor's proposals, you are lucky if you can find on the City web site the actual Comprehensive Plan that currently governs and would in substantial part be repealed. It seems to be accessible mainly via the page which is devoted to the “update.” And until recently you were completely on your own in trying to discern the vast differences between the two documents.

After months of criticism for its failures of transparency, the City responded weakly with a “crosswalk” document (available on the Seattle 2035 documents page, and only in Excel format) that begins to identify the many parts of the current plan that would be lost. Unfortunately the crosswalk document doesn’t classify or analyze the changes. Also, anything stated in the crosswalk or other City documents doesn’t have legal standing, as the actual changes in the Comprehensive Plan will be by City Council passage of an ordinance, a draft of which the City has not yet released.

The Mayor and his agencies continue with gross violations of transparency about their proposed Comp Plan changes and indeed about the current Comp Plan whose many good parts they would furtively repeal. In response, public interest advocates from around the City have analyzed the actual changes, and are pressing the City to be more honest about what it is proposing. Readers are encouraged to review three documents (all available at <http://eastlakeseattle.org/?page=CompPlan>) that offered in the public interest: (1) a [table](#) that compares and explains the most important land use provisions of the current and proposed Comprehensive Plans; (2) a more detailed [list](#) of the deletions and weakenings in all categories, not just land use; and (3) [info](#) on the City's Nov. 7, 12, and 14 open houses where the public can write comments on poster boards, and the e-mail and U.S. mail addresses to which written public comments can be sent.

A sampling of the changes hidden in the Mayor's proposals. Following are some of the most significant features of the current Comp Plan’s balanced policies and goals which the Mayor and his agencies propose to delete or denature. A goal (those with a G) or a policy (those without a G) is deemed deleted if no similar language survives.

- Deletes policy LU11: “In order to maintain the character of Seattle’s neighborhoods and retain existing affordable housing, discourage the demolition of residences and displacement of residents, while supporting redevelopment that enhances its community and furthers the goals of the Plan.”
Effect of deletion: Eliminates current protections for affordable housing and neighborhood character.
- Deletes goal LUG2: "Foster neighborhoods in which current and future residents and business owners will want to live, shop, work, and locate their businesses. Provide for a range of housing types and commercial and industrial spaces in order to accommodate a broad range of families and

individuals, income groups, and businesses." *Effect of deletion: Eliminates the Comp Plan's neighborhood focus.*

- Deletes policy LU3: "Establish rezone criteria and procedures to guide decisions about which zone will provide the best match for the characteristics of an area and will most clearly further City goals." *Effect of deletion: Allows wholesale upzones without regard for local conditions and preferences.*
- Deletes policy LU34: "Limit the maximum amount of lot area covered by a structure to maintain compatibility with the scale and character of an area, to provide an adequate proportion of open area on a site relative to the area occupied by structures, and to provide occupants with sufficient access to light and air, as appropriate to the intended character and use of an area." *Effect of deletion: Removes current expectations for yards, landscaping, and trees.*
- Deletes policy LU39 to "preserve and enhance the City's physical and aesthetic character and environment by preventing untimely and indiscriminate removal or destruction of trees" and to provide incentives to property owners for tree retention; deletes policy LU41 for street trees; and deletes policy UV39 to enhance the tree canopy and understory in urban villages. *Effect of deletion: Trees are no longer specifically identified as important.*
- Deletes policy LU81: "Limit building heights to establish maximum heights, maintain scale relationships with adjacent buildings, and limit view blockage." *Effect of deletion: Eliminates current obstacles to unlimited increases in building heights.*
- Deletes policies LU1, LU5, LU76, LU164 that currently direct that zoning, rezoning, and conditional use changes reflect community preferences, and be consistent with neighborhood plans. *Effect of deletion: Ignores community preferences and eliminates the neighborhood planning process.*
- Deletes policies LU59 and LU60, which define and protect single family zoning. *Effect of deletion: Removes the Comp Plan's current obstacles to eliminating single family zoning.*
- Replaces policy LU67 with policy LU8.9. *Effect of change: Allows ultra small lot development in single family and multifamily zones.*
- Deletes goals LUG6, LUG6.1, and TG17 and policies LU20, LU49, LU, LU50, T-39, T-40, and T-46 that currently direct that parking policies "account for local objectives," recognize parking as a part of "moving people and goods," consider "access to local businesses," "parking spillover into residential areas," and "truck access and loading," and not "introduce serious safety problems or blighting influences" but rather "achieve vitality of urban centers and urban villages" and "preserve Seattle's competitive position in the region." While deleting those goals and policies, the Comp Plan "update" would introduce two new policies: LU63 to "rely on market forces" for onsite parking and T40 to give higher priority in the allocation of street space to "greening" (e.g. on-street parks) over "storage" (the City's new negative term for parking). *Effect of deletions and additions: Eliminates any balance or sanity in parking policies.*

Why and how to contact the Mayor and Council. It is urgent for members of the public to comment on the proposed Comprehensive Plan “update.” Until Nov. 20, please e-mail your views to 2035@seattle.gov or send them by U.S. mail to the Seattle Department of Planning and Development, Attn: Seattle 2035, 700 5th Avenue, Suite 2000, P.O. Box 34019, Seattle WA 98124-4019. But public comment to the Mayor and City Council is only beginning. As the Mayor and his agencies may be wedded to these changes, be sure to send your views to the City Councilmembers, who will make the final decision sometime in 2016.

Mayor Ed Murray does not accept comments from the public by e-mail. Electronic communication is via a web site, <http://www.seattle.gov/mayor/get-involved/contact-the-mayor>, allowing a maximum of 3500 characters, or about 500 words. (By comparison, the Mayor's proposed Comp Plan update document has more than 280,000 characters and more than 48,000 words.). You can also reach Mayor Murray by letter (there is no length limit on letters) at 600 Fourth Avenue, 7th floor, P.O. Box 94749, Seattle, WA 98124-4749, or by fax at 206-684-5360.

As the Mayor and his agencies probably are wedded to their proposals, it is urgent to contact the City Councilmembers, who will make the final decision sometime in 2016. Be sure to communicate with the City Councilmembers individually, rather than by a group e-mail or letter (which is far less likely to be heeded). The City Council e-mail addresses are currently as follows: sally.bagshaw@seattle.gov, tim.burgess@seattle.gov, jean.godden@seattle.gov, bruce.harrell@seattle.gov, nick.licata@seattle.gov, mike.obrien@seattle.gov, john.okamoto@seattle.gov, tom.rasmussen@seattle.gov and kshama.sawant@seattle.gov. Godden, Licata, Okamoto, and Rasmussen will soon leave the Council, and the results are not yet official for the four new members who will replace them. You can also reach the City Councilmembers (including those who are incoming) by letter at 600 Fourth Avenue, 2nd floor, P.O. Box 34025, Seattle, WA 98124-4025, or by fax at 206-684-8587. There is no limit on length of e-mail messages or letters to City Councilmembers.

There are more than 48,000 words in the Mayor's Comprehensive Plan update proposal (and of course that doesn't include the tens of thousands of words now quietly scheduled for deletion from the existing Comprehensive Plan). These revolutionary and very negative changes will go through unless, soon, you send some well-chosen words of your own to the City, and unless you encourage others to do so.

The above information is offered as a public service; links to the more detailed documents prepared by public interest advocates can be found at <http://eastlakeseattle.org/?page=CompPlan>. Readers are encouraged to contact Chris Leman, cleman@oo.net, (206) 322-5463 if they find any errors or divergences between what is stated here and what is in the proposed Comp Plan “update”, or if they wish to suggest improvements in this alert or in the more detailed analysis that underlies it.