

UNIVERSITY DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL
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September 15, 2015

Seattle City Council
600 4th Ave, 2nd Floor
Seattle, WA 98124
Via email

Honorable Councilmembers,

I am writing on behalf of the University District Community Council to urge you to reject DPD's proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendments for the University District (UD), and to put an immediate hold on all rezone proposals for the neighborhood until a clear and binding plan is forthcoming from DPD as to how to mitigate the impacts of existing development, let alone that which will result if current DPD's skyscraper tech-hub vision for the UD is implemented.

I was involved in the development of the current University Community Urban Center Association (UCUCA) neighborhood plan, and one of the main outcomes of that effort was that much of the core of the UD in was upzoned in anticipation of the coming of light rail, which we thought would arrive well before 2010. Light rail may be arriving 16 or so years later than the voters were initially promised, but much of the development planned to occur around it has arrived, and the UD has already exceeded its 20-year growth goals.

Several years ago, the then-President of the Greater University District Chamber of Commerce put in a standard economic development grant for the UD to the Office of Economic Development, which was rejected. DPD then expanded that proposal to require what would wind up being a total re-write of the UCUCA Plan, and this effort has largely been driven by the University of Washington since, as they provided the seed money to fund it and have also dedicated countless staff hours to ensuring that it comes out to their liking (which is to say that they will have the zoning required to allow them to develop skyscrapers on the other properties they purchased along with the former Safeco Tower).

I was asked to join the initial U-District Livability Partnership Board, and rejected the offer primarily because 1) I had watched DPD actively undermine any and all design compromises made during the last UCUCA planning process since it was adopted in favor of letting developers skirt any and all of those restrictions, and 2) because of an Orwellian gag order that forbade UDLP members from "disparaging" the work of the group. The latter requirement - and the get-along go-along culture encouraged within the UDLP - saw to it that any participants who did not share the UW and DPD's high-rise upzone agenda left the so-called "process" in short order, as this was a framework that simply brooked no dissent.

Since then, the UW has pushed relentlessly for high-rise zoning, undermined broad-based community efforts to include a plaza/open space in conjunction with the light rail station (the latest and most egregious example being the decision to pay Sound Transit to put the sort of footings on the station box that would allow a high-rise building after spending the last 5 years saying they had no plans to do so), and has effectively taken over both the former Greater University Chamber of Commerce, as well as re-constituting the U-District Business Association with a guaranteed 1/3 UW membership even though they are not actually a dues-paying

organization. In the latter case, the UW used its large land holdings – which are in fact publicly-owned - to push through approval of the BIA over the objections of many smaller local property owners. The UW's donations toward the BIA may be voluntary, but it certainly appears that they are getting what they paid for!

I – and most of the members of the UDCC - knew four years ago that the predetermined outcome of this so-called “public process” was going to be a binding upzone to build skyscrapers in the UD accompanied by a smattering of vague non-binding language about how this development would be mitigated, which is exactly what has occurred. This upzone is being driven almost entirely by the University of Washington and DPD with the barest fig leaf of community involvement, and the time for the Council to put the brakes on it is now.

In addition, the University of Washington is currently developing its next 10-year Campus Master Plan (CMP), and among the proposals they say they are studying (which in reality means that they are a done deal, if the UDP process and the previous CMP experience are any indication) is to upzone for several 240' buildings along the length of Pacific Avenue, as well as at least doubling and possibly tripling the zoned heights in the Southwest Campus. This is an entirely separate process from the current one being stage-managed by DPD and the UW to add skyscrapers north of the UW's Major Institution Overlay, and it is important to note that the environmental analysis of each of these plans will occur in isolation, and will not analyze the cumulative effects of both actions being taken together. Needless to say, this is no accident.

It is simply premature to make the changes DPD is proposing to the Comprehensive Plan until the City Council actually does the work (which one would hope will actually involve the broader public) to make the policy decision that zoned heights in the University District will be increased four to six fold. If these Comprehensive Plan Amendments are approved, I have no doubt that DPD will be citing them when the Council takes up the actual rezone package as setting the direction for their plan to turn the U-District into South Lake Union north, and by then any community input opposing the UW/DPD juggernaut will be said to be too little, too late.

The Livable U-District Coalition has it exactly right – the Council needs to put a halt to all of DPD and the UW's proposed upzones until a comprehensive and binding mitigation plan is developed and fully vetted first. No mitigation – no upzones. Period.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Fox". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Matt Fox,
UDCC President
U of W Class of 1988