

Midtown Task Force

Meeting #1 Consultant's Report

by Bill Trimm, FAICP

Task Force Purpose, Members, Staff and Consulting Team

The first meeting of the Midtown Task Force was conducted on July 28th utilizing the city's virtual meeting app Zoom. The Task Force is composed of 13 members appointed by the City Council with two representatives from the Planning Commission (Mitch Cornelison and Van Tormohlen), Economic Development Committee (Gordon Cole and Raymond Cook), and nine at-large members (Paula Denny, Rio Ingram, Thomas Kreinbring, Ethan Martez, Katherine Thompson, Karl Houtman, Jeanette Pop, Alice Armstrong and Kyle Stevens). Two members of the City Council (Councilmembers Merrill and Kuleta) serve in a liaison capacity.

Following a welcome by Mayor Kartak, the Task Force introduced themselves and stated their interest in the Snohomish community and specifically, the Midtown Planning District. Planning Director Glen Pickus, AICP, summarized the agenda and introduced Planner Brooke Eidem and Economic Development and Communications Manager Wendy Poischbeg as staff members who will guide the planning process.

The consulting team of Bill Trimm, FAICP, Town Planning and Economic Development and Bob Bengford, AICP of Makers Architecture and Urban Design was introduced and provided the Task Force with a summary of the roles and responsibilities of the City Staff, Consultants and Task Force members. Pursuant to the ordinance creating the Task Force, the role of the Task Force is to discuss, consider and recommend effective and practical revisions to the Comprehensive Plan policies and development regulations for the Midtown District. The focus of their recommendation is to generate economic development, increase housing options and create affordable housing. Their recommendations will then be forwarded to the Planning Commission for review, a public hearing and recommendation to the City Council for action. The consultants' roles are to facilitate the meetings and bring forward plan policy, zoning and design revisions based on the Task Forces' input.

Midtown Planning District - Visioning Exercise

The primary focus of the first meeting was to ask Task Force members what they envisioned would be the future land use mix for various portions of the 106-acre Midtown District. To provide the Task Force with a sense of the land uses and building types that may be viable in the District, a set of images of various developments from around the region were presented. The images were reproduced from a recent market study conducted by Snohomish County. The study analyzed current economic and demographic data for the City and projected what land use mix and building prototypes would best fit their 9.5-acre site east of Avenue D and 13th street specifically and the Midtown District generally.

To fully understand the group's expectations of future land uses and building form, a "visioning exercise" was conducted for seven separate sections of the District. As each section or "vista" was shown on the PowerPoint screen, the Task Force was asked to visualize what the vista would look like in the year 2035. The first four vistas were in the southern section of the Avenue D corridor between 6th Street and just north of 10th Street. The remaining three vistas were in the northern section of the corridor including the Snohomish County site.

The Southern Section

Between 6th street and 7th Streets on the east side of Avenue D, several members envisioned the area to be transitional with a mix of multi-family housing over convenience retail or office uses. The "transitional" idea was based on members understanding that the neighborhoods south of 6th are characterized with historic single-family residential uses. Other comments considered future stand-alone multi-family housing while others did not see any real change due to the stable mix of current office, multifamily residential and religious uses. Between 7th and approximately 9th Streets, if extended, members thought there would not be much change to the west side of Avenue D but envisioned upgraded buildings and new mixed-use housing and commercial uses on the east side of the street. Some members envisioned the area currently occupied with large surface parking to be redeveloped with multi-family housing, upgraded commercial uses, and improved internal traffic flow between the uses. Concern about the safety and appearance of the Interurban trail that leads to the Aquatic Center were echoed by several members. Thoughts to improve the "greening" of the area and trail safety included trail widening, signage and landscaping.

Ideas about the section of the corridor between 10th Street and the Kla-Ha-Ya Village shopping center differed for each side of Avenue D. On the west side, several members envisioned mixed use residential over retail with tuck under parking due to the elevation change. Although the east side of Avenue D appears fully developed with auto-repair uses, offices and retail, new commercial/manufacturing could occupy the large commercial building adjacent to the dental office/restaurant building. Members also commented on the importance of improving the intersection of 10th and Avenue D as new and redeveloped uses occur in the immediate area.

The Northern Section

The section north of 13th Street on the east side of Avenue D, generated numerous thoughts about future building upgrades and major redevelopment potential. This section includes the Safeway and Haggen Shopping centers and several smaller strip malls and out-buildings. Members commented that this area has greatest opportunity for redevelopment primarily due to the large expanse of surface parking. Thoughts focused on building and site design compatibility with future uses on the county site west of Avenue D. Several members emphasized the importance of ensuring compatible street frontage improvements that address pedestrian safety, landscaping and compatible building form with the County site. Redevelopment of the large surface parking lots for multi-family housing and retail uses not associated with groceries were suggested. Several members thought revitalization of the buildings south of 13th Street including modernized facades and upgraded building materials could improve the appearance of the site and perhaps generate more economic development interest and opportunities.

Other thoughts included improving pedestrian activity and linkages with the Ferguson Park and Blackmans Lake.

The northernmost section of the corridor from 13th Street to the roundabout including the Armory site on the east side of Avenue D generated numerous ideas about future development. Concerning the west side of Avenue D north of the county site, members discussed future housing opportunities, mixed use development and ensuring pedestrian safety related to crossing Avenue D. The members also thought the Armory site, located adjacent to Ferguson Park, provided a great opportunity for redevelopment. The site is owned by the City and if or when the Armory relocates to another site in the region, the site could be redeveloped to more intensive uses. Ideas about future uses ranged from creating a park with trail linkages to Ferguson Park and Blackmans Lake to mixed-uses including a motel, flex/tech spaces for incubator business and multi-family housing. Staff noted that the site serves as a “northern anchor” and entrance to the Avenue D corridor and future uses should be well designed to embrace the architectural character of Snohomish.

The last vistas to be envisioned were the 9.5-acre Snohomish County former shops site. Two vistas were presented. First, members were asked to consider what type of uses and building types they saw adjacent to the Bonneville Avenue frontage. Ideas included dense multi-family housing fronting on the street and distinctive architectural design to take advantage of views from Highway 9. The second vista of the County site was from the Avenue D frontage. Several members envisioned the development of a mix of multi-family housing and commercial uses with internal open space corridors similar to previous images shown for Woodinville. Access to the site from Avenue D was also a concern and how to safely address pedestrian movements to the shopping centers located to the east. Concern was also expressed about general traffic volumes from new developments and how best to mitigate the impacts.

Next Steps – Visual Preference Survey

Based on the Task Force’s comments and input for future land uses, City staff and the consulting team are in the process of preparing a visual preference survey. The visual preference survey will be presented at the next Task Force meeting, tentatively scheduled for August 25th and is aimed at gaining an understanding of the Task Forces’ preference of the design of buildings, sites, streetscapes, storefronts and housing types. The product or outcome of the visual preference survey is to inform potential revisions to the City’s current plan, policies and development regulations. In other words, can the designs of buildings, sites, streetscapes and landscaping preferred by the Task Force be attainable given the current plan and regulatory environment? If not, staff and consultants will prepare a list of comprehensive plan policy and code revisions that will be necessary to realize the Task Force’s vision. In accordance with the Midtown District planning process, suggested revisions to the plan and development regulations will be presented to the Task Force in late September for review.