

# MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Commission  
From: Midtown Planning District Task Force  
Date: February 23, 2021  
Subject: Recommended Midtown Planning Policies and Design Principles

## **Introduction**

The City Council created the Midtown Planning District Task Force in February 2020 to study and recommend to the Planning Commission potential revisions to the City's Comprehensive Plan and development regulations for the 305-acre Midtown Planning District. Our 13-member Task Force, together with the City Council liaisons, met for six virtual meetings between July 28, 2020 and February 23, 2021. Our Task Force discussed, reviewed, and listened to a myriad of issues and ideas to promote future development and redevelopment in the Midtown District consistent with the City Council's goals. We are pleased to present the following suggested policies and design principles for your consideration in preparing updated Comprehensive Plan policies and development regulations for the Midtown Planning District.

## **Task Force Meeting Summary**

At our first meeting on July 28<sup>th</sup>, we received information on the existing conditions and infrastructure capacities and participated in a visioning exercise to consider various future land use patterns for the district. Our second meeting, held on August 25<sup>th</sup>, was devoted to a visual preference survey where we voted on a series of images of various building typologies, heights, details, streetscapes and landscaping concepts that we thought would best fit with the Snohomish Character.

Based on our comments, expectations, and ideas expressed at the first two meetings, staff introduced several new planning concepts and policy additions at our third meeting on October 13<sup>th</sup>. The policy additions are to be considered by the Planning Commission for incorporation into the Comprehensive Plan and to guide the further development of new zoning and design elements for buildings, site planning, streetscapes, parking and landscaping improvements. The proposed policy additions are enabled by the following existing land use, transportation, economic development, and housing goals from the Comprehensive Plan.

## **Comprehensive Plan Goals**

- Designate adequate lands for existing and future land use needs of Snohomish.
- Encourage higher density residential development in appropriate locations.
- Manage growth and community change in accordance with the values and vision of the Snohomish community of residents, landowners, and businesspeople, and consistent with the Growth Management Act.
- Preserve and enhance the quality of character of and connections between the City's residential and mixed-use neighborhoods.
- Accommodate a range of housing types and residential densities to provide living options for the spectrum of ages, lifestyles, and economic segments of the City's population,

- {Promote} Quality housing available to all economic sectors of the community and those with special needs,
- Use public resources efficiently to leverage economic development,
- Develop thriving commercial areas that are safe, attractive, and convenient, and
- Develop an integrated and balanced transportation system in Snohomish that provides safe, efficient, and reliable multimodal transportation and improves the system’s environmental outcomes.

**Proposed Midtown District Policy Additions**

To move forward in realizing these goals, the Task Force is recommending that the Planning Commission consider the following policy direction for the Comprehensive Plan and design principles to inform new design standards to the City’s Land Use Development. City staff prepared the following proposed policy amendments to the Comprehensive Plan based on comments, opinions and ideas provided by the Task Force at the first two meetings.

**Land Use:**

- LU 2.12** Create a Midtown Zoning District in the Commercial Land Use Designation Area generally along the Avenue D corridor from Sixth Street to SR9. Provide two distinct overlay areas to accommodate differing land use densities and intensities.
  - a. The southern portion of the district between Sixth and 10<sup>th</sup> streets should allow mixed land uses and low-rise building heights to maintain compatibility with surrounding public and residential neighborhoods.
  - b. The northern portion of the district between 10<sup>th</sup> Street and SR 9 should allow for mixed-use developments with moderate to high residential densities and mid-rise buildings deemed compatible with surrounding uses and neighborhoods.
- LU 2.13** Create new site and building design standards applicable to Avenue D and cross streets in the Midtown Zoning District that provide for varying building facades and heights, streetscape features, parking, vehicular and pedestrian access, and landscaping provisions.
- LU 2.14** Promote the use of innovative regulatory tools to encourage flexibility in the design, conditions and phasing of unique- use development proposals.

**Multiple Family**

- MF 5.5** Multi-family residential in the Midtown District should be sited and designed consistent with the district design standards for building massing, details, façade materials, open space, landscaping, parking and service elements. The siting and design of buildings that front on Avenue D and cross streets should reflect the block frontage standards stated in the design standards.
- MF 5.6** Consider expanding the City’s Multiple Family Tax Exemption to increase the City’s economic competitiveness and incentivize new multi-family development proposals in the Midtown District.

## Commercial

**CO 6.1:** **Commercial capacity.** Designate adequate mixed-use areas to provide for a variety of commercial activities with differing characteristics and emphases as described below:

- a. Commercial: ...
- b. Neighborhood Business: ...
- c. Historic Business District: ...
- d. Business Park: ...
- e. Midtown District
  - e-1: Enable increased density and intensity standards that will incentivize desired commercial development and respond to local market conditions.
  - e-2: Retain and support expansion of existing uses in the Midtown District and support infill development consistent with design standards.
  - e-3: Promote more intensive development in the corridor north of 10<sup>th</sup> street through redevelopment of large surface parking lots to mixed-use developments and upgrades to existing multi-tenant buildings. Architectural and urban design standards should begin to define the “Snohomish Character” and enhance the northern gateway to the District and City.
  - e-4: The former Snohomish County Public Works Shop site at 1201 Bonneville Ave. should be planned for mixed land uses including multi-family residential, office, flex-tech, and commercial uses. Site design should take advantage of the elevation change with terraced building pads, varying building heights, open space layout and opportunities for structure parking. Site improvements that front on Avenue D and Bonneville Avenue should provide enhanced streetscape features such as abundant landscaping, widened sidewalks and safe vehicular access.

## Transportation

**TR 22: Land use planning.** Plan for land use densities and mixed-use development patterns that encourage walking, biking and transit use in designated areas. Consider amending the City’s Capital Improvement Program to provide for the preparation of a streetscape and landscape improvement plan for the Avenue D corridor.

### **Proposed revisions to the Zoning Code and Design Standards to Implement the Midtown Policies**

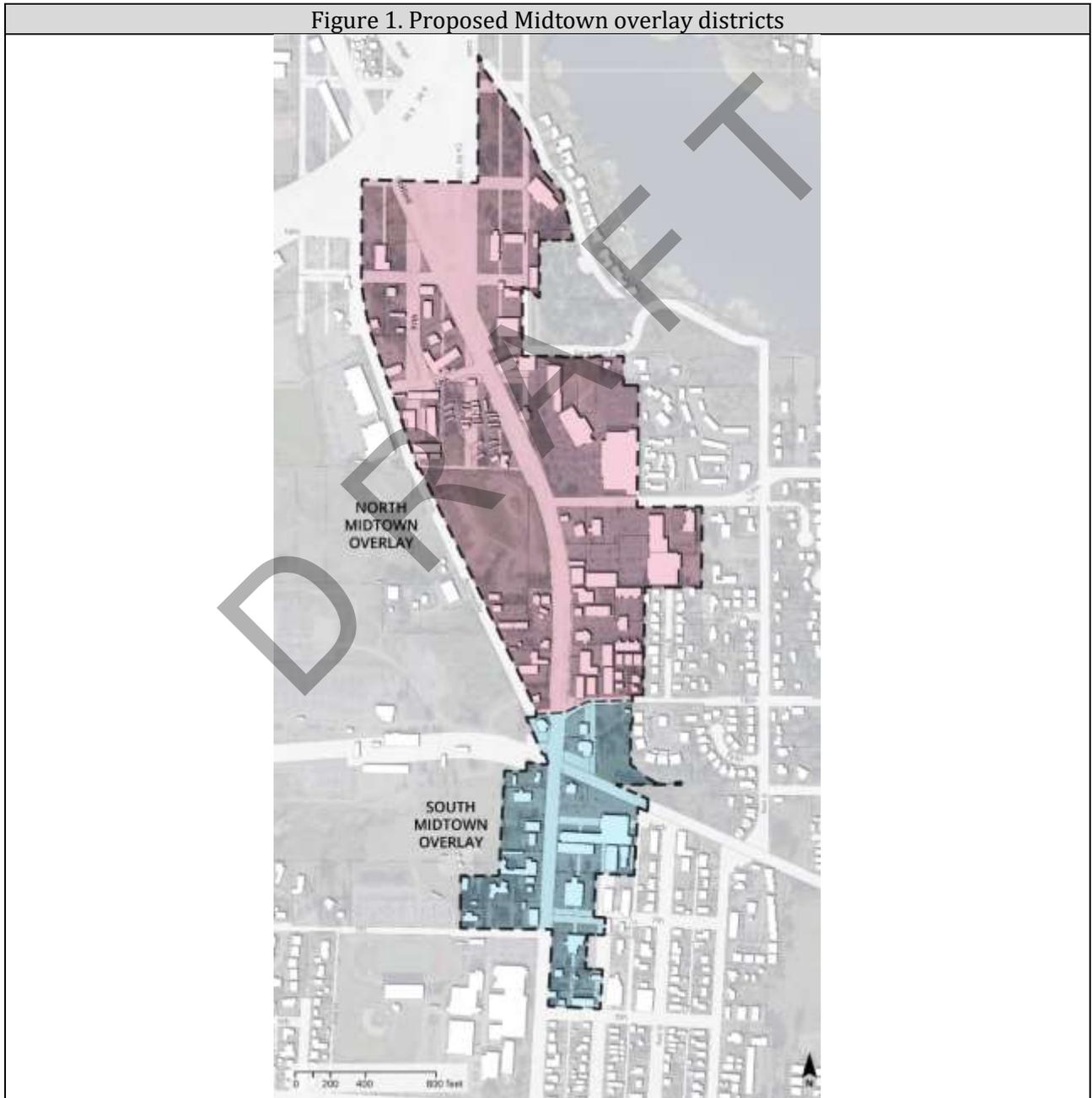
Using the proposed Midtown District Policies as a basis, staff presented the Task Force with a set of potential revisions to the City’s development code as well as City initiatives that may be directed by the City Council. The following suggested revisions to both the City’s zoning code and design standards were presented for our consideration at our fourth meeting on October 27th.

**Development Code Considerations:**

**Potential Zoning Code Revisions**

Given that the Midtown District, which is currently zoned Commercial, encompasses over 300 acres and extends for nearly one mile from Sixth Street to Highway 9, we were presented with a policy question of dividing the area into two segments or overlay areas. The overlay areas were based on existing land uses and the opportunities for potential future redevelopment. The southern overlay area would extend from 6<sup>th</sup> avenue to 10<sup>th</sup> and the northern overlay area from 10<sup>th</sup> avenue to highway 9. Figure 1 illustrates the two segments.

Figure 1. Proposed Midtown overlay districts



Based on the existing low-density land use character combined with limited redevelopment potential in the southern area, the Task Force felt that building height and land use intensity should be less than that of the northern area. Thus, for the southern overlay area, we opined that potential revisions to the zoning code should consider limiting the building height to 45 feet and allow for future mixed-use buildings.

For the northern overlay area, our consensus was that greater opportunities exists for future redevelopment due to the large amount of land devoted to surface parking lots and vacant parcels. To provide for more competitive land uses subject to local market conditions, we believed the residential density should be increased from 18 dwelling units per acre to a greater density consistent with market conditions and with a building height up to 55 feet.

## Potential Design Standards Revisions

The Task Force provided the City staff with our opinions on various design considerations for the Midtown District. We are aware that the Planning Commission is the appropriate body to review and recommend various development code provisions to the City Council and given that, our Task Force would like you to consider the revisions to the City's design standards based on the following design principals. These principles were derived from our review of various design elements and features gleaned from the visual preference survey. The following list of principles are not ranked nor prioritized but should provide a solid foundation for the draft design standards that follow.

### Design Principles

- ***Building location and orientation standards for the Districts' streetscapes are intended to implement the community's vision. These are referred to as "block frontage standards" and include designations such as storefront, mixed, landscape and undesignated, which can be applied on a block-by-block basis in the district to help guide the form of future development.***

Examples of the block frontage provisions are presented in Figures 2-5 below.

Figure 2. Example summary of applicable block frontage designations

Summary of key block frontage types.		
	Permitted Frontage	Details
<b>Storefront</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No new parking adjacent to the street.</li> <li>Special transparency, weather protection, and entry requirements.</li> <li>Minimum commercial space height and depth.</li> <li>No ground floor residential uses except lobbies for upper level units.</li> </ul>
<b>Mixed</b>	↑ Storefront or Landscape Frontages allowed ↓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parking must be to the side or rear of buildings. For multi-building developments, no more than 50% of frontage may be parking.</li> <li>Landscaping to soften façades of non-storefronts and buffer parking areas.</li> <li>Minimum façade transparency requirements per use and setback.</li> </ul>
<b>Landscape</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parking must be to the side or rear of buildings. For multi-building developments, no more than 50% of frontage may be parking.</li> <li>Landscaping to soften façades and buffer parking areas.</li> </ul>
<b>Undesignated</b>	Storefront or Landscape Frontages allowed but not required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landscaping to soften façades of non-storefronts and buffer parking areas.</li> <li>Minimum façade transparency requirements per use and setback.</li> </ul>

Figure 3. Example “Storefront” frontages and standards

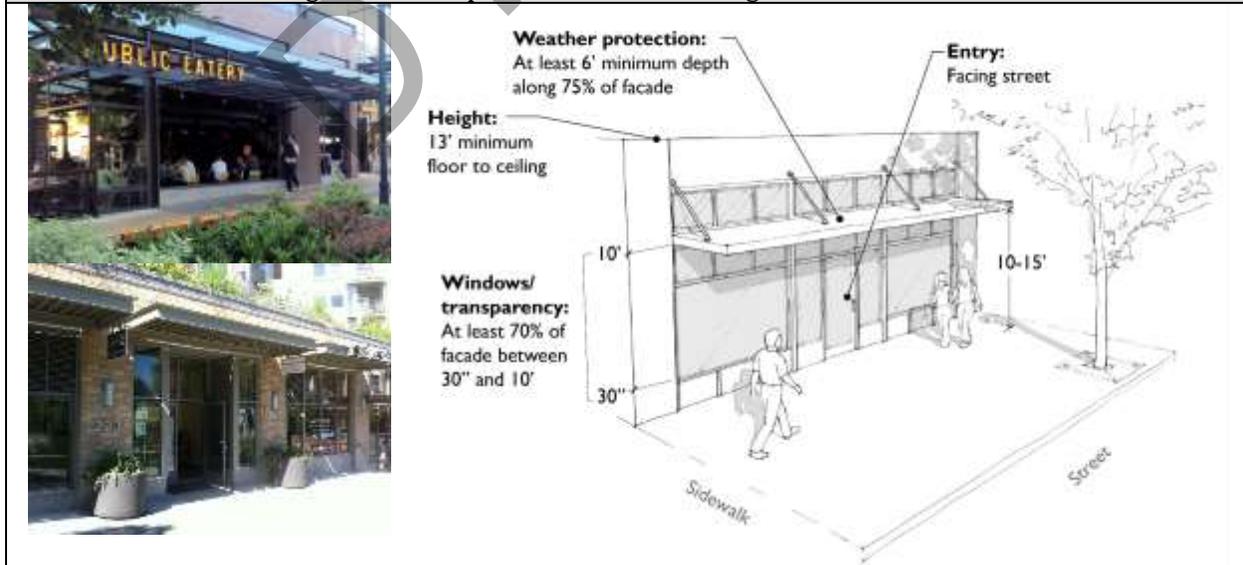
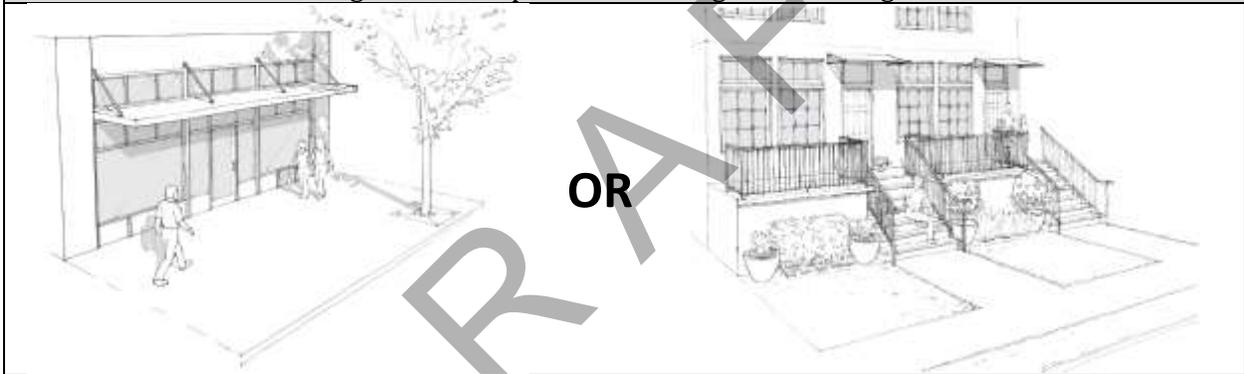


Figure 4. Example "Landscaped" frontages and standards



Figure 5. Example "Mixed" designated frontages

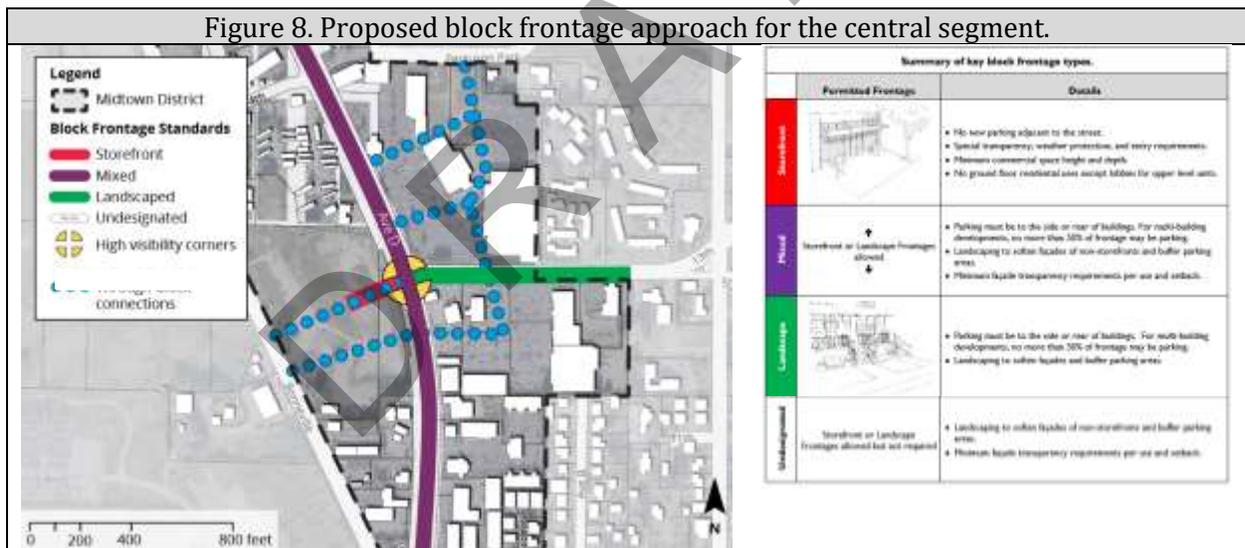


- **The Avenue D Corridor should continue to allow for a mixture of storefront and landscaped block frontages.**

Figure 7 below illustrates a mixed block frontage designation from Avenue D between 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>.



- **13th Street should emphasize landscaped block frontages.**



- *Buildings should be articulated to add visual interest and reduce the perceived scale of large buildings.*

Figure 9. Articulated building examples.



- *Building façades should integrate high-quality exterior materials with an emphasis on brick and wood, but flexibility to consider other materials that help reinforce and enhance the character of Snohomish.*

Figure 10. High quality exterior building materials that reinforce and enhance the character of Snohomish



- ***The County maintenance yard site should be planned for mixed uses including multiple family residential, commercial and flex-tech uses with building frontages on Avenue D and Bonneville Ave consistent with new design Standards.***

Snohomish County provided two alternative layouts for the Open Houses. Both alternatives are consistent with the above design principle. (Place holder for Task Force Comments on the County alternatives to be added from February 9<sup>th</sup> meeting)

## Alternative A



# Alternative B



## Public Comments from the Open Houses

As you know, the City created a highly creative three-tiered approach to the public outreach step of our planning process. Staff did a great job of preparing a story map of the Midtown project, a description of potential new land use policy and design issues and an opportunity for the public to weigh in with their individual comments and opinions. Although the public responses and comments are all available on the City's Midtown website, we thought it interesting to share with the Commission how the public's response aligns with the views of the Task Force for various survey questions introduced at the open houses. Thus, provided below is a matrix that illustrates how the Task Force opinions compare with those of the public for the survey questions.

Issue / Survey Question	Task Force Consensus (poll results from TF mtgs. 2 and 3)	Open House Comment
Should a separate Planning District be created to plan and regulate development in Midtown?	Yes	Yes
Should two geographic planning areas be created in Midtown?	Yes	Question not asked, see comments below
Should greater density and building heights be permitted?	Yes	Yes

What types of uses should be prohibited?	Warehousing, outdoor storage, manufacturing	Warehousing, industrial, storage, manufacturing, vehicle sales
South Overlay – Acceptable Maximum Building Height	35'-45'	45'
North Overlay area – Acceptable Maximum Building Height	55'	55'
North Overlay Area- Is a 75' building height acceptable under special circumstances?	Generally unacceptable	Generally unacceptable
Should Midtown have separate parking standards that focus on location, credits and reduced stalls?	Yes	Yes
Should tandem parking be allowed for townhomes?	Yes	Yes
Should design standards discourage corporate architecture?	Yes	Yes
Should design standards require wood and/or brick exterior materials?	Yes, with flexibility of other materials	Generally, Yes (13 yes-10 no)
Should pitched rooflines be required for buildings of 4 stories or less?	Generally, Yes (5 yes – 4 neutral)	Split (11 yes-11 no)
Should flat roofs be required for buildings of 4 stories or more?	Yes, with additional design elements	Yes
Should enhanced open space standards be adopted?	Yes, general comments to enhance “greening” of the corridor.	Yes

Staff also provided the Task Force with the following summary of additional open house comments provided via email.

1. New design standards and development regulations are needed to incentivize redevelopment and must be implemented. Consider the Pilchuck standards as a model.
2. Enhance pedestrian facilities and access through improved sidewalks, trails and biking lanes throughout the District and the City.
3. Like the idea of two zones.
4. Consider increasing density and building height to help address affordable housing needs.
5. Promote mixed use developments with structured parking and reduce large surface parking lots.
6. Plan for more public open space, consistent landscaping standards and improved maintenance.
7. Alternatives A and B for the County site are acceptable.

**(Place holder for Additional Task Force comments from 2/9 and 2/23 meetings)**

Again, we are pleased to present these suggested policies and design standards to the Planning Commission for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Midtown Task Force,

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Rio Ingram, Chair

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