



## MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Commission  
From: Midtown Planning District Task Force  
Date: March 9, 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 seven virtual meetings between July 28, 2020 and March 9, 2021. Our Task Force has 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 list of recommendation for your consideration in preparing updated Comprehensive Plan policies and development regulations for the Midtown Planning District. The recommendations include several new policies to the Comprehensive Plan, a new zoning designation for Midtown, and new design principles that will inform potential code amendments.

### **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 and help define the Snohomish Character.

Based on our comments, expectations, and ideas expressed at the first two meetings, the Midtown Project Team (staff and consultants Bill Trimm and Bob Bengford) 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 and consistent with the following existing land use, transportation, economic development, and housing goals from the Comprehensive Plan.

## Comprehensive Plan Goals

- **GOAL LU 1:** Designate adequate lands for existing and future land use needs of Snohomish.
- **GOAL LU 16:** Encourage higher density residential development in appropriate locations.
- **GOAL LU 2:** 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.
- **GOAL LU 3:** Preserve and enhance the quality of character of and connections between the City's residential and mixed-use neighborhoods.
- **GOAL LU 5:** 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,
- **GOAL HO 1:** [Promote] Quality housing available to all economic sectors of the community and those with special needs,
- **GOAL ED 4:** Use public resources efficiently to leverage economic development,
- **GOAL LU 6:** Develop thriving commercial areas that are safe, attractive, and convenient, and
- **GOAL TR 1:** 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 Comprehensive Plan Policies for the Midtown District

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 the creation of new zoning provisions and design standards to the City's Land Use Development Code (Title 14 Snohomish Municipal Code). The following recommended policy amendments to the Comprehensive Plan are based on first drafts prepared by the Project Team and on comments, opinions and ideas provided by the Task Force in reviewing the initial drafts.

### 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 with moderate residential densities 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 land use developments with higher densities and mid-rise buildings deemed compatible with surrounding uses and neighborhoods.
- LU 2.13** Create new site and building design standards applicable to 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 or mixed- 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.

*(Note: Examples of the block Frontage Standards and designations are illustrated in Figure 2 on page 6)*

**MF 5.6** Promote a mix of new residential units, sizes and densities and use effective strategies designed to create residences that include those that are affordable to low- and moderate-income households, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

## 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 adopted 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 Bonnevill 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 Bonnevill 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 Zoning Code and Design Principles for the Midtown District

Using the proposed Midtown District Policies as a basis, the Project Team presented the Task Force with a set of potential revisions to the City's zoning code and design standards for our consideration at our October 27<sup>th</sup> meeting and further discussed at our February 9<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> meetings.

### 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 future redevelopment. The southern overlay area would extend from Sixth Street to 10<sup>th</sup> Street and the northern overlay area from 10<sup>th</sup> Street generally to Highway 9. Figure 1 on the next page 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 land uses and buildings.

For the northern overlay area, our consensus was that greater opportunities exist 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 maximum building height up to 55 feet.

## Proposed Design Standards Revisions

The Task Force provided the Project Team 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 recommended principles were derived from our review of various design elements and features gleaned from the visual preference survey. The following list of recommended 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>	<p>↑</p> <p>Storefront or Landscape Frontages allowed</p> <p>↓</p>	<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>	<p>Storefront or Landscape Frontages allowed but not required</p>	<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>

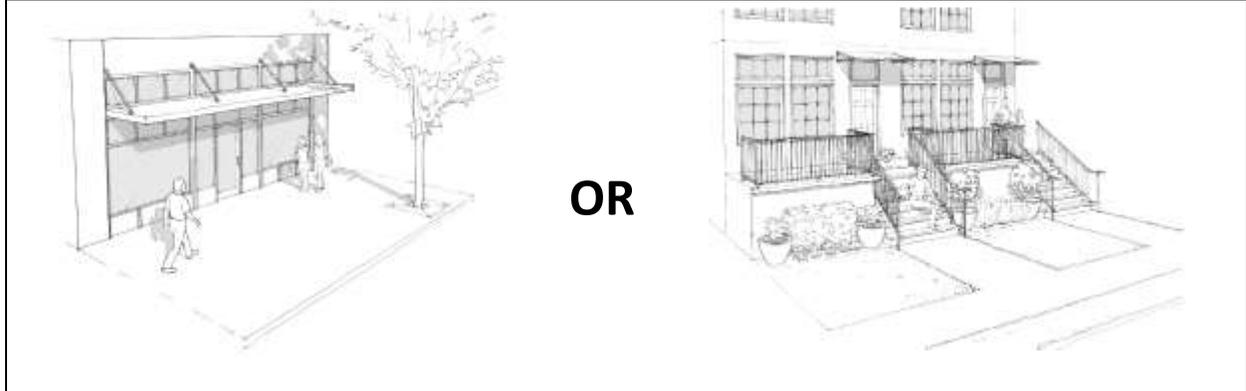
**Figure 3. Example “Storefront” frontages and standards**



**Figure 4. Example “Landscaped” frontages and standards**



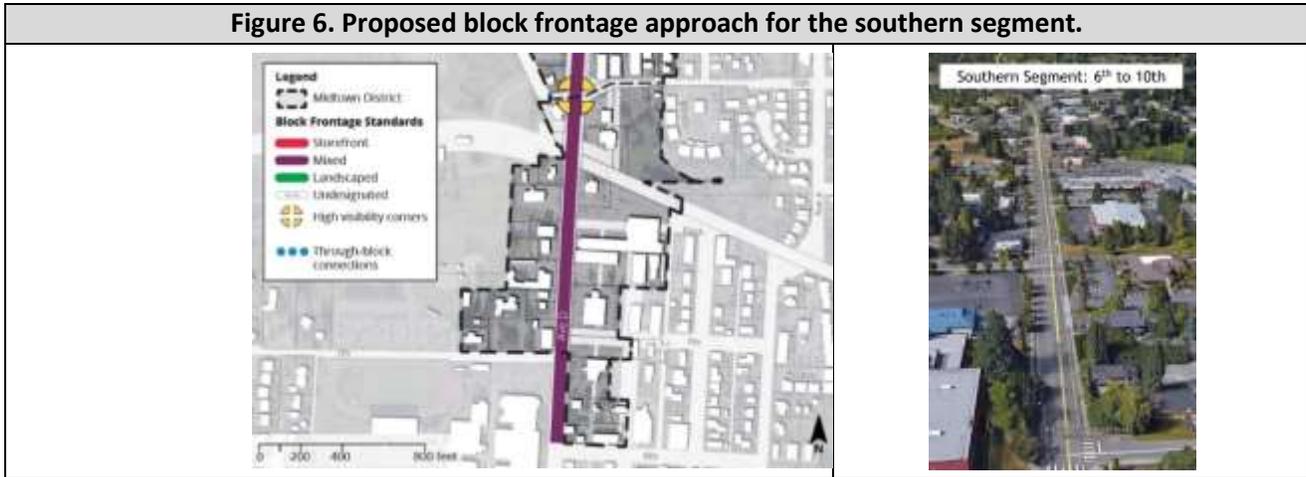
**Figure 5. Example “Mixed” designated frontages**



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

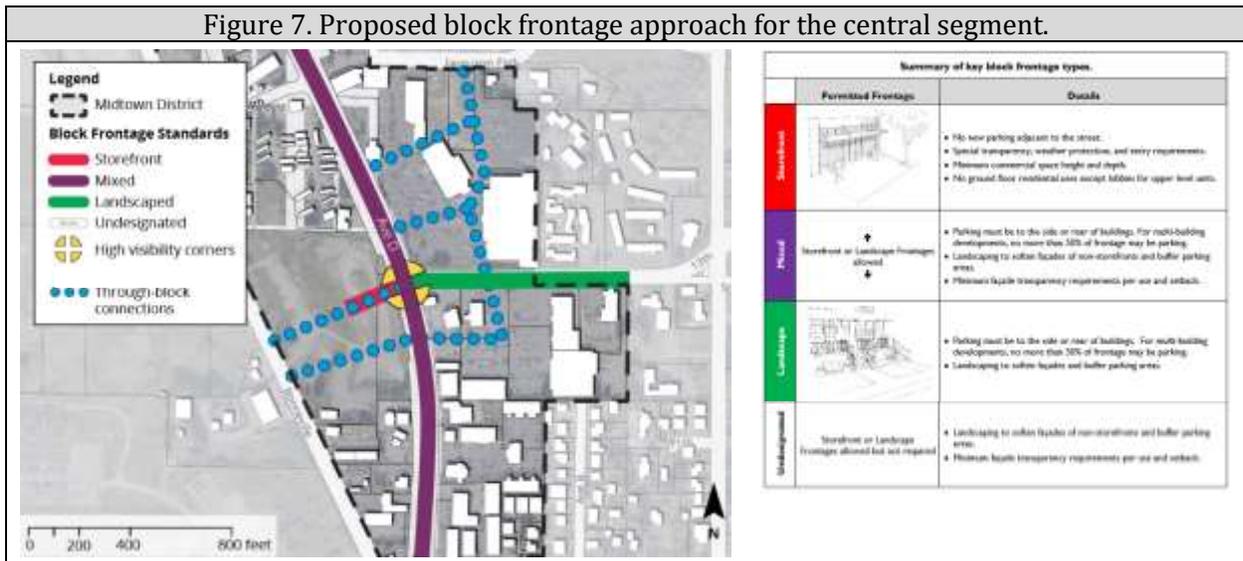
Figure 6 below illustrates a mixed block frontage designation from Avenue D between 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Figure 6. Proposed block frontage approach for the southern segment.**



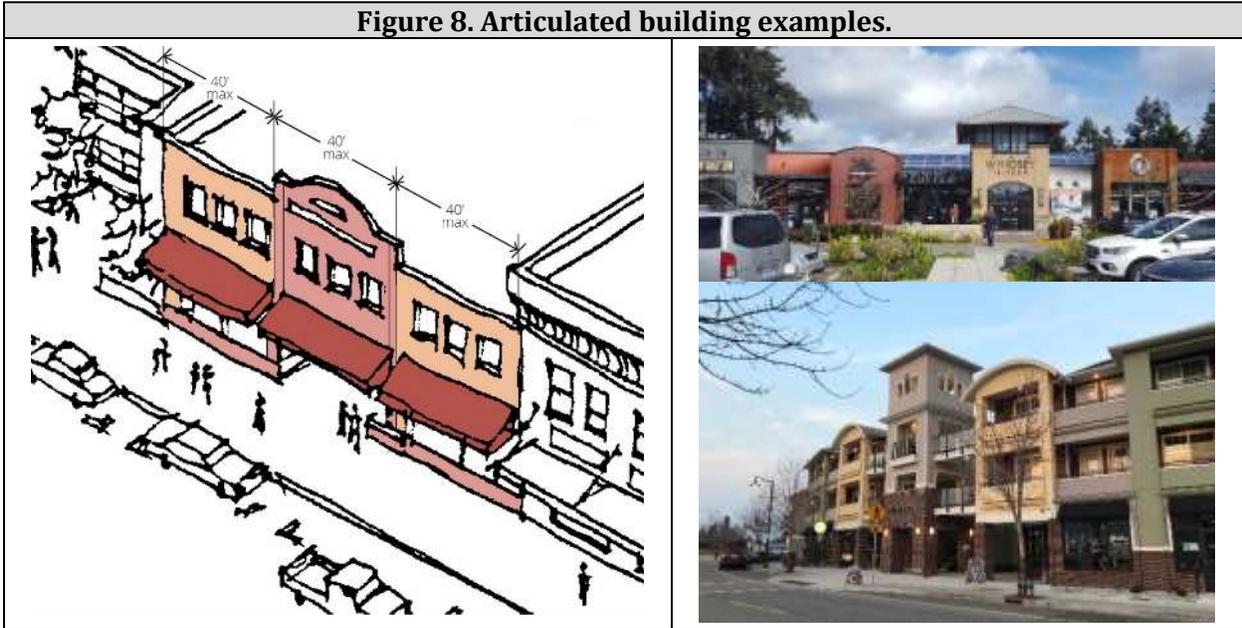
**3. 13th Street should emphasize landscaped block frontages.**

**Figure 7. Proposed block frontage approach for the central segment.**



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

**Figure 8. Articulated building examples.**



5. 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 9. High quality exterior building materials that reinforce and enhance the character of Snohomish**



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

For the open houses, Snohomish County provided two alternative illustrative layouts that are consistent with the above design principles. We discussed the two alternatives at our February 9<sup>th</sup> meeting and

although the illustrations were purely diagrammatic and not associated with a specific proposal, we had many comments about the types of uses, building heights, open space and parking. A future development proposal for the County site will be of keen interest to our residents and we want to ensure that updated comprehensive plan policies and development regulations will provide guidance and effective regulations to affect a well-designed project that is in the best interest of Snohomish.

## General Land Use and Design Topics

In addition to the Comprehensive Plan, zoning and design principles presented above, we also discussed a set of general land use / design topics to recommend to the Commission for its consideration that may influence other revisions to the City's development code. These additional topics are derived from a combination of comments and opinions of the Task Force and comments from the public open house events.

1. Architectural and design standards should help to define the "Snohomish Character." (Addressed in Commercial Policy 6.1.e.3)
2. The creation of affordable housing should be encouraged, with consideration given to establishing minimum requirements and/or providing incentives. (Addressed in Multi Family Policy 5.6)
3. The maximum allowed density in the area should be increased from the current cap of 18 dwelling units per acre.
4. The maximum allowed building height should be increased with a smaller increase for the south area and a larger increase in the north.
  - a. Up to 45' in south
  - b. Up to 55' in north
5. Enhanced development review should be considered for larger sites.
6. A minimum amount of commercial space should be encouraged on the street level facing Avenue D. (Addressed in Design Principles #1 and #2)
7. Midtown regulations should prohibit specific undesirable uses.
8. Building frontage standards should be established for streets that are either "Storefront", "Landscaped", "Mixed", or "Undesignated" with maximum 0-foot setback for Storefront and 10-foot minimum setback for all other frontages with an opportunity to reduce to 5 feet. (Addressed in Design Principle #1 above)
9. Parking lot location should be determined by block frontage designation:
  - a) Storefront: no parking in along frontage
  - b) Mixed: parking to side or rear of building
  - c) Landscaped: parking to side or rear of building
  - d) Undesignated: no location requirements

Strategic flexibility through departures from the parking location provision should be considered for large sites as long as the development meets the intent, however the portion of the frontage that is occupied by parking should be limited. (Addressed in Design Principle #1)

10. Building design regulations should encourage use of articulation, high-quality exterior materials with an emphasis on brick and wood, and other design details. (Addressed in Design Principle #5 above)
11. Roof requirements such as flat/pitched and architectural details should be based on the size of the building. (Partially addressed in Design Principle #4)
12. Building design standards should discourage corporate architecture.
13. Midtown should have its own unique parking regulations that provide more flexibility and to incentivize new development.
14. Developments should be required to incorporate significant useable open space elements into their site design.
15. The Avenue D corridor should be “greened” with more extensive use of landscaping and trees, including consideration of evergreen species and adoption of a City maintenance program. Preservation of existing significant trees should also be encouraged. (Addressed in Policies LU 2.12 and TR 22)
16. Green building practices and the establishment of electric vehicle charging stations and solar panels should be incentivized.
17. The City should proactively conduct a traffic study of the Midtown area that will inform future developers and the City regarding traffic and access.
18. Development of Midtown should include bicycle and pedestrian facility improvements and connections. (Addressed in Policy TR-22)

### **Public Comments from the Open Houses**

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 District website, we thought it would be 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. Provided below is a matrix that illustrates how the Task Force opinions compare with those of the public for the survey questions.

<b>Issue / Survey Question</b>	<b>Task Force Consensus (poll results from TF mtgs. 2 and 3)</b>	<b>Open House Comment</b>
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.

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

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Midtown Task Force,



---

Rio Ingram, Chair

**Midtown Planning District Task Force Members**

Alice Armstrong  
Gordon Cole  
Raymond Cook  
Mitch Cornelison  
Paula Denney  
Karl Houtman  
Thomas Kreinberg  
Ethan Martez  
Jeanette Pop  
Kyle Stevens  
Katherine Thompson  
Van Tormohlen

CC: Mayor Kartak  
City Council Members  
City Administrator Schuller  
Design Review Board Members  
Economic Development Committee Members  
Parties of Interest