



**CITY OF KIRKLAND**  
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## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Kurt Triplett, City Manager

**From:** Marilynne Beard, Deputy City Manager  
Paul Stewart, Deputy Planning Director  
Kari Page, Neighborhood Services Outreach Coordinator

**Date:** January 21, 2013

**Subject:** NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING PROCESS

The City Council is planning to discuss the neighborhood planning process at the upcoming City Council retreat. By way of background, a report from the Planning Commission was prepared (included as part of the Comprehensive Plan Update staff report) that discusses options for making the process more efficient. The report was partially a response to budget reductions made in the 2009-2010 Budget and again in the 2011-2012 Budget that cut staff resources available to support neighborhood plans.

In order to develop a more specific recommendation about the future of neighborhood plans, it will be helpful to understand the City Council's views on the purpose and process for neighborhood plans in the future. As a first step, staff conducted a facilitated discussion with the Kirkland Alliance of Neighborhoods about their perceptions of the neighborhood plans. Three questions were asked:

1. What is the value of having of neighborhood plan for your neighborhood?
2. What about the process works well?
3. What are the opportunities for improving the process?

A summary of the comments received at the KAN meeting is attached to this memo. Staff is recommending that the City Council answer the same three questions from their perspective.

Staff recommends that the topic of neighborhood plans would benefit from further public involvement beyond KAN and that, based on KAN and City Council input and additional input from other interested stakeholders, an updated recommendation can be prepared.



## Kirkland Alliance of Neighborhoods

Wednesday, January 9, 2013

### Input on Neighborhood Plans and the Planning Process

#### NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS (*the product*)

What is the value of a neighborhood plan:

- Predictability about a piece of property
- Vision of the future over a defined time period
- Focus on future
- Knowing where density is going to go
- Protection for the neighborhood
- Understanding your neighborhood in the context of wider community and adjacent neighborhoods
- Acknowledgement that neighborhoods are distinct and so are plans
- Useable at neighborhood level by residents
- Clear statement of objectives over time
- Having goals for the neighborhood
- Relevance to me – relates to my neighborhood

Opportunities for improvement:

- Write the plan so everyone can understand
- The plan should provide predictability but also acknowledge and respond to change
- Provide consistency between the Comprehensive Plan, Neighborhood Plans, and the zoning code.
- Perhaps the Plan should be more visionary and less burdened with details – concise and easily digestible
- Need an agreed upon "life" of each Neighborhood Plan (20 years is too long – 5 year is too short) and stick to it

#### NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING (*the process*)

What we like:

- Starting with an overall vision and identification of key values – helps direct the process and bring everyone together
- Starting with big picture
- Discussion of values helps bring everyone together and helps get to solutions
- Lots of staff support
- Ability to provide input into the process
- Meetings with businesses, schools, church groups, and other community members that aren't typically at their neighborhood meetings
- Include current status in each meeting plan ( i.e. where we have been, where we are, and where we are going in the)
- Consider using former Planning Commissioners to volunteer their expertise to various projects
- Learning about the future and deciding how we want things to change
- Understanding of where we are today, what development pressures will come to bear (growth) and what we can do to absorb growth and still maintain important neighborhood character based on local values
- New neighborhood (Finn Hill) is looking forward to in a Neighborhood Planning Process:
  - Understanding today's zoning (what's on the books now)
  - Understanding what Finn Hill has to absorb for their part of density

- Discover how the density can be absorbed into strategic places that can enhance their overall values and preserve the parks – etc.
  - Learn about public services and other elements of the plan
  - Looking for win/win alignments with growth and their mission
  - Define what the residents/Finn Hill Neighborhood can do to help
- New neighborhood (Evergreen Hill) is looking forward to a Neighborhood Planning Process:
  - Most of Evergreen Hill is already developed so it may be more difficult creating interest in participating in the planning process in this area
  - Where will the parks come from (1/2 mile radius goal)
  - What happens to the private parks and all of the Homeowners Associations –
  - How can we get people involved and engaged in becoming a Neighborhood Association rather than many separate homeowners associations

#### Opportunities for improvement:

##### Timeline and Process

- Too many meetings, process is too long, and feels bureaucratic
- Hard to get continuity in membership as most people can't commit this much time (1.5 years for Houghton called fast track. When asked to raise hands - no one in the room said they could commit that much time if the Neighborhood Planning process came to their neighborhood)
- Every 20 years may be too long – couldn't we have a check in every X years?
- Try breaking up the plan into different sections and invite people to participate in the section they are most interested in (let them decide when to jump in and exit)
- Make assumptions known about density and growth for 5, 10 and 15 years out
- Speed up the education pieces and reduce the level of detail so the timeline can be reduced
- Save tough issues to the end – process can be consumed by conflict with private amendments and zone changes on one or two parcels
- Hold meetings in the evening so people who work can participate
- Very important that there be a representative and an alternate from each neighborhood involved in the Comprehensive Planning process and that either the representative or the alternate be a KAN rep for the neighborhood (so that information can flow).
- KAN is uniquely qualified to assume role of "translator" for our neighborhoods in the Comprehensive Planning Process
- KAN can and should understand and interpret Comp Plan process for our neighborhood and likewise, interpret and act on the opinions and reactions from our neighbors
- More people may participate if the process wasn't so long

##### Communication

- Use language that everyone understands – speak in non-planner terms
- Use email
- Keep messages short and sweet – like twitter with links for more information
- Create a step by step process (handbook) on what the Neighborhood Planning Process is and how it works so people not involved know what it is and how it works
- Make the information relevant to "me"
- How will decisions impact the people (what does it mean)
- Relate specifics of the plan to what it means to the neighborhood (4 floors of housing looks like this)

- Clearly articulate what the City's purpose of the Neighborhood Plan is and explicitly how it will be used
- Explain how the Neighborhood Plan relates to the zoning code
- Need a better way to connect the planning process/decisions with the rest of the neighborhood (who doesn't attend the meetings)

#### Geographical

- Look at surrounding neighborhoods across borders – impacts don't stop at boundary
- Could keep neighborhood process intact but do them simultaneously within a sub area for collaboration across neighborhood boundaries
- Like focus inward on my neighborhood only – keep this intact

#### Plan Changes (e.g. Private Amendment Requests)

- Mail notices to multiple people in the neighborhood if requested by the neighborhood or if they are inactive
- Change should come from the neighborhood rather than the City
- Better educate the residents to understand the plan and how to monitor it over time
- Continued education and feedback as the plan is implemented
- Want to rely on the plan – not to see it changed immediately after creation
- Follow the plan after it is adopted
- Clear process for learning about how the product/plan changes over time – create neighborhood "experts"
- Clarify if the plan is meant to be static or dynamic
- Include photos/pictures of proposed change so people better understand what is being proposed
- KAN can help neighborhoods stay on top of change
- Hot Sheet helps and can feed proposal information to the neighborhoods and KAN
- Provide feedback loop on how and why plans are changed after they have been changed (especially to neighborhoods who recently underwent the process so they better understand why)
- Make the messages more clear when they come out announcing a proposed change for the plan (people don't understand the language or importance of the message – and it gets lost or overlooked)



**Improving Subarea Plans**

**Planning & Community Development**

**January, 2012**

## **Improving Subarea Plan Updates**

### **1. The Problem**

The Kirkland Comprehensive Plan contains twelve neighborhood plans and two corridor plans. With the recent annexation, two new neighborhoods were added and another neighborhood was expanded, resulting in sixteen areas for which plans potentially need to be prepared and maintained. A map of the neighborhood boundaries is attached. With current resources and other priorities, keeping the plans up to date will be a significant challenge. Consequently, it would be desirable to find a way to either speed up the cycle of neighborhood plan updates or find alternatives to neighborhood planning.

### **2. Purpose of Neighborhood Plans**

Kirkland has prepared neighborhood plans since 1977. The plans have enabled the City to examine and plan for issues at a localized scale, addressing the unique characteristics of different parts of the City. Land use policies and regulations have been developed at a very fine geographic scale.

In addition, the neighborhood plans have encouraged greater citizen participation and involvement in the planning process.

These objectives remain valid today; although localized planning need not be done at the scale of recognized neighborhoods. In acknowledgement of this, the remainder of this paper will use the term subareas, which may or may not coincide with neighborhoods.

### **3. Outcomes of Neighborhood Plans**

Neighborhood plans address a broad variety of conditions, ranging from high density mixed use business districts to low density residential areas. The update process is an opportunity to comprehensively review issues within a localized geographic area. The neighborhood planning process also provides an opportunity to review private amendment requests within the context of a broader area.

Often new ideas emerge over the course of the plan update process that were not anticipated in the initial stages of the plan update.

As an outcome of previous neighborhood plan updates, the following innovative ideas have been adopted by the City:

- **A new vision for a mixed use, pedestrian oriented mini urban village for the Yarrow Bay Business District (Lakeview Neighborhood Plan).**
- **Creative flexible development standards for clustering and smaller lots for the South Houghton slope area (Lakeview Neighborhood Plan)**
- **Small lot allowances and historic preservation incentives (Market and Norkirk plans)**
- **Increased height and development intensity (Totem Lake and NE 85<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Plan).**

Following the completion of the Lakeview and Central Houghton Neighborhood Plans staff noted the following observations on what worked well and what didn't with these two updates. These plans didn't follow the typical process since the Houghton Community Council (HCC) took the lead on the updates.

#### What Worked Well

- Having the HCC take the lead.
- Joint meetings and public hearing with the Planning Commission (PC) and HCC.
- Joint transmittal memo on recommendations from the PC and HCC.
- Heritage Society drafting the historic section.
- Getting comments from the Parks Board and Transportation Commission.
- Combining topics for Lakeview and Central Houghton (e.g. small lot provisions)

#### What Didn't Work as Well

- Advisory group process (selection of members, the time it takes, confusion on role and participation, the number of meetings, frustration with the process). Many participants quit coming to meetings.
- Neighborhood University (holding this event in the beginning was somewhat confusing).
- Sending out a final action postcard (confusing and not cost-effective).
- Waiting to do the Houghton Business District

#### **4. How Often Should Subarea Plans Be Updated?**

In order to consider ways to improve subarea planning, it would be helpful to identify the desired frequency for examining localized land use issues and updating subarea plans.

The current status of neighborhood and corridor plans is shown below by the date the plans were most recently updated:

2011:	Lakeview and Central Houghton;
2007:	Market, Norkirk and Market Corridor;
2005:	Highlands
2003:	North Rose Hill
2002	Totem Lake (some amendments in 2008 & 2009)
2001:	NE 85 <sup>th</sup> St.
1991:	South Rose Hill (partial update)
1990:	North/ South Juanita
1989:	Moss Bay (CBD updated more recently)
1988:	Everest
1986:	Bridle Trails
No plans:	Finn Hill, Kingsgate and recently annexed portion of North Juanita

In accordance with the Growth Management Act, major updates of the Comprehensive Plan must be done every eight years, at which time the plan must address growth issues over the subsequent 20 year period. Other plan updates are allowed on an annual basis.

An ambitious goal for subarea plan updates would be to have each plan reviewed during the eight year period between major Comprehensive Plan updates. This really amounts to reviewing plans on a six year cycle, since the major Plan updates typically take two years and dominate the attention of the Planning Commission and staff during that time. With fourteen neighborhood plans and two corridor plans, this would equate to updating an average of about three of the existing neighborhood/ corridor plans per year.

A less ambitious goal would be to strive to review all subarea plans over the course of two major Comprehensive Plan update cycles or once every sixteen years. With this schedule, however, most of the plans would be out of date well before their next scheduled update.

Another option would be to establish different update schedules for different areas. Areas experiencing greater growth pressures, business districts for example, typically need to be updated more often. Consequently, high growth areas could be assigned more frequent updates.

## 5. Staff Resources

One of the variables that has a significant effect on how often neighborhood plans can be updated is the number of staff able to be assigned to neighborhood plans. Over the past two years, there has been 1.5 – 2.0 FTE of project planner time focused on neighborhood plans. During this time, two neighborhood plans were rewritten. However, the availability of staff is affected from year to year by competing tasks, their relative priorities, and funding levels. A copy of the most recently adopted Planning Work Program is attached.

## 6. Public Participation

A major reason that neighborhood plans take as long to update as they do is the public participation process. Recent plan updates included the following participation elements:

- one or more kick off meetings;
- appointment of an advisory committee, with several months of committee meetings;
- several study session meetings of the Planning Commission (and where applicable the Houghton Community Council), particularly early in the process to help set direction and then again following the work of the advisory committee to review and approve the final plan;
- presentations at neighborhood meetings
- mailouts and information handouts
- posting of public notice signs
- web page listing
- listserv messages
- One or more public workshops or open houses
- One or more public hearings before the PC or HCC

Ways to streamline the process without shortchanging the opportunity for the public to influence the outcome of the plan may be explored. Some ideas include:

- Use an up-front scoping process, that narrows the topics under review;
- Eliminate the use of advisory committees, instead use focused outreach to interest groups, such as neighborhood associations and businesses;
- Use facilitated public workshops that focus input on key questions.
- Use on line surveys or web based tools

Public meetings are inherently time intensive. They must be scheduled well in advance and there needs to be adequate time between meetings for preparation, follow-up and adequate public notice. Unless there are very few issues of substance or a significant change in the process, it's unlikely that a plan update could be completed in less than a year and half or two years.

## 7. Scope of Issues Considered in Subarea Plans

One way of reducing the time it takes to complete subarea plan updates would be to limit the scope of issues addressed. The update could start with a scoping process to narrow down the range of issues that will be under review. Land use, streets, walkways and parks are typically the biggest issues. Topics that are adequately covered by citywide policies could be eliminated.

Although this may save some amount of time, the most difficult and time consuming issues to address during the sub area plan updates are land use issues – which are at the inherently at the heart of the plans.

It should also be noted that if there are to be any land use changes, it is important to incorporate any rezoned and code regulations concurrently with the plan update. This does add additional time and notice requirements. However, it is inherently more efficient do it at the time of the sub area plan rather than delaying to a future date following plan adoption.

## 8. Simplify and Standardize the Subarea Plan Format

Another idea would be to restructure sub area plans into a shortened format. For example, rather than having the plans list of a series of goals and policies, they could be oriented around a series of maps with a succinct text explanation of items identified on the maps. The key maps would be land use map, which would be broken up to highlight specific areas or districts within the neighborhood. Here's one idea:

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Overview and Vision
2	History
3	Natural Features Map and Text
4	Land Use Map – overview of entire sub area
5- 9	Land Use Districts – maps highlighting specific districts with descriptive text
10	Public Facilities (transportation, parks, etc.)
11	Public Facilities text – desired improvements
12	Urban Design

## 9. Geographic Scope of Planning Areas

**Plan for Larger Geographic Areas** Rather than preparing a plan for each neighborhood, one idea would be to prepare subarea plans for logical groupings of neighborhoods. This could involve a single plan for each subarea, or multiple neighborhood plans updated as part of a single subarea planning process. Following are two alternative approaches to subareas.

### a. Four subareas:

- Finn Hill, Juanita,
- Kingsgate, Totem Lake
- North Rose Hill, NE 85<sup>th</sup> St. Corridor, South Rose Hill, Bridle Trails
- Market, Market Corridor, Norkirk, Highlands, Moss Bay, Everest, Lakeview, Central Houghton

b. **Six subareas:**

- Finn Hill
- Juanita
- Kingsgate, Totem Lake
- North Rose Hill, NE 85<sup>th</sup> St. Corridor, South Rose Hill, Bridle Trails
- Market, Norkirk, Highlands, Market Corridor, Moss Bay
- Everest, Lakeview, Central Houghton

**Business District Focus** Another idea would be to focus detailed planning on the geographic areas where the majority of growth and development is anticipated – primarily in and adjacent to business districts. This could involve eliminating neighborhood plans altogether, except for the portions that address the business districts and other areas of higher intensity development (which are typically adjacent to business districts). This would result in thirteen or fourteen business district plans, which could be organized in groups to update over a six year cycle.

Alternatively, subarea plans would continue to cover all areas within a subarea, but updates would be limited to the geographic area within and immediately surrounding the business districts.

**Eliminate Neighborhood Plans** A more radical idea would be to eliminate neighborhood and subarea plans altogether. With this alternative, the Comprehensive Plan would consist entirely of the general elements focused on specific topics - for example, Land Use, Economic Development, Transportation, etc. The Comprehensive Land Use Map would continue to show land use designations at whatever level of detail is necessary, but there would be much less background about the rationale for the designations at specific locations or the specific policies pertaining to each area. While this would simplify the Plan, it could diminish its effectiveness. In addition, with this approach we'd no longer be systematically reviewing planning issues and engaging the community at a focused geographic level.

## 10. Plan Update Schedule

The most recent schedule (January, 2011) of neighborhood plan updates is attached.

As noted above, the following neighborhood plans have been completed in the past ten years and are in relatively good shape: North Rose Hill, NE 85<sup>th</sup> St., Market, Norkirk, Highlands, Lakeview, and Central Houghton.

We have a window of only a year before work on the major Comprehensive Plan update begins. The update will likely take up to two years beginning in early to mid 2013 and culminating by mid 2015. We've tentatively planned for the update to include an examination of planned land use for Totem Lake as called for in the Totem Lake Action Plan. Staff time needed for the update will

reduce and possibly eliminate the time available for sub area planning, but until we fully develop a scope of work and prioritize other potential work tasks, it's hard to know for sure.

Consequently, the most immediate question is where do we focus our attention in the next year or so? Options include the following:

- **Prepare plans for the new annexation neighborhoods.** Due to the geographic scope of the annexation area together with the time limitation, this may need to be a shorter plan (or plans) compared with those that we've done in the past, but this would provide an opportunity to implement a new format that can be used for all sub areas, as discussed above. In addition, the geographic scope of the plan(s) would match the selected subarea organization for future plans.
- **Update the most out of date neighborhood plans in the pre-annexation City.** The next neighborhood on the update list is the South Rose Hill/Bridle Trails plan. If this option is selected, we would need to consider if or how the plan would be integrated into a larger subarea. In both of the examples provided above, South Rose Hill and Bridle Trails would be combined into a single subarea with North Rose Hill and the NE 85<sup>th</sup> St. Corridor. It would be very ambitious to complete a new plan for such a large subarea in the limited time available. Furthermore, the North Rose Hill and NE 85<sup>th</sup> St. Corridor plans are not as out of date and in need of updating as South Rose Hill and Bridle Trails.

Other candidate pre-annexation neighborhoods with out of date plans include Moss Bay and Everest.

- **Focus on planning for targeted business districts.** In this option we could prepare the plans for one or more of the following districts:
  - Houghton Business District, as called for in the recently adopted Houghton Neighborhood Plan
  - Bridle Trails
  - Annexation neighborhood business districts