



## CITY OF KIRKLAND

Planning and Community Development Department  
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### MEMORANDUM

**To:** David Ramsay, City Manager

**From:** Eric Shields, Planning Director  
Jeremy McMahan, Planning Supervisor

**Date:** January 3, 2008

**Subject:** DOWNTOWN STRATEGIC PLAN ASSESSMENT AND UPDATE – PHASE II WORK PLAN  
(FILE NO MIS07-00011)

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Review the draft work plan and a budget proposal for Phase II and provide direction to staff and the Downtown Advisory Committee (DAC).

#### **BACKGROUND DISCUSSION**

The process of updating the 2001 Downtown Strategic Plan was divided into two phases - Phase I (assessment) and Phase II (update). Phase I was completed with the delivery of the [Strategic Situation Assessment](#) to the City Council in October, 2007. The consulting budget for Phase I was \$74,600.

Strategy areas that the DAC proposed to focus on in the Phase II DSP update were divided into two major categories (a complete listing of the strategic recommendations is included in Attachment 1):

- **Management, Organizational, and Marketing Strategies** (e.g. – complete vision, demonstrate City leadership, develop partnerships, coordinated marketing, etc.)
- **Design, Infrastructure and Regulatory Strategies** (e.g. – identify and address development barriers, connect sub-districts, refine parking strategies)

Based on review of the Situation Assessment Council in October and further discussions with the Economic Development Committee (EDC), staff has been working to prioritize the focus of the update. At this time, the available budget is limited to the \$30,000 which Council would reallocate from the Lakeshore Plaza budget. We do not anticipate a complete update to the 2001 Downtown Strategic Plan unless additional funding is available in a future budget. In weighing the priorities identified in the Strategic Situation Assessment and the relatively limited project budget, staff recommends that the next phase of work be scoped tightly around the issues identified related to ground floor uses and retail opportunities/challenges. A draft work plan is included as Attachment 2. Once Council provides the DAC with direction, staff will retain appropriate consulting.

By focusing on this key component and providing the DAC with supporting technical consulting, we hope to identify strategies that that can be implemented quickly. However, we should also expect the study to indicate the need for changes at a more significant policy level. Further steps and strategy development would require additional Council direction and need to be part of any future budget request.

It should be noted that there has been community interest in having the DSP update include a review of downtown building heights. The City's policies and regulations for building heights are set forth in the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code. The statutory process for creation and amendment to these documents falls to the Planning Commission and City Council. The Council will be discussing downtown zoning at their retreat in March.

Also absent from the work plan is specific work on the parking strategy. Council has recently tasked the City Parking Advisory Board with work on parking revenue/management and parking supply. Two members for the PAB serve on the DAC so there are channels for communication and collaboration between the groups. The PAB should continue to lead and may consult with the DAC as needed.

### **DOWNTOWN ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The DAC had requested that the group be expanded to include four additional members (gallery, retail, restaurant, and youth). The Economic Development Committee has appointed four new downtown merchants to the DAC (Todd Ormsby, The Slip; Penny Sweet, Grape Choice; Teresa Carolan, Studio 150; and Gunnar Nordstrom, Gunnar Nordstrom Gallery. Given the retail focus of Phase II, the EDC decided to solicit the additional merchant expertise in-lieu of adding a youth member to the group. The previously appointed 16 members will continue to serve on this phase of work.

### **BUDGET**

Staff recommends that Council authorize funding for the update from the Lakeshore Plaza study budget (approximately \$30,000).

The following excerpts from the October, 2007 Strategic Situation Assessment are provided for easy reference. The complete document may be viewed by [clicking here](#). The recommendations are cross-referenced to the proposed scope of work in Attachment 2

**DAC STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DSP UPDATE:**

**A. MANAGEMENT, ORGANIZATIONAL AND MARKETING STRATEGIES**

- A.1 Complete the New Vision for Downtown and Communicate it Broadly.** The focus groups and stakeholder interviews showed that the vision for downtown is not clear to people. People aren't sure what the City is doing downtown now, what its vision is, and how it is working to operationalize that vision. There is a desire for the City to clearly define and communicate its vision. This will be especially important as the City addresses specific planning and redevelopment proposals in the next year.
- A.2 City Commitment and Leadership.** Given downtown's challenges and many opportunities, people want the City to show leadership downtown. In nearly every focus group, people were asking for decisions, action strategies and steps to address problems and make improvements. Citizens would like the City to articulate downtown's next chapter and lead the way in making it a reality. Key to that leadership is clarity in the vision, an effective supporting implementation strategy, and maintaining effective communication with the community.
- A.3 Focus on Retention and Recruitment of Complimentary Businesses.** In the 2001 DSP, a major focus was on improvements to the physical environment. In the updated Plan, a special focus could be devoted to improving the downtown business climate, especially through identifying complimentary businesses to attract and recruit to downtown. Another focus area could be on organizing businesses to work together, and in concert with the City, the Kirkland Downtown Association (KDA), and the Greater Kirkland Chamber of Commerce (Chamber). Specific strategy recommendations may include building on Kirkland's existing identified market strengths.
- A.4 Focus and Strategically Direct City Resources.** The City is investing resources and money downtown through several avenues—planning, economic development, tourism and Lodging Tax revenue, direct financial support to the KDA, and to the Chamber for business retention technical assistance. With City resources diffused across multiple resources, there is confusion among stakeholders about what the City is and isn't doing, and where to turn for help. Moreover, the public doesn't fully see the City's role or support for downtown; it isn't clearly visible. Many businesses likewise don't know about the resources that are available through the City, the Chamber, and KDA. Pulling all of these resources together through an integrated City funding and resource strategy would create leverage and provide clarity to stakeholders and the public about the City's role and the resources available.
- A.5 Define and Develop New Partnerships Downtown.** Expectations of what the City can do alone in the downtown are often too high. More effective would be an approach in which the City and the downtown business community develop an integrated strategy for improving downtown, with clear roles and responsibilities for each party. Following the theme of "Public Actions, Private Opportunities" the downtown should have strong, collaborative partnerships

with each of the key segments of the downtown business community. In particular, there is an opportunity to define a larger role and responsibilities for the KDA—to make the organization a full partner in realizing the vision and goals of the DSP, and to hold the organization accountable for achieving certain performance objectives.

**A.6 Identify and Encourage New Roles for Property Owners.** Property owners play a critical role in downtowns—in selecting the right retail mix and tenants, in maintaining, managing and investing in their properties, and in participating in partnerships with the City and other businesses for marketing, communications, and business attraction purposes.

The emerging property owners group presents a significant opportunity for the City to develop improved relationships and partnerships with downtown property owners. Building on the interest and momentum that has been generated through the planning process, there are likely opportunities for business-to-business partnerships as well. Some of these were suggested in the focus groups, involving joint marketing and communications across businesses. The City can help guide and support all of these partnerships.

**A.7 Downtown Marketing Strategy.** Downtown retailers say that additional marketing is needed for downtown to increase awareness and attract new customers. Retailers noted that customers don't know all of the offerings and the opportunities to shop in various downtown businesses. They urge a coordinated, broad marketing and increased awareness campaign for the downtown, with memorable messages that will bring shoppers to the area. A coordinated marketing program, with walking maps, joint advertising, signage and window display standards, and related strategies could help package the downtown as an attractive, cohesive shopping district, rather than a series of individual stores working alone.

## **B. DESIGN, INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGULATORY STRATEGIES**

**B.1 Identify and Address Barriers to Desired Development.** Revisit the City's regulatory requirements to remove barriers to high quality development, particularly to enable a more diverse mix of housing and to support creation of office uses to bolster the area's business climate while supporting the overall vision for Downtown Kirkland.

This area has been perhaps the most contentious and debated issue in Downtown Kirkland. As outlined in the Assessment of Current Challenges, many developers would like the City to increase height limits to improve economic feasibility, while many residents would prefer height limits are maintained or reduced to retain Kirkland's character.

This kind of community discussion, debate, and even disagreement about the specifics of zoning codes is not uncommon, and can even be expected in an attractive and successful community. Moreover, the codes and policies that govern downtown Kirkland are the product of previous public process that has taken place over many years. At the strategic level, this kind of debate challenges leaders to either develop strategies that build on established codes and policies or to revisit established codes and policies. The DAC will look to the City Council for guidance on what specific issues to explore versus issues that should be left to the Planning Commission, Parking Advisory Board, or other appropriate groups.

**B.2 Streetscape, Signage and Wayfinding Upgrades.** Review and make investments in downtown's urban design realm, including particularly streetscape, signage, and wayfinding,

all of which would improve downtown's appearance and accessibility. This recommendation stems from the focus group research, which showed that people coming from outside the area aren't sure where to go in downtown. Improved signage would help direct people and publicize the district's offerings. Similarly, there are opportunities to improve sidewalks (broken and cracked in places), lighting, and tree plantings that would create a fresher and more vibrant feeling downtown.

**B.3 Connectivity Between Downtown's Sub-Districts.** Focus groups consistently emphasized the importance of strengthening the pedestrian spine between the waterfront and Park Place. Design, management and marketing strategies that better connect the two activity centers would benefit economic activity in both places, and would improve the overall downtown experience.

**B.4 Downtown Parking Strategy.** Parking plays an important supportive role in the success of downtown. The City will have to refine its downtown parking strategy to achieve the vision. An effective parking management strategy will utilize existing spaces more efficiently, and will add to the inventory effectively, to serve new development. Working with the Parking Advisory Board and key downtown stakeholders (including the KDA, the Chamber, and downtown property owners and individual businesses), the City should consider a review and updates to the downtown parking management strategy and the codified parking requirements for various property uses to ensure that they support the updated vision and strategic plan. This strategy could possibly include parking validation programs, establishing an a long-term approach to paid parking, encouragement of public/private parking provision, shared parking, and a feasibility study and plan to develop potential new parking supply downtown.

**DAC WORKING VISION STATEMENT:**

***Downtown Kirkland is a vibrant and charming urban waterfront community with unique shopping, destination dining, public art and galleries, beautiful parks and gathering places.  
It is an economically vital, pedestrian-friendly district that attracts the City's residents and visitors to enjoy its heritage and waterfront ambiance.***

**Guiding Principles for a Great Downtown Kirkland**

The City and the community will collaborate to encourage:

- A safe, family-friendly environment
- Year-round activity with a mix of daytime and night-time uses
- A complimentary and successful mix of retail shops and services
- A balance of residential, office, retail, and entertainment uses
- Adequate transportation access and parking
- Sustainable and visually appealing architecture, public spaces, and amenities
- Improvements that embrace the waterfront and connect the Lake to downtown and Park Place

***With this vision, downtown will flourish, help build community, and uniquely reflect Kirkland***

## Downtown Advisory Committee Work Plan Downtown Retail/Ground Floor Strategy

*Note: The Strategic Situation Assessment (SSA) strategy areas are included parenthetically with references to the DAC recommendations in Attachment 1.*

Step	Task	Consultant Resources
1. Information Gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inform DAC and consulting team on current City, Chamber, and KDA efforts on (A.3, A.7):               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Business recruitment</li> <li>○ Business retention</li> <li>○ Marketing and tourism (LTAC)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Inform DAC and consulting team on current City, Chamber, KDA responsibilities and partnerships (A.5, A.6)</li> <li>▪ Inform DAC and Consulting Team on current City regulations related to retail (design standards, parking requirements, sign regulations...) (B.1)</li> </ul>	Facilitation
2. Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Retain consulting team to conduct a retail market feasibility analysis, including (A.3, B.1):               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Review of community retail interests from stakeholder process</li> <li>○ Evaluate what the market can support for downtown retail</li> <li>○ Evaluate existing (and approved) retail spaces</li> <li>○ Identify space needs (for new space and existing space)</li> <li>○ Evaluate how current codes influence retail market</li> <li>○ Identify sites where ground floor uses are not supporting desired land use patterns</li> <li>○ Evaluate edge/perimeter retail challenges</li> <li>○ Evaluate market realities of improving underperforming sites</li> <li>○ Evaluate allowed/prohibited ground floor uses</li> <li>○ Evaluate role of parking requirements in market decisions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Facilitation, Retail Market Analysis, Development, Urban Design
3. Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ DAC recommendations to Council on:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Retail market conditions reality check (A.3)</li> <li>○ Potential tools to influence the market in positive direction</li> <li>○ Potential partnership improvements (City, Chamber, KDA, downtown property owners, and residents,...) (A.5, A.6)</li> <li>○ Funding and resource strategies to support recommendations (A.4)</li> <li>○ Updated working vision statement based on findings (A.1)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Facilitation, Retail Market Analysis, Development, Urban Design