City of Kirkland Planning and Community Development Department

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Over the next two years Kirkland will be updating its Comprehensive Plan to reflect how the City should accommodate growth over the next twenty years. This paper looks at future trends that may affect Kirkland and how “Smart Growth Principles” can be used to respond to these trends to help create the type of community we may want.

What are Smart Growth Principles?

Like the State’s Growth Management Act, the term “Smart Growth” is an urban planning concept that advocates focusing growth in compact livable communities to avoid sprawl.

“Smart Growth Principles” were developed in the early 1990’s as an outcome of the Smart Growth Network founded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Network is made up of a consortium of 30 national organizations of government, business and civic organizations that promote smart growth and offer resources to help communities. For more information and resources, see page 6 of this document.

According to the Smart Growth Network, “Smart Growth Principles can be considered best practices or tools that communities can use to grow in ways that support economic development and jobs; create strong neighborhoods with a range of housing, commercial, and transportation options; and achieve healthy communities that provide families with a clean environment.”

In 2006, the Smart Growth Network looked at the key characteristics that make successful communities and developed the following 10 basic principles:

1. Mix land uses together
2. Take advantage of compact building design
3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
4. Create walkable neighborhoods
5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
6. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
7. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions

Smart growth is an alternative to urban sprawl, traffic congestion, disconnected neighborhoods, and urban decay. Its principles challenge old assumptions in urban planning, such as low density development, automobile focus and separating land uses.
The Smart Growth Network developed a series of implementation guidelines. These guidelines can be used as a checklist to determine how consistent Kirkland’s Comprehensive Plan goals, policies and development standards measure up to these principles.

**How will our growth targets and future trends affect Kirkland?**

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires that cities plan for growth within a 20 year period. In 2011 Kirkland added 30,000 people with the Juanita/Finn Hill/ Kingsgate annexation. Today Kirkland’s population is 81,730. By our “target year” of 2035, Kirkland is expected to have 13,000 new residents for a total population of 94,000. Kirkland’s growth targets between the year 2013 and 2035 are 8,361 new housing units and 22,435 new jobs. The new residents will need housing and access to transportation, schools, shops and services, parks and entertainment. How and where should we accommodate these new housing units and employment?

**How can Kirkland implement Smart Growth Principles to respond to these changes?**

The following summarizes the trends we may see and how the City can apply Smart Growth Principles in planning for Kirkland’s future.

**1. MIX LAND USES TOGETHER**

Smart Growth Principles encourage mixing uses such as residential and retail in new developments or buildings on the same property. Redevelopment and new growth should be targeted to existing commercial areas that are close to transit and transportation hubs. A good example of this is Juanita Village located at NE 116th ST and 100th Avenue in the Juanita Neighborhood. As a result, the following benefits to the Kirkland community can be attained:

- Results in more efficient use of land
- Allows a variety of housing types and densities
- Reduces distances between housing, workplaces, retail businesses, and other destinations
- Encourages more compact development
- Strengthens neighborhood character
- Promotes pedestrian and bicycle friendly environments
- Provides opportunities to walk to services and jobs

Existing goals and policies in the Kirkland Comprehensive Plan reflect many of these Principles, such as promoting mixed-use residential and commercial development, buildings designed with the pedestrian in mind (pedestrian oriented development), walkable neighborhoods and complete streets.
2. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF COMPACT BUILDING DESIGN

As Kirkland grows we know there will be a decrease in availability of usable, undeveloped land. The cost of land will continue to increase. How the land is used most efficiently while balancing development with preservation of open space and natural areas will be a challenge. Planning for well designed, compact, mixed use development will be essential in making this work.

Young and older segments of our population will be attracted to smaller and more affordable housing options within close proximity to neighborhood shopping areas and transit. A young, educated workforce is attracted to living in denser urban areas with lively commercial districts, recreation, entertainment and good transit availability. The trend is for communities to be designed where all ages can work, live, attend school, shop, and play in an area compact enough to allow walking to most destinations.

Well designed, development with amenities that include “people places,” such as open space plazas, coffee shops, theaters, public art and vibrant commercial communities provide a strong sense of place.

There are economic development advantages to compact development. Businesses do better in strong business districts that provide goods and services directly to nearby residents. Refurbished outdated malls and commercial centers to incorporate a mix of uses and improve walkability should be encouraged.

3. CREATE A RANGE OF HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHOICES

Life expectancy is increasing (by about two years from 2000 to 2009.) By 2030, one in five Americans will be elderly. A greater proportion of seniors will have different needs from younger residents such as physical limitations for getting around town and desire smaller housing options. The cost of housing is increasing, at the same time, the size of housing and household size is decreasing.

Kirkland has become more diverse. As people of different cultural backgrounds and a broader range of income levels play a greater role in our community, there is a need for diverse housing types and both ownership and rental options. King County reflects a trend across the US toward more renting and less home ownership.

Encouraging housing choices such multi-generational housing, extended family housing, residential suites (very small apartments), backyard cottages, accessory dwelling units, senior housing, and smaller housing will be necessary accommodate people’s needs and desires.
To respond to these trends and to increase the amount of affordable housing in Kirkland, Zoning Code regulations require 10% of residential units (4 or more) to be affordable in commercial and multi-family zones. The City also provides incentives for building additional units and allows for a variety of housing types such as cottage housing, small lot single family homes and accessory dwelling units.

4. CREATE WALKABLE NEIGHBORHOODS

The nationwide increase in obesity rates suggests a need to encourage healthier lifestyles that include healthy food, exercise, and increased walking as a primary mode of transportation. As the City grows it will be important to provide many non-motorized transportation options, such as bike trails, pathways and sidewalks, and to encourage design of developments geared to the pedestrian rather than auto-oriented places.

Adding pedestrian improvements to create walkable neighborhoods reduces the use of automobiles, improves air quality, reduces noise, makes streets safer for pedestrians, and improves social interaction. Kirkland has been recognized as one of the top ten walkable communities in the country by the Wall Street Journal.

5. FOSTER DISTINCTIVE, ATTRACTIVE COMMUNITIES WITH A STRONG SENSE OF PLACE

Attractive, well designed communities with lively neighborhoods create distinctive unique places that attract new residents and businesses. In Kirkland many of the neighborhood and business districts require design review to ensure development is well designed, contains open spaces, has superior landscaping and reflects the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

6. PRESERVE OPEN SPACE, FARMLAND, NATURAL BEAUTY, AND CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL AREAS

Global climate change is generating more frequent extreme weather, damaging human-built structures and the natural environment. This trend cannot be ignored as Kirkland may experience increased flooding along streams and in the roadways and wind damage from storms. Finite world energy resources and the expense of developing new energy sources will increase the cost of running businesses, homes and automobiles.

Use of all sources of energy, but especially non-renewable sources, negatively impacts our environment. In the future there will be a greater emphasis on green building design and sustainable strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
Balancing new development with protecting and enhancing critical areas and shoreline areas will be necessary to retain open space, surface water systems and habitat. Low impact development techniques where rainwater is collected, stored or recharged on-site helps reduce flooding and improves water quality. It will be necessary for us to consider how our natural environment is connected as one system and designed into the built environment through sustainable building practices.

In Kirkland we have adopted development standards and implemented programs to encourage sustainable and green building practices. The City is also exploring the use of “transfer of development rights” in the Totem Lake Business District whereby undeveloped land in King County is preserved while increasing development potential. We should continue to support shoreline restoration and initiatives to return Kirkland’s Lake Washington shoreline to a more natural state that can more readily handle increased stress from climate change.

7. STRENGTHEN AND DIRECT DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS EXISTING COMMUNITIES

Smart growth promotes directing growth to areas already served by infrastructure, such as roads, sewer and water. This approach is more cost effective and maintains the value of public and private investment. It is a more efficient use of land and infrastructure, can provide a stronger tax base, and promotes opportunities for jobs close to housing.

8. PROVIDE A VARIETY OF TRANSPORTATION CHOICES

Given our regional growth and Kirkland’s attraction as a place to live and grow a business, and with easy access to I-405 and SR 520, traffic will increase. Congestion on the roadways drives the need for more alternatives to car travel, as well as the need to improve the efficiency and safety of the roads we have. Traveling long distances to work and home reduces the quality of life, adds to the costs of fuel and makes it less sustainable for the environment.

Managing growth in Kirkland to keep work, home, shopping, and entertainment close to home should be encouraged. Over the years we have seen expansion of the Kirkland transit centers in Downtown, Totem Lake and at the South Kirkland Park and Ride, but we will need to look at new opportunities.

Alternatives to automobiles, such as bicycle paths, pleasant and safe pedestrian corridors, and convenient transit centers will be necessary. Recent acquisition of the Cross Kirkland Corridor (old railroad tracks) gives Kirkland a great opportunity to create a significant bicycle/pedestrian route through the city and to connect with other communities.
9. MAKE DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS PREDICTABLE, FAIR, AND COST EFFECTIVE

Balancing the fiscal resources of operating a city with the services that residents and businesses expect will require the City to continue to look at greater efficiencies. Time is money for businesses and development. The City strives to improve permit review processes, and to address timing and regulatory amendments to make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective. The City can also look at creating incentives to encourage use of Smart Growth Principles in the design of projects. For example the City has an expedited permit review process for projects for green buildings.

10. ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION IN DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS

Public engagement in the planning and development review process makes for stronger communities because it brings a variety of interests into the discussion and people are invested in the outcome. Early engagement in the process is the best way to influence the decisions that are made by the City Council, Boards and Commissions. For example the City encourages developers to meet with neighbors prior to submittal of an application and to listen and incorporate resident concerns into a proposal.

In early 2013, the City launched an extensive comprehensive public involvement campaign, “Kirkland 2035: Your Voice. Your vision. Your Future.” The purpose is to engage community members in the update process of the Comprehensive Plan and to involve them in the development and update of other long-range plans like the Cross Kirkland Corridor Master Plan, Transportation Master Plan and Park Master Plan. The City will continue to explore innovative approaches to involve the community due to the importance of these plans and ensure that participation is meaningful.

Sources
- American Planning Association - Planning and Community Health Research Center: http://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/health/mixedusedevelopment.htm
- II.2.g Paul Beyer, Director of Smart Growth · Governor’s Smart Growth Cabinet, Albany, NY

Additional Resources
For additional information about Smart Growth see the following websites:
- American Planning Association www.planning.org
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency www.epa.gov
- Smart Growth Organization www.smartgrowth.org