

KIRKLAND DOWNTOWN STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

Downtown Advisory Committee Meeting Summary #1: May 8, 2007

Task Force Members

Brian Berg
Rob Butcher
Denise Campbell
Margaret Carnegie
Joe Castleberry
Jeffery Cole
Doug Davis
Ken Dueker
Gary Harshman
Carolyn Hayek
Larry Kurofsky (*absent*)
Keith Maehlum
Bea Nahon
Michael Nelson, co-chair
Glenn Peterson
Don Samdahl, Mirai Associates (*absent*)
Jeff Trager, co-chair
Jon Pascal – incoming chair, Transportation Commission

City & Organizational Staff

James L. Lauinger, Mayor
Eric Shields, Planning Director
Ellen Miller-Wolfe, Economic Development Manager
Jeremy McMahan, Planning Supervisor
Dick Beazell, KDA Executive Director
Bill Vadino, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director

Consultants

Bonnie Berk, Berk & Associates
Meghann Glavin, Berk & Associates

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mayor Lauinger opened the meeting by welcoming and thanking Downtown Advisory Committee (DAC) members for their participation, stressing the importance of the Committee to the City and to downtown.

DAC members and other participants then introduced themselves, sharing briefly their interests, background and previous roles in downtown Kirkland working groups.

DOWNTOWN STRATEGIC PLAN (DSP) PROJECT AND SCHEDULE

Jeremy McMahan, DSP project manager, reviewed the purpose of the project and the project schedule, as well as relevant history from the 2001 Downtown Strategic Plan and the current state of downtown. Ellen Miller-Wolfe followed up with information about current initiatives and projects downtown, specifically the proposed new development at Park Place.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Meghann Glavin reviewed the draft DAC member responsibilities and operating principles. There was consensus on most of the outlined responsibilities and operating principles. Discussion focused on two issues:

- (1) Interaction with the media. It was discussed and decided that, while individuals can speak to the media if contacted, only the co-chairs should speak on behalf of the Committee. If individual Committee members are approached by the media, they should so notify the co-chairs and the project manager.
- (2) "Principals only" policy. Committee members spent the most time considering this issue. After several perspectives were voiced, it was decided that the fairest approach is to have a principals only policy at the table, and if the Committee member cannot attend a meeting, a representative of his/her group can attend as an observer, reporting back to the group.

The Committee agreed to review the draft Operating Principles at their June meeting, with the two changes above noted.

ROUNDTABLE STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT AND VISIONING

Part A: Strengths, Opportunities, and Challenges

The Committee brainstormed Kirkland's strengths, opportunities, and challenges:

Strengths

- People have a passion for downtown; there are a lot of things that draw people downtown.
- The shops and things we do have are unique, Kirkland is not "anytown USA" with a Pottery Barn and a Gap.
- We have a vibrant, safe, clean great downtown that we should be proud of.
- The downtown is walkable, with trees, plantings, flowers.
- Our topography and geography are great.
- Proximity to the lake. I really appreciate having the water, makes the downtown so different than other cities.
- Peter Kirk Park: having a large green space close to the downtown area, is a huge asset.
- Peter Kirk Park is a great alternative for those who cannot afford a lake view; I live in a condo where I can see the park and dense development around it. That open space provides great quality of life..
- We have the tourist aspect downtown, people are drawn to the marina. Its great to see so many families.

Challenges

Challenging Business Environment

- The economy is fragile. It is the nature of the beast, a catch 22. The city is trying to micromanage development by saying we need this on this corner, that on that, but we need to focus on how we encourage the type of development we want and what our vision is.
- This can be a challenging retail environment because of inconsistent customer bases and high rents. It is heart-breaking to see shuttered doors and windows. Retailers see downtown Kirkland as an incredible location but in many cases without a good business plan it is not economically viable.
- Seasonality is a huge challenge. In the winter downtown is dead as a doornail. University Village is also outside, but its business is not seasonal. How can Kirkland achieve that?
- Many residents that have second and third homes in downtown Kirkland. This contributes to the seasonality challenge. On a great day there are people all-over; in the winter you could fall down in the street and not get found until the morning.
- There is a lot of retail turnover. Many businesses don't have adequate information or a solid business plan.
- Downtown has many individual small property owners. Trying to get 9 property owners on the same page for a project such as Lakeshore Plaza is quite an challenge.
- We don't have the right spaces, with our floor plan configuration downtown, its going to take a lot of work to get some type of sea changing development.
- We have broken a record, we have retailer who is paying \$60 per square foot and unfortunately that sets a precedent. Most businesses need rents at lower rates to survive.
- We have odd, small retail spaces. To support the kind of successful retail we need, you need bigger spaces. We need more buildings with bigger spaces; we need someone to take a block and redevelop it.

Traffic, Parking, and Access

- There has been so much growth, which has caused havoc for transportation. We need to encourage vitality and growth that solves our problem, not aggravates it.
- We are an alternative to I-405. We need some ideas on how to solve the transportation challenges and plan for growth to make downtown a destination point.
- Our sidewalks are in bad condition, does that affect the viability of downtown?
- There is a perception that there isn't enough parking.

Communication

- There is a mentality that it is the neighborhoods versus downtown and downtown versus the City Council. Hopefully in this process we can identify and address our own biases.

Opportunities

Businesses Vitality and Good Retail Mix, Working with Business and Property Owners

- Landlord's perspective: my last vacancy I put a sign in the window for a 900 square foot space. Most inquiries were from people who always wanted to own a business, but don't have a business plan. To fill the space I recruited an existing successful business owner who I knew had the expertise to manage a successful business.
- Landlords cannot revamp spaces unless they have tenants to sustain that development.
- I believe the antique mall is a key to revitalizing downtown.
- Lake Shore Plaza could add retail space and contribute to year round vitality.
- Kirkland is developing an identity as a sustainable community, a place that promotes sustainable concepts.
- What is Kirkland's identity?
- Right now there is a lot of women-oriented shops – hair, bridal, dresses, consignment. How can we broaden the mix? Should we broaden the mix? There is a cluster theory and maybe if ladies boutiques are our niche, we should buy into it within reason
- Downtown already has the cluster effect. On Park Lane there is a cluster of clothing stores, bridal shops, etc. There is also an exercise cluster. The cluster theory is in town and working.
- As a young family I come downtown frequently, I find myself going to Bellevue and Woodinville, what's there that I can't get downtown?
- We need higher residential density in downtown to help address the weak retail.

Community Feel and Appropriate Scale Development

- The size of our retail is affected by the size of our spaces. The scale and accessibility of those spaces works for us but not for many retailers.
- Kirkland is walking city currently, there are other cities that would kill to have what Kirkland has, it's because of the scalability.
- You have to increase the density; you will find the right balance between density and scalability. How can we increase the density and keep the scale? If we can balance that, stand back because we'll be a national success.
- Density is the name of the game, and it's not economically feasibility to redevelop, that's why I have 700-1400 square foot retail spaces.

Market, Serving Residents versus Serving Tourists

- There are more people living downtown. But most of their dollars are spent in the restaurants and not in the retail stores. Its a challenge and an opportunity: we are not a "dry goods" downtown, we are a destination downtown
- We are part of the friends and family tourism circuit. People take out of town guests here.
- We are part of the tourism menu, one of many things that people will visit the region for.

- I do not want downtown to be a tourist destination. It should be more than that. People who live here should be using it. There used to be a hardware store on Central Avenue, we need more of that again.
- If downtown is not capturing the local residents, it needs to capture others and there needs to be a reason for those tourists to come downtown
- Tourism is a part of the total package, it's not just the lake, it's 6th Street and Park Place. The seasonality can be solved by architecture and design.
- Park Place sounds good, how can we use the traffic to downtown's advantage, get people to get out of their cars ,we're never going to solve it so we should look at it as an opportunity

Create Connections

- We need connections that pull people along the sidewalk through all of downtown. One of the concerns with Central Avenue is that no one is pulled down the street. How do we make the streetscape draw people along the street from Anthony's?
- I think the waterfront is a huge asset and it is key to bring people off the lake into town
- We're not bringing anyone from the west. That can be done with design. We'd like to work with our landlords, how can we get them together?
 - On every major corner in this town there is a bank.
- Park Place is part of downtown, but people don't walk through, people don't walk from library downtown, people aren't going to cut through the park, it is a blockage.
- Creating a pedestrian walkway that will link these areas, park place, marina park, and downtown
 - Lot's of work has been done on Marina Park, if you could see the parking it would open up the vision of the lake, encouraging people

Transportation and Access

- European cities are covered with piazzas and plazas, many with parking underneath. We should follow that model -- lift the park up, put parking underneath.
- The Performing Arts Center and senior center, both are not well-enough served by parking.
- The parking problem is more a perception than a reality. We're looking at strategies to better manage it into the evening and using pricing. It's going to be difficult to be the first community on the east side with paid parking.
- The parking challenge is perceived, and also real.
- The transit center is going to enhance connectivity.
- Park Smart is difficult to administer effectively.
- Working to increase the parking supply in the context of a Council that doesn't want to invest general fund dollars and believes that parking revenues should pay part of the cost.

Parks

- I believe that parks are a huge asset and they need to be co-managed with downtown retail, and with the KDA.

Part B: Brainstorming a Vision for Downtown – Part 1

Bonnie asked the group to brainstorm a vision for downtown Kirkland.

- Retain the current feel.
- Make it more pedestrian friendly; more connectivity and linkages.
- Connectivity and retail vitality.
 - University Village is filled, there are no gaps and voids. No pedestrian will go across the antique mall.
 - Downtown has to work together.
 - Think about how Disneyland functions. You feel like you are part of the community, you walk through Main Street.
- Consider covered walkways.
- What does walking do? Why should it be walkable?
 - Makes me feel good, an experience that creates positive energy.
 - I work in downtown Bellevue, I can't get that feeling there.
 - That's what attracted Google here.
- There should be a definable sense of place, that provides an experience that is different from Redmond or Bellevue.
- I heard someone say they liked living in Kirkland because it felt like they were always on vacation. They felt happy and interested in doing new activities. We need to encourage that.
- Having the small-scale appearance is a major attraction, despite the fact that it may not be economically feasible.
- This group needs to define the word scalability. The way scalability interacts with economic viability and density is the key to this project and the key to creating a sense of place in downtown Kirkland.
- We need enhanced public spaces – for example, the location for the Wednesday market is precarious.
- Connect downtown to City Hall.

Bonnie thanked the group for their ideas and brainstorming and reminded the DAC that in the next meeting we will continue to discuss the Vision for downtown.

QUESTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The group identified the following questions to address and answer in future meetings:

- Will this project have a website? Will materials and meeting summaries be posted to the website?
 - Answer: Yes, Jeremy will send the URL to DAC members.
- Can the City identify opportunity sites downtown?
- What is the zoning in downtown?
- Growth pressures – can we get more information?
- What is the status of projects and strategies recommended in the 2001 Plan?

Jeremy said that he will send the Committee background information on all of the above issues.

NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING DATE

The group discussed and agreed upon longer meetings to be held on Thursday evenings (with dinner provided). The next meeting will be: Thursday, June 7th, from 4 pm to 7 pm