



MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 30, 2011

To: Planning Commission

FROM: Jeremy McMahan, Planning Supervisor

SUBJECT: Presentation of Decision Commons planning tool

RECOMMENDATION

Receive a presentation on the Decision Commons tool. Suzanne Cartwright and staff from the University of Washington Runstad Center will provide an overview and demonstration and be available to answer questions.

Decision Commons is a new tool being developed to help communities make better policy choices by visually integrating variables such as economic, environmental and aesthetic choices. The tool is currently being tested on the Bellevue-Redmond corridor of the Sound Transit East Link project as a station area planning tool.

A brochure is attached and an informative three minute overview of the capabilities can be viewed at the website www.decisioncommons.org.

City staff and members of the Design Review Board have been invited to attend the presentation.

Attachments

1. Brochure

Decision Commons

Envision a Sustainable Future

The Need is Great. Our region – like so many in the United States – faces tough choices. Costs for implementing public policy decisions are rising due to increasingly complex issues, cumbersome decision-making processes, and poorly communicated choices. Decision Commons will provide a powerful new tool to support more effective planning and policy for the sustainable development of our cities and regions – places that promote human prosperity and ecological balance.

What is Decision Commons?

A new approach to integrating off-the-shelf technology that will allow participants to visually explore the economic and environmental implications of policies and alternative futures. This will facilitate better land use, real estate development, and infrastructure decisions from the local to the regional level.

In light of many pressing economic and environmental issues, robust tools like Decision Commons need to be deployed as quickly as possible.

The primary purpose of Decision Commons is to strengthen our understanding of the:

- connections between policies and the physical form of our cities
- interactions between public and private decision making
- comparison of future land use and development scenarios
- visual character of our communities
- environmental and economic implications of growth



Sponsorship

The Quality Growth Alliance – a diverse group of Puget Sound planning, development, education and environmental interests – along with the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, have joined forces to sponsor Decision Commons. Seed funding has been obtained from the Microsoft Corporation and the City of Seattle as well as contributions from Parsons Brinckerhoff, Mithun, and the University of Washington’s Runstad Center for Real Estate Studies.



Strategic Direction

Decision Commons will facilitate decision making in a variety of settings by providing an interface for users to input assumptions while the software uses existing data and planning models to produce a visual sense of place with economic and environmental results as outputs. Results from this modeling can be displayed and interacted with in a variety of ways – from desktop computers to visualization labs and conference rooms. Interactive feedback will allow multiple stakeholders to collaborate on key decisions. Decision Commons has both public process and technical objectives.



Decision Commons
User Experience



Visualization System
Modeling System
Geospatial Database

Public Decision-Making Objective: Connect policy choices to land use, infrastructure and urban development decisions, enabling stakeholders to envision alternative futures and compare them across a variety of meaningful metrics. This in turn provides the basis for implementing preferred alternatives.

Technology Objective: Develop a suite of tools that will allow users to experience realistic digital models of our cities and surrounding landscapes and to better understand the economic and environmental implications of development policies.

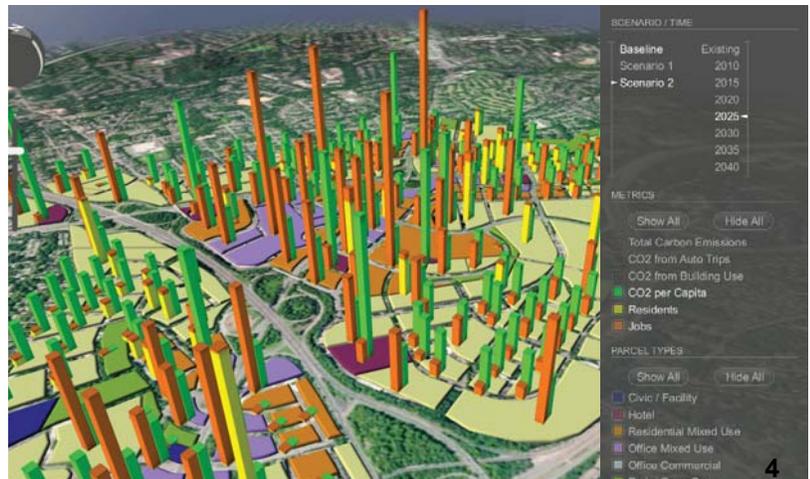
Decision Commons History

In March 2007 a Seattle Chamber of Commerce delegation of 87 elected officials and business and civic leaders visited Arizona State University to experience Decision Theater, a visualization environment where participants are able to view the projected impacts of policy decisions. The delegation saw how this tool helps link strategies for transportation, climate change, water management, population growth, land use, emergency preparedness, and infrastructure. To test the potential for a similar tool in Puget Sound, an initial demonstration of Decision Commons was developed in September 2008 utilizing data developed during the Urban Land Institute's "Reality Check 2008" exercise. This showed the potential of the Decision Commons idea to over 2,000 regional leaders at annual meetings of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce and the Quality Growth Alliance.

Participation in Puget Sound Reality Check



Emerging Tools for Urban Analysis



Development Progress

Based on positive feedback from the initial demonstration, a Steering Committee comprised of developers, business leaders, environmental groups, and academics representing the Quality Growth Alliance and the Seattle Chamber was formed in July 2009 to study Decision Commons' potential. The study resulted in a business plan that defines user requirements and a strategy to operate Decision Commons. The business plan also outlines the budget and funding requirements for the further development of this important tool. The first step is to demonstrate the potential of Decision Commons through a Test Case.

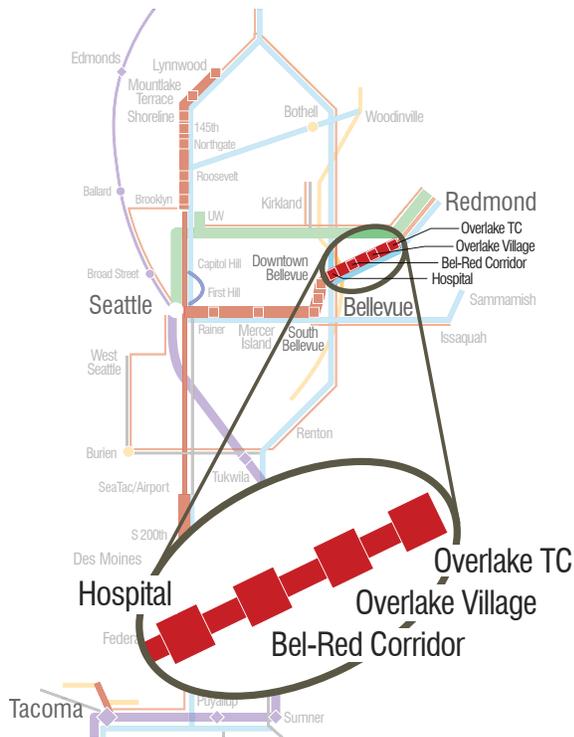
Test Case

The Steering Committee established the following criteria for selecting the Test Case location:

- connectivity to real-world infrastructure and planning issues;
- potential to demonstrate urban visualization capabilities;
- deals with current major infrastructure and land-use decisions made through public processes;
- broad community support for selected policy alternatives.

The Bellevue-Redmond corridor of the Sound Transit East Link was selected as the Test Case because it best met the above criteria and has the support of key stakeholders including Sound Transit, Bellevue and Redmond city officials, affected land owners, and community organizations. The Test Case will focus on the light rail corridor and the individual station areas from Overlake Hospital to the Overlake Transit Center. This corridor is particularly appropriate because planning is far enough along to have settled on an alignment which allows a focus on Decision Commons as a tool for station area planning; there is adequate data to "power" the model; and there is indication of solid support from municipalities, landowners and sponsors.

The Test Case will be used to identify appropriate variables and to select desired visual and quantitative outputs. Extensive coordination with stakeholders throughout the development process will ensure that Decision Commons provides critical functionality and maximizes value for end-users.



Bellevue-Redmond Corridor Test Case Location



Next Steps

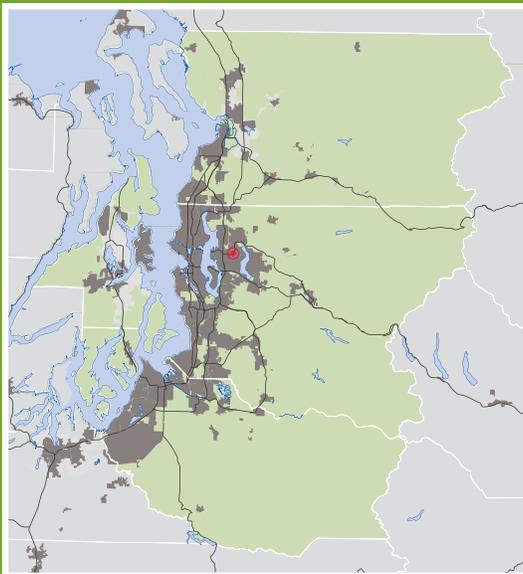
Upon completion of a successful Test Case demonstration, Decision Commons will have tested critical aspects of a next-generation decision support tool leading to a “Prototype Phase” of development which will allow application of Decision Commons to a larger geographic area and interactively demonstrate the effects of various development scenarios in real-time. Once the effectiveness of a Prototype has been demonstrated, the project will move into an Implementation and Rollout phase. A projected timeline and budget for each phase of Decision Commons development is outlined below.

Timeline



Take Action – Support Decision Commons

Our region faces tough choices.
 Costs for implementing policies are rising.
 Costs for not implementing the right policies are also rising.
 Local government and business see the potential for this tool,
 and it’s needed sooner than later.



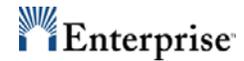
More Information

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