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# ABOUT GROWTH



A CONTINUING REPORT ON THE 2035 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

## *the* center *piece*

By enhancing Totem Lake Park and building the Cross Kirkland Corridor, land-use experts believe Kirkland can spur redevelopment in the City's designated Urban Center.

A young family enjoys Totem Lake Park.



**T**otem Lake is a chatty place. More than 90 different species of birds hang out there, along with the bullfrogs, the turtles and the Long-Eared Owls. It's an inviting place, too. You could get there—and escape the oceans of asphalt that surround it—simply by strolling down one of two boardwalks.

Few, however, take that walk.

Bob Shultz, 57, is one of them. And he does it regularly—to document its wildlife and to test its water for phosphates, nitrates, acidity, turbidity and temperature.

“This is a [17]-acre gem ...” says Shultz, a

self-described ‘citizen-scientist.’ “If I were king, I would try to feature the naturalness of it within an urban area. It’s a functional, natural wetlands, surrounded by an urban area. That’s rare.”

Shultz, of course, is talking about Totem Lake Park. The three-acre lake and its surrounding wetlands fulfill dozens of functions for its surrounding community—water purification, habitat, flood protection, among others.

Kirkland’s leaders are hoping it can perform one more: To help transform the Totem Lake business district into the denser,

### TO LEARN MORE

■ Contact Dorian Collins, senior planner for questions about the Urban Center: 587-3249; [dcollins@kirklandwa.gov](mailto:dcollins@kirklandwa.gov)

■ Or Michael Cogle, deputy director of Parks, for questions about Totem Lake Park: 587-3310 or [mcogle@kirklandwa.gov](mailto:mcogle@kirklandwa.gov)

# vision for the URBAN CENTER

The idea of Totem Lake as an Urban Center emerged as City policy in 2002, when the Totem Lake community collaborated on a vision statement for its neighborhood.

“The new plan envisions the area as the City’s ‘economic engine,’ wrote then-Mayor Larry Springer in an April 2002 letter to King County Executive Ron Sims that requested Urban Center designation. “[It will be] a focus for jobs and activity, providing the community and region with services, vehicle sales, major destination retail and health care.”

To manifest that vision, Kirkland’s leaders created an ambitious plan (see map at right) to transform Totem Lake into a dense, walkable village that offers its community open space, a nightlife and a variety of places to work and live. To be one of King County’s 18 Urban Centers, Totem Lake has to meet several criteria, chief among them, it has to:

- Be one and-a-half square miles or less
- Accommodate 15,000 jobs within half-mile of transit center
- Accommodate 50 employees & 15 households per acre

more walkable, more inviting urban village the community had imagined in 2002 when it articulated its neighborhood plan.

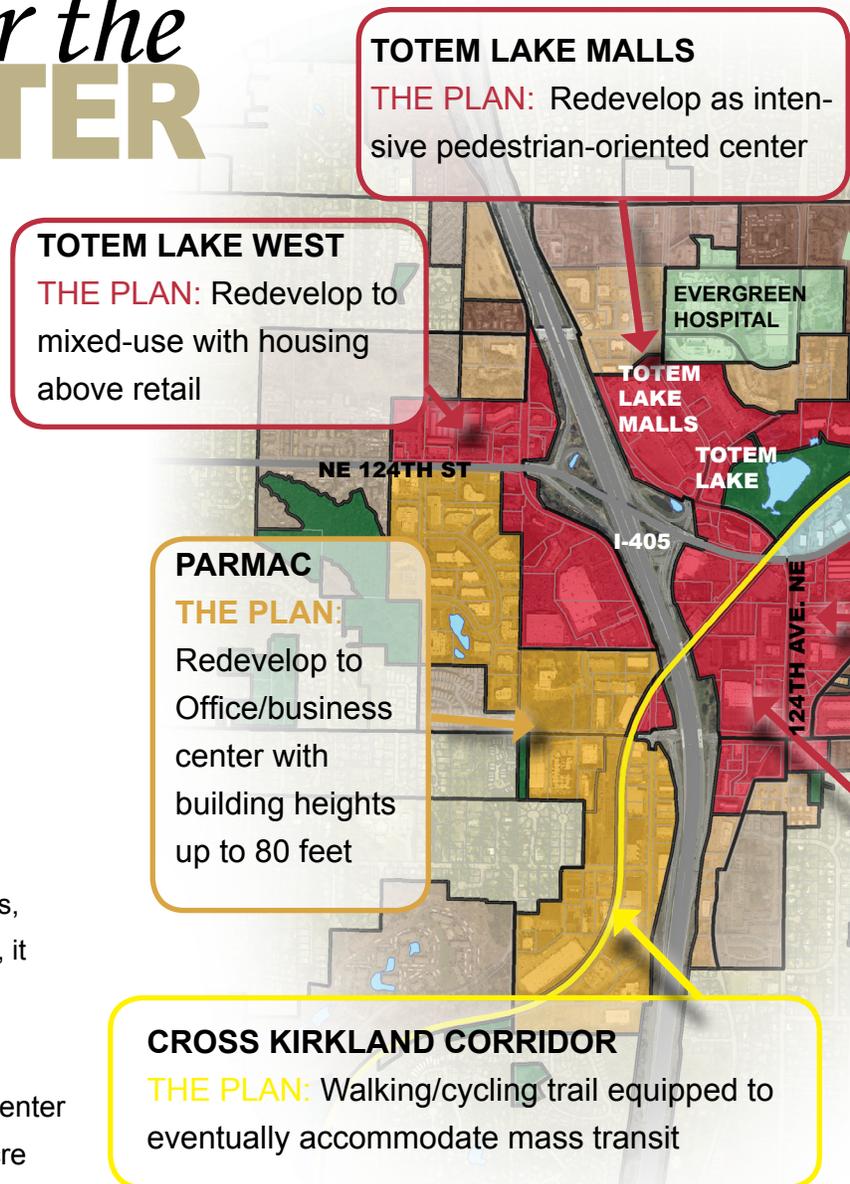
## Urban Centers

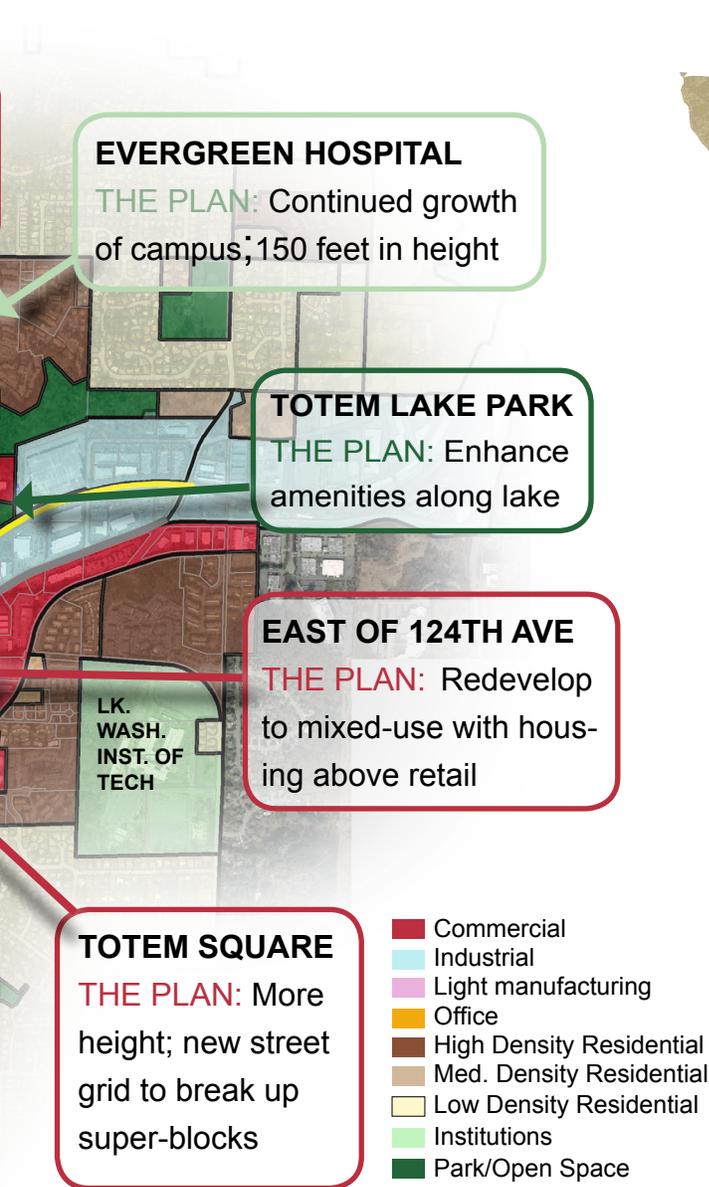
That plan became the basis for a designation the Totem Lake business district earned in 2003: Urban Center. The Totem Lake business district is now one of 18 Urban Centers throughout King County. And because of its Urban Center status, it receives priority when applying for federal funding. Since 2009, in fact, Totem Lake has won more than \$6 million in federal funding—all intended to improve transporta-

tion.

The purpose of these Urban Centers is to transform them into dense, pedestrian-oriented communities that can attract as much as one-half of the new jobs and one-quarter of the new residents forecasters expect to add in the coming decades. Totem Lake’s share of this could be as many as 10,000 jobs and 2,000 households.

To achieve those growth targets and to capitalize on the economic center that already produces nearly a third of the City’s sales tax revenue, Kirkland has invested \$51 million into the Totem Lake neighbor-





Totem Lake to the west side. In 2012, it worked with the Department of Transportation to make the freeway interchange at Northeast 116th Street safer and more efficient for people who drive, bike and walk. And this spring, the City retained the landscape architectural firm that designed Seattle’s Magnuson Park—The Berger Partnership—to study Totem Lake Park and draft a master plan for it.

### How Totem Lake developed

Other than its name, the lake hasn’t changed all that much since 1945, when 23-year-old Jerry Rutherford and her husband moved into a hilltop farmhouse overlooking a bog, then named Lake Wittenmyer.

A few people would go fishing on it,” says Rutherford, now 91, who for nearly two decades was a reporter for the *Kirkland Eastside Journal*. “It was pretty boggy to get out there. You didn’t think of it as a lake. You thought of it as a muddy hole, with fish and mountain beavers.”

The area’s pastoral character began to change on November 7, 1967—election night. On that evening, residents in Kirkland, Bothell and Redmond joined with unincorporated residents in Kenmore, Woodinville and Juanita to form a hospital district. They called it “King County Hospital District No. 2.” It was 108 square-miles. Totem Lake was its geographic center.

Purchasing land for the hospital would be the five district commissioners’ first order of business. They found it in Totem Lake; 35 acres—all within a short walk of Puget Sound’s new four-lane interstate, I-405.

The Totem Lake Malls followed in 1973. And in the ensuing years, so did hotels, restaurants, apartments and other retail spaces—most of them positioned to attract freeway traffic. Warehouses and light-industrial factories emerged along the Eastside Rail Corridor. For more than a decade,

hood—with plans to invest more. Those investments run the gamut—from mitigating chronic floods on Totem Lake Boulevard, to improving traffic circulation on 124th Avenue Northeast. Kirkland has offered \$15 million worth of street improvements to help spur redevelopment of the Totem Lake Malls. It has revised its zoning to allow more residential density and building heights of up to 160 feet in some areas. In 2007, it teamed-up with Sound Transit and the Department of Transportation to build the \$80 million Totem Lake Freeway Station and the Northeast 128th Street bridge over Interstate 405, which connects the east side of

## the **ECONOMIC** engine

When it comes to jobs

and sales

tax revenue, no

other business district in

Kirkland compares to Totem Lake. A

third of the City's 37,378

jobs are located in Totem

Lake. And a third of the City's

sales tax revenue comes from

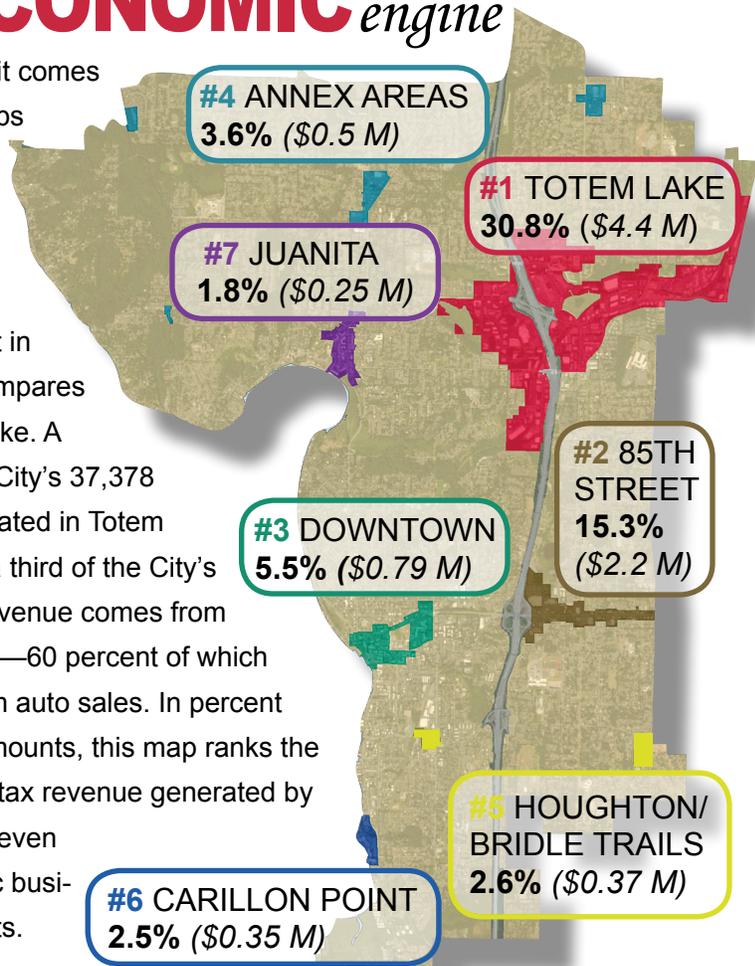
Totem Lake—60 percent of which

derives from auto sales. In percent

and total amounts, this map ranks the

2012 sales tax revenue generated by

Kirkland's seven most prolific business districts.



the Malls were the center of it all.

“Totem Lake Center is a new concept,” said its owner, Puget Sound Land Company’s president John Stuart in a 1973 interview with the *Eastside Journal*. “We hope, eventually, one can bike or walk to all these facilities. They’ll all be in one place.”

### A ‘sense of place’ starts here

But then began the Malls’ decline—hastened by roof collapses, flooding, tenant-abandonment and a lawsuit between the Malls’ two current owners.

“The thing that the Malls offered was a sense of place,” says Ellen Miller-Wolfe, Kirkland’s economic development manager. “That’s what this is all about. Place-making. And that’s what we want to put back. So we’ve been looking at what we have in Totem Lake that [local government] could effect. And what we have is a lake nobody sees and a rail corridor that’s been abandoned. And we’re thinking it starts there.”

The City of Kirkland tested this idea in 2011, when it hired a panel of land-use experts from the Urban Land Institute to scrutinize Totem Lake business district and the City’s plans for it. After extensive analysis, the panel proposed two public investments: Purchase the rail corridor and enhance and expand Totem Lake Park to the northwest.

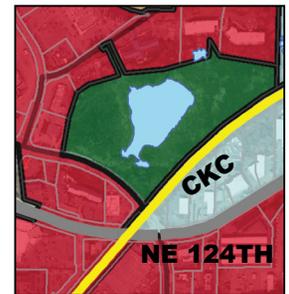
Expanding the park to the northwest is the idea landscape architects from the Berger Partnership started with, as well. While performing their own analysis of the area, however, they had an epiphany: The Cross Kirkland Corridor forms the park’s southern boundary, its longest edge.

“You can’t separate the two,” says Guy Michaelson, a principal landscape architect at the Berger Partnership. “So now you can start to imagine that the lake can become the centerpiece, the visual centerpiece, of the neighborhood.”

“This is sort of [the community’s] chance to be aspirational,” Michaelson continues. “To look at the lake as not what it is now, but what it wants to be.”

And with that centerpiece established, private development should follow, helping to manifest the two-decade-old vision of Totem Lake as Kirkland’s thriving Urban Center.

### TOTEM LAKE PARK



Totem Lake Park could expand to the northwest, as indicated on this map. The Berger Partnership is looking at parcels between Northeast 124 Street and the Cross Kirkland Corridor.