5/20/2024

To:
Mayor Bruce Harrell
Councilmember Tammy Morales
OPCD Director Rico Quirindongo

ESES
ESSENTIAL SOUTHEAST SEATTLE

Re: **Southeast Seattle Business Districts Feedback on One Seattle Comprehensive Plan**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the One Seattle Comprehensive Plan. We are a group of Southeast Seattle community-based organizations serving neighborhood business districts through small business support, clean and safe activities, placemaking programs, marketing, and events. We appreciate the work that City staff have put into drafting the Plan and we are excited about the vision it lays out.

However, we would like to express our disappointment that the Plan appears to no longer provide Neighborhood-level policy recommendations, which we have relied on as documentation of stated goals in our advocacy in the past. We are concerned that the Urban Center profiles in the appendix, which have not yet been provided for feedback, will not meet the same level of rigor to which we are accustomed. We understand that including the Neighborhood sections takes additional time and effort; we simply wish to express that we believe they were worth it, and are sad to see them not included.

In addition, we offer the following feedback that we believe will strengthen the Plan and bring its policy actions into alignment with its stated values.

Economic Development & Creative Economy

- **Commit to increasing funding for Economic Development policies.** While we appreciate the intentions behind the ED policies in the One Seattle Plan Draft, we are concerned that they are restatements of activities that are already occurring without or emphasizing that an increase in funding is needed. We strongly recommend including “increase” and “fund” language as policy directives for the Office of Economic Development, particularly with regard to:
    - Only in Seattle grant funding to provide a stable source of funding for staffing business district organizations, with consideration for increasing cost of living.
    - Community Wealth building opportunities for BIPOC business owners.
    - Direct grant or forgivable loan programs for businesses, such as the Tenant Improvement Program and the Storefront Repair Fund.
    - Programs to support BIPOC refugee- and immigrant-owned small businesses, with technical assistance to overcome language and technology access barriers to accessing resources and permits so that small business ownership can be a pathway toward creating generational wealth.
- **Support bold policies for reducing vacant spaces.** We encourage the City of Seattle to consider policy options to make more business spaces affordable and to encourage

property owners to fill vacant storefronts. Please research the effectiveness of policies such as commercial vacancy taxes, incentives for affordable business spaces, or assistance to business owners to access vacant spaces.

- **Integrate opportunities to build the creative economy in small business support programs.** The creative economy plays a crucial role in driving economic development by providing community identity and revitalization. Building creative economy jobs into small business funding programs creates connections across business communities and expands visibility for local creative enterprises, while providing needed services to small businesses.

Housing, Land Use, & Growth Strategy

We echo the calls made by housing organizations in our area, particularly the letter written by the Complete Communities Coalition. Some specific issues are of key concern to us as local business district organizations:

- **We support housing abundance to accommodate job growth and maximize transit.** Seattle needs to have enough homes to meet its job growth. Given the existing housing crisis, we call on the One Seattle Plan to encourage one-to-one growth of housing and jobs. This will enable the housing market to balance and stabilize, lowering housing expenses and making more homes affordable for workers at all levels. We also strongly encourage including transit corridor up-zones to maximize access to the mass-transit network, reducing the need for car trips and creating healthier neighborhoods.
- **Missing middle housing must offer affordable homeownership opportunities for BIPOC families.** Zoning policy must align with market realities to ensure that developers and homeowners are able to afford to build more dense housing options. Specifically, we are concerned that FAR restrictions in the new Urban Neighborhoods makes actual development of 4 or 6 plexes very challenging to finance, and family sized units nearly impossible to build. We strongly encourage increasing the FAR to the rates suggested by HB 1110 or seen in Spokane, so that we can see affordable 4-6 plex developments of family sized units in our neighborhoods.
- **Please consider additional areas for growth in Southeast Seattle.**
    - Consider expanding the Columbia City Urban Center to S. Juneau St, reinforcing the Columbia City - Hillman City Arts and Culture district.
    - Add back Neighborhood Centers along Lake Washington, particularly at S Genesee St. and 50th Ave S and at S Farrar St. and Wilson Ave S., where there are existing small business areas with great access to waterfront parks and regular transit access. We strongly encourage more dense development in this area, particularly of family-sized affordable units.
    - Add a Neighborhood Center at S Columbian Way and Beacon Ave S, where there are existing small businesses, frequent transit access, and access to Jefferson Park and Cheasty Greenspace.

Transportation, Climate, & Open Space

- **Collaborate with King County Metro to invest in improving public transit.** To meet our climate goals and reduce pollution, we must urgently reduce the number of cars on

our roads. However, the transit network is insufficient, and the current level of service does not encourage car owners to choose transit over driving. We strongly encourage investments in incentive options. Please consider:

  - *Maintain parking while increasing transit* - While we support reducing or eliminating parking requirements for new developments in high transit access areas, we must recognize that people – including some community members living with disabilities and caregivers of young children and senior citizens – still need to be able to park in our business districts. Reducing parking options *before* improving transit appears to only exacerbate animosity among people who still need to drive. There must be realistic transit options before reducing parking options.
  - *Invest in first/last mile solutions* - We're excited by King County's Metro Flex program in Othello and Rainier Beach. We strongly support expanding this service across all of Southeast Seattle to support connections to light rail.

- **Reduce barriers for nonprofit community organizations to use parks.** We suggest reducing fees and limitations on vending at community events. Currently, community organizations in our networks are opting against activating City parks because the fees for our vending partners are too extravagant. The City wants to see parks activated and well maintained - we want to be your partners!

We request that these revisions are included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and implemented through the Mayor's Recommended Plan. We believe that they will strengthen our business districts, meet the expressed desires of voters, and ensure that the implementation of the One Seattle Plan aligns with its stated values. We call on you to create a more visionary plan to lead Seattle into a future where every resident and business can thrive.

Sincerely,

Essential Southeast Seattle Collective

Beacon Business Alliance
Mt. Baker Hub Alliance
Rainier Ave Business Coalition
MLK Business Association