



**CITY OF KIRKLAND**  
**Planning and Building Department**  
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## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Kurt Triplett, City Manager

**From:** Adam Weinstein, AICP, Planning and Building Director  
 Allison Zike, AICP, Deputy Planning and Building Director

**Date:** July 26, 2024

**Subject:** **Briefing on K2044 Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element Update – Transit Corridors; File No. CAM22-00032**

### RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that City Council (Council) receives a briefing and provides feedback on the 2044 Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element Update, focusing on the analysis of potentially increasing housing capacity along frequent transit corridors.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- There has been intense community debate about one particular draft policy in the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan:
  - *DRAFT Policy LU-2.4: Create additional capacity for higher-intensity residential uses along identified frequent transit corridors citywide, and ensure development regulations enable multi-unit housing types.*
- Neighborhood residents have raised concerns that staff are proposing building heights of up to six stories, and densities ranging from 50 to 200 units per acre, extending 1/2 mile each direction from transit corridors. The draft policy does not propose any height or specific density and the SEIS evaluation only considered increased densities within ¼ mile from transit corridors.
- While this high-level policy would focus a portion of the City's planned growth along corridors with frequent bus service, to create more housing options and affordability, and reduce traffic, it does not establish specific allowed residential densities. The policy also requires that any new transit corridor change must address many of the concerns raised by residents such as increased traffic, gradual transitions of intensity, school capacity, commercial and retail services, bike and pedestrian safety, and more.
- If this policy is adopted by Council as part of the Comprehensive Plan Update, it would be followed by an implementation project, with many opportunities for public input, that would evaluate potential zoning changes along frequent transit corridors. These zoning changes could encompass new requirements for affordable housing along transit corridors, along with allowance for different densities and development standards than those that currently exist.
- This memo seeks to provide additional context around the objectives of this draft policy and ways that it could be adjusted to meet the many competing objectives of the City in planning for future growth. Any ultimate transit corridor policy would not be adopted by Council until it adopts the Comprehensive Plan (scheduled for Fall 2024) and subsequent zoning changes would not occur until 2025 or 2026 at the earliest.

Therefore, this briefing is primarily informational and is intended to help prepare the Council for future discussions about the Comprehensive Plan scheduled for Fall 2024.

- Council feedback on transit corridor options at the August 7, 2024 meeting is requested.

## BACKGROUND:

### Overview

The Land Use Element guides future growth in Kirkland and helps establish the appropriate locations for certain types of development (i.e., land uses), the allowed intensity of each land use, and where open space and other important community uses should be located. This guidance is set forth in the Element through the Land Use Map (showing Citywide Land use designations), and the goals and policies – *some of which may serve as policy groundwork, or direction, for future Kirkland Zoning Code (KZC) amendments that would implement changes to development capacity.*

Because residential uses are the predominant uses throughout much of Kirkland’s land area, the Land Use Element is very influential in affecting where and how new housing gets developed in the City. The Land Use Element is the foundational chapter of the Comprehensive Plan that establishes how Kirkland will accommodate our assigned growth targets (from King County) for the Plan update horizon year of 2044, shown in the table below.

HOUSING UNITS		JOBS	
Existing (2018)	K2044 Target (2019 – 2044)	Existing (2018)	K2044 Target (2019 – 2044)
38,656	13,200 (above 2018 existing)	49,280	26,490 (above 2018 existing)

Staff has provided the PC and Council with briefings on the Land Use Element most recently at the below meetings. Details about the discussion topics for each meeting, summaries of community outreach and engagement activities related to land use, and relevant attachments can be accessed in the linked meeting materials for each date.

- May 23, 2024 PC Public Hearing: Draft Land Use Element<sup>1</sup>
- May 3, 2024 Joint City Council/PC Retreat<sup>2</sup>: Policy Discussion and Review of Land Use Capacity Analysis
- January 11, 2024 PC Study Session<sup>3</sup>: Land Use Policy Briefing #1 and Review of Land Use Capacity Analysis and Study Issues

### Transit Corridors Study Issue

One of the study issues for the Land Use Element, identified by Planning Commission (PC) and Council in 2023, is to:

*“Explore appropriate uses and densities on existing neighborhood commercial-oriented sites, along and within walksheds of transit corridors, around parks/open spaces, or other locations while considering equity impacts to housing residents.”*

<sup>1</sup> <https://kirklandwa.primegov.com/meetings/ItemWithTemplateType?id=426&meetingTemplateType=2>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.kirklandwa.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/city-council/agenda-documents/2024/may-3-2024-retreat/6\\_housing-supportive-land-use.pdf](https://www.kirklandwa.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/city-council/agenda-documents/2024/may-3-2024-retreat/6_housing-supportive-land-use.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://kirklandwa.primegov.com/Portal/Meeting?meetingTemplateId=803>

Focusing new growth along frequent transit corridors is considered good planning practice and helps promote community objectives in the following ways:

- Adding new housing along frequent bus lines gives residents the ability to take trips via transit instead of driving, reducing traffic and air pollution;
- Increased residential densities generate increased affordable housing, because multi-family residential projects in most of the City are required to set aside at least 10% of units at levels that are affordable to lower-income households;
- Increased residential densities also create downward pressure on the price of market-rate housing, because there is more supply, allowing people in the community who have trouble paying for housing to live in the community;
- Density helps foster neighborhood-serving retail uses (corner stores, etc.), creating a more walkable, sustainable community;
- Clustering more housing along frequent transit corridors bolsters the City's argument to King County Metro and other transit agencies that more and better transit service is warranted; and
- Because clustering housing along transit lines makes for efficient use of existing roadways, it is more fiscally sustainable.

However, as with any type of growth, allowing for more housing construction around transit corridors also comes with risks, including the potential for increased traffic if good transit service and bike/pedestrian connections are not in place, or if school capacity and neighborhood services don't materialize. One of the key purposes of the Comprehensive Plan, however, is to ensure that infrastructure – most notable transportation infrastructure – keeps up with growth. This and other policy initiatives also help ensure that changes associated with growth do not compromise, but rather help sustain, the great quality of life in Kirkland.

In response to the transit corridor study issue, staff identified several areas to study the potential of additional housing capacity. These areas were included in the land use capacity analysis (i.e., a calculation of how much new housing and jobs the City's zoning can accommodate) and evaluated in the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS). The purpose of evaluating additional capacity in these analyses was to create a high "bookend" of capacity tied to specific geographic boundaries in such a way that the analysis for the Transportation Strategic Plan (TSP) and Transportation Element updates could identify needed infrastructure to support growth.

## DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

### Capacity Analysis

For the analysis of studying additional capacity along frequent transit corridors, a methodology was developed to *approximate* how much additional capacity could potentially be created along the corridors. Planning and Building Department staff worked with the TSP project team to identify corridors where there was either existing frequent transit service (defined as at least one bus every 15 minutes during peak hours for this analysis), or planned frequent transit service (e.g., the forthcoming Metro K-Line). Along these corridors, staff applied a ¼-mile buffer within which to study adding capacity. It should be noted that the ¼-mile buffer does not reflect a true "walkshed" (i.e., the true walking distance using existing sidewalks or other routes), it simply extends from the transit route. Lastly, the capacity analysis assumed a density of 50 dwelling units per acre (du/acre) to the parcels within the buffers to approximate a total additional capacity along each studied corridor. If and when the City decides to rezone areas along transit corridors, it is likely that allowed densities would not be implemented along the entirety of transit corridors, but would vary based on access to other community services. For instance, there could be nodes of 50 du/acre (or another density) with lower intervening densities. It's also important to remember that capacity is reflective of how many units *could* be created if individual property owners decide to

sell their properties and there are willing developers and favorable market conditions. Creating capacity does not mean that everything that can redevelop will redevelop.

It is thus important to draw a clear distinction between planned growth and capacity. As noted earlier, the City is planning for 13,200 new residential units by 2044 – our planned growth. Having additional zoning capacity beyond this planned growth does not mean that more growth will happen, only that there will be many more opportunities to build housing in Kirkland and flexibility to expand the housing supply. These additional development opportunities can be helpful in making it easier to develop housing in Kirkland to address the local and regional housing crisis. Thus, it is considered best practice for cities to plan for housing capacity that exceeds their growth targets.

Table 1, below, from the completed capacity analysis memorandum<sup>4</sup> shows the results of this capacity modeling.

*Table 1. Detailed Capacity for Zoning Changes to Transit Corridors*

Transit Corridor	Totals (2022)		Capacity (with existing zoning)		Additional Capacity (with potential zoning changes)	
	Dwelling Units	Jobs	Dwelling Units	Jobs	Dwelling Units	Jobs
100th Ave NE to Totem Lake Transit Center (NE124th St/NE 128th St)	4,140	8,869	993	926	1,007	936
6th St S to 132nd Ave NE (NE 68th St/NE 70th Pl)	1,305	793	100	9	2,092	1,113
Downtown Transit Center to 132nd Ave NE (Central Way/NE 85th St)	4,116	9,640	2,820	2,540	4,322	3,581
Downtown Transit Center to 100th Ave NE (Market St)	3,180	2,499	372	442	4,386	2,604
Downtown Transit Center to S Kirkland Park and Ride (NE108th Ave NE/6th St/98th Ave NE)	1,093	4,978	86	153	2,949	1,720
Downtown Transit Center to S Kirkland Park and Ride (Lake St/Lake Washington Blvd NE)	2,916	7,474	651	1,679	2,271	3,016
NE 85th St to Totem Lake Transit Center (124th Ave NE/Totem Lake Blvd)	1,861	3,339	998	4,548	3,600	5,941
<b>All Transit Corridors</b>	<b>18,611</b>	<b>37,592</b>	<b>6,020</b>	<b>10,298</b>	<b>20,627</b>	<b>18,911</b>

Notes: The capacity with zoning changes is comparative, not additive to the baseline capacity. Employment from home occupation is included in employment capacity for both baseline and zoning change.

### Draft Land Use Element Amendments for Increased Capacity Along Transit Corridors

In consideration of moving this specific study issue forward, staff has included a new policy and amendments to the Land Use Map (see Attachment 1 for an illustration of the transit corridors) in the draft element that would take the first step in planning for additional capacity along frequent transit corridors. The policy and map amendments would provide the initial direction for future steps to implement changes to allowed capacity; they are not parcel- or density-specific. Rather,

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.kirklandwa.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/planning-amp-building/kirkland-2044-comp-plan/k2044-people/land-use/pdfs/k2044\\_capacityanalysismemo\\_final2024-03-26.pdf](https://www.kirklandwa.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/planning-amp-building/kirkland-2044-comp-plan/k2044-people/land-use/pdfs/k2044_capacityanalysismemo_final2024-03-26.pdf)

the amended Land Use Element would serve as a starting point if, or when, a project to develop Kirkland Zoning Code (KCZ) amendments is included in the Council-adopted Planning Work Program. The drafted policy for this topic (Policy LU-2.4), shown below and including accompanying narrative text, is a result of a staff recommendation and input from the PC. The proposed amendments to the Land Use Map would simply show the frequent transit corridor buffers as an overlay for future consideration. **Neither the policy nor the map would commit Council to zoning transit corridors at any specific density.** If the ultimately selected densities are higher than what was anticipated in the DSEIS, the City would need to analyze whether supplemental environmental review is required.

*DRAFT Policy LU-2.4: Create additional capacity for higher-intensity residential uses along identified frequent transit corridors citywide, and ensure development regulations enable multi-unit housing types.*

*In 2044, the City is expected to have a surplus capacity above the King County growth targets. That said, it could be in the City's interest to continue expanding capacity beyond what is needed to meet the growth targets and achieve important community-wide objectives such as housing affordability, better transit service, and reductions in per capita energy use. Specifically, enabling and encouraging housing production should be focused in areas that are high-opportunity, such as areas with transit corridors and that have good schools and are in close proximity to job centers. Promoting this concept distributes growth across a broader area of the City in the next 20 years.*

*Increased housing and jobs density across a wider area would support the City's current 10-minute neighborhood goals that are incorporated in the Sustainability Strategic Plan. Denser housing and mixed use development along transit corridors would help bring more daily needs, such as retail and commercial services, within a 10-minute walk of more Kirkland residents. This would help create more walkable environments outside of Kirkland's Urban Centers, with destinations along key transit corridors.*

*Policies enabling this concept should specifically address the following topics:*

- o Continued and improved transit service on these corridors;*
- o Vehicular traffic;*
- o Street safety for all modes;*
- o A gradual transition of intensity with the highest intensity uses located closest to the center of the corridors and the lowest intensity uses located at the outer edges of the corridors;*
- o The need for schools to serve residents living both in and outside of the key transit corridors;*
- o The need for publicly accessible parks and open space within the key transit corridors whether they're publicly or privately owned;*
- o The need for sufficient grocery, commercial, and retail services to enable a complete community centered on the key transit corridors.*

Any changes to the Land Use Element for this specific topic do not immediately alter the development regulations (e.g., density, height, etc.) for any specific parcels. Amendments moved forward by Council adoption would be reflected in the Plan by making changes to policy and the Land Use Map within the Element that will designate the approximate scale of intensity for each respective area. Those changes would then be implemented through future KZC amendments to determine the more specific appropriate development allowances (e.g., maximum height, structure mass). When the KZC amendments are considered is when the public, PC, and Council would have opportunities to provide additional feedback into exactly how land use intensity increases occur throughout the City, and how they should be designed, transition into other areas, etc. This KZC amendment work is generally identified on the adopted 2024-2026 Planning Work Program as beginning in 2025 at the earliest, and depending

on the extent of changes necessary, may be broken into distinct projects and/or phased in a future work program.

### **Options for Draft Policy LU-2.4**

While including the above draft policy does not obligate Council to direct an implementation project within a specific near-term timeline, the draft policy could be further revised to be more specific about the conditions under which the City would consider actual changes to allowed density. An example of that could focus on being intentional about syncing with frequent transit availability by amending the policy to read as follows (narrative text omitted):

*Alternate Draft Policy LU-2.4: Create additional capacity for higher-intensity residential uses along identified frequent transit corridors citywide but only after both the Sound Transit I-405 Stride BRT service and the King County Metro K-Line transit service have been implemented and ensure development regulations enable multi-unit housing types.*

The Sound Transit “Stride” Rapid Transit service is currently projected to start by 2028. The Metro Transit K-Line service is projected to begin in 2030. The Council may update the Comprehensive Plan every year and the next major Comprehensive Plan update will occur in 2034, allowing future Councils to adjust with real information once new transit service is implemented.

Another way in which the policy and map amendments could be altered include changing which frequent transit corridor buffers are reflected as overlays on the map. For instance, corridors around Bus Rapid Transit lines (such as the K Line) could be retained and other transit corridors could be removed. Other options for amendment include:

- Changing the “buffer” around the transit corridors from ¼-mile to some other distance;
- Establishing priority transit corridors that should receive the most immediate attention; and
- Identifying specific locations (nodes) within transit corridors that should be focused on for future density increases.

To-date, the Planning Commission’s approach has generally been the more expansive one of keeping all options on the table for future planning since the policy does not commit the City to undertaking specific zoning changes in the future.

While future implementation projects for KZC amendments would not be limited per this overlay (corridors for future analysis could be deleted, added, or altered), it is intended to be used by staff as a “starting point” for analysis in the potential future project. For example, although not studied in the capacity analysis and DSEIS, the PC directed staff to amend the draft Land Use map to include a transit corridor buffer that extends along 100<sup>th</sup> Ave NE north to Kirkland’s City limit (this is not reflected in the map in Attachment 1). The intent of this addition was to support future enhanced transit service.

### **Compliance with County, Regional, and State Requirements**

As part of the 2044 Comprehensive Plan update process, staff is required to coordinate with the Washington State Department of Commerce, Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), and King County to show that Kirkland’s Plan complies with applicable requirements from those entities. Compliance is evaluated by City staff providing drafted policies that are responsive to these requirements. Draft policy LU-2.4 has been provided to show full or partial compliance with requirements from outside agencies related to focusing on providing housing near transit, building capacity for housing affordable to a range of household incomes, and to link land use and transportation networks.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The PC public hearing for the Land Use Element began on May 23, 2024. The PC continued the public hearing to the June 27, 2024 meeting, where they voted to continue the hearing once again to their scheduled August 22, 2024 meeting. With the previous PC vote to continue the hearing, the PC also opted to re-open the record for spoken testimony (in addition to written testimony) from the public. A joint study session with the PC and Council is scheduled for the regular October 15, 2024 Council meeting to discuss the PC's recommendations on the full Comprehensive Plan update.

At the August 8, 2024 Council meeting, staff requests that Council provide feedback on the concept of additional capacity along frequent transit corridors, which can include edits to the drafted policy and Land Use map discussed in this memo.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1 – Transit Corridors



# Potential Land Use Changes Along Frequent Transit Corridors

## 5. Increased capacity along frequent transit corridors

1	100th Ave NE to Totem Lake Transit Center (NE124th St/NE 128th St)
2	6th St S to 132nd Ave NE (NE 68th St/NE 70th Pl)
3	Downtown Transit Center to 132nd Ave NE (Central Way/NE 85th St)
4	Downtown Transit Center to 100th Ave NE (Market St)
5	Downtown Transit Center to S Kirkland Park & Ride (NE108th Ave NE/6th St/98th Ave NE)
6	Downtown Transit Center to S Kirkland Park and Ride (Lake St/Lake Washington Blvd NE)
7	NE 85th St to Totem Lake Transit Center (124th Ave NE/Totem Lake Blvd)

Staff proposes the route buffers be included on the adopted Land Use Map as an overlay; which will not result in any regulatory changes. Future projects would explore the potential of changing the land use designation to Corridor Mixed Use.

