

CHAPTER TWO

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION AND LOCATION OF PROPOSAL

The Livable South Downtown planning process was initiated in 2005 by the City's Department of Planning and Development (DPD). Preliminary recommendations were released by DPD in March 2006. Land use and zoning alternatives are required to undergo environmental review prior to legislative decision-making. Consequently, DPD has published this environmental impact statement (EIS) to provide information to decisionmakers, agencies and interested citizens.

The EIS studies the environmental impacts of three “action” alternatives that include possible land use and zoning changes associated with Livable South Downtown planning, and one “no-action” alternative. These changes, if adopted, would influence future patterns of growth and development in South Downtown, including maximum heights and sizes of future buildings that may be built in the area. The EIS analysis considers the implications of the full range of recommendations covered within the Livable South Downtown planning process.

The South Downtown study area addressed in this EIS covers the southern portion of the Downtown Urban Center (Pioneer Square and Chinatown/I.D. neighborhoods), segments of industrial lands located at the northern boundaries of the Greater Duwamish Manufacturing and Industrial Center (MIC), and a peripheral edge of the Jackson Place neighborhood just east of Rainier Avenue S. (see Figure 2-1). This narrow strip extends as far north as the intersection of 12th Avenue S. and Boren Avenue S. and as far south as S. Dearborn Street.

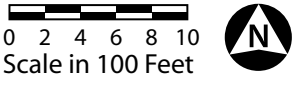
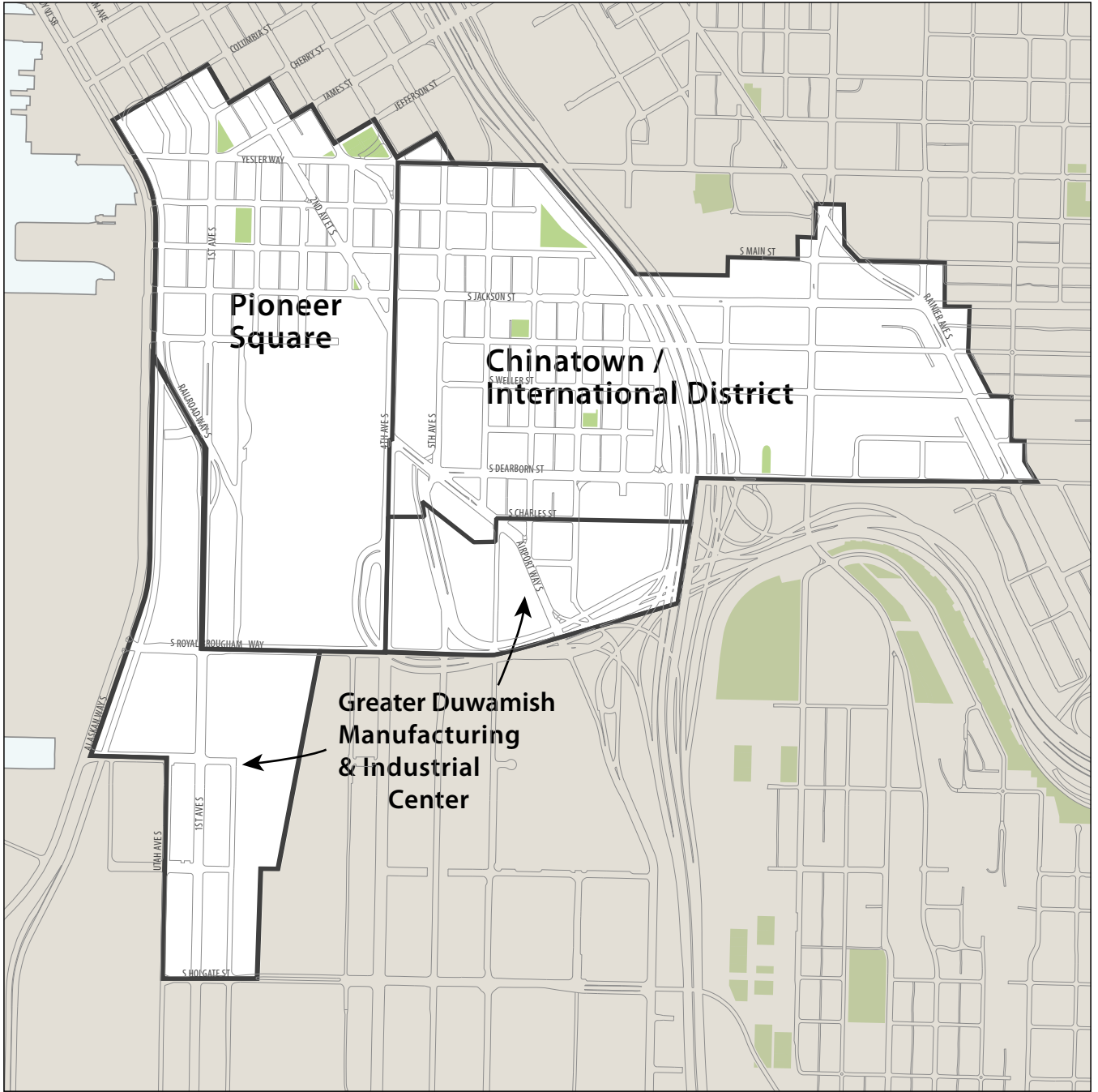
BACKGROUND

Origins of the Livable South Downtown planning process

The South Downtown planning process was inspired by a vision for future growth in South Downtown expressed by neighborhood plans, community organizations and property owners. The idea of encouraging more residents through infill development and through improvements to the physical environment was attractive to city leaders, and is an extension of neighborhood plan objectives for Pioneer Square and Chinatown/I.D.

DPD staff identified current challenges and impediments to desired objectives, including:

- a high water table and earthquake hazards that influence building design and renovation
- public safety perceptions
- traffic congestion
- possibly dated land use and zoning designations and regulations
- the complexity of special review processes in areas of historic and cultural significance
- affordable housing needs
- preservation and rehabilitation of historic structures
- effective transition between Downtown and industrial areas to the south
- preservation of industrial lands and potential impacts of residential uses near industrial uses.



Livable South Downtown

Figure 2-1
Study Area

Positive influences and opportunities were also identified, including:

- a well-established and valued historic, cultural and social character in core neighborhoods;
- access to transportation including the interstate, light rail, seaport, and intercontinental rail, including the transit hub at King Street Station;
- commercial areas composed of small and large businesses
- proximity to the Downtown employment center
- the presence of several large parcels where future development could create new business activity, jobs, housing and amenities that could enhance the area's overall character.

The Department of Planning and Development initiated a planning process for the South Downtown study area to examine land use and zoning in the area. This effort was informed by advice and feedback from an advisory group comprised of approximately 25 area stakeholders representing the diversity of interests in the South Downtown area. After ten advisory group meetings and additional general public meetings, DPD issued a "Phase 1 Staff Report" with preliminary land use recommendations in March 2006. Subsequently, staff has proceeded with the required environmental reviews that accompany such proposals. Legislation to amend the Land Use Code and possibly the Comprehensive Plan is expected to follow in 2008.

Objectives of the Livable South Downtown planning process

Goals for the Livable South Downtown project include:

- Stimulate future housing and job growth through adjustments in zoning and land use codes
- Respect neighborhood character and neighborhood plans
- Promote an integrated mix of uses
- Support quality connections between neighborhoods and downtown as a whole
- Encourage economic vitality and environmental sustainability
- Accommodate regional services and ensure they align with the goals of the local community

Specific objectives to accomplish through the project include:

- Evaluate zoning opportunities and constraints, particularly in regard to achieving more housing and job growth
- Identify desired development direction
- Recommend and implement City land use actions to support emerging residential/employment communities
- Consider opportunities for environmentally sustainable practices in future development
- Recommend public and private investments that would contribute to a well-balanced community in South Downtown.

The South Downtown advisory group has also helped refine other key issues that planning recommendations should address, including:

- improved streetscape design;
- amenities and services available to support an increased population;
- a range of housing opportunities for households at different income levels;
- maintaining freight mobility;
- industrial land preservation;
- recognition and accommodation of Port activities and mobility needs;
- quality design in new development and compatibility with existing neighborhood character; and
- a viable environment for all businesses, particularly small businesses throughout Chinatown/I.D.

SUMMARY OF DRAFT PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS

For the purposes of this Draft EIS, the Livable South Downtown planning recommendations are summarized below in a draft form. At this point in the planning process, these are not meant to represent final recommendations but to illustrate a range of possible actions that could be taken. After the Draft EIS is published and circulated, additional public comments will inform the development of final recommendations. In this manner, the environmental review process will fulfill a purpose to inform planning staff, the public, and decision-makers about the implications of decisions to be made on possible land use and zoning changes.

Overall Vision

The South Downtown study area includes neighborhoods that are cherished for their historic and cultural resources. South Downtown is also uniquely positioned at the juncture of Seattle's Downtown business district, its deep-water port terminals, its regional transportation facilities and largest sport entertainment venues.

The Livable South Downtown planning process provides an opportunity to reflect on the area's past, its present and consider its possible futures. The area must maintain its historic and cultural identity while at the same time prepare for the future. Seattle and the region will grow substantially over the coming years. South Downtown will be subject to the forces and effects of growth perhaps as much or more than any area in the region. Recommendations from this process will play an important role in shaping how these neighborhoods grow in the coming years.

As a collection of neighborhoods with distinctive history and character, South Downtown is highly valued by the City and by people who reside and work in the area. Many of the physical patterns of use and development in South Downtown's neighborhoods have changed little over several decades. While this has supported the preservation of the historical legacy of the neighborhood, it has also contributed to its decline. Some properties have not been adequately maintained, failing to retain their full usefulness even as the city's economy has changed. Other properties have remained vacant or lightly developed, fulfilling a variety of functions ranging from vehicle parking to light industry and product distribution.

From a national and global perspective, Seattle is an important west coast port city that is well situated for trade with Asia, supporting the export and import of goods that drives the local economy. City policies support the continued and long-term well-being of port-related activity. As a regional center, Downtown Seattle supports a wide variety of jobs and economic activity that are key to the well-being of the region, and generate daily volumes of people commuting to and from jobs and residences. The South Downtown study area is complementary to Downtown's economic role, supporting a variety of businesses and an increasing population of office workers.

Recent economic trends, combined with expressed interest in developing several larger properties, suggest that the future will inevitably bring new development that will affect these neighborhoods regardless of zoning. The challenge for the Livable South Downtown planning process is to assess present-day conditions and identify measures that will help to achieve the desired future vision of the neighborhoods as they evolve. These choices will influence how each neighborhood functions, and how they fit into the larger framework of the city's infrastructure. More importantly, the choices will affect the quality of environment and the quality of life for neighborhood residents and employees for many decades to come.

Consistent with the goals of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan and the neighborhood plans of Pioneer Square and Chinatown/I.D., the Livable South Downtown planning process envisions neighborhoods that are

complemented by new developments that incorporate appropriate mixes of uses and are compatible with their surroundings due to high-quality and sensitive architectural design. New development will be optimally sized to fit with each area's location within or near the Downtown Urban Center and transit hub. Infill of properties in Pioneer Square and Chinatown/I.D. will enliven and knit together the neighborhoods, and provide continuity of street-level uses including retail and other services for residents and visitors. An increase in residents within and near these neighborhoods will provide additional customers for local businesses, increased social activity and "eyes on the street" that will contribute to public safety. Police and emergency protection will be sufficiently provided to ensure that personal safety is improved and criminal activity is discouraged.

The South Downtown planning process also envisions a system of public spaces and streetscapes that are pleasant environments, well-located, well-lit, well-connected, with ample amenities including parks, art and landscaping. As growth occurs, it will be important to retain the cultural, socioeconomic and historic character of Pioneer Square and Chinatown/I.D. through appropriate actions to support the health of residents, businesses and the social character of these neighborhoods. Similarly, the physical and aesthetic qualities that define these neighborhoods will not be damaged by poor-quality or insensitively designed new structures, but will be enhanced by design that is respectful of the historic and cultural context.

Functionally, transit and road systems will effectively encourage efficient travel choices within manageable congestion levels. Freight mobility will be maintained by appropriately-sized streets, truck routes, highways and inter-connected rail systems. Industrial uses south of the study area, including Port activities, will be protected through thoughtful transition from the mixed use environment of South Downtown to the maritime industrial environment of the Duwamish. New development will be energy-efficient and incorporate features and techniques that will support environmental sustainability.

Emphasis on Recommending Land Use and Zoning Actions

The planning process has focused on how land use and zoning regulations may better support the diverse planning objectives related to residential and economic growth. These regulations typically focus on the size and shape of buildings, and the intended overall land uses and functions encouraged in specific areas. They also address complementary purposes such as urban design, public spaces, architectural quality, and how different areas relate in their functioning and characteristics. These factors also play an important role in influencing overall livability and character.

Identifying and implementing land use and zoning actions to support future growth in South Downtown will continue to be a high priority of the Livable South Downtown planning process. This will include consideration of supporting strategies or actions that may be needed to avoid or mitigate significant adverse impacts. In addition, recommendations will touch on other matters relating to livability, including housing, economic development, public safety, transportation, utilities and the environment.

underutilized areas. Similarly, the themes suggest a preference for increased development capacity, particularly for residential-oriented development, to grow efficiently around core neighborhoods.

In the “emerging areas”, generally those south of the historic neighborhoods, south to S. Royal Brougham Way (and S. Dearborn Street in Little Saigon), the planning themes support actions that would increase development capacity, allowing employment growth, as well as encouraging opportunities for residential development where it would support neighborhood objectives.

In the southern portion of the study area, the themes support a transition to industrial use and activity to the south. Transition may favor the retention of current zoning, or a transition in height and density between Downtown and the Greater Duwamish Manufacturing and Industrial Center.

References to Geographic Areas Throughout the Draft EIS Report

Throughout the DEIS, both formally-recognized and informal references are made to specific geographic sub-areas within South Downtown to aid discussion (see Figure 2-3). In general these sub-areas are identified as follows:

Pioneer Square refers to areas that are zoned Pioneer Square Mixed (PSM) within the Pioneer Square neighborhood area.

Central Pioneer Square, or the “core” generally refers to areas located within the PSM 100 zone.

Chinatown/International District (I.D.), as a designated neighborhood refers to areas within South Downtown located east of 4th Avenue S., north of approximately S. Dearborn Street and west of Rainier Avenue S. However, some analyses refer to the Chinatown vicinity as the portion of this neighborhood west of I-5 approximately south of S. Main Street.

Chinatown historic core refers to areas located within the National Register Historic District. These areas are zoned IDM 75-85, predominantly north of S. Weller Street, south of S. Main Street and east of 5th Avenue S.

Japantown refers to the northern portion of Chinatown/I.D. located approximately north of S. Jackson Street and east of 4th Avenue S. The hill portion of Japantown is located east of 5th Avenue S. between Yesler Way and S. Jackson Street.

South-of-Dearborn means the area located south of S. Dearborn Street and east of 4th Avenue S. Lands in the South-of-Dearborn areas are currently zoned for general industrial (IG2) and general commercial (C2) use.

Little Saigon refers to the area within the Chinatown/I.D. neighborhood that is located east of Interstate 5, to approximately Rainier Avenue S.

The WOSCA property is located on IC-65’ zoned land north of Royal Brougham Way and west of 1st Avenue S., north almost to Railroad Way S. “WOSCA” refers to former site users, the “Washington Oregon Shippers Cooperative Association.”

The Stadium Area primarily refers to land located within the Stadium Transition Overlay, near the 1st Avenue S. corridor south to S. Holgate Street, and both sides of the 4th Avenue S. corridor south to S. Royal Brougham Way.

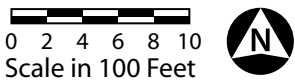
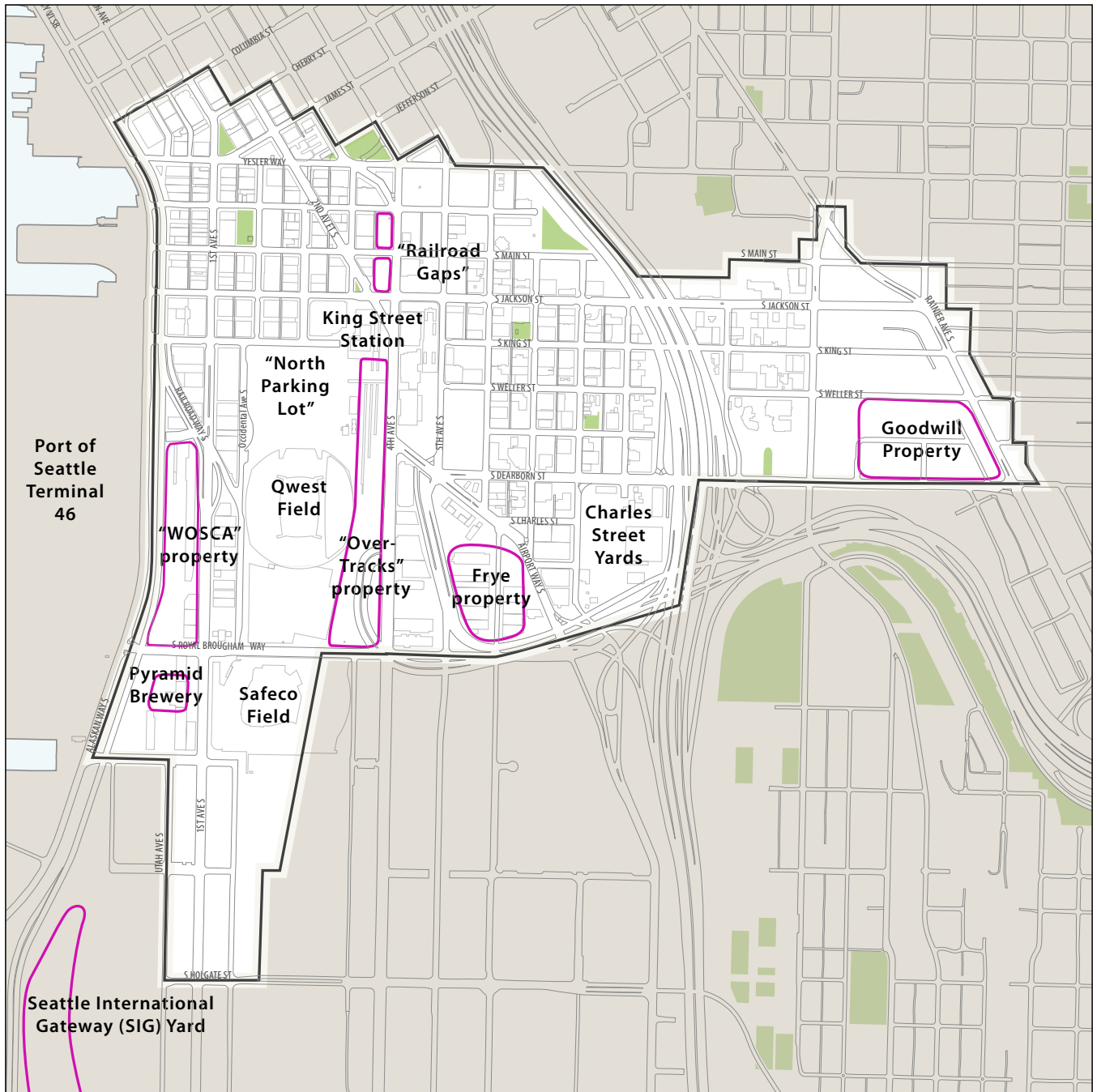


Figure 2-3

Properties Identified in the EIS Analysis

Livable South Downtown

The “Over-Tracks” property refers to the vicinity just west of 4th Avenue S. between approximately King Street Station and S. Royal Brougham Way, that primarily consists of development rights directly above the existing railroad right-of-way. A limited amount of other property not over the railroad tracks is also located in this vicinity.

The “Railroad gap” properties are two half-blocks located north of S. Jackson Street on the west side of 4th Avenue S., within Pioneer Square zoning. These properties extend north to S. Washington Street, north of which is the portal to a rail tunnel below Downtown. These blocks contain railroad right-of-way at ground level, which is below the street level of 4th Avenue S.

How and Why SEPA Alternatives are Defined

The EIS alternatives, defined by City staff, cover a range of possible land use and zoning actions and Code amendments. The net result of these alternatives will be a varied development pattern across the study area, with a range of possible environmental impacts. The EIS findings provide perspective on the range of choices and how particular choices could influence the future shape, patterns, and impacts of development.

Preparation of SEPA EISs for “programmatic” or “non-project” actions is allowed “more flexibility... because there is normally less detailed information available on their environmental impacts...” State law indicates that “the lead agency shall discuss impacts and alternatives in the level of detail appropriate to the scope of the non-project proposal and to the level of planning for the proposal.” (SMC 25.05.442).

Environmental review provides information to decision-makers so they can choose from a range of possible actions. This range of choices can vary from “no change” to the maximum level of change under consideration. The studied alternatives should be defined to cover this range, an approach known as “bracketing” or “book-ending.” Decisionmakers then can be confident that combinations of possible choices that are made within the range of the alternatives have received sufficient environmental review. Otherwise, supplemental analysis may be needed. The Alternatives studied in this EIS follow this approach.

This EIS also is likely to support “phased review” of future development proposals in the study area, as indicated by SMC 25.05.060 E. Future development proposals may adopt all or part of a programmatic SEPA analysis and add further site-specific impact analysis as necessary. This can increase the efficiency of environmental review for development proposals in the study area.

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

The EIS alternatives address a range of possible regulatory choices, with different implications for the amount and distribution of future growth and related environmental impacts. Alternative 1's zoning choices would likely result in greater commercial development toward the west of the study area (along the 1st Avenue S. corridor, including the WOSCA property), while Alternative 2's zoning choices would likely result in greater concentration of commercial development toward the east and central portion of the study area (along the 4th Avenue S. and Airport Way S. corridors, including the “over-tracks” and Frye properties sites). Alternative 3 assumes a more balanced distribution of future growth across the study area. Alternative 4 is the "No Action Alternative" that analyzes what may happen with future growth and development if no changes are made to existing zoning and the Land Use Code. Refer to Figures 2-1 and 2-3 for location of subareas and key identified locations, and see Figures 2-4, 2-5, 2-6 and 2-7 for depictions of the Alternatives.

Alternative 1 – Neighborhood Infill with Commercial Growth Toward the West

Overview of Planning Concept

Alternative 1 encourages growth that will reinforce the neighborhood core areas, with modest expansion of development capacity in other peripheral vicinities. This means that the rezones would encourage infill development within the Pioneer Square and Chinatown/I.D. cores in locations where historic resources would not be directly impacted. Additional zoned development capacity would be provided in three areas at the edges of these neighborhood cores—the Qwest Field north lot vicinity, the Japantown vicinity (especially between 4th and 6th Avenues north of S. Jackson Street) and in the northern portion of the WOSCA property. This should result in the central neighborhoods experiencing the benefits of increased residential occupation, a more engaging streetscape with greater continuity of uses, and improved business vitality.

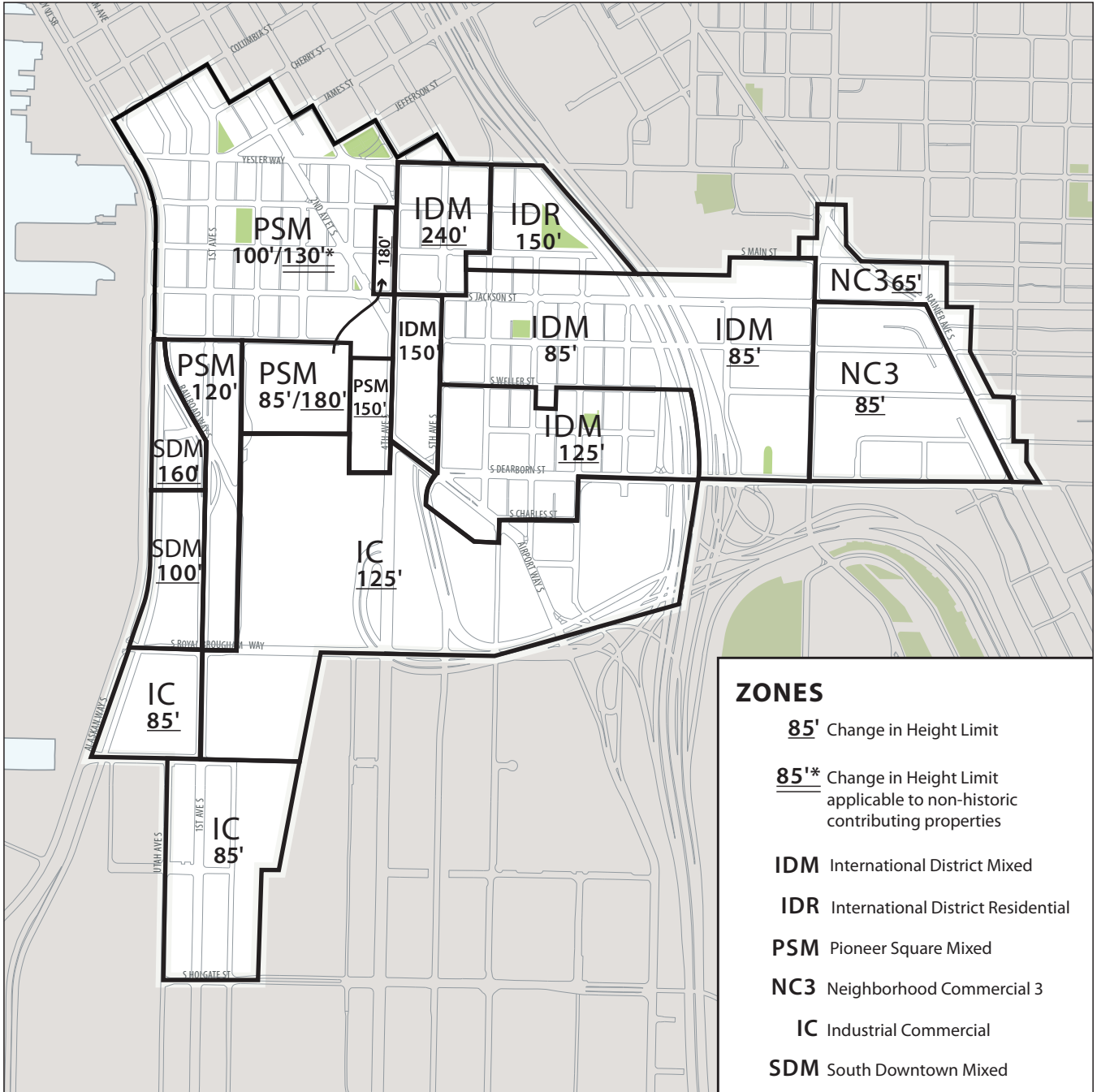
An emphasis on commercial growth “toward the west” would occur in part through increases in commercial development capacity along the 1st Avenue S. corridor south of Pioneer Square. The following summarizes Alternative 1's proposals for the individual subareas within South Downtown. Also, see Figure 2-4.

Zoning to Encourage Infill Development in Neighborhood Core Areas

Additional residential or commercial infill development of vacant properties would likely result in a more continuously activated streetscape within neighborhood core areas, thereby improving overall vitality and safety. Zoning and land use regulations would encourage infill development that is compatible with and complementary to existing development in neighborhood core areas. In Pioneer Square, the alternative envisions allowing additional height to encourage infill development at vacant properties (most in parking lot use) and at non-historically-contributing properties (see Appendix I). In the Chinatown/I.D. core, zoning changes would target the blocks south of S. Weller Street, outside the National Register Historic District, for residential infill development.

Increased Residential Development Capacity at Edges of Core Neighborhoods

Zone changes to encourage a significant new and denser residential presence at the edges of the neighborhood cores would help revitalize these established neighborhoods. Infill high-density residential development would add a new residential presence, would efficiently use these lightly developed areas near the King Street Station transit hub, and would provide a more continuously activated streetscape, all of which would augment neighborhood character. Affected areas include the Japantown vicinity located between 4th and 6th Avenues S. and approximately S. Jackson Street and Yesler Way, the northern portion of the Qwest Field parking lot, and properties near Railroad Way S. (south to approximately S. Dearborn Street, if extended) on the west side of 1st Avenue S. This 1st Avenue S. vicinity is part of an area that would



Note: Height limits shown correspond to maximum heights of future development anticipated by zoning concepts. However, final zoning designations could vary from this labeling.

be moved from the Greater Duwamish Manufacturing and Industrial Center into the Downtown Urban Center.

Increased Commercial Development Capacity along 1st Avenue S.

Zone changes along the west side of 1st Avenue S., south of approximately S. Dearborn Street (if extended) would encourage dense new commercial development with high-quality design, open space and pedestrian features, primarily on the WOSCA property, as far south as S. Royal Brougham Way. In this location, a new “South Downtown Mixed” (SDM) zone would be created to facilitate development that would include high-quality architectural design, public open space features, and pedestrian amenities. These zoning changes would help improve the character of development in the corridor that lies between State Route 99 to the west and Pioneer Square-zoned properties on the east side of 1st Avenue S. As noted above, this vicinity would be moved into the Downtown Urban Center.

Moderate Commercial Concentration along 4th Avenue S. and the south-of-Dearborn vicinity

Alternative 1 would accommodate a moderate amount of additional density of commercial development along the west side of 4th Avenue S. above and near the existing railroad corridor. This would occur within the Pioneer Square Mixed and Industrial Commercial zones through increases in height and density limits.

Retention of Industrial zones and transition to industrial center to the south

Areas on the southern periphery of the study area would continue to be zoned Industrial (proposed as Industrial Commercial zones) prohibiting housing, and accommodating development that is compatible with and provides a transition to the industrial areas to the south. Under Alternative 1, the block containing the Pyramid Brewery (refer to Figure 2-4), between S. Atlantic Street and S. Royal Brougham Way, is proposed for a 20-foot increase in height limit to 85 feet but with no additional development capacity proposed.

Alternative 2 – Neighborhood Infill with Commercial Growth Toward the East

Overview of Planning Concept

Similar to Alternative 1, Alternative 2 encourages infill development within the central areas of Pioneer Square and the Chinatown/I.D., and dense residential development at the edges of the core neighborhoods on properties that are vacant, underused, or consist of non-historically-contributing structures. The primary difference is that Alternative 2 assumes an increased concentration of commercial development within the central and eastern portion of the study area. This would test a scenario of significant commercial growth along the 4th Avenue S. corridor, south of S. Dearborn Street, and in Little Saigon. The south-of-Dearborn vicinity would remain industrially-zoned, allowing more intensive commercial and industrial development transitioning to the more intensive industrial zone (IG2) to the south. No changes to Downtown Urban Center boundaries are proposed under this alternative. The following summarizes Alternative 2's proposals for the individual sub-areas within South Downtown (see Figure 2-5).

Zoning to Encourage Infill Development in Neighborhood Cores

Similar to Alternative 1, additional infill development of vacant properties would likely increase residential development and result in a more continuously activated streetscape within the neighborhood cores. Adjustment to zoning and land use regulations would encourage infill development compatible with and complementary to the neighborhood cores. In Pioneer Square, in addition to Alternative 1 strategies, maximum height limits would be assigned in sub-areas within the historic district to recognize variation in the existing building patterns. Also, an optional zoning strategy that would favor residential infill development in the core of Pioneer Square is studied. In the Chinatown/I.D. core, the Alternative 2 proposal is for rezones to 125 feet for residential-oriented development south of S. Weller Street similar

