

SEATTLE VIEWS

*An Inventory of 86 Public View Sites Protected Under
SEPA (SMC 25.05.675)*

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

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The accompanying inventory was conducted in the summer of 2001. It represents a visual appraisal and inventory of amenities at 86 sites throughout Seattle. These sites are identified in Seattle's Environmental Policies governing the review and conditioning of physical development in the city (SMC 25.05.675P). These sites represent the extent to which the City of Seattle historically has considered public views in the review and conditioning of development through the Master Use Permit and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review process.

In recent years, issues concerning the protection and preservation of Seattle's vistas and viewscapes have arisen, particularly during the recent period of intense development activity. As Seattle strives to meet its responsibility to accommodate more of the region's growth under the Washington State Growth Management Act, we need to revisit policies governing public view protection and assess the extent to which our inventory of sites and views has kept pace with the changes the City has undergone over the past three decades since the list was first created. This inventory is an important first step in this assessment.

Methodology

For each site, elements of the viewscape were listed (for example, Mt. Rainier or the Lake Washington Ship Canal) and documented with one or more photographs. A rough typology was established, with "panoramic views" being those that tend to fill the viewer's horizon; "framed views" indicating that the dominant feature is set between or among other features such as vegetation, existing structures, or topography; and "secondary views" referring to features that are not dominant within the viewscape. A map was created for each site roughly indicating the direction and field of view, along with a list of site characteristics and amenities.

Next Steps

The inventory does not represent a judgment on the part of the City that these sites are the only ones worth considering and that other public viewpoints or prospects that could be degraded or obstructed will not be regarded as significant. Rather, it is the first step in a longer public process to evaluate the public's opportunities to enjoy seeing significant natural and developed features such as Mount Rainier, Puget Sound, and the City skyline, and to determine the susceptibility of each site to being obscured or its quality eroded by new development in the viewscape.

As Seattle grows, access to views of our waterways, other natural features and regional setting become increasingly scarce, with accessibility limited to those who can afford to own the best view properties. With renewed effort and commitment to conservation of our diminishing public views, and by taking stock and effectively assessing what we currently value and protect, future generations of residents and visitors alike will appreciate the rich legacy of views and vistas provided by the unique topography and natural setting of Seattle.

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