

LETTER—NPAC STATUS REPORT UPDATE SUBCOMMITTEE

To: NPAC and City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development
From: NPAC Status Report Update Subcommittee
Re: Advice Letter to City
Date: April 21, 2009 – Revised for May 19, 2009 NPAC Meeting

Pursuant to Ordinance 122799, we are writing to provide advice from the Neighborhood Planning Advisory Committee (NPAC) regarding the Status Report Updates and the update process.

Background:

Ordinance 122799 directed City departments to work with neighborhoods to “review the status of the City’s existing Neighborhood Plans.....” A number of neighborhood plans are 10-years old and during this time many neighborhoods throughout the city have experienced significant growth. Added to this, “the City also adopted new growth targets for all neighborhoods when the Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2004.” Not all of the growth and development has been equitably distributed throughout the City, with a number of neighborhoods benefiting from major public investments (i.e., Pro-Parks levy, Libraries for All, Bridging the Gap and other programs) while other neighborhoods have experienced less investment. Consistent with the intent of the Neighborhood Plan Status Report Process, our primary objective was “to provide an opportunity for the City and neighbors to discuss the current status of their neighborhood plans and changes in neighborhoods since the plans were adopted.”

Introduction:

The NPAC Status Report Update Subcommittee has the following comments on the format and content of the DRAFT Neighborhood Status Report Template presented at the March 17, 2009 NPAC Meeting.

We hope that the Status Reports will:

- Report information about the neighborhoods in a clear, organized manner;
- Help inform citizens about neighborhood planning;
- Facilitate dialogue at the open houses;
- Support the prioritization of neighborhood plan updates; and
- Identify gaps in current neighborhood plans

I. General Comments:

1. City-wide wrapper is a good idea, with more specific neighborhood information inside.
2. Clarify who is key audience for status report. Identify what information is on-line to support points/information in the status report. The idea is to make this information accessible to the key audience.
3. Graphics need work and need to be consistent. Graphics shown are confusing and could be better organized. Graphics also need to be consistent and comparable within each neighborhood status report and between the neighborhoods.

4. Discuss current Neighborhood Planning Element in the Comp Plan – Section 8. It is our understanding that these status reports will inform the City’s 2011 Comp Plan update. As such, this information should be used to revise Neighborhood Plan specific goals and policies listed in section 8.
5. Provide information discussing city-wide growth targets and neighborhood-specific growth targets. People need to know the projections for the City as a whole and how each neighborhood is participating in that growth. A chart comparing urban village growth targets would be very helpful. This information could be included on city wrapper because this is primary/important information.
6. Identify the difference between the “neighborhood” and an urban village. Growth targets are for the urban village areas, but many people participating do not live within the urban village boundary. Remind people why the urban village boundaries were drawn in the first place. Example, Greenwood and Phinney Ridge are different neighborhoods but share the same Urban Village.
7. Remind readers that these status reports are going to help the City and NPAC evaluate which Neighborhood Plans should be recommended for update.

II. Neighborhood/Urban Village Specific

1. Tell the neighborhood’s “story”. We like the use of images and text. Show a “then and now” visual comparison using neighborhood plans. (The current neighborhood plan/map contrasted with an updated plan/map showing changes that have occurred since implementation of the plan.)
2. For each status report, list the elements in the same order as the Comp Plan so that information can be compared from one neighborhood to another. This should be done with one page minimum for each of the following elements:
 - land use
 - transportation
 - housing
 - capital facilities (with subcategories – parks, libraries, schools, fire, etc)
 - utilities
 - economic development
 - human development
 - cultural resources, and
 - environment.

The intent of identifying the elements of the existing neighborhood plan is to let people know whether or not a neighborhood included this information in its plan. This is not a qualitative comment, rather one to let people know whether this occurred so they can decide whether to include it in the update. This also may be a way to organize comments at the public meetings where we gather information from the community members.

3. If the purpose of the neighborhood plans is to identify gaps, they need to be summarized at the end of the status report. All gaps summaries should use a consistent format (maybe a simple table) for easy comparison. At a minimum the gaps should identify if a neighborhood plan did/did not address an element.

4. Discuss sustainability as an overarching theme that should be identified within each element.
5. Some elements need to be described within the urban village boundary while other would be described within the neighborhood. For example, Wallingford urban village open space does not include Gas Works Park, but Gas Works Park is still accessible to the Wallingford neighborhood.
6. Some elements may need to be described with a hierarchy – for example open space and transportation are elements that can be described in regional facilities and local facilities. Licton Springs Park is a neighborhood Park in Aurora-Licton Urban Village. Seward Park is a regional destination and Alki Playground is more of a neighborhood park – both serve neighborhoods but neither is included in Urban Village statistics. Light rail and train service are examples of regional transportation facilities. Bike lanes and sidewalks can be described locally.
7. Status reports should be the same length so that when it comes time to compare status reports to inform the prioritization criteria – analysis is easier. For example, if a neighborhood plan did not address open space, do not skip the section; note that element was not addressed in the existing 1998 Plan.
8. Identify how and if design guidelines fit into the Comp Plan and Neighborhood Plans. If a neighborhood does not have design guidelines – say that. If a neighborhood has conflicting or more current plans for urban design elements, show the conflicts or updates on the status report.
9. Identify the limitations of the existing data. If 2000 census data is no longer current – consider using it for the baseline of the current plans since it is more reflective of Seattle in 2000 vs. 2009. Remind people about the status of the 2010 Census collections and the timeline for when more current data would be available. If we are relying on 2000 census data, we recommend creating some type of QA/QC process that will use more current data when it is available during the 2011 Comp Plan update process.
10. Avoid using planning terms without explanation or definition – Not everyone knows the different types of zoning. If planning terms need to be used, a glossary might be useful.