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## **Seattle's one-way sign for biotech**

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When it comes to biotechnology, Seattle wisely is following the one-way arrow: forward. The trick is picking a good speed.

Haste risks leaving the city overcommitted, going too far for too little return. Moving slowly could mean getting left behind.

So far, the city appears to be acting reasonably. By providing development options around South Lake Union, it's providing a close-in location for biotech. That's prudent, not premature.

It's important to remember that behind the interest in biotechnology here is the region's enormous medical, scientific and research capability. The health of the University of Washington, the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and other institutions is the essential factor for continued progress.

But more research space around South Lake Union, or elsewhere in the area, can help. South Lake Union offers proximity to the university, potential for greater residential density and a relatively scenic in-city spot.

It makes sense to change South Lake Union height limits so biotech buildings can have more space between floors. The city also should make park improvements and reasonable transportation investments.

Critics worry that Mayor Greg Nickels and the City Council, whose members largely support biotech at South Lake Union, will throw big money after uncertain returns. The solution is implied in a draft report on development's potential payoff in jobs and tax revenues.

Noted UW economist Paul Sommers distinguishes between the significant development that is already in some stage of planning or construction and the more speculative prospects through the year 2020. As prospects gradually solidify, roll out more investments. Realism, not boosterism, must govern the pace of spending.

The city should try to assure that new housing develops more or less as commercial investment occurs. Support for South Lake Union changes will grow if housing is built early, not late, with opportunities for rental and home ownership by low- and moderate-income residents.

Cities everywhere hope to attract medical and biological research. But Seattle has significant talent. That justifies confidence that coolheaded decisions can bring worthwhile, potentially exciting developments.