Promoting Economic Development Through Upfront SEPA Review:
Lessons from South Downtown Tacoma
This session will focus on the City of Tacoma’s South Downtown Subarea Plan and associated “Non-Project” SEPA Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
Background

- UWT Campus
- Regional Growth Center
- PSRC Growing Transit Communities
- HUD Grant
- One of 3 Subareas in Downtown Tacoma
UWT Campus

- Current Student Population: 4,000
- Staff: 900
- Projected 2030 Student Population: 14,000

Looking east on the Grand Staircase on the UWT campus
Regional Growth Center

2030 City-wide Targets

- 60,000 new jobs
- 70,000 new people
- Based on growth allocations from PSRC and Pierce County
- The Growing Transit Communities Partnership was funded by a three-year grant from the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities.
- Three main goals for the Strategy:
  - Attract more of the region’s residential and employment growth near high-capacity transit.
  - Provide housing choices affordable to a full range of incomes near high-capacity transit.
  - Increase access to opportunity for existing and future community members in transit communities.
- South Downtown is one of three demonstration projects.
The four Sound Transit LINK station areas located in South Downtown are all designated as the “Stimulate Demand” type.

The high priority strategy categories associated with the “Stimulate Demand” type are:

- Promote economic development to retain and expand job base
- Long-Range capital facilities plan with phased infrastructure and public realm investments
- Affordable housing assessment and preservation
- Community needs assessment and targeted investments
• U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program

• Supports locally-led collaborative efforts to determine how best to target housing, economic and workforce development, and infrastructure investments to create more jobs and regional economic activity

• Six livability principles

• To date, HUD has awarded over $165 million to 74 regional grantees in 44 states and helping to improve the lives of approximately 112 million people.
Downtown Tacoma Subareas

- North Downtown
- South Downtown
- Hilltop
Previous Planning Efforts
About the Project

• Subarea Plan and EIS

• Planning Target: 30 million sq. ft. of new development
About the Plan

- Identify Necessary Utility Improvements
  - Water, sewer, storm water, telecommunications, etc.

- Plan for Open Space
  - Prairie Line Trail, potential pocket & destination parks, Foss Waterway Park, etc.

- Prioritize Transportation Investments
  - Light rail, bus, train, parking, pedestrian, bike, roadway improvements, etc.

View of Pacific Ave. from S. 21st St. The Harmon Brewery with office/loft space above.
Project Goals

- Maintain basic eligibility for federal, state, and regional transportation funding

- Accelerate public investment in downtown through a series of coordinated actions, e.g. utility/multi-model street upgrades and Freighthouse Square-area upgrades

- Gain a competitive advantage for new private and public sector investment through a streamlined project approval process, more flexible zoning, and public/private partnerships
Stakeholder Input & Review

Data Collection + Existing Conditions Review

Establish Draft Goals and Policy Framework

Draft Subarea Plan & EIS

Council Approval

September 2011 – Spring 2013

Spring - Winter 2011

Spring 2011 - Fall 2012

Spring 2012- Fall 2013

December 2013
• “Transit-Infill Review” Upfront SEPA

• The City has also proceeded under the “Planned Action” and “Infill Exemption” Upfront SEPA forms, recognizing that RCW 43.21C.420(5)(a) and (b) (“Transit-Infill Review”) include a sunset provision.
Non-Project EIS

• Not subject to SEPA-based appeals at project level

• Jointly sponsored by the City of Tacoma and the University of Washington Tacoma (UWT)

• A non-project document in that it addresses a 600-acre area of South Downtown Tacoma and presents a cumulative impact analysis for the entire subarea

• Transit Infill Review

• No project/EIS consistency test

• Provides certainty and predictability

• Streamlines permit review process
Extensive EIS Notice Provision and Community Outreach

• Transit-infill review requires extensive mailed notice, and upfront public participation provisions.

• The outreach efforts included providing project updates and overviews of the Plan and EIS to neighborhood councils, interested parties, monthly meetings with the Steering Committee, quarterly meetings with a Council-resolution-formed Working Group, periodic stakeholder meetings, and business group outreach.

• Participants were encouraged to voice concerns, provide suggestions, and discuss particular issues throughout the entire process.
Catalyst Projects

- UWT Campus Approval
- Amtrak Station
- Pierce Transit Site Redevelopment
- Prairie Line Trail
- The Henry
• The City pre-approved the entire UWT Campus Master Plan

• UWT campus was established in 1990 and UWT campus has undergone an extraordinary transformation, earning numerous awards for the adaptive reuse of several century-old, brick railroad-era structures into modern classroom facilities

• UWT’s plans for continued expansion will be a major economic driver for the area.
Amtrak Station Relocation

- Amtrak station is being relocated to Freighthouse Square from its current location on Puyallup Avenue.

- The relocation is part of the Point Defiance Bypass Project which will reroute passenger trains to an existing rail line along the west side of Interstate 5 through south Tacoma, Lakewood and DuPont.

- The Project will allow two more runs from Tacoma to Portland, create a faster route, and more reliable service, as well as free up the Point Defiance tracks for freight-only traffic.

- A Citizen Advisory Group was formed in February 2013 to help with the planning process of the relocation of Amtrak Station.

- The Citizen Advisory Group recommended that the Amtrak station relocation be sited at the east end of Freighthouse Square.
Pierce Transit Site Redevelopment

- Site owned by Pierce Transit across from Freighthouse Square on East 25th St.

- A market study done by Kidder Mathews found that there is a market for housing in this area, there is currently virtually no housing in the Dome District.

- The proposed building would have 78-88 dwelling units, 7500 sq. ft. of retail, 4,000 sq. ft. of amenities, and 7,000 sq. ft. of opens space.

- 6 modes of transportation.
Map of the Pierce Transit Site
The Henry

- Located between Dock St. and the Foss Waterway on the north side of the S. 21st St bridge
- 161-unit mixed-use building
- Rooftop dining, private dog park, views of Mt. Rainier and the Foss, retail space, and public park space.
- $32 million building
- Same group that built the first major building on the Foss, Thea’s Landing
Thank you.

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