SEPA EIS Process

What is SEPA?

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) is a state policy established in RCW 43.21C that requires state and local agencies to consider the likely environmental consequences of governmental decisions, including decisions on comprehensive plans and regulatory changes. Implementing rules (often referred to as the SEPA Rules) are codified in the Washington Administrative Code 197-11 and in Seattle Municipal Code Title 25 Environmental Policies and Procedures. The SEPA Rules provide detail for the environmental review process, including the EIS process.

What is an EIS?

An environmental impact statement, or EIS, is a document that provides an impartial discussion of significant environmental impacts, reasonable alternatives, and mitigation measures that would avoid or minimize adverse impacts. All alternatives assume the same level of growth and that the majority of growth will be focused in designated centers, generally referred to as urban villages. The alternatives differ in the proportion of growth assumed for the different centers and villages.

What is the difference between a Draft EIS and a Final EIS?

A Draft EIS provides the public and agency decision-makers with information on likely significant adverse environmental impacts of a proposal and alternatives and on mitigation measures to reduce impacts. A Final EIS includes all comments received on the Draft EIS and responses from the City, and may include revisions to the Draft EIS based on comments received and new information learned.

How will I know when the Draft EIS is issued and where will it be available?

The Draft EIS is tentatively scheduled to be released in October 2014. Should the schedule change, updated information will be posted on the City's project web site.

A notice of availability of the Draft EIS will be posted on the City's project web site (see link below) and emailed to those who have signed up to receive email updates.

http://www.2035.seattle.gov

The draft EIS will be posted on the City's project website and hard copies will be available at several public libraries and the Seattle Department of Planning and Development Public Resource Center.

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What is scoping?

Scoping is the process of identifying the elements of the environment to be evaluated in an EIS. Scoping is intended to help identify and narrow the issues to those that are significant. Scoping includes a public comment period so that the public and other agencies can comment on key issues and concerns. Following the comment period, the City considers all comments received and determines the scope of review for the environmental analysis.

The scoping process begins with issuance of the Scoping Notice. For the Comprehensive Plan Update EIS, the City of Seattle issued the Determination of Significance/Scoping Notice on October 17, 2013 and made it available to the public through a variety of methods. The scoping period closes on April 21, 2014.

What are the elements of the environment? Which ones will be studied in the EIS?

As defined in SEPA, potential elements of the environment that may be considered include both the natural environment (earth, air, water, plants and animals, energy and natural resources) and the built environment (environmental health, land and shoreline use, transportation, aesthetics, housing, public services and utilities). An EIS focuses on environmental impacts and is not required to evaluate all of the possible considerations and effects of a decision, such as economic competition and social policy analysis.

For the Comprehensive Plan Update EIS, the City is proposing to address land use, plans and policies, transportation, population, housing and employment, public services, utilities, air quality, climate change and noise.

How are the alternatives defined?

The lead agency (in this case the City of Seattle) determines the alternatives based on their assessment of reasonable options that could feasibly attain the proposal's objectives. For the Comprehensive Plan Update the City has identified three alternatives. All alternatives have the same level of growth and show the majority of growth in designated locations, generally referred to as urban villages. The alternatives differ in the proportion of growth assumed for different place types-urban center, hub urban village, residential urban village and manufacturing and industrial center.

- Alternative 1 (Urban Center Focus) – Most growth would be focused in urban centers: Northgate, University District, Downtown, Uptown, South Lake Union, and Capitol/First Hill.

- Alternative 2 (Urban Village Focus) – More growth would be focused in urban villages, such as Columbia City, Lake City, Crown Hill, Morgan Junction, Fremont and Eastlake.

- Alternative 3 (Transit Focus) – Growth would be encouraged around existing and planned light rail stations in the Rainier Valley, Capitol Hill, the University District, Roosevelt, and Northgate.

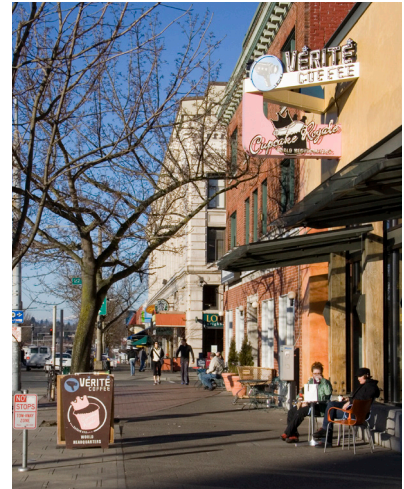# Commenting on the EIS

When can I provide comment?

The comment period for the Comprehensive Plan Udpate EIS will follow release of the Draft EIS. The Draft EIS is made available so that the public and agencies can comment on the accuracy and content of the EIS before it is finalized.

The City plans to provide a 45-day comment period following release of the Draft EIS. During this period, written comment may be provided at any time and verbal comment may be provided at a public hearing to be held by the City, tentatively scheduled for November 2014. Additional information on dates and how to provide comment will be provided in the Draft EIS.

There is no comment period following issuance of the Final EIS.

What will happen to my comments?

The City will consider all comments provided during both Scoping and the Draft EIS 45-day comment period. Comments may result in corrections, additions or clarification of information in the Draft EIS. The Final EIS will include all revisions made as a result of comments as well as specific responses to all comments.

How can I make my comments the most effective?

The Washington State Department of Ecology has developed a Citizen's Guide to SEPA Review and Commenting (www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/sepa/citizensguide/citizensguide.htm). The following tips for commenting on an EIS are extracted from this document.

- Be clear, concise, and organized. Decide what you need to say before you begin. Developing an outline, if you have a number of points, is a good idea to help you group your comments in a logical order. Jumping back and forth between several topics reduces the impact of your argument.

- Be specific. Saying that you are against a project will not have as much effect as saying why. It is always a good idea to give as much support as possible to your comments. Include as much factual information as possible. For instance, you can compare how things were, to how they are, to how you believe they will be in the future—and why. Referring to the Comprehensive Plan, development regulations, information on similar projects or situations, or other environmental laws and/or documents can also be helpful.

- Identify possible solutions. Suggestions on reasonable mitigation (conditions to avoid, minimize, or reduce adverse impacts) may help shape a questionable project into a welcome addition to a community. After identifying your concern, whenever possible, suggest possible solutions.