



Seattle
**Office of Planning &
Community Development**

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To: Councilmember Dan Strauss, Chair, Land Use and Neighborhoods Committee

From: Rico Quirindongo, Interim Director, Office of Planning and Community Development

Subject: Racial Equity Analysis of Seattle 2035 Comprehensive Plan and Urban Village Strategy

Background

This staff report summarizes the results of a preliminary racial equity analysis of the Seattle 2035 Comprehensive Plan and Urban Village Strategy. This work responds to a Statement of Legislative Intent (29-4-B-1-2019) adopted by City Council that requests that the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD), in consultation with the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) and the Office of Civil Rights (SOCR), “prepare a racial equity analysis of Seattle’s strategy for accommodating growth” as part of “pre-planning work in anticipation of the next major update to the Comprehensive Plan.” In addition to the findings described in the body of this report, two attachments to this staff report inform and complete the racial equity analysis – 1) a community engagement summary report and 2) a memo with findings and recommendations prepared by PolicyLink, a national research and action institute advancing racial and economic equity.

OPCD is kicking off the major Comprehensive Plan update in late 2021 with final adoption by June 2024, the statutory deadline under the Growth Management Act. Seattle 2035, which was adopted by the City in 2016, contains among its core values, goals, and policies a commitment to race and social justice. This racial equity analysis and the plan update itself is an opportunity for the City to consider how we are doing in achieving the promise of that plan, to revisit and examine the policy framework and assumptions embedded in the plan, and to identify lessons learned through a period of historic growth, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a broad reckoning with systemic racism.

The Comprehensive Plan update will include a Racial Equity Toolkit (RET), integrated throughout the entire planning process. The RET will define racial equity outcomes for the plan, engage community and stakeholders, and analyze data to inform policies that mitigate harm and ensure more equitable benefits as the city grows. This racial equity analysis, which evaluates past decisions and outcomes, sets the stage for the RET.

The racial equity analysis addresses high-level questions central to the update process, such as:

- How can the Comprehensive Plan update advance racial equity?
- What racial equity outcomes should define success?

- What are the racial equity benefits and impacts of the current Urban Village Growth Strategy?
- What improvements might make the Comprehensive Plan and Growth Strategy more equitable?

The racial equity analysis was informed by targeted community and stakeholder engagement, analysis and recommendations by PolicyLink, and data analyzed by the City in previous reports and initiatives. Throughout this process, OPCD worked closely with DON and SOCR. This collaboration enriched our ability to identify major themes and questions, connect with key stakeholders, review draft deliverables, and ground the work in the values and practices that have centered race in recent work by the City, including recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Targeted engagement with community stakeholders was a key part of the racial equity analysis. This preliminary effort focused on BIPOC community members, organizations active in community development and advocacy around racial equity issues, and City boards and commissions. With the launch of the Comprehensive Plan update, OPCD will begin engaging a broader set of constituents and interests citywide, including continued discussion of the policy issues identified in the racial equity analysis.

First, we convened five focus groups with community members representing a range of racial, ethnic, and geographic communities of color across the city. Assistance for this effort was provided by Puget Sound Sage, a local non-profit organization that advocates for equitable communities, and the Community Liaison program in the Department of Neighborhoods. Community Liaisons are trusted community messengers who partner with the City to advise on avenues for engaging with historically underrepresented communities and provide inclusive outreach and engagement. Focus groups included two in-person sessions in winter 2020 and three focus groups conducted online in fall 2020. The focus groups also included an opportunity for capacity building, with Sage providing a Comprehensive Plan 101 training as an initial session for 13 community stakeholders in February 2020.

Second, after completion of the focus groups, OPCD convened an online Workshop on Racial Equity in the Seattle 2035 Comprehensive Plan and Urban Village Strategy on October 29, 2020. This event was supported by PolicyLink. The workshop included nearly 100 attendees, including volunteers and staff from community-based and advocacy organizations, participants in the earlier focus groups, members of City boards and commissions, Equitable Development Initiative Fund grantees, and staff from several City departments.

A full report out from these engagement activities is contained in a Community Engagement Summary. See Attachment A.

Evaluation by PolicyLink

PolicyLink describes itself as a national research and action institute dedicated to advancing racial and economic equity with a focus on delivering results at scale for the 100 million people in the United States living in or near poverty. PolicyLink takes an “inside-outside” approach to policy change, working with grassroots advocates focused on economic and racial justice, as well as with policymaker and government champions, to achieve equitable policies.

During the development of the Seattle 2035 Comprehensive Plan in 2014 and 2015, the City contracted with PolicyLink to provide independent expertise in more fully addressing race and social justice considerations in the plan and its policies. This work included a citywide workshop on equitable development and review of each plan element with recommendations on policies, actions, and monitoring of impacts. Engaging with PolicyLink again in 2020 on this racial equity analysis was an opportunity to reflect on the outcomes of Seattle 2035, with an emphasis on identifying work yet to be done toward effectively planning for a more equitable city in the next plan update.

PolicyLink’s work on the racial equity analysis began with a policy and data review. City staff provided PolicyLink with policy documents, including Seattle 2035, and relevant data reports, including the Urban Village Monitoring Report (2018), the Community Indicators Report, and other data from the Equitable Development Monitoring Program, as background for considering outcomes for BIPOC communities related to the Comprehensive Plan and Urban Village Strategy. Next, PolicyLink worked with City staff to design and facilitate the October 29 Workshop on Racial Equity in the Seattle 2035 Comprehensive Plan and Urban Village Strategy. Finally, drawing upon the data and policy review and community and stakeholder input, PolicyLink produced a memo with findings and recommendations. See Attachment B.

PolicyLink Recommendations and Comprehensive Plan Next Steps

This section summarizes the recommendations made by PolicyLink, which address the Comprehensive Plan update directly and also address potential strategies to implement the plan once adopted. Recommendations are grouped under several topical headings: housing supply and affordability, housing and neighborhood choice, jobs and economy, displacement, and community engagement. Following each set of recommendations, we describe several potential next steps for further exploration of these themes in the update and RET, that will include broad community engagement across a variety of stakeholders with opportunities to participate citywide and in neighborhoods across the city.

Housing Supply and Affordability

Recommendations from PolicyLink include:

- ✓ “Increase the supply of affordable housing, particularly units that are community-controlled with long-term affordability provisions”
- ✓ “Explore opportunities to advance equitable transit-oriented development (eTOD)”

- ✓ “Expand and replicate support for community land trusts” including “as part of the disposition strategy for publicly owned/surplus land”
- ✓ “Consider developing a fund to support the acquisition of units with expiring affordability requirements that could be used for community land trusts or other cooperative homeownership models, along with affordable homeownership opportunities in neighborhoods currently zoned for single-family homes”

Next steps for Comprehensive Plan update

The Comprehensive Plan update will address housing needs anticipated over the next 20 -year planning period. Next steps include:

- Use information from the Equitable Development Monitoring Program, housing analyses, and upcoming ongoing community engagement and RET to inform housing policies in plan
- Study alternatives in the EIS that meet 20-year housing needs and provide for increased supply and diversity of housing types, specifically to meet the identified needs of BIPOC households
- Explore policies and actions to create more affordable housing in urban villages, support community ownership and community-led affordable housing development and other models for long-term affordability

Housing and Neighborhood Choice

Recommendations from PolicyLink include:

- ✓ “Adopt a land use vision and regulations that center housing security and affordability for current and future BIPOC communities, with access and choice in neighborhoods of opportunity and bridges to homeownership and wealth building”
- ✓ “The City must end the prevalence of single-family zoning” with a “racially inclusive approach”
- ✓ “The City should explore the best combination of financial and regulatory incentives, penalties, and technical assistance necessary to generate additional housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income households in neighborhoods currently zoned for single family residences”
- ✓ “Institute a zoning overlay that promotes homeownership among BIPOC residents in formerly ‘greenlined’ single-family neighborhoods”

Next steps for Comprehensive Plan update

The plan update will explore a range of growth strategy alternatives that will shape the future locations for more plentiful and diverse housing opportunities in different areas of the city. Next steps include:

- Consistent with proviso on the 2021 budget (OPCD-2-B-2), study a range of growth strategy alternatives in the EIS, including potential zoning changes to allow a broader range of housing types
- Evaluate growth strategy alternatives against racial equity outcomes defined through a RET
- Update access to opportunity maps to inform and shape an update of the urban village strategy
- Identify community needs and environmental justice considerations that may be addressed through land use policies and community investment priorities in the plan

Jobs and Economy

Recommendations from PolicyLink include:

- ✓ “Foster an equitable workforce system”
- ✓ Coordinate “workforce training with the economic development priorities for future growth”
- ✓ Plan from a “more complete understanding of the equity outcomes related to economic growth”

Next steps for Comprehensive Plan update

The Comprehensive Plan update is an opportunity to work with community stakeholders – including workers and business owners – to review and strengthen the policies that result in economic benefits for BIPOC communities. Next steps include:

- Identify policies to support affordable commercial space, community-led economic development, small businesses within neighborhoods, workforce training, and education
- Use best available racially disaggregated data on economic factors and outcomes for BIPOC households and businesses
- Work to align the growth and land use strategies with goals for a more inclusive and equitable economy, such as by incorporating recommendations of the Industrial and Maritime Strategy

Displacement

Recommendations from PolicyLink include:

- ✓ “Identify and protect places of significant cultural importance”
- ✓ “Ensure the plan broadly supports community preference tools and the City should explore the viability of expanding the policy to support low-income BIPOC residents that are housing insecure but may want to live in lower-density neighborhoods”
- ✓ “Include policies that support adoption of tools like Tenant Opportunity to Purchase (TOPA) and Community Opportunity to Purchase (COPA)”

- ✓ "Robust community benefits agreements (CBA) should be employed by the City for large commercial and multifamily market rate developments to generate resources for affordable housing and opportunities for economic inclusion"
- ✓ "Develop an approach for providing reparations to BIPOC Seattleites"

Next steps for Comprehensive Plan update

The racial equity analysis has documented the degree to which ongoing displacement and displacement risk has impacted low-income BIPOC households and communities and has highlighted ways in which the City's growth strategy may be exacerbating and/or failing to sufficiently mitigate those impacts. Next steps for the update include:

- Consistent with 2020 budget proviso OPCD-2-B-2, study in the EIS one or more alternatives explicitly designed to mitigate displacement
- Identify strategies that minimize potential displacement, support community wealth building, and promote the inclusion of affordable housing in areas that are planned for growth
- Update displacement risk mapping analyses to shape update of urban village strategy

Community Engagement

Recommendations from PolicyLink include:

- ✓ "The city will need to rely on an ecosystem of more deeply engaged residents"
- ✓ "Expand the Community Liaisons program to ensure that there is a pipeline of BIPOC resident leaders of a range of ages, and across neighborhoods that is adequately trained to support ongoing outreach once the updated plan has been adopted"
- ✓ "To optimize the investment in capacity building, recruiting youth and young adults should be prioritized"

Next steps for Comprehensive Plan update

- Consistent with proviso OPCD-1-A-2, OPCD will present a community engagement plan to Council later in 2021
- The Comprehensive Plan update will include broader community and stakeholder engagement citywide and in neighborhoods across the city
- Community engagement will prioritize heightened engagement and partnerships with BIPOC communities and community based organizations that serve them