

Graham Street Station Area Planning

Phase 1 Engagement Summary

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Seattle
Office of Planning &
Community Development



Seattle
Department of
Transportation

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Introduction

The Graham Street Station Area Planning team brings together staff from the Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD), the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), and community partners to help shape how the Graham neighborhood will grow around its future light rail station.

The Graham Street Station Area Plan is the City's first opportunity to plan for Equitable Transit Oriented Development (ETOD) in a future Sound Transit 3 project. ETOD builds community power through ownership and permanent stewardship of land, investing in organizing rooted in community vision, process, and systems change. It creates holistic community benefits that include but are not limited to affordable housing, childcare, cultural space, arts, healthy food, good jobs, healthcare, education, small businesses, open space, and more while advancing mobility, access, economic, and environmental justice grounded in belonging, resiliency, and community health.

Guided by these ETOD principles, we began by listening — meeting people at neighborhood events, small businesses, in conversations with community leaders, and through an online survey — to understand what people value most about Graham today and what they want to carry forward as the neighborhood evolves with light rail expansion.

Station Area Planning Roles

The Graham Street Station Area Plan focuses on the places and experiences around the future station, not the design, construction, or operation of the light rail station. OPCD leads land use and community planning to ensure growth reflects neighborhood priorities. SDOT focuses on creating safe, connected transportation options like walking, rolling, biking, and taking transit to and from the station and around the neighborhood. Sound Transit will build and operate the station, currently planned for completion in 2031. By coordinating across these agencies, the City can shape policies and regulations, and identify opportunities to invest in infrastructure, housing, and public space that reinforce the neighborhood's cultural and economic vitality.

In this report, “we” refers both to this Station Area Planning Team and the City of Seattle, which can be used interchangeably. To request this information in an alternate format, please contact Graham Station Area Planning community engagement lead Aja Hazelhoff at aja.hazelhoff@Seattle.gov or (206) 684-0561.

Grounded in Community History

Located in the heart of South Seattle, Graham is one of the most culturally diverse areas in the city, a place of many languages and traditions where families have lived for generations and new neighbors continue to build their lives.

In 2019, Puget Sound Sage and the Graham Street Community Action Team released [*Graham Street: A Community-Driven Neighborhood Vision*](#)¹ (*Graham Street Vision*). This plan reflected community priorities as light rail planning began: affordable housing, thriving small businesses, safe ways to move around, and preserving the neighborhood's cultural identity.

When the City started this process in 2025, we began by asking of these priorities: *What has changed? What is still true?*

A Snapshot of the Graham Neighborhood Today

Recent data from the [*South Seattle in Focus*](#) report² show that many of the factors shaping Graham's future remain tied to its past. South Seattle continues to be one of the city's most racially and culturally diverse areas, yet household incomes and access to opportunity remain below the citywide average. Commutes are longer, small businesses face rising costs, and public spaces along the car-centric MLK Jr Way corridor are few. At the same time, the neighborhood's strength lies in its people, multi-generational families, immigrant-owned small businesses, and a network of cultural and faith-based institutions that keep the community connected.

Several local organizations are grantees of the City's Equitable Development Initiative (EDI), anchoring community presence and creating opportunities for community-led development, ownership, and stability in and near the Graham area. Each project reflects the community's long-term vision to remain rooted, connected, and thriving even as the city changes.

¹ Puget Sound Sage, [*Graham Street: A Community-Driven Neighborhood Vision*](#), March 2019.

Retrieved from: <https://pugetsoundsage.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/PSS-GrahamStreetVision-1.pdf>

² Berney, Rachel; Yue, Haoyu; Lecciones, Aaron; Leung, Keith; Sa, Hoseok; Unnikrishnan, Chithira; Chan, Jeremy; Melaragno, Jacob; Slawny, Danielle; & Udelhofen, Sarah. [*South Seattle in Focus: Baseline Data for Equitable Transportation and Public Space Planning*](#). Department of Urban Design & Planning, University of Washington, September 2025.

Retrieved from <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/items/47ddde98-77ec-4ade-a734-c0d35ef21f88>

Phase 1

Engagement Overview

The summer 2025 engagement built on earlier listening and data gathering with community partners. Hundreds of stakeholders shared stories and survey responses that confirmed what has long been true about Graham, that people want to stay in the neighborhood, move around safely, and see opportunity close to home.

Several guiding themes first identified in the *Graham Street Vision* were reaffirmed through this summer's engagement:

- A beautiful, supported, and stable neighborhood
- A place to find jobs and economic opportunity
- An abundance of multigenerational and multicultural community spaces
- A healthy environment that helps us thrive
- Community-centered mobility that offers safe and simple access to what we need

These themes now frame the City's ongoing planning and engagement work, guiding conversations about housing, mobility, small-business stability, and cultural preservation.

Where We Are Now

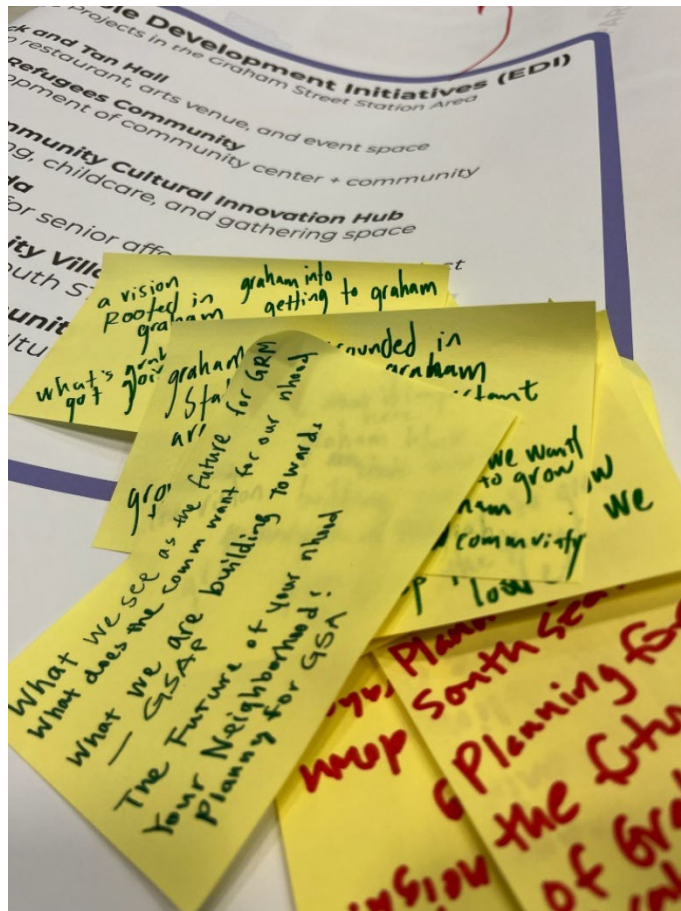
Phase 1 marked a return to connection, checking back with neighbors after years of change to see what still holds true. Graham's core values remain strong, and there is shared momentum for what comes next. EDI investments are helping cultural anchors stay rooted, while new conversations are pointing to where future efforts should focus: safer streets, housing that fits multigenerational families, and spaces that invite people to gather. The next phase will move from listening to co-creating strategies and projects that make those priorities real.

How We Engaged

Throughout the summer, the project team spent time in Graham meeting residents, small business owners, community leaders, and visitors where they already gather. These in-person conversations—whether during a site walk, a cultural celebration, or over shared meals—helped ground this work in the lived experiences of people connected to the neighborhood.

We began with one-on-one and small-group meetings with long-time neighborhood anchors and organizations serving the Graham community. We also joined local cultural gatherings to listen, celebrate, and connect. We shared lunch with elders at the Filipino Community Center, had tea in the New Holly offices of the Somali Safety Task Force, and enjoyed a meal prepared by Buddhist nuns at Co Lam Pagoda. We attended a ribbon cutting ceremony for the Somali Cultural Innovation Hub, and a groundbreaking for the new community center being built by the Cham Refugee Community. These events offered windows into the values and traditions that shape daily life in Graham.

These conversations helped ground our understanding of the vision for Graham that many of these groups and individuals helped to create in 2019. Since that time, there have been many milestones in community-led development to learn from and build upon. There have also been other changes here to the economic and social fabric, including displacement pressures that continue to threaten the stability of this community. Spending time in community and building relationships here was essential to understanding the rhythm of daily life, how it has evolved, and now these new realities inform community priorities for how Graham's future growth.



Feedback notes and materials from Graham Station Area Planning. Credit: OPCD

Online Survey

Beyond the one-mile walkshed of Graham & MLK, the Graham community includes many regular visitors who come to this neighborhood from other places in Seattle, King County, and the Puget Sound region. We used a survey (Phase 1 Survey) to reach a wider cross-section of Graham residents, workers, and visitors. As in our other conversations, the goal of this survey was to both confirm and expand upon the priorities presented in the *Graham Street Vision*.

Small Business Outreach

Early conversations with community members pointed to the critical role that Graham's small businesses play within this community. Graham's small businesses are more than economic anchors—they are social and cultural hubs that play an essential role in keeping their customers and communities grounded here. In partnership with a cohort of Community Liaisons, our team conducted door to door outreach concurrent with the Phase 1 Survey. This approach allowed us to better connect with and receive feedback from immigrant and non-English speaking small business owners and staff, helping our team to understand how the City can provide support in the face of current and future challenges.

Community Events

Public space activations offered some of the richest opportunities to connect directly with residents and neighbors. At celebrations and events across Graham and in neighboring communities, people shared their hopes for the station area while enjoying food, music, and art that reflected the community's diversity and creativity.

Events included:

- 98118 Festival (Columbia City Park)
- Anti-Displacement Resource Fair (Rainier Beach Community Center)
- Buddha's Birthday Celebration (Co Lam Pagoda)
- Cham Youth Field Day (Brighton Playfield)
- Columbia City Beatwalk (Columbia City)
- Columbia City Night Market (Columbia City)
- Hillman City What's Good Festival (Rainier Avenue, Hillman City)
- Sound Transit Safety Fair (Odessa Brown Children's Clinic, Othello)
- Sound Transit Graham Public Workshop (Filipino Community Center)
- Talipapa Festival (Filipino Community Center)

We were inspired by the ways these events supported feedback that celebrated the Graham community and centered the joy people feel about being in this place. We also noted how gatherings were used to temporarily activate streets, sidewalks, and other public spaces. We sought to incorporate and reflect this approach into several events that helped to shape our methodology to facilitating place-based conversations about Graham's future.

Dream Big for Graham, Brighton and Rainier Beach—we joined an interactive and play-based visioning workshop hosted by SDOT's Public Space Realm team at the Southeast Seattle Senior Center for a conversation about planning for the future neighborhood.

HomeSight Walking Tours—we joined two “Cultural Exchange Walking Tours” hosted by HomeSight in the Othello and Graham neighborhoods. These walks featured stops at local businesses, cultural and religious organizations, and other well-loved community gathering spaces.

Juneteenth Playstreet – we joined SDOT and the SouthEast Seattle Senior Center to co-host a playstreet as part of their annual Juneteenth celebration, temporarily closing the street in front of the center to provide additional active space for intergenerational play, dominos, eating ice cream, and holding conversations about the past, present, and future of this neighborhood.

National Night Out—we co-hosted a block party with a local resident and visited multiple block parties hosted by Graham neighbors during SPD's annual community building event. The event encourages anyone to apply for a permit to temporarily close their street to host an event that activates our public street space for socializing and gathering.

Throughout the summer, we met neighbors at cultural festivals, playstreet celebrations, block parties, and community gatherings. **Across all of them, one theme stood out: the Graham community comes alive in shared spaces—spilling out into streets, sidewalks, and public space to connect and celebrate.** We carried that same spirit forward as we planned to host an event to gather the Graham community to share out what we learned about this neighborhood's vision for the future.

**Across all of them, one theme stood out:
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Graham Block Party

On Saturday, September 27, 2025, more than 300 community members came together for the Graham Block Party—a celebration of neighborhood voices and a chance to share what we have been hearing through months of engagement. We transformed South Eddy Street into a vibrant public space filled with art, conversation, and connection, offering different ways for people to interact with what we heard over the summer.



*Bilingual Vietnamese-English flyer for the Graham Block Party.
Credit: OPCD*

We invited many of the groups and neighbors we met over the summer to help us co-host the event, adjacent to the future site of the new light rail station. Gathering here allowed people to imagine what change could look and feel like at the intersection of MLK and Graham—an investment this community has advocated for almost two decades.

- Attendees explored neighborhood demographics through a hands-on sculpture and relaxed on oversized street furniture while listening to audio stories from local residents and small business owners.
- A large, illustrated map displayed the feedback we have heard so far, connecting community input to the long-term *Graham Street Vision* and showing how our planning work builds on what neighbors have already shaped.
- The Graham Block Party also celebrated the people, businesses, and organizations rooted here. Community-based organizations, City partners, artists, and vendors filled the street with program booths, cultural performances, music, dancing, exercise classes, and live grilling—all to the sweet beats played by our DJ, a local business owner and neighbor.
- Free food from restaurants on MLK and Rainier, custom Graham artwork made by a local artist, and raffle prizes from nearby businesses gave attendees a familiar but recontextualized taste of what makes this neighborhood special.
- Local leaders shared powerful remarks on community-driven development, immigrant-led organizing, the importance of City investments that reflect neighborhood priorities, and the value of continued dialogue between residents and City departments.

So today is more than about food and celebration and music. It's about preparing for the future of Graham Street light rail station, a project full of opportunity, but also responsibility. We all know that transit brings access to jobs, schools, health care and connection, but it can also bring challenges like rising housing [costs] and displacement. That's why our collective mission is to make sure that this station is built for the community and by the community.

Opening remarks by Ahmed Ali, Executive Director, Somali Health Board, at the Graham Block Party (September 27, 2025).



A child plays in the street during the Graham Block Party. Credit: OPCD

What We Heard

Over the summer, we held hundreds of conversations to better understand daily life in Graham—how people get to and move through the neighborhood, where they encounter challenges, and identifying the spaces and places they rely on to eat, play, gather, and stay connected. The people we engaged with shared excitement around recent changes and frustration over persistent and unresolved challenges. Their perspectives give us a clear foundation for identifying the actions needed to address persistent challenges and build on emerging opportunities.



*An OPCD staff standing in front of a map of Graham talks to a community member during the Juneteenth Celebration at Southeast Seattle Senior Center.
Credit: Ian Dapiaoen/OPCD*



Link Light Rail travelling north crossing the MLK & Graham intersection. Credit: Aja Hazelhoff/ OPCD

Transportation Access & Mobility

To learn more about the ways community members access the neighborhood we asked, “What would make it easier, safer, and more enjoyable for you to get around the Graham neighborhood and to the future station?”

Survey respondents identified adding pedestrian improvements (sidewalks, trails, and pathways), bike infrastructure (protected bike lanes, bike trails, and greenways), and greenery (trees or plants) as the top three ways to make getting around easier and more enjoyable.

In conversations beyond the survey, people described the places they travel to in Graham—where they shop, gather, and play—as well as how they get there and where they’re coming from. They also shared their thoughts about the challenges and opportunities they see ahead as the neighborhood continues to evolve alongside major transportation infrastructure projects.

Through this feedback, community members offered guidance on how the City can plan and implement future work to support a shared vision for transportation access and mobility, first expressed in the 2019 *Graham Street Vision*: **Community-centered mobility that provides safe, simple access to daily needs, connecting residents within Graham and to the wider region.**

Traffic Safety & Street Design

- Address longstanding safety issues with at-grade light rail crossings along MLK Jr. Way S.; consider safety improvements such as crossing gates, barriers, or grade separation (Sound Transit Engagement Report, Winter '24/Spring '25).
- Calm traffic on neighborhood streets to slow down vehicles heading to I-5 and other busy streets.

"The single biggest improvement would be to reduce the likelihood for traffic violence. This is one of the deadliest neighborhoods in Seattle where people routinely break all kinds of traffic laws. The number of pedestrian deaths here is horrific and unacceptable. Please design this new station in a way that facilitates walking, biking, and calms down the traffic insanity on MLK." (Phase 1 Survey)

"Traffic calming along MLK and building a large variety of housing would be a huge boon for the neighborhood and make it feel like a place people want to spend time and money." (Phase 1 Survey)

"For Graham Street, anything that can make the crossing at MLK safer and also walking along it feel insulated from high speed traffic would improve the walk ability. Same goes for some of the arterials like Orcas. Slower speeds and other pedestrian infrastructure, combined with dense amenities would make it feel much more like a space I want to spend time in." (Phase 1 Survey)

Transit, Biking, and Walking Connections

- Enhance existing bus routes for faster, more reliable service on MLK and Rainier.
- Develop a new east-west bus line on S Graham Street connecting Seward Park to Beacon Hill.
- Expand east-west bike connections between Rainier Valley and Beacon Hill, and improve north-south greenway routes.
- Improve pedestrian safety at high-crash intersections.
- Build sidewalks and safe walking routes that connect adjacent pocket neighborhoods to the Chief Sealth Trail and Brighton Playfield.

Pedestrian Comfort & Experience

- Invest in sidewalks, lighting, benches, shade, trees, and wayfinding signage to encourage walking and lingering.
- Create pedestrian-friendly environments that support everyday activity and comfort, particularly for youth and elder populations.

"I'd like to see more and larger trees planted to offer more shade, this neighborhood is considerably hotter than neighborhoods with more tree cover, which also makes it hard to be outside." (Phase 1 Survey)

"I would like to see more improvement to the sidewalks and more pedestrian friendly spaces and thoroughfares. The neighborhood is boxed in by MLK and Rainier, which both have heavy traffic. It's hard to walk anywhere and crossing MLK is intimidating with all the high speed traffic and how far the distance is." (Phase 1 Survey)

"Our curb cuts on many of the streets need to be added, or updated and there's a lot of encroachment from plants onto the sidewalk that make it hard for seniors disabled people to navigate" (Phase 1 Survey)

Maintaining Space for Businesses Visitors

- Maintain parking and vehicular access for small businesses and cultural institutions before, during, and after light rail construction
- Provide a range of options for how to access and arrive at the future station area, including arriving there by bike, foot, transit or vehicle.

"...businesses also need parking. Light rail needs parking ...it's unrealistic to think that everyone can walk or wait 20 minutes to a half hour for a bus to take you to the light rail. we still have to rely on cars in order to get to doctors appointments, and some job locations...many people have to live outside of the city to afford being able to work in Seattle. We need Housing to support those people so they don't have to commute one and a half hours one way per day..." (Phase 1 Survey)

"How to handle pick-up/drop-off around station? A lot of people still are going to want to drive to station given topography" (Gather/Shop/Play Mapping)

"Businesses here will need better sidewalks that can be useful for elders and youth especially; people come from all directions to access the school and other senior-focused cultural centers like the Filipino Community of Seattle. No matter how they get to Graham if its driving or walking on getting off at the new train stop, they'll need safe sidewalks to get to where they're going (Graham Business Outreach)



Lion Dance at Co Lam Pagod. Credit: Jessica Ramirez/ OPCD

Community Gathering Spaces

Our conversations with community members helped to confirm the places that matter to the people that live in and visit Graham. These are the places where people gather to socialize and build community, places that create stability and continuity.

Feedback from our survey and from our community mapping exercises highlighted many of the same places identified in the 2019 *Graham Street Vision* as still being “places that community has identified to preserve.” Other conversations highlighted how the public spaces that connect us to these places—streets, sidewalks, rights of way— can help to make them accessible and connected to the communities they serve.

Speaking with community leaders and organizations, we learned more about the ways in which cultural and religious organizations that serve the larger Graham community have been successful in establishing, maintaining, and growing their footprint within this neighborhood. We also heard about ways that the City can continue to support the strategies that have been so successful in maintaining their ability to remain rooted in this community. We heard feedback that informs how our work can support a Graham containing, ***“An abundance of multigenerational and multicultural community spaces.”***

Shared and Connected Public Spaces

- Create public spaces that support community health, recreation, and social connection, including parks, plazas, and open spaces designed for gathering.
- Design and connect public spaces to support intergenerational activities, ensuring youth, elders, and families can share space together safely and comfortably.
- Integrate walking and biking connections to link community destinations and assets—schools, parks, and houses of worship—with future transit access.

“For a lot of seniors, the journey is the destination. That means that it matters a lot how that journey goes, if it’s safe and enjoyable—and if there’s somewhere to sit and linger at the end, that’s also important” (Juneteenth Playstreet)

“There are so many youth that use [the gas station and parking lot at] intersection of MLK and Graham specifically, and that won’t change because the school [Aki] is right there. This is a third space for youth coming to/from school, waiting for bus—cross between a destination and a waiting spot, a place to see and be seen ” (Gather/Shop/Play Mapping)

“Prioritize sidewalks from station to cultural centers to encourage transit use (instead of driving/parking)” (Gather/Shop/Play Mapping)

Strengthening Cultural Anchors

In neighborhoods experiencing market pressure and risk of displacement, cultural anchors support long-standing communities to root in place as neighborhoods change. In areas of high displacement risk, investing in cultural spaces, small businesses, and community institutions ensures that the people who built the neighborhood continue to shape its future.

- Increase investment in community-based organizations and cultural institutions that serve as long-term anchors in Graham.
- Support the creation, preservation, and expansion of spaces that reflect the neighborhood’s multicultural identity and sustain its creative and entrepreneurial energy.
- Ensure that future development prioritizes community ownership models and protects shared gathering spaces from displacement pressures.

The Equitable Development Initiative (EDI) is a City of Seattle program that helps communities in historically marginalized neighborhoods create and protect spaces that reflect their culture, prevent displacement, and support local jobs and businesses.

Equitable Development Initiative Grantees within the Graham Street Station Area Plan:

- **Black and Tan Hall** – Cooperative restaurant, arts venue, and event space that fosters creativity and shared ownership.
- **Cham Refugees Community** – Redevelopment of a community center and creation of community housing.
- **Co Lam Pogoda** – Early planning for senior affordable housing.
- **Filipino Community Village** – Senior housing with a youth STEAM education center.
- **Hillman Hub** – Community-owned arts space for creatives.
- **Multicultural Community Coalition** – Small-business support and cultural space for East African communities.
- **Somali Community & Cultural Innovation Hub** – Senior housing, childcare, and gathering space.

I really do feel like I have a web of relationships within walking distance. I go over to Tony's all the time for a banh mi, and when my kid was old enough for little adventures, I'd say, "Here's ten bucks—go pick us up some banh mi for lunch on the weekend." I could trust her with those errands and trips because it felt safe. I can walk to the Black and Tan to meet a friend for a drink. Hearing the temple, seeing the festivals there—that's how I've marked time in this neighborhood for so many years. I know where to go, where to tell my siblings to go, and where they'll be safe.

A Graham neighbor interviewed for audio stories shared at the Graham Block Party



*Owner and staff of the iconic Rainier Restaurant pose outside of their restaurant, at the corner of MLK & Eddy.
Credit: Jessica Ramirez/ OPCD*

Economy

From conversations with residents and visitors who know and love this area, it quickly became clear that Graham's small businesses are at the heart of community life. They are places of connection as much as commerce—where people come not just to shop or eat, but to see neighbors, exchange news, and feel part of something local and familiar.

During community mapping activities, neighbors filled our Graham Station Area map with dots and notes marking restaurants, medical providers, small grocers, and retail shops along and near MLK Jr. Way S and Rainier Ave S. These are the anchors of daily life in Graham—the places where people eat, shop, and most importantly, gather.

We heard more about the importance and function of Graham's business community through our survey and through door-to-door outreach with local business owners and staff. Business owners aware of Sound Transit's light rail construction plans described a

mix of excitement and anxiety: optimism for the new opportunities the station will bring, and concern about how construction-related disruptions could affect their livelihoods and sense of stability.

Both business owners and residents shared ideas for how the City can help local businesses remain resilient during this period of growth and change—through investments that support continuity, visibility, and long-term success for the small enterprises that make Graham distinctive.

This feedback helps to shape how the City can invest in strategies that ensure Graham continues to be **“a place to find jobs and economic opportunity.”**

Business Stability During and After Light Rail Construction

- Anticipate and mitigate disruptions from station construction that could reduce customer traffic and visibility for nearby businesses.
- Establish a support network for small businesses before, during, and after construction to prevent closures and long-term economic displacement.
- Address parking and access needs to keep stores reachable by both local and regional customers throughout the construction process.

“The City needs to think about traffic jams, congestion. More people will be driving and walking along with more people taking the light rail. Everyone needs to be able to move around otherwise that's when businesses suffer” (Graham Small Business Outreach)

“Transportation projects are just kind of a way of life around here; there will be a hard period while [the light rail station construction] is happening, but businesses will be okay if community supports them; having an organized campaign around this is a good idea to strengthen businesses before a big change like this” (Graham Small Business Outreach)

“The problem with the new developments I've seen so far is that the storefronts on the ground level remain vacant for months or years--presumably because the rent is too high. This benefits *no one,* but could benefit everyone (including property owners) if community needs were prioritized” (Phase 1 Survey)

Affordability and Displacement Risks

- Stabilize local businesses ahead of rising land values and rents following light rail station development.
- Support existing cultural and legacy businesses that serve as key social and economic anchors for the Graham community.
- Mitigate the ripple effects of higher costs that may push long-time customers and residents farther from the area.

"This community is very friendly, and has ties that extend beyond the neighborhood into other places in & outside the city. It's strong but also can be easily hurt by things like construction and big/long changes that come from outside. There's a history of that happening in this community--not just here but in other places in Seattle" (Graham Small Business Outreach)

Redevelopment needs to happen very carefully so as not to displace small business tenants in existing commercial developments. It should be a mix of larger apartment buildings that include smaller scale retail spaces and restaurant space as well as smaller scale moderate density to help existing residents stay in place. Incentives should be provided to property owners to keep small business and residential tenants in place, otherwise relocation assistance to keep them in the area should be prioritized (Phase 1 Survey)

Protect the area around the temple and keep the small business thriving like Rainier BBQ, Soufend Cafe, and Q Bakery. I would love to see a new shopping center in the old island Pacific location. Maybe some adjacent housing. We have a beautiful strong Vietnamese and Southeast Asian community here that have temples and businesses that could use our support. Things like the u haul and mc Donald's are not necessary for this thriving community (Phase 1 Survey)

"If the plaza at the NE corner of Graham & MLK could be redeveloped *without pricing out current tenants (who are cornerstones of the community)*...that would be a huge improvement." (Phase 1 Survey)

Inclusive Economic Growth

- Invest in pathways to economic opportunity for youth, including mentorships, internships, and training through community-based organizations, schools, and recreation programs.
- Support BIPOC- and immigrant-owned small businesses with targeted technical assistance, marketing, and financing tools to help them grow and remain rooted in place.
- Use wayfinding, signage, and public art to showcase local businesses, celebrate neighborhood identity, and strengthen community pride.

"I would like to see the Graham neighborhood be a destination for folks in Seattle rather than a neighborhood people pass through or go to run errands. Efforts to highlight the neighborhood's cultural diversity with art events and markets could go a long way as well as promoting local businesses." (Phase 1 Survey)

"Better signage to direct riders to Brighton Playfield and Co Lam Pagoda" (Phase 1 Survey)

Designing Public Spaces that Support Adjacent Businesses

- Invest in pedestrian-oriented public spaces that increase walkability, lingering and activation that connects and increases access to local businesses.

"More/better plaza space could help boost business--customers can stay and be around without feeling like they need to leave quickly; lingering in place supports businesses" (Graham Business Outreach)

"I love how Sun Ta Tofu & Soufend have connected their businesses with their shared parking lot. Their corner has really brightened up. (Phase 1 Survey)

"Artworks and in-language signage that honors and gives visibility to Graham's many cultural communities" (Gather/Shop/Play Mapping)

"Wayfinding signage that identifies cultural landmarks and important community spaces" (Gather/Shop/Play Mapping)

"Multilingual wayfinding signage, especially near station for orientation to neighborhood & community" (Gather/Shop Play Mapping)



A “3D map” showing possible housing types that could be encouraged near future transit investments. Blocks representing housing and land use types were placed by participants. Credit: Lucien Ong/ OPCD

Housing

Graham is home to families who have lived here for generations, as well as newer residents who have recently made this neighborhood their home. Many others have left—pushed out by rising housing costs and a lack of housing options that reflect their needs and ways of living.

Conversations with residents and neighbors revealed that the Graham community extends far beyond those who currently live here, with many visitors including former residents. The most frequently used word to describe the larger social community of Graham in the Phase 1 Survey was *diverse*. That diversity shows up in many forms—cultures, languages, ages, household types, and connection to this place—and it shapes what people need from their housing. Families, elders, and youths all emphasized the importance of housing options that make it possible for people to stay and thrive in place.

Phase 1 survey results revealed a clear desire for housing that reflects the diverse needs of Graham residents. Many respondents emphasized the importance of larger apartments with three or more bedrooms to accommodate extended families. Others expressed a need for homes designed for intergenerational living, where multiple generations can live together comfortably. There was also strong support for multifamily housing that includes

shared outdoor and indoor play areas for children—spaces that make family life easier and strengthen community connections.

Residents also pointed out opportunities for growth and reinvestment in underused spaces near the future light rail station. Many noted large surface parking lots, vacant parcels, and drive-thru businesses that could be redeveloped into housing with shops, parks, and community spaces on the ground floor.

Feedback points to a vision of **a beautiful, supported and stable neighborhood** that strengthen the social and economic connections already rooted in Graham—allowing existing residents and businesses to flourish while also welcoming new neighbors as the area grows around the future station.

Stable, Inclusive Housing Choices

- Develop vacant and underused lots into new housing that serves current residents and future generations. This includes City-owned parcels in the unopened Right of Way.
- Encourage land use changes that support a mix of housing types—including options suitable for large or multigenerational families—to reflect the diversity of current household needs in Graham.
- Expand affordable housing opportunities near the future light rail station and along major transit corridors to keep people who live here connected to the opportunities this investment will bring.
- Balance new development with community stability, ensuring existing residents share in the benefits of public investment.

“We need multiuse developments with cultural sensitivities to our immigrant populations both long established and newly arrived.” (Phase 1 Survey)

“Usually when there is development, the low income housing that is provided doesn't support the types of people that live in the neighborhood. This is a multi generational and family oriented neighborhood.” (Phase 1 Survey)

“There's just a lot of empty pavement around the light rail station in terms of parking lots, and also some big brand places that could...become something much taller with retail and community spaces below and Housing above.” (Phase 1 Survey)

"Higher density housing near the light rail station similar to at Othello station." (Phase 1 Survey)

Mixed-Use and Connected Development

- Redevelop large sites into mixed-use spaces that include housing, small businesses, and community-serving amenities within walking distance of transit.
- Create public spaces that blend residential and commercial activity, encouraging social life, safety, and shared ownership of place.
- Ensure land use and zoning changes around the station area promote public life and a pedestrian experience that invites walking, gathering, and socializing.

"I would love a way to sit with friends in a plaza/park with picnic tables/outdoor seating. I think restaurants and retail are ideal for this area to make it a vibrant stop on the light rail. Some park or shop(s) that draw people to Rainier Ave retail from the light rail would be great." (Phase 1 Survey)

"Encourage new development to include public space connections that provide buffers against the noise and pollution from MLK." (Phase 1 Survey)

"It would be really great to get a multi-family corridor connecting the Graham area to Hillman City. Taller buildings with active retail bases that lead the path safely between the two" (Phase 1 Survey)



Caption: Community members at the Graham Block Party. Credit: Aliok Ali

Environment

Conversations with community organizations and leaders highlighted how Graham’s open spaces are already being used to bring people together and sustain the neighborhood’s well-being. From community gardens hosting intergenerational learning opportunities, to local parks and cultural gathering spots that host events and celebrations, green spaces in Graham are working spaces—active and deeply social.

Graham community members described a vision for their neighborhood where parks, gardens, and tree-lined streets do more than add beauty—they create spaces for connection, health, and opportunity. Whether at a block party or a festival, conversations around the future of Graham describe trees and open space as vital to everyday life: places where neighbors gather, elders find shade, and youth can learn about the natural world. They’re also viewed as essential to Graham’s long-term resilience—supporting clean air, cooler streets, and a healthier environment for future generations.

Community feedback also helped identify opportunities for growth. Through surveys and mapping exercises, people pointed to vacant lots, neglected corners, and unopened rights-

of-way that could be transformed into community gardens, pocket parks, or shaded walking routes—places that invite people to gather, grow, and care for one another.

Together, these ideas reflect how the Graham community envisions investing in **“a healthy environment that helps us thrive.”**

Greening the Neighborhood

- Add more greenery along major streets, including trees, planters, and landscaped buffers, to reduce heat, improve air quality, and make streets more inviting for pedestrians and people on bikes.
- Integrate green stormwater infrastructure—such as rain gardens, bioswales, and permeable surfaces—into sidewalks and public spaces to manage runoff and enhance the pedestrian environment.
- Transform vacant and underused lots into parks, community gardens, and greenways that serve both recreational and ecological functions.

“Southeast Seattle needs more tree canopy for the health and well-being of its residents (and to combat the historical racism that resulted in our part of the city having fewer trees). More landscaping in this large area would make a huge difference. Removing at least parts of the concrete to plant trees would make such a difference to lower the temperature...More nature in that space would benefit everyone” (Phase 1 Survey)

“I’d like to see more and larger trees planted to offer more shade, this neighborhood is considerably hotter than neighborhoods with more tree cover, which also makes it hard to be outside.” (Juneteenth Playstreet)

Parks, Plazas, and Gathering Spaces

- Invest in new, flexible public spaces—parks, plazas, and P-Patches—that can host recreational activities, markets, festivals, and community education.
- Reimagine the right of way, streets, and public spaces near the future light rail station to support communal uses, social gathering, and intergenerational activity, making them central to daily life in Graham.
- Partner with Graham-area schools, community organizations, and artists to activate parks, streets, and other public spaces with programming that celebrates local culture, promotes environmental education, and fosters community stewardship.

“Would be great to see that space reimaged with some greenery and area to rest while waiting for the link [light rail]” (Phase 1 Survey)

“Year-round outdoor space covered with translucent plastic to hang out at the park in the rain” (Phase 1 Survey)

“There is a lot of empty, unused lots in the box between the MLK and the Chief Sealth trail as well as Orcas and Graham Street. It would be great if these could be made into something that meets more community needs, like park space with playgrounds or housing. Some green belt is good, but most of these spaces are just unmanaged blackberry jungles.”

“New activated green spaces would be great. There were about two parcels between the McDonalds and the Temple on Graham that seemed to not be so buildable. Would be great if it was developed into a community resource, park, p-patch, etc.” (Phase 1 Survey)

Food Systems, Environment, Economy

- Consider ways to expand access to designate new community gardens, small farms and edible landscapes that connect residents and visitors to cultural foodways and local agriculture.
- Support food establishments like grocery stores and local restaurants as a local economic driver, providing opportunities for youth employment and leadership, small business incubation, and cultural food sovereignty.
- Invest in green jobs and workforce training programs that building local expertise in environmental stewardship.
- Activate underutilized public spaces with youth-focused environmental programs that connect young people to the natural world and opportunities to build technical & leadership skills.

"Want an anchor grocery store back in Empire Shopping Center" (Gather/Shop/Play Mapping)

"Can we please get grocery store [At Empire Plaza], or at least a more safe parking lot! There are a lot of people from all directions that go here, needs to feel like more of a center with intention. This is at the heart of the center! It should feel like it" Gather/Shop/Play Mapping

"Don't discount McDonald's! It's about cheap, 24 hr, fast easy to access food in a central location. Need services like this in the neighborhood" (Gather/Shop/Play Mapping)

What Comes Next

In the next phase of engagement, we'll build on what we've heard by working with community members to identify specific projects, partnerships, and policy changes that can advance Graham's priorities.

This includes using community feedback to inform a set of strategies for implementation—such as improving street safety and transit access, shaping future land use and zoning decisions, and supporting the small businesses and gathering spaces that anchor this neighborhood.

We'll continue using **place-based engagement** to have these conversations in the community—through focus groups, walking tours, and on-site discussions that invite neighbors, business owners, and cultural organizations to weigh in on potential actions. Their feedback will help shape implementation steps for transportation, housing, economic development, and public space investments, and to align City and agency resources in support of near- and medium-term strategies and wins that can be implemented on an ongoing basis.

Please note that quotes have been lightly edited for clarity and readability while preserving the speaker's voice.

