

# Seattle's Growth Strategy

## Introduction

Seattle's strategy for accommodating future growth and creating a sustainable city builds on the foundation of its many diverse neighborhoods, and aims to create a better city by providing:

- A variety of housing options and employment growth
- Walkable communities with good transit access
- Services and the infrastructure needed to support growth
- Respect for the natural environment and enhancements to the city's cultural resources

Together, these outcomes help define the urban village strategy as a thoughtful and effective way to grow Seattle now and into the future. As Seattle's population and job base increase, urban villages will be the areas best able to support the increased density needed to house and employ the city's newest residents and workers. The City has made a commitment to growing wisely, in ways that ensure a livable future that is sustainable and accessible to all. By concentrating growth in the urban villages, Seattle can strengthen successful aspects of the city's character, continuing to encourage growth in dense, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use neighborhoods at appropriate locations throughout the city.

This Plan envisions a city where growth helps to build stronger communities, heightens our stewardship of the environment, leads to enhanced economic opportunity and security for all residents, and is accompanied by greater race and social equity across Seattle's communities.

This Element of the Plan describes how the City goes about planning for growth and how it involves others in that planning. It also describes where the City has determined most growth should occur – in the urban centers, urban villages and manufacturing/industrial centers. It also presents policies about urban design that describe how decisions about the location of growth should interact with the natural and built environments.

## Planning for Growth

### Discussion

This Plan is the City's response to the state's Growth Management Act (GMA) and its requirements for a comprehensive plan that meets certain standards. In addition to this Plan, the City also prepares more detailed plans and regulations for implementation and to guide the specific activities of various City departments. The City has a history of encouraging community participation in the development of City plans. In preparing the 1994 version of this Plan, the City deliberately sought participation from a number of communities that had not traditionally been involved in such efforts. Since the original

adoption of the Plan, the City has been even more systematic in conducting outreach to under-represented communities to have their opinions and needs reflected in plans and programs the City will be carrying out. As the make-up of the city's population continues to change, the City will need to increase these outreach efforts to ensure growing segments of the community are represented in the choices the City will make. Enhanced participation in planning and in decision-making can help create communities of opportunity for everyone, regardless of race or means. It can also help balance how the benefits of growth are distributed across the city's communities.

As described in the Introduction to this Plan, planning is a process that continues beyond the production of a document. It requires continual monitoring of conditions that the plan was intended to affect. That means someone or some group must be responsible for understanding what the plan intended and be in a position to both collect data on changes over time and recommend specific adjustments as the need arises. Over time, new people will move into the city and into individual urban villages, and the City will need to find ways to engage these new residents and business owners in testing whether the Plan's vision, goals and policies continue to reflect the current population and circumstances.

## GOAL

**GSG1** Have strategies that prepare the City for the challenges and opportunities of growth and that represent the needs and desires of a broad cross-section of city residents and business owners.

## POLICIES

**GS1.1** Work with other governments in the region to develop coordinated approaches to growth management that will advance the City's values.

**GS1.2** Maintain an updating process for this Plan that is predictable and transparent to the public.

**GS1.3** Engage Seattle residents and businesses in discussions leading to the adoption of plans that guide growth, City government activities, and City services so that the outcomes reflect the public's values and concerns.

**GS1.4** Develop and use practices to reach historically under-represented communities and to aid their participation in decision-making processes.

**GS1.5** Monitor urban centers and villages to track changes over time in the number of housing units and jobs, population and public investments, and use this information to make decisions about conducting further planning or providing additional investments to help meet the needs of residents in these locations.

- GS1.6 Monitor development activity in areas with high potential for displacement of marginalized populations and small businesses and identify and implement strategies that can limit that displacement.

## Urban Village Strategy

### Discussion

The foundation of this Plan's approach to managing growth is a strategy that concentrates most of the expected future growth in places the City has designated as urban centers and urban villages. Most of these places have been the commercial areas serving their local communities or even the broader city and region for decades. They are the places best equipped to absorb more housing and businesses and to provide the services that new residents and employees will need.

Urban centers and villages are complete, compact and connected neighborhoods within the city. They are community resources that allow Seattle to deliver services more efficiently. Urban villages also enable the City to pursue a development pattern that is both environmentally and economically sound. As a result, Seattle can more comprehensively plan for a sustainable future. With an aim to advance the entire community, this approach helps maximize the benefits of public infrastructure investments and to promote private and public collaborations.

Locating more residents, jobs, stores, and services near each other can reduce people's reliance on cars, thereby decreasing fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions. Increasing residential and employment densities in locations makes transit and other public services convenient for more people, and it also makes providing these key services more efficient. This can be a benefit to transit-dependent populations and to those who rely on other community services.

The urban village strategy takes the existing and intended character of the city's neighborhoods into account when planning for future growth. The places selected for absorbing the most growth come in various shapes and sizes, and they will serve somewhat different purposes. The following four designations represent the roles that different areas will play in the city's future:

**Urban centers** are the densest Seattle neighborhoods, and they act as both regional centers and as neighborhoods that provide a diverse mix of uses, housing, and employment opportunities.

**Manufacturing/industrial centers** are home to the city's thriving industrial businesses, and like urban centers, are regional designations and important regional resources for retaining and attracting jobs and for maintaining a diversified economy.

**Hub urban villages** are communities that offer a balance of housing and employment, and generally are less dense than urban centers. These areas provide a mix of goods, services, and employment for their residents and surrounding neighborhoods.

**Residential urban villages** are locations of expected residential concentrations, generally at lower densities than urban centers or hub urban villages. While they are also sources of goods and services for residents and surrounding communities, they are not to be concentrations of employment.

Each of these areas is intended to see more growth and change over time than other commercial nodes or primarily residential areas, and together they will accommodate the majority of the city's expansion during this Plan's lifespan. The City will continue to work with its residents, businesses, and institutions citywide to promote conditions that will help each of its communities thrive, but it will pay special attention to the centers and villages where the majority of expansion is expected. The policies in this Plan provide direction for that change and growth.

The City will especially focus growth within urban centers and urban villages in the areas within easy walking distance of frequent and reliable transit service. The presence of transit reinforces the walkability and decreased car dependency intended in the urban villages by providing viable alternatives to cars for area residents and employees. The centers and villages also provide focal points for locating services and public gathering places.

Because urban centers and urban villages are the places where the City expects to concentrate public facilities, services and transit, it will be important to ensure that there are opportunities for all households, including those with low incomes, large families, and people of color to find housing and employment in those places.

In addition to designating urban villages and defining desired conditions, the Plan addresses conditions outside urban centers and villages, which will also accommodate some growth, although in less dense patterns. These include single-family neighborhoods, small areas of multifamily and commercial areas, and scattered industrial areas. On the whole, however, the urban village approach continues to direct most new development away from Seattle's single-family-focused communities because most of these areas do not have needed services within easy walking distance.

## GOAL

**GSG2** Accommodate most of the city's housing and employment growth in designated urban centers and urban villages in ways that will lead to equitable outcomes for all of the city's residents.

## POLICIES

**GS2.1** Designate places as urban centers, urban villages, or manufacturing/industrial centers based on the functions they can perform and the densities they can support.

- GS2.2 Encourage investments and activities in urban centers and urban villages that will enable those areas to flourish as compact mixed-use neighborhoods designed to accommodate the majority of the city's new jobs and housing, provide services and employment close to housing, and promote efficient use of public services, including transit, with housing options for a variety of households and a range of incomes.
- GS2.3 Establish boundaries for urban centers, urban villages, and manufacturing/industrial centers that reflect existing development patterns, intended community characteristics, and recognized neighborhood areas.
- GS2.4 Coordinate planning for transportation, utilities, open space and other public services to meet the anticipated growth and increased density.
- GS2.5 Encourage infill development on vacant and under-used sites, particularly in urban centers and villages.
- GS2.6 Plan for development in urban centers and urban villages in ways that will provide a broad cross-section of Seattle households with better access to services, transit, and educational and employment opportunities.
- GS2.7 Promote levels of density, mixes of uses, and transit improvements that will support the use of walking, biking, and public transportation.
- GS2.8 Direct the majority of future development to centers and urban villages, and limit the possibility of scattered growth along arterials and other areas not conducive to walking, transit use, and cohesive community development.
- GS2.9 Use zoning and other planning tools in places where growth and development are expected to shape the amount and pace of growth in ways that will control displacement of marginalized populations, community services and institutions.
- GS2.10 Establish Urban Centers and Urban Villages using the criteria described in Growth Strategy Figure 1.

**Growth Strategy Figure 1. Characteristics of Urban Centers and Urban Villages**

Characteristic	Urban Centers	Hub Urban Villages	Residential Urban Villages
Land Area	Up to 1.5 square miles (960 acres)	At least 20 contiguous acres of land currently zoned to accommodate commercial or mixed-use activities	Includes one or more centers of activity, including at least 10 acres of commercial zoning within a radius of 2,000 feet
Access	<p>Within ½ mile of the existing or planned high capacity station;</p> <p>Existing or planned connections to surrounding neighborhoods by bicycle and/or pedestrian facilities</p>	<p>Transit service with a frequency of 15 minutes or less during peak hours and 30 minutes in off-peak hours, with direct access to at least one urban center</p> <p>Convenient and direct connections to neighboring areas by pedestrians and bicyclists</p>	<p>Presently served by a transit route providing direct transit service to at least one urban center or hub village, with a peak-hour transit frequency of 15 minutes or less and 30 minutes at off-peak times</p> <p>Connected by existing or planned to be in the future by bicycle and/or pedestrian facilities to neighboring areas and nearby public amenities</p>
Zoning and Use	Zoning that allows for a diverse mix of commercial and residential activities	<p>Zoning that allows a broad range of housing types as well as commercial and retail support services— either existing or allowed under current zoning—to serve a local, citywide, or regional market</p> <p>Opportunities for redevelopment due to a substantial amount of vacant or under-used land within the village</p>	Zoning that emphasizes residential uses while allowing for commercial and retail support services for the surrounding area
Growth Accommodation	<p>Zoning that permits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A minimum of 15,000 jobs within a 0.5 miles of a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient zoned capacity to accommodate a minimum of 25</li> </ul>	Existing densities or the potential for residential density of at least 8 units per

	<p>high-capacity transit station</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An overall employment density of 50 jobs per acre</li> <li>• An overall residential density of 15 households per acre</li> </ul>	<p>jobs per gross acre and at least 2,500 jobs, in addition to at least 3,500 dwelling units within the village</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The area presently supports, or current zoning would allow an overall residential density of 15 or more units per gross acre</li> </ul>	<p>gross acre under current zoning</p>
<p>Currently Designated Centers/Villages (See map on Figure XX)</p>	<p>Downtown Seattle First Hill/Capitol Hill Uptown University Northgate South Lake Union</p>	<p>Lake City North Rainier Bitter Lake Village Ballard West Seattle Junction Fremont</p>	<p>Crown Hill 23<sup>rd</sup> &amp; Jackson Madison-Miller Wallingford Eastlake Othello South Park Upper Queen Anne Roosevelt Aurora-Licton Springs Green Lake Rainier Beach Morgan Junction Admiral North Beacon Hill Greenwood/Phinney Ridge Columbia City Westwood/Highland Park</p>

GS2.11 Permit varying sizes of urban villages based on local conditions, but limit sizes so that most village areas are within walking distance from employment and service areas in the village.

GS2.12 Reflect the area that is generally within a ten-minute walk of frequent light rail stations in urban village boundaries.

GS2.13 Support convenient access to healthful food for all areas where people live by encouraging grocery stores, farmers’ markets and community food gardens.

GS2.14 Allow commercial activity in residential urban villages that supports the overall residential function and character of the village.

- GS2.15 Promote meaningful choice for marginalized populations to live and work in urban centers and urban villages throughout the city.
- GS2.16 Designate areas as manufacturing/industrial centers consistent with the following criteria and with the Countywide Planning Policies:
- Existing zoning that promotes manufacturing, warehousing and distribution uses
  - Zoning that discourages uses that pose short- or long-term conflicts with industrial uses, or that threaten to convert significant amounts of industrial land to non-industrial uses
  - Strictly limit residential uses and discourage land uses that are not compatible with manufacturing/industrial uses
  - Buffers that protect neighboring, less-intensive land uses from the impacts associated with industrial activity (provided by generally maintaining existing buffers, including existing industrial buffer zones)
  - Sufficient zoned capacity to accommodate a minimum of 10,000 jobs
  - Land parcels suitable for industrial activity
  - Relatively flat terrain allowing for efficient industrial processes
  - Reasonable access to the regional highway, rail, air and/or waterway system for transportation of goods
- GS2.17 Designate the Ballard-Interbay and Duwamish areas as manufacturing/industrial centers.
- GS2.18 Use zoning and other tools to maintain and expand existing industrial activities within the manufacturing/industrial centers.
- GS2.19 Limit City-owned land in the manufacturing/industrial centers to uses that are compatible with other industrial uses and that are inappropriate in other zones, and discourage other public entities from siting non-industrial uses in manufacturing/industrial centers.
- GS2.20 Retain land in the Manufacturing/Industrial Centers for industrial uses and develop criteria for evaluating requests to remove land from a M/IC, recognizing the important economic resource the land in these centers represents.

## Areas Outside Centers and Villages

- GS2.21 Support healthy neighborhoods throughout the city so that all residents have access to a range of housing choices, as well as access to parks, open space and services that make it easy for them to walk, bike or take transit to meet many of their daily needs.
- GS2.22 Allow limited multifamily, commercial, and industrial uses outside of urban villages to support the surrounding area or to maintain the existing character.



GS2.23 Plan for uses and densities on hospital and college campuses that are located outside an urban center or village in ways that recognize the important contributions of these institutions and the generally low-scale development of their surroundings.

## Distribution of Growth

### Discussion

The urban village strategy focuses Seattle's future growth primarily within areas designated as centers and villages. This Plan anticipates that most future job growth will take place in urban centers—areas that already function as high-density, concentrated employment cores that enjoy the greatest access to the regional transit network.

Currently, jobs and households are unevenly distributed throughout Seattle. For instance, the four adjoining urban centers (Downtown, Capitol Hill/First Hill, South Lake Union, and Uptown) contain almost one-fifth of the City's households and nearly one-half of the city's jobs—on less than 5 percent of the city's land. Downtown alone has about ten times more jobs than housing units. However, the Plan does not intend to have an even distribution of jobs and households across the city, and future growth estimates also show that the urban centers' current role as primarily job centers is likely to continue.

Industrial job growth will continue to take place mostly within the City's two existing and well-established manufacturing/industrial centers. There will also be overall job growth in hub urban villages distributed throughout the city, which will promote additional employment centers that are easily accessible to the surrounding residential population, thereby locating jobs and services near where people live.

The largest amount of residential growth is expected to occur in urban centers, furthering chances for people to live close to work. The next most significant share of residential growth will likely occur in the various hub and residential urban villages throughout the city. More modest growth will be dispersed, at lower densities, in various places outside centers and villages, including along arterials where current zoning allows multifamily and commercial uses.

Over the next 20 years, this Plan anticipates that Seattle will add 70,000 housing units and 115,000 jobs. These estimates represent the City's share of King County's projected 20-year growth.

### GOAL

GSG3 Accommodate approximately 80% of the city's expected household growth in urban centers and urban villages and 80% of employment growth in those areas plus manufacturing/industrial centers. Figure 2 shows the amount of growth planned for each

center, and Figure 3 shows the growth rate planned for different categories of urban villages.

**Growth Strategy Figure 2  
Estimated Urban Center Growth 2015-2035**

	Housing Units	Jobs
<b>Urban Centers</b>		
Downtown	10,000	30,000
First Hill/Capitol Hill	7,000	3,000
University District	2,700	8,000
Northgate	1,600	6,000
South Lake Union	4,700	20,000
Uptown	3,500	3,500
<b>Manufacturing/Industrial Centers</b>		
Duwamish	-	3,000
Ballard - Interbay	-	1,500

**Growth Strategy Figure 3  
Estimated Urban Village Growth Rates**

	Expected Housing Growth Rate*	Expected Job Growth Rate*
<b>Hub Urban Villages</b>		
With frequent transit **	70%	50%
Without frequent transit	40%	50%
<b>Residential Urban Villages</b>		
With frequent transit	80%	
Without frequent transit	20%	

\* Growth above 2014 actual housing units or jobs

\*\* Frequent transit means a light rail station or two or more bus lines serving multiple destinations

## POLICIES

- GS3.1 Encourage residential growth in places around the city that are conducive to compact, well-served urban living.
- GS3.2 Increase employment growth in areas that are convenient to the city's residential population as a way to promote walking and transit use and to reduce work commutes.
- GS3.3 Plan for a variety of uses and the highest densities in Seattle's urban centers, consistent with their role in shaping the regional development pattern.

- GS3.4 Base 20-year growth estimates for each urban center and manufacturing/industrial center on:
- Citywide targets for housing and job growth adopted in the Countywide Planning Policies
  - The role of the center in regional growth management planning
  - Access to transit
  - Existing zoning, including capacity for additional commercial and residential development
  - Existing densities
  - Current development conditions, recent development trends and plans for private or public development, such as by major institutions
  - Plans for infrastructure, public amenities and services that could attract or support additional growth
  - Potential benefits and burdens for the city's marginalized populations
- GS3.5 Encourage a distribution of growth that both fosters opportunity in low-income neighborhoods and provides access for marginalized populations in neighborhoods that already have good access to opportunities and amenities.
- GS3.6 Focus development activity on centers and villages over the Plan's 20-year timeframe through such measures as providing services, facilities, and incentives to accommodate estimated growth.
- GS3.7 Adjust urban center growth estimates at least every 10 years to reflect current information as well as state and county 20-year growth estimates, or reexamine projections as neighborhood plans for the city's centers are substantially amended.

## Urban Design

### Discussion

As Seattle evolves, thoughtful urban design can help both conserve and enhance the aspects of Seattle's physical environment that make it so appealing to residents and visitors alike. These aspects include: well-defined and diverse neighborhoods; the city's compact, intimate, walkable scale; mixed-use neighborhoods; close relationship with nature; and parks, streets, and public spaces. In a flourishing city, urban design can help seamlessly integrate the new with the old, producing positive results while limiting the negative impacts of change. The policies in this element are concerned with broad choices the City might make about where and how to develop.

The policies in this Element are not intended to be used for reviewing individual projects. Through zoning regulations and design review, the City helps shape the appearance of individual projects.

The designation of several Seattle historic districts preserves those valued neighborhoods' distinctive character. Moreover, the way the City builds and maintains major infrastructure, including parks and roads, will continue to define key public spaces and the connections among them.

Providing a citywide context, the urban design policies described here outline the City's future approaches in regulating, building and maintaining the city, while reflecting its diverse neighborhoods, populations and natural features. The policies here are separated into three specific areas: Natural Environment, Built Environment, and Public Spaces. More detailed direction for individual projects can be found in the Land Use Code's regulations and in design guidelines.

## GOAL

**GSG4** Maintain and enhance Seattle's unique character and sense of place, including its natural setting, history, human-scaled development, and community identity as the city grows and changes.

## Natural Environment

### POLICIES

**GS4.1** Encourage the preservation, protection, and restoration of Seattle's distinctive natural features and land forms such as bluffs, beaches, streams, and remaining evergreen forests.

**GS4.2** Design public facilities and development regulations to emphasize physical and visual connections to Seattle's natural surroundings, with special attention to public vistas of shorelines, the Olympic and Cascade Mountains.

**GS4.3** Encourage design that recognizes natural systems and integrates ecological functions such as storm water filtration or retention with other infrastructure and development projects.

**GS4.4** Respect topography, water and natural systems when building by siting tall buildings in harmony with the city's topography.

**GS4.5** Increase both physical and visual public access to streams, lakes and the Sound.

**GS4.6** Extend sustainable landscaping and an aesthetic approach to typically under-designed sites such as surface parking lots, rooftops and freeway borders.

- GS4.7 Promote the use of native plants for landscaping to emphasize the region's natural identity and foster environmental health.

## Built Environment

- GS4.8 Preserve characteristics that contribute to communities' general identity, such as block and lot patterns and areas of historic, architectural or social significance.
- GS4.9 Design public infrastructure and private building developments to help visitors understand the existing block and street patterns and to reinforce the walkability of neighborhoods.
- GS4.10 Use zoning tools and natural features to ease the transitions between urban villages' moderate building intensities to lower-density developments of surrounding areas.
- GS4.11 Design streets with distinctive identities that are compatible with a citywide system that defines differences between types of streets.
- GS4.12 Preserve, strengthen, and, as opportunities permit, reconnect Seattle's street grid as a means to knit together neighborhoods and to connect areas of the city..
- GS4.13 Develop street designs that reflect each street's function, right-of-way width, adjoining uses and opportunities to provide open space and green infrastructure.
- GS4.14 Design urban villages to be walkable, using approaches such as clear street grids, pedestrian connections between major activity centers, incorporation of public open spaces, and commercial buildings with retail and active uses that flank the sidewalk.
- GS4.15 Design multifamily zones to be appealing residential communities with high-quality housing, and development standards that promote privacy and livability, such as appropriately scaled landscaping, street amenities, and in appropriate locations limited commercial uses targeted for the local population.
- GS4.16 Encourage designs for buildings and public spaces that maximize use of natural light and provide protection from inclement weather.
- GS4.17 Encourage the use of land, rooftops, and other spaces to contribute to urban food production.
- GS4.18 Use varied building forms and heights to enhance attractive and walkable neighborhoods.

- GS4.19 Use groupings of tall buildings, instead of lone towers, to enhance overall topography or to define districts.
- GS4.20 Consider taller building heights in key locations to provide visual focus and define activity centers, such as near light rail transit stations in urban centers and urban villages.
- GS4.21 Limit the negative impacts of tall buildings on public views and on sunlight in public streets and parks through regulations defining upper-level building setbacks, lot coverage limits or other techniques.
- GS4.22 Locate tall buildings to respect natural surroundings and key natural features and to minimize obstructing views of these features, such as by having lower building heights near lakes or the Sound.
- GS4.23 Encourage street widths and building heights that are in proportion with each other by reducing setbacks from the street and keeping reasonable sidewalk widths for lower buildings.

## Public Spaces

- GS4.24 Encourage innovative street design that expands the role of streets as public spaces that could include use for markets, festivals, or street parks.
- GS4.25 Promote well-defined outdoor spaces that can easily accommodate potential users and that are well integrated with adjoining buildings and spaces.
- GS4.26 Design public spaces that consider the nearby physical context and the needs of the community.

## Annexation

### Discussion

Small areas of unincorporated land lie immediately south of the Seattle city limits. The King County government currently administers services to these areas. However, the state's Growth Management Act (GMA) anticipates that all areas within the county's urban growth boundary will eventually be part of a city. Figure 4 shows the locations the City has identified as potential annexation areas.

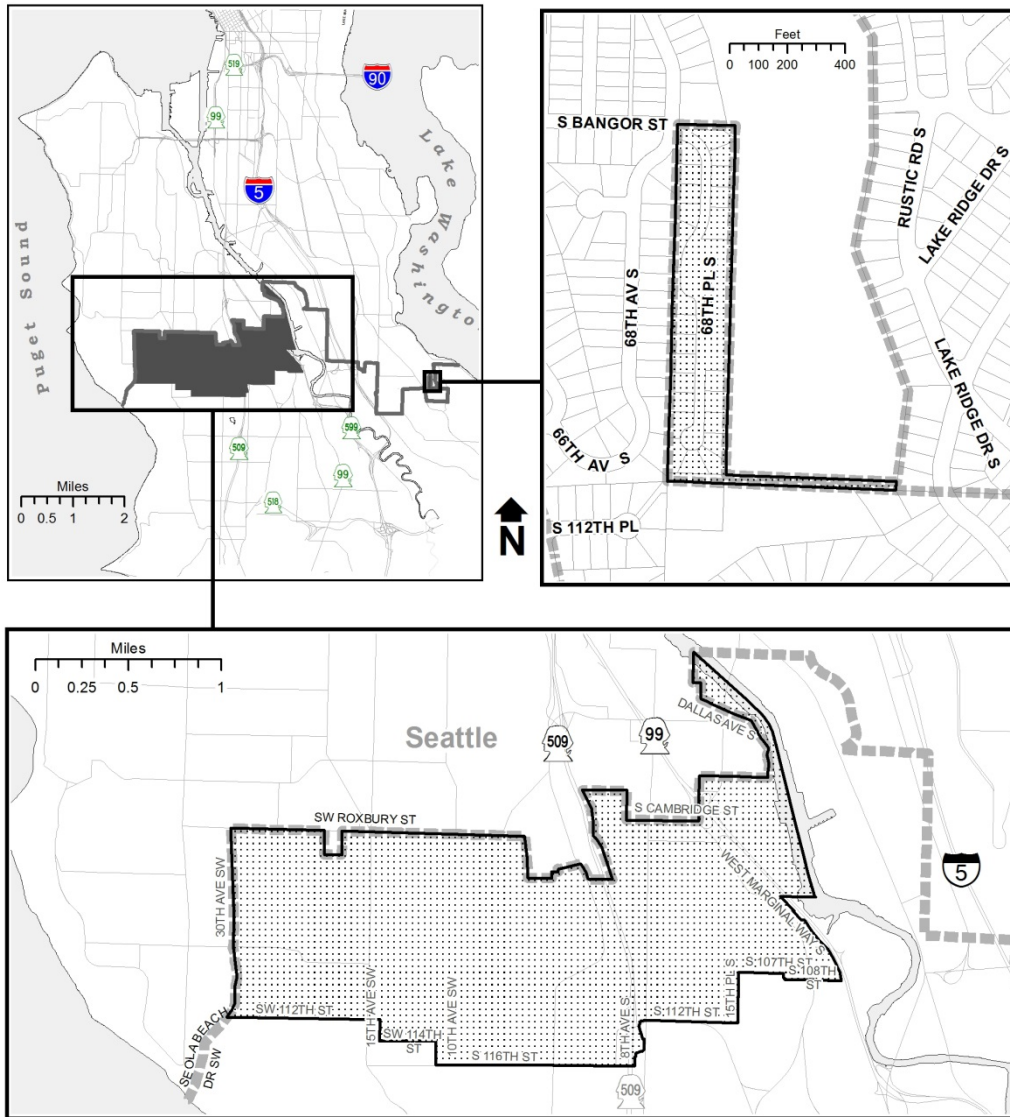
### GOAL

- GSG5 Eliminate pockets of unincorporated land abutting Seattle.



## POLICIES

- GS5.1 Cooperate with adjacent jurisdictions in order to reach equitable and balanced resolutions to jurisdictional boundaries for the remaining unincorporated areas abutting city limits.
- GS5.2 Consider annexing land in cases where:
- The area has access, or can easily be connected, to areas already served by the City
  - The City can readily provide services to the area
  - The boundary changes or interjurisdictional agreements will result in an equitable distribution of revenues and costs related to asset transfer and to the development, maintenance and operation of facilities
- GS5.3 Designate for potential annexation those areas that include City-owned parcels or small sites almost completely surrounded by land currently within Seattle's city limits. Areas meeting these conditions are designated as Potential Annexation Areas as shown in Growth Strategy Figure 4.
- GS5.4 Consider annexation requests by the residents of unincorporated areas as a way for the City to meet regional growth management goals.
- GS5.5 Support annexations of unincorporated areas to surrounding jurisdictions by taking part in public outreach efforts to determine local sentiment regarding annexations, the development of inter-local agreements concerning final annexation plans, and the evaluation of proposals to create new jurisdictions in these areas.

Growth Strategy Figure 4  
**Potential Annexation Areas**



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 Potential Annexation Area  
 Seattle City Limit