TO: Planning Commission and Design Commission  
FROM: Scott Greenberg, Development Services Group Director  
DATE: January 29, 2016  
RE: Joint Commission Meeting #8

Meeting #8 is focused on the draft Comprehensive Plan language. Discussion of affordable housing was originally on the agenda but was removed. After talking with staff from ARCH, we decided to first work with our economic consultant to bring you better information on the economics of providing affordable housing in the Town Center.

The draft Comprehensive Plan policies are provided for your review and discussion. Staff has incorporated edits based on your discussion on January 27th. The topics/policies remaining to be discussed are in Goals 8-14, as well as reviewing the edits shown on Attachment 1.

Getting to a motion on February 3rd is critical to keep this process moving forward. Here is a suggested motion you can propose and vote on:

I move to direct staff to use the draft Comprehensive Plan policies on Attachment 1, as amended tonight for use in consultant work and code writing.

At your last meeting, Commissioners requested several items. Due to the short turnaround for the Feb. 3rd meeting, we were unable to prepare a single map overlaying street types, retail frontages and arterials. Based on your discussion, staff is proposing to eliminate the street types. The retail frontages are shown on Figure TC-2. An enlargement of the arterial map from the Comprehensive Plan awaiting City Council action is attached to this memo.

Commissioners also requested school attendance information. The “GMA Fact Sheet” posted online last April has the information on the last page:  
http://www.mercergov.org/files/GMA_Factsheet_April2015_v3.pdf. According to the Mercer Island School District, there are 149 students attending District schools living in the Town Center, about 3.5% of the total District student enrollment:

- Elementary: 71 students
- Middle: 30 students
- High: 48 students
As a reminder, the City adopted school impact fees last year that are designed to mitigate impact of new projects on the school system.

- Principal Arterials carry the highest volumes of traffic and provide the best mobility in the roadway network. These roads generally have higher speed limits, higher traffic volumes, and limited access to adjacent land uses.

- Secondary Arterials connect with and augment principal arterials and generally have a higher degree of access to adjacent land, lower traffic volumes and lower travel speeds.

- Collector Arterials provide for movement within neighborhoods, connecting to secondary and principal arterials; and typically have low traffic volumes and carry little through traffic.

- Local Streets provide for direct access to abutting properties and carry low volumes of traffic at low travel speeds. Local streets are usually not intended for through traffic.
Town Center (part of the Comprehensive Plan)

MERCER ISLAND TOWN CENTER SHOULD BE...

1. **THE HEART** of Mercer Island, where residents want to shop, eat, play and relax together.
2. **ACCESSIBLE** to people of all ages and abilities.
3. **CONVENIENT** to enter, explore and leave with a variety of transportation modes.
4. **WELL DESIGNED** with public spaces that offer attractive settings for entertainment, relaxation and recreation.
5. **DIVERSE** with a range of uses, building types and styles that acknowledge both the history and future of the island.
6. **LOCAL** providing businesses and services that meet every day needs on the island.
7. **HOME** to a variety of housing options for families, singles and seniors.

GOAL 1: Create a mixed-use Town Center with pedestrian scale and connections.

1.1 A walkable mixed-use core should be located adjacent to the regional transit facility and be of sufficient size and intensity to create a focus for Mercer Island.

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

Goal 2: Create a policy and regulatory structure that will result in a mix-diversity of uses that meet Islanders’ daily needs and help create a vibrant, healthy downtown serving as the City’s business, social, cultural and entertainment center.

2.1 Use a variety of creative approaches to organize various land uses, building types and heights in different portions of the Town Center.
Goal 3: Have a diversity of uses that meet Islanders’ daily needs without traveling off-island.

Goal 43: Have a mixture of building types, styles and ages that reflect the evolution of the Town Center over time, with human-scaled buildings, varied height, set-backs and step-backs and attractive facades.

43.1 Limit building height to buildings taller than two stories may be permitted if unless appropriate public amenities and enhanced design features are provided, including but not limited to:

a. Green buildings;
b. Enhanced street level building design features;
c. Enhanced site design features;
d. Enhanced landscaping;
e. Affordable housing;
f. Enhanced public open space, either on-site or payment in lieu of on-site open space.

43.2 [ALTERNATIVE A] Locate taller buildings on the north end of the Town Center and step down building height through the center to lower heights on the south end, bordering Mercerdale Park. See Figure TC-1

43.2 (ALTERNATIVE B) Locate taller buildings on the north end and periphery of the Town Center and step down building height through the center. See Figure TC-1

43.3 Limit the perceived and actual building height on sloping sites by measuring the number of stories height from on the lowest side of the building.

3.4 Mitigate the “canyon” effect of straight building facades through use of upper floor step-backs, facade articulation, and similar techniques.

43.5 Buildings on larger parcels or with longer frontage should provide more variation of the building face, to allow for more light and create the appearance of a smaller scale, more organic, village-like development pattern. Building mass and long frontages resulting from a single user should be broken up by techniques such as creating a series of smaller buildings (like Island Square), providing pedestrian connections within and through a parcel, and use of different but consistent architectural styles to create smaller building patterns.
Building facades should provide visual interest to pedestrians. Street level windows, minimum building set-backs, on-street entrances, landscaping, and articulated walls should be encouraged.

**Goal 54:** Create an active, pedestrian-friendly retail core.

**54.1** Street-level retail, office, and service uses should reinforce the pedestrian-oriented circulation system.

**4.2 Encourage a variety of space sizes for retail uses.** However, the majority of retail spaces should be appropriate for small retail operators and prevent large (“box store”) development. Long retail street frontages with a single user are discouraged.

**54.3** Designate various street frontages for small-scale primary, secondary and limited retail use as shown on Figure TC-2.

- **a.** Primary Retail frontage streets should be the area where the majority of retail activity is focused. Retail shops and restaurants should be the dominant use, with personal services also encouraged to a more limited extent.

- **b.** Secondary Retail frontage streets should be the area where a moderate amount of retail, restaurant and personal service uses are located. Offices and medical services should be encouraged.

- **c.** Limited Retail frontage streets should have a smaller amount of retail, restaurant and personal service uses, and should encourage the development of live-work units.

**Goal 65:** Encourage a variety of housing forms, including townhomes, condominiums and apartments and live-work units attractive to families, singles, and seniors at a range of price points.

- **a.** Land uses and architectural standards should provide for the development of a variety of housing types, sizes and styles.

- **b.** Encourage development of low-rise multi-family housing in the TCMF subareas of the Town Center.
b. Encourage the development of affordable housing within the Town Center.

The Joint Commission discussed adding a policy to encourage ownership housing in the Town Center. The following two policies from the proposed Comprehensive Plan Housing Element address that goal (with proposed changes shown):

Housing Element Policy 3.9: Use regulatory and financial incentives in the Town Center and PBZ/CÖ districts such as density bonuses, fee waivers, and property tax reductions to encourage residential development for a range of household and ownership types and income levels.

Housing Element Policy 3.10: Provide incentives for first-time and more affordable ownership housing opportunities to meet local needs, such as condominiums.

c. Encourage development of low-rise multi-family housing in the TCMF subareas of the Town Center.

CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Goal 76: Be convenient and accessible to people of all ages and abilities, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users and motorists.

Goal 87: Town Center streets should be viewed as multiple-use facilities, providing for the following needs:
- Access to local businesses and residences
- Routes for through traffic
- Transit routes and stops
- On-street parking
- Pedestrian and bicycle travel
- Sidewalk activities, including limited advertising and merchandising and restaurant seating.
- Occasional special events and outdoor entertainment

7.1 All Town Center streets should provide for safe and convenient motor vehicle and pedestrian access to existing and future development in the Town Center.

7.2 Provide streets that allow older adults and individuals with disabilities to “stroll or roll”, and cross streets safely.

7.3 78th Avenue SE should be the primary pedestrian corridor in the Town Center, with ample sidewalks, landscaping, amenities and open space.

7.4 77th Avenue SE should serve as the primary bicycle corridor connecting the regional bicycle network along I-90 and the planned light rail station with Mercerdale Park and the rest of the Island south of the Town Center.
8.1 Type 1 streets should serve as primary bicycle corridors connecting the regional bicycle network along I-90 and the planned light rail station with Mercerdale Park and the rest of the Island south of the Town Center. 77th Avenue SE is currently the only designated Type 1 street.

8.2 Type 2 streets should serve as neighborhood streets providing on-street parking for adjacent businesses and vehicular movement within the Town Center. Type 2 streets are shown on Figure X.

8.3 Type 3 streets should serve as Town Center’s major pedestrian corridors. Retail, restaurant and similar uses should predominate at the street level. Building design should help establish and emphasize the desired character of the street. Ample sidewalks with landscaping, amenities and open-space should characterize the pedestrian environment. Curb cuts should be minimized. 78th Avenue SE is currently the only designated Type 3 street.

Goal 98: Be pedestrian-friendly, with tree-lined streetscapes, wide sidewalks, storefronts with canopies, and cross-block connections that make it easy to walk around.

98.1 Provide convenient opportunities to walk throughout Town Center.

98.2 Create safe pedestrian routes through larger city blocks.

Goal 109: Have ample parking, both on-street and off, and the ability to park once and walk to a variety of retail shops clustered along major streets.

109.1 Reduce the land area devoted to parking by encouraging structured and underground parking. If open-air, parking lots should be behind buildings.

109.2 On-street parking should be located to be convenient to merchants.

109.3 Encourage improved access to transit, bicycle, pedestrian and shared parking facilities to reduce trip generation and provide transportation alternatives, particularly for secondary trips once users reach the Town Center.
409.4 Off-street parking should be well-lit, convenient and well-signed so that drivers can easily find and use parking.

409.5 Additional commuter parking is needed to serve Mercer Island residents.

Goal 1110: Prioritize transportation investments in the Town Center that promote mixed-use and compact development and provide multi-modal access to regional transit facilities.

Goal 1211: Promote the development of pedestrian linkages between public and private development and transit in the Town Center District.

PUBLIC REALM

Goal 1312: Have inviting outdoor spaces with seating, greenery, water features, and art that offer settings for outdoor entertainment and special events as well as for quiet contemplation.

1312.1 Outdoor public spaces of various sizes in Town Center are important and should be encouraged.

1312.2 Encourage the provision of on-site open space in private developments but allow for in-lieu contribution towards the cost of a more substantial City-constructed Town Center public amenity project.

1312.3 Investigate potential locations and funding sources for the development (and acquisition if needed) of a significant public open space that can function as an anchor for the Town Center’s character and redevelopment. Identified “opportunity sites” are shown in Figure XTC-3 and described below. These opportunity sites should not preclude the identification of other sites, should new opportunities or circumstances arise.

Add map showing opportunity sites

Figure XTC-3: Possible locations for significant public open space

a. Site 1: The public right of way on SE 27th Street along the large curve located just south of Starbucks, with potential for the additional acquisition of the triangular parcel immediately to the South. Under this proposal, the curved roadway would be eliminated and replaced with a four-way intersection of 76th Avenue SE and SE 27th Street and public plaza in the former curved roadway. With the optional acquisition of the property to the south, the plaza could be expanded to a size adequate for a public “square” and gathering place. This option would require acquisition of the property to the south of SE 27th Street at fair market value consistent with applicable law and a re-routing of traffic along 76th Avenue SE and SE 27th Street, including right of way improvements to create a four-way intersection. The development of this plaza would need to be done in coordination with Starbucks as it would impact access to their property. It is believed that the Starbucks drive-thru can be retained. One additional
benefit from this proposal is traffic calming and improved pedestrian crossings along SE 27th Street.

b. Site 2: The property located on the south side of SE 27th Street, between 77th and 78th Avenues SE, where a Walgreens store is currently located. This option would require acquisition of the property at fair market value consistent with applicable law, or a development agreement and/or public private partnership aimed at creating both public open space and retail/restaurant space.

c. Site 3: The right of way on 78th Avenue SE north of SE 27th Street, portions of Sunset Highway and a portion of the park space immediately to its north. This concept would create a multi-function outdoor event space able to accommodate uses such as the farmers market, art fairs and other public events. This area is already used for events such as Art Uncorked, but is underutilized. The proposal could include a permanent structure in Aubrey Davis Park, such as a pergola. This option would require permanent or temporary closure of the right of way on 78th Avenue SE as well as an agreement with the State Department of Transportation regarding placement of a permanent structure within Aubrey Davis Park (because the Park is in the I-90 right of way).

SUSTAINABILITY

GOAL 1413: Town Center buildings should meet a high standard of energy efficiency and sustainable construction practices as well as exhibiting other innovative green features, above and beyond what is required by the existing Construction Code.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GOAL 1514: Continue to encourage vitality and growth through the support of economic development activities on Mercer Island.

1514.1 Establish the Town Center as an active and attractive commercial node, including the use of gateways, wayfinding and signage, and links to transit.

1514.2 Maintain a diversity of downtown land use designations.

1514.3 Support economic growth that accommodates the required employment growth target of 1,228 new jobs from 2006-2035, with recognition of regional growth targets, by maintaining adequate commercial zoning capacity, infrastructure, and supportive economic development policies.

1514.4 Investigate formation of a business improvement area (BIA), or other mechanism authorized by state law, to help promote Island businesses, to support Town Center activities, and to finance improvements and amenities. Identify a staff person who will help coordinate economic development activities.

1514.5 Support public and private investment in existing properties, infrastructure, and marketing to help maintain longstanding businesses and attract new ones.
Create a healthy economic environment where Town Center businesses can serve the needs of Mercer Island residents as well as draw upon broader retail and commercial market areas.