



## City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

Xio Alvarez and Matt Hutchins, Co-Chairs  
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

### SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, January 22, 2026

Approved Meeting Minutes

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**Commissioners Present:** Xio Alvarez, Cecelia Black, McCaela Daffern, Andrew Dannenberg, Dylan Glosecki, Matt Hutchins, Julia Jannon-Shields, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Dylan Stevenson, Margaret Szeles, Kelabe Tewolde

**Commissioners Absent:** Rebecca Brunn, Radhika Nair, Dhyana Quintanar, Monika Sharma, Nick Whipple

**Commission Staff:** Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Olivia Baker, Policy Analyst; Robin Magonegil, Commission Coordinator

*Seattle Planning Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript and represent key points and the basis of discussion.*

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Referenced Documents discussed at the meeting can be viewed here:

<https://www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/meetings>

#### Chair's Report & Minutes Approval

Co-Chair Matt Hutchins called the meeting to order at 7:34 am. Co-Chair Hutchins offered the following land acknowledgement:

*'As we begin our meeting, we respectfully acknowledge that our meeting today is taking place on occupied Coast Salish land. We pay respect to Coast Salish Elders past and present and extend that respect to their descendants and to all Indigenous people. To acknowledge this land is to recognize the history of physical and cultural genocide and settler colonialism, which continues to displace Indigenous people today. It is to also recognize these lands, waters, and their significance for the resilient and wise peoples who continue to thrive in this region despite the consequences of displacement and broken treaties. Those who hold settler privilege in this city must work towards supporting the Coast Salish people and all Indigenous people using the various forms of wealth and privilege they reap due to it.'*

Co-Chair Hutchins noted that this meeting is a hybrid meeting with some Commissioners and staff participating remotely while other Commissioners and staff are participating in the Boards and Commissions Room at Seattle City Hall. He asked fellow Commissioners to review the Color Brave

Space norms and asked for volunteers to select one or more of the norms to read aloud. He suggested to Commissioners that they collectively agree to abide by these norms.

### **Announcements and Approval of the Meeting Minutes**

Vanessa Murdock, Seattle Planning Commission Executive Director, announced several upcoming Commission meetings and reviewed the format of this meeting.

**ACTION: Commissioner Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson moved to approve the January 8, 2026 meeting minutes. Commissioner Andy Dannenberg seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.**

### **Public Comment**

Ms. Murdock noted that public comment may be provided in person at City Hall, submitted in writing via email at least eight hours before the meeting, or offered on the hybrid meeting platform MS Teams. Public comment must be able to be given in two minutes or less.

There was no public comment.

### **Discussion: Draft Downtown Regional Center Plan**

Ms. Murdock stated that the public comment deadline for the Draft Downtown Regional Center Plan has been extended to February 15. She stated that Commissioners will have an opportunity to provide comments on the draft plan at the next Housing and Neighborhoods Committee meeting on February 5<sup>th</sup>. She encouraged Commissioners to review the draft plan and come prepared with any comments.

Seattle Planning Commission staff provided an overview of the Plan's five themes, including highlighting relevant goals and policies within each theme of interest to the Commission.

### **Downtown is Home**

"As the heart of the City, Downtown is home to a growing population. Yet, the experiences, services, and housing that are currently provided are not supportive of people at all stages of their lives. This theme focuses on a series of goals, policy directions, and actions designed to create a thriving, inclusive, and accessible urban core."

#### Theme Metrics:

- Increase registered childcare facilities
- Increase total housing units
- Increase number of first-time home buyers
- Decrease number of cost burdened households
- Increase playgrounds downtown.

### **Goal DH 1 Add at least 13,500 new housing units across Downtown**

DH 1.1 Regularly review, simplify, and optimize permitting regulations and processes that affect Downtown residential development

DH 1.2 Prioritize residential development in the Downtown Core

- *Commissioner comment: One action item under this policy is to allow more housing types with a focus on family-friendly housing and affordability along Third Avenue. Commissioners expressed concern about Third Avenue's readiness for more housing.*

DH 1.3 Increase flexibility in new commercial building designs to plan ahead for future conversions to residential use

- *Commissioner comment: Ensure this policy does not add to construction costs to further financially burden new construction.*

DH 1.6 Explore additional programs or actions that provide incentives for office-to-income-restricted residential conversion proposals, in addition to the State sales tax exemption.

DH 1.7 Encourage the conversion of existing downtown buildings to allow for a wider variety of uses, with an emphasis on securing long-term income-restricted housing

**Goal DH 2 Preserve and expand housing that is accessible to a range of incomes**

DH 2.1 Protect low-income renters from increased risk of displacement by focusing on those with incomes at or below 50% of the area medium income (AMI)

DH 2.2 Increase opportunities and capacity for tenants to move into home ownership

DH 2.3 Help ensure adequate funding for long-term income-restricted housing

**Goal DH 3 Evolve Downtown neighborhoods to better meet the diverse needs of all residents and families**

DH 3.1 Increase housing that supports residents in all different life stages (family-friendly housing, live-work housing, accessible senior housing)

DH 3.2 Simplify the housing production process thereby reducing upfront development costs

- *Commissioner comment: Policy is too vague and may be better placed in DH 1*

DH 3.3 Support new models of income-restricted and market-rate homeownership (community land trusts, cooperative or shared equity models, and co-housing)

DH 3.4 Expand family-focused services and experiences, particularly around housing and transit

DH 3.5 Encourage childcare facilities, public restrooms, indoor open play spaces, or children-focused educational programs as part of incentives programs

### High level comments:

- *The plan should explicitly connect Downtown housing growth to reducing regional commute distances. Positioning Downtown housing as a regional commute-reduction strategy strengthens the case for both residential growth and transportation investment. (DH 1 and tied to FW 4)*
- *Many policies mention family and child-focused residential amenities, which are needed, but Downtown also requires policy that encourages more general/all ages residential amenities and access to everyday goods and services for people of all ages. Can needed amenities be incentivized/added to existing vacant spaces?*
- *Plan omits important details about how to make Downtown more livable. Where are nearest grocery stores, schools, and recreational facilities/gyms? Does existing transit provide easy access to these amenities?*
- *Public safety is covered in the Safe and Welcoming theme but is related to adding residents Downtown. If public safety is not addressed, developers will not be interested in projects along Third Avenue regardless of incentives.*

### **Make Downtown Safe and Welcoming**

“Celebrate Downtown’s culture and history and invest in public spaces that support diverse needs.”

#### Theme Metrics:

- Increase outdoor space for youth
- Increase accessibility
- Increase park access
- Decrease violent crime

### **Goal SW1 Make Downtown safe for everyone, all hours of the day**

SW 1.1 Ensure outdoor spaces are accessible, well lit, comfortable and clean

- *Commissioner comment: Increase bike safety in downtown access.*
- *Commissioner comment: Clarify that this goal includes an effort to disrupt and discourage anti-social behavior common along sidewalk near 12th and Jackson.*

SW 1.2 Create a comfortable and convenient transit experience for everyone, including while waiting for buses and making transfers

- *Commissioner comment: Expand to include commitments to seamless transfers between ferry, rail, bus, bike, and walking modes.*

SW1.3 Maintain public spaces through dedicated resources and continued partnerships with local communities and businesses, to reduce the burden of public space maintenance on historically underinvested communities

- *Commissioner comment: Appreciate the more equitable distribution of needed investment.*

SW 1.4 Enhance community policing services and alternative response programs

- *Commissioner comment: Enable all Seattle residents to help those in need and be part of solution.*

**Goal SW2 Make Downtown welcoming and inclusive, treating all with respect and dignity**

SW 2.1 Partner with Indigenous communities to reflect their histories and futures in Downtown land use, signage, and wayfinding systems

- *Commissioner comment: Suggest stronger language— such as 'commit to partnering and listening to.'*

SW 2.2 Plan for additional primary and urgent healthcare facilities to provide local support to Downtown residents

- *Commissioner comment: Important. Reduce building use restrictions to enable more services and job opportunities Downtown in order to support increasing residents Downtown in ways beyond simply adding housing. 15 minute neighborhood concept.*

**Goal SW3 Wrap Downtown in a green embrace**

SW 3.2 Improve underpass connections within the Chinatown-International District

SW 3.4 Further adapt land use regulations to support the activation of ground floors, storefronts, and landscaping and loading adjacent to the waterfront along Alaskan Way

- *Commissioner comment: Expand to include commitments to seamless transfers between ferry, rail, bus, bike, and walking modes.*

**Goal SW4 Increase parks, plazas, and greenspaces as Downtown grows**

SW 4.1 Expand access to park space in areas with gaps, and in communities that were disproportionately affected by past planning actions

- *Commissioner comment: Appreciate intent to repair past harms and neglect.*

SW 4.4 Seek opportunities to repurpose or activate the right of way for recreational opportunities

- *Commissioner comment: Yes! See SPC Repurpose the Right-of-Way issue brief.*
- *Commissioner comment: Reallocate space on streets to put people first.*
- *Commissioner comment: Replace "seek opportunities" with "pursue" or "aggressively pursue."*

SW 4.5 Continue supporting community-led conversations and planning efforts to shape open spaces in ways that reflect local needs, with a focus on ecological resilience and access to fresh, healthy food.

- *Commissioner comment: Strengthen verb – "commit to supporting...."*

**Goal SW5 Provide a variety of recreational experiences throughout the year for Downtown residents and visitors**

**Goal SW6 Reveal, celebrate and protect Downtown's history and culture**

SW 5.3 Complete planned improvements to Downtown public spaces

- *Commissioner comment: Include wayfinding.*

**Make Use of Every Square Foot**

"Vibrancy and activity are core to what draws people Downtown. In the post-pandemic context, new ways to effectively reuse space Downtown are required. Bold actions and proactive thinking can help to foster economic growth, equitable development, and vibrant cultural experiences. The goals within this theme... aim to transform Downtown into a thriving urban center that creates economic opportunity for all."

Theme Metrics

- Increase number of jobs
- Increase small businesses
- Decrease vacant commercial and office space

**Goal SF 1 Fill Downtown spaces with a mix of commercial uses**

SF 1.1 Adapt underutilized Downtown office spaces and upper floors to new uses

SF 1.2 Leverage vacant or underutilized publicly-owned properties for redevelopment with community benefits

SF 1.3 Encourage the transformation of privately-owned vacant land into uses that contribute to Downtown's growth

**Goal SF 2 Focus, preserve, and reposition retail destinations to align with today's experience-based market**

SF 2.1 Protect and enhance Downtown's unique retail destinations

**Goal SF 3 Support the creation and growth of at least 60,000 new jobs in Downtown**

SF 3.4 Provide technical assistance and support to pop-up businesses, new small businesses, and legacy businesses

SF 3.5 Align City regulations to support new retail trends, successful pilot programs, and the strength of existing commercial areas

**Goal SF 4 Enhance the reliability and quality of downtown facilities and utilities to support future development**

SF 4.3 Consolidate and right-size Downtown parking

**Goal SF5 Ensure economic growth is equitable and aligned with community goals**

SF 5.1 Protect existing businesses and at-risk communities from displacement, particularly when improvements are being made

**Goal SF 6 Attract, grow, and make the creative industries visible Downtown**

SF 6.1 Increase events and activities in public and private spaces near cultural hubs in each neighborhood to make these areas more vibrant, welcoming, and connected to the community

SF 6.3 Make it easier to participate in the Downtown creative economy

- *Commissioner comment: Needs more robust solutions for keeping artists and cultural spaces embedded Downtown.*

**High level comments:**

- *Policies under the broader goal of attracting and growing creative industries, including SF 6.1, place strong emphasis on cultural consumption. What is missing is a strong parallel focus on cultural production and long-term sustainability of culture and the arts. The plan does not include clear actions for requirements or incentives for artist studios, fabrication/makers space, or long-term stewardship by cultural producers. Artists are primarily positioned as contributors to public space rather than as workers who need affordable, stable places to operate, aside from one action under SF 6.3. Without dedicated production space, artists may be commissioned temporarily to support Downtown activation while being displaced permanently. Culture becomes something that is displayed Downtown rather than sustained.*
- *Policies SF 1.1 and 3.5 focus on reuse of office space and aligning city regulations with new retail trends and pilot programs. These could both be strengthened by actions or a new policy to explicitly position Downtown as a testbed for regional economic transitions. Without explicit testbed framing, many of the policies read as defensive responses to Downtown's challenges. Framing as opportunities for testing and pilot programs shifts the frame as intentional leadership tools.*

**Steward our Home for the Next Seven Generations**

"Foster long term stewardship of Downtown's urban ecology and natural environment."

**Theme Metrics:**

- Increase access to the waterfront
- Increase street trees
- Decrease fossil fuels

## **Goal SG 1 Connect people to nature through views, experiences, and physical connections**

- SG 1.2 Collaborate with representatives of Tribal Nations, urban Indian communities, and local non-profits to deepen storytelling and wayfinding that honor the cultural and ecological significance of water
- SG 1.3 Facilitate waterfront access for Indigenous communities and honor treaty rights and cultural practices
- SG 1.4 Communicate the value of water resources, urban habitat, tree canopy, and ecological systems that uniquely reinforce Downtown's slopes, green spaces, and waterfront conditions

## **Goal SG 2 Care for Downtown's water, land, and natural resources**

- SG 2.1 Manage stormwater responsibly by cleaning and minimizing run-off into Puget Sound and reducing the strain on Downtown's combined sewer overflow facilities
- SG 2.2 Ensure new development is sustainable and responsive to Downtown's waterfront environment
- SG 2.4 Protect and expand Downtown's tree canopy
- SG 2.5 Support policies that protect Puget Sound as an essential resource for the food systems, cultures, and economies of Tribal Nations

## **Goal SG 3 Reduce Downtown's reliance on fossil fuels**

- SG 3.1 Explore and expand local power generation/district energy approaches and employ a low-pollution neighborhood model
  - *Commissioner comment: Should be strengthened to reflect the long-standing conversation around low-pollution neighborhoods. Downtown is the most viable place to implement this model at scale. Moving from exploration to clearer commitments around local power generation, district energy, and low-pollution neighborhood implementation would better reflect Downtown's potential as a climate demonstration district.*
- SG 3.2 Achieve and maintain fully electrified public sector vehicle and vessel fleets
- SG 3.3 Expand sustainable building practices, including the promotion of adaptive reuse
- SG 3.4 Ensure renovated and new construction buildings achieve high environmental and emissions standards

## **Goal SG 4 Ensure Downtown is resilient to natural disasters and climate change**

- SG 4.1 Address Chinatown-International District and Pioneer Square's high concentration of unreinforced masonry (URM) buildings in need of seismic retrofits

SG 4.2 Continue supporting resilient infrastructure and facilities that provide assistance across Downtown neighborhoods before, during, and after emergencies and severe weather events

SG 4.4 Protect and expand access to healthy food, food cultivation, harvesting, and sharing

### **Find Our Way**

"Downtown is easily navigable for children, older adults, and people with disabilities through thoughtful amenities like seating, hill climb assists, and shade. Major nodes serve as dynamic, inclusive hubs that spark broader transformation across Downtown."

Theme Metrics:

- Increase walk-bike-transit mode share
- Decrease greenhouse gas emissions from vehicle trips
- Decrease traffic-related injuries
- Decrease drive mode share

### **Goal FW 1 Rethink and re-allocate space on streets to put people first**

FW 1.1 Pursue street transformations to create more space for walking, rolling, biking, transit, and lingering or gathering

- *Commissioner comment: Support policies that reallocate space on streets to put people first.*
- *Commissioner comment: Curious to explore/discuss the role of increased bike safety in Downtown access. With the rise of e-bikes and scooters on the roads or on sidewalks, protected and separate (from cars and pedestrians) facilities seem like they should be considered as well. Suggested protection should encompass more than just paint and include physical separations.*

FW 1.3 Advance a mix of seasonal, weekend, and in some cases, permanent restrictions for personal vehicle traffic to make areas of Downtown car-free or "car-lite"

FW 1.4 When providing maintenance, update the street to reflect right-of-way allocation needs that support adjacent land uses and planned transportation networks

FW 1.5 Update design standards to better support people streets and public spaces that enhance community health and improve safety

### **Goal FW 2 Make traveling through Downtown a safe and comfortable experience**

FW 2.1 Prioritize pedestrian safety and visibility at crossings throughout Downtown

FW 2.2 Apply strategies to reduce collisions and vehicle speeding in pedestrian-rich Downtown neighborhoods

**Goal FW 3 Celebrate Downtown’s unique cultures and histories – especially its Indigenous population – throughout its transportation system and public spaces**

FW 3.1 Reflect Indigenous art, culture, language, and gathering spaces throughout Downtown’s streets and public spaces, especially on the shoreline, to honor Native cultures and our deep relationship with the water

FW 3.3 Use transportation and public space investments to help repair past and current harms to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) groups, in concert with Seattle’s transportation equity strategy

**Goal FW 4 Create a sustainable and resilient Downtown transportation system**

FW 4.1 Deliver projects and operate the transportation system to advance our climate goals

FW 4.2 Make frequent service corridors the backbone of Downtown’s surface transit network (buses, bus rapid transit, and streetcar)

- *Commissioner comment: Are there existing public transit systems that connect to grocery stores, schools, etc.? Would the commute be reasonable and support living in Downtown? Or would transit-connected necessities, like grocery stores and schools, just encourage people to live closer to South Lake Union or the Central District?*

FW 4.3 Provide programmatic support to promote clean, sustainable travel options

FW 4.4 Explore innovative strategies to foster neighborhood vitality and improved community health

FW 4.5 Advance multimodal access to create connected, people-centered places that reflect community visions and support equitable, vibrant growth

**Goal FW 5 Design Downtown streets to support innovation and a thriving local economy**

FW 5.1 Pair local land uses with dynamic transportation needs

FW 5.2 Support economic vitality through the movement of goods and services on our city streets

FW 5.3 Plan for and support dedicated spaces that accommodate freight and logistics activities

**Goal FW 6 Use streets to help people navigate and find their way through a legible Downtown**

FW 6.1 Celebrate Downtown Seattle’s unique geography.

- *Commissioner comment: Improving hill climb wayfinding and expanding hill climb opportunities: hill climbs are a game changer for navigating downtown but between Metro and SDOT, hill climb maps are either outdated or not available online.*

## FW 6.2 Design and maintain Downtown streets to be safe and accessible for people of all ages and abilities

Ms. Murdock provided the following summary of general comments from Commissioners:

- Overall, the Downtown Regional Center Plan lays out a vision that I felt like was missing in the Comprehensive Plan with policy recommendations that are innovative, include diverse communities, and plan for complete communities for all ages.
- Especially excited to see accessibility and people with disabilities included beginning with recommendations for meeting the unhoused communities' needs with alternative response programs.
- When goals are identified as near-term, the associated actions should reflect a higher level of readiness. Suggest a comb through of the policies and actions to double check the feasibility of near-term actions. This will be important to improve the credibility and effectiveness of the plan overall.

### Commission Discussion

- Commissioners asked how the draft plan considers meeting the needs of those who are unhoused and need emergency services. Commissioners asked what the term "safe and welcoming" means for those who are struggling to find a place to sleep each night. This plan should represent an opportunity to match Downtown housing capacity with a human services strategy. Ms. Murdock stated that the Commission has not weighed in on this specific subject. There are several policies in the Safe and Welcoming theme to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- Commissioners expressed concern that the draft plan is not realistic if many Downtown development projects are not economically feasible.
- Commissioners noted that several comments encouraged strengthening the policy language, discouraging use of words like "explore" or "consider." Commissioners recommended starting the policy statement with the proposed action, for example "repurpose the right-of-way."
- Commissioners expressed concern that the draft plan includes language about Downtown accommodating more families and children but does not mention anything about schools.
- Commissioners recognized that our current economic climate is challenging for housing and noted that this is a twenty-year plan. Hopefully economic conditions for Downtown development will improve in the next three to five years. Commissioners noted that the draft plan does not seem to address short-term solutions to the specific challenges in areas such as 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and the area around 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Jackson.
- Commissioners noted the need for balance between short-term actions and long-term outcomes. Achieving those outcomes must start with creating places that people want to be. Olivia Baker, Seattle Planning Commission staff, recognized that the draft plan includes an implementation table showing short-term, mid-term, and long-term actions, but noted that the table does not include timeframes for those actions.
- Commissioners noted that Downtown is essentially in transition. Jobs have historically been the core of Downtown, but the nature of work has changed. Commissioners stated that this plan is oriented toward creating a high-rise residential neighborhood. On one hand, it is showing that economic conditions make development challenging, but on the other hand, the plan is showing

that the Downtown population has increased significantly. There is also a discontinuity in the demographics of Downtown, including residents that have high incomes and those who have low incomes or no income. The need for emergency housing Downtown is very significant.

Commissioners stated that this plan needs to embrace how Downtown must evolve.

- Commissioners noted that the draft plan addresses issues that will require the involvement of departments other than the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD). Ms. Murdock stated that the draft Downtown plan does include mentions of coordinating with other plans. Commissioners stated that this type of subarea plan, while written by OPCD, is prepared on behalf of all departments. These plans are typically a multi-department endeavor and do not only set policy direction for one department.
- Commissioners stated that the draft plan appears to be more oriented toward those who have the means to live Downtown. The plan should include more content about how to provide housing, emergency shelter, and services for low-income residents.
- Commissioners stated that the Capitol Hill neighborhood has lost a lot of performing arts spaces because they became unaffordable. There are several major performance spaces Downtown. Artists will eventually leave a community if it does not make economic sense to stay. Many artists cannot afford to live in the city.

**The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 am.**

#### **Resources**

[Draft Downtown Regional Center Plan](#)

[Office of Planning and Community Development Downtown Regional Center Plan website](#)