

City Council Approved Talking Points on SB 5466

Seeking changes to SB 5466 (Transit-Oriented Development)

- Mercer Island is generally supportive of higher density housing with affordability requirements around existing and future high-capacity transit. Concentrating growth around transit leverages the region's billions of dollars of investment in transportation infrastructure to improve mobility and minimize impacts on the environment.
- Mercer Island believes this bill is in line with the goals of Puget Sound Regional Council's VISION 2050. VISION 2050 incorporates a strong focus on locating growth near current and future high-capacity transit facilities, with a goal for 65% of the region's population growth and 75% of the region's employment growth to be in regional growth centers and areas within walking distance of high-capacity transit.
- Mercer Island is seeking several changes to this bill before we can fully endorse and support this bill. The bill should include increased flexibility on the placement of the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) area and removal of restrictions on requiring parking.
- The City is concerned with the inclusion of "Frequent Bus Stops" as a trigger for a TOD area. While it is not anticipated that this would affect Mercer Island, it is bad policy to use a specific bus frequency as a sole measure for increasing development capacity.

Preserve ability of cities to regulate parking

- The bill should remove the preemption of city's ability to regulate parking.
- Even near high-capacity transit, most Mercer Island households will continue to own and operate cars. The City must be able to ensure new development provides enough off-street parking.
- Otherwise, Mercer Island will be left with an expensive problem to solve -- a parking shortage, borne by regulatory overreach that fails to acknowledge the unique circumstances of each community.
- Mercer Island is currently undergoing a town center parking study that intends to optimize the management and regulation of existing and future parking. This data-driven approach, tailored to the unique needs of the island, is better suited to addressing the problem of out-sized parking requirements.

Increased flexibility on the placement of the TOD area

- The new allowance for FAR averaging is an important addition providing much needed flexibility within the designated station areas/hubs.
- The bill should provide cities the flexibility to apply the additional density in a configuration other than a circle or walkshed centered on a station. Geographic constraints, infrastructure capacity and other contextual factors should be considered in establishing the boundaries for station areas and hubs. For example, a large portion of the ¼ mile circle around Mercer Island's station falls in Lake Washington.
 - The most recent amended bill attempted to address this issue, but we believe further clarification is needed. Current text says a city can "adopt a station hub variance, but only after consultation with and approval by WSDOT" (Section 5, subsection 30 and 31). "Variance" is not defined, neither is the criteria WSDOT would use to make a decision on a variance application.

- **We would ask for clarification of the language as follows** “A city planning under RCW 36.70A.040 may adopt a station area variance, but only after consultation with and approval by the WSDOT. A station area variance is used to approve an alternate station area and/or station hub boundaries. The modified station area and station hub must contain at least the same development capacity as the development capacity contained within the area that is a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile walking distance from the transit station and $\frac{1}{4}$ mile walking distance from the station, respectively. However, the station area and station hub may be configured to address geographic constraints, infrastructure capacity limitations, and other local considerations to the extent that no portion of the station area is located more than 1 mile from the transit station.
- Specific to Mercer Island, we would prefer the TOD area to be focused within the existing Town Center and multifamily zones rather than a broad circle around the light rail station. This change would not reduce the intended increase in development capacity, rather it would focus it in the area already served by the infrastructure and amenities necessary for higher density development.