
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

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PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: Planning Commission

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DATE: November 2, 2022

SUBJECT: Comprehensive Plan Update
Transportation Element – Third Draft

Attachments A. Third Draft - Transportation Element

PURPOSE

To receive the Planning Commission’s response to comments on the third draft of the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan (see Attachment A). Once the Planning Commission has provided input on the third draft, this round of review of the element will conclude. The Planning Commission will have a few more touches on the Transportation Element, as spelled out in the next steps below.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The public may submit written comments on the Transportation Element to comp.plan@mercerisland.gov. Public comments will be provided to the Planning Commission at its November meeting. Please visit the [Comprehensive Plan update project website](#) for more information about the update process.

BACKGROUND

The Planning Commission was briefed on the first draft of the Transportation Element on July 27. The Commission provided written comments on the first draft following the meeting. The comments on the first draft and staff responses were provided to the Planning Commission with a second draft of the Transportation Element at their September 28, 2022, meeting. The Planning Commission provided comments on the second draft resulting in the attached third draft.

FEEDBACK REQUESTED

The Planning Commission requested staff draft several alternatives for consideration at the next meeting. Staff will walk the Planning Commission through those alternatives at the November meeting. The Planning Commission can make comments on each alternative while going through the alternatives. Please review the alternatives listed below in advance to be prepared to provide comments at the meeting.

Transportation Policy 2.3, pg. 4

Staff was asked to revise Transportation Policy 3.1 to remove the phrase “for all communities”. In response, staff has prepared three alternatives for the Planning Commission to consider. The difference between the three alternatives is highlighted in yellow below. The Planning Commission also asked staff to draft a policy to address equity in transportation planning, which will be addressed in the next section (policies 4.8 & 4.9).

Staff Proposed Alternative:

Encourage partnerships with nonprofit providers and the private sector in the provision and operation of the transportation system.

Existing Policy 2.3:

Pursue opportunities for private sector participation in the provision, operation and maintenance of the transportation system.

Decision Point: The Planning Commission can (1) approve the staff alternative; (2) propose changes to the wording of the staff proposed alternative; or (3) make no change. No change would keep the policy as established in the currently adopted Transportation Element.

Transportation Policy 3.1, pg. 4

Staff was asked to revise Transportation Policy 3.1 to remove the phrase “for all communities”. The Planning Commission also asked staff to draft a policy to address equity in transportation planning. In response, staff has prepared three alternatives for the Planning Commission to consider. The difference between the three alternatives is highlighted in yellow below.

Staff Proposed Alternative:

Alt 1: Use design, construction and maintenance methods, and low impact development strategies to minimize negative health and environmental impacts related to water quality, noise, and pollution.

Alt 2: Use design, construction and maintenance methods, and low impact development strategies to minimize negative health and environmental impacts related to water quality, noise, and pollution **for all communities.**

Alt 3: Use design, construction and maintenance methods, and low impact development strategies to minimize negative health and environmental impacts related to water quality, noise, and pollution **for all communities, especially those that have been disproportionately affected by transportation decisions.**

Existing Policy 3.1:

Use design, construction and maintenance methods, and low impact development strategies to minimize negative impacts related to water quality, noise, and neighborhood impacts.

Decision Point: The Planning Commission can (1) approve the staff alternative 1, 2, or 3; (2) propose changes to the wording of a staff proposed alternative; or (3) make no change. No change would keep the policy as established in the currently adopted Transportation Element.

Transportation Policy 4.8 and 4.9, pg. 5

When discussing Policy 3.1, the Planning Commission asked for a draft policy addressing equity in transportation planning. Staff drafted policies 4.8 and 4.9 that address equity for the Planning Commission to consider. The Planning Commission can also consider moving goal 4 and its associated policies to the beginning of the Goals and Policies section (Goal 1).

Proposed Policies 4.8 and 4.9:

- 4.8 Implement transportation programs and projects that address the needs of and promote access to opportunity for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, people with low or no incomes, and people with special transportation needs, while preventing and mitigating displacement of these groups.
- 4.9 Address the needs of people who do not drive, either by choice or circumstances (e.g., elderly, teens, low-income, and persons with disabilities), in the development of transportation programs and projects.

Decision Point: The Planning Commission can (1) approve policies 4.8 and 4.9 as drafted; (2) propose changes to the wording of the staff proposed alternative; or (3) make no change. The no change option is a decision to not add a new policy to the Transportation Element. The Planning Commission can also decide whether they would prefer moving goal 4 and its associated policies to the beginning of the goal and policy section to add emphasis to the topics covered there. Please note, the goals and policies are numbered for organization only, the numbering and order of goals and policies does not imply importance.

Transportation Policy 3.3, pg. 4

Goal 3 addresses environmental impacts from transportation infrastructure. At the September meeting, Commissioner Boatsman proposed an addition to transportation policy 3.3 to add direction to encourage tree planting in the unused portion of rights of way. The alternative below was prepared to address that proposal.

Alternative:

Construct transportation improvements with sensitivity to existing trees and vegetation.
Encourage programs that plant trees in unused portions of public rights-of-way.

Existing Policy 3.3:

Construct transportation improvements with sensitivity to existing trees and vegetation.

Staff Commentary: The proposed addition to Policy 3.3 is not recommended. The proposed amendment is beyond the scope of work for updating the Transportation Element. The scope of work is specifically targeted at addressing the amendments required by the Growth Management Act (GMA) and recent amendments of the King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs). The proposed additional policy language is directed at creating new policy direction that is not required by GMA, addressing recent changes to the CPPs, or otherwise included in the Comprehensive Plan update scope of work approved by the City Council with [Resolution 1621](#).

Decision Point: The Planning Commission can (1) approve the alternative; (2) propose changes to the wording of the staff proposed alternative; or (3) make no change. No change would keep the policy as established in the currently adopted Transportation Element.

Transportation Policy 7.4, pg. 7

Staff was asked to revise Transportation Policy 7.9 to clarify the meaning of the policy. Policy 7.9 is numbered 7.8 in the existing Transportation Element. This policy is directed at creating a transportation system with direct and safe connections. The staff proposed alternative would revert Policy 7.9 to the original text and create a new Policy 7.4.

Staff Proposed Alternative, New Policy 7.4:

Emphasize transportation network connectivity to minimize travel distances and emergency response times by avoiding street closures.

Existing Policy 7.8:

Strive to create a complete, connected active transportation system allowing direct and safe access for active transportation modes.

Decision Point: The Planning Commission can (1) approve the staff alternative; (2) propose changes to the wording of the staff proposed alternative; or (3) make no change. No change would keep the policy as established in the currently adopted Transportation Element.

New Transportation Policy 12.X, pg. 10

Staff was asked to draft a new transportation policy under Goal 12 to add policy direction to study opportunities to increase “last mile” solutions near transit. A Planning Commissioner comment also suggested that this could include electric bike infrastructure.

Proposed New Policy to Address Comment:

Alt 1: Study opportunities to expand electric bicycle facilities that serve the Town Center, light rail station, and park and ride.

Alt 2: Study opportunities to provide innovative last-mile solutions serving the Town Center, light rail station, and park and ride. [note: this would be an additional policy that would be added under Goal 4]

Decision Point: The Planning Commission can (1) approve alternative 1 or 2 as drafted; (2) propose changes to the wording of the preferred policy; or (3) make no change. The no change option is a decision to not add a new policy to the Transportation Element.

Transportation Implementation Policy

Staff was asked to draft a Transportation policy to detail the implementation process for the Transportation Element. Unlike most comprehensive plan elements, the implementation process for transportation elements is established in the Growth Management Act (GMA) and other state law. Cities are required to establish a project list in the transportation element (see Table 3 in Attachment A). The project list includes both road improvement projects, maintenance of infrastructure, planning projects, and other implementation actions for the Transportation Element. Projects from that list are added to the 6-year Transportation Improvement Program (6-year TIP). Each year, the City is required by state law to update the 6-year TIP. This includes considering available funds and projected costs.

Staff Recommendation: Adopting policies in the Transportation Element that articulate implementation steps for the element is not recommended. The state law already establishes a clear process the City must follow for implementing the Transportation Element. At best, implementation policies would simply duplicate the

process already established in the state law. The problem with duplicating state law requirements in the Comprehensive Plan is that any amendment the State Legislature makes will trigger a comprehensive plan amendment. Furthermore, because the law is already established at the state level, reiterating the implementation process in the Comprehensive Plan would not add any value.

Wrapping Up Review

Once the Planning Commission has given feedback on all the alternatives this round of review of the element will conclude. Please note that the Planning Commission will have several additional rounds of review of the element later in the update process, as outlined under the next steps below.

NEXT STEPS

1. There might be additional changes to the Transportation Element for the Planning Commission to consider during the Comprehensive Plan update. These additional changes would be in response to the Climate Action Plan and other planning efforts. Discussion of these possible amendments will take place when the Planning Commission takes up these topics later during the update process.
2. Summer 2023 – A Community Open House will be held to gather public input on the overall comprehensive plan update. Following the Open House, the Planning Commission will have the opportunity for another “touch” on the Land Use Element during a comprehensive plan update “tune up” meeting .
3. Fall 2023 - After the “tune up” meeting, the Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on the overall comprehensive plan update. This will include a review of the Land Use Element before making a recommendation to the City Council.