



CITY OF MERCER ISLAND, WASHINGTON

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September 16, 2019

Puget Sound Regional Council
Paul Inghram, AICP, Director of Growth Management
Erika Harris, Senior Planner

Via Email

RE: Mercer Island Comment on Draft VISION 2050

Dear Puget Sound Regional Council, Mr. Inghram, and Ms. Harris:

The City of Mercer Island City Council, Planning Commission, and staff have reviewed the Draft VISION 2050 plan; the City Council and Planning Commission held a joint study session to review the Draft VISION 2050 plan and its implications for Mercer Island on August 20, 2019. Mercer Island City Councilmembers are actively engaged with the King County Growth Management Planning Council and Sound Cities Association. The purpose of this letter is to provide specific comments from the City of Mercer Island, as informed by the August 20, 2019 Mercer Island study session.

The City of Mercer Island supports the overall goals and policy direction established in the Draft VISION 2050 plan. The purpose of this letter is to provide specific comments from the City of Mercer Island on the Draft VISION 2050 plan.

Local Implementation

VISION 2050 establishes a regional growth strategy to accommodate forecasted growth in the four-county region. Consistent with the Growth Management Act¹, the City of Mercer Island supports the creation of additional countywide tools that consider local circumstances in establishing local growth targets and implementation strategies. In particular, the City recommends that VISION 2050:

- Include the creation of countywide process to set locally tailored growth targets that are consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy;
- Include policies that support cities in exercising discretion in making choices about accommodating growth; conversely, avoid regional growth policies that represent a "one-size-fits-all" solution to accommodating growth.

Financial Constraints

VISION 2050 should directly address the financial challenges faced by counties and cities and associated with the implementation of the regional growth strategy. Current revenue sources (for Mercer Island and similarly situated cities) to implement VISION 2050 are insufficient to support necessary planning efforts to implement the regional growth strategy. Similarly, current revenue sources are insufficient to support the infrastructure improvements that would be necessary for the extent of development called for by the VISION 2050 regional

¹ RCW 36.70A.110(2)

growth strategy and are insufficient to support ongoing maintenance and operations of existing infrastructure designed to accommodate the last 30 years of growth.

Mercer Island recognizes that this challenge cannot be directly addressed by the Puget Sound Regional Council. The City recommends that VISION 2050 incorporate policies that support regional and local efforts to develop state legislation to provide new fiscal tools for implementation of Growth Management Act related actions (i.e. state revenues to support unfunded planning and infrastructure expenditures). Without such state legislation, implementation of the regional growth strategy VISION 2050 plan is in jeopardy.

Mercer Island's Unique Constraints

The draft VISION 2050 plan reflects a regional growth strategy that seeks to leverage the region's investment in a regional transportation system, by focusing population and job growth near regionally funded transit centers. As noted above, the City of Mercer Island supports the regional growth strategy in concept however Mercer Island also faces significant hurdles in accommodating additional population and job growth.

Mercer Island is bounded entirely by Lake Washington, with no additional "undeveloped land" and is encumbered with substantial critical areas including steep slopes, wetlands, watercourses and shorelines. In addition, Mercer Island faces significant costs to upgrade infrastructure to support significant additional redevelopment on the island. Furthermore, Mercer Island's proximity to two high growth metropolitan cities, which have accommodated a high proportion of job growth that in turn drives housing demand, make affordable housing solutions on Mercer Island challenging to implement. Finally, to accommodate the Sound Transit station, Mercer Island has lost one of its few freeway access points; which, in combination with forecasted growth for high capacity transit cities may result in significant transportation congestion and delays. In a review of other high capacity transit cities, Mercer Island appears to have unique and significant challenges in implementing the multi-county planning policies contained in VISION 2050.

Consequently, the City recommends that VISION 2050 regional growth strategy acknowledge that the City of Mercer Island, while a high capacity transit community, is effectively built out and cannot accept further significant population or job growth.

In closing, the City of Mercer Island recommends that the draft VISION 2050 plan address the: A) local implementation; B) financial constraints; and C) Mercer Island constraints on accommodating additional growth.

If you have questions or comments regarding the contents of this letter, please contact me at 206.275.7732.

Regards,



Evan Maxim
Director of Community Planning and Development
City of Mercer Island

Copy: Mercer Island City Council
Mercer Island Planning Commission
Interim City Manager Jessi Bon