



Bruce Harrell
Seattle City Councilmember

July 8, 2015

Mayor Ed Murray
City of Seattle

Director Scott Kubly
Seattle Department of Transportation
City of Seattle

Director Brian Surratt
Seattle Office of Economic Development
City of Seattle

Dear Gentlemen:

As all of us begin to prepare for the budget and for a successful vote on the Move Seattle Levy, I wanted to bring to your attention a project of mutual interest and support. I believe we have an exciting opportunity in front of us and I want to take full advantage of it.

I speak of the project known as the Mt. Baker Town Center; a project envisioned by City planners, neighborhood supporters, community activists, transportation advocates and environmental leaders.

The action I am requesting is that we create, within our City Departments, an interdepartmental team focused on a set of targeted public realm investments sorely needed within the North Rainier Hub Urban Village by the end of 2015. Based on much work that has already been done, a strong argument could be made that based on environmental equity and social justice, the City should partner with our North Rainier community and help it share in the benefits of public investment and economic development occurring in other areas of our great city.

By way of background, the North Rainier Hub has tremendous potential as a vital Town Center, connecting our downtown to Rainier Valley, and reconnecting the neighborhoods of Beacon Hill to the west, and Lake Washington to the east.

Yet, despite major regional investment in the Mt. Baker light link station and a Town Center rezone, there remains un-walkable and dangerous streets for its residents, business owners and school-age children. I am aware of a visually impaired resident and ArtSpace business owner who was denied approval for a seeing eye dog because the streets were too dangerous for the dog.

In April of this year, the Seattle Economic Development Commission issued the North Rainier Urban Village Assessment, which further underscored the need for our City to invest in this important part of

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our community. The analysis in the North Rainier Urban Village Assessment includes the following painful, but important findings:

- The North Rainier Urban Village lacks the essential components of livability for Mixed Use Centers.
- The City should focus on complete streets, vibrant street life, and a community for all ages to implement the North Rainier Neighborhood Plan.
- City Leadership for planning and implementation of the North Rainier Urban Village has been inconsistent due to changes in political leadership, economic cycles, and staffing.
- The Southeast Seattle Action Agenda did not include enough focus on attracting private investment, did not lead to needed public improvements, and was too broadly focused to be effective for urban village-specific goals.
- Implementation of the neighborhood plan, including investments in the public realm, community facilities and infrastructure, interdepartmental coordination, and partnership with the private sector has been lacking.
- Interdepartmental coordination during the creation and implementation of plans was insufficient in North Rainier, resulting in a lack of physical improvements or new development.
- The time and resources used in the 2014 rezone may have been better directed toward forming strategic partnerships and addressing major infrastructure needs that are barriers to redevelopment.
- The City has not invested enough in public facilities and infrastructure near the Mt. Baker station, which remains a major obstacle to redevelopment. Investments in transportation are needed to support the transition to a mixed-use center.
- The City historically has not formed strong partnerships with property owners and developers in North Rainier to coordinate private and public investment.
- The City and transit agencies did not acquire sufficient parcels to support major development opportunities.
- The City must actively engage transit partners before, during and after station construction on issues of land acquisition, station design and redevelopment.
- City investments in infrastructure may signal a commitment to improving the area thereby improving market demand for additional growth and development.
- Public officials and agency staff should not assume that "if you build it, they will come" regarding private investment after transit investments are made.

North Rainier Urban Village Assessment, Berk / Seattle Economic Development Commission (April, 2014). I believe we have spent too many years studying the problems around this station area. It is time to fulfill the promise of a safe, pedestrian friendly, transit-oriented community within the North Rainier Hub.

I hope you believe a compelling case has been made that City Departments -- including SDOT, DPD, Parks and Recreation, DON, OED and SPU -- form an IDT North Rainier Action Team. This team can coordinate with local stakeholders, on a targeted set of public realm and infrastructure improvements needed to tackle the challenges that have kept this transit area lagging behind the rest of our city. The

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creation of this team was specifically recommended in the North Rainier Assessment. This recommendation is sound, as is the recommendation for better coordination with other relevant agencies and organizations, including Sound Transit.

I commend SDOT for the solutions being developed in the Accessible Mount Baker project. We have waited too long for these types of solutions, and we cannot delay investing in these types of changes. I also commend OED for beginning its partnership with local stakeholders this year. That work should continue, but to be effective, that work must be coordinated through a team. This type of interagency coordination has been successful in First Hill, Northgate, and South Lake Union. We cannot afford to neglect this type of leadership and focused investment in the North Rainier transit area. The Mount Baker Town Center only exists on paper. As a matter of social justice and equity, we need to complete the station area and foster the type of economic development enjoyed in other parts of our great city.

Sincerely,



Bruce A. Harrell
Seattle City Councilmember

cc: Director Ben Noble, City Budget Office
Director Kirstan Arestad, Central Staff