

Mount Baker Station Area

Open Space Nexus Analysis

December 5, 2012

As part of proposed land use and zoning changes within the Mount Baker (McClellan) Station Area Overlay District, the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) recommends increasing the allowed structure height from 65 to 125 feet on two large parcels. Consistent with City policy, when additional development capacity is allowed by rezoning, incentive zoning is applied as part of the rezone. Incentive zoning means that to fully achieve the additional height, project proponents would need to provide affordable housing and, potentially, other amenities. Open space has been identified during a neighborhood plan update process as the priority amenity in the North Rainier Hub Urban Village, where the subject rezone area is located. The following document estimates the level of existing open space needs in the Station Area and the likely open space need generated by new projects in order to evaluate the appropriateness of proposed open space incentives allowed through the incentive zoning program.

Assessing Existing Open Space Needs

People use and value a diversity of formal and informal open spaces that can serve different purposes:

- Large “regional” open spaces such as Seward Park or Magnusson Park provide substantial recreational opportunities that may be accessed infrequently such as areas for hiking, major athletic facilities, or opportunities to gather in large numbers
- Medium “neighborhood” open spaces provide for opportunities for gathering within a reasonable walk or bike that individuals can access with some frequency, such as areas for sports, playgrounds, or places to sit and read
- Small “local” open spaces provide opportunities for individuals to be outside in close proximity to homes, businesses, or shopping areas for a variety of formal or informal activities such as reading outside, quick breaks for dogs, smoking breaks, people watching, or resting between activities; these types of spaces often include a mix of place on public and private property as well as the right-of-way

The Comprehensive Plan affirms the importance of a variety of open space opportunities and establishes basic goals for open space planning in Seattle. These goals focus primarily on the development of the Department of Parks and Recreation’s system of formal public parks; rather than the more complex system of private open space and right-of-way infrastructure. However, these goals are important to understand in assessing the overall need of the neighborhood. Specifically, the Comprehensive Plan establishes four sets of open space goals that should be considered in assessing existing local open space needs, which are discussed below:

- **Distribution-based Goals:** The 2011 Open Space Gap Report Update analyzed and mapped the extent to which distribution-based goals were being met. This analysis

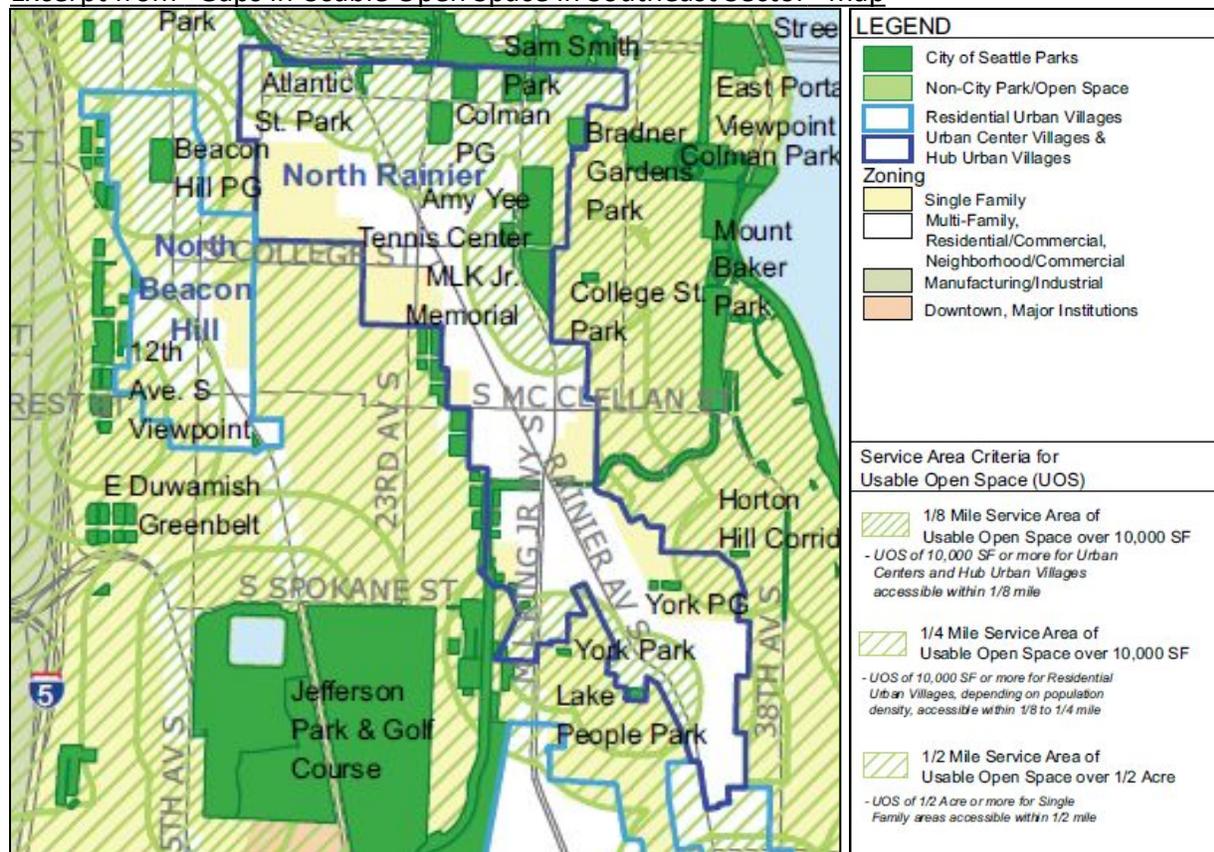
showed that the majority of the Mount Baker Station Area was not meeting distribution-based goals. The only exception was the area located around Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park which includes a portion of the site that is proposed to be zoned SM-125. However, this park is geographically separated from Station area by a large arterial street and a substantial grade change preventing a direct connection. A picture of the view to the park from the Lowe's site is shown below. Given the indirect route necessary to access the park by foot, the walking distance to this park is even greater than what was measured by the Parks GIS analysis.

- **Residential Population-based Goals:** The 2011 Open Space Gap Report Update summarized population-based statistics for the North Rainier Hub Urban Village, but not the Station Area itself. This summary concluded that the North Rainier Hub Urban Village has substantially more open space than is necessary to meet the residential population-based goals through 2024; however, these goals are met predominately by a few large parks located on the edge of the Hub Urban Village and a significant distance from the Station Area. None of the parks included in this analysis are located in the Mount Baker Station Area. The North Rainier Hub Urban Village is a particularly large and linear urban village compared with other urban villages, so it is likely appropriate to consider the Station Area as well as the Urban Village. If the Station Area were used as the unit for calculating residential population-based goals, it would not meet these goals as there are no parks within the station area according to the Parks Department's calculations. As noted above, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park is not immediately accessible to the Station Area given that it is geographically separated from Station area by a large arterial street and a substantial grade change.
- **Breathing Room Goals:** Breathing room open space refers to the combined acreage of all dedicated open spaces, including parks but also greenspaces, trails, and boulevards. This goal acknowledges that that neighborhoods need more than just formal parks to provide open space and natural areas. However, the Comprehensive plan does not provide breathing room goals for local areas so it is not appropriate to apply this standard to the Mount Baker Station Area.
- **Village Commons Goal:** The comprehensive plan establishes a goal of having one usable open space of at least one acre for every urban village. Colman Playground, Bradner Gardens Park, and Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park all meet this criterion.

View of Martin Luther King Jr Park from Northeast Corner of Lowe's site



Excerpt from "Gaps in Usable Open Space in Southeast Sector" map



Additionally, the North Rainier Hub Urban Village is very auto-oriented neighborhood with a substantial amount of parking lots and driveways. The environment is very uninviting to pedestrians as there are very few areas to rest or relax. In order to maximize the investment of the light rail station in this area, it will very important to develop more open space opportunities that can help to make this area a more pleasant place for pedestrians. Small, local open space opportunities will be especially important since the large roads and auto-oriented environment discourage walking.

View from Northeast Corner of Lowe's site



Overall, this analysis suggests there is a substantial existing open space need within the Mount Baker Station Area that would justify allowing public open space amenities to count toward incentive zoning. The majority of the area does not appear to meet distribution standards and the population-based standard is not met within the Station Area. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial represents the only major amenity for the area and is separated by substantial barriers which make it unlikely to be used on a regular basis by users of the Station Area. Additionally, the large roads and auto-oriented environment create a very inhospitable situation for pedestrians which could be someone meliorated by the presence of open space.

Assessing Project-level Impacts

The additional open space need created by new projects is likely to vary based on the specific uses contained in the project and the availability of other amenities nearby; however, there are existing standards that may help approximate the likely magnitude of impact.

For residential areas, the Hub Urban Village Usable Open Space Population-based Goal provides the best existing approximation of open space need generated by new residential development. This goal of 1 acre of usable open space per 1,000 households can be translated to usable open space per residential floor area as follows:

$$1 \text{ acre}/1,000 \text{ households} * 43,560 \text{ sq ft}/1 \text{ acre} * 0.95 \text{ household}/1 \text{ unit} * 1 \text{ unit}/1,063 \text{ gross sq ft} \\ = 38.9 \text{ sq ft open space} / 1000 \text{ sq ft of residential floor area}$$

Project-level impacts for non-residential uses are more difficult because of the diversity of possible nonresidential uses. The City of Seattle does not currently have any open space goals that specifically address needs generated from nonresidential use. The Land Use Code does, however, require open space as part of office developments in Downtown, Commercial, and Seattle Mixed zones in recognition of the open space needs created by these uses. This standard requires at least 20 square feet for each 1,000 square feet of office space. This standards were developed as part of the City of Seattle's "Revised Development Regulations, Open Space for Downtown Office Projects" (1994) from analysis of open space requirements for a number of US cities, including San Francisco, Charlotte and Pittsburgh. Open Space requirements for retail uses were not included because "such desirable small businesses would find meeting the open space requirement economically infeasible" (Issues Guide to the Mayor's Recommended Comprehensive Plan, 1994). The City has not been able to find research attempting to calculate the open space need generated for other nonresidential uses; however,

it is likely that the open space need for other uses will be similar where a similar number of employees are housed. Retail and light industrial uses in particular are likely to have different levels of open space need as they have small numbers of employees per square foot. However, these types of uses are likely to represent a small portion of projects utilizing open space amenity incentives as it would only apply to projects that build above the base FAR and are located in zones with height limits greater than 85ft. This type of construction is used almost exclusively for projects that are primarily residential and office. Consequently, the 20 square feet of open space per 1,000 square feet of total floor area is likely to be appropriate for most projects.

Assessing Potential Open Space Incentives

Given that the Station Area appears to have a substantial open space need, it makes sense to compare the likely maximum amount of open space that might be provided by theoretical projects in different zones to the estimated open space need likely to result from new projects. This can be accomplished by calculating the amount of open space that would be provided to satisfy the entire non-housing incentive for project that maximize their development capacity and comparing this amount of open space to the total non-exempt floor area of the building. While some open space amenities are counted at a ratio of 5 extra sq ft per 1 sq ft of open space, it is more appropriate to use the 7:1 ratio because the open space amenities that counted at this ratio are more similar to the type of open spaces that were envisioned in creating the goals and standards discussed previously (i.e. plaza-like environments with seating and open areas).

Maximum Open Space Provision under Incentive Zoning

	Base FAR	Max FAR	Max % Incentive to Open Space	Standard Ratio	Max requirement per 1000 sq ft
Non-Residential					
SM-125	5	8	25%	7:1	13.4
SM-160	5	9	25%	7:1	15.9
SM-240	6	13	25%	7:1	19.2
Residential					
SM-125	5	8	40%	7:1	21.4
SM-160	5	9	40%	7:1	25.4
SM-240	6	13	40%	7:1	30.8
HR	7	14	40%	7:1	28.8

In each of these zones, the maximum open space provided through incentive zoning would be less than total estimated need generated by each project. Consequently, allowing use of open space to qualify as a public amenity under incentive zoning can be justified by estimated project impacts alone for all likely zones in which it might be implemented.