

PSRC PLAN REVIEW REPORT & CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION



TUKWILA SOUTHCENTER SUBAREA PLAN

December 23, 2020

SOUTHCENTER

The Tukwila City Council adopted the Southcenter Regional Growth Center (RGC) Subarea Plan in 2014 and incorporated it as an element of the City’s Comprehensive Plan in 2015. In 2016, the City was awarded the *Governor’s Smart Choices Award - Implementation of a Comprehensive Plan* for the Southcenter Plan. The Southcenter area was designated as a regional growth center by PSRC and includes intensely commercial and industrial areas, such as Westfield Southcenter Mall and Andover Industrial Park, and is home to a Sounder commuter rail/Amtrak station, providing inter- and intra-regional travel options.

While the area had limited housing at the time of plan adoption, Southcenter in the next 30-50 years is envisioned as a high-density area with a range of housing options, greater transportation access, and enhanced walkability while supporting existing commercial activities. Since adoption of the Southcenter Plan and implementing development regulations in 2014, and the construction of the signature pedestrian bridge over the Green River providing a more direct connection between the urban center and the Sounder Tukwila Commuter Rail Station, the residential neighborhood development continues to expand with over 530 units existing in 2020 and an additional 136 units under construction. The city completed the subarea plan to address PSRC regional growth center subarea plan requirements and submitted the plan to PSRC. PSRC staff worked with city staff in preparation of this report.

REGIONAL GROWTH CENTERS CERTIFICATION

VISION 2040 includes DP-Action-17 (p. 98) that directs jurisdictions with regional growth centers and/or manufacturing/industrial centers to develop subarea plans for those centers. This expectation has been in place since 2003 and is required for all new regional centers. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) and local governments have worked together to develop an overall process for reviewing and certifying that regional center plans are consistent with VISION 2040, the Regional Transportation Plan, and the Adopted Policy and Plan Review Process.¹

In 2018, PSRC adopted the Regional Centers Framework Update. VISION 2050, an update to VISION 2040, was adopted in fall 2020. The Regional Centers Framework calls for review of centers in 2025, following local plan updates. All regional growth centers are expected to have subarea plans adopted and updated to be consistent with the Framework and VISION 2050 by that time. Certification of a subarea plan now reaffirms the planning work for the regional growth center is consistent with VISION 2040 and is an opportunity to identify whether any additional planning work is required by 2025.

CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION

Based on the review of the Southcenter Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan, the following action is recommended to the PSRC Growth Management Policy Board, Transportation Policy Board, and Executive Board:

The Puget Sound Regional Council certifies that the Southcenter Regional Growth Center Subarea Plan addresses planning expectations for regional growth centers.

¹ The specific requirements for center planning are provided in [PSRC’s Plan Review Manual](#), and the process is also described in [VISION 2040, Part IV: Implementation](#). Certification of the jurisdiction’s comprehensive plan for consistency with the regional transportation plan, regionally established guidelines and policies, and Growth Management Act requirements for transportation planning is completed through a separate board action.

Review of Regional Growth Center Planning

The remainder of this report contains a summary of the PSRC review of the Tukwila Southcenter subarea plan. Under each heading, the scope of the certification review, as guided by the [Plan Review Manual](#) and [Regional Center Plans Checklist](#), is listed in high-level bullets. Discussion in each topic area highlights exemplary provisions of the plan, as well as issues identified through the certification review where future work on the part of the city may more fully address VISION 2040, the Regional Transportation Plan, and center planning requirements. Future work should be considered as jurisdictions update local plans in 2024 to be consistent with VISION 2050 and the Regional Centers Framework.

The review contained in this section follows the format and content established in the Regional Center Plans Checklist, covering the seven major categories (center plan concept, environment, land use, housing, economy, public services, and transportation).

Center Concept

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following center concepts:

- Vision for the center**, including a commitment to compact, pedestrian and transit-oriented development.
- Identification of the area** designated as a regional growth center and relationship to other plans.
- A **market analysis** of the center's development potential.

DISCUSSION

The Southcenter plan effectively addresses the Center Concept requirements.

- ☑ The plan envisions Southcenter transforming into a high-density area with new housing, mix of commercial uses, high-quality transit and pedestrian facilities, and improved public space while supporting existing business and industry.
- ☑ The plan describes the center, its relationship to citywide planning, and broader county and regional context for the center and its development market.

Environment

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following environmental policy topics:

- Critical/environmentally sensitive areas**, including inventories and relevant policies and programs.
- Parks and open space**, including public spaces and civic places, and provisions to encourage accessible open space.
- Innovative stormwater management** policies and programs.
- Air pollution and greenhouse gas emission reduction** policies and programs.

DISCUSSION

The Southcenter plan effectively addresses many of the Environment requirements.

- ☑ The plan provides details on existing parks, trails, and recreation areas and includes strategies to protect and enhance open space, such as standards for preserving open space and improving areas around natural features like Tukwila Pond as a way to attract residential development and balance out increasingly dense land use.
- ☑ The plan calls for updating the Street Tree Plan and increasing tree canopy coverage for Southcenter to help provide shade and reduce impacts from greenhouse gas emissions.

- ☑ The plan calls for providing improvements that enhance connectivity and encourage other forms of travel besides the automobile, including wider sidewalks, active storefronts, on-street parking, connections to existing trails, and bicycle lanes.
- ☑ The City is currently working on a master plan for improving Tukwila Pond Park as an amenity for the area and to attract housing.

The following comments should be considered in future review of the subarea policies:

- ☐ PSRC appreciates the policies and strategies to improve surface water management in the city’s comprehensive plan. Updating the plan to better connect these policies and strategies to Southcenter specifically will provide a clearer understanding of the particular stormwater needs of the center.
- ☐ A more detailed discussion of existing conditions related to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, as well as policies to reduce them, would support better health outcomes and improve quality of life for people who live and work in Southcenter.

Land Use

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for center plans to address the following land use topics:

Defined boundaries and shape for the center that are compact and easily walkable.

Residential and employment growth targets that accommodate a significant share of the jurisdiction’s growth, as well as residential densities and building intensities with capacity to accommodate these levels of growth.

Mix, distribution and location of existing and future land uses described and mapped. Encourage a mix of complementary uses.

Design standards for pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented development and other transit-supportive planning that orients land uses around transit.

DISCUSSION

The Southcenter plan effectively addresses many of the Land Use requirements.

- ☑ The plan’s calls for more than 2,700 additional households and 5,000 additional jobs in Southcenter by 2031, which represents more than half of Tukwila’s planned housing growth and a substantial portion of the city’s job growth.
- ☑ The plan restructures the center into subdistricts, establishing a new Transit Oriented Development (TOD) district where housing and transit-supportive uses are encouraged within ½ mile walking distance of the Southcenter Transit Center and the Tukwila Sounder Commuter rail station, and areas adjacent to amenities such as the Green River and Tukwila Pond Park.
- ☑ The plan includes robust strategies to develop design guidelines and standards to promote a high-quality urban environment and facilitate pedestrian- and transit-supportive land uses.

The following comments should be considered in future review of the subarea policies:

- ☐ During the upcoming countywide target-setting process, the city should ensure citywide population and employment allocations enable the city to adopt new center growth targets for Southcenter that meet minimum planning expectations for regional growth centers (planning for at least 45 activity units/acre). When updating the center growth targets, consider the Regional Center Framework’s goal for a minimum mix of at least 15% planned residential and employment activity in regional growth centers.
- ☐ PSRC appreciates how the Southcenter Element considers subdistricts within the center with unique characteristics and planning priorities. The city should consider further refinements to reduce the size of the center so that is consistent with the Regional Centers Framework, which requires centers to be 200 – 640 acres, unless served by internal high capacity transit.

Housing

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following housing policy topics:

Existing and targeted housing units.

Tailored provisions for a variety of housing types, affordable housing, and special housing needs.

Implementation strategies for addressing housing targets and goals.

DISCUSSION

The Southcenter plan effectively addresses many of the Housing requirements.

- ☑ The plan notes that, as of adoption in 2015, Southcenter had very little residential development. More residential development has occurred since plan adoption, and the plan expects the center will be home to more than 2,700 households by 2031. With the city expecting to add 4,850 new housing units by 2031, the housing target for Southcenter represents more than half of the city's planned growth.
- ☑ The plan includes implementation strategies to address the center's housing targets by encouraging high-density housing served by enhanced pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities.
- ☑ The plan recommends developing incentives and facilitating public investment in amenities to encourage and attract housing development.

The following comments should be considered in future review of the subarea policies:

- ☐ Tukwila's partnership in the South King regional housing action plan under HB 1923 shows a dedication to expanding housing affordability opportunities within the city. It is proactive to work with several other jurisdictions to address housing regionally. The Southcenter Element should be updated to tie this regional housing work to the center, recognizing that the center plan is an opportunity to identify market-based affordable housing strategies and adopt a variety of housing tools that increase the share of affordable housing. As Tukwila is anticipating a large share of the city's overall growth to occur in Southcenter, it is important that the center plan demonstrates how to meet housing needs for various income levels, including affordable, subsidized, and special needs housing needs.

Economy

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following economy policy topics:

Key sectors and industry clusters in the center.

Economic development policies and programs for the center.

DISCUSSION

The Southcenter plan effectively addresses the Economy requirements.

- ☑ The plan highlights Southcenter's robust economy that includes retail, entertainment, professional services, and warehouse/industrial. The plan calls for more than 5,000 additional jobs by 2031.
- ☑ The Comprehensive Plan's Economic Development element and the Southcenter Plan call for actively promoting development in Southcenter through incentives to attract new businesses, investing in infrastructure and public amenities, building on the presence of existing shopping assets, and encouraging private investment.
- ☑ The Southcenter element calls out the need to identify and prioritize projects necessary to catalyze economic development in the Urban Center and create a strong environment for business and the economy.

Public Services

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Center Subarea Plan Checklist calls for center plans to address the following public services topics:

Local capital plans for infrastructure, such as sewer, water, gas, electric and telecommunications, including financing and strategies to ensure facilities are provided consistent with planned growth.

DISCUSSION

The Southcenter plan effectively addresses the Public Service requirements.

- ☑ The plan references the city's Capital Improvement Plan, which contains policies and plans to improve and expand infrastructure in Southcenter in accordance with anticipated growth.
- ☑ The Comprehensive Plan's Utilities Element gives priority to Southcenter for City-planned utility improvements and extensions in order to meet the city's growth targets.

Transportation

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Regional Center Plans Checklist calls for subarea plans to address the following transportation policy topics:

Integrated multimodal transportation network, including pedestrian and bicycle facilities, as well as linkages to adjacent neighborhoods and districts.

Regional high-capacity transit, local transit and coordination with transit agencies.

Complete streets provisions for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, vehicles, and – where appropriate – freight.

Context-sensitive design provisions for transportation facilities.

Environmentally friendly street treatments (green streets).

Level-of-service standards and concurrency provisions tailored for the center to encourage transit.

Parking management strategy that addresses supply of parking, on-street parking and mitigating effects of parking.

Mode-split goals.

DISCUSSION

The Southcenter plan effectively addresses the Transportation requirements.

- ☑ Policies 10.2.4 and 10.2.5 in the Comprehensive Plan's Southcenter Element call for prioritizing pedestrian accessibility by minimizing conflicts with vehicles and improving design standards to enhance navigability to and within the Mall, bus transit center, Tukwila Pond, and the Sounder/Amtrak station. Likewise, Objective 7 in the Southcenter Plan calls for enhancing connectivity and expanding the number of routes through Southcenter, especially for east-west streets linking the Mall and transit center.
- ☑ The plan prioritizes coordination with Sound Transit and City of Renton to improve access between the Sounder/Amtrak station and the Center. Policy 13.4.7 in the Transportation Element calls for studying the feasibility of a Southcenter area circulator to connect key destinations in the Center to encourage fewer car trips and enhance connectivity.
- ☑ Objective 8 in the Southcenter Plan and Policy 10.2.2 in the Southcenter Element call for creating a complete street network and improving pedestrian access. Implementation strategies include breaking up megablocks, creating a streetscape improvement plan, and building a pedestrian bridge over the Green River, which was completed in 2018.
- ☑ Policy 10.2.8 addresses the Center's parking strategy. The policy and subsequent implementation strategies address ways to reduce parking demand through shared parking and CTR/TDM programs, developing standards for parking design and pedestrian safety, and looking for opportunities for on-street parking in the TOD district.

- ☑ The City's Transportation Master Plan includes mode-split targets for Southcenter that aim for a mode-split of 66% drive-alone trips and 34% non-drive-alone trips.

The following comments should be considered in future review of the subarea policies:

- ☐ The Plan should consider strategies to enhance access to the center from adjacent neighborhoods and districts for multimodal and active transportation.

Conclusion

PSRC thanks the city for working through the plan review and certification process for the center subarea plan. The Southcenter plan effectively addresses the provisions of the Regional Center Plan Checklist, demonstrating consistency with VISION 2040, and is recommended for certification. The adopted Regional Centers Framework calls for review of centers and center plans again in 2025, following the adoption of VISION 2050 and local plan updates. In 2025, PSRC review will ensure that center plans, center growth targets, and local comprehensive plans have been updated to be consistent with VISION 2050 and the Regional Centers Framework.

For additional information regarding this certification report, please contact Ben Kahn at bkahn@psrc.org.