

Regional Growth Center Plans Designation Report



City of Kirkland, Greater Downtown Kirkland

April 27, 2023

Overview

On February 27, 2023, the City of Kirkland submitted an application to PSRC for designation of Greater Downtown Kirkland, a 564-acre, well-connected mixed-use, commercial, and high and medium-density residential area, as a Regional Growth Center (RGC) pursuant to the designation procedures adopted by the PSRC Executive Board in June 2018. PSRC staff reviewed the request, along with additional information provided by the city. This report documents the consistency with the regional growth center designation criteria. A separate report regarding subarea plan certification has also been prepared ([available here](#)) and reviews the city’s subarea planning for consistency with VISION 2050 and the [Plan Review Manual](#).

Background

The proposed center is located in the City of Kirkland in King County, encompassing the city’s historic center. It is bordered to the west by Lake Washington and includes one mile of the Cross Kirkland Corridor and the I-405 interchange at NE 85th Street within the eastern portion. The center currently has over 6,000 residents and over 11,000 employees. Figure 1 demonstrates the location of the proposed center. If designated, Greater Downtown Kirkland would be the thirtieth regional growth center in the region and the second in Kirkland, in addition to Totem Lake.

Designation Recommendation

Staff reviewed the Kirkland application and recommends the PSRC Growth Management Policy Board act to recommend designation to the Executive Board:

Recommend the Executive Board approve the designation of the proposed Greater Downtown Kirkland as a Regional Growth Center.

Centers Framework

Regional centers are a core component of VISION 2050’s strategy for accommodating and managing growth in the central Puget Sound region. Regional growth centers are identified as locations of compact, pedestrian-oriented development with a mix of housing, jobs, retail, services, and other destinations. Regional growth centers and transit station areas are expected to accommodate a significant portion of the region’s residential growth (65 percent) and employment growth (75 percent).

The Executive Board revised the Designation Procedures for New Centers in 2018 to address updated policy guidance adopted as part of the Regional Centers Framework Update. The [Designation Procedures](#) are designed to ensure that the proposed center can accommodate significant growth, limit the number and distribution of centers, and provide consistency regarding the type, location, distribution, and development potential of new centers. The new framework identifies two types of regional growth centers: Urban Growth Centers and Metro Growth Centers. Kirkland is applying for *Urban Growth Center* designation.



Each application is evaluated using the information and responses to the criteria provided by the applicant. The Regional Centers Framework requires that a subarea plan be completed and adopted prior to the submittal of a regional center designation application. The subarea plan is evaluated, concurrent with the designation process, for consistency with the planning requirements for regional growth centers.

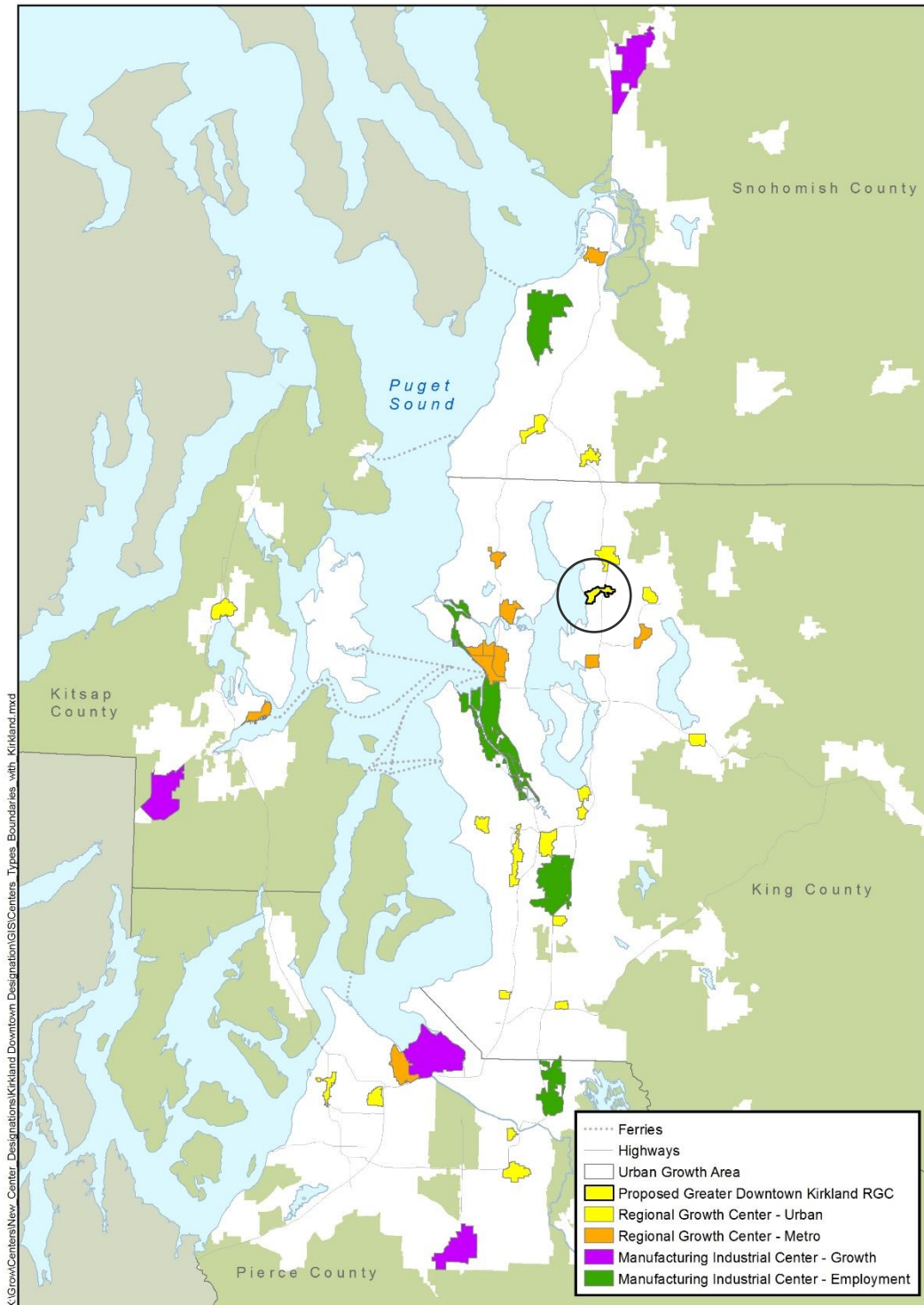
PSRC staff evaluated the application and subarea plan from the city of Kirkland.

- Section A of this report describes the designation eligibility.
- Section B describes the designation criteria.

A separate plan certification report documents a review of the Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan and the 85th Street Station Area Plan. Drafts of both reports were provided to the cities for review and comment.



Figure 1. Proposed Greater Downtown Kirkland Regional Growth Center



Eligibility Requirements

To be considered for designation as a regional growth center, applicants must meet basic eligibility requirements. The following summarizes how Greater Downtown Kirkland addresses the eligibility requirements:

1. Local and Countywide Commitment

The city must demonstrate that the center is a local priority and that a commitment to making local investments to create a walkable, livable center has been made.

The city has demonstrated a commitment to supporting the regional growth center. Fostering well-planned growth in the area has been a city priority. The Central Business District was rezoned for high density mixed-use development as part of the 1987 neighborhood planning process to foster a walkable district with land uses that could support frequent transit service.

The city's commitment to creating a downtown regional growth center continued with the 2001 Downtown Strategic Plan, which further promoted mixed-use development, pedestrian-oriented design, and multimodal connections. The city has implemented major investments in the Greater Downtown over the past 15 years that total over \$15 million and include capital improvement projects such as the reinvented Park Lane as a flexible street that hosts community events and has seasonally been closed to automobile traffic in the evenings; bicycle and pedestrian improvements along the Lake Washington shoreline; improvements along Central Way (a major east/west corridor); creation of the Cross Kirkland Corridor (rail-trail that links Greater Downtown Kirkland to Bellevue to the south and the Totem Lake Urban Center to the north); and bicycle, pedestrian, and automobile improvements along the 6th Street corridor (a major north/south route).

The city has also prioritized continued planning investments for the area. The city invested in the NE 85th Street Station Area Plan and has been working closely with Sound Transit and WSDOT to develop new connections between the future NE 85th Street Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Station, the Central Business District, and the Rose Hill Business District. The city is also in the early stages of establishing a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District under new state enabling legislation in the eastern portion of the Greater Downtown, to generate new resources for future infrastructure improvements to accommodate new growth in the area. To-date, the city has identified TIF boundaries, assessed the future revenue, and identified the list of infrastructure projects that would be included in the TIF.

The center must be identified as a candidate for regional designation in the local jurisdiction's comprehensive plan and countywide planning policies.

The application meets this requirement. The Kirkland 2015 Comprehensive Plan identifies Greater Downtown Kirkland as a candidate for a regional growth center. In December 2019, the City Council adopted policy amendments (Policy LU-5.5) showing the boundary of the King County designated Greater Downtown Urban Center and policies that prioritize infrastructure investments to the area.

King County designated Greater Downtown Kirkland as an Urban Center in its countywide planning policies in 2019.

In December 2022, the City Council adopted amendments to Policy LU-5.5, along with a new map that shows the precise boundary of the Regional Growth Center. The policy states, "To support sustainable, transit-oriented growth patterns, the City has sought designation of Greater Downtown Kirkland as an Urban Center pursuant to the King County Countywide Planning Policies and as a Regional Growth Center by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)."



The city must adopt an ordinance or resolution that requests PSRC to designate the center and authorizes city staff to submit a completed application.

The Kirkland City Council adopted Resolution R-5384 on September 3, 2019, which authorized the submittal of an Urban Center application to PSRC and King County.

2. Planning

The city must complete a center plan that meets guidance in the Growth Center Plan Checklist in PSRC’s Plan Review Manual prior to applying. In addition to the checklist, the plan should include environmental review and should provide an assessment of housing need.

The application meets this requirement through the adoption of the NE 85th Street Station Area Plan, adopted in June 2022, and the Moss Bay Neighborhood Plan, updated in December 2021. Documentation of consistency with PSRC’s center planning requirements is provided in the certification report. Both plans included environmental review that identified no new unavoidable significant adverse impacts anticipated, except for transportation. Impacts to transportation are anticipated to be reduced by implementing a range of mitigation strategies; however significant unavoidable adverse impacts may still exist for auto, freight, and safety as a result of queuing throughout the station area and on the I-405 off ramps.

3. Jurisdiction and Location

New regional growth centers should be located within a city, with few exceptions.

The application meets this requirement, as the proposed center is located in the urban growth area, within the city of Kirkland.

The distribution of centers throughout the region, including by county, and whether new center locations would be advantageous for overall regional growth objectives, should be considered. Centers should be distributed in locations consistent with the regional vision, and in areas that do not place additional development pressure on rural and resource lands. Environmental factors may be considered in designating new centers.

The proposed center would be the second Regional Growth Center designated in Kirkland, and the thirtieth in the region. The proposed center is located between several other regional growth centers such as Totem Lake, Bellevue Downtown, and Redmond Overlake, and is not adjacent to rural and resource lands. This network can provide for enhanced multimodal connections between the centers and already is well-served by high-frequency bus service.

4. Existing Conditions

The city must demonstrate that the existing infrastructure and utilities can support additional growth.

The application meets this requirement. The city demonstrates that the Greater Downtown center is currently well served by utilities. The Kirkland Water Utility provides water service to the area and the system has sufficient capacity to serve anticipated growth. In 2022, the city updated its Surface Water Master Plan, the strategic plan for managing storm and surface water in Kirkland and identifies priorities for future years. The City of Kirkland Sewer Utility provides sanitary sewer service to the area and extensions are typically funded by developers or local owners in compliance with Kirkland Municipal Code.

The center must include a mix of both existing housing and employment.

This regional growth center includes a mix of both housing and employment. There are currently 3,735 housing units and 11,156 employees according to PSRC’s estimates and Office of Financial Management (OFM) data. There are three distinct commercial areas, each of which is located adjacent to residential uses. These mixed-use areas provide a diversity of land uses throughout the center.



The city must include a justification of center boundaries. The boundary of the center should be generally round or square shape and avoid linear or gerrymandered shapes that are not readily walkable or connected by transit.

The Greater Downtown Kirkland boundaries encompass well-connected, commercial, and high and medium-density residential areas centered around Kirkland’s historic downtown. The center deviates from a round or square shape in that it includes the area immediately surrounding the planned BRT station at I-405/NE 85th Street. This area is included because of the pedestrian, bicycle, and transit connections that are planned between the BRT Station and the historic downtown and the transit connections this investment will provide for the area. The certification report provides additional comments on planning to provide a walkable and well-connected environment throughout the center.

The center must have bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, amenities, and a street pattern that supports walkability.

The Moss Bay neighborhood has extensive infrastructure that fosters a walkable environment, including a historic grid street pattern, street trees, and pedestrian-oriented design. Today, the NE 85th Street Station Area (the eastern portion of the center) lacks pedestrian access in certain areas. As the area develops, it is planned to evolve into a vibrant, mixed-use environment that promotes walking, biking, and transit. Existing and planned bicycle infrastructure provides connections within the center and to neighboring cities, transit connections, and other areas of Kirkland.

Designation Criteria

In addition to fulfilling the eligibility requirements listed above, applicants for regional growth center designation must demonstrate conformity with the designation criteria. The following summarizes how Greater Downtown Kirkland meets the criteria for Urban Growth Center designation:

1. Compatibility with VISION

The proposed regional center is consistent with and supportive of VISION policies for centers. The proposed center has the capacity to accommodate significant residential and employment growth, and the city has established goals and policies to support that growth. This growth represents a significant share of the city’s growth targets.

A [plan certification report](#) has been prepared for the subarea plan that further describes how adopted policies address VISION 2050. Further planning work for the proposed regional center should reflect updated countywide planning policies and growth targets to be consistent with the planning horizon of the city’s comprehensive plan.

2. Activity Levels

Existing Levels of Activities

New Urban Growth Centers must have existing density of 18 activity units per acre.

The proposed center included 6,038 residents in 2020 and 11,156 jobs in 2021 in 564 acres. This is an average density of 30.6 activity units per acre.

	Existing Total (2020/2021)	Existing Density (per acre)	Existing Requirement (per acre)
<i>Population</i>	6,083	10.8	-
<i>Employment</i>	11,156	19.8	-
<i>Total Activity Units</i>	17,239	30.6	18.0



Target Levels of Activity

New Urban Growth Centers must be planning for density of 45 activity units per acre.

The regional growth center application provides sufficient planning for density. Greater Downtown Kirkland is planned to accommodate a total of 21,414 residents and 33,066 employees in 2035, based on the King County targets for the city and local planning. The city should update growth targets for the regional growth center in its 2024 comprehensive plan, reflecting achievable market demand over the next 20-year period.

	2035 Planned Total	2035 Planned Density (per acre)	Planned Density Requirement (per acre)
<i>Population</i>	21,414	38.0	-
<i>Employment</i>	33,066	58.6	-
<i>Total Activity Units</i>	54,480	95.6	45.0

Zoned Development Capacity

The center must have sufficient zoned development capacity to adequately accommodate targeted levels of growth. Because it is not time-bound, zoned capacity can allow higher levels of development and a more compact and mature urban form in regional centers.

Kirkland’s capacity analysis for 2035 in the Moss Bay and the NE 85th Street Station Area Plans provide a zoned development capacity to accommodate a total of 21,404 residents and 33,066 jobs, the same as the planned growth for the center.

3. Size

The center must meet the size requirements of a minimum 200 acres and maximum 640 acres, unless the center is served by an internal, high-capacity transit system, in which case, it may be larger.

The regional growth center meets the size criterion. The proposed center is 564 acres in size, meeting the size requirement for urban growth centers.

4. Transit

The center must have existing or planned fixed route bus, regional bus, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), or other frequent and all-day bus service. High-capacity transit may be substituted for fixed route bus.

The application meets this requirement. The Greater Downtown includes the Kirkland Transit Center, which supports multiple frequent, all-day bus routes. The center also includes one planned BRT station at the intersection of I-405 and NE 85th Street as part of Sound Transit’s transportation improvements.

5. Market Potential

There must be evidence of future market potential to support planning target.

Greater Downtown Kirkland is currently experiencing significant growth. A market study was completed for the center and shows that there is substantial market demand for the planned growth anticipated in the center. The study also supports that Greater Downtown would not redirect growth from Kirkland’s existing Totem Lake regional growth center because each has unique amenities and represents a distinct subset of the regional economy.



6. Role

Evidence must demonstrate that the center will play a regional role by serving as an important destination for the county and the jurisdiction and the jurisdiction must be planning to accommodate significant residential and employment growth under the Regional Growth Strategy.

The application meets this requirement. Greater Downtown Kirkland is located in the middle of an existing network of urban centers in east King County. The center currently contains many major employers and functions as a regional destination for residents, employers, and visitors.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Staff reviewed the application and finds that the proposed center meets minimum eligibility requirements for center designation.

Next steps for the city, to maintain consistency with VISION 2050 and the adopted Regional Centers Framework, include:

- Updating the local comprehensive plan to be consistent with VISION 2050 and the updated countywide planning policies and growth targets. Growth targets for the regional growth center should directly relate to the growth targets and planning horizon identified in the city's comprehensive plan.
- Working with PSRC in 2025 as centers and center plans are reviewed, in accordance with the adopted Regional Centers Framework. PSRC may provide additional comments or guidance for center planning as part of this work.

