

January 7, 2012

Brian Boudet c/o  
Community and Economic Development Department  
747 Market Street, Room 1036  
Tacoma, WA 98402

Re: South Downtown Sub-area Plan

Historic Tacoma is pleased that the City of Tacoma is embarking on a comprehensive plan for the South Downtown Subarea. We urge the City and its consultants to address the South Downtown Subarea's historic resources as significant character defining elements, which can influence allowed uses and density limits for long-range development goals. As such, the project should seek the highest and best use of existing historic structures and provide additional density with sympathetic development as needed.

We understand that an existing conditions survey will be the next major plan phase. It is critical that the subarea's historic buildings and the neighborhoods that they define are identified at the outset to preserve and enhance their unique characteristics and contributions to the larger district. Historic resource inventories were last conducted in the area between 2001-03. We understand that funds are available within the subarea/EIS project to update these inventories and thus recommend updating historic resources inventories and incorporating their results into the broader conclusions reached in the upcoming existing conditions survey.

Housing is a necessary component of such broad-based development. Historic Tacoma believes that strengthening existing residential neighborhoods and extensive use of live/work 'loft' living units are the preferred first steps in adding to the population base of the sub-area. New housing should be added to support and not supplant or compete with the residential capacity to be achieved by use of existing resources and opportunities.

Historic Tacoma has maintained an active interest in the Brewery and Dome districts; the Brewery district has been on the organization's Watch List of vulnerable properties (see attached) for three years. Important character-defining building clusters and neighborhoods include the existing mixed-rate and affordable housing developments to the west. These include pockets of older residences which influence the design character of the low to mid-density housing abutting the commercial /industrial areas and provide valuable support to proposed development zone uses. Former industrial sites contain large volume buildings of robust and utilitarian character, which define the district and the blue-collar qualities of the city. These structures can support a wide variety of uses; some have already been re-purposed, including the former Chihuly complex and the brick warehouse that now houses Ault Electric Co. The sub-area plan should particularly favor intact groups of buildings, such as clusters of historic factories in the heart of the Brewery District and the Pacific Brewing Co. building complex.

The Dome District has built its own identity as a railroad and transportation center, with many historic contributing businesses and industries. Historic Tacoma recommends working directly with Dome District representatives to set the context for future development.

In the Pacific Northwest there are many models of resurgent neighborhoods whose success is rooted in their innate historic character. We need look no farther than the campus of the University of Washington, Tacoma, for an excellent example of intact historic fabric enhanced by thoughtful infill construction. Portland's Pearl District, Seattle's Georgetown neighborhood and Granville Island, in Vancouver, B.C. are all examples of industrially based neighborhoods which have been integrated into the fabric of vibrant urban areas without compromising or losing their historic character. We encourage close study of these successful examples.

All of the goals and recommendations of Historic Tacoma, as well as the full spectrum of development opportunities envisioned for the area could be enhanced with an area-wide, or project-specific Public Development Authority. The new dawn of large scale planning in Tacoma, as evidenced by the concept of the South Downtown Sub-area Plan is the perfect occasion to bring this forward-looking solution to bear in serving the City's planning and development goals.

Historic Tacoma appreciates the opportunity to submit these comments and looks forward to a productive collaboration with the City in this bold venture.

Sincerely,

Caroline T. Swope, M.S.H.P., Ph.D.  
Board President  
Historic Tacoma