

*Urban Centers Development Toolkit Project  
Everett & Renton Regional Growth Centers*



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## Executive Summary

In the 1980's suburban growth outpaced central city growth throughout the Puget Sound Region. The 90's experienced a transition away from this trend. Our central cities are keeping pace with our peripheral areas. Much of this has been due to the Washington State Growth Management Act, coordinated regional planning, incentives, strategic implementation of regulations, and increased cooperation with the private sector and the general public.

The Puget Sound Regional Council serves as a one-stop location for technical expertise, increased communication among local jurisdictions, and coordinated regional planning in the form of VISION 2020, the region's long-range growth management, economic and transportation strategy. There are objectives to concentrate growth into 21 city centers included in the 1995 plan. Local jurisdictions are to be in agreement with these regional goals, but these aims are implemented using many different approaches, each with varying results.

In 1996 and 2002 Regional Council staff compared quantitative growth patterns between the 21 geographic areas. The Regional Council's Growth Management Policy Board asked for the development of a more qualitative assessment of the tools and strategies that have been effective in attracting growth into the more successfully urbanized centers. In order to limit the scope of work, Bellevue, Bremerton, Everett, Kent, Renton, and Tacoma were chosen as the six centers to be evaluated.

The review of Everett and Renton is contained within this report. A variety of written resources were drawn upon for the report such as city plans, associated websites, newspaper articles, and planning journals. Data was analyzed comparing changes in population, housing, employment, wages & incomes, and rental & ownership patterns in the center and the city. Site visits were conducted and a variety of stakeholders were interviewed in order to infuse the project with a more qualitative understanding of how different jurisdictions and partners have been able to create positive results.

**Everett** has a long history of planning with growth at a slow, steady pace during the years leading up to the '90s. Much of the City had deteriorated with age, but change was still somewhat unwelcome. Everett has begun to make the necessary and challenging transition from an aging industrial city with a long history of resource-based employment to a more modern center of urban activity and development. It has recently been able to form partnerships with transit agencies and the county to develop large public projects in addition to widespread infrastructure and streetscape improvements. This has secured private investment and attracted more people to participate in the activities downtown.

**Renton** is preparing for the potential consolidation of Boeing. It is concentrating on diversifying its economy, it is promising to focus development in the downtown to help preserve single-family neighborhoods, it is partnering and forming better communications with the private sector, and it is using a variety of innovative regulations and incentives in order to completely transform the downtown from an auto-oriented area into development containing housing and offices above other uses.

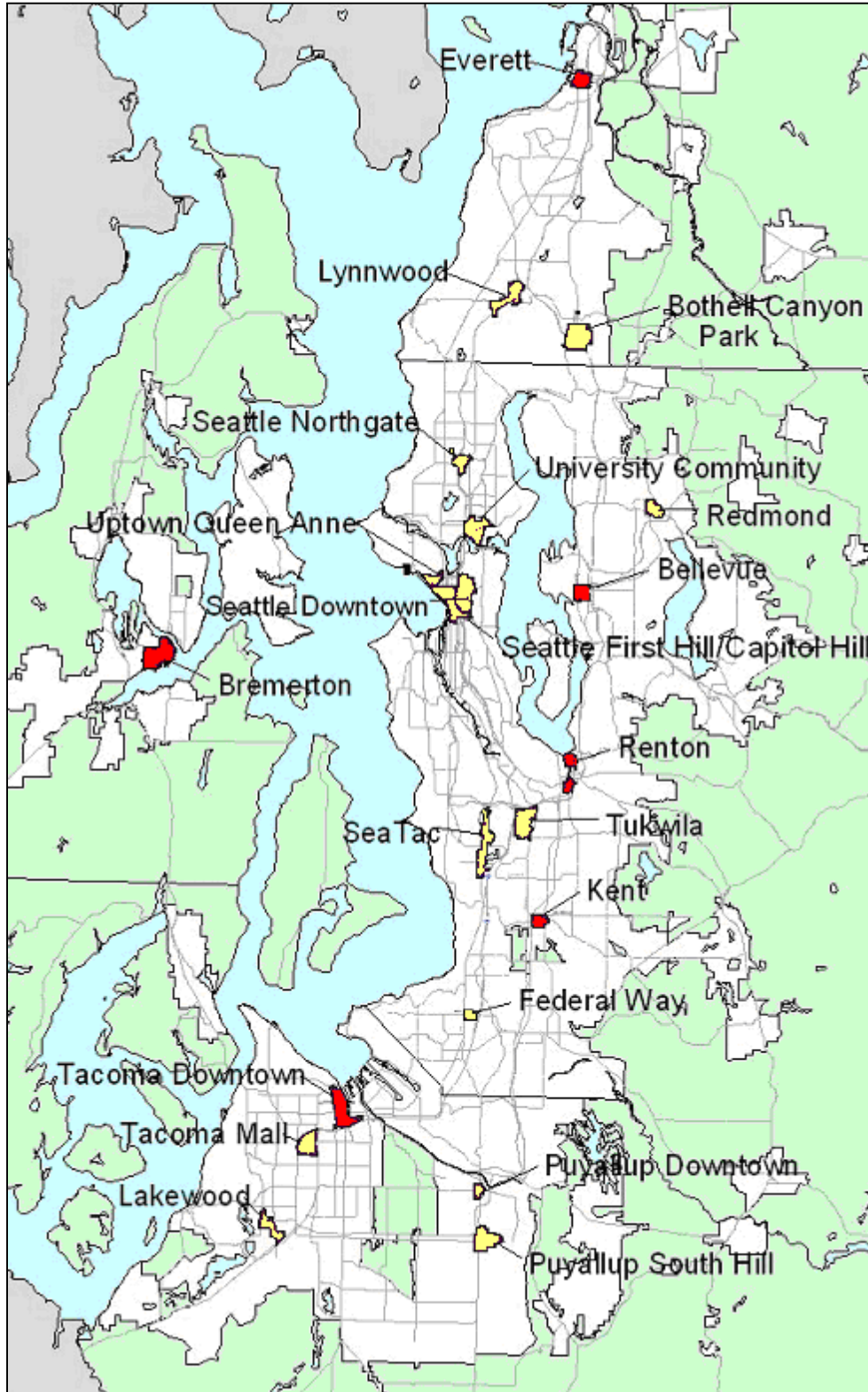
Challenges remain for both centers. Despite the slow regional economy, Everett and Renton are retaining their downtown development focus. Everett understands that it missed much of the opportunity available during the boom of the '90s and it intends to catch the next wave. Renton is aware of the opportunity it has related to potential changes at Boeing and it has taken an aggressive stance to secure alternative forms of economic activity such as biotechnology, health, and more diverse forms of retail.

# Table of Contents

<b>Downtown Everett Background Report</b>	<b>5</b>
Introduction, Context, & Data	6
Recent Projects	8
Evaluation	13
Challenges	15
Interview Results	17
Conclusions & Recommendations	18
<hr/>	
<b>Downtown Renton Background Report</b>	<b>19</b>
Introduction, Context, & Data	20
Downtown Projects	24
Evaluation	27
Additional Projects	28
Interview Results	31
Conclusion & Recommendations	33
<hr/>	
<b>Figures, Images, &amp; Maps</b>	
Map of Evaluated Regional Growth Centers	4
<b>Everett</b>	
Aerial Photo	5
Center Boundaries	7
Figure 1: Growth Focused Into Center & City	7
Figure 2: Center Job Sector Changes	7
Figure 3: Average Rent	8
Figure 4: Average Wage	8
Figure 5: Median Income	8
Figure 6: Population by Age Cohort	8
Figure 7: Renters & Owners	8
Figure 8: Households With & Without Children	8
Special Events Center Images	9
County Campus Redevelopment Images	10
Everett Station Images	11
Streetscape & Façade Improvement Images	14
Additional Images	15-16
<b>Renton</b>	
Aerial Photo	19
Center Boundary	21
Figure 1: Growth Focused Into Center & City	21
Figure 2: Renters & Owners	22
Figure 3: Households With & Without Children	22
Figure 4: Population by Age Cohort	22
Figure 5: Center Job Sector Changes	22
Figure 6: Average Wage	23
Figure 7: Median Income	23
Downtown Development Images	24 & 26
Figure 8: Average Rent	26
Figure 9: Aggregate Vehicles Available & Housing Units	26
Southport Development Images	28-29
South Renton Neighborhood Images	29
Boeing Consolidation Images	30
Frye's Electronic Image	31
IKEA Performing Arts Center Image	32

## Puget Sound Regional Growth Centers

The six centers studied in the *Urban Centers Development Toolkit* project are shown in red, and include Bellevue, Bremerton, Everett, Kent, Renton, and Tacoma Downtown. **Everett** is located at the northern edge of the four-county region. Because of this northern location, the City is well positioned to access trade by ship, truck, and rail into many areas throughout the northwest. **Renton** is located at the southern end of Lake Washington. It's placement takes advantage of many nearby metropolitan areas.



Everett Regional Growth Center From Above



# **Downtown Everett Background Report**

## **An Old City Can Learn New Tricks**

### ***Background***

The original 1890's street grid with small pedestrian-scaled blocks has remained as a reminder of Everett's successful history. As Snohomish County's largest City and one of the state's largest employers, Everett was built as a commercial and industrial stopping point in connection with the construction of the Great Northern Railroad. In the early 1900's Everett paved the way towards urban development by logging the forests and trading at sea. Much of this maritime and timber-based history carries over into present time, but some things have changed.<sup>1</sup>

The waterfront is still dominated by industrial uses. The City is still the largest in Snohomish County. Everett still gets a reputation as a hub for hard-working individuals, but some think change is good for the City. The former mayor and the current long-range planning director indicate that "[the City] was down and it is on the way back up," that Everett has "blue-collar roots" and there is some reluctance to the fact that change is going to happen.<sup>2</sup> The City recognizes that "nothing turns around quickly" and it wants to preserve the level of commitment long-term residents have provided for the City, but it is pursuing a more intensive form of urban development.<sup>3</sup>

Recent investments in transit, beautification, and entertainment facilities are beginning to place Everett in a stronger position throughout the region. Despite its location far north of the majority of the region's intensely urbanized areas it appears to be returning to its role as a major metropolitan center. The City is proud of its recent success and David Koenig, Long Range Planner, indicated that, "the projects it takes on get done."<sup>4</sup> The City is beginning to implement some of the ideas it has formed over its long planning history.

Everett's first comprehensive plan was developed in 1954. It laid out the initial structure for the zoning of the City. In 1983 Everett created an economic development strategy and in 1987 the City developed the Central City Development Plan. Both plans attempted to focus growth in the center before the regional plan, VISION 2020, identified Everett as one of the 21 Regional Growth Centers.<sup>5</sup>

The City had explored important aspects of smart growth prior to the adoption of the Growth Management Act (GMA). With the update of the zoning code in 1989<sup>6</sup> and the \$350 million advantage of a newly added naval workforce,<sup>7</sup> the City had already made some commitments to center planning. By the time the Growth Management Act was adopted Everett had previously started focusing development centrally and it had a high number of integrated uses, some mixed-use areas, and a fair balance in the distribution of jobs and housing.<sup>8</sup>

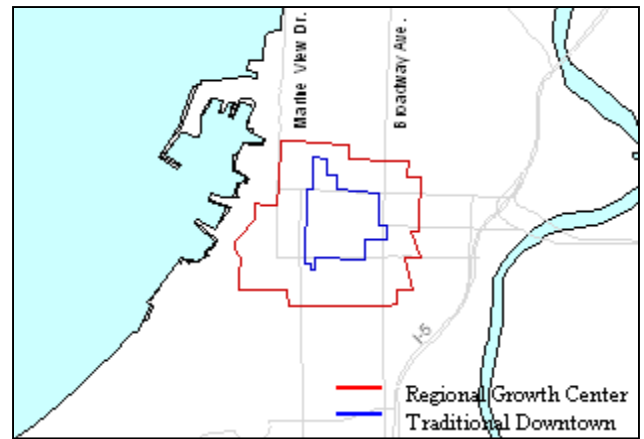
## Reaffirming A Regional Role

In its effort to retain its status as a major player in the Puget Sound, the City is beginning to invest in major improvements throughout its downtown. It is anticipated that these actions will aid in the development of partnerships with a variety of stakeholders. Working with transportation agencies, educational institutes, and the private sector has added to the resources of the jurisdiction. The City also benefits from large employers such as Boeing who have a vested interest in retaining a well-trained nearby workforce.

The 1994 Everett Comprehensive Plan highlighted the importance of concentrating jobs into designated employment centers like the downtown. The center has since become an intensive focus of employment relative to the City (Fig 1). The center also accounted for one fourth of the employment growth from 2000 to 2001 (Fig. 1). The addition of new educational and institutional investments appears to have added to the opportunities available in financial, insurance, real estate & services (FIRES) as well as governmental and educational occupations (Fig. 2).

Creating a good balance between jobs and housing is a challenge for many jurisdictions throughout the region and these new job opportunities did not create a significant draw for residents to locate specifically in Everett's center. Only two percent of the City's population growth and under six percent of the housing growth occurred in the center between 1990 and 2000 (Fig. 1). Population growth slowed fairly significantly and housing growth increased only slightly. Despite

**Regional Growth Center Boundaries**



*The City naturally developed as a port with the Puget Sound on the western edge and the Snohomish River on the East. At the local and regional level there are differences between how the boundaries of the center were originally defined.*

	% Center Growth	% City Growth	% City Growth In Center
<b>Population '90-'00</b>	8.7%	30.7%	2.0%
<b>Housing '90-'00</b>	16.4%	25.0%	5.9%
<b>Employment '95-'00</b>	10.7%	9.8%	16%
<b>Employment '00-'01</b>	7.1%	4.2%	25%

Source:  
Population & Housing: 1990 & 2000 Census.  
Employment:: Employment Security Department Estimates.  
Note:  
Land area of center is 2.21% of City

	1995-2000		2000-2001	
	#	%	#	%
<i>Construction &amp; Resources</i>	180	107%	-61	-18%
<i>Financial, Insurance, Real Estate &amp; Services</i>	261	6%	776	18%
<i>Manufacturing</i>	146	35%	-12	-2%
<i>Retail</i>	-7	-1%	-99	-10%
<i>Wholesale, Transportation, Communications, Utilities</i>	-63	-10%	-100	-17%
<i>Government &amp; Education</i>	514	15%	251	6%
<b>Total</b>	1030	11%	755	7%

Source:  
Employment Security Department Estimates

<b>Figure 3: Average Rent Change 1990-2000</b>	
Center	City
+\$91	+\$125
18%	21%

Source:  
1990 & 2000 Census  
\*All Renter Occupied Units Paying Cash Rent

<b>Figure 4: Average Wage Change 1995-2000</b>	
Center	City
+\$ 6,633	+\$ 6,525
26%	19%

Source:  
1990 & 2000 ESD Estimates

<b>Figure 5: Median Income Change 1990-2000</b>	
Center	City
+\$ 8,582	+\$ 11,685
45%	41%

Source:  
1990 & 2000 ESD Estimates

<b>Figure 6: Change in City population growth in center by age cohort 1990-2000</b>	
<18	-1%
18-34	-2%
35-49	4%
50-64	8%
65+	-6%
Total	2%

Source:  
1990 & 2000 Census

<b>Figure 7: % Of New Owners &amp; Renters 1990-2000</b>		
	% Of owner growth	% Of renter growth
<b>Center</b>	-3 %	103%
<b>City</b>	48%	52%

Source:  
1990 & 2000 Census  
\*All Renter Occupied Units Paying Cash Rent

<b>Figure 8: # Of New Households With &amp; Without Children 1990-2000</b>		
	Households with Kids	Households W/O Kids
Center	-6	330
City	2897	4749

Source:  
1990 & 2000 Census

this slow growth Everett has been able to retain a fairly stable population of people living in the downtown as rent has been more affordable in the center (Fig. 3) and wages (Fig. 4) and incomes (Fig. 5) increased at a slightly more rapid pace than the City. From 1995 to 2000 center wages were lower, but they were beginning to catch up to the City with the addition of the 261 jobs in FIRES (Fig. 2). All of the new households that were added in the center were older working age residents (Fig. 6) who were all renters (Fig. 7) without kids (Fig. 8). Despite the addition of these older residents, the median age of the City is still 32.2 years.<sup>9</sup>

## If You Build It...

Center planning in Everett is currently focused on setting the groundwork for a more intensive urban identity by committing to large public investments. Most of the City's projects have required financial resources outside of the jurisdiction. The City considers it be important that the developments are successful in order to appeal for funding on future projects. In addition to infrastructure improvements and the re-designation of one-way streets to two-way streets, the city has advanced eight major projects at a \$335 million cost to the state, county, and local jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup> The three most extensive projects in the center are the Special Events Center, the County Campus Expansion, and Everett Station.<sup>11</sup>

## Special Events Center

The Special Events Center will have a rooftop architectural feature meant to “evoke the maritime and logging heritage of the City.”<sup>12</sup> The mast-like spires follow a 1994 design objective to “enhance the appearance of the downtown skyline through the encouragement of interesting and distinctive roof forms on major buildings.”<sup>13</sup> The facility will host multiple hockey and skating events, concerts, political gatherings, and special community celebrations. These will provide opportunities to residents of the City, Snohomish County and other northern counties.<sup>14</sup> It will contain an arena that can be expanded from a 3,000 to 10,000 seat range within 24 hours.<sup>15</sup> It is expected to attract 600,000 people per year.<sup>16</sup> The \$71.5 million project did not require any new citywide taxes.<sup>17</sup> Everett received \$30 million from a special sales tax credit from the state.<sup>18</sup>

Other sources include county lodging taxes, anticipated admissions taxes, and operational revenues that help to cover the rest of the construction costs.<sup>19</sup> The City indicates that, “state policy to make Public Facilities District [PFD] funding available for regional centers was essential for the Everett project.”<sup>20</sup> The County applied one third of its PFD revenue to the development of the special events center where the revenue was “coming in at an unexpected high rate.”<sup>21</sup> The City had to begin construction on the special events center by January 2002 in order to take advantage of the tax credit from the state and prepare for the Washington Hockey League season.<sup>22</sup> Still, funding was only one of Everett’s obstacles.

## Special Events Center Interior



## Building Construction & Rooftop Feature



## Special Events Center Exterior



As Everett acquired land for the special events center a citizen group, Citizens for a Better Arena, attempted to block the construction because it would have removed a large portion of what was identified as the historic district. Preservationists in the City have called the arena plan “a ‘big bang’ theory of redevelopment... to transform it forcefully into something radically different.” The Everett PFD challenged the initiative developed by the community group.<sup>23</sup> The Snohomish County Superior Court did not uphold the initiative indicating that the project had proceeded too far along and “decisions were purely administrative, not legislative, in nature and therefore not subject to the initiative process.”<sup>24</sup> The Special Events Center was given a brick façade and many aesthetic elements were added in response.

### **County Campus Expansion**

There are other cases where the City has attempted to make obstacles into opportunities. One example is the County’s need to consolidate employee offices.

The City had a strong desire to “focus city, county, state, and federal functions into a single, easily accessible area.”<sup>25</sup> Construction began on an extensive county campus expansion in 2002. County government recognized its own inefficiencies as it historically paid “\$2.6 million dollars every year to rent commercial offices throughout Everett.”<sup>26</sup> Executive Bob Drewel sought to relocate or develop Snohomish County offices in a cheaper location near Paine Field, but

### **Future County Campus Rendering**



### **County Campus Redevelopment Plan**



the community and the former mayor were concerned that citizens would face challenges in attempting to access county offices if placed outside of the City.

Everett offered an incentive to the County for the development of an administrative building by allowing the sales tax off of the office buildings in the new campus to be used as a credit for the construction of the new facilities. The county launched the \$167 million Campus Redevelopment Initiative. The project includes a jail, a courthouse expansion and a seven-story 1300 space underground parking garage. The garage will have a shared use with the special events center and the PFD. As part of the agreement, 500 spaces will be

provided free of charge and the remaining 800 spaces will generate revenue for the County. The 160,000 square foot administrative building will begin in late 2003. In addition, a large civic plaza will be placed on top of the underground garage.<sup>27</sup>

The City has been creative in other ways. Currently, there is little designated parkland in the center and the plaza included in the redevelopment plans fulfills a 1994 objective to provide large public space “near or next to major buildings of civic importance.”<sup>28</sup> The City also encourages the provision of public space through a requirement that ensures that it is included on any project that involves residential development.<sup>29</sup> Few pocket parks or large open areas are contained in the center and it is extremely important that the City was able to negotiate for an area within regional growth center boundaries.

### **Everett Station**

The City is investing in other important regional assets. The 1994 Comprehensive Plan contains goals in support of a multi-modal facility. The long-term result is Everett Station, which is meant to “improve the role and visual impact of local and regional transit in the downtown.”<sup>30</sup>

Ed Hansen, former mayor, modeled the idea after a collaboration of 13 universities located in a complex connected to a Bay Area Rapid Transit Station. He transformed the original design of the building and negotiated with a consortium of universities to add an educational and job-training component to the project originally focused only on transportation. The proposal was contained in the

**Everett Station Exterior**



**Everett Station Interior**



**Everett Station Transit Center**



governor’s higher-education budget plan in 1998 and Everett’s space was leased at a low cost due to

the fact that construction had already been primarily funded.<sup>31</sup>

The \$44 million dollars for the project had been generated by City, state, and federal sources. Amtrak and Sound Transit have also contributed to the project. The building contains \$330,000 dollars worth of art and it has been designed so that it “evokes a sense of great rail stations of an earlier era. Soaring concrete arches help support the copper-tiled roof, and a staircase, somewhat in the style of New York’s Grand Central Station, rises to the second floor.”<sup>32</sup> A large window on the interior highlights the activity and rough industrial beauty of the surrounding City.

The North Snohomish, Island, and Skagit County Higher Education Consortium (NSIS) is contained in the University Center of Everett Station. A partnership was developed between five state universities including the University of Washington. It had been initiated due to a 1997 legislative request for a “flexible and innovative means for delivering increased education access to the northern counties.”<sup>33</sup> Job training and job placement services are provided within Everett Station indicating that the City has attempted to balance commitments to its residents with obligations it has made to developers.

Downtown revitalization of the aging industrial area and residential access between different facilities has been a large part of project development strategies in Everett. The Comprehensive Plan emphasizes that “major transportation terminals for regional transit service

should be used as opportunities for revitalizing the downtown by employing timeless, classic forms of architecture, incorporating pedestrian features and encouraging adjacent investment.”<sup>34</sup> Everett hopes to attract housing, tech-oriented firms, and other uses within a quarter mile of the station.<sup>35</sup> The City has also “improved service between downtown and Everett Station” making it so that buses run through the downtown every eight to ten minutes during peak hours.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Additional Incentives***

Other strategies being employed are policy and regulatory changes that benefit both residential and commercial development throughout the center.

The building code was changed to allow for 5-story, wood frame, multi-family housing development. Everett also developed an expedited permit process and the City initiated a 10-year property tax deferral program. The first developers to use the deferral built affordable rentals focused on low-income households. Everett’s perspective is that this below-market rate housing has not significantly aided the local economy and the City now wants to diversify its housing to attract the type of people that are able to support local businesses and spend money downtown. The tax credit has been used in order to improve the design for a number of projects in the center.<sup>37</sup>

In order to attract mixed-use development the City had to reduce the proportion of housing required in mixed-use projects from two thirds of the project to one third and parking requirements were standardized so that developers now have to

provide only one space for each housing unit.<sup>38</sup> This strategy has been used effectively in other jurisdictions, but it is too soon to tell whether these changes will have a large impact.

## **...Will They Come?**

### ***Filling In The Blanks***

Is the City thinking big and small? The combination of multiple large-scale projects is envisioned as a method of attracting new visitors to downtown businesses. The majority of the projects under construction are related to public activities and uses and the City considers it to be increasingly important to attract private investment on small or assembled parcels. Everett's answer appears to be in the form of more intensive marketing efforts.

The development adjacent to Everett Station has yet to come, but the City is "working on design standards [and] regulations for development around the Everett Station multi-modal community center [and] the Broadway Avenue Corridor."<sup>39</sup> Consultant Leeland & Associates conducted a market study for the City and made the recommendation to "increase the manufacturing base and relate it to tech-based employment" in order to take advantage of the skills of newly trained/educated students at Everett Station's University Center.<sup>40</sup> The City would like to encourage more intensive development around its large investments.

### ***Reassessing City Priorities***

Everett is beginning to broaden its strategy. "Under Ed Hansen it was more substantive [because it was needed]... now there is more of a focus on

marketing... Now [Everett] has something to market."<sup>41</sup> Earlier this year the City of Everett developed a slogan in order to attract positive publicity. With the branding, "Everett: Be Surprised", the City is attempting to highlight the unexpected changes that it has been able to implement in recent years.<sup>42</sup>

Multiple groups are dedicated to the success of Everett's center. The Downtown Everett Association (DEA) provides representation of businesses in downtown Everett to the media and other governmental bodies. A Business Improvement Area taxing district (BIA) has historically been used for street cleaning and minor streetscape improvements and maintenance. Now the funds will be more focused on the promotion of city activities. The Downtown Everett Action Committee "exists to enhance the economic vitality and to sustain the revitalization of downtown Everett."<sup>43</sup> Finally, the Everett Area Chamber of Commerce attempts to coordinate all of these partners with the City.

Everett will be building the groundwork for involved partners by advertising development potential. Everett's marketing activities have been newly named "Great Thinking, With A View."<sup>44</sup> The City indicates that there is now a "tremendous amount of cooperation and a strong working relationship with the business community and the county."<sup>45</sup> The new mayor recognized the necessity of fostering a more active marketing group in order to draw in partners from the private sector and Economic Development Director, Lanie McMullin, was hired. Overall, the City indicates that Everett

contains a “strong core [of private interests] working hard and working closely with the City.”<sup>46</sup>

### ***Beauty Brings Builders***

Many older communities face challenges related to dilapidated housing and aging commercial areas in need of building facade improvements. Everett has fallen prey to this experience. Many of the older neighborhoods lack proper maintenance and commercial buildings from more recent history suffer from poor design that does not provide for a positive civic image. The City has focused on the “rehabilitation of vacant buildings into residential and commercial uses.”<sup>47</sup> In addition, the City has formed a Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) that aids in the revitalization of the housing stock, historic preservation, some economic development, and community facility improvements.<sup>48</sup> The results are evident on the street.

There is visible proof that Everett has had recent success by pursuing its 1994 vision as it has “upgrade[d] the condition and appearance of the streetscape and sidewalks throughout the downtown.”<sup>49</sup> The city targeted Colby Ave. and Hewitt Ave. and enhanced features at the intersection between these two main streets. In 2002 the City spent \$10 million for upgrades on Hewitt.<sup>50</sup> As part of this effort, the City has invested in major water and sewer upgrades that are necessary for further development.<sup>51</sup>

Curb bulbs continue to be constructed throughout the center in order to create narrower street crossings and provide vegetation and other

### **Revitalization Efforts**



### **Streetscape Improvements**



### **Pedestrian Features**



aesthetic elements. Street lighting and other utility hardware were recently redesigned to fit more

appropriately into the streetscape. All of these efforts have enhanced the appearance of the downtown.

## Challenges

### ***Building In A Built Out Center***

The center has major redevelopment obstacles relative to the surrounding City. Less than 5 percent of the land in Everett’s center is vacant, but the overall City has a generous supply of vacant land.<sup>52</sup> This makes it difficult to focus major developments in the downtown.

As an indication, there are few currently observable land use changes on smaller lots. The conversion of an old single family home to a church and the development of an office building that is only one story tall, suggests that the City may need to concentrate on containing more density. There are a few newer town-homes sparsely distributed in the residential areas. Some Hewitt Ave. properties have been purchased for renovations and “for the first time in years, residential developments are being built near the downtown core.”<sup>53</sup> Nautica Partners, LLC. took advantage of the City’s tax abatement program and developed a \$9.7 million mixed-use project with 122 apartment units and 5,500 square feet of retail. An additional mixed-use development is also under construction.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Protecting Neighborhoods***

Commercial development on residential sites is not always of benefit. Many of the residential areas of Everett’s center contain a large number of small medical and law offices operating

### **Town-homes**



### **High-Density Residential Development**



### **Mixed-Use Development Under Construction**



## **In-House Medical Office**



out of old residential structures. The City originally allowed in-house medical offices in order to provide a neighborhood dentist or doctor for the nearby residential areas.

In 1990 Everett reduced the number of possible uses in the residential areas due to an excessive increase in this type of development. The City compromised with established medical businesses by establishing a medical/clinic office area.

Now the City indicates that, “all of the medical areas are expanding” and Everett contains “the second busiest emergency room in the state.”<sup>55</sup> The move resulted in the merge and expansion of General Hospital and Providence Medical Center. A new facility has been constructed to address the needs for childbirth and breast cancer care and the hospital was renamed Providence Everett Medical Center.<sup>56</sup> The City has reaffirmed that it wants to limit the number of medical facilities encroaching upon its residential neighborhoods.

Residential land use policy was changed in 1994 to “strongly [discourage] the conversion of

residential areas to non-residential uses.”<sup>57</sup> The policy goes on to deter the encroachment of commercial zones into residential areas with some exceptions that allow for nearby neighborhood-scale retail uses, less intensive mixed-use development, and some commercial redevelopment. The policies also allow for “home occupations as a subordinate and clearly accessory use to the permitted residential use.”<sup>58</sup> Other challenges are more difficult to address at the local level.

## **Regional Barriers**

The economy has been a major burden in revitalization efforts. Everett lost some potential office development due to the decreased demand for office space in the region.<sup>59</sup> Local Boeing job reductions have also contributed to the problem. It is apparent to the City that there will be a soft rental market which will slow multi-family development over the next few years.

The City indicates that, “if people can afford to, they are buying,” not renting.<sup>60</sup> Everett is finding it difficult to provide for owners because of a large number of lawsuits against developers for faulty condominium construction. Insurance companies are unwilling to support condominium development because of the losses they are likely to incur. The “demand for condos is still there,” but many projects are on hold.<sup>61</sup>

## **Access Limitations**

There are additional challenges that the City has little control over. Access on and off I-5 is extremely important for the City of Everett. The

roadways were originally intended for 30,000 vehicles per day at one interchange outside of Everett. Five times that number is what is occurring at present.<sup>62</sup>

The City indicates that it is very dependent on the implementation of regional transportation projects. According to the City the local projects have been done and the county has completed some east-west projects, but Everett is waiting on commuter rail and the state has yet to come through.

## **Perspectives from interviews**

Lessons can be learned from Everett's long history of planning. The Regional Council met with the City, the Everett Area Chamber of Commerce, and a number of business owners to draw out some advice that similar jurisdictions may be able to apply to their own attempts to concentrate growth into their center.

The City has indicated that, "if you face something that the market doesn't support you won't have successful development." Looking back to the boom of the 1990's that Bellevue was able to take advantage of, Everett understands that, it "missed that boat, but [the community is] putting [itself] in the position to sail when the next one comes."<sup>63</sup> It has been very realistic about its goals and it understands that it is not yet in the best market for certain types of development.

A jurisdiction should have the "willingness and flexibility to change directions and take advantage of things when they are there in front of [it]." For the Everett Station it was important for the City to ask "what are the success stories from other

similar areas?"<sup>64</sup> The project would not have contained as diverse a set of uses if the former mayor had not visited other areas to explore alternatives that were available.

With this elasticity, however, it is important for jurisdictions to "be forward thinking and encourage people to take the risk."<sup>65</sup> Many of the projects that Everett has been able to develop are the result of long-term planning efforts involving multiple partners. It is also evident that the origin of these projects can be traced back to the vision that the City developed for the 1994 Comprehensive Plan.

Everett has been energized by recent public investments. The City indicates that many of the projects that are complete or close to complete are well regarded by the public overall. Preserving the way of life in Everett has been particularly important to the public and the City has had to contend with some opposition to major change. When facing opposition, it has been important for the City to pay very close attention to the success of projects that are to set the tone for future development. Everett recognizes that it "built confidence by having some victories" and it suggested that other jurisdictions should "blend the vision of the future with the past" in order to gather support from long-time community members.<sup>66</sup> There may be "a lot of squawking, but if you do a project well, people will embrace it." For Everett Station there was "not one naysayer" that criticized the project once it was complete.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

It is always important for cities to identify what role or niche they can fill in the region. Markets for development can be more or less approachable for investors depending on the jurisdiction. Everett is creating a market for growth by attracting entertainment activities in the form of a stadium capable of holding a variety of events. It is putting people on the street by ensuring that governmental offices remain in the downtown, by redeveloping the streetscape so that pedestrian amenities dominate the downtown landscape, and by placing higher-education facilities in a transit accessible location.

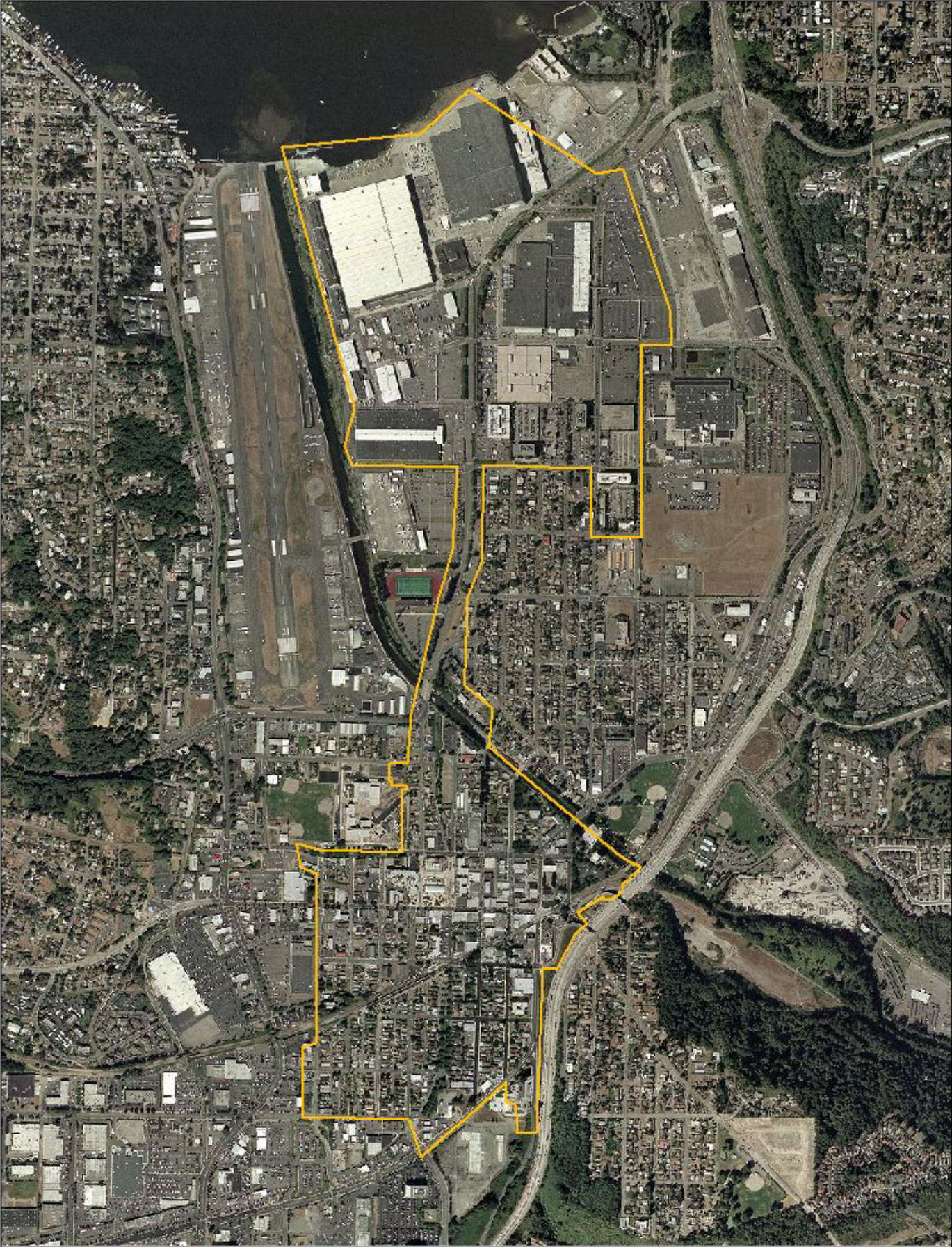
Improving access is one of the most important factors in attracting jobs and people. Everett is performing well in the region by ensuring that local transit facilities are well integrated with the regional commuter rail system that is under development.

Everett contains the anchors for development, but there is much of the landscape still to be filled. Assembling land and finding developers willing to invest in smaller parcels should be one of the City's primary focuses in the coming years. Everett has been impressive in its ability to build in a fully developed City. It must leverage the investments it has made by marketing its successes and forming better land use connections between Everett Station, the Special Events Center, and the downtown.

By coordinating the numerous groups dedicated to the downtown, the City would be able to prevent competition for resources and institute a

clearer understanding as to where responsibilities lie and how the sustained vision will be fulfilled.

Renton Regional Growth Center From Above



# **Downtown Renton Background Report**

## **Seeking The Center**

“Renton has been an amazing success story. By moving car dealers out to a better, more visible location along the freeway, the city has opened up whole blocks for new development. Housing, along with shops and cafes have come in, forming a relatively dense, walkable core around a new civic square. A multistory parking structure that is part of an expanded and re-configured transit center will contribute to the economic vitality by providing a shared parking resource for businesses and residents.”

-Mark Hinshaw, Seattle Times June 30, 2002.

## **Background**

The City of Renton has made a name for itself in the Puget Sound region. State agencies, Newspapers, and national journals have highlighted Renton’s center-based planning efforts as a success. Jurisdictions throughout the region have become increasingly attentive to how the City has gained visibility in the region. So how did this old, struggling, mid-sized suburban city get this much attention?

Like many other older cities throughout Washington State and the entire northwest, Renton’s origins are connected to the development of railroad and resource-based industries. The development of the Boeing Plant for the World War II production of the B-29 airplane served as a dramatic boost for the City.<sup>67</sup>

The City’s ability to provide jobs and other services to its residents has been directly connected to fluctuations in the airline industry and it has recognized this vulnerability. Political leaders in the early 90’s committed to a philosophy that Renton would have to diversify and “do something different or die.”<sup>68</sup> The historic district was in need of support that the City could not provide and strip

development dominated the city’s streets. As a requirement of the Growth Management Act the City of Renton adopted a comprehensive plan in 1995 and there was a “useful coincidence of centers concepts already under development.”<sup>69</sup> Renton promoted the creation of a “visual and physical focal point for the surrounding residential areas.”<sup>70</sup> Over the past eight years the City has attempted to focus growth and development into its regional growth center in an effort to create a community with a positive regional image and more of an urban quality. The City has been very effective at forming solid partnerships with business and community resources, gaining public support, investing in innovative regulatory revisions, and creating and taking advantage of redevelopment opportunities.

The City established a ‘Center Downtown’ designation to create an environment with urban scale multi-family development at the highest densities allowed in the City. It hopes to “create a new synergism of public and private sector activities.”<sup>71</sup> Policy in the comprehensive plan went on to make sure that new office and commercial developments were to be more intensive than what had previously existed. Internal vehicular circulation was to be improved while car access was to be somewhat limited with a requirement that parking be located inside buildings and shared among different users.<sup>72</sup>

## **Unearthing Opportunities**

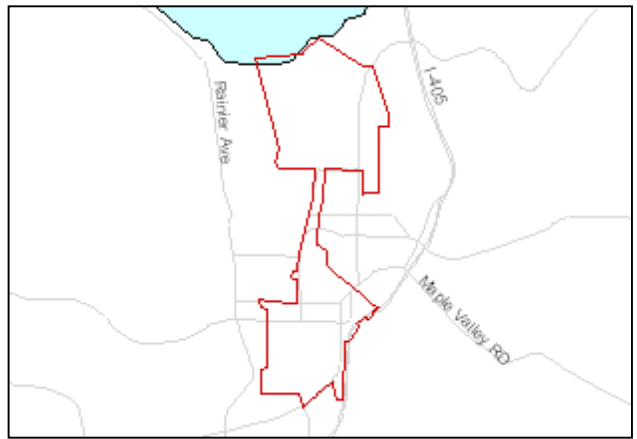
The jurisdiction set a five-year goal to implement all regulation revisions specific to the downtown center.<sup>73</sup> The City has had tremendous

progress along this short timeline. In response to a growing number of suburban-style multi-family developments, Renton was able to build upon a public movement to protect single-family neighborhoods and the City promised to focus multi-family development primarily in the downtown. While outside the center the City also made a change in the required number of short housing plats from four to nine increasing incentives for developers to invest in infill single-family development on small lots.

The urban center has not gathered the amount of housing growth that was anticipated, but it is important to note that a fair number of the housing projects are occurring just outside of the center and many of the projects occurred after 2000 when the City was able to take advantage of redevelopment opportunities. Still, the center was not a major focus of housing growth between 1990 and 2000 (Fig 1). It gained housing units at a lower rate than the city. In the earlier part of the decade the center had accounted for 6.3 percent of the housing growth in the city, but fewer housing units were added in the second half of the decade and the center accounted for half as much of the city’s growth as it had been.

Even though there is a poor rental market in the region, the lower land costs in Renton have been able to sustain developer’s interests. In 2002, 845 total units were finalized in the City because it is attracting “people who want the urban feel but can’t afford to live in downtown Seattle or Bellevue,” however, developers have been a bit more cautious following the 2001 slump.<sup>74</sup> After experiencing an

### Regional Growth Center Boundaries



*A major interstate, I-405, runs along of the eastern edge of the center. The boundaries of the center are defined equally at the local and regional level. Renton’s center has industrial development related to Boeing in the north and more urbanized development in the south.*

	% Center Growth	% City Growth	% City Growth In Center
<b>Population '90-'00</b>	22.4%	20.1%	4.8%
<b>Housing '90-'00</b>	14.8%	17.8%	4.5%
<b>Employment '95-'00</b>	22.7%	28.8%	26%
<b>Employment '00-'01</b>	-4.4%	-2.5%	56% decline

Source:  
Population & Housing: 1990 & 2000 Census.  
Employment: 1995, 2000, & 2001\* ESD Estimates.

Note:  
Land area of center is 4.97% of City

extremely rapid leasing rate of 25 units each month, a local developer now indicates that his other units are renting at only 10 a month. He is “not about to start building anything right now,” but he remains confident that Renton is still a good market to be in as it is the next stop over for high-tech businesses that want to locate nearby.<sup>75</sup>

Figure 2: % Of New Owners & Renters 1990-2000		
	% Of owner growth	% Of renter growth
Center	0.0%	100.0%
City	77.5%	22.5%

Source:  
1990 & 2000 Census  
\*All Renter Occupied Units Paying Cash Rent

Figure 3: # Of New Households With & Without Children 1990-2000		
	Households with Kids	Households W/O Kids
Center	+10	+237
City	+944	+2545

Source:  
1990 & 2000 Census

Figure 4: Change in City population growth in center by age cohort 1990-2000	
<18	0%
18-34	10%
35-49	4%
50-64	2%
65+	20%
Total	5%

Source:  
1990 & 2000 Census

Figure 5: Center Job Sector Changes				
	1995-2000		2000-2001	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Construction &amp; Resources</b>	153	10%	-34	-20%
<i>Financial, Insurance, Real Estate &amp; Services</i>	994	1%	-653	-37%
<i>Manufacturing</i>	2158	0.2%	4	0%
<i>Retail</i>	-134	-0.2%	-285	-45%
<i>Wholesale, Transportation, Communications, Utilities</i>	585	3%	-186	-24%
<i>Government &amp; Education</i>	-579	-1%	393	240%
<b>Total</b>	3178	0.2%	-761	-4%

Source:  
1995, 2000, & 2001 ESD Estimates

All of the new housing units constructed in the urban center were renter occupied units between 1990 and 2000 (Fig 2). The center attracted mostly single people without kids where the city attracted more of a mixture of household types (Fig 3). In

addition, 20 percent of the City's growth of those over 65 was located in the downtown area (Fig 4). Unlike population and housing, employment was strong in the downtown area and comparable to the city between 1995 and 2000 (Fig 1).

Renton's employment characteristics are changing. In 1990 Boeing provided 59 percent of the jobs in Renton. The company now accounts for 35 percent of the jobs.<sup>76</sup> Boeing, Inc. and Paccar, Inc. remain among the top five principal private employers, but Zones, Inc. received more of the employment base than Paccar in 2001 and the City is pushing for more diverse forms of employment with the addition of IKEA and Wizards of The Coast.<sup>77</sup> It is important to note that half of the center is made up of Boeing property and the data changes would be much more significant if not for the airline giant. Half of the 2001 job losses occurred in the urban center, some due to Boeing cutbacks (Fig 1). The year 2001 also saw Manufacturing and Government & Education jobs as the only sectors with growth in the center (Fig 5). In the wider city almost all of the job sectors had gains while Retail and Wholesale, Transportation, Communications, and Utilities jobs declined and G&E remained stable.

It is interesting to observe that 3,178 jobs were added to the center, but 304 people moved out from 1995 to 2000. In contrast, 4,662 people moved into the city with the addition of 12,313 jobs. Jobs in the outlying areas of the city have continued to pay around \$9,000 less, but center wages increased with slightly less intensity relative to city wages during the ten-year period (Fig 6). Those that live in

the downtown have remained poor. The median income is around \$13,500 lower in the center and growing slower than the City (Fig 7).

Citywide, Renton has received some very recent successes despite the sagging economic climate. In 2002 City planning fees were \$300,000 higher than budgeted and building permit revenues finished about \$600,000 greater than expected. The City also reports that 58 percent of Renton citywide households currently earn more than \$50,000 a year and the citywide median household income was \$60,661.<sup>78</sup>

**Growth Guiding Gurus**

A center’s development is dependent on an approach that is well-coordinated, but flexible. This holds true for the people implementing such measures in each jurisdiction. Renton’s success is due in no small part to the commitment and dedication of its staff.

Sue Carlson, Renton’s former economic development director, has been acknowledged as an important actor in Renton’s success. She began work to revitalize the City in 1993. After working for the City of Redmond, she brought with her knowledge of planning, real estate, and development issues. Her position was created with the co-location of the Economic Development Department and the Long Range Planning Department. She inspired staff with an optimistic outlook on the City’s future and came through on a number of projects. Her efforts have resulted in major downtown development, a transition in

<b>Figure 6: Average Wage Change 1995-2000</b>	
Center	City
+\$ 11,006	+\$ 10,521
23.3%	27.0%

Source:  
1990 & 2000 ESD Estimates

<b>Figure 7: Median Income Change 1990-2000</b>	
Center	City
+\$6,959	+\$13,427
27.5%	41.5%

Source:  
1990 & 2000 ESD Estimates

Renton’s regional image, and the attraction of new businesses such as IKEA.<sup>79</sup>

In 1995 Renton aggressively sought to acquire land for redevelopment in the center. The City negotiated with local car dealerships to relocate nearer to Interstate 405 to take advantage of the captive commuting audience.<sup>80</sup> Renton changed the zoning in an area away from the downtown, transforming an old industrial area into an area within city limits where dealerships could locate near each other to allow customers opportunities to comparison shop.

The City discounted the land price and half of the appraisal fee was waived in return for the relocation of dealerships to the new area. The ‘Automall’ zone has generated a lot of revenue for the city and opened up five acres for redevelopment in the downtown.<sup>81</sup> The City carefully considered which development company they would allow to build on the large tract of land to fulfill the vision they had set out for in the 1995 comprehensive plan.

Leadership in the community is not limited to the public sector. Don Dally was willing to take a risk on Renton because of the City’s promise to

invest in road improvements and the transit center. The City courted Dally because he “bought into the vision.”<sup>82</sup> He continues to be involved with much of the development activity in the downtown and his company understands how Renton’s urban center is framed in the region. Dally encouraged the city to take action to support the private community as it sought out places to build. It became obvious to Sue Carlson “if [the City] wanted the developer to invest, [it] needed to invest [its] own money.”<sup>83</sup>

## Setting The Tone

Dally Homes, Inc. has now developed three moderately dense housing and mixed-use complexes. Dally’s Renaissance at Renton (110 units), Burnett Station (58 units), Metropolitan Place (90 units), and other developments in the downtown have been successful at laying the groundwork for a regional growth center with a more urbanized demographic.<sup>84</sup> Dally was not concerned with the fact that his projects would compete with one another. Having many complexes actually helped to “set the tone.”<sup>85</sup> In a community unaccustomed to this form of development, it was important for the project to appear as part of a larger whole. Instead of developing a single incongruent mixed-use building, the project aimed to create community. Dally focused on providing options for young and old renters who “don’t want to live on the hill where kids are, they want more of an urban feel.”<sup>86</sup> Dally’s downtown projects were facilitated by a number of plans and agreements with the City and the County.

**Renaissance At Renton**



**Burnett Station**



**Metropolitan Place**



## **Partnering To Succeed**

Dally had been encouraged by the success of the nearby 110-unit Renaissance At Renton development, which had filled in only four months.<sup>87</sup> Due to the City's investment in infrastructure and amenities, his company reconsidered an abandoned idea to develop the former Good Chevrolet car dealership following a review of the costs to provide parking.

Renton had already adopted useful zoning for the downtown area. There was a memorandum of understanding between the City and Dally to build a new plaza and provide additional park space that a citizen group had been demanding for some time. Prior to February 2000, the City had already invested \$4 million in infrastructure improvements and land assembly at a significant savings to the developer.<sup>88</sup> The city paid for infrastructure improvements "up to the walls."<sup>89</sup> The City's investments made it possible for Dally to spend more on the buildings to produce a higher quality project.

It was necessary for the City to have additional public partners so that the projects could pencil out. Sue Carlson recognized these needs and recruited King County at an early stage. The three-way partnership between the City, the County, and Dally Homes, Inc. was then formed with the establishment of the County's Transit Oriented Development (TOD) program in 1997. Renton was particularly enthusiastic about being a pilot site for TOD and Dally had already considered more construction in Renton's downtown.<sup>90</sup>

Edward Walker, Metro's South County TOD Project Manager, indicates that the GMA resulted in "a natural collaboration between suburban cities and the county to satisfy housing targets using county property currently utilized solely for park-and-rides," and the City of Renton had "an incentive to work with the county on a project that would add density to its downtown center."<sup>91</sup>

The County was willing to front some of the cost for parking as long as the property contained shared-use tenant and transit-related spaces on the base floor. The City insisted on the ability to replace the county as tenant if the demand for off-street parking outpaced the demand for transit-related parking within a ten-year period.<sup>92</sup> The City was also able to negotiate for the construction of a new \$10 million parking garage to contribute to the activity being generated downtown. It will provide 570 spaces and the parking will be shared among different users.<sup>93</sup>

Dally was also willing to provide free bus passes to prospective residents because of the construction of the parking facility. The county supported this with the purchase and marketing of the transit passes.<sup>94</sup> This strategy is important because it appears that poorer renters continue to live in the center, despite the fact that the average rent has increased (Fig. 6, 7, & 8). Also, free passes and improved access might have allowed people to pay more for added urban services & amenities due to a decrease in individual transportation costs.

**Renton Transit Center**



**Civic Plaza**



**Renton Pavilion (Planned)**



Figure 8: Average Rent Change 1990-2000	
Center	City
+ \$ 130	+ \$ 112

Source:  
1990 & 2000 Census  
\*All Renter Occupied Units Paying Cash Rent

Figure 9: Change In Aggregate Vehicles Available & Housing Units 1990-2000	
Vehicles	Housing Units
9%	26%
247	536

Source:  
1990 & 2000 Census

**Forming A New Community**

Partly as a result of the TOD development, the incentives, and the addition of elderly residents, census data indicates that while many housing units were constructed in the center, fewer vehicles were added (Fig. 9). Transit service changes may have reduced the desire for vehicle use as routes were revised to connect through the new Renton transit center and Metro added 115,000 hours of service.<sup>95</sup> People are beginning to appear on the street as a result of the new developments.

It became a priority for the City to create a gathering space where casual resident and traveler interaction could take place. The new public plaza provides the necessary ingredients for a range of social interaction. High school students, skateboarders, businessmen, and older residents can be seen in presence of each other throughout the day.

The Piazza Renton will be further improved on in the coming months. The last addition to the center complex will include enhancements to Renton Pavilion. The Pavilion is a deteriorated

Mazda dealership building that currently stands as a solitary reminder of what the area looked like prior to construction of the many new facilities. With plans to spend \$2.6 million<sup>96</sup> on structural upgrades and facade improvements, the City hopes to develop a central place for indoor and outdoor retail and civic uses.<sup>97</sup> Mayor Jesse Tanner indicated that, “the pavilion is the latest piece of the puzzle the City began assembling five years ago... The building will provide a venue for events, bringing more people and activity to our rapidly changing downtown core.”<sup>98</sup> Retail uses will be integrated with celebrations such as the farmer’s market and the City anticipates that improvements will be complete sometime in 2003.

New retail development has been slow in coming, but it is happening. In the historic district, vacant storefronts remain, but unique restaurants, bars, and breweries are beginning to locate in Renton’s center. Places such as Melrose Grill, Giant’s Causeway Irish Pub, Armandos Cafe Italiano, and Jubilante are beginning to make Renton into more of a 24-hour place.

## **The Market Maker**

Much of Renton’s recent success can be traced back to the integration of marketing elements into city practices in 1997. There was a perception that Renton’s schools were suffering and there were not many “quality developments.”<sup>99</sup> Delores Gibbons, School District Superintendent, and Sue Carlson got together and formed a collaborative partnership between an interdisciplinary group of public and private stakeholders.<sup>100</sup> Sharing ideas

and resources, the Renton Community Marketing Campaign was formed and the City hired ‘branding’ consultants Hamilton/Saunderson and Hornall Anderson. After establishing a city slogan “Renton. Ahead of the Curve,” playing off of the notorious I-405 ‘S’-Curves congestion, the City began the marketing of major businesses, companies, and institutions under its jurisdiction.<sup>101</sup>

Renton initially spent \$600,000 to promote its activities and brand City vehicles and stationary. The marketing campaign continues to advertise business and quality living opportunities through success-story news articles and profiles of individual business owners and workers. It forms direct comparisons with taxes in other cities in the region to make the case that Renton is cheaper for locating business.<sup>102</sup>

The establishment of a City Business Plan has been particularly helpful in ensuring that all City staff is on the same page and motivated with the idea that Renton is a ‘World Class City.’ The document is at every City employee’s desk. It contains five permanent goals with annually revised objectives, making it concise enough for everyone to understand and stay focused. In addition, all City budget requests are tied to the Business Plan.<sup>103</sup>

The City has worked hard to change its image. It now speaks and acts more like the business community in order to attract and form better communication with developers and business leaders. Alex Pietsch, Renton’s current Economic Development Director, indicated that the marketing campaign has placed Renton in a less vulnerable position in the region:

“Clearly it has made a difference in people’s perceptions of Renton and created a buzz... We had a blue-collar image. We were known as the ‘Boeing Town’. We wanted people to think of Renton in a new context... The campaign has certainly attracted developers to take a look at Renton.”<sup>104</sup>

The City now indicates that, “[it has] never had a major player break ranks on any of the major decisions.”<sup>105</sup> Staff also indicated that there have been no substantive appeals in the urban center because investments have visibly paid off, as the City has been able to attract developers, major investors, and begin revitalizing its downtown.

Renton also invested in a streamlined permitting system that it believes has paid off. The “Getting To Yes” campaign has reduced approval times for building and development permits in the region.<sup>106</sup> The City performs pre-application meetings providing written comments. It has also committed to a six-week SEPA and site plan review that can be run concurrently with the processing of building permits. An important element in Renton’s changes has been the expansion of environmental checklists in order to reduce the need for an Environmental Impact Statement. All of these actions have streamlined the process and sped up development permitting.

Between 1993 and 2000 the number of permitted units in the City was 4,189. Around 85% of these permits occurred in the four years leading up to 2000. Annual revenue from building permits rose from \$800,000 to \$2.8 million in the last ten years. The mayor also reported that there has been

nearly \$600 million in new construction from 2000 to 2003 and 59 percent of all total property taxes now come from commercial, industrial, and mixed-use properties.<sup>107</sup> In spite of all this activity, around seven percent of the land in Renton’s center is still vacant.<sup>108</sup> This provides the City with the opportunity to develop the center rather than having to focus projects in areas outside of the downtown.

## **Projects From Around The Center**

Planning efforts and the development that has occurred in the downtown has attracted new and traditional developers. Benaroya Co. was “willing to step up and take a risk and invest in [the City],” with the development of an office park in the mid-1990’s.<sup>109</sup> Paul Allen’s Vulcan Northwest, Inc. had some initial plans to develop mixed-use on a 68-acre waterfront property northeast of the regional growth center. The \$60-80 million project is on hold after plans to buy additional property fell through.

New developers that have located in the area appear to have adopted a similar approach to development. SECO Development and Wright Runstad & Co. have invested in a large mixed-use waterfront project on an old steam power plant site just outside of the urban center boundaries adjacent to the Boeing factories.<sup>110</sup> The Southport development is planned to include 17.5 acres of waterfront projects. The first apartment complex, The Bristol at Southport, is complete with 188 units above two levels of parking and retail. The apartments cater to a youthful, high-class market.

The timing of a second 207-unit apartment complex will depend on the occupancy rates at the first building.<sup>111</sup> The project also includes three nine-story office buildings and a hotel that are currently on hold.<sup>112</sup> The City believes that a center boundary adjustment to include this site would be a logical extension since the area is on the edge of the existing boundary.<sup>113</sup>

As part of the City's effort to increase housing in the downtown, Centex Homes also developed 37 condos taking advantage of the less well known Cedar River and pedestrian access to the downtown transit hub.

#### **The Bristol At Southport**



#### **Southport Office Development**



## **Proactive Planning Activity**

The street grid, development types, and the general character of the northern part of Renton's center are very different from the south. The City envisions the north as an area of more diverse forms of employment and development than its current state. In addition, the City also has some interesting plans for the South Renton Neighborhood.

### ***Innovative Plans***

In November of 2000, Renton started to explore options to develop the southern area of the center. The plan has the intention of using an old linear park as a pedestrian spine that connects the City Hall to the new development. This would extend the core of the downtown and open up opportunities to connect civic and retail uses.

The City has invested in an unexpected strategy to reduce densities in the area to attract developers.<sup>114</sup> Renton decided that the area had been over-zoned for high-density multi-family development and it was time to transition the low-density single-family character that currently exists into a more dense urban form. The area will be down-zoned to allow for intermediate scale projects that remain dense enough to meet growth targets. The proposal has been well received in developer focus groups and some new town-home development is likely to happen within the next few years.<sup>115</sup>

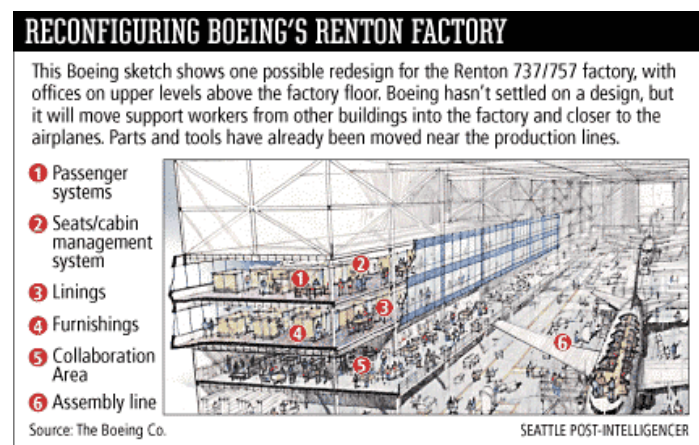
## Survival Strategies

The northern half of the regional growth center is almost entirely composed of Boeing factories and offices in private ownership. Much of the property is not accessible to the general public and it forms a significant obstacle for roadway circulation. Boeing relocated its major corporate offices in 2001 and it is looking to consolidate some of its resources on to a smaller portion of the current property. NBBJ Architects have designed the consolidation so that offices will be constructed in the mezzanines of the factory space and engineers will be able to look over the construction of their designs (See Fig. 10). The City has planned ahead and it is well positioned to take advantage of the 75 to 280 acres that may open up to redevelopment due to this move.<sup>116</sup>

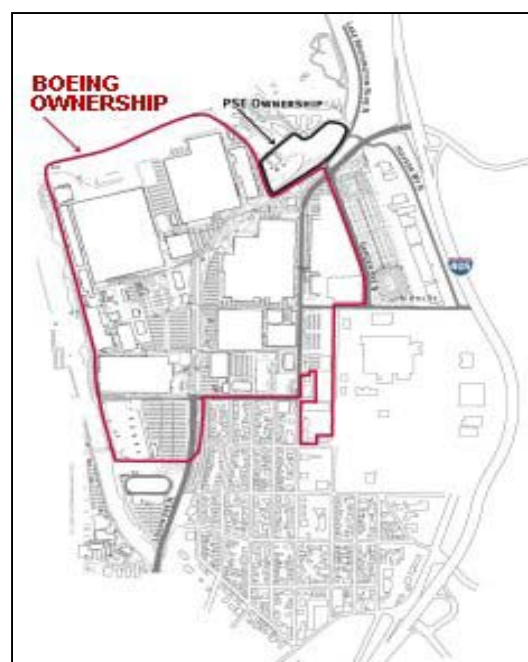
As part of a larger City effort, this northern section of the center may be developed as “a ‘Science City’ where research, discovery, and education blend with commerce.”<sup>117</sup>

Renton intends to “transition the industrial property to its highest and best use.” It is committed to prevent the site from being the setting for an alternative industrial use and the City wants the area to have ‘town center’ type development. It would create “new opportunities for retail, housing, entertainment, and public spaces.”<sup>118</sup> Boeing and the City are in the process of forming a plan through a development agreement to explore changes in the existing zoning regulations that would allow for better sale value and redevelopment potential.<sup>119</sup>

Fig. 10 - Consolidated Boeing Offices



Potential Boeing Redevelopment Site



The two more intensive redevelopment scenarios would prepare the City for the potential absence of Boeing operations within 30 years. Both alternatives include office and residential buildings up to six stories in height. The plan would account for 17.7 million square feet of development potential if fully developed. This total would provide a comparable amount of office space as other eastside cities.<sup>120</sup> In addition, the non-industrial area of the center has pedestrian-scaled block sizes at an average of 3.4 acres in size and the

northern part of the center has only three blocks totaling 325 acres.<sup>121</sup> Significant infrastructure additions would be necessary in order to bring more pedestrian urban form to the northern industrial area.

With Boeing cutbacks and the recession, office and industrial property vacancies have climbed. In 2000 the amount of office space that was vacant in the City was 5.3 percent. It grew to 12.3 percent by the end of 2001.<sup>122</sup> Some retail and office space in the historic district is up for rent or lease.

In response to the weakening office market the City has had to explore other options. Opus Northwest LLC had intended to develop on a large 17-acre vacant lot adjacent to Renton City Hall, but the company was concerned about the rising vacancy rates and it abandoned the idea. The City has refocused its efforts and attracted retail to this and other sites. The member-based, Sam's Club, will open a store adjacent to City hall to compete with Costco's dominance in the region.<sup>123</sup> Construction has started on a Frye's Electronics and a Target store is proposed on the eastern border of the urban center's northern industrial area.<sup>124</sup>

This recent endeavor into big box development is not an icon of Renton's historic aesthetic, transit and pedestrian oriented planning, but the City has always indicated that it will choose economically feasible projects in order to diversify its economy. Here still the City seems to retain its GMA centers focus by locating the big-box development to areas near I-405, while retaining

## Big Box Retail Construction



other more central areas for more dense, mixed-use development.

## Perspectives From Interviews

The story of Renton's downtown development has become a regional example of flexible and effective local planning. Important lessons arise in observation of the incentives and tools that the City has used to facilitate better center development. The Regional Council met with the City and a local developer to learn about how Renton has achieved its successes.

Private developers, landowners, and the general business community sometimes criticize jurisdictions for being overly focused on regulation. Cities have set regulations in place in order to develop better communities, but it is important to "look to your own regulations as obstacles to better development."<sup>125</sup> According to those interviewed, Renton's staff continuously critiques its own assumptions and avoids the accumulation of tiny code and regulatory changes that developers see as

unwarranted and unnecessary obstacles. The City used developer focus groups to assess its own plans and found it useful to involve other leaders in decisions related to downtown development. The City “doesn't point towards the policy, they work with business.”<sup>126</sup> As an example of Renton’s commitment, a grocery store had threatened to leave the downtown and Renton worked hard to change the zoning and design guidelines to retain the business. It ultimately allowed the siting of a gas station on the grocery store property. The City has subsequently been able to secure the grocery store chain in one other location.

It is important for jurisdictions to understand the market in which they are appealing for development. If a City’s goals are directly contradictory to market forces no development will occur. Focus groups are particularly important as they can define how the market and the public might respond. Community and business leaders have a complementary perspective as to what is more valuable for the city and the center.

The IKEA Performing Arts Center represents the City’s success at engaging community leaders and local businesses. IKEA contributed \$500,000.<sup>127</sup> The City had taken initial steps to negotiate with the school district and IKEA to develop a performing arts center with 550 seats shared by professionals and high school students. As a testament to an involved public, a citizen-based non-profit was formed and it raised \$1.5 million within 18 months.<sup>128</sup> The performing arts center already provides for an excellent aesthetic addition to S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. If not for the City’s

### **IKEA Performing Arts Center**



collaboration with the school district and IKEA, Renton would have found it more difficult to generate this intensive amount of public support and secure enough funding to complete the project.

The City has increased its public involvement efforts in order to improve citizen-city dialogue. It invested in a neighborhood program in the late 1990's, which assigned City employees to neighborhoods to offer support for local projects. The program evolved into the use of neighborhood liaisons that continue to participate in community picnics and discussions on small capital improvement projects. The liaisons are used as a communication and feedback tool with the public. The City also has a neighborhood matching grant program that concentrates on beautification and an online outreach effort allows citizens to make comments on proposals and get involved with a variety of City activities.<sup>129</sup>

A final point was made in the interviews that one project can generate a lot of enthusiasm about encouraging downtown development. Renton indicates that jurisdictions should not “underestimate the power of seeing something to completion.” Visible quality of life improvements go a long way and the public will often rally behind a civic body once it has seen results.<sup>130</sup>

## Conclusions & Recommendations

The City has made wise, far-reaching decisions and it seems to listen to and respect all business and community representatives. Very clear end-points were in mind when the City's plans were crafted. It marketed its successes and strategically compromised with developers. The jurisdiction's actions have resulted in a new form of development that creates a more centralized identity.

Many believe the Renton example demonstrates some of the benefits of the Growth Management Act and the regional strategy to designate centers to absorb growth. These state and regional provisions did not necessarily ensure that this type of center's development would occur, but it provided the flexibility, legal framework, and incentive for an active civic body to initiate effective smart growth measures sensitive to business and community needs. By limiting the locations where growth can occur, these approaches have created a market for development in locations that would not have normally been considered for development.

Hiring staff with diverse and practical experience was Renton's first positive step towards the development of a more proactive civic body. Renton's staff has been able to reach out to the community by sponsoring a variety of community programs and boosting public pride by promoting successes in the City. Sue Carlson 'shook [the City] up.' She and other City staff ensured that partnerships were developed when any thread of common needs could be associated between

different stakeholders. The jurisdiction has negotiated wisely and it has made bold decisions focusing on long-term benefit with targeted public funds to achieve specific development and design objectives.

Renton still does not have the market for development that is present in large, well-located cities like Bellevue or Seattle and it is unfortunate that the City has had to allow big-box retail so near to the downtown. However, it is still close enough to the hottest development markets in the region so that it can be somewhat selective in the developer it chooses for projects.

Until it has attracted more density though, Renton will have to be proactive to perk developer's interests and create a market for good forms of development. It will be important for the City to continue to make major public investments, reduce parking ratio requirements and other regulatory obstacles, carefully compromise with the right developers, continue to work with Boeing as changes occur, and aggressively pursue its effort to form a regional identity as a city with a diverse economy that promotes its activities in line with the business community and its residents.

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  - <sup>3</sup> ibid
  - <sup>4</sup> ibid
  - <sup>5</sup> Centers Report, December 2002.
  - <sup>6</sup> City of Everett Comprehensive Plan, August 1994
  - <sup>7</sup> City of Everett “Great Thinking. With A View.” Marketing Materials 2002
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  - <sup>11</sup> City of Everett Website (<http://www.ci.everett.wa.us/>)
  - <sup>12</sup> PFD website (<http://www.everettpfd.org>)
  - <sup>13</sup> 1994 Everett Comprehensive Plan
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  - <sup>20</sup> Meeting 05.22.03
  - <sup>21</sup> ibid
  - <sup>22</sup> Everett PFD newspaper advertisement ([http://www.everettpfd.org/catch\\_the\\_excitement.html](http://www.everettpfd.org/catch_the_excitement.html))
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  - <sup>35</sup> 2002 Marketing Materials
  - <sup>36</sup> PSRC Center’s Survey, October 25, 2002.
  - <sup>37</sup> Meeting 05.22.03
  - <sup>38</sup> ibid
  - <sup>39</sup> PSRC Center’s Survey, October 25, 2002.
  - <sup>40</sup> Meeting 05.22.03
  - <sup>41</sup> ibid
  - <sup>42</sup> Tuinstra, Rachel “Surprise! Everett Gets City Slogan” Seattle Times March 06, 2003.
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  - <sup>47</sup> PSRC Center’s Survey, October 25, 2002.
  - <sup>48</sup> City of Everett Website
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<sup>61</sup> ibid  
<sup>62</sup> ibid  
<sup>63</sup> Meeting 06.06.03  
<sup>64</sup> ibid  
<sup>65</sup> ibid  
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<sup>67</sup> City of Renton Website (<http://www.ci.renton.wa.us/>)  
<sup>68</sup> Meeting 04.11.03  
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