

Economic Development

Neighborhoods & Strategic Planning

HIGHLANDS REDEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

The proposals for the Highlands Subarea are currently being reviewed by the [Planning Commission](#). For **updated** information, please visit the Planning Commission [Information Page](#).

The Problem

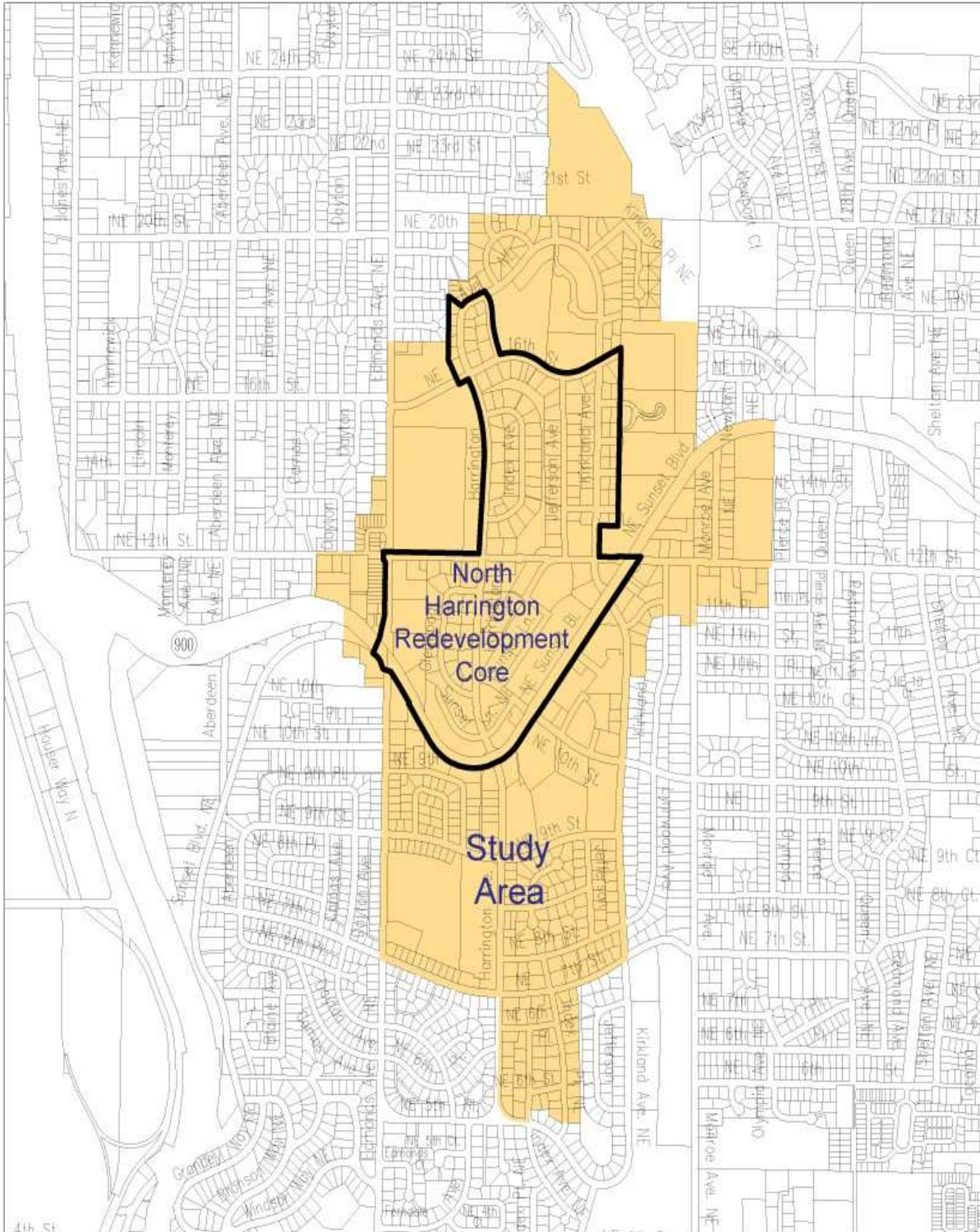
Today, where there were once well kept homes and high homeownership, absentee landlords, poorly maintained aging duplexes, increasing crime and growing poverty plague portions of the Renton Highlands. The area is dominated by deteriorating WW II-era duplexes, originally built to temporarily house wartime workers at the Boeing and PACCAR plants. These are the same duplexes the Seattle and King County Housing Authorities have been demolishing around the region because of their poor condition. The Health Department has cited the area for lead paint exposure and hazardous indoor air quality due to mold and mildew. Less than 3 percent of Renton's land mass and 12.5% of the population, the area draws 20% of first aid calls, 19% of fire calls, 20% of code enforcement complaints, 24% of auto thefts and 15% each of the City's murders and armed robberies.

Existing market forces threaten to perpetuate and deepen the decline of the neighborhood. As social problems worsened, homeowners have left the neighborhood. Absentee landlords have little incentive to redevelop. Their duplexes are leased and rented, creating positive cash flow without high carrying cost. Replacing and upgrading structures is not cost effective given the current below-market land values in the area and the low density of development allowed under existing regulations. This blighted neighborhood requires dramatic action to again be the great neighborhood it once was and to right the disproportionate demand for City services.

The Vision

The City of Renton's vision is to transform the core of the Renton Highlands-the North Harrington neighborhood-into a renewed, redeveloped community that is safe, walkable and attractive to people of all income levels with a mix of single-family houses, townhomes, carriage houses, condominiums and apartment homes. A new street and alley network will make better use of the land. Pedestrian connections and a greenway will link homes to nearby new shops, parks, library, the community centers, and Renton Technical College. Innovative storm water systems and landscaping will add to the appeal of the neighborhood and reduce the environmental impacts of redevelopment. New housing will help stimulate revitalization of the Hi-Lands Shopping Center, attracting new shops, restaurants and services to serve residents of the Greater Highlands. The Highlands Redevelopment Initiative will improve the quality of life in the North Harrington neighborhood making it a place that people of all walks of life want to be-no longer a place where people have to be because they have no other option. Once this initial area is cleaned up, the market will take the reins-revitalizing the remaining portions of the Highlands Sub-area without significant additional City involvement.

To achieve these goals, the City is developing a Sub-area Plan and redevelopment initiative that combines in a comprehensive strategy new, higher-density zoning, key public sector investments in infrastructure, parks, library, and North Highlands Community Center; partnerships with private and non-profit homebuilders, and the Renton Housing Authority; and use of the State Community Renewal Act, which allows cities to accumulate properties as part of a Community Redevelopment Plan.



Highlands Sub-Area Plan Study Area & North Harrington Redevelopment Core



Economic Development, Neighborhoods & Strategic Planning
 Alex Pietsch, Administrator
 G. Del Rosario
 20 February 2006



Description: Comprehensive, strategic approach based on public/private partnerships to make dramatic improvements within a few years.

Elements:

- **Develop a Highlands Sub-area Plan** that includes land use policies and development standards to stimulate revitalization.
- **Develop a North Harrington Community Renewal Plan: a detailed, comprehensive strategy** combining new land use policies and zoning; investments in infrastructure and community facilities; partnerships with one or more private homebuilders, the Renton Housing Authority and non-profit homebuilders; a plan for property acquisition and assembly; property owner and community engagement, and where needed, resident relocation assistance.
- **Make Declaration of Blight:** City would declare the North Harrington Community Renewal Area blighted based on analysis of deteriorating conditions in the neighborhood to trigger provisions of the Community Renewal Act.
- **Use Community Renewal Act:** Implement the State Community Renewal Act to create a partnership with one or more private developers to create a redevelopment master plan and acquire an assemblage of property large enough to justify higher value new homes and investment.
- **Invest in new public infrastructure and facilities,** such as low-impact storm water systems, streets and alleys, the library and North Highlands community center.
- **Select private homebuilder(s) to partner** in a master plan redevelopment.
- **Develop partnership with Renton Housing Authority** and non-profit homebuilders to assist with relocation and replace and expand the range and number of quality affordable homes.
- **Create opportunities for existing property owners to own and occupy new homes** in the redevelopment.
- **Extensive community engagement strategy.**
- **Reserve the right to compel property owners to sell on a limited basis as a last resort** after all other tools and incentives have been exhausted.

Results:

- Faster, more comprehensive redevelopment of the North Harrington portion of the Sub-area, the area with the worst conditions.
- **Large-scale land assembly justifying higher quality development** and investment.
- **Comprehensive approach to public infrastructure investment** to stimulate private redevelopment.
- **Larger public investment in affordable housing,** increasing the overall availability of new, quality affordable housing in Renton.
- **Attractive, mixed-income neighborhood** with a wider range of new quality homes serving existing and new residents.
- **Increased redevelopment prospects for the adjacent Hi-Lands Shopping Center.**

Outline of Implementation Timing and Steps:

1st Quarter (Jan-Mar) 2006

- \$150,000 set aside in 2006 Budget for planning and public outreach **(completed)**.
- Analyze the real estate market to guide new zoning and density incentives **(completed)**.
- Develop conceptual land use plan identifying land uses, densities and growth assumptions. **(nearly complete as of 4/13/06)**
- Collect and analyze data needed to support a declaration of blight under the Community Renewal Act **(nearly complete as of 4/13/06)**
- Continue public outreach (four property owner, one developer, and one institutional owner (school and church) focus groups, and one open house completed).
- Mayor outlines the City's Initiative in the State of the City Address.
- At Council Retreat, Mayor and Council determine direction of initiative and request additional \$1 million of unallocated fund balance to Highlands Redevelopment Fund (\$2.5 million total)
- Based on Mayor and City Council's direction, develop expanded public outreach program.

2nd Quarter (April - June) 2006

- City Council committee and Planning Commission hold meetings on proposed implementation legislation including interim zoning, Comprehensive Plan amendments, Sub-area Plan.
- City meets again with expanded focus groups of property owners to discuss plan.
- City meets with residents of the Highlands and adjacent neighborhoods in community open house and other meetings as part of larger communications and outreach strategy.
- Engage Renton Housing Authority (RHA) and other non-profit housing organizations to develop affordable housing replacement plan.
- **By May 14th**, expiration of the Highlands Building Moratorium, City Council adopts a package of new, interim zoning to attract new investment to the Highlands residential and commercial areas.
- Complete DRAFT Sub-area Plan, which includes a package of Comprehensive Plan amendments, rezones, development standards, and capital facilities plan.
- **By June 30**, complete DRAFT Declaration of Blight and North Harrington Community Renewal Plan (NHCRP), which includes plans for redevelopment, infrastructure and facility improvements, and housing relocation and replacement.

3rd Quarter (July-Sept.) 2006

- City encourages redevelopment of area outside of targeted Community Renewal Area by connected willing sellers with developers of smaller scale.
- City continues to work with existing commercial property owner to identify new commercial development with emphasis on leveraging adjacent new mixed income residential development.
- **By July 31st**, submit Sub-area Plan, Declaration of Blight and NHCRP to City Council for consideration and subsequent adoption.
- City launches media outreach to explain the NHCRP.

- City issues RFP and selects development partner(s) for master planning and redevelopment envisioned in NHCRP.

4th Quarter (Oct.-Dec.) 2006

- RHA identifies new housing locations for existing Section 8 voucher holders displaced by redevelopment.
- RHA partners with non-profit housing developers to identify and build new affordable housing in smaller, scattered developments around the City.
- City and development partner complete Development Agreement.

- Development partner begins to purchase property from willing sellers.

- City offers Community Renewal purchases for willing sellers seeking tax advantages of "friendly condemnation."
- City explores with Development Partner and commercial property owner possible joint redevelopment of both the residential and commercial areas.
- RHA partners with non-profit housing developers and Development Partner to develop mixed-income housing on existing, new, and/or swapped property within the NHCRP area.

2007

- Development Partner initiates first redevelopment project(s).

For further information:

Please mail, fax, or e-mail questions, comment, or suggestions to:

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