

**CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM**

**SUBJECT:**

Public View Corridor of Mount Rainier

**STAFF CONTACTS:**

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**POLICY ISSUES:**

How should the established view corridor from the public space of City Hall to Mount Rainier be treated in the discretionary rezoning currently being considered by the City for portions of the Downtown Office Limited Business District (DT-OLB) and the East Main Station Area Planning study area?

**Existing Comprehensive Plan Direction**

The Comprehensive Plan Urban Design Element includes the following policy specific to views from public places for features such as Mount Rainier.

*Policy UD-62. Identify and preserve views of water, mountains, skylines or other unique landmarks from public places as valuable civic assets.*

**DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL:**

- Action
- Discussion
- Information

Tonight's Study Session provides additional information on a policy issue relating to the established view corridor from City Hall to Mount Rainer and its relationship to discretionary rezoning under consideration as part of the Downtown Livability Initiative and East Main Station Area Planning effort. Council discussion will inform these processes and provide direction on next steps. This issue was introduced to Council at the most-recent East Main Station Area Plan update on January 11, 2016, where Council asked that additional information be brought back for discussion.

**BACKGROUND:**

There is existing City policy and code support for protection of significant views from public spaces. As the Downtown Livability Initiative and East Main Station Area Planning effort have progressed, an issue has arisen with respect to the impact of taller and more dense buildings being considered through potential upzones on an established view corridor from the public space at City Hall to Mount Rainier. The primary areas in question regarding their potential

impact on the view corridor lie generally between 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 114<sup>th</sup> Avenue/I-405, from NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street south to approximately SE 4<sup>th</sup> Street. (See Attachment A for more detail.)

### **Existing Policy Direction**

The Comprehensive Plan Urban Design Element includes the following policy specific to views from public places for features such as Mount Rainier.

*Policy UD-62. Identify and preserve views of water, mountains, skylines or other unique landmarks from public places as valuable civic assets.*

The Downtown Subarea Plan includes the following policy direction for design guidelines, which ultimately are included in Bellevue's Land Use Code, to maintain view corridors in addition to promoting other important design elements.

*Policy S-DT-37. Link building intensity to design guidelines relating to building appearance, amenities, pedestrian orientation and connections, impact on adjacent properties, and maintenance of view corridors. These guidelines will seek to enhance the appearance, image, and design character of the Downtown.*

### **Existing Code Provisions**

Bellevue's Land Use Code for Downtown has specific language regarding view preservation corridors (20.25A.100.E for the core part of Downtown, and not the DT-OLB District) and views (20.25A.110, which applies to all of Downtown). The location of view preservation corridors are not specifically identified in the Land Use Code, although the types of spaces from which the view originates are, as well as the subject of the view preservation corridors (mountains, skylines, unique landmarks). Also addressed is development and redevelopment in locations that affect the skyline or offer views of skylines, considering impacts to views on adjacent sites and buildings, and the availability of public views from public places. (See Attachment B for more detail.)

### **Description of this View Corridor**

The view corridor under discussion emanates from the public space comprised of the City Hall concourse, balcony and Council Chambers. The specific viewing location depicted in Attachment A is from the balcony on the east end of the City Hall concourse near the compass art sculpture. This viewing location provides a partially obstructed view of Mount Rainier along with the Somerset and Newcastle hillsides. To add territorial context to the view, the width of the view of Mount Rainier as it hits the Newcastle skyline to each side of Mount Rainier.

### **Uniqueness of this View Corridor**

Downtown's major public open spaces include Downtown Park, Ashwood Park, Compass Plaza and City Hall. The public right-of-way also functions as a location where public views are afforded. While views from these public spaces of the Cascades, Olympics and Downtown Seattle exist in a number of locations, views of Mount Rainier from major public spaces within Downtown are somewhat limited. The only significant view of Mount Rainier from a major public place in Downtown Bellevue is from City Hall. While other views exist of Mount Rainier from Downtown public places, obstructions prevent clear views.

### **Protection of the View Corridor to Date**

Construction of the City Hall public concourse and outdoor public plaza in 2006 created a significant view of Mount Rainer, one of the Northwest's iconic natural features. This view corridor was protected in 2008 through the design review process for a downtown development project. The Metro 112 project at the corner of NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street and 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE required reconfiguration of the building to take a portion of a tower out of this view corridor, and granting of a variance so that the re-positioned tower got relief from the step-back requirement along NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

### **Implications of the View Corridor Moving Forward**

This same view corridor could be impacted by rezoning studies currently under consideration. Recommendations from the Downtown Livability Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) are currently before the Planning Commission. The Downtown Livability CAC recommended further analysis of buildings up to 200 feet in height and 5.0 FAR in the Downtown OLB District between NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Main Street. The current height limits are 90 feet and 3.0 FAR for "residential" and 75 feet and 3.0 FAR for "nonresidential". In the East Main Station Area, the CAC is currently considering 200 to 300-foot tall buildings and up to 4.0-5.0 FAR on the Red Lion site and sites south to SE 6<sup>th</sup> Street. Current zoning provisions generally limit height and density to 75 feet and 0.5 FAR in this area. It is important to note that the existing buildable zoning envelopes in both of these areas allow full redevelopment to occur without impacting the view corridor, and therefore the view corridor has no impact on existing property rights. It only becomes an issue with respect to increasing heights, and is one factor the City may take into account in the discretionary rezoning process.

To protect the view corridor, analysis shows portions of the Downtown OLB District, specifically the Sheraton site, would need to be limited to 91 to 117 feet in height if upzoned. The Downtown Livability CAC recommendation for 5.0 FAR can be accommodated at these lower heights but could result in a fairly large building mass. For the view corridor to be preserved and to allow taller buildings than 90 feet, a building massing study could be used to address view blockage and building massing.

In the East Main Light Rail Station area, the Red Lion property is principally impacted by requiring some portions of the site to be no greater than 123 to 148 feet if upzoned. City analysis has shown that TOD densities of 4-5 FAR can be achieved at these heights. To retain the view corridor and also allow taller buildings up to 200 feet would require placement of towers along 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and away from eastern portions of the site.

### Pros and Cons of Retaining View Corridor

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Retains significant and unique public view of Mount Rainier within Downtown.</li><li>• Retaining the view corridor does not preclude the ability to achieve dense, mixed-use development at appropriate TOD densities.</li><li>• Protection of the view corridor has no impact on existing property rights; it is a factor in considering the appropriate height for the discretionary rezone process now under consideration.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Downtown Livability and East Main processes have discussed potential for better urban form resulting from increased height, more tower spacing, and open space with same FAR, and the view corridor limits the flexibility to achieve this on some sites.</li><li>• Results in potentially large building mass on Sheraton site if buildings limited to 90-117 feet and view protected.</li><li>• Places taller buildings along 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE in East Main planning area if CAC height and FAR recommendations are adopted and view corridor protected.</li></ul>

### **ALTERNATIVES:**

1. Endorse the importance of protecting the subject view corridor from City Hall to Mount Rainier as a factor to be taken into account in the Downtown Livability and East Main Station Area Planning processes.
2. Direct that this view corridor not be taken into account in the Downtown Livability and East Main Station Area Planning processes, and direct staff to review existing policies accordingly.
3. Provide alternate direction to staff.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Option 1: Endorse the importance of protecting the subject view corridor from City Hall to Mount Rainier as a factor to be taken into account in the Downtown Livability and East Main Station Area Planning processes.

### **ATTACHMENT:**

- A. Overview graphic of view corridor from City Hall public space to Mount Rainier
- B. Existing Land Use Code provisions for view protection