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I. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In 1960, the newly created City of Mercer Island adopted the City's Comprehensive Plan. At that time the issues facing the community reflected those of a City in its infancy:

- To encourage the most appropriate use of land;
- To develop a circulation system that will provide safety and convenience;
- To install public facilities adequate to meet the demands of the population; and
- To preserve the unique physical setting of the island.

Since 1960, the City has evolved into a mature community within the rapidly growing Puget Sound region. The 1990 Growth Management Act provided an opportunity for the community to update its original Comprehensive Plan. By 1994, the issues facing the community were different from those in 1960.

The 1994 Comprehensive Plan identified the essential issues facing the City while re-enforcing our community values in relationship to the region. The Plan focused on how to revitalize the City's Town Center, comply with regional requirements for clean water and transportation, meet local needs for affordable housing and maintain reliability in public facilities and utilities.

The 2004 Comprehensive Plan update built upon the efforts begun in the previous decade. Some change has occurred. Improvements to Town Center streets and the adoption of new design regulations have helped spawn new mixed-use and commercial development in the Town Center. However, most of the key issues and the overall vision identified in 1994 Comprehensive Plan continue to be relevant for this community.

Currently, the island is almost fully developed, consistent with the long term goals of maintaining a single family residential community within a unique physical setting. The City is served with an adequate and convenient circulation system. Parks, open space, public facilities and utilities are available, consistent with the needs of the citizenry. The City and private parties have made a considerable investment in the redevelopment of the Town Center with new buildings, a more vibrant streetscape and pedestrian-friendly environment.

The City's efforts to focus growth and revitalize the Town Center through targeted capital improvements and design standards to foster high quality development are now bearing fruit. Between 2004 and 2014, eight mixed use projects were constructed in the Town Center, consisting of approximately 850 housing units.

In 2018, the City Council committed to a continuous process of self-improvement and self-assessment by evaluating City's policies and programs against the best practices established by the leading international analytic framework. Initially this was accomplished through the use of the STAR Community Rating System. As better analytic tools become available, the intention is to continue to identify and adopt the leading international analytic framework.

The Vision Statement, following this Introduction, details how the community's values will be manifested in future years. The issues addressed in this Comprehensive Plan concern how best to revitalize the City's Town Center, comply with regional requirements for clean water and transportation, meet local needs for affordable housing and maintain reliability in public facilities and utilities.

The challenge in this process will continue to be in translating the requirements of the Growth Management Act and policies of related planning documents including the Puget Sound Regional Council's (PSRC) Vision 2040 and Transportation 2040, and the King County Countywide Planning Policies into a meaningful planning process for Mercer Island. Every effort has been made to concentrate first on the most pressing issues of the community, while still complying with the other requirements of the Growth Management Act.

OVERVIEW

The Comprehensive Plan is organized into six elements: Land Use, Housing, Transportation, Utilities, Capital Facilities, and Shorelines. Each of the elements contains the following:

- Information on existing conditions;
- Explanation of how the element integrates with other plans and programs including the requirements of the Growth Management Act;
- A statement of policy direction; and
- An action plan.

Technical and background information is contained in a separately bound appendix document.

IMPLEMENTATION

Adoption of the Comprehensive Plan is the first step toward achieving the City's goals for the future of the community. The Comprehensive Plan will only be effected when implemented through a number of actions including the adoption of new City Code provisions, revised zoning and design guidelines, city participation and representation in regional forums and re-investment in capital facilities.

The Plan should be viewed as a dynamic document and subject to change as community values, conditions and needs change. To this end, the City will perform periodic reviews of the Plan and amendments as changing conditions require and citizen involvement dictates. The Growth Management Act requires that the Plan be comprehensively reviewed and updated every seven years. Periodic updates may not occur more than once a year, except as allowed under RCW 36.70A.130.

II. VISION STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Growth Management Act, Vision 2020, Destination 2030 and related policies have ushered in a wide range of new planning options, challenges and opportunities. Like other jurisdictions throughout the region, Mercer Island must periodically engage in a comprehensive review of its policies and their relationship to state and regional planning mandates. This process provides the opportunity to identify and reaffirm the community's long held values. It also offers a forum for policies to be updated and assimilated to function as a whole.

A Vision Statement is an essential ingredient in successful comprehensive community policy planning. Essentially, the statement should reaffirm time-tested policies or values that are generally held as positive "community trademarks" and identify others deemed relevant. Moreover, a Vision Statement should be a

reflection of community aspirations. Through periodic review and refinement, it is intended to set parameters for future community activities.

The following Vision Statement is essentially the compilation of several long standing policies embodied in several existing planning documents including the Land Use Plan, Town Center Plan, Park and Open Space Plan, and the Arts and Culture Plan. Reexamining these policies implies a reexamination of the City's overall policy base.

This Vision Statement should satisfy (at least) the following three purposes: 1) City Boards, Commissions and Staff will use the Council's explicit guidance in determining the priority and degree of evaluation of existing elements in the City's Growth Management Act Policy & Planning Work Plan; 2) City employees will be guided in the provision of quality municipal services; 3) Most importantly, the Council, its advisory bodies and the community-as-a-whole will proceed with a common understanding of the quality of life values or themes that will shape our community for years to come.

"Islands can seem rather special, but then so can islanders ... most people who remove themselves to islands regard themselves as having entered paradise Classically, a person goes to an island in much the same spirit as a person heads into exile—seeking simplicity, glorying in a world that is still incomplete and therefore full of possibilities."

Paul Theroux

COMMUNITY VALUES

Mercer Island is not an island unto itself. The community is part of a regional complex that affords housing, human services, jobs, transportation, cultural and recreational opportunities. As a partner in the ever changing world of environment, economics and politics, Mercer Island has and will continue to be an active player in regional issues. However, within this framework, Mercer Island will continue to maintain local control of all significant policy issues. Likewise, active community participation and leadership are fundamental for protecting and enhancing the values and characteristics that have shaped the quality of life and livability of Mercer Island.

In relative terms, Mercer Island is a young community. However, the City adheres to a collection of intrinsic values and has a desire to shape its own future as well as be an effective regional partner. While values can change over time, they do provide the basic foundation for a host of community actions and generally reflect the "heart and soul" of the community. The values listed below are among the community's most important and therefore deserve special attention.

Residential Community	Mercer Island is principally a single-family residential community, supported by healthy schools, religious institutions and recreational clubs.
Quality Municipal Services	Mercer Islanders need and expect safety, efficiency and continuously improving municipal services.
Fiscal responsibility	Mercer Islanders expect fiscal responsibility from their municipal services in light of limited resources and heightened competition for revenues.
Education is the Key	The community and its public and private institutions are committed to provide excellence in education.

Livability is Paramount	Our community's values are reflected by safety and freedom from fear, physical and environmental attributes, and the cultural and recreational opportunities of our Island. This translates into the feeling that Mercer Island is "the nicest of places for everyone to live."
Cherish The Environment	Island residents see themselves as "stewards" of the island environment. In considering community decisions, protection and enhancement of trees, open spaces, clean water and air, neighborhood quiet and environmentally sensitive lands will be given high priority.
Sustainable Community	Mercer Island strives to be a sustainable community: Meeting the needs of the present while preserving the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. We consider the relationship between the decisions we make as a community and their long-term impacts before committing to them. We understand that our strength is dependent on an open and transparent decision-making process that takes into account the economic, environmental and social well-being of our community.

HOW THE VALUES ARE MANIFESTED

Values often are characterized by specific actions or combinations of actions. Over time these actions become local community trademarks that have a profound influence in shaping a wide range of private and public decisions. Specific actions that will continue to exemplify Mercer Island's values include:

Regional Role

Quality Services

Livability

Stewardship

- The community clearly links its interests in regional matters through involvement in transportation, education, human services, domestic water, air traffic noise, marine patrol, public health and safety, and pollution abatement. Participation will continue through individual citizens, interest groups and elected officials.

Community Leadership

Representative

Government

Strong Leadership

Citizen Involvement

- Mercer Island is committed to representing its citizens through its elected and appointed officials. A longtime producer of resourceful and professional leaders, Mercer Islanders will continue to exert strong and active leadership in local and regional affairs.
- Active participation by the Island's citizens in civic events and issues is essential to representative self-government. As one of its "trademarks," the

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	community continues to place a high value on the opportunity to participate at all levels of decision-making.
Environment	
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The City is committed to implementing policies aimed at preserving and enhancing the Island's physical characteristics. Regulatory tools such as the Zoning Code, Subdivision Ordinance, Critical Lands Regulations, Shoreline Master Program, Tree Ordinance and Design Standards continue to serve as the underpinning for protection of environmental values.• The preservation of open space (trees and green spaces) continues to be a primary means to attain the community's quality-of-life vision. The implementation of low impact development techniques also preserves the natural environment. City leaders will continue to search for effective new methods and standards to protect and enhance the environment.
Stewardship	
"Green Equity"	
Destiny Control	
Citizen Involvement	
Town Center	
Community Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Town Center will continue to be located within its current boundaries and will be bordered by residential uses. Mixed-use development that includes residential units shall be encouraged within this zone. Businesses should continue to develop at a scale compatible with other community values and should provide a range of retail, office and residential opportunities. The community-scaled business district will primarily cater to the needs and desires of Island residents and employees.• Ongoing attention to urban design principles, pedestrian needs, traffic considerations and green spaces is essential.
Bounded	
Residential	
Quality Service	
Community Services	
Pride & Spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mercer Island will continue to provide a wide range of education, cultural and municipal services for the community's varied population. Balanced and flexible programs will be necessary to meet the community's evolving needs in education, recreation and cultural enjoyment. The community will maintain its broad range of quality basic services, including public safety, human services, physical development and utilities. At the same time, community leaders recognize that delivery of these services will take place in an arena of limited resources and heightened competition for tax revenues.
Excellence in	
Education	
Recreational & Cultural Opportunities	
Residential Land Use	
Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mercer Island is principally a low density, single-family residential community. The community will continue to seek ways to enhance its image as Puget Sound's "most livable residential community." Supporting these efforts, City leaders will maintain the integrity of existing approved land use policies.
Environmental	
Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The community, through its ongoing consideration of public and private projects, will continue to seek ways of enhancing the Island's quality of life through open space preservation, pedestrian trails and well-designed and functional public and semi-public facilities.• As a single-family residential community with a high percentage of developed land, it is not necessarily appropriate that the community provide all
Leadership	
Citizen	
Involvement	
Neighborhood	
Pride	

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types of lands uses. Certain activities will be viewed as incompatible with prevalent land uses and environmental values. Examples include certain recreational uses, cemeteries, zoos, airports, landfills and correctional facilities.

- Civic, recreation, education and religious organizations are important and integral elements of the community character and fabric. Their contribution and importance to the established community character should be reflected and respected in land use permit processes.

Housing

**Residential
Pride & Spirit
Responsive
Housing Opportunities**

- The single-family character of the community will continue to generate the need for a variety of housing. A mix of residential housing opportunities in and around the Town Center and other existing multi-family areas will be an important element in maintaining the diversity of the Island's population.

- To understand and preserve the quality and diversity of the Island's housing stock, periodic reviews of housing policies will be undertaken. With that end in mind, methods will be sought to encourage diversity and reinvestment in existing neighborhoods and homes.

Transportation

**Regionally
Linked
Livability
Safety
Leadership**

- The geography, employment and lifestyle characteristics of Mercer Island demands good permanent access to and from Interstate 90. This will require continued participation in regional transportation matters.

- Local land use policies will be coordinated with transportation plans in order to provide safe, functional surfaces for vehicles, bikes and pedestrians while avoiding local "gridlock." Local transportation planning will continue to emphasize a semi-rural setting for various arterial and collector streets. Pedestrian walks linking activities will continue to be a high community priority.

Population

**Pride & Spirit
Excellence in
Youth
Housing
Opportunities
Recreational &
Cultural
Services**

- As with virtually all facets of the community fabric, population changes will occur. Mercer Islanders can expect to see their population grow from 23,310 in 2014 to an estimated (PSRC, approximate) 25,243 persons by 2030.

- Within that population base, the Island will see changes in age profiles, along with their respective needs and expectations for municipal services. The provision of human services and facilities must be updated from time to time to address changes in the community's racial, age, income and lifestyle make-up. This diversification will continue to be encouraged. The standard for providing excellent services for the Island's youth will be applied to all public services and across all ages.

III. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

INTRODUCTION

At its March 1992 retreat, the City Council decided to seek professional assistance in reviewing the City's existing public involvement practices. As envisioned, the review was to include an analysis of citizen participation as it relates to specific issues facing the Council and community as well as to look at the role of City boards and commissions in public input processes. Ultimately, the Council was interested in the identification of strategies and techniques that would enhance City decision-making in general, and how citizen participation is conducted on Mercer Island in particular.

Upon completion of the review, the City adopted its Public Participation Strategy (August, 1992). The strategy included Objectives and Principles which help to guide the crafting of future public involvement plans for future public issues. At the time of adoption, the Council committed to applying its new Strategy to its two most important and immediate concerns: Downtown Revitalization and development and implementation of the (GMA-required) Comprehensive Plan.

The Objectives and Principles are described below, followed by the specific public involvement strategies adopted and implemented for the Downtown Revitalization and Comprehensive Plan processes.

COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Mercer Island City government is committed to good public process. That commitment is reflected in efforts to enhance and optimize the way in which City decisions are made to include the broadest possible range of Island residents. The City's mission and values are understood by the Council and serve as the unifying principles that guide its decisions.

As the City undertakes its initiative to enhance its overall public participation framework, the following specific objectives have been defined:

- Increased openness and responsiveness of City government to its constituents.
- Better City decisions considering expert opinion as well as a full range of citizen perspectives and information.
- Informed consent of various stakeholder groups in decision-making processes, recognizing that conflicts may exist despite efforts to resolve them.
- Streamlined decision making with broadened public input and participation, visible public acceptance and support for Council decisions.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PRINCIPLES

- Public participation should be driven by the specific goals and objectives of the program, in consideration of the specific groups of potentially affected interests or stakeholders, NOT by a random collection of public participation techniques.
- Public participation should take place as early as possible in a decision process, preferably at the scoping or option identification stage. It should include specific activities as well as informal, "keeping an ear to the ground" efforts, and should focus on opportunities for two-way communication and responsiveness by the public.

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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PRINCIPLES

- The decision-making entity should commit in advance to the planned level of public involvement and how it will use the public input that is received to make its decision. People must be brought to realize that the City is always listening to their concerns, even though it may not always agree with what it hears or implements.
- Appropriate techniques range from simply informing citizens to involving them through opportunities for direct participation in decision making. The guiding principle is to select the fewest number of the simplest techniques that will meet the objectives.
- Public input must be fully integrated and sequenced with technical work and the decision process in order to be useful in raising and resolving emerging issues.
- Providing feedback to public participants is critical to confirming their input, demonstrating that it is valued and in maintaining their interest in participating in City processes.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION & THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Foreseeing the need to initiate "early and continuous citizen involvement" for the Comprehensive Plan, the City focused its expanded model for public participation on development of the Central Business District (CBD) Vision — the place where nearly all of Mercer Island's Growth Management issues are focused. In August, 1992, the City launched the Town Center "visioning" process that relied upon the broadest range of community "stakeholders." Over 80 active participants worked between October, 1992 and June, 1993 to develop the document entitled "Your Mercer Island Citizen Designed Downtown." A newsletter mailing list of over 150 persons was built to maintain continual communication to interested individuals.

August 1993 marked another major step in the Council's commitment to the role of public participation in the implementation of the Town Center vision and preparation of the Comprehensive Plan. The City Council created the GMA Commission to serve as the primary citizen body to oversee the drafting of the draft plan.

Consistent with the adopted public involvement strategy, the GMA Commission consisted of citizen "stakeholders," representing standing City boards and commissions, citizens, downtown property owners, and business community groups. The GMA Commission oversaw and coordinated the preparation of all Comprehensive Plan elements, ultimately passing them on the City Planning Commission for formal review and public hearings.

Prior to making formal recommendations to the City Council, the Planning Commission will conduct meeting, hearings and/or workshops to obtain further public input. Providing another avenue for public input, environmental review of the draft plan's impacts is integrated into the Planning Commission's hearing and review process.

The Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the City Council in December, 1993 after GMA Commission review and discussion, Planning Commission review and approval, SEPA review and City Council workshops and public hearings. Adoption of the remaining four planning elements occurred in October, 1994.

Between 1994 and 2016, the 2005 update was the only substantial update. The City continues to be committed to public participation in its 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update. The City held several meetings and an open house to discuss proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan prior to City Council public meetings.

Concurrent with the Comprehensive Plan update, the City conducted a Town Center Visioning process to assess growth in the Town Center and prepare new design standards. Public involvement throughout the Town Center Visioning process has incorporated the efforts of two citizen stakeholder groups, a liaison group of Councilmembers, Planning Commissioners and Design Commissioners. The Stakeholder Group's recommendations

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were reviewed by the Planning and Design Commissions meeting jointly, followed by consideration by the City Council. In 2015 and 2016, the City held 69 meetings, including nine public input meetings or public hearings, public meetings and received over 350 comments from approximately 225 people.

AMENDING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is a dynamic document because it is based on community values and an understanding of existing and projected conditions and needs, all of which continually change. The City plans for change through the established, formal procedures for regularly monitoring, reviewing and amending the Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan also represents an integrated statement of policies, consistent with regional plans and based on a broad perspective developed over many months of wide spread public involvement. Amendments to the Plan should be done carefully with a view toward maintaining the internal consistency and integrity of the document.

The process for amending the Mercer Island Comprehensive Plan is established in chapter 19.15 of the Mercer Island City Code (MICC), consistent with the provisions of WAC 365-196-640. WAC 365-196-640 also states that plan amendments cannot be considered more frequently than once a year except in an emergency, and that all proposed amendments in any year must be considered concurrently so that the cumulative effect of the changes can be considered.