



Memorandum

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Date: March 15, 2024

To: City Council
City Manager's Office

From: David Pyle – Director of the Department of Community Development
Comprehensive Plan Update Team

Re: 4th Street Parcels Proposed Land Use Designation in 2024 Comprehensive Plan

Recently as part of the March 7 Planning Commission Meeting and the March 11 City Council Meeting public comment was provided by the Mattes family regarding a proposed land use map change for property adjacent to their residence. The Mattes comment letter is timely, however slightly ahead of the public process for the Comprehensive Plan update. This memo is intended to provide additional understanding as to why the City of Sammamish is considering the proposed changes to the land use designations on the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) for 13 parcels along 4th Street just to the West of Town Center (Exhibit 1).

These parcels were identified during a city-wide review of current land uses and are seen to be somewhat inconsistent with best zoning practices as they currently consist of low-density zoning adjacent to an area of much higher intensity, which is seen as generally incompatible and likely to result in conflict. Changing these parcels' future land use designation presents an opportunity to add additional capacity within the City for middle housing development in an area with walkable proximity to the City's Town Center Subarea. This would promote added capacity for diverse middle housing types within walking distance to jobs, services, and an arterial corridor that is most likely to be served with enhanced transit options.

Currently, the 13 parcels are identified on the existing FLUM in the 2015 Comprehensive Plan (which mirrors the City's existing zoning map) as low-intensity residential uses, R-1 and R-6 (Exhibit 1 & 2). The draft FLUM for the 2024 Comprehensive Plan proposes changing their future land use designation from one of low-intensity residential, a designation called Neighborhood Residential, which allows for R-1 to R-8 zoning, to an increased residential density designation called Urban Residential (Exhibit 3). The Urban Residential designation will support zoning allowing for multi-family middle housing type development (R-12 and R-18) including multi-plex buildings, stacked flats, courtyard apartments, and other forms of large middle housing—between Neighborhood Residential and higher-intensity areas like Town Center and Mixed-Use Centers.

The City recognizes and sympathizes with the fact that these proposed changes may feel stark to neighboring property owners. The intent of these proposed changes is not to single out or isolate neighboring properties, nor is it a bureaucratic map-making exercise. Instead, it is an earnest attempt to meet the goals of the community, the City Council, and the state by creating opportunities for more diverse and affordable middle housing options within the City in walkable proximity to existing and planned infrastructure, services, and amenities.

Background

Existing Conditions and Considerations

The thirteen 4th Street subject parcels are adjacent to the western edge of the Town Center subarea. They sit along 4th Street, which recently underwent extensive publicly funded improvements including street-widening, the creation of round-a-bouts and sidewalks, and the installation of public utility connections to serve as a key connection to the Town Center. The parcels are flat, moderately forested, and have limited environmental constraints. They feature older homes on large tracts on septic systems rather than city sewer. The parcels to the north and west are zoned R-4 and R-6, and the parcels to the south are zoned R-1.

Neighboring property owners to the south of the 4th Street parcels have expressed concern that increasing the land use designation could result in high-density development abutting single-family zoned parcels, creating a harsh transition between lower and higher-density land uses. Please see the Mattes public comment regarding this issue as Exhibit 4.

Town Center Design and Edge Transition Challenges

The Town Center's zoning was designed in a "Wedding Cake" fashion that would concentrate higher densities towards the core of the subarea and gradually step-down zoning intensity towards the edges to promote a smooth transition between the Town Center and the surrounding single-family zoned parcels. An example of this can be seen with the forthcoming Brownstones West development located at the south-western edge of the Town Center just south of 4th Street and just east of 222nd Place SE. This development will be built out at an effective density of R-7 to R-8 with building heights that have been reduced as part of a development agreement to lessen the impact on neighboring parcels.

Should the thirteen 4th Street parcels be designated as Urban Residential in the updated FLUM, it could result in future rezoning and development that will likely result in higher densities than that of the Brownstones West development (e.g. if this land use map change were to be approved and the properties were to be rezoned the thirteen parcels *could* foreseeably be developed at an R-12 or R-18 density vs. the R-7 to R-8 density of Brownstones West).

The challenge is making an effective and smooth transition between the 4th Street parcels and the neighboring parcels to the south. Staff suggest using tools identified in the [Housing Diversification Toolkit](#) such as a concomitant agreement or contract rezone that offers opportunities to negotiate development outcomes and mitigate potential impacts through the rezone process. Please see the *Recommendation* section below for more information.

The Reasoning for Urban Residential Land Use Designation

The key challenge of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update is determining how the City's land use policies will need to be updated or modified to accommodate changing conditions in the state and region around housing requirements. The City's land use policies must be responsive to the changes in the state's regulatory environment and appropriately plan for targets set by regional and county planning authorities while also being responsive to the needs and desires of the community for increased housing options and affordability.

The proposed changes to the land use designations for the 13 parcels located along 4th Street align with both the state's changes to housing law and the community's desires for more housing options. Highlighted below are reasons supporting the City's decision to propose a higher land use designation for the 4th Street parcels.

Alignment with 2044 Planning Vision

One of the first steps the City Council took as part of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan update was to define a [2044 Planning Vision](#). The Planning Vision captures the City's guiding principles, values, and goals for the City's future and creates Vision Strategies that provide guidance on how the vision can be realized. The Planning Vision was shaped by community input gathered at the Planning Summit held in November 2022, the Community Visioning project completed by the City in the spring of 2022, and further refined by input from City Staff, the Planning Commission, and the City Council. The Planning Commission and City Council held meetings on this topic on [December 8, 2022](#), [December 13, 2022](#), [February 2, 2023](#), and [February 14, 2023](#), before approving the Planning Vision on [March 21, 2023](#).

The Vision Strategies provide the guidance and direction that support the change for the 4th Street parcels in land use designations from low-density residential uses to more dense uses that will support a greater number of housing units and types.

Vision Strategy 5 - *Provide a Variety of Housing Choices and Support a Wide Array of Lifestyles*, reflects the community's and City Council's desire to expand the range of available housing options to provide affordable and appropriate housing for individuals based on their needs and income.

Vision Strategy 4 - *Ensure Inclusive, Connected, and Safe Neighborhoods* encourages planning neighborhoods that have access to retail, restaurants, key services, and other amenities within walking distance. The 4th Street parcels are within walking distance to existing and planned infrastructure, services, and amenities.

Vision Strategy 1 - *Sustain Natural Environment and Reduce Climate Impacts*, directs the reduction of climate impacts, which will be achieved in part through creating more dense housing that reduces the environmental footprint of development. Additionally, 4th Street's walkable proximity to the Town Center allows for reducing the reliance on vehicles, lessening carbon emissions through a reduction in vehicle miles traveled.

The community's input shaped the 2044 Planning Vision and Vision Strategies and is reflected in the City's proposal to increase the land use designation of the 4th Street parcels.

Alignment with New State Housing Laws

The 2024 Comprehensive Plan update must be responsive to changes in state law and regional planning policies pertaining to land use and housing. House Bill 1220, passed in 2021, requires the City to demonstrate it is planning for and accommodating additional new housing at all income levels. House Bill 1110, passed in 2023, promotes the development of middle housing by requiring increases in densities in areas typically dedicated for single-family zoning and to adopt and allow middle housing typologies as part of the City's zoning code.

Shifting the 4th Street parcels to an Urban Residential designation aligns with the requirements of both House Bills 1220 and 1110. The Urban Residential designation will allow for zoning densities that can accommodate housing at levels of deeper affordability and larger forms of middle housing types.

Alignment with City Council Approved Land Use Guiding Principles

Over the course of several meetings in 2023, staff worked with the City Council to develop a set of 'Land Use Guiding Principles' that define the values, goals, and constraints for land use policy changes within Sammamish. The City Council met on this topic on [March 7, 2023](#) and approved the principles on [April 4, 2023](#).

Listed below are examples of the Guiding Principles that support the inclusion of the 4th Street Parcels in an Urban Residential Land Use Designation:

- 1. Be responsive to state, regional, and county requirements, guidance, and criteria so that the City can achieve Comprehensive Plan certification;*
- 2. Be complementary to existing historic land use and zoning patterns so that the fundamental development pattern and general distribution of urban intensity of the City do not change.*
- 4. Reflect the housing needs of local residents so that households can access living arrangements that best support their stage of life, physical capabilities, and financial means;*
- 5. Leverage existing infrastructure to minimize services costs for new development so that barriers are reduced for new diverse and affordable housing;*
- 6. Enhance existing zoning strategies and incentivize the redevelopment of areas with existing impervious surface so that impacts to natural resources are minimized.*
- 7. Utilize successful zoning practices so that the development of diverse housing types is integrated, blended into, and matches existing development patterns at the outward edge.*
- 8. Increase densities over a sufficient land area to promote deep affordability so that housing at specified income ranges is achievable;*
- 9. Be within walkable proximity to amenities, features, services, jobs, and transit to reduce vehicle miles traveled and decrease dependence on single occupancy vehicles.*

The 4th Street parcels as an Urban Residential designation resonates with the Guiding Principles: They would leverage the existing publicly funded infrastructure of the 4th Street improvements and public utility access; their proximity to the Town Center promotes walkability; they provide the opportunity for densities that allow for housing types that can accommodate deeper levels of affordability or middle housing; they are flat, minimally forested, and have minimal environmental constraints, limiting impacts to the natural environment; and they are adjacent to higher-intensity uses therefore complementing the City's existing land use and zoning patterns. Additionally, employing tools from the Housing Diversification Toolkit such as concomitant agreements or contract rezones would allow for mitigating development's impact and creating a blended transition between lower and higher-density land uses.

Recommendations

Staff recommends the City retain the thirteen 4th Street parcels as an Urban Residential land use designation in the FLUM as part of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan. Staff further recommend including language within the 2024 Comprehensive Plan that ensures that if these parcels are rezoned, tools will be in place such as a concomitant agreement or contract rezone, to ensure the outcomes are consistent with community goals and mitigate the impacts of development to neighboring parcels.

Exhibits

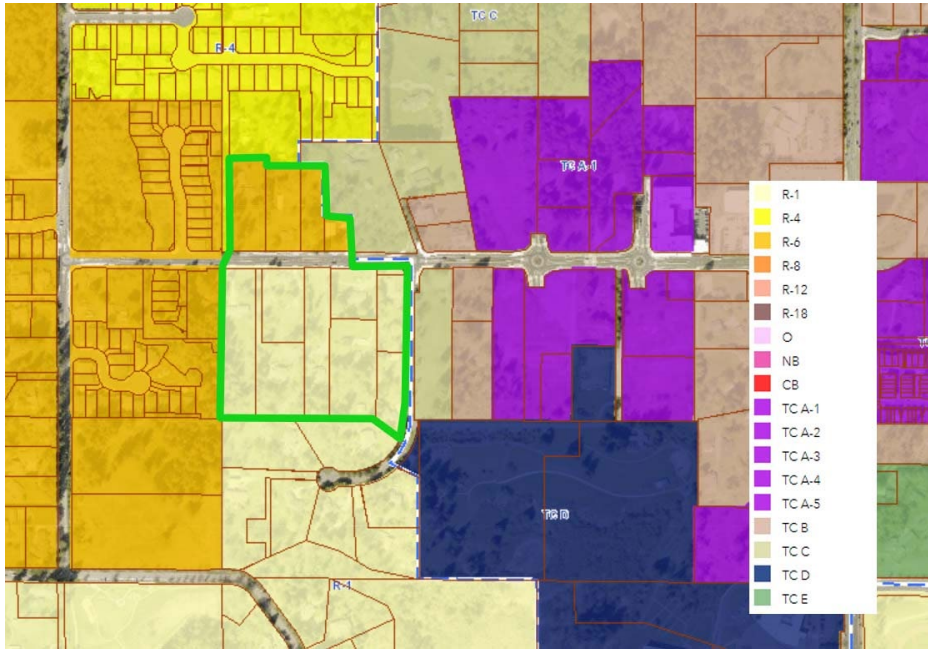


Exhibit 1 – Existing 2016 Zoning Map

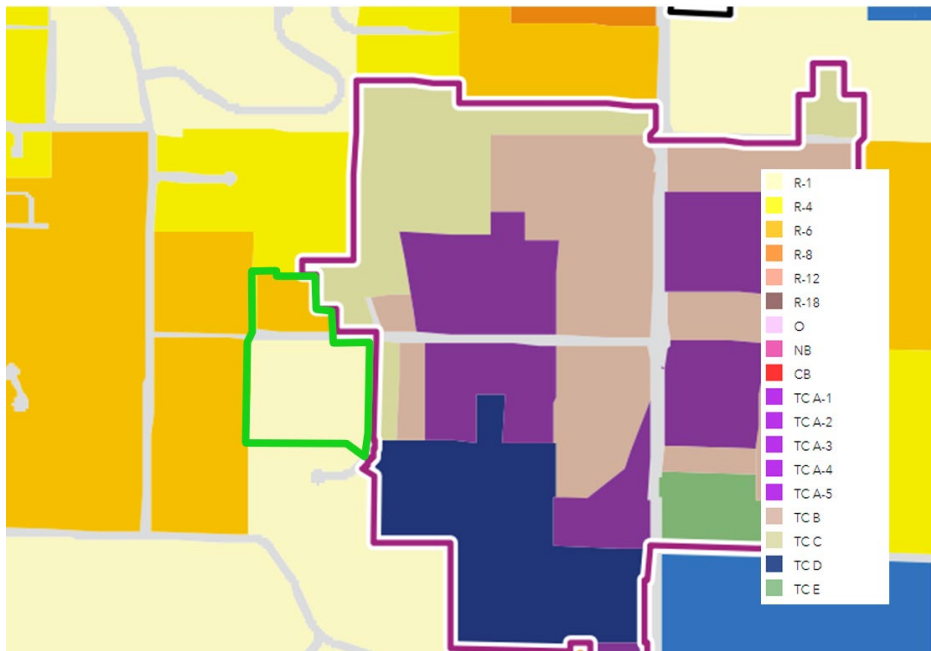


Exhibit 2 – 2015 FLUM

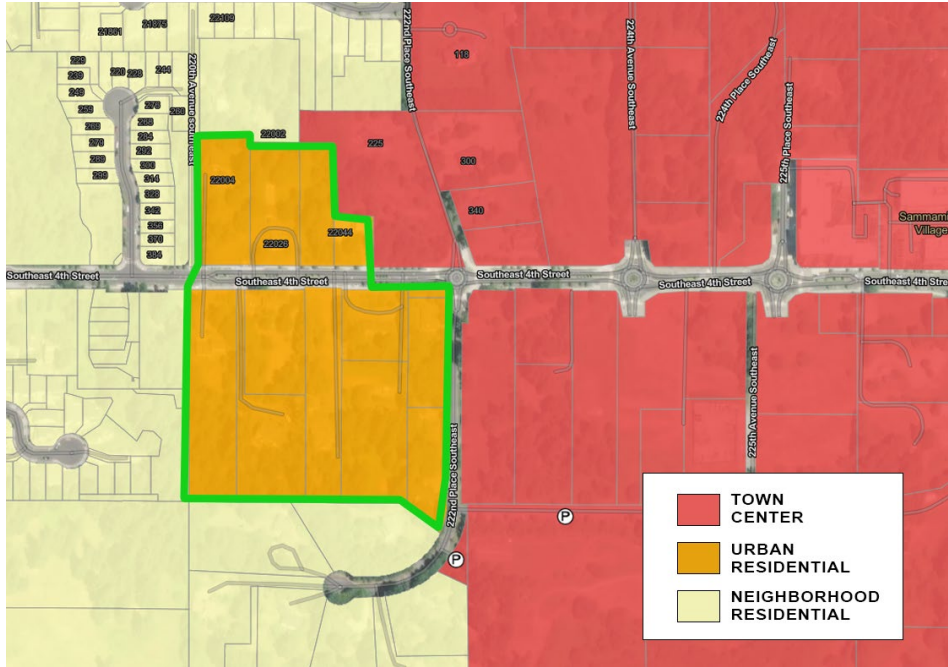


Exhibit 3 – Proposed 2024 FLUM

Exhibit 4 – Mattes Public Comment

Date: March 6, 2024

From: Michael and Katherine Mattes, 629 222nd Place SE, Sammamish 98074

To: Planning Commission, City Council, and Community Development Department

RE: Comprehensive Plan Update/Proposed Upzone of Land Along SE 4th Corridor

Introduction

Our house lies across the street from the Lower Commons. The entire boundary of our property to the north and to the east is adjacent to the proposed urban residential zone. Because our house is situated in the northeast corner of our lot, we are steps away from where the city proposes R-12/18 zoning. Perhaps 20-30 feet from our front and back porches. We are zoned R1.

Background

We moved to Sammamish 18 years ago. The Town Center was in the concept phase. The city was encouraging citizens at the time to engage with the planning process, and we did. We attended countless planning commission and city council meetings, public forums, design charrettes, and so on. We offered public comment on several occasions and always tried to be constructive. There were many belligerents at the time. We were not among them.

We didn't fear the Town Center. Our investment of time and energy centered on achieving a positive outcome: an interesting and attractive place to live, shop, and gather; built to scale; mindful of its natural surrounds; and sensitive to the reality of there being bordering SFR neighborhoods. And city government listened. On every level, they listened. The resulting plan reflects this. The "wedding cake" concept was born out of a conscious effort by city leaders to migrate the intensity of development toward the TC core, while transitioning gradually to surrounding neighborhoods.

Our street is an example of this. The existing homes are R1. The baseline zoning for the TC Brownstones West project across the road, before TDRs and other incentives, is R4. Behind that it becomes somewhat denser. And so on. Until you arrive at 6-7 story mixed use at the core. There was an obvious balancing of priorities in this approach. There was good faith consideration of TC neighbors' desire for a gradual transition.

Now we learn that the city proposes to leapfrog over our homes and erect another "cake" in our back yards, with allowable building heights of up to 60 feet. From R1 right to R18. Zero transition. Years of deliberate and exhaustive planning set aside. Our house could well lie in the shadow of whatever is built there.

Additional Context

We raised our kids in Sammamish. Both attended public schools. Katherine runs the Friends of the Library non-profit which, since she took over, has become something of juggernaut raising funds for programming at the library—countless hours of volunteering that have enriched everyone. She also volunteer-teaches ESL twice a week at a local church. Her students are recent arrivals to Sammamish

from all over the world. Our son became an Eagle Scout here and led two major service projects that benefitted the city. We have voted in favor of every single school and public improvement bond.

Quite aside from this, when the city has sought our input or cooperation on neighborhood matters, we have provided it. Granting an easement to community-owned land for a roundabout; providing input on the design of the community garden, which the city incorporated in its entirety; and, nearly alone among our neighbors, granting the city permission to explore the feasibility of a trail connector from the Lower Commons to Big Rock Park through yet another parcel of community-owned land.

Real Life Implications of Proposed Changes

We understand that the city's intent is not to hurt us personally. That the proposed upzone is a product of bureaucratic map making. Nameless. Faceless. *Let's draw the line here. There are houses there, and people live in them, but we have goals to achieve.*

But please understand: to us, this is punitive. It is devastating. From R1 to R18. Zero transition. Like a scene from the movie *Up*. We are grieving right now. We had planned to age in place.

We don't begrudge the effort to create more diverse housing options in Sammamish. It is an important goal, one we support; one the Town Center was meant in large part to address. But city leaders seem now to want to inoculate the rest of Sammamish against just such development by dropping it all on our heads.

We thought we were doing the right things. We stayed knowing the Town Center was coming. We engaged. We were constructive. A balanced and exciting TC plan took shape. And Katherine, in particular, has made this city a better place. We were invested here. If the upzone is approved as is, the harm would be real.

Our Request to City Planners and Commissioners

To date, every approved project along the SE 4th corridor west of 222nd PL SE (including at least one under construction) has been R4-R6. This is what we always assumed would happen with those properties adjoining our own. And we were—and remain—fine with that. It made sense.

R1 directly abutting R18 does not make sense. We implore city planners and leaders to account for this. Top stair-step any new upzone and redevelopment away from surrounding/adjoining lots such as ours. And to do so in such a way that future developers cannot later *undo* it by means of variances, incentives, cultivating influence at City Hall, and so forth. And we ask, whether we are a part of Sammamish's future or not, that you save trees. There are scores of them in the proposed upzone. Soaring firs and hemlocks. Hardwoods. Let a few of them live.

Thank you.

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