JUNE 2022

Mill Creek Boulevard Subarea Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

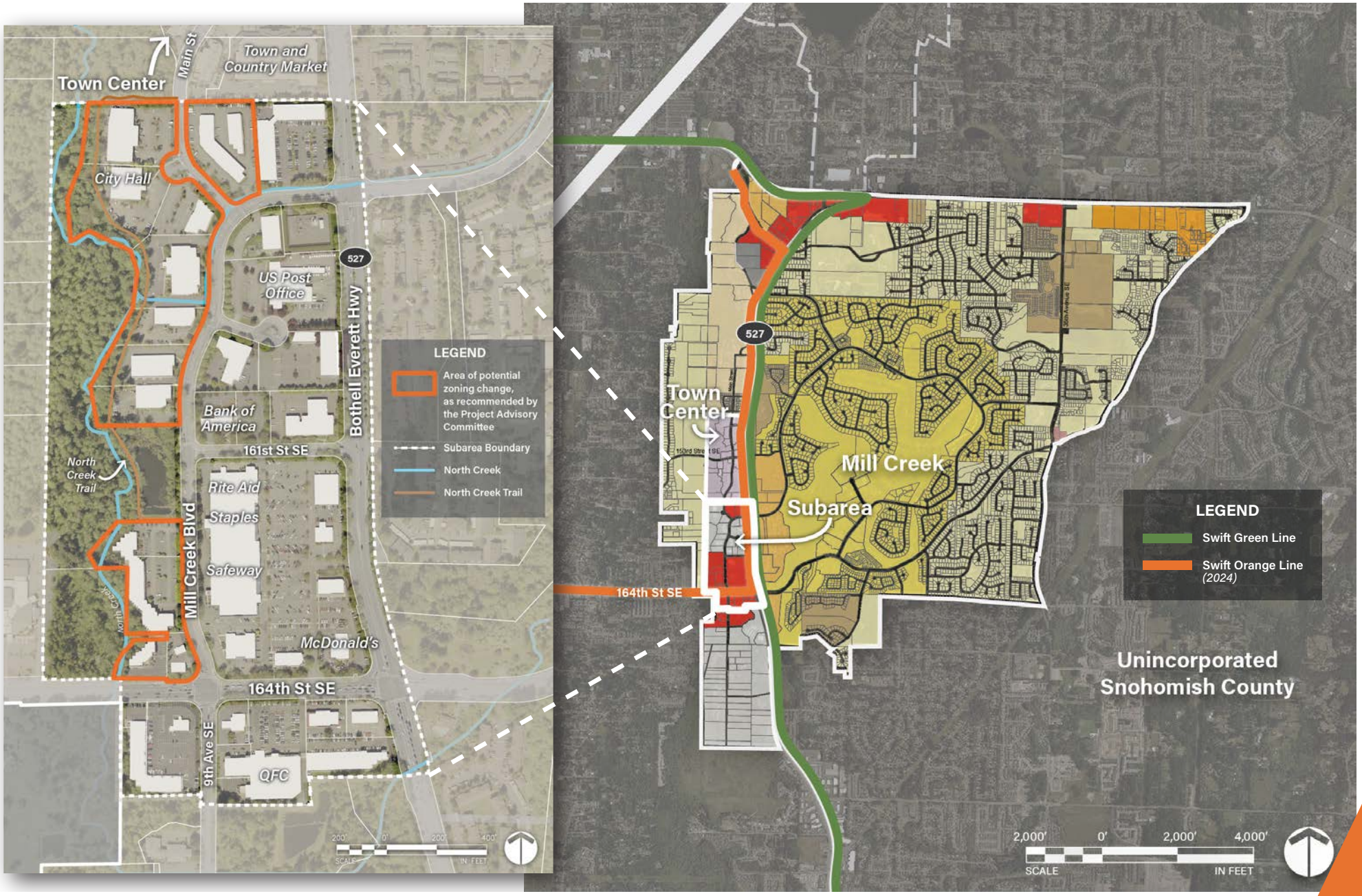
The Mill Creek Boulevard Subarea Plan establishes a long-term vision to guide redevelopment over the next twenty years. In January of 2022, the Mill Creek City Council determined that the subarea plan should be considered as part of the City's 2024 Comprehensive Plan update process. The subarea is located directly south of Mill Creek Town Center, west of Bothell Everett Highway (SR 527), east of North Creek, and also includes the businesses on the south side of 164th Street SE (see map, next page).

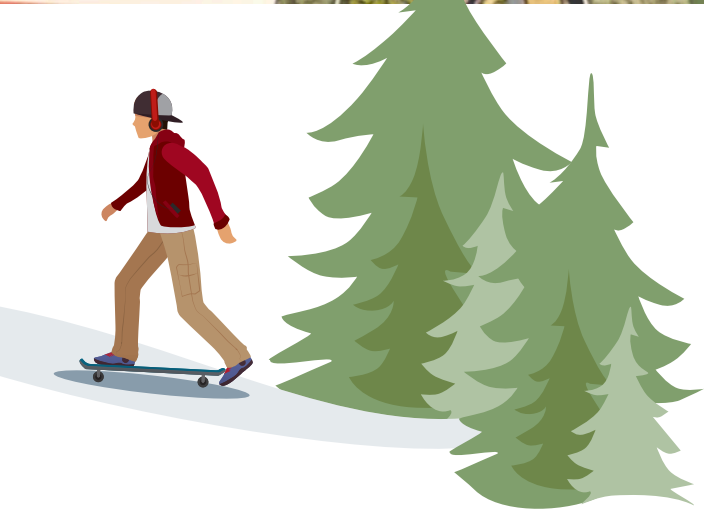
The subarea plan includes recommendations related to land use and transportation and helps to frame options for improving the character and function of the Mill Creek Boulevard Corridor. Several capital improvements are proposed in this area, and the subarea plan provides a framework to support coordination and design of these improvements:

- *Intersection improvements at 164th Street SE, 161st Street, Main and SR 527;*
- *Repair of surface water aging infrastructure failures identified in a 2018 study;*
- *Water quality treatment;*
- *Pavement preservation; and*
- *Potential improvements to enhance pedestrian and bicycle access to transit.*

While redevelopment of the parcels in the corridor is not imminent, the City made the decision to collaboratively engage with residents, business representatives, and affected property owners to identify potential land uses that could bring increased economic activity to the area and improve the aesthetics of this important gateway to the city and Town Center.

MILL CREEK BOULEVARD SUBAREA MAP AND VICINITY MAP





PURPOSE OF THE SUBAREA PLAN

The purpose of this plan is to identify ways to strengthen economic development and to evaluate potential changes in land use that would provide additional opportunities (business, economic development, transportation, housing, and public spaces) for the community. The plan also addresses how the subarea can be enhanced and improved as an important gateway to the city and Town Center.

The plan provides options for meeting established growth allocations (population, housing, and employment), focusing growth near services and transit, consistent with Washington State Growth Management Act and regional policies. The plan also frames options for improving the character and function of Mill Creek Boulevard to serve local business access, rather than serving as a cut-through route. The subarea is a busy hub of activity for Mill Creek, and the plan recommends ways to enhance and strengthen the identity, sense of place, and civic functions of this important place—the heart of the community.

PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Mill Creek City Council appointed a diverse group of property owners, business representatives, and residents to form a Project Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC worked with the City's planning team (City staff and consultants) to evaluate land use, transportation, and economic development opportunities within the Mill Creek Boulevard Corridor Subarea. The City Council directed the PAC to evaluate three potential scenarios:

- No changes to zoning in the subarea;
- Potential intensified land uses (upzoning) in 30% of the subarea; and
- Potential intensified land uses (upzoning) in 50% of the subarea.

The PAC met nine times throughout the planning process to review public input, analyze data, prepare and evaluate alternative planning scenarios for the subarea, and prepare recommendations on potential land uses and infrastructure (see page ES-6).

Vision and Goals for the Subarea

To guide development of the recommendations in the subarea plan, the planning team and the PAC prepared a vision statement and key goals as guiding principles. The vision statement and key goals will be carried forward when the subarea plan is further considered as part of the City's 2024 Comprehensive Plan update process.

Visioning concept illustrations for the subarea

VISION STATEMENT

Serving as a gateway to Mill Creek and an extension of Town Center, the Mill Creek Boulevard Subarea will redevelop and change over time, extending the character and identify of Town Center south. The subarea will continue to function as a vibrant commercial and civic hub, with the addition of compatible mixed use buildings and residential uses to support local business, as well as to provide space for new businesses and services. The new buildings will be similar in character to the mixed use and multifamily buildings in and surrounding Town Center.

Public uses of the subarea will be enhanced and expanded through improved spaces for community uses, events, and festivals, better access to North Creek Trail, beautiful streetscape improvements, pedestrian corridors, and a welcoming civic campus where City Hall is located. Additional retail shops, restaurants, and other active uses will occur in a flexible framework of redevelopment that responds to the market. With implementation of the plan, the subarea will become an extension of Town Center and will enhance Mill Creek's desirability as a great place to live, work, shop, socialize, and spend time supporting our strong community.

Concept showing boardwalk and overlook at City pond

GOALS

- Strengthen the character and identity of the subarea to enhance its sense of place and its importance as a gateway to Mill Creek.
- Address traffic congestion through multi-modal improvements and access to high capacity transit. Provide adequate parking for existing and future uses.
- Allow for mixed use (commercial/residential/office) over a portion of the subarea, in alignment with the Project Advisory Committee recommendations to support the market demand for residential.
- Support economic development, business vitality, and related employment opportunities in the subarea through land use and zoning changes.
- Leverage the subarea as a suitable location to meet population, housing, and employment targets allocated to Mill Creek.
- Make the subarea more pedestrian-friendly— walkable and bikeable so that people will feel encouraged to walk and bicycle between places rather than drive.
- Design Mill Creek Boulevard to function as an attractive gateway to the community, as well as to serve local transportation and parking needs rather than as a cut-through between 164th and SR 527.
- Consistent with Mill Creek's reputation as a safe community, ensure that the subarea continues to be a safe and secure place, leveraging the proximity of the Mill Creek Police Department in the subarea.
- Enhance public open spaces and streetscapes to provide opportunities for everyone in the community and promote multigenerational activities, with a focus on creating:
  - An attractive multi-modal street network and a network of tree-lined streets, as well as connecting pedestrian and bicycle linkages (on-street and off-street);
  - Greenways with healthy trees and vegetation and trails for walking and bicycling that connect to the North Creek Trail corridor, Town Center, and surrounding neighborhoods;
  - An enhanced and expanded North Creek Trail corridor through the subarea;
  - A well-designed regional stormwater system that enhances water quality, controls flows to area creeks, and improves habitat for fish and wildlife;
  - An active use area surrounding the City's pond that relates to surrounding redevelopment; and
  - Festival street and public plaza spaces, creating the Mill Creek Commons.

Project Advisory Recommendations for the Subarea

The basis of the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) recommendations was review of economic data showing mixed use zoning that allows multifamily residential use is the most economically viable type of redevelopment. In their recommendations, the PAC determined that approximately 30% of the subarea, generally the properties along the west side of Mill Creek Boulevard, should be considered for this increased land use intensity, with North Creek providing an amenity and buffer to the redevelopment.

Conceptual illustrations in the subarea plan provide a sense of how redevelopment might look in this portion of the subarea. More residents in the subarea would provide more customers for existing businesses in the vicinity—including Town Center. Additionally, the redevelopment would generate significant revenues for the City. These revenues could provide a funding source for improving infrastructure, amenities, and services in the subarea, the aesthetics of the corridor as a gateway, public spaces along North Creek Trail, and water quality entering North Creek through the construction of upgraded stormwater facilities as a part of new development.

HERE ARE THE PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE'S TEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SUBAREA:

1. *Engage stakeholders throughout the planning process.*
2. *Allow a mix of uses for redevelopment.*
3. *Allow additional building height.*
4. *Provide illustrative design and development standards.*
5. *Require public spaces and amenities with redevelopment.*
6. *Require that the streetscape in the subarea be designed to support the safe movement of pedestrians, bicyclists, and automobiles.*
7. *Change the function of Mill Creek Boulevard to serve the properties in the corridor; not to be a cut-through between SE 164th Street and State Route 527.*
8. *Seek public improvement partnerships to make strategic streetscape improvements while preparing to implement the plan—sooner rather than later.*
9. *Consider a regional strategy for stormwater management.*
10. *Evaluate the land uses desired in the corridor.*

Next Steps and Action Plan

LOOKING AHEAD

With completion of the subarea plan, the next step will be for the City to work with the Planning Commission and the City Council through the 2024 Mill Creek Comprehensive Plan update process to determine the future direction for the subarea. The Comprehensive Plan update process will begin in early 2023 and will be completed by the end of 2024. The public will be engaged during this process. Planning Commission and City Council meetings are open to the public, and decision-making will be transparent.

Through the Comprehensive Plan update process, there will be opportunities to consider the recommendations from the PAC and integrate the subarea plan into the Comprehensive Plan. The intent will be to guide future redevelopment in alignment with the vision and goals for the subarea. Changing the function of Mill Creek Boulevard to serve the adjacent land uses in the corridor rather than as a cut-through between 164th Street SE and SR 527 will be another important potential next step, which will require updating existing policies and strategies in the City's Comprehensive Plan.

In addition to the planning and zoning related steps above, the City may determine to move forward with specific improvements in the subarea, including upgrading Mill Creek Boulevard and completing intersection improvements at 164th Street, 161st Street, Main and SR 527. Improvements also may include repair of aging surface water management infrastructure facilities to address failures identified in a 2018 study, as well as water quality treatment as required under current Department of Ecology standards. The City may also implement pavement rehabilitation and improvement projects to enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety and connectivity to the *Swift* bus rapid transit lines.

ACTION PLAN

Considering the recommended steps described on the previous page, the action plan prioritizes potential action items for the City over the course of the next few years to move this plan forward toward implementation.

A. ***Continue public involvement efforts as part of the actions listed below,*** ensuring that the community is engaged in the process and is provided with meaningful opportunities to provide input and feedback.

B. ***Consider revisions to land use designations and changes needed to the City's Comprehensive Plan*** (including the plan's land use map), as well as policies and strategies that may need to be updated in the 2024 Comprehensive Plan to align with the Project Advisory Committee's recommendations. This would include making updates to the Transportation, Land Use, Housing, and other relevant elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

C. ***Provide State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) compliance*** as part of the Comprehensive Plan update process, which may include additional, more detailed analysis of environmental conditions to support potential changes.

D. ***Complete Mill Creek Municipal Code amendments,*** including zoning and code provisions to support the City's updated Comprehensive Plan (2024).

E. ***Prepare illustrative design standards,*** adopted by reference in the Municipal Code to support and guide subarea redevelopment so that it is consistent with the desired character and aesthetics for the subarea, and so that it enhances the overall character of Mill Creek and the subarea's function as a gateway to the community.

F. ***Move forward with already programmed capital improvement projects in the subarea,*** taking into consideration how improvements may relate to and support future redevelopment and enhancements recommended in the subarea plan.

G. ***Develop a funding strategy for, and design and implement Mill Creek Boulevard corridor improvements,*** which could be completed in phases: design development, preparation of construction documents, and construction.

H. ***Develop a funding strategy for, and study, design, and implement surface water management improvements,*** which could include regional or subregional facilities and water quality treatment to support future redevelopment. These actions would improve habitat and environmental conditions of North Creek, as well as the downstream waters of the Sammamish River and Lake Washington.

I. ***Consider opportunities to enhance public and civic spaces in the subarea.*** As an important and busy hub of the community, the City will continue to evaluate opportunities to enhance the public spaces and civic functions of the subarea. The community offered a variety of ideas during the planning process, such as: improving access to North Creek Trail; providing more public gathering spaces in the vicinity of City Hall and other public areas; adding more public art installations; enhancing streetscapes and creating shared/festival street areas; and creating a better public experience around the City pond.