

Chapter 1.0

Plan Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Rainier Beach Neighborhood Plan

For the past three years, the residents, property owners, business owners, employees, students, and friends of Rainier Beach have earnestly worked to develop a useful and sustainable plan to serve as the future foundation of the neighborhood. The primary purpose of the Rainier Beach Neighborhood Plan is to establish a blueprint for the how the area will grow and develop -- socially, economically, culturally, and demographically.

Why Do We Need A Plan? Anchoring the southernmost segment of Southeast Seattle, Rainier Beach represents a beautiful and largely undiscovered region of the City. Its borders include Beacon Hill to the west and the shores of Lake Washington to the east. It is a community with rivulets, creeks, ravines, hills, parks, streets, trails, businesses, and civic institutions. The most common structure is the single family home. Rainier Beach maintains long-time residents, many of whom built their homes or first moved to the area as early as the [930s and 1940s. Yet, the area also attracts many new families that have several generations living under one roof. The neighborhood schools and associated civic facilities brim with students of all ages. Shopping areas, although not as dense and expansive as they might be, are lively and diverse, with many languages and cultures represented in various shops and restaurants. Public agencies have indicated that over 60 languages are spoken in Rainier Beach. In addition to all this, a large number of religious institutions, neighborhood councils, civic improvement groups, adopt-a-street crews, after-school student groups, and ethnic clubs and associations help define the character and substance of Rainier Beach.

It is this desire to preserve and promote Rainier Beach's multicultural diversity and unique urban fabric that provides part of the impetus to develop a .20-year neighborhood plan. The other driving force is the need to adapt to change and do so in a sustainable way. The community supports new, affordable housing, but prefers to see it happen in smaller, moderate-sized buildings. It desires new economic development, but would also like to preserve existing small businesses. [t welcomes regional mobility and neighborhood serving transit and non-motorized transportation facilities, but will not tolerate impacts to residential streets. And it wants new jobs and educational opportunities for its children and adults and it wants it now.



It is these challenges that this Plan strives to address. Through the hard work and partnerships of the Rainier Beach Neighborhood 2014 Planning Committee, its project staff and consultants, the Seattle Neighborhood Planning Office, and most importantly, the members of the Rainier Beach community, this Plan has been developed to serve as Rainier Beach's blueprint for a vibrant and sustainable future.

1.2 Neighborhood Planning Context

In 1994, the Seattle City Council adopted the Comprehensive Plan. The Plan's primary focus centered on targeting population and employment growth in already well established urban neighborhoods. In return for accommodating the burden of this growth, these designated "urban villages" would benefit from increased capital investment in their communities. The Comprehensive Plan designates Rainier Beach as one of 18 residential urban villages scattered throughout the City. As illustrated in Figure 1 on page 3, its boundaries generally extend from Rose Street to the north, Fletcher Street to the south, MLK, Jr. Way to the west, and Seward Park Avenue S to the east. As part of the Phase I community outreach process, the urban village boundaries were expanded to include a "panhandle" for all properties facing Rainier Avenue from Rose Street to Holly Street.

The Rainier Beach residential urban village occupies 227 acres in the southern most section of Rainier Valley. As a residential urban village, the Comprehensive Plan envisions Rainier Beach to be comprised of "...concentrations of low to moderate densities of predominantly residential development with a compatible mix of support services and employment." Comprehensive Plan growth targets indicate that the Rainier Beach residential urban village can expect an additional 740 new households over the next two decades, [2 percent of the total growth citywide. No growth targets are in place for employment, but strategies can be developed through the neighborhood planning process to promote redevelopment of the area's commercial centers and future transit hubs.

1.3 Community Outreach Efforts

Planning efforts for the Rainier Beach Neighborhood Plan have occurred in two phases. Phase I of the planning effort was completed in November 1997, and involved identification of past planning efforts, community outreach and validation, community visioning and planning goals, and development of a Phase II Planning Committee and project scope of work. The culmination of this expansive and successful process is documented in the report, ***Our Neighborhood Spoke, We Started Our Work*** dated February 1998. Excerpts of Phase 1 outreach have been reproduced in this section below.

Following the completion of Phase 1, the Rainier Beach Neighborhood 20[4 Planning Committee moved forward to develop a grass roots, community-directed plan that addressed the top community priorities. To achieve this goal, the Committee, in connection with representatives from the Rainier Beach community-at-large, worked in four subcommittees to develop plan recommendations: *Housing and Land Use, Community Education, Economic Development, and Transportation and Transit Facilities*. The future construction of the regional light rail system along the MLK, Jr. Way corridor (with a station at Henderson Street) provided an initial focal point for all groups. To ensure a feedback loop and to keep all members of the community in touch with the neighborhood planning process, the Planning Committee continued its outreach efforts in Phase II with the following tasks:

- . Hosted regular Planning Committee meetings on the first Monday of every month.
- . Publicized and welcomed all community members to participate in subcommittee work sessions.
- . Designed and distributed monthly newsletters and postcard meeting notices.



Rainier Beach Neighborhood 2014

A ♦ PLAN ♦ FOR ♦ THE ♦ FUTURE

Figure 1
Rainier Beach Residential Urban Village Boundary

- Contacted and met with cultural organizations, churches, and other neighborhood non-profit associations in an effort to involve “hard-to-reach” neighborhood stakeholders.
- Conducted approximately 20 personal interviews to gain input from the local business community.
- Presented preliminary plan recommendations to various City agencies in August [1998].
- Hosted a “Preview of the Plan” workshop in October 1998 (attracting nearly 100 people) to present the plan and gain input from the Rainier Beach community-at-large.
- Designed and distributed a Plan Validation Newsletter to all addresses located within the Rainier Beach residential urban village.
- Hosted a Plan Validation Event in December 1998 to present final plan and gather remaining input from the community-at-large.

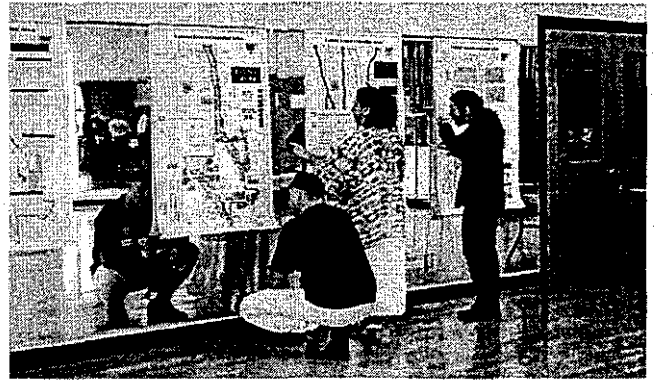


Figure 2

Images from the October 10th Preview of the Plan Workshop

Highlighting Phase 1 Outreach

Accomplishments. Rainier Beach Neighborhood 2014 (RBN2014) went through five chronological stages in completing Phase 1. The following descriptions, excerpted and annotated from the report, ***Our Neighborhood Spoke, We Started Our Work***, highlight each of these stages, stressing the accomplishments of the outreach and their insight for helping shape the technical, hands-on planning that took place in Phase II.

Stage 1- Organizing Rainier Beach, July to November 1996

In order to organize residents, land and property owners, business owners and employees, public agencies, groups and clubs, students, and “users” of the area, RBN 2014 had to become a working group, create a name, establish planning boundaries, and develop a logo for stationery. From July to September 1996, Veronica Jackson, the City’s designated Neighborhood Planning Project Manager, began sending out word to community clubs, organizations, and their leaders. Meetings were set up, and those first few people began spreading the word, simply by talking to their neighbors.



▲ Lily Brinker greets people.



▲ James Luster and Howard Goodman (right) present Phase I outreach findings.



▲ A little one enjoys the festivities.



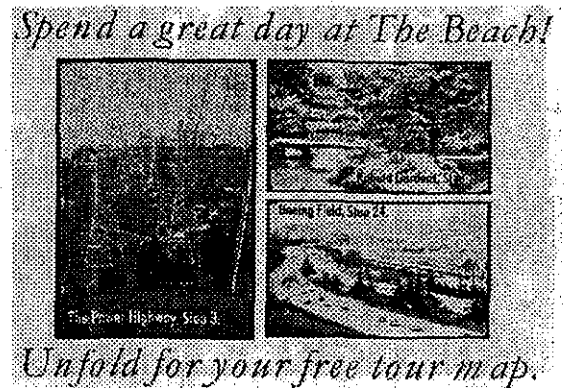
▲ Mary Ann Parmeter (left) and Lisa Merki vote on priorities.



▲ Aaron Swar (left) and Lisa Merki chat it up with former City Councilperson Jane Noland.



▲ Before he was Mayor, Paul Schell visited with the Rainier Beach community during Phase I of neighborhood planning.



▲ This brochure was developed during Phase I to promote the diverse sights and sounds of Rainier Beach.

By October [1996, RBN 2014 had a larger committee, create a name, logo, and map. From this point the group began to solicit commitments from its members to serve the group, that is, circulated forms to fill out stating how many hours could be dedicated to work, which work was preferred, and what specific talents could be offered. Following additional meetings and increased solicitations, RBN 2014 developed a large phone list, commitments from several community members, and increased attendance at committee meetings.

Stage II- Consolidating to Make Phase 1 Official, September 1996 to 22 February 1997

In this stage, the task turned towards keeping information about RBN 2014 moving outward and towards becoming officially contracted with the City for Phase I funding dollars. This stage reached its high point with the "Kick-Off" public gathering on 22 February [1997.

The consolidation period featured several sessions in the general monthly meetings, and smaller sessions with subcommittees, where the topic of the Seattle Neighborhood Planning Office's procedures and steps were explained by Veronica Jackson and other City staff. The community formed a subcommittee to handle the contracting issues, bringing back results and setbacks to the larger group. Other important subcommittee work that took place during this stage focused on media and publicity, by-laws, outreach strategy, and planning for the February Kick-Off event.

Stage [11- Making Ourselves and NPOS Goals Known, 22 February to June 1997

Unlike other neighborhood planning groups, RBN 2014 decided that rather than spend \$8,000-\$10,000 on a consultant team to "organize" the neighborhood, the community would take on this responsibility. The method used was twofold: first, to use traditional methods of community action to spread the word, i.e.; letterwriting, walking the neighborhood, adopting streets and parks, cleanups, community council meetings. Second, the group decided that funding could best be used to take RBN 2014 meetings and its mission to "hard-to-reach" local groups.

RBN2014 perceived that many area organizations were not easily identified. They had no profile in the public's eye, and tended not to reach out to the City or other clubs and associations. The strategy focused on funding individual meetings with these groups in exchange for the opportunity to inform their members about the neighborhood planning process, the project Questionnaire, and to request input from the membership. To support this effort and reach out to local businesses, RBN 2014 sent out volunteers to walk five targeted routes and talk to businesses, hand out flyers and announce the Kick-Off event.

February 22nd Kick-Off Event. The event proved more popular and successful than anyone could have hoped or imagined. Featured were an introduction of the planning activities, generation of issues in the community (particularly Sound Transit and the future light rail system), and a call to attract new participants. Several elected representatives attended. In total, the meeting attracted over 160 persons from a wide variety of interests. To gain input, community members were asked to share their priorities, opinions, and concerns. Indifferent banners displaying neighborhood planning categories, including:

- Education
- \\ Housing
- \\ Looks/Appearance
- Opinions on the Rainier Beach Community Center
- Parks
- Recycling
- \\ Security
- \\ Social Services
- \\ Transit
- \\ What I Like About Rainier Beach
- \\ What Not to Change
- \\ Zoning

Stage IV- Gathering Opinions About Planning Ideas, June to September 1997

RBN 2014 continued its work to stay in touch with “hard-to-reach” groups, and developed lists of “ideas” for planning – ideas gleaned from monthly meetings and from comments at the February 22nd event. To supplement its outreach efforts, RBN 2014 committed to preparing a questionnaire that would not be repetitious of previous surveys and would inspire the Rainier Beach community to think positively about making plans for the future.

Working in partnership with the Seattle Neighborhood Planning Office, RBN 2014 sent out an areawide mailing of the Questionnaire, reaching approximately 9,000 addresses. Combined with having Questionnaires filled out at the “hard-to-reach group events, RBN 2014 received a remarkably high return rate of nearly 700 responses. Again depending on the neighborhood's spirit of volunteerism, the Questionnaires were tabulated by community members and categorized according to priorities.

On August 23, the community hosted a “Visioning Event”, where the results of the questionnaire were put on display. RBN 2014 decided that a process of winnowing would be used. At the visioning event, RBN 2014 presented the community-at-large with the ideas that had received the top priority over the entire outreach phase. This resulted in community members having the opportunity to comment on all 14 of the most important ideas generated. At the event, the 14 ideas were grouped into six categories, each of which had its own voting table, and information team: (1) Neighborhood Transportation, (2) Business and Retail, (3) Parks, (4) Environment, (5) Government, and (6) Social Services.

Stage V- Transforming into Phase II Planning, September to November 1997

In RBN 2014's regular meetings, the Committee interpreted the results of voting at the August 23rd event. The group realized that something interesting had happened. The general voting confirmed the priorities of the Questionnaire findings: however, closer inspection of the August 23rd event tally revealed that youth had favored one idea more importantly than adults: to make an areawide study of streets that were not friendly to pedestrians and cyclists, and suggest ways to make them work for all modes. After much discussion, the Planning Committee agreed to include this idea for Phase II study.

Before Phase II could begin, RBN 20[4 presented a final community meeting to validate its hard work and its findings. At this meeting, RBN20[4 attempted to pinpoint various parties who had expressed interest in the work, but had not shown up for meetings. The purpose of the validation meeting, held September 22", was to present the draft Phase II work scope and gain final community "buyoff" on the work done to date. In essence, it provided the community-at-large with one last chance to clarify, challenge, and/or affirm the ways in which RBN 2014 had organized itself, listened to the community, and done its work.

By the November 1997 meeting, the Phase II scope had been revised in ways that were to the liking of the temporary subcommittee in charge of it. Furthermore, the Phase II Planning Committee was approved and new chairpersons were elected: Dawn Blanch and James Luster. The group had survived through Phase I, and mustered the energy to develop what follows in upcoming chapters: the Rainier Beach Neighborhood Plan, a plan for a sustainable future.