

NORTHGATE TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT
URBAN DESIGN STUDY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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1. Project Overview

What is the study looking at?

The City of Seattle is responsible for land use and street use planning, including coordination with transit agencies such as King County Transportation and Sound Transit. This Northgate South, Transit-Oriented Development and Urban Design Study is part of an ongoing effort to help the community grow in a manner that balances many needs toward the creation of a healthy vibrant community. As such, this study focuses on three particular elements of the physical community: 1) building types, form and character; 2) community assets and; 3) streets and other mobility connections.

Development Types, Form and Character

The predominant character of a community comes from the types of use, form and character of the buildings. The City regulates the use and design standards for private development through the land use (zoning) code with its related design standards such as allowable heights and setbacks. Private developments, such as new apartment buildings, are also required to go through a design review process that allows designers the flexibility to address unique opportunities of particular sites and neighborhoods. This study illustrates different scenarios of building heights and setbacks if built under current rules as well as potential changes to the rules. The current rules are somewhat complex, but generally allow a diversity of uses (both residential and commercial) in buildings as tall as 65' (at the edges) to 125' in height (at the center) of the study area. As a reference, the Thornton Place project is built to a 65' height. The rules also require 15% of the lot area to be open space.

1. Project Overview

Healthy Community

A healthy and vibrant community needs to have a variety of public parks and open spaces, civic buildings/spaces (public and private) and stores and services that serve daily needs. Public civic buildings include libraries, schools and community centers. Private civic buildings include places of worship as well as civic, activity, and social clubs. Stores that make a community 'livable' include grocery, drug, and hardware stores. Services include child care, dry-cleaning, and miscellaneous professional businesses just to name a few.



Streets and Connections

The City of Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) is responsible for the planning and operation of all the public streets and 'rights-of way'. Although this is commonly understood as the vehicular roadway portion, with its predominant emphasis on private vehicles and trucks, it also includes pedestrian sidewalks, bicycle and transit facilities. A recent emphasis on the latter has led to an establishment of a citywide 'complete street' policy that helps SDOT balance the needs of all users of the public streets. This study looks for opportunities to realize this balance and improve mobility and connections for all users, both within the neighborhood as well as to/from adjacent communities.





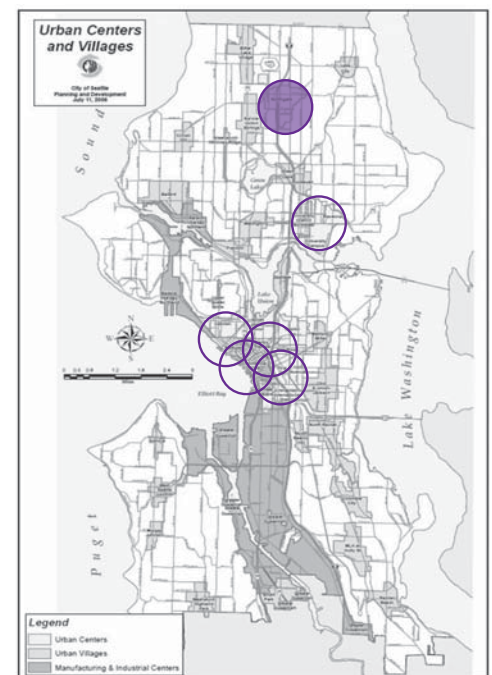
Why is the study being done?

The city is required to plan for growth in response to a State of Washington law requiring counties and cities to designate specific areas to accommodate growth and coordinate related planning and public investments. As such, the City of Seattle designated Northgate as one of six 'Urban Centers' in its comprehensive plan. Northgate is also one of the 27 areas in the region designated to accommodate growth by the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), which is responsible for coordinating planning efforts and allocating federal grants for King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap Counties.

Because of this 'Urban Center' designation and as part of the 'Sound Move 2' project, Sound Transit will provide Light Rail Service to the Northgate area by 2021. This presents an opportunity to create a dynamic neighborhood on land that is now dominated by parking lots. Throughout the country, locations with frequent high-capacity transit service develop into thriving and attractive places for people to live and work. The Northgate area is a great candidate for becoming such a community.

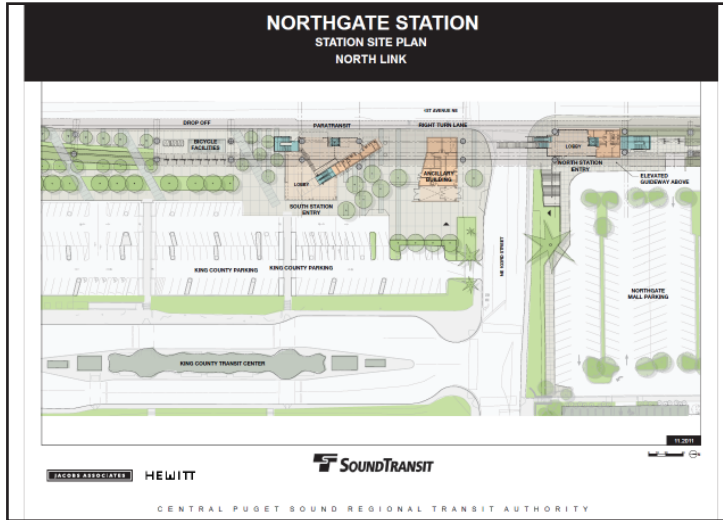
This redevelopment trend can also be reflected by recent planning efforts which have focused on a gradual transition from an auto-oriented neighborhood to a more pedestrian friendly mixed-use community. These efforts have resulted in tangible improvements to the livability and character of the neighborhood. These include the realization of the Northgate Library and Community Center, the Thornton Creek water quality channel, and the Hubbard Homestead Park.

In parallel, King County Metro is evaluating the need to modify or rebuild the current bus transit center to better coordinate and optimize bus operations with the LRT station and to enable the future redevelopment of its property with multifamily homes, retail and/or offices. Part of Metro's evaluation includes figuring out how many park and ride spaces will be needed after the rail station is built.



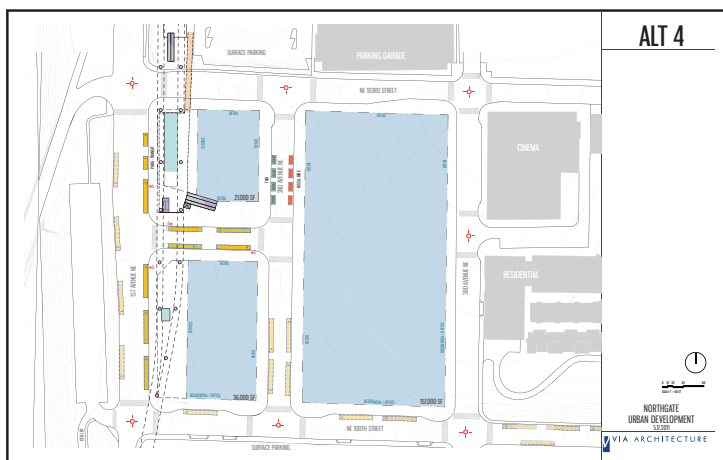
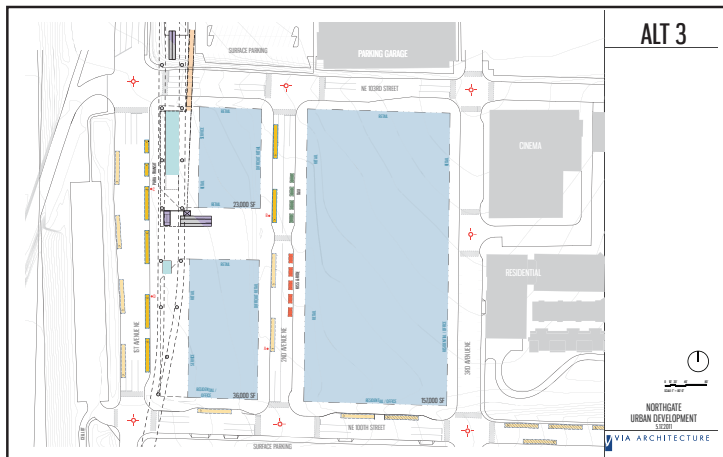
Seattle Urban Centers and Villages
Source: City of Seattle, DPD

1. Project Overview



Northgate Station (30% Design)*
Source: Sound Transit

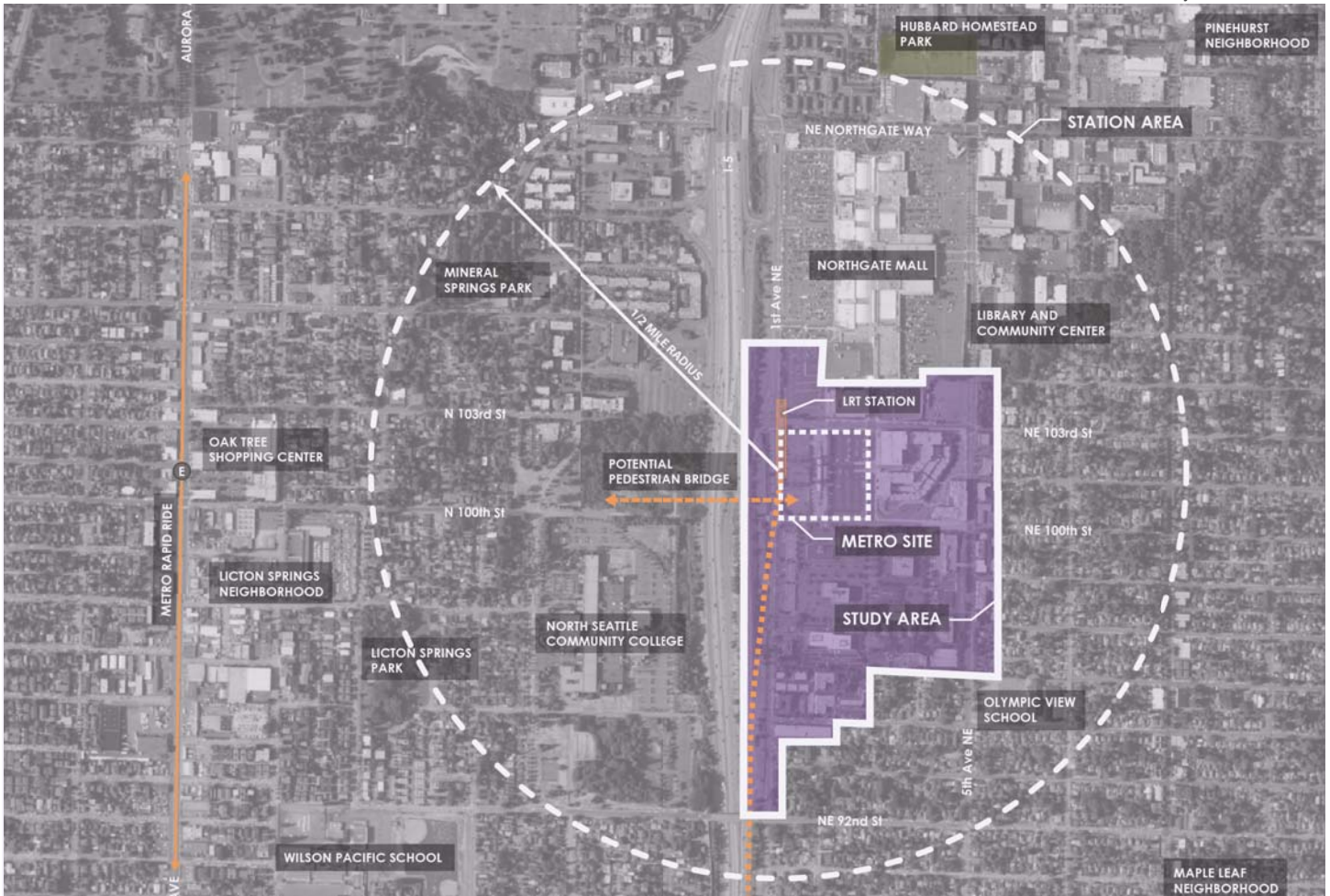
The Northgate Light Rail Station is part of the second phase 'Sound Move 2' project that will provide fast, reliable and efficient transit service to and through Downtown Seattle and SeaTac Airport, reducing the current 26 minute bus trip to downtown to 13 minutes by train. Sound Transit estimates that up to 15,000 people will use the Northgate Station by 2030. The Northgate station will be an interim terminus, for approximately three years, until a further extension to Lynwood is completed by 2024.



Northgate Transit Center (Design Alternatives)*
Source: King County Metro Transit

The Northgate Transit Center, owned and operated by King County Metro Transit, provides the central bus transfer hub and commuter park and ride service for the neighborhood and the greater north Seattle area connecting to Downtown Seattle and other major destinations. Built in 1990, the station's center island configuration allows easy transfers between buses and the surrounding parking lots. When the rail opens in 2021, commuters will begin using light rail as the main transit service to Downtown Seattle. Consequently, the configuration and operations of the transit facility are being evaluated for improvements to provide an efficient transfer between buses and the new light rail station. Metro is also looking at possible transit-oriented development and parking at the existing center.

* At the time of this report, both agencies, Sound Transit and King County, continue the design process of both LRT and Bus stations. Several alternatives are being studied.



Where is the study area?

High-capacity rail stations generally stimulate development activity within a half mile walking distance from the station. New residential and commercial development could be stimulated both before and after the station is built. Because the I-5 freeway blocks half of this area from any pedestrian access, the City focused the study on the immediate station area as shown on the attached graphic. The southern and eastern boundaries were defined by the limit of existing commercial and multi-family zone boundaries.

Although this study did not evaluate planning issues or opportunities west of the freeway, a parallel study by Metro did determine the issues and costs related to providing a new pedestrian and bicycle bridge across I-5. Such a bridge could allow easy access to the North Seattle Community College (NSCC) and the commercial and residential areas to the west and northwest. It could also provide an important connection to the planned Metro Rapid Ride bus service on Aurora Avenue. However, no funding sources have been identified to date for additional study or construction.

The large King County Metro parking lot site sits at the heart of the station area. This area established the central core of the three development 'concepts' illustrated later in this report. Separate and related studies by King County for this parcel have also explored how a new transit center might work with new development, including several different parking scenarios after the rail station is built.

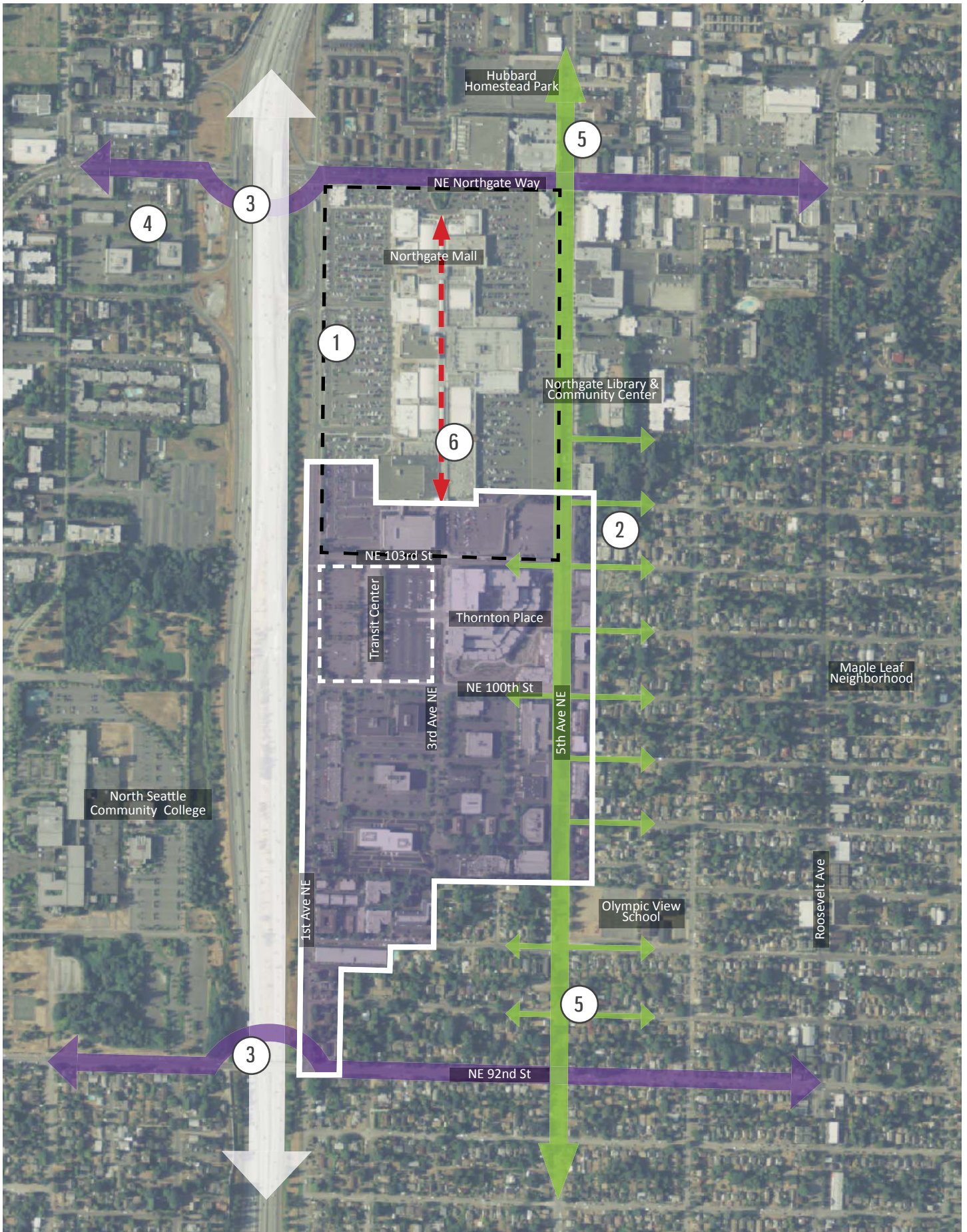


How was the study done?

The study was completed based on an urban design analysis of the existing conditions, public comments from a public open house, and a related on-line survey. From this information, five basic principles for development were developed to guide the creation of three alternative visions of what future development might look like. These visions, illustrated in the following pages, were presented at a second public open house for comments.

Several general characteristics of the overall Northgate area were noted

1. The Northgate Mall continues to dominate the 'sense of place'.
2. Recent development southeast of the mall is more pedestrian-friendly with a mix of uses and sidewalks with active storefronts.
3. The freeway divides the area, with only two connections (NE 92nd Street and NE Northgate Way) that are almost a mile apart.
4. Very little recent development has occurred west or northwest of the freeway.
5. Fifth Avenue NE establishes the primary north-south connection between Northgate's northern core and this 'Northgate South' study area with multiple residential streets reaching up into the single family neighborhoods to the east and a few arterials connecting around the Mall and to the transit center and office buildings to the west.
6. The Mall is configured around a north-south 'spine' on axis with Third Avenue NE which extends through the study area.



Specific observations of the study area were also made:

1. Multiple large parking lots, utilized by the mall, transit center and office buildings at the south edge.
2. Few streets, which consequently establish large 'super-blocks' that limit pedestrian and vehicular connections.
3. The Thornton Creek restoration area park establishes a conspicuous and well used public amenity, but does not provide a civic open space for public gatherings.
4. The freeway creates a constant din of sound as well as air pollution.
5. There are not any central 'way-finding' features.

These observations, in addition to examples of development types, forms and character were presented to the community for comments. An online survey, which complemented the open house, allowed for a broader range of stakeholder input for those who could not attend the public meeting. A complete record of comments is included in Appendix B. However, six common themes emerged.

1. Walkable, Livable and Attractive places: The community expressed their concerns regarding the lack of pedestrian-friendly streets or human scale buildings.
2. Well-Designed Mid-Sized Urban Places: A desire was expressed to avoid big empty public open spaces while still accommodating farmers markets or community gatherings.
3. A variety of and transition between building heights: Although some high-rise buildings might be acceptable in the center, a variety of mid-rise and low rise development is preferred, stepping down to transition to the surrounding neighborhood.
4. Active and Attractive Building Edges: Try to create active edges with storefront retail and ground related housing.
5. Support Community Businesses: Although the mall serves regional retail needs, the community expressed a need for businesses serving more common daily needs such as grocery, drug and hardware stores.
6. Green Natural Feature: The community is rightly proud of the efforts to protect and restore Thornton Creek. New development should capture opportunities to preserve the presence of nature in the area.



2. Urban Design Principles

Based on the comments and combined with the analysis, five general urban design principles are proposed to inform the development of three alternative visions of a vibrant and livable future neighborhood in this area. The Urban Design Principles are:

1. Create human scale places.
2. Fill-in the gaps.
3. Reinforce neighborhood connections.
4. Establish a neighborhood main street.
5. Buffer the freeway.

1. Create human scale places

The community wants more **human scale places** as it evolves from a place that was designed for cars to a place that is inviting, safe and attractive to walk around. This evolution can be realized in many different ways both in public spaces and private buildings. Streets need to be designed at dimensions and with elements that are scaled for pedestrians not cars driving at high speeds. Vehicular lane widths on local streets should not be wider than 10'. Parallel parking should be provided where it supports adjacent storefront retail and ground related residential townhouses; it should not be wider than 8'. Sidewalks need to include pedestrian amenities such as lighting, benches, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, pedestrian scale signs. At appropriate locations such as small public plazas, public art, information kiosks and unique paving should be provided. Landscape strips should be provided with low scale durable plants that have minimal maintenance. Crosswalks paving and signals need to prioritize pedestrian safety.

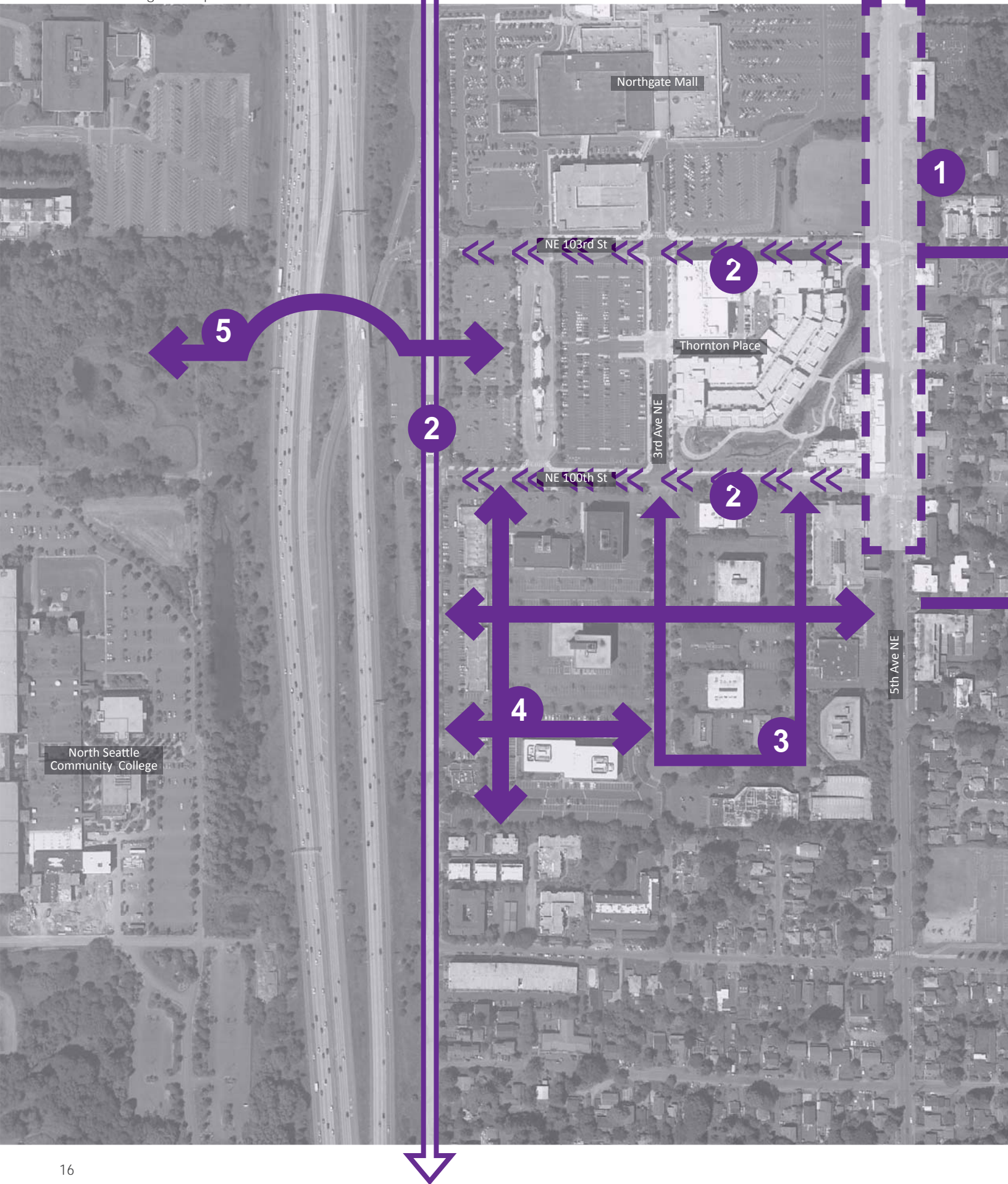
Buildings should incorporate interesting uses, modulation, textures and details that provide interest and delight to pedestrians. This is most important at the ground level but upper level articulation and windows also provide an opportunity to incorporate smaller scale details.





2. Fill-in the gaps

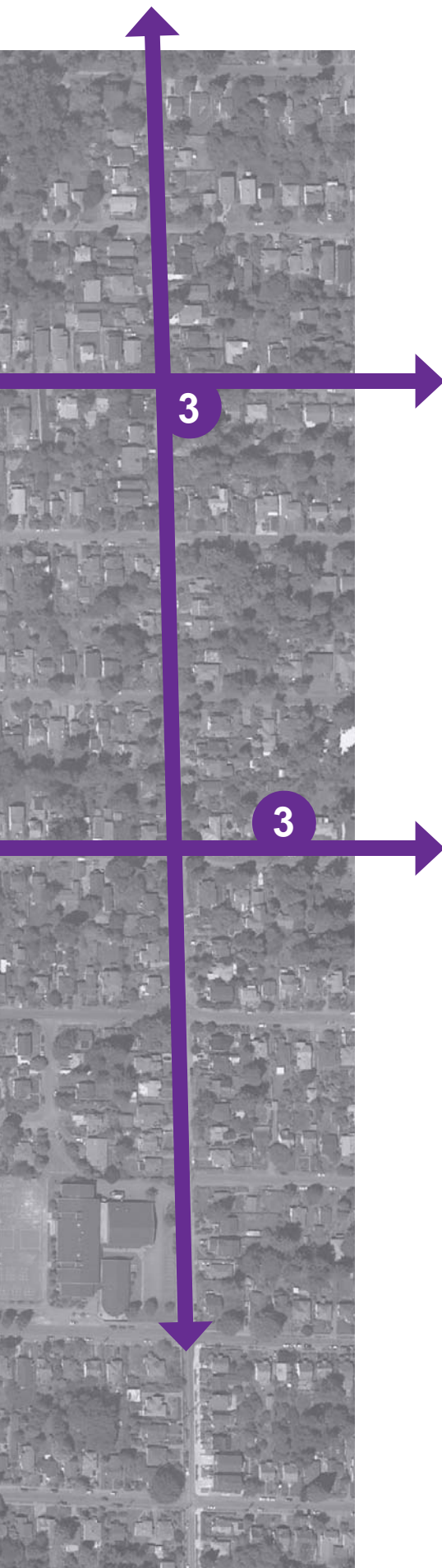
The second principle, **filling the gaps**, refers to using incremental 'infill' development to replace the surface parking lots over time. Since many of the existing buildings appear to be in relatively good condition, completely new development is unlikely in many places. Fortunately, the configuration of many of the office buildings appears to allow for some incremental infill of new buildings, or for building expansions as market demands evolve. This would need to occur in careful coordination with the parking required to replace the lost capacity and still be sufficient to serve the new buildings. However, it should be assumed that new transit service will support a reduction in the market requirement for parking. Filling the gaps will also provide more pedestrian activity and an opportunity to introduce more human-scale places.



3. Reinforce neighborhood connections

Reinforcing community connections, the third principle addresses the lack of pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular options to circulate within the neighborhood and between adjacent communities. Improvements are needed where existing streets and public right-of-ways currently exist. New connections, either pedestrian paths or vehicular streets should reinforce and connect with the existing pattern and scale of the surrounding street grid wherever possible; these new connections are intended to help reduce the super-block sized grid, allowing more pedestrian amenities and mobility options. The city has already begun identifying several locations and proposals for such improvements. Although further detailed studies are required to prioritize these, the key recommendations include:

1. Make 5th Ave NE safer and more attractive.
2. Add a bicycle lane on 1st Ave NE and sharrows on 100th and 103rd Sts.
3. Add sidewalks and curb cuts at key locations in residential streets.
4. Introduce mid-block connections in a few key places.
5. Build a new pedestrian & bicycle bridge across I-5.



4. Establish a neighborhood main street

The Northgate South study area lacks a strong way-finding feature. The fourth principle, **establish a neighborhood main street**, attempts to reconcile this deficiency. Third Avenue is an obvious candidate as it is aligned with the pedestrian spine of the mall and it is a low volume vehicular street centrally located through the neighborhood. A new “complete street” concept plan for Third Avenue should be developed for the area between the mall and NE 97th Street. This plan should incorporate design elements of continuity and elements of distinction along the entire 1/3 mile length as it transitions from retail use at the north to more residential uses at the south.



Example of an urban residential street in Portland, OR. The image features the desired character for 3rd Ave NE.

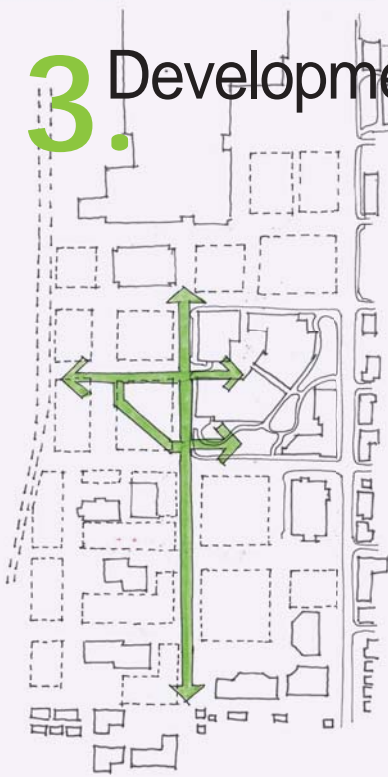


5. Buffer the freeway

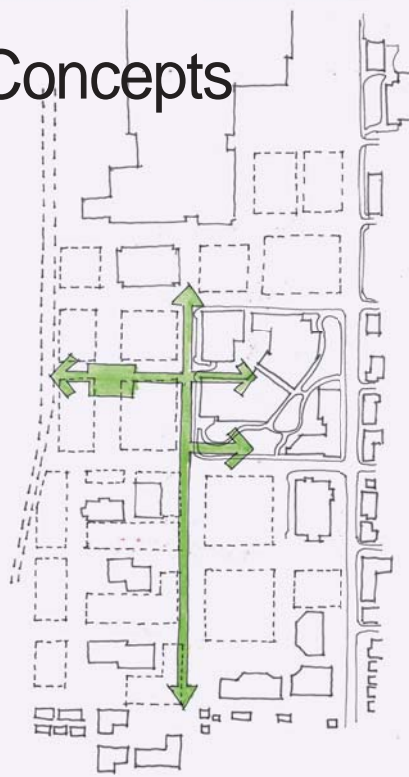
The fifth principle, **buffer the freeway**, acknowledges the adverse impacts of noise, sound and air pollution that I-5 has on the quality of place throughout the Northgate South area. Although the light rail trains should not add much additional noise originated from the guideway, there will be platform announcements and other noise surrounding the station as well as potential noise from the trackway curves entering the station. A potential solution to help mitigate this would be commercial office and/or research buildings along the edge of the freeway. These uses typically thrive on the exposure to the freeway traffic. The zoning provision requiring building heights to step down at the edges should remain at properties adjacent to residential areas.

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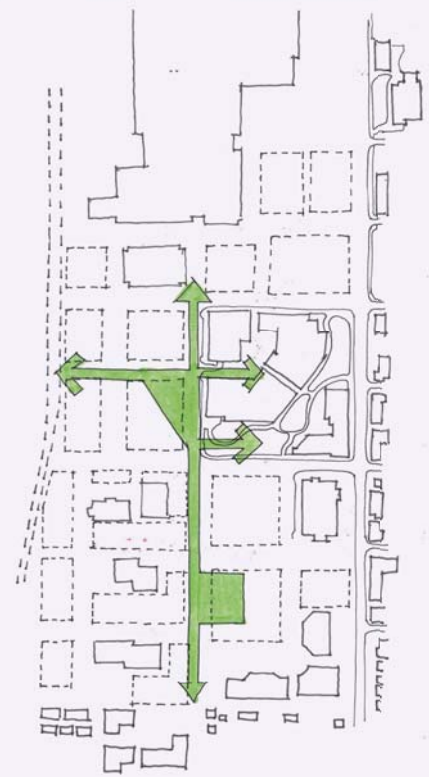
3. Development Concepts



A. Creek Street



B. Station Place



C. Park Place

Based on the development principles, three alternative concepts were developed to illustrate a range of potential future development. Each concept was developed around a distinctly different open space objective. None of the concepts are specific proposals and many of the ideas are interchangeable. All three concepts illustrate a consistent amount of development, all slightly less than the maximum currently allowed*. Concepts 'A' and 'B' both show some buildings built to the maximum allowable 125' building heights with minimum required open space (15% of site area). Concept 'C', although showing approximately the same amount of building space, illustrates how a community might look if several 240' residential high-rises were allowed, combined with larger open spaces. The concepts are named, Creek Street, Station Place and Park Place, respectively.

Three subareas within the overall study area are illustrated consistently on all three concepts. The first, the southeastern edge of the mall includes the corner wrapping around 5th avenue NE from 3rd Ave NE to NE 105th Street. This area is shown as developed to the maximum allowable height (65' and 85') with primarily multi-family residential buildings over a large retail/parking base. The second area, adjacent to the freeway, is shown developed as office/research buildings over above-grade parking with street level retail. The third area contains the three office complexes (Northgate Executive Center I & II and Northgate Plaza) located between 1st and 3rd Avenues NE. Since the office buildings are in relatively good condition and appear to be well leased, the concepts assume they would remain and show how new office and infill residential development could occur, replacing surface parking lots.

* A separate related evaluation by Metro studied the current allowable development capacity (6 FAR) on the central site and determined that it was likely sufficient or more than the market would support for quite a long time.








A. Creek Street

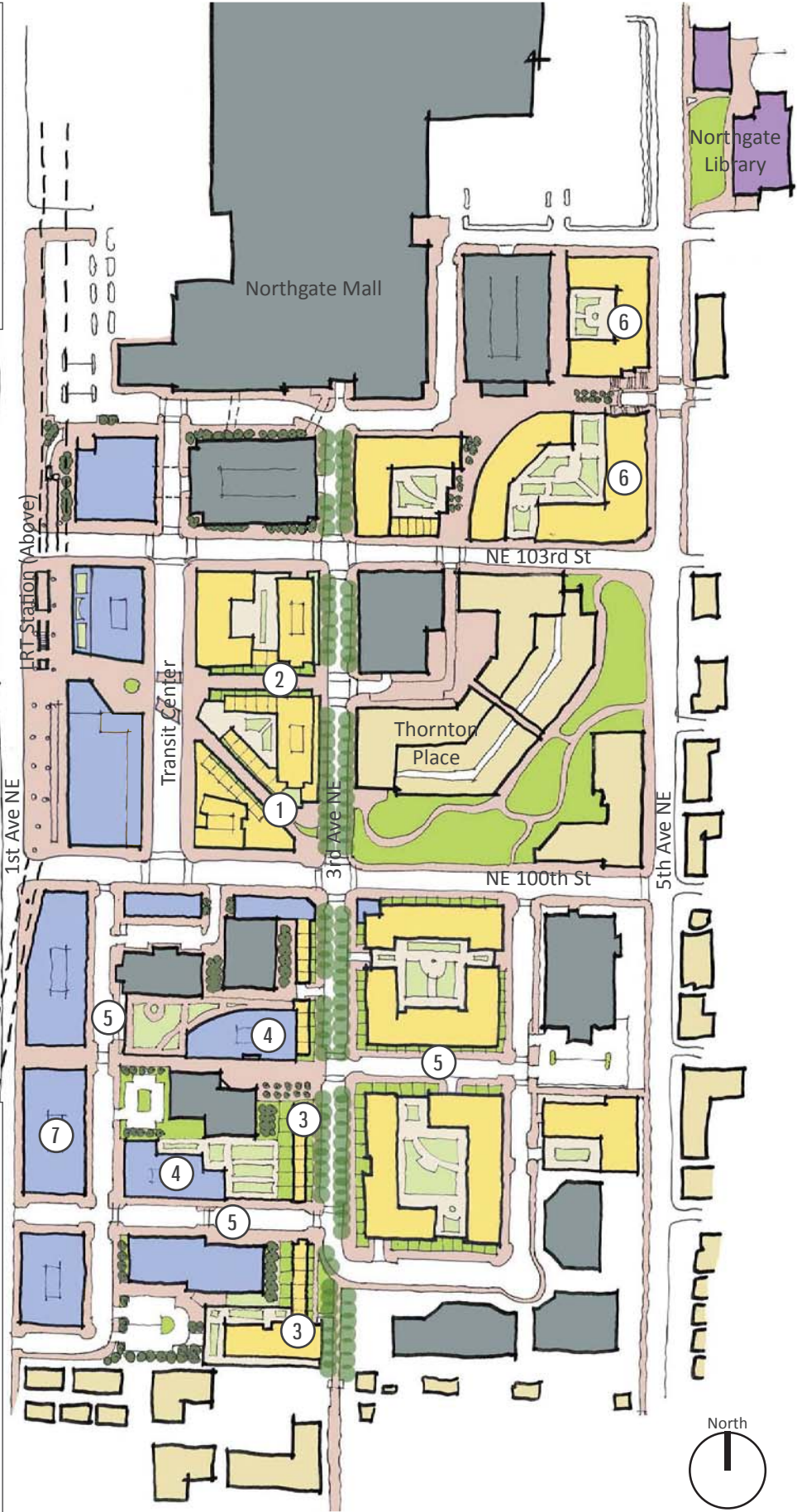


The Creek Street concept illustrates what a mixed-use residential development might look like if the buildings were built to the currently allowed 125' heights and the required 15% open space provided in two pedestrian streets (also known as 'woonerfs'). The first street/woonerf is shown as an east-west connection that is aligned with the current intersection on 3rd Ave NE half way between NE 100th and NE 103rd Streets. The other connection is a diagonal pedestrian street that would directly connect the Thornton Creek Park (water quality channel) with the new transit center. Although the grades would not allow for an actual creek connection, the connection and elements of on-site open spaces could still be designed with references and 'metaphors' to a creek water course.

This concept also illustrates a residential emphasis for development south of 100th between 3rd and 4th Avenues NE. The concept shows what current 85' allowable building heights might look like (65' is required along the south edge at NE 97th street). The concept shows primarily ground-based residential townhouse units at the base because residential uses would be more viable there, allowing for retail uses in more viable locations such as north of NE 100th Street.

LEGEND

-  Existing Building
-  Residential Building
-  Commercial Building
-  Park/Open Space
-  Courtyard/Building Base



FEATURES

1. 'Creek Street' Woonerf
2. East-West Mid-Block Connection
3. Residential Infill
4. Commercial Infill
5. Mid-Block Connections
6. Residential over Retail Base
7. Commercial Buffer

A. Creek Street



'Bird's eye' view looking North-West.

A. Creek Street



View looking North on 3rd Ave NE and NE 100th Street. Artist's interpretation.








B. Station Place



The Station Place concept illustrates what a mixed-use residential development might look like if the required 15% open space is provided primarily in a public plaza near the light rail station. An east–west connecting street, enlivened by ground-floor retail or restaurant uses is also included to establish an important mid-block connection. A plaza in this location would receive ample sunlight and could be an active, mid-sized open space. However, the plaza’s orientation toward the bus and rail stations might work against its vitality as a public gathering space if it is too exposed to transit functions and not a sufficient attractive amenity. Transit plazas do not need to be very large and tend not to make for successful spaces for other community gathering spaces.

This concept also illustrates an emphasis on office buildings for the area south of NE 100th Street between 3rd and 4th Avenues NE. The concept shows what the current allowable 85’ building heights might look like (65’ is the maximum height along the south edge at NE 97th Street). The building configurations illustrate larger floor plate sizes, comparable to downtown high-rise buildings, as the anticipated future market would support. They also illustrate generous open space and planted areas, also typical of probable future market demand and expectations for this location.

LEGEND

-  Existing Building
-  Residential Building
-  Commercial Building
-  Park/Open Space
-  Courtyard/Building Base



FEATURES

1. 'Station Place' Plaza
2. East-West Mid-Block Connection
3. Residential Infill
4. Commercial Infill
5. Mid-Block Connections
6. Residential over Retail Base
7. Commercial Buffer



B. Station Place



'Bird's eye' view looking North-West.

B. Station Place








View looking North on 3rd Ave NE and NE 100th Street. Artist's interpretation.



The Park Place concept illustrates what a mixed-use residential development might look like if the allowable building heights were increased to 240' and intentional strategies to create distinct civic gathering spaces are pursued. Zoning could be tailored to accomplish public planning objectives, including affordable housing and open spaces. This concept's additional open space is shown as two deliberately distinct types of spaces. Adjacent to 3rd Ave NE, Thornton Place and the bus/rail station, a 'hybrid' plaza and park space is conceived with an urban paved plaza as well as planted green spaces. The plaza space would complement more urban and small retail activity while the planted area would still serve the residential uses. With thoughtful design, this space could serve as an attractive civic gathering space with green features, to be a dynamic urban space activated at its edges and providing breathing room and recreational opportunities. South of NE 100th Street, a more typical residential park is conceived as an amenity offering more passive and active green space for resident children and families. It would be important for both open spaces to be surrounded by active uses to foster the stewardship essential for adequate maintenance and safety.

LEGEND

-  Existing Building
-  Residential Building
-  Commercial Building
-  Park/Open Space
-  Courtyard/Building Base



FEATURES

1. 'Park Place' Civic Plaza
2. Public Park
3. Residential Infill
4. Commercial Infill
5. Mid-Block Connections
6. Residential over Retail Base
7. Commercial Buffer

C. Park Place



'Bird's eye' view looking North-West.

C.Park Place



View looking North on 3rd Ave NE and NE 100th Street. Artist's interpretation.