



## **Envision Midway - A Collaborative Planning Project**

### **Underlying Conditions**

#### **Stakeholders Committee**

#### **Introduction:**

The Midway Study Area stretches from the northern border of the City of Des Moines at South 216<sup>th</sup> Street south to South 272<sup>nd</sup> Street where the Cities of Kent and Des Moines end and the City of Federal Way begins. The defining feature of the study area is State Route 99 or Pacific Highway South, also locally referred to as “Pac Hwy.”

Following is a summary of the study area’s history, environmental setting, demographic information, and land uses and regulations. These are underlying conditions that shape Midway today. As we move forward with the planning project, additional information will be provided.

#### **Brief History:**

The name “Midway” was a marketing tool, used to denote the area’s location halfway between Seattle and Tacoma. The completion of Highway 99 in 1928 spurred development. Two iconic features associated with this area include the famous Spanish Castle and the Midway Drive-in Theater. The Spanish Castle was a hot night club located at the corner of Pac Hwy and Kent-Des Moines Road. Midway Drive-In opened in 1940 and was the largest single screen drive-in theater in the area. Both the Spanish Castle and Midway Drive-In are gone, but the pattern of automobile-oriented development persists with low density commercial development flanking Pac Hwy and residential uses stretching east and west away from the commercial strip.

#### **Environmental Conditions:**

The Midway Study Area is located on a ridge sandwiched between the Duwamish/Green River Valley and Puget Sound. Generally the landscape is gently rolling with the highest point located in the northern third of the study area. Throughout much of the study area, there are views to the west toward Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains and to the east toward the Kent Valley, Cascade

Mountains and Mt. Rainier. The landscape also contains some wetlands and areas where steep slopes and unstable soils have constrained development. A rather large wetland located in the southeast portion of the study area is the headwaters for McSorley Creek which flows through Salt Water State Park and into Puget Sound. Parkside Wetlands located in Des Moines at S 248th Street and 26th Avenue S is a 14-acre passive park containing wooded wetlands.

### **Demographics:**

An examination of who lives in and around the Midway Study Area is essential to understanding the issues currently facing the community. The 2000 U.S. Census provides the best data we have to work with. Change surely has occurred since 2000, but change has not been so rapid that the data presented from the 2000 Census are not useful. To understand the demographics of 2008, it may be useful to look back to population trends from 1990 and 2000. Despite changes in the census tract boundaries during that decade, some useful generalizations can be made.

#### *Population Trends*

While Kent has been growing at about 3% annually, which is comparable to the overall growth rate of the Puget Sound Basin, growth in Des Moines has been stagnant. The median age within the City of Des Moines in 2000 was 37 years while in Kent it was 31.8 years. The State of Washington had a median age of 35.8 years. These numbers have been relatively consistent over the past two decades.

#### *Ethnic Composition*

The populations of Kent and Des Moines have been changing dramatically over the past few decades. As the population has grown, one of the most notable changes has been an increase in ethnic diversity. In 1990, both cities were 89 percent white while in 2000 they were approximately 70 percent white. The population of Des Moines in 2000 was 12 percent foreign-born while in Kent it was 17 percent foreign-born. As often occurs with the settlement patterns of recent immigrants, there are concentrated communities of kinship and social networks. The study area is home to a growing Latino population. The Hispanic/Latino population of both cities is approximately 7-8 percent of the total population, but nearly 20 percent within the study area.

#### *Household Income*

Income levels in the region have increased; however, poverty is a part of the demographics of the Midway Study Area. In 2000, median household income was

\$48,971 for the City of Des Moines and \$46,046 for the City of Kent, both slightly higher than the median for Washington State. Within the study area, the median income ranges from \$27,284 to \$61,400. Another indicator of economic health is the number of households living below poverty level. In 2000, 9.2 percent of individuals in Des Moines and 11.6 percent of individuals in Kent lived below poverty level, while in Washington State 10.6 percent of individuals lived below poverty level. In contrast, 26.4 percent of individuals in Census Tract 290.04 and 14.3 percent of individuals in Census Tract 289.02 were below the poverty line. There are some economically vulnerable families living within the Midway Study Area, with some Census Blocks reporting up to 34.6 percent of families living below poverty level.

### **Land Use:**

#### *Regulatory*

The Cities of Kent and Des Moines share a common yet irregular city boundary line. The line is an artifact of an unconventional annexation process that would not be possible today. The zoning along this irregular border is similar, allowing two-story buildings (maximum 35 feet height) with a 40 percent lot area to building area ratio. Regulations north of Kent/Des Moines Road in the Des Moines Pacific Ridge neighborhood are more permissive, allowing 100 and 200 foot buildings. The details associated with Kent and Des Moines development regulations will be addressed in more detail in future meeting materials.

#### *Existing Land Use*

The Midway Study Area is dominated by commercial land use, with some housing consisting of apartments and mobile home parks. The types of business range from regional big box establishments, to national and regional chain stores, to locally-owned retailers and restaurants, some serving the diverse ethnic communities living in the area. Start-up businesses are drawn to the area by the lower rents of the commercial buildings that are old and near the end of their useable life. Additional land uses in the area include outdoor storage, pockets of light manufacturing, and large tracts of vacant land associated with two closed landfills belonging to the City of Seattle (e.g., Midway Landfill and Kent Highlands Landfill). Prime vacant and redevelopable lands are scattered throughout the study area; some of the lands have view potential.

Midway is also home to Highline Community College (HCC) with a student population of about 10,000 students and over 1,250 employees. Highline and Federal Way School Districts serve the area with public education for grades K-12.

### *Housing*

According to the Comprehensive Plans of both cities, a key housing issue is the changing demographics and supply of work force housing. The 2000 Census indicates an increase in single people, couples without children, and single parents with children. It is anticipated that the aging Baby Boomers will want or need to downsize. While the need to accommodate diverse groups is pressing, the existing affordable housing stock within the study area is deteriorating and newly developed housing is not affordable for lower middle income households. The goals and policies found in the Housing Elements of each city's comprehensive plan provide a larger framework to consider.

### *Parks and Open Space*

There are several parks and recreational open space within or adjacent to the study area. Des Moines' Midway Park is a 1.6-acre park located at S 221st Street and 29th Avenue S in the northeastern part of the study area. Parkside Park, located in Des Moines at S 244th Street and 25th Avenue S is a 4.4 acre park with a play area for children and a walking path. Saltair Vista Park, located at S 246th Street and 26th Place in Kent, is a small neighborhood park with a play area for children, picnic tables and benches.