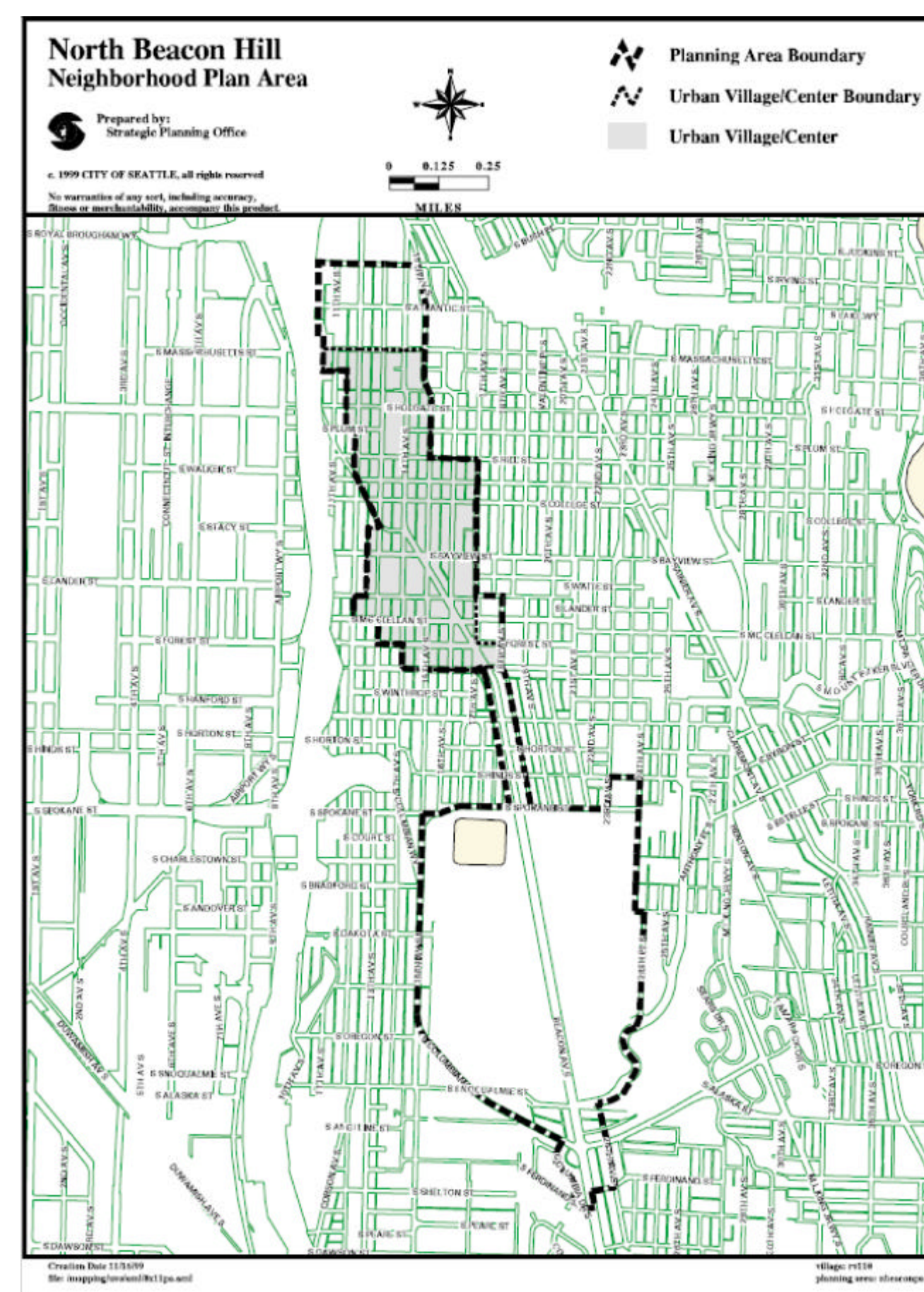


North Beacon Hill

Top Priorities in North Beacon Hill

- Affordable Housing
- Racially/Culturally Diverse
- Safe
- High Performing Schools

The boundaries of North Beacon Hill are designated by S Judkins Street on the north, 15th and 17th Avenue on the west, and S Stevens Road to the south. Beacon Hill overlooks downtown Seattle from the southeast and is distinguished by the 16-story Pacific Medical Center, built in 1934 as the U.S. Marine Hospital and the current home to the on-line company, Amazon. The North Beacon Hill ridge extends south from First Hill between the Duwamish River and the Rainier Valley and it rises to 350 feet in elevation.¹³



Affordable Housing and Racial and Cultural Diversity Linked in North Beacon

Affordable housing and racial and cultural diversity were considered by respondents to be the two top priorities in North Beacon Hill. Craig Thompson, from the Beacon Alliance of Neighbors explained,

Currently in Seattle it is very difficult for working class people to buy homes. The mean prices for homes in this country make it difficult for people to become home owners. People pay too much in rent and can never get ahead to save up enough to buy a home. And there is also a lack of affordable housing.

The impact of increasing housing prices in North Beacon, much like in other neighborhoods, is changing the makeup and dynamics of the neighborhood. Craig Thompson added,

¹³ http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=3004

When rents go up it hurts people's ability to pay. And in a way what we are seeing is the process of gentrification, and it is a two sided coin, because it drives up the prices and takes away some of the character. The (ethnic) people in this community are not benefiting from the opportunities that are available for people like me.

A number of respondents praised the neighborhood for its ethnic, cultural, and economic diversity. However, many indicated that rising housing prices and gentrification posed serious threats to the community. Roberto Maestas, Executive Director of El Centro De La Raza stated,

The housing here is better than many other places, but the pressure is on, especially with the Sound Transit project coming in. This brings in gentrification and all of the poor people are pushed away. Right now there are a substantial number of working people on the Hill [North Beacon] in general, but the pressure is on, and we are going to start to see changes.

Housing Affordability

While the full impact of Sound Transit's light rail is not yet known, a number of respondents suggested that the light rail will exacerbate the housing crisis even further, as accessibility from North Beacon Hill to downtown increases. Another concern raised was that developers were not using the land to its full potential. The neighborhood is one of 38 designated as an urban village.¹⁴ Some respondents felt that despite

¹⁴ There are currently 38 urban villages in the City of Seattle. These areas were designated as such by Seattle's Comprehensive Plan as part of the City's smart growth strategy. Urban villages are intended to be the areas in the city of greatest growth and density in terms of jobs and housing. http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/Seattle_s_Comprehensive_Plan/DPD_001178.asp

Beacon Alliance of Neighbors (BAN) The Beacon Alliance of Neighbors has the goal of improving the quality of life in Northwest Beacon Hill. BAN commits itself to making Beacon Hill a place where people can live safely in a caring, active community.

El Centro De La Raza has a mission to achieve quality, justice, dignity and freedom for all people without regard to race, color, creed, sex or national origin. El Centro seeks to empower – through peaceful means and social change – those affected by poverty, militarism, racism, and sexism so that they may become self-reliant.

zoning code which allowed for denser mixed-used developments, developers were under-developing to avoid red tape from the City and the community. Many interviewees felt that more dense developments would create additional housing options and thus help with the housing issue.

Diversity

Those respondents who selected racial and cultural diversity as a neighborhood priority felt that the neighborhood's current diversity was an asset to be preserved. Notably, those interviewees who had recently moved to the neighborhood (within the last five years) placed a high value on diversity. Touting the diversity of the neighborhood, Roberto Maestas remarked, "the races here are working together as good as or better than anywhere I know in the country. It is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the nation."

Respondents viewed gentrification as imminent due to the lack of affordable housing in the neighborhood. They expressed additional worry that there were not enough minorities engaged in neighborhood decision-making. Craig Thompson noted, "the outreach to all of the different ethnic groups is a major challenge, because the groups who are active do not equally represent the groups in the neighborhood and decisions get made for them which may not represent their views."

Interviewees voiced concern that the rich character of the community was diminishing as the availability of affordable housing steadily declined. Several respondents highlighted the importance of racial

diversity in the commercial core. Curtis LaPierre, an architect who worked on the community design guidelines for the neighborhood asserted,

Awareness is there. We recently prepared design guidelines, and we really want to keep out corporate franchises because having these places [corporate franchises] displace the [local] businesses that supply an important need for parts of our community.

North Beacon Hill Community Members Want High Performing Schools and a Safe Neighborhood

High Performing Schools

The general consensus amongst those interviewed was that the schools in North Beacon Hill are not adequately preparing children for the future. Alan Sugiyama, Executive Director of Center for Career Alternatives and a long time resident, noted that the elementary schools do fairly well, but maintained that,

The middle and high school are low performing schools, because they are small school they don't draw the dollars like bigger schools. If you don't have high performing schools then people don't want to move into that neighborhood.

While many interviewees were unsure about the level of parent involvement in schools and if children stay in neighborhood schools, people generally agreed that schools needed improvement. When asked what could be done to improve the quality of education in North Beacon, interviewees felt that improved leadership from the principals and other administrators was crucial. Respondents expressed little confidence in school administrators' abilities to hire qualified teachers

or maintain a clean and welcoming environment for the students and staff. Most interviewees attributed the state of neighborhood schools to a lack of adequate funding.

Safe Neighborhood

The community leaders in North Beacon generally felt that the neighborhood was improving with respect to safety, but maintained that there was still work to be done. Interviewees felt that the neighborhood's proximity to the Jungle, a nearby open space, was one of the primary safety concerns for the community. Beacon Alliance of Neighbors (BAN) has worked hard to clean up the Jungle and other parks, both in terms of reducing trash and clearing out drug activity. Laurie Rasmussen, president of the North Beacon Chamber of Commerce explained,

If people perceive that a neighborhood is unsafe then they are not going to go there. In the past it [North Beacon] was less safe because of the Jungle but there has been a big push by the city to control it. There are various crimes and litter, but it is a lot better than before.

When asked what the best means of addressing safety issues might be, Laurie Rasmussen urged residents to take ownership of their community. "If you don't like it you ask for help. If something bothers you then you have to take ownership of it. You need to petition the city for what you want." Another approach, as presented by Katrina Freeburg, who works with the St. George School, might be to create more opportunities for connecting community members through dialogue, because "saying who they are creates a dialogue and the more you know people in your community the safer you feel."