

Peter Steinbrueck's Responses to the Socially Responsible Development Questionnaire

- 1) Socially responsible development:** Seattle takes a strong stance in favor of environmentally sustainable development. Do you believe that Seattle also encourages socially responsible development? What does socially responsible development mean to you, and in the absence of any policy incentives, how does it come about? How can it be encouraged with policy?

Socially responsible development (SRD) is project development in the built environment that, besides the physical and environmental, addresses human, community, and social needs. These can include everything from human health, walkability, public safety, historic and cultural connections, to social equity, jobs, housing affordability, and childcare.

The City of Seattle encourages SRD (but generally does not mandate) through its many Comprehensive Plan policies, programs, tax abatement, incentive zoning, development regulations, historic districts and landmarks ordinance. SRD is also carried out through the city's partnership with Seattle Housing Authority and its redevelopment projects such as New Holly, Rainier Vista, High Point, and Yesler Terrace, and since 1984, the Seattle Housing Levy Program.

The Seattle Planning Commission's proposed Transit Communities amendment (2012) to the Land Use Element of the Seattle Comprehensive Plan is a good example of social policies and goals intended to guide healthy, environmentally responsible development.

Transit Community policies integrated with land use and development support the City's decision-making process regarding public infrastructure investment and capital projects, land use and zoning changes, and transportation improvements. Transit Communities define place-types, such as walkable compact communities with easy access to transit. The ten-minute "walkshed" defines the geography of a transit community, informs development and identifies additional best practice methods to successfully plan for SRD within the framework of transit-friendly communities.

- 2) Negative outcomes:** What trends accompanying growth and development in other cities, or in Seattle's history, do you hope Seattle will avoid in future development cycles? What brought you to live in Seattle? What aspects of growth do you believe bring about fear of loss? How can Seattle avoid negative outcomes?

I am a Seattle native (for 55 years), and while I love Seattle, I also truly enjoy visiting other great cities such as New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and San Francisco, as well as internationally. Seattle, for its place on earth in the great Northwest, its natural setting, culture, and diverse economy is unique in the country. I can't think of a better place to live.

Yet we struggle to hold onto what we have as growth pressures continue to challenge our quality of life, the environment, livability, and social equity. This is what most people are concerned about when it comes to changes that growth brings. As Alan Durning, founder of Sitaline Institute in his 1997 book, *"This Place on Earth,"* said:

"If we cannot create an environmentally sound economy here (in the Pacific Northwest), in the greenest part of history's richest civilization, it probably cannot be done. If we can, we will set an example for the world."

It is my greatest hope that as our urban populations grow in the Seattle metropolitan area and the Puget Sound region, we can tackle our three greatest co-dependent challenges of densification, transportation, and the environment in socially just ways that protect and enhance – not degrade – quality of life and livability for all.

For several decades now, I've been an avid student of many diverse patterns of urban growth and development of cities in the U.S. and all over the world. My focus and professional practice in recent years has been on developing a framework for urban sustainability and greening of cities in the U.S.

In 2010, I was honored to receive a year of independent research under the Loeb Fellowship program at Harvard University. This gave me the opportunity to pursue my passion for sustainable cities in an academically rigorous and concentrated way. Under my Loeb Fellowship I studied at the Lincoln Land Institute, MIT, the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and the Graduate School of Design. I audited courses by leading urban scholars and researchers ranging from Urban Ecology, to Transportation Planning, City and Regional Planning Theory, and New Landscape Urbanisms.

My independent research allowed time to read extensively some of the most current books. Among the best of them I recommend "Growing Greener Cities", edited by Eugene Birch and Susan M. Wachter, and "Urban Regions, Ecology and Planning beyond the City," by Richard T.T. Forman. My research included dozens of other articles and academic research addressing challenges in the age of climate change, mass urbanization, and population growth.

I have also gained knowledge and insight from my many study missions over the years to cities ranging from New York City to Birmingham, Ala., and to Istanbul, Vancouver, B.C., London, Berlin, and Copenhagen.

We are living in a new urban age. Urbanization is an unstoppable global trend, with now more than 50 percent of the world's population living in cities. Population growth, resource depletion, over-consumption, depletion of natural resources, energy demands and climate change require cities to

become more sustainable. Seattle, as an innovator of climate solutions and the greening of cities, can set an example for sustainability, but only if we are successful in turning our aspirations into practice.

A recent study on the location of poverty in America by the Brookings Institution revealed a trend among the nation's 95 largest metro areas in 2000 and 2008. Suburbs were becoming home to the largest and fastest-growing poor population in the country. The suburbanization of the poor is a worrisome pattern and is the direct outgrowth of center city gentrification. It creates social inequities on the poor, such as food deserts, environmental injustices, long commute times and lower standards of living. Smart growth, complete neighborhoods, transit-and-pedestrian-friendly communities, and socially responsible development, if scaled up, can all serve as a check on these inequities.

- 3) Process:** How do you rate Seattle's speed in response to demand for housing? How can Seattle improve upon existing planning policy and process (Comprehensive Plan; Design Review; Planning Commission; etc.)? What are the benefits and shortcomings of the "Seattle process"? If you would modify the planning or permitting process in any way, please cite positive and/or negative examples from other cities. Are there any specific precedents from Seattle or other cities that you view as a model of civic and private partnership in the built environment?

Seattle's commitment to providing affordable housing is long and strong, as demonstrated through the seven year housing levy (renewed by Seattle voters four times), the incentive/bonus zoning program, Seattle's many non-profit housing developers, and Seattle Housing Authority's large scale redevelopment projects. Our limited developable land and our growing population's diverse housing needs unfortunately far exceed the availability of low to moderate-priced (and so-called "workforce" housing), that's produced in Seattle. As a result, people must live farther and farther from work to find affordable housing, especially housing suitable for families with children.

The paradox is that Seattle's single-family, family-sized housing stock is currently occupied by two or fewer people on average, and priced well out of reach for most moderate- to low-income earners. Market rate housing production tends to lag behind job growth, and supply never catches up with demand. Builders are challenged to build unsubsidized market rate housing that's affordable to moderate- (workforce) and low-income earners.

Seattle's changing demographics, economic forces, and lifestyle choices are creating new demand for luxury high-rise units on the high end of affordability scale, and micro-units (so-called "apodment" dwellings) on the low end, with very little supply of the much needed middle-income households.

Our famous "Seattle process" should be viewed as a good thing about our citizenry in terms of civic involvement – and it is exceptional when compared to most other cities. Yet the process must not be

endless, or with uncertain outcomes. Goals and objectives should be set at the onset through outreach and meaningful community involvement. Strong and effective political leadership is needed to bring process to a successful closure. That's where the process often breaks down.

A specific precedent, in the City of Bellevue, uses technology to reach citizens for commenting on the city's Comprehensive Plan Update. Comments received are compiled and submitted to the Bellevue Planning Commission for review. The city reports, "The process was outstanding and they were genuinely pleased with the level of honest dialogue, the quality of the posts and the engagement of the public on each other's ideas."

Seattle lags behind in terms of its ability to keep up with demand for housing. A zoning variance can take 1.5 years, which discourages innovation and affordability. Planning policy goes through endless rounds of debate while growth happens unchecked. Seattle can improve through restructuring for proactive planning. Having a fee-driven permitting favors high-end development over affordability. One area for improvement--deserving of closer examination--is Design Review.

Our population is expected to grow by 150,000 over the next 15 years. Seattle will be challenged to meet the need for a diversity of housing types and a range of affordability. Zoning is the best tool we have to promote a range of housing types for lifestyle choices and incomes.

I initiated the city's first design review program in 1989 under the Citizens' Alternative Plan for downtown. Design review works to integrate projects with existing built form and should be objectively applied under established neighborhood design guidelines reflecting character and scale. This is not always the case, and there is always room for improvement of process.

In my first term on the city council, from 1997 to 2001, I chaired the Housing and Human Services Committee, Later I chaired the Urban Development and Planning Committee, from 2003-2007.

According to figures from the Seattle Office of Housing and the Department of Planning and Development, during those two consecutive terms in office and under my leadership on the city council, my Downtown Livability Plan and the South Lake Union rezone have so far resulted in:

- \$25 million dollars in contributions from the city's bonus/incentive program that has leveraged new affordable housing projects.
- Nearly 1,200 low-income housing units in downtown and South Lake Union.
- A total of 9,700 housing units have been built, permitted, or are under construction.

My plan has been working successfully: These figures represent a significant contribution to housing stock over just a few years, toward meeting our city's growing housing needs in the center city.

The best way to predict the future is to plan it. Comprehensive planning, transportation planning integrated with smart growth practices, and innovative zoning tools are the best means to achieve our goals.

- 4) Built Form:** What do you believe is the right mix of parking and building typologies in Seattle in the next 10 years? If you anticipate reduced car ownership and/or increased density, please discuss potential changes in how Seattleites access nature and the outdoors.

A few examples of the building typologies that could be more widely used include: single family; small lot development; detached and attached accessory dwelling units (ADUs); row houses; townhouses; cottage/cluster housing; midrise; and high-rise developments.

Approximately 75 percent of all Seattle households – single family and multi-family – own at least one car (2010 U.S. Census). Population growth, environment, climate, and other constraints demand that we must move to reduce our heavy reliance on the automobile in the future, by expanding transportation choices and better land use integrated with transportation planning – in other words, SMART GROWTH!

Parking demand is highly variable depending on location, concentration of use, age and income demographics. No one today knows where the city's parking ratios came from. Clearly the ratios set by the city in the land use code do not reflect current realities. But it is also clear that parking is still a hot button issue for many. I expect that vehicle miles traveled (VMT) will continue to decline as will car ownership in the future, as we invest in and move toward other less car dependent means to advance urban mobility.

The city's parking policies should reflect current and future demand for private off-street parking. In most cases, the market can be a better determinate of parking demand. In Donald Shoup's 2004 book *"The High Cost of Free Parking,"* the author makes the argument that parking is inherently not free, nor should it be. Parking demand should be monetized and cost-out so that the people who don't own cars can choose not to pay for parking they may not need or want.

And those who do own a car and want parking reserved for them, they can pay their full share of the cost of providing it. The market is beginning to respond to changing lifestyles and desire for freedom

from car dependency and high costs of car ownership. This is a good sign, and needs to be encouraged and supported through our transportation and land use policies and public investments.

- 5) Affordability:** In which neighborhoods and what mix should affordability be found? Please also discuss strategies you believe are effective at reaching affordability targets, and those you believe are ineffective. Please cite specific examples from other cities. Example strategies include: Preservation of older housing and retail, and other means to prevent displacement; increased housing supply and micro-housing; Incentive zoning; Multi-Family Tax Exemption; Seattle Housing Levy—please also discuss any specific changes to the program or amount that you'd favor when the Housing Levy is brought up for renewal in 2016.

Diverse housing choices should be available in all of Seattle's great neighborhoods, but unfortunately is not. Affordable housing is becoming increasingly out of reach for many. We need to plan better, and zone appropriately, for the full spectrum of housing types, from micro units and ADUs, to low-rise, to midrise, and high-rises. New housing should be sensitively placed and scaled to respect established neighborhood character. Neighborhood residents should have a voice in shaping the future. There is an important role for design review in achieving best results in architectural form, character, and scale.

Preservation of older multifamily housing supports neighborhood character and affordability, and should be carefully considered in neighborhoods, such as South Lake Union, which are experiencing growth pressures.

When rezoning for growth, the city should honor and adhere to its comprehensive plan targets (jobs and housing) and affordability goals for the development of new housing in urban centers such as South Lake Union, University District and Northgate – where 60 percent of Seattle's residential and job growth are planned. Infrastructure investments must be made to support growth, such as transportation improvements, utilities, police, fire, parks, community centers, family friendly amenities, and schools.

One example of coordinated planning between land use and transportation planning for housing affordability is Transit Friendly Communities, or Transit Oriented Development (TOD). Nationally, there is no clear definition of TOD or agreement on desired outcomes. However, by zoning for compact pedestrian-friendly communities and placing affordable housing close to transit, household expenditures for transportation-related costs can be reduced, and ridership expanded.

These are worthy goals for our city, and it's the concept behind the city's Transit Service Overlay districts along the Sound Transit stations. The objective is also intended to support economic

development and regional growth management planning goals. This is a long-term strategy – as build out is incremental, and car dependency is still very much a fact of life for most residents in Seattle.

TOD results have met with varied success around the country (see *“The New Transit Town, Best Practices in Transit-Oriented Development,”* by Hank Dittmar and Gloria Ohland, Island Press, 2004). If we can better tailor planning, urban design, and architecture of new stations and surrounding areas to protect distinct neighborhood character, while meeting specific needs in each community for walkability, livability and affordable housing choices, we will have more positive economic, social, and environmental outcomes that fulfill citywide goals.

Finally, Seattle can be a great city of the future! We are a dynamic city of thinkers and innovators on the move. Now, we need to be a city of doers and take the lead in charting the future course for sustainable urban development.

--Peter Steinbrueck, FAIA, Candidate for Mayor
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