

Westwood & Highland Park Seattle



The proposed study area is located within the Westwood/Highland Park neighborhood in the southwest area of the City of Seattle. The study area is a commercial corridor of approximately 25 acres (10 hectares). It traverses one of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan's designated "Residential Urban Village" areas. The study area will be served by bus rapid transit (BRT) beginning in 2021.

The neighborhood is more racially diverse and its households have a lower median income than the city overall. The area lacks parks and recreation spaces, and residents and businesses have a higher risk of displacement and lower access to opportunity than other areas in the City.

The City's main expectation is that students envision and communicate how incremental redevelopment strategies can create complete 15-minute neighborhoods that will help Seattle

achieve its Climate Action Plan goal of reducing road transportation emissions (currently a large part of Seattle's GHG emissions), supporting quality of life and more sustainable lifestyle.

These incremental redevelopment strategies can be envisioned for the proposed study area to fill in its "missing teeth" and make walking, biking and transit the preferred modes of travel for residents' daily needs.

The priority outcome is a portfolio or "toolkit" of strategies with captivating visuals and supportive research that the City can scale up for potential application citywide. Key to the success of an incremental approach to complete neighborhoods, is for strategies to be implementable by local small business, property owners, artists, non-profits and investors, so that improvements bring economic opportunity to the community while livability is improved.



Approx. site area: 25 acres (10 ha)

Demographics: In the Westwood/Highland Park neighborhood approximately 52 percent of residents are persons of color and the median household income is lower than the citywide average.

Priority areas & main City expectations:

A key city priority is to achieve a resilient and complete 15-minute neighborhood through incremental development/redevelopment strategies that provide access to opportunity for existing community members. Complete neighborhoods will result in reduced vehicle emissions, cleaner air and reduced carbon footprint. An incremental and creative repurposing of existing developed sites and structures will further lessen carbon outputs resulting from demolition and new construction.

Presentation of the site

Seattle is recognized as a leader in developing and implementing policy and legislation that supports complete or 15-minute neighborhoods, including mixed uses, multi-modal transportation, and green and sustainable development practices. However, there is still a lot of room to work on achieving this vision citywide.

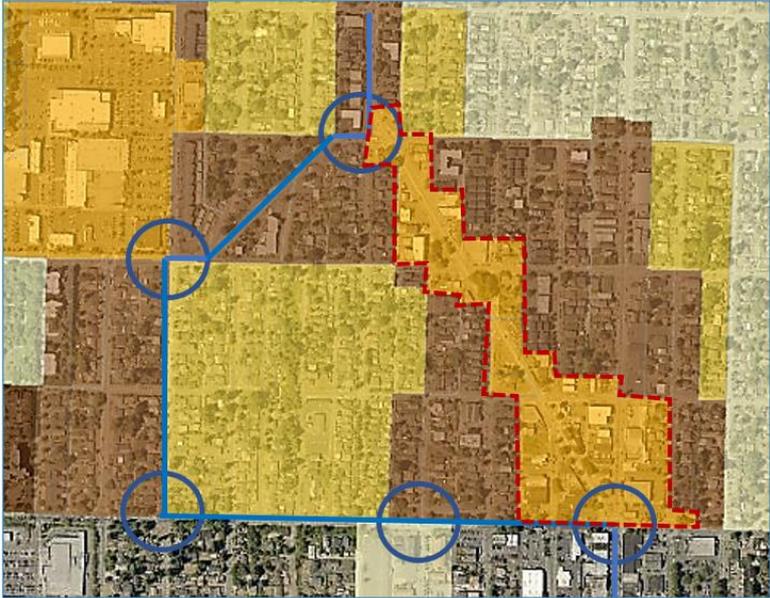
The proposed study area has been identified because it represents conditions found many places in Seattle where neighborhoods have added the ingredients of a complete neighborhood but lack the granularity and connectivity to function as one. Some challenges to the realization of a 15-minute neighborhood includes a pattern of auto-oriented uses intermixed with a more traditional “mainstreet”-style building pattern and lack of pedestrian amenities to encourage walking to, from and within the commercial district. The diagonal geometry of the Delridge Way corridor also presents a certain challenge with the resulting triangular parcels that can be difficult to program.

The Westwood/Highland Park neighborhood is a representative example of one of Seattle’s “less complete” neighborhoods with commercial areas that still accommodate cars better than travelers on two feet or two wheels. It is also one of Seattle’s more affordable neighborhoods (comparatively speaking). The proposed study area within Westwood/Highland Park, was selected as an opportunity site to pilot incremental 15-minute city strategies that can achieve a more livable, complete neighborhood without resulting in displacement or gentrification. Students are asked to envision the future of existing residents and businesses and how they make up a complete neighborhood. How can improvements be implemented in a way that lifts up rather than harms, provides access to opportunity, and respects cultural character? We are looking for recommended incremental actions that a local small business, a resident and/or a community-based organization can take to improve their part of a neighborhood that collectively adds up to big and positive change.

The map below shows the location of the proposed study area (outlined in red dashed line) relative to new bus rapid transit (BRT) stations and route (shown in blue) that will connect to a future light rail station to the north. The study area is located within one of the Comprehensive Plan’s designated “Urban Villages” where future housing and job growth is expected to be focused. Existing zoning for the study site and surrounding area can support infill development and redevelopment at an incremental scale given small lot sizes and existing density and intensity of development.

Students are encouraged to consider the future of the nearby shopping center site and compare it with the finer grained commercial corridor (study area). Both commercial areas have the same zoning designation, and both are auto-oriented due in part to former zoning designations. Both types of neighborhood commercial centers exist in many of Seattle’s neighborhoods. How can the City distinguish the existing retail typologies through complete 15-minute neighborhood redevelopment strategies and opportunities? Do some incremental development strategies work universally, and do others only work in finer grained built environments?

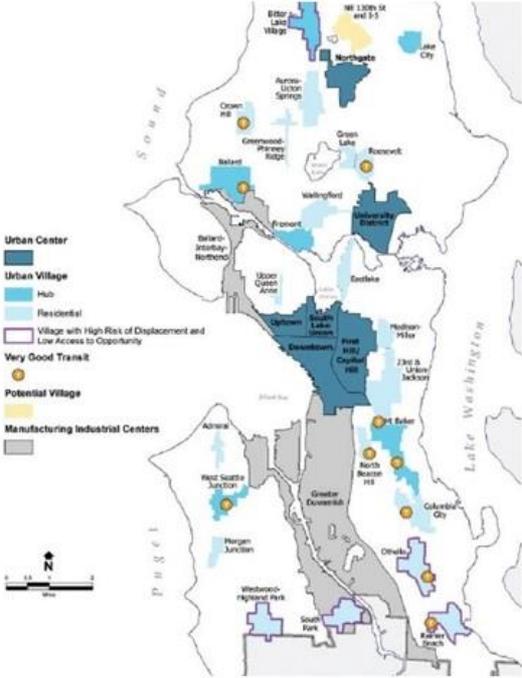
The area includes and is adjacent to three distinct zoning districts 1) neighborhood commercial (orange – the study area); 2) residential small lot (bright yellow); and 3) low-rise multifamily residential (brown). Pale yellow-colored areas are zoned for single family use and are located outside the designated Urban Village area.



Site: 

BRT Route: 

BRT Stations: 



Source: www.sccinsight.com

Figure 1 Seattle's Urban Villages – study area is in the Westwood/Highland Park urban village located along the southern city limits. Aerial below of Westwood/Highland Park.

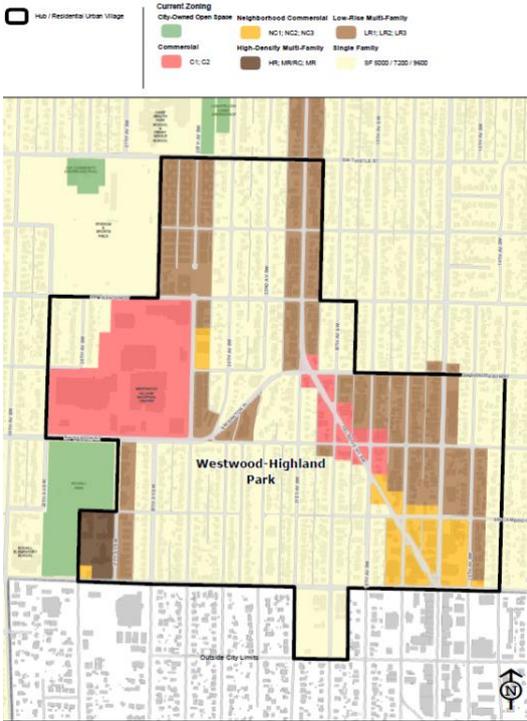
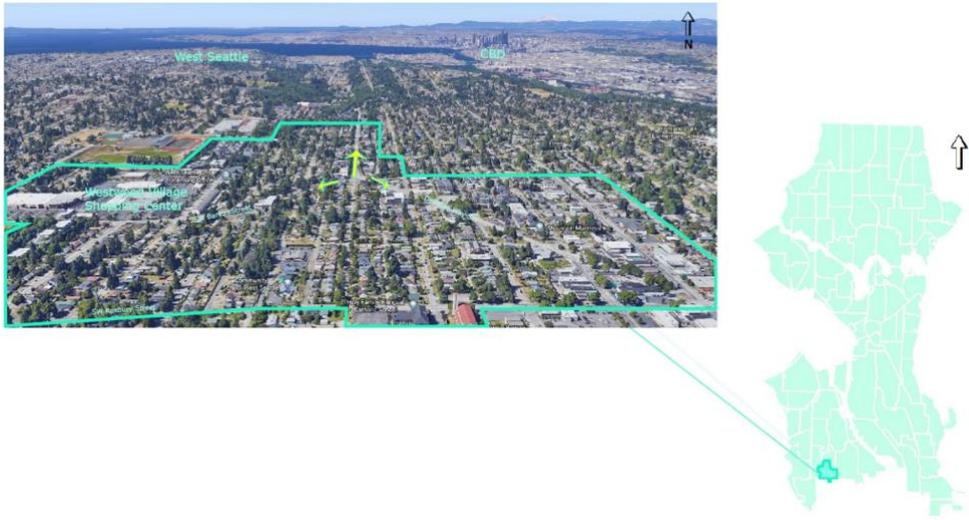


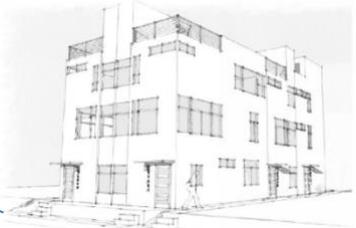
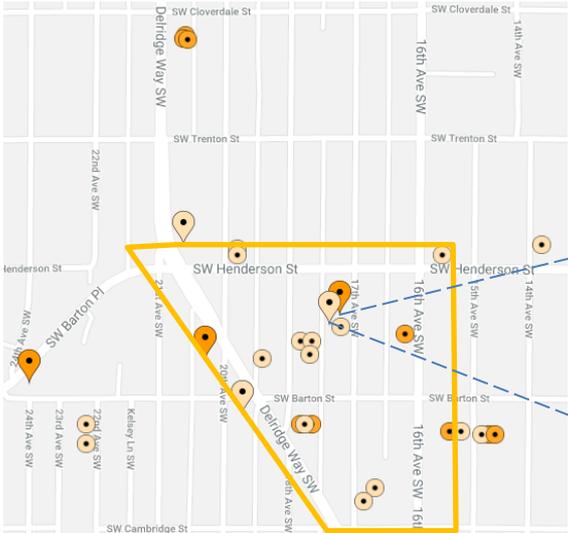
Figure 2 shows zoning patterns prior to changes enacted in 2019 that changed single-family zoning to residential small lot and multifamily. Also note that pink areas on this map were rezoned from commercial to neighborhood commercial to encourage mixe



Example of existing small commercial spaces along the corridor. Source: www.google.com/maps



Westwood Village shopping center. Source: www.google.com/maps



Snapshot of project sites in permitting or construction phases east of Delridge Way SW. Source: www.seattleinprogress.com

City climate priorities and specific environmental issues to address

Reaching Net Zero GHG emissions by 2050 and building resilience against future environmental shocks and stresses is a key priority for Seattle. This is outlined in the [Seattle Climate Action Plan](#). Students should look for opportunities to contribute to these goals in their proposals.

In 2020 the West Seattle Bridge which provided a key connection for the Westland Highbrook Park neighbourhood, to the rest of the city, was closed. This has limited physical access to and from the study area and people feel cut off from the rest of the City. By creating a complete neighborhood where residents and workers can access their daily needs within a 15-minute walk or bicycle ride, the stress of limited access to points beyond the neighborhood can be reduced. Related priorities are reduction in vehicle emissions and heat island effect. Incremental and sustainable redevelopment strategies should explore and prioritize opportunities for building and site adaptation, reuse, and/or co-use as opposed to demolition and replacement of existing structures.

The City is currently working with community stakeholders in the Westwood/Highland Park area to inform how capital improvements for stormwater management and eliminating combined sewer outflow into Longfellow Creek can also address community desires/needs such as additional open space and improved streetscape. The City is also committed to implementing green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) in partnership with property owners on appropriate sites. Complete neighborhood strategies should consider incremental and low-cost green elements that respond to stormwater management, heat island effect, habitat and urban agriculture at appropriate scale and typologies.

The following are additional priorities to consider within a “complete” neighborhood to improve emissions reductions potential:

1. Explore the study area edge conditions in consideration of how the commercial corridor can better interface with adjacent residential areas to improve connectivity and livability. How can travel on foot or bicycle to and from the neighborhood commercial area and future BRT stations be more comfortable, inviting and safe? What could be added to residential areas that would help make the neighborhood more complete (home based businesses, corner store/micro business, public realm improvements, other?)
2. Significant investments in bus rapid transit (BRT) are underway that will connect the study area to a future light rail station to the north. Making the new BRT service the most convenient, safe, and desirable mode of travel to and from the regional light rail system will be critical to successful bus/rail integration and achieving the goal of reduced car trips. Complete neighborhood strategies should consider how BRT station locations can inform uses and the last mile traveled experience.

Other expectations for the site’s redevelopment

The complete neighborhood strategies should be viewed through an environmental and social lens – delivering an improved, healthier, safer, complete neighborhood. This should be designed in a way that is beneficial to all current residents and not lead to displacement experienced elsewhere in the City. This is the reason this project stresses the importance of envisioning small-scale and incremental strategies that can be achievable by local business and property owners, small-scale developers and non-profit organizations. Considering there are no specific funding sources identified for this study area at this time, students should identify implementation strategies that are no- to low-cost and risk to be accessible and appealing to community. These could be actions that can be led by community groups and organisations. However, students should also identify the appropriate city role(s) in support of incremental redevelopment such as: funding improvements; providing grants to community-based organizations; adopting supportive policies and legislation and partnerships.

City staff have engaged community stakeholders to inform and shape planned and potential new capital investments in stormwater management and pedestrian and bicycle facility improvements. The following are some recurring themes staff has heard from community that inform the priorities for this project:

- Building community in place and employing anti displacement strategies is a high priority.
- Identified parks gaps and lack of tree canopy in the neighborhood present an opportunity to build greenspace access and connections in concert with GSI and RainWise (rain garden) programs.
- Delridge Way (central to the study area) feels unsafe for pedestrians and bicyclists and there is a desire for a safer, more accessible pedestrian corridor.
- Create a “community innovation” grant to fund community-led gatherings and celebrations, temporary public art, temporary maker space or incubator type projects.
- Support cultural activities and community efforts that community groups are already pursuing in the neighborhood, but lack resources to implement.
- Create workforce development opportunities to build capacity within the community to construct and maintain projects located in the community.
- There is interest in seeing the Westwood Village shopping center redeveloped in ways that better represent a complete neighborhood - adding affordable housing and de-paving some of the surface parking areas to daylight portions of the bog and creek it sits atop.

Specific city planning rules and regulations

The study area has a general zoning designation of neighborhood commercial (NC), (SMC 23.47A). A variety of uses are allowed in the NC zone in addition to commercial and retail including, but not limited to, residential and live-work units, light manufacturing/maker spaces and urban agriculture. A portion of the Delridge Way corridor has a pedestrian designation applied (P suffix) that requires a minimum 80% of street-level frontage contain pedestrian-oriented uses.

The entire study area and surrounding area within the designated Residential Urban Village is subject to the city’s Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) requirements which requires new development provide for a minimum amount of affordable housing onsite or pay a fee-in-lieu to provide for affordable housing off site. Most importantly, the comprehensive plan Urban Village designation signifies this neighborhood as one of the areas within the city where future growth can best be accommodated with a diverse mix of housing types and commercial uses.

The adjacent residential areas zoned RSL (SMC 23.44)– Residential Small Lot, allow for single family homes as well as small-scale apartments, carriage houses, cottage housing development, rowhouse and townhomes. The RSL zoning was applied in 2019 to areas formerly zoned for single-family homes to encourage development of “missing middle” housing within designated urban villages.

The adjacent residential areas zoned LR 1-3 (SMC 23.45) Lowrise Multifamily allows for a range of multifamily housing types from rowhouse and townhouse style developments up to 5 story apartment buildings. A portion of the LR zoned area includes a RC designation that allows for some ground floor commercial uses.

There is no minimum parking requirement for uses in urban villages if the use is located within a frequent transit service area. As bus rapid transit service will make much of the study meet the definition of a “frequent transit service area, students should consider opportunities to de-pave and repurpose existing surface parking.

Final project submission deadline

15 June 2021 at 5 pm UTC