

Carla Hoekzema

From: Megan Kogut <megan@ridgecrest.pub>
Sent: Thursday, November 2, 2023 11:11 AM
To: Plancom
Cc: Nathan Daum
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Ground Floor Commercial Development Code Amendments - public comment for November 2, 2023 meeting

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Dear City of Shoreline Planning Commission,

My name is Megan Kogut. With my husband, I moved to Shoreline in 2003. We have owned the same house in Ridgecrest for 20 years. With my husband, I created two new businesses nearby: Ridgecrest Public House (2015) and Drumlin (2022). In 2021, we encouraged our fellow Ridgecrest neighbors to open The Seattle Barkery in our building. In 2022 we bought the commercial building those two businesses are in. In 2022, we leased to a new locally owned yoga studio called Life Balance Yoga. This fall, we leased to Ridgecrest Books, a new locally owned bookstore. And I am currently mentoring a local resident to open an art studio and shop in a unit I rented across the street. These are all locally owned independent "third place" businesses.

Although our property is zoned Neighborhood Commercial and of course is ripe for redevelopment for mixed use, and we are very strong supporters of density, we prefer to retain some neighborhood character rather than redevelop as everything around us changes.

I used to be active trying to encourage the City of Shoreline to recognize and invest in that area and other commercial areas in Shoreline. The sidewalks, landscaping and utilities have not been updated since they were built in the 1940s. The exception is this fall's sidewalk update project, which is a great improvement even though it was spurred by the ADA, not economic development.

Today, I write not in support or opposition to the City of Shoreline's Ground Floor Commercial Development Code Amendments. I think that the City could be helping by encouraging, not forcing. So I want to add context.

I understand and support the purpose of the amendments. People who live in Shoreline want to see more shops, restaurants and so on in Shoreline. And they get frustrated when they see new construction without new businesses downstairs. They see missed opportunities.

However, I argue that if there were a market for new businesses downstairs, they would be there. Developers know their markets.

Further, new construction typically means expensive tenant improvements from bare studs, and high rent due to high capital costs. And when new construction isn't in an area that is "hot" for retail and service, the businesses who are more likely to move in are franchises and chains, AKA "national brands". A trip around

Seattle shows how true this is. And even Shoreline Place, with all their vision, has so far only signed on Pet Evolution, Big Chicken, and Mod Pizza, all national brands.

I don't disparage national brands, which provide a consistent quality experience for the customer and relatively stable income for owners and franchisees with less headache. But they do not readily contribute to a sense of local community. As franchises and chains, they inherently provide a rigidly consistent experience that is transportable anywhere. So, the amendments may just get us more "cookie cutter" businesses, when the people advocating for more businesses in Shoreline were hoping for placemaking businesses owned by their neighbors.

There are exceptions, like Hemlock State Brewing in Mountlake Terrace. But Hemlock State Brewing has three owners determined to make it work near Shoreline, and they took out a big loan. Those types of brave and well-resourced business owners are rare. And beer is a relatively easy business. I would not hope for a lot more of these types of business owners to move into ground floor redevelopment in Shoreline.

So by forcing the market now, you may be populating Shoreline with national brands. This is ok near light rail stations, where transportation oriented businesses are arguably better suited for the purpose of handling high volume, short turnaround business from commuters. But deep in the neighborhoods, national brands would be far less appropriate. And they could be there for a long time.

On the other hand, I am disappointed that the amendments are not coupled with larger scale efforts by the City of Shoreline to encourage economic development consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. You can force commercial development building by building. But only the City can plan, and act, on a larger scale, to encourage economic development. But, it doesn't really.

I spent a lot of time in 2015-2018 trying unsuccessfully to advocate to the City's previous Economic Development Manager with specific solutions. And I'll comment on the Comprehensive Plan before December 1 with more detail. But for the purpose of tonight's meeting, I'll put it in a nutshell.

I see that City Hall, as the sum of all its employees, fails to include economic development in day to day decisions. I read all the ED goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan, but I don't see actionable items. I do see a lot of missed opportunities because the City seems to focus only on enhancing and supporting its own amenities. Here are four examples off the top of my head:

1. The Transportation Plan reads something like a tsunami escape plan, with a focus on commuting in, across and out of Shoreline. Shoreline is a grid, and commutes are real. But the heavy lifting of recognizing and planning for neighborhood commercial areas isn't there.
2. The Sidewalk Plan likewise did not focus on the desired or existing volume pedestrian traffic in and near commercial areas that would contribute to a higher walking score. Instead it focused on municipal features like arterials, parks, and bus stops. Commercial areas were, in the end, a negligible factor in the matrix.
3. The [City's Public Art program](#) is focused heavily around City Hall and Aurora Avenue, not other commercial areas. In Ridgecrest that the only art is the street banners, now faded, that Ridgecrest Neighborhood Association commissioned a decade ago. The closest other art is the wall at the Shoreline Library on 175th Street, and the sculptures in Hamlin Park and Public Health Labs. There is nothing in the Ridgecrest commercial area, which sees hundreds of people every day and evening. (I apologize for being Ridgecrest-centric, but I use it as an example.)

4. The City's road signage focuses on municipal amenities. Not enough focus was placed on commercial areas. I realize that signage was based heavily on citizen input, but current businesses should have been more actively included according to the Comprehensive Plan.

The City of Edmonds did significant placemaking and beautification for economic development. See [Visit Our Business Districts - City of Edmonds, WA \(edmondswa.gov\)](https://www.edmondswa.gov/visit-our-business-districts). This won't be easy to do in Shoreline, which is mostly residential. But it's where things could get started, including policies and specific goals that could link to other City programs. I tried to get something like this started when I was on the board of the Shoreline Chamber of Commerce, but I've moved on because I was an army of one. It seems that the Planning Commission could take this on, especially when it is already focusing on neighborhood commercial areas and arterials.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Megan Kogut PhD