



# LYNNWOOD, WASHINGTON

10 MINUTE WALK NATIONAL STUDY VISIT



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**FACING PAGE:** City Center in Lynnwood, Washington, is intended to become a vibrant, mixed-use, transit-accessible new neighborhood.

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Rendering of the Village Green at Northline Village, a mixed-use community located at the western edge of City Center that is expected to open in 2024.





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## ABOUT THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE

The Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of providing leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 81 countries.

More information is available at [uli.org](http://uli.org). Follow ULI on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

## ABOUT 10 MINUTE WALK

Parks are essential to the physical, environmental, and economic health of people and communities. Parks help expand the economy by attracting homebuyers, tourists, and highly talented workers. They protect the environment, provide space for the enjoyment of arts and nature, and make people healthier, happier, and more connected.

Despite these known benefits, research shows that one in three Americans—more than 100 million people—do not have a park within a 10-minute walk of their home. 10 Minute Walk is a movement dedicated to improving access to safe, high-quality parks and green spaces in cities—large and small—throughout the United States. Led by The Trust for Public Land (TPL), in partnership with the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the Urban Land Institute and with support from The JPB Foundation, 10 Minute Walk is working to create a world in which, by 2050, all people live within a 10-minute walk of a park or green space. This partnership drives commitments from city leaders working to achieve this vision and transform their communities.

Nearly 300 U.S. mayors have endorsed 10 Minute Walk so far. ULI, TPL, and NRPA are working with partners in select cities on measurable policies and strategies to advance the 10 Minute Walk vision. Success in this work will require the expertise, creativity, and close collaboration of public- and private-sector leaders. ULI has a powerful role to play in catalyzing its members, networks, and partners around a vision of a green, sustainable, connected, and resilient future for all people.

Learn more and connect with 10 Minute Walk at [10minutewalk.org](https://10minutewalk.org) and [uli.org/parks](https://uli.org/parks).



Lynnwood Recreation Center—located less than a mile north of City Center—is a key public community asset that includes two pools, sports courts, and multipurpose rooms.



### THE ROLE OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACES IN A NEW VISION FOR CITY CENTER IN LYNNWOOD, WASHINGTON

Located less than 20 miles north of downtown Seattle, Lynnwood, Washington, with a population of just over 40,000,<sup>1</sup> feels like a typical suburban community: strip malls, parking lots, single-family housing, and low density. However, though many suburban communities do have a “downtown” or “main street,” Lynnwood has to date been unable to develop this type of central core.

But during the early 2000s, Lynnwood desired to reinvent itself and started a planning process for the aptly named City Center. The future neighborhood—which is loosely bounded by 48th Avenue West, 194th Street SW, and Interstate 5—was thought to be the ideal place to develop a central heart of the community. The goal for the City Center Sub-Area Plan, adopted in 2005, was “to create, within 20 years, a compact, intense, and lively city center that offers Lynnwood new opportunities for culture, commerce and habitation.”<sup>2</sup>

The subarea plan sought to redevelop single-story strip mall development into a multistory mixed-use community concentrated near transit. To anchor City Center, a core would be developed with high-rise office buildings. Surrounding the core would be transitional zones that would support residential and retail uses. A new street network would break down the existing superblocks into pedestrian-friendly areas and would connect these new uses. One of these streets, 198th Street SW, would be a premier pedestrian street designed as a promenade to enhance safety and the interaction of commerce and people. Along the promenade, a chain of new public spaces would be built over time to eventually connect to Alderwood Mall, the region’s destination shopping center.

City Center was primed for development in 2007. While implementation of the plan was stalled because of the 2008 financial crisis, voters approved a Regional Transit Authority ballot measure to bring light rail to Lynnwood, opening up opportunities for easier access to and from Seattle and the region overall. The Lynnwood City Center Station is anticipated to open in 2024 and has already brought external investment to the City Center area, including mixed-use community Northline Village and several individual housing projects.

In 2018, Mayor Nicola Smith was one of the first 50 mayors in the country to join the national 10 Minute Walk movement. The mayor committed to increasing the percentage of residents living within a 10-minute walk to a park from 76 percent to 85 percent and to improving park quality by addressing the \$3 million in deferred maintenance, all by 2030. In 2019, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) awarded the city of Lynnwood a 10 Minute Walk grant and technical assistance opportunity to help it develop an action plan to meet these goals. A key strategy to meet the 10 Minute Walk goals is to ensure that new parks are developed in the city’s urban and densifying core, as well as enhancing connections to the Interurban Trail, a 24-mile, regional, nonmotorized trail that stretches from Shoreline to Everett along the route once used by electric interurban railcars.

The city has been working since 2007 to identify the best locations for new parks in the City Center area. The 2007 City Center Parks Master Plan identified several new parks to support the growth of City Center, anchored by a central 4.6-acre park, referred to as Town Square Park. However, since 2007 the cost escalation of property in City Center has driven the cost of land from \$40 per square foot to nearly \$100 per square foot. The land acquisition cost of \$20 million for a 4.6-acre park is beyond the capacity of the city of Lynnwood, but the demand for park space remains.

The Parks Master Plan was updated in 2018 to revise the City Center parks strategy to include Town Square Park and a smaller park identified in the 2007 plan, Village Green. The Village Green concept has now been incorporated into the Northline Village development plan. Although it is smaller than previously planned, the plan also includes a dog park and the development overall is looking at ways to incorporate ground-floor retail, including a grocery store adjacent to the park. The 2018 update also identified several possible sites for Town Square Park along the 198th Street promenade as potential candidates for the project. These properties range in size from 1.5 acres to five acres. Several of these properties are more aligned with the city's capacity for purchasing, but it has been difficult to reach a consensus on the best site for this new central park.



CITY OF LYNNWOOD

City Center study area (shaded in light orange).

## BACKGROUND



ULI

The study visit experts and ULI staff on the Interurban Trail.

## NATIONAL STUDY VISIT PROCESS

ULI's national study visits bring volunteer experts from across the United States to a city or community to provide a set of recommendations to priority areas identified by local stakeholders. Experts are identified based on areas of expertise needed by the community.

For the 10 Minute Walk national study visits, the parks departments (or similar entity) and local district councils are engaged in setting priorities and planning the visit. These fast-paced, three-day study visits include a briefing to the experts on the study area and the questions to be addressed, a tour of local parks and neighborhoods, interviews with stakeholders, and a public presentation of recommendations. The recommendations serve as a guide to help each city create implementable and actionable plans and priorities for the parks departments moving forward.

## NATIONAL STUDY VISIT ASSIGNMENT

To help push forward the City Center vision developed over 10 years ago and ultimately select the ideal site for Town Square Park, city staff worked with ULI to bring volunteer experts from across the country to Lynnwood to advise on a specific set of study questions. The assignment was to provide actionable recommendations for moving forward with a new plan for City Center, considering future transit, and ensuring that parks and open spaces are central components to the new community.

The panel of experts was asked to consider the following study questions when framing their recommendations:

1. What role would a City Center urban park play in catalyzing civic activity and promoting property investment in the neighborhood?
2. Which tools and partnership opportunities are available to leverage public and private investment in the area to build public amenities, like parks and plazas? How can more private development be incentivized? How can the city assist the development community with consolidation of small parcels?
3. Because arterials in City Center are barriers to nonmotorized movement, what streetscape interventions can remake City Center into a pedestrian-oriented, transit-oriented development, integrating existing infrastructure like the Interurban Trail, with active park-facade interfaces creating an integrated greenspace-to-urban fabric?

During the study visit, February 26–28, 2020, the panel of experts was briefed by city staff and received a guided tour—on foot and by bus—of the City Center area and the Interurban Trail, as well as the adjacent Civic Center, home to City Hall and the Lynnwood Recreation Center, considered a jewel of the community. They led small-group interviews with nearly 30 local stakeholders at Lynnwood City Hall, including residents, community leaders, city staff members and leadership (including Mayor Nicola Smith), private developers, and representatives from local nonprofits. Everything the experts read, saw, and heard was factored into their discussions and the recommendations presented at a public meeting held at City Hall on February 28.



The Interurban Trail, which runs adjacent to City Center, is a 24-mile, regional, nonmotorized trail that follows the route once used by electric interurban railcars.

SARA HAMMERSCHMIDT/ULI

## 10 MINUTE WALK PLANNING GRANTS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

As part of 10 Minute Walk, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is leading yearlong engagements with park and recreation departments from cities across the United States. NRPA is providing \$40,000 grants to support local efforts to incorporate 10-minute park access as a sustained planning and funding priority. Grantees, which receive technical assistance from NRPA, The Trust for Public Land, and the Urban Land Institute, work to:

- Establish and analyze baseline metrics for 10-minute-walk park access and park quality, ensuring that data and analysis include underrepresented populations.
- Identify priority areas and actions based on findings from assessments.
- Create equitable citywide policies that support achievement of 10-minute-walk park access.
- Incorporate 10-minute-walk park access into citywide planning documents.
- Identify funding to sustain continued investment in parks, operations, programming, and connections.



**Parks are really the center of communities and bring so many benefits to the places that we live, work, and play.** They are vital institutions for community connection, health, equity and inclusion, environmental sustainability, and equitable economic development.”

**RACHEL BANNER**, DIRECTOR OF PARK ACCESS, NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on what they learned and saw on the tour, and from conversations with community residents and stakeholders, the experts recognized numerous positive attributes about Lynnwood. Lynnwood is great for families, and it has good schools and a great police department. There are 17 parks within seven square miles. The “Pacific Northwest” feeling of the Civic Center campus and the Sea Mar Community Health Center site with their large evergreen trees and natural canopy really made the experts sense that they were in a special place, and they heard that the Lynndale Park Amphitheater has a similar feeling.

Lynnwood is a relatively affordable place to live in the Seattle region and has a diverse population with many unique cultures and identities. More than 100 languages are spoken in Lynnwood and, as of 2017, 29 percent of residents are foreign-born.<sup>3</sup> Overall, Lynnwood is a very welcoming community.

The experts also heard that Lynnwood is fairly automobile centric and uncomfortable for pedestrians, especially those in wheelchairs and with disabilities. The City Center area in particular has a lot of dated strip malls and a number of small parcels with many different owners, making consolidation of parcels difficult. The public has little to no awareness of the city’s ongoing plans overall, especially for the City Center area, and is generally skeptical of City Center’s redevelopment getting started or completed. Interviewees also conveyed a lack of unified identity for Lynnwood.

### Identity and Branding

Although the experts heard about and felt the lack of identity for Lynnwood, it was also discussed in the local news media a week before the study visit. A February 22 article from King 5 News described how the new transit hub and City Center redevelopment projects such as Northline Village could cure Lynnwood’s “identity crisis.”<sup>4</sup> The experts made the point that even if it felt like Lynnwood has no brand or identity, in fact it already does. Sometimes, a brand stems from others only knowing the worst feature of a place or more generally from how others describe it. In Lynnwood’s case, it has been known as the “place with the mall.”<sup>5</sup>

However, a new or enhanced identity and brand cannot come from a consultant or marketing team, or outsiders like the national experts that joined the study visit. The experts note that identities and brands are built on shared experiences and on the small day-to-day decisions, as well as the commitment to make a community the best or unique place it can be.

Regarding City Center, after 20 years of planning, the brand is likely stale and in need of a slight refresh to excite residents and to show real action toward progress. The experts do not think that an entirely new plan is needed, but the city may want to reimagine some of the spaces and identify who their users and what the uses may be. The market has changed since the planning of City Center first started; the original vision anticipated office uses, but market forces are showing a residential focus. The experts encourage city staff to think about all types of anticipated

users and uses that follow current trends, in particular, to make sure that the new parks and plaza reflect their needs. In addition, the experts feel that a new name for the area may be in order, especially if the City Center moniker does not stir up the most positive connotations for longtime Lynnwood residents who have yet to see this area change.

Specific design and programming ideas for celebrating an area and getting people excited may serve as inspiration for some quick wins in the City Center area. Many interviewees indicated a desire for covered spaces in public places, because of the rainy climate. Summit Park in Cincinnati implemented colored plexiglass structures that filter sunlight and provide shade. An iconic feature of the park allows for flexible uses based on the season: couches and firepits in the summer and an ice-skating rink in the winter.

Another easy way to engage residents in telling the story of Lynnwood involves encouraging social media posts and creating “Instagrammable moments.” Setting up areas, such as a public art wall, that people want to share on their social media platforms, creating a hashtag, and branding City Center as something more inherently “sharable” can help attract people from outside the city to Lynnwood and help establish a regional identity.

The experts strongly encourage city staff to keep thinking about who Lynnwood is now and who it should be and to ensure that a common vision is part of a branding refresh for City Center. To achieve real action toward City Center, the experts made several recommendations under three general categories: ensuring leadership to guide change, looking at the physical design of the area, and attracting private investors to execute the nearly 20-year vision.

### Leadership to Guide Change

The experts note that Lynnwood is fortunate to have several large opportunities and decision points; not every community has such choices, though the ability to direct change will be critical to achieving success. The way the city decides to direct this change will have long-lasting ramifications and will determine the degree to which City Center is a successful redevelopment, or whether it is less successful than it could have been. The experts have several recommendations for taking control of change to guide and direct it, rather than just letting change happen to Lynnwood. The city has a significant opportunity right now to shape its future, and it should be driving the decisions of what happens and how City Center is designed.

**Update the vision and clarify processes.** The experts acknowledge that a lot of work has been done on the City Center plan, but there is still an opportunity to update and refine the vision, and that should be done quickly. The public realm guidelines specifically should be updated, including articulating the vision for the look and feel of the streetscape. The experts encourage the city to build flexibility into the guidelines to have the ability to address any changes and opportunities that may arise and incorporate best practices and lessons from the Northline Village planning process into broader guidelines for City Center, including the streetscape concepts. Specifically, the physical connections between City Center, the Civic Center, and the Lynnwood Convention Center should be strengthened.



The quality of public ground throughout what I call the connective tissue, between different places and open spaces, is also critical.

**How well you plan these connections will determine the success of your City Center area.”**

JEANNE MYERSON, PRINCIPAL, THE BELGRAVE GROUP

With regard to a vision for the new parks, the experts recommend that the city emphasize the value enhancement and qualitative aspects of open space, which are key to future value creation and success for City Center. The city and partners should focus all decisions regarding parks on the health and other benefits that they can provide to the current and new residents of Lynnwood.

The experts note that the city has recently simplified the development processes, and they encourage city staff to continue in that direction. Developers looking for opportunities in this region have their choice of cities that are benefiting from transit expansion, and they are going to be attracted to one that has an understandable and predictable development process. Developers are looking to minimize their risk and would prefer to work with communities that understand what it takes to get projects done; the city of Lynnwood should do everything possible to eliminate confusion to attract developers. That includes ensuring that developers—and residents—understand the desired outcomes for a redeveloped City Center, in a way that is easy to read and comprehend. This approach can ensure better working relationships with developers and better buy-in from the community, as they understand exactly what the city is trying to accomplish.

**Community engagement that supports city leadership and builds support for City Center.** To ensure change, the city must build community support so that city leadership—from the mayor to department heads—can reprioritize City Center development plans and find the funding to execute the plans.

During the stakeholder interviews, the experts heard skepticism about the plans that have been circulating since 2007. It is critical that something tangible happens now, so people understand that City Center is real and going to happen. Lynnwood has a lot of stakeholders, so an opportunity and an ability exist to get people involved and build a broad base of community support to move forward with the plans. Engage with a variety of residents, transit providers, the business community, and developers to gain support for the tough decisions that are necessary to prioritize capital spending. Lynnwood's population is already diverse and vibrant, and the fact that the city's website is multilingual, including Arabic, Vietnamese, and Korean, is impressive. Clearly, to the experts, the city recognizes the vitality of the community, and by harvesting that vitality, City Center will become similarly vital and vibrant.

To achieve the needed support for the public realm changes envisioned for this redevelopment, the city will need buy-in from many different groups. But that buy-in will result in stewardship for whatever is being built, whether parks or other parts of the public realm. City Center should be a place where everyone is part of the success; everyone should feel ownership of and pride in the parks and streetscape.

One strategy to achieve support is to form a community advisory board for City Center; this group could be a subset of the Parks and Recreation Board or modeled after another existing board. The experts encourage the city to make this board as diverse and representative of Lynnwood as possible, even by offering to compensate people for the time they are contributing to the project. The advisory board could be tasked with defining valuable programming opportunities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Another strategy is to tap into existing anchor institutions that have expressed interest in using new spaces in City Center. The experts heard that Edmonds College was interested in becoming involved in the parks programming, opening up opportunities for public/private partnerships that should be further explored. They also heard interest from community stakeholders in after-school programming for children as part of the redevelopment; the city, and the parks department, can work with the local Boys & Girls Club, which has great programs elsewhere in Lynnwood. Further collaboration could be developed with other institutions, such as Lynnwood Library, a branch of the regional Sno-Isle Libraries. As programming is developed for City Center, these types of organizations and institutions should be involved in the process.

Finally, the experts recommend exploring a variety of funding opportunities to create a pipeline to ensure that programming can continue beyond the initial opening of the redevelopment. The city should look into grant and philanthropic funding, and also engage the community further through crowdsourcing. People can donate funds to name benches or fountains; children can design tiles that can be incorporated as public art. These small components can begin to build a foundation of support on many different levels, as well as to foster an emotional connection to City Center.

### Physical Realm and Connections

When thinking specifically about refreshing the City Center plan, the experts have several recommendations about the design of the physical realm and connections to existing infrastructure. The experts see this design as critical to creating a welcoming arrival experience for the users of the new light rail and the more robust bus service that will disperse people throughout the city. The experts are not recommending a new planning process, rather how to prioritize investments and how to get started implementing the current plan.

**Connectivity within the community.** The upcoming Sound Transit light-rail extension in Lynnwood is a huge opportunity for the city, and it is critical that decisions related to the Lynnwood station and how it is presented to the public are well defined. About 18,000 people will get off the train in Lynnwood, and they should feel welcome, should sense that Lynnwood is a special place, and should not immediately face a parking lot. They should see greenery, and they should see very clear, effective, and multilingual wayfinding signage that celebrates the diversity of the city.

The quality of the public space and the streets throughout City Center—what can be thought of as the connective tissues between different places and uses—is also essential. As this area currently has a lot of traffic, some major improvements are coming; make sure that these improvements include infrastructure for pedestrians, bicycles, and other alternative transportation modes that are safe, attractive, and inviting. People should not be deterred from exploring City Center by foot, bike, or scooter because they feel a street is too difficult to cross.

**Safe and reliable connections to the transit station.**

Much was said by interviewees about how people will be getting to the new transit station and how to make the station easily accessible through an expanded bus network. The experts encourage the city to try to coordinate with regional and local transportation agencies and look at opportunities to help people easily get to and from the new station, such as on-demand transportation or shuttles. The new Via platform—a joint venture of Sound Transit, the city of Seattle, and King County Metro—is a model for on-demand mobility that Lynnwood could explore. The experts also note that a slew of parking now surrounds the transit station and encourage the city, to the extent possible, to emphasize bike and pedestrian safety and ensure a comfortable and inviting experience for people arriving at the station by bus and by train. A welcoming environment for people arriving at the station by all types of modes is critical.

**Expand facilities and services in anticipation of future growth.** The new transit station is a regional investment and is anticipated to bring a large amount of growth to Lynnwood. Consequently, the City Center area, located adjacent to the station, is an incredible chance to bring new investment to Lynnwood and to realize a community-supported vision of a heart of the city. With this growth, however, will come a greater demand for city services and amenities, such as the Lynnwood Recreation Center and the use and maintenance of city parks and green spaces. Planning for expansion of facilities and services now—so that new population growth is supported in a way that makes the public realm and city facilities quality places that everyone can access—is an important component to ensuring that growth serves to enhance the quality of life of everyone.

City Center physical improvements plan by national experts.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Priority pedestrian and bike enhancements.** As the experts reviewed the City Center Sub-Area Plan and reflected on what they saw and heard, they identified three key anchors in the area: the transit center; the Civic Center area with City Hall, the recreation center, and the library; and the convention center. When thinking about how to prioritize street improvements for pedestrian safety, the experts recommend using these three natural destinations as the points of connection. They note that it is about a 10-minute walk from the transit station to 196th Street SW, at the midpoint of City Center; from there, another 10-minute walk north on 44th Avenue to the Civic Center or east on 196th Street SW, to the convention center. The experts believe that 44th Avenue (primarily between the Lynnwood City Center Station and the Civic Center) and 196th Street are the most critical streets along which to focus pedestrian and bike improvements, to emphasize their importance alongside vehicular traffic.

The experts also see the Interurban Trail as another way that people will access the transit station, so it is important to ensure that connectivity from the trail directly to the station is seamless and that the trail itself has proper design. They also recommend considering creating some smaller-scale streets, to break up the large blocks that exist today. These new midblock connections—whether they allow vehicle access or whether they are just for pedestrians—can create more permeability and help people move around the area efficiently.

### Physical Design Improvements

As the experts spoke with area stakeholders, they got a sense of how people would access the new transit station. Several physical improvements to infrastructure in and around City Center can create the best possible conditions for connectivity and access, both to the train station and to other proximate destinations.

**Interurban Trail improvements.** The pedestrian bridge that brings the Interurban Trail across 44th Avenue and onto the transit station site is a great feature, but the trail overall could benefit from enhancements. The experts recommend looking at separations between bikes and pedestrians along the trail, implementing sound barriers or landscaping to block out highway noise, and installing lighting for people getting on and off the train early in the morning and late in the evening. The experts also note that the segment of the trail where they recommend focusing improvements (the arrow located along the bottom of the graphic on page 17)—which could also include aesthetic enhancements, such as public art—is unlikely to be disturbed by any future rail expansion, so investments in this segment are not at risk. They see the trail as a great opportunity for investment as it will likely get a lot more use once the transit station opens.

**Distribution of roadway real estate.** The experts urge the city to think carefully about the real estate of the major roadways within City Center and how the right-of-way can be redistributed to different users. They note that the current plan for 196th Street SW shows a central median and question whether that 18 feet could instead be used for bicycle lanes on the edges. Similarly, new north–south connections in the City Center plan could operate as pedestrian-only or pedestrian-priority streets. There is an opportunity to further consider right-of-way configuration after the light rail is expanded north and the City Center station is no longer the terminus; this is likely to result in an additional decline in vehicle trips. Overall, the experts recommend being creative with the design of existing and new roadways and thinking critically about how the streets will function, not just for people traveling through the city but for the quality of life of residents living in and adjacent to City Center.

Looking north along 44th Avenue from the Interurban Trail. The experts recommend enhancements to the trail as they expect it will get more use upon opening of the transit station.



SARA HAMMERSCHMIDT/ULI

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Parks and Public Spaces in City Center

The experts are very excited about the opportunities facing Lynnwood with the new transit station and the City Center development, and particularly the opportunities related to parks and open spaces. Not every community has an opportunity to create new gathering spaces, and they note that these new parks and public spaces not only will help shape and define Lynnwood as a community, but also will have the potential—if designed with residents in mind—to create memorable experiences for new and current Lynnwood residents.

#### Creating public gathering spaces within City Center.

The experts know that a primary component of the City Center project is a new central gathering space. Concurrent with recommendations regarding right-of-way improvements to make getting to destinations within and around City Center more pedestrian and bicycle friendly, the experts recommend thinking about the different types of civic gathering spaces that could be created along these routes, rather than one primary space. The city has already identified potential parcels where a new central park could be located. The experts suggest that after looking at some route configuration and pedestrian-friendly improvements that are identified in the graphic on page 17, a good location for a central park is around the new intersection of proposed 42nd Avenue and the reconfigured 198th Street promenade. The experts note that—rather than try to create a larger “central park”—a one- or two-acre park in this location, with areas for people to gather and relax, with green space, and with small park amenities, would be a place people in this area would naturally gravitate toward. A park of this size would help complement some of the other new uses in the area, such as businesses, restaurants, and housing.



The experts recommend that the city focus on a series of smaller public spaces along 198th Street and a new 42nd Avenue (center of diagram).

With some of the new connections that they sketched out, the experts think an opportunity also exists to create an additional gathering space at the east end of the 198th Street promenade, what they called the Civic Plaza opportunity site.

**Potential to relocate civic uses to City Center.** The experts see real potential in relocating City Hall or other civic services to this area, as well as creating additional gathering places or parklike settings. This change could complement the current businesses in this area, as well as the convention center, and, if properly done, become a destination for people to enjoy both day and night.

A city in Johnson County, Kansas, created a similar facility that could serve as inspiration. A new civic campus for the city of Lenexa was initiated after years of planning and partnership development: its City Hall, located on the second floor of the building, also includes leased space to a local university and a popular ground-floor public market space with restaurants and local vendors. The Public Market opens into a commons area with seating and firepits, and a new public library recently opened immediately south of the City Hall building, also adjacent to the Public Market commons.

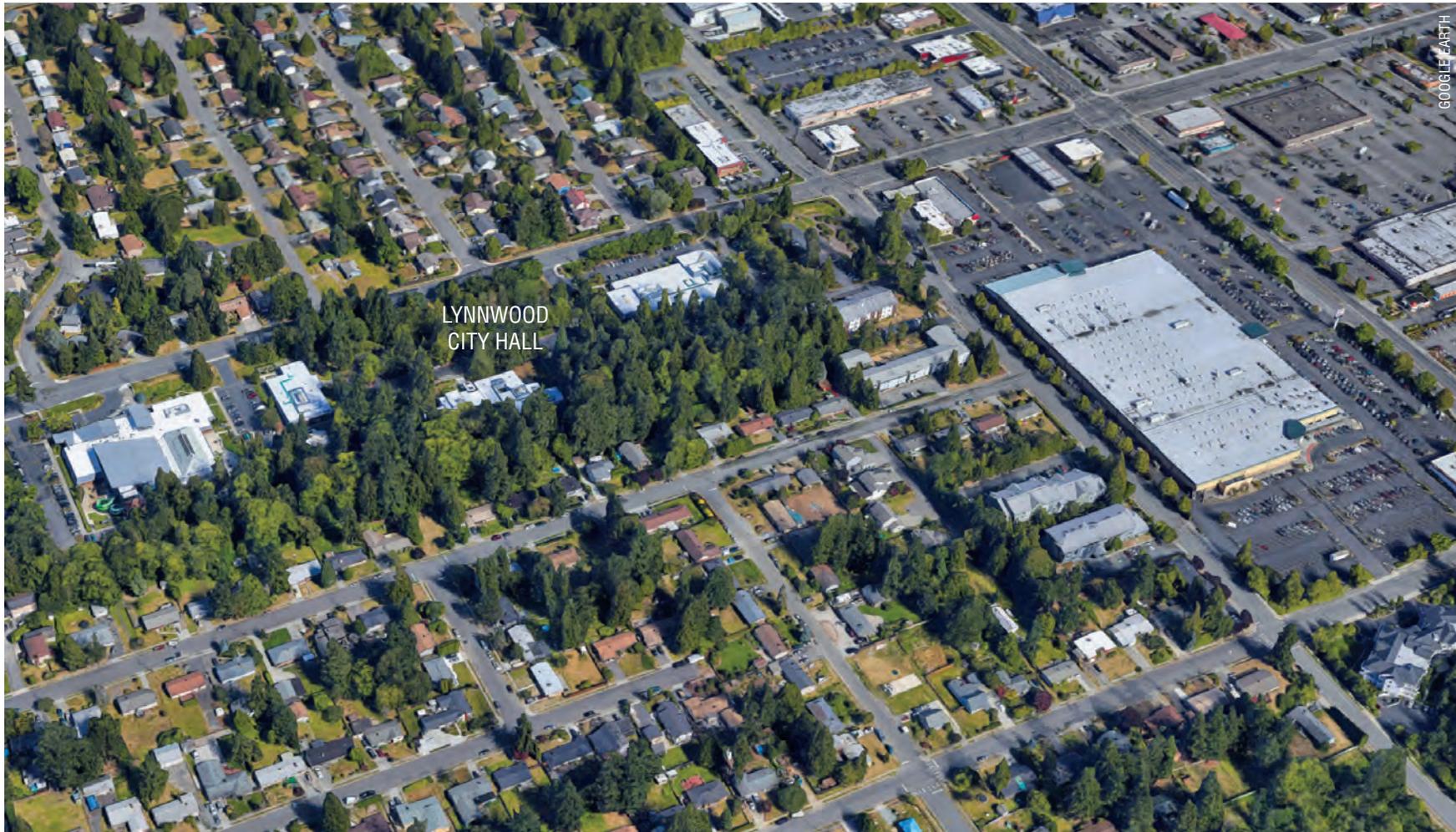
The experts recommend that Lynnwood think seriously about relocating City Hall—which they heard was outgrowing the current complex—to an area in City Center and coupling it with other, more active civic uses, such as a library, a park or plaza, and retail space.

**Rethinking a “central park.”** Many stakeholders told the experts that the city needs a central park, and a number of ideas for amenities and design were shared. So many ideas were mentioned that trying to accomplish everything on a one- or two-acre site is unrealistic. And the ability of the city to purchase enough property to create a larger gathering space may also be unrealistic.

The experts do believe that it is important to provide parks and gathering space within City Center itself; however, when they looked at an aerial view of the surrounding area (see page 22), they noticed a stark disparity in setting—which was also noticeable in both physical conditions and feeling while on the site tour. The City Center area looks and feels like a sea of concrete, whereas the Civic Center area—just a 10-minute walk from City Center—features a lush tree canopy and a more parklike setting. When the experts first arrived to tour the Civic Center area, they immediately sensed they were in a special space.

Relocating some civic buildings from the Civic Center—such as City Hall, the Lynnwood Library, or both—could open up space for additional public park acreage in a setting that already looks and feels more like a park. Particularly if created in proximity to the recreation center, and taking advantage of new pedestrian-friendly routes proposed by the experts, the currently branded “Civic Center” area could become a natural draw for people who live, work, and play in City Center. In an area separated from the transit station and separated from the highway, with an existing mature tree canopy, it feels like a natural space where people will enjoy coming to gather, relax, and recreate.

The experts recommend that the city consider relocating some civic buildings from the Civic Center—such as City Hall, the Lynnwood Library, or both. **This way, space could be opened up for additional public park acreage in a setting that already looks and feels more like a park.**



A bird's-eye view of Lynnwood showing the lush areas of the Civic Center (left) adjacent to City Center parking lots.



For City Center, we kept hearing, ‘We need a Central Park.’

The City Center area is really a sea of concrete; there is a lot of asphalt and not much tree canopy. Where you do see the tree canopy is the Civic Center, and it is a beautiful setting. With some of the pedestrian-friendly routes that

we have recommended, **this area will be a natural draw for folks that live, work, and play in City Center.”**

**JEFF STEWART**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOHNSON COUNTY PARK AND RECREATION DISTRICT

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Attracting Residents and Investors to City Center

A critical component of making City Center a success is the city of Lynnwood's being in the driver's seat for the entire project, including strongly leveraging the transit station investments. The experts pointed out that this project is about more than the investment that the city and Sound Transit are making in Lynnwood; it is also about capitalizing on and directing the private investment that not only is necessary for success but is sure to be attracted to the area because of the new transit station. And as the market has changed from when the City Center plan was first created, from primarily office to primarily residential, it is important that the city thinks about the types of civic and public amenities that will attract not just residents to the new Lynnwood City Center but investors as well.

### Provide Amenities Residents Want

When the City Center plan was created, it contained mostly office uses, so the primary people who would be there were eight-to-five workers—who require a different set of amenities than the likely residents now, apartment dwellers. Population trend projections show that between 900,000 and 2 million people will be added to Snohomish County (location of Lynnwood) and King County (location of Seattle) by 2050,<sup>6</sup> so providing housing at the right density will be critical throughout the region and, importantly, within the current blank slate that is City Center.

Investment will likely be in multifamily buildings. Therefore, if the now-anticipated City Center resident is an apartment dweller, rather than an office worker, Lynnwood needs to be prepared to meet those needs. A key question that must be asked is, "What kinds of amenities are these residents looking for?" The experts maintain that, for transportation,

these residents likely will love—or need—to be able to move around without a car. City Center will have transit nearby, and Uber and Lyft are available, but the city also needs to ensure that the area is safe for pedestrians and easy to get around by bike or scooter.

The experts have more ideas of what new City Center residents will likely value. The new residents will likely be attracted to quality public spaces and third places, such as coffee shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues. They will look for convenient shopping options, like drugstores and small supermarkets, and for opportunities to volunteer and become active in the community. They are seeking ways to engage in their immediate neighborhood.

And the experts believe that these future residents, who may also be Lynnwood's future leaders, present a great opportunity for Lynnwood, and City Center, to improve and expand. Future residents are diverse, they value authenticity, and they will be looking for unique local businesses. Lynnwood currently has some great small businesses, but new residents will demand more.

Based on this profile of new residents, a good percentage will very likely have dogs; according to the National Multifamily Housing Council, more than one-third of apartment renters own pets, with the majority being dogs.<sup>7</sup> Although the Interurban Trail is close and provides space for walks, more will be needed to make City Center a dog-friendly environment. The experts recommend that the city think about where residents will be able to take their dogs for a quick walk, places for dogs to run off leash, and retail and services, such as a pet store and a veterinarian. City Center is primed to be the perfect place to provide all of these types of amenities to new area residents.



If Lynnwood provides desirable amenities, investors

will flock to City Center. **Without the amenities, investors will go where costs are similar, but rewards are greater.”**

DAN EERNISSEE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, CITY OF EVERETT, WASHINGTON

### **Amenities Attract Investors**

The experts also note the importance of looking at the value of area amenities and services from the perspective of a private investor. Investors want to support projects in cities that are actively thinking about what they can do to make residents move into new housing more quickly, move out more slowly, value their home more, and share what they like about the area—most likely via social media. The experts note that residents will also share what they do not like, which is why these factors are so important to consider.

The experts underscore the importance of setting up City Center for success using a financial argument as well: looking at capitalization rates for rental properties is how the profitability of property can be evaluated over time. The experts estimate that if rents rise—or expenses fall—by \$25 per month in a 150-unit building, the value of that building increases by over \$1 million. Additionally, the city should remember that the Lynnwood Transit Center is not the only station opening in 2023 or 2024: investors, and future residents, will have their choice of about nine other nearby communities with a new transit station to potentially invest in or live near. The experts are confident that if Lynnwood provides desirable amenities at City Center, investors will come and properties will be potentially more valuable than in other areas without such amenities; without amenities in City Center, investors may go where building costs are similar, but the potential rewards are greater.

### **Reduce Developer Cost, Risk, and Uncertainty**

While the experts described a number of quality-of-life and quality-of-place amenities that are important to attract residents and interest from investors and developers,

they also presented specific ways in which the city can proactively reduce developer costs, risk, and uncertainty.

**Continue to improve development and entitlement processes.** The experts learned that the city has made great strides recently in improving development and entitlement processes, and they recommend that the city continue to focus on that. Developers need to clearly understand the rules and requirements of the city, and they need to be certain that the city will stick to those requirements.

**Solidify vision and planning fundamentals.** To help improve certainty for developers, the city must solidify the vision for the City Center site and update plans to reflect the shift to a primary focus on housing, while also integrating office and retail uses. In addition, identifying needed infrastructure upgrades, the location of the park, required public land easements, and similar planning fundamentals that might be required will improve developer certainty as they look at prospects in the City Center area.

**Maintain flexibility to respond to market conditions.** The experts note that maintaining flexibility is a very challenging but very important balance for a city to strike. Although certainty is critical with regard to entitlement time frames, entitlement requirements, and the provision of key neighborhood amenities and infrastructure, it is also important that land uses and product types are able to change in response to evolving market conditions and consumer preferences. As market conditions have already changed the plan for City Center once, the city should keep an eye on market trends and think critically about how new plans—particularly for the new infrastructure that needs to go in—could be adaptable for different types of land uses should that need arise.

**Support the transition of uses.** The experts noticed that a number of current uses within City Center are much more automobile-oriented and perhaps unlikely to thrive as City Center transitions into a denser and more pedestrian- and bicycle-oriented neighborhood. The city should initiate a business relocation program that incentivizes and facilitates moving some of these businesses into areas of the city that are more suitable for those types of uses, and where those businesses can thrive over the long term.

Redevelopment and reuse of properties with existing, cash-flowing businesses present a particular set of challenges. Not only do redevelopment prospects need to offer sufficient financial returns to overcome the inherent risk of development, but those financial returns must replace and exceed the existing cash flow of those businesses. It may seem more rational and less risky to the business or property owners just to continue to maintain their business where it is presently operating because of the current cash flow. In these circumstances, the city can deploy a number of strategies to encourage recalcitrant property owners to redevelop, including property owner education regarding other development prospects; technical assistance to guide owners through the land use, entitlement, and design processes; and infusion of capital into new projects. Any approach to lowering the risk and costs associated with the transition of current businesses will ultimately help realize the vision of the City Center site as a denser, mixed-use neighborhood.

**Facilitate land absorption through potential civic uses.**

As previously mentioned, the experts see a great opportunity for the city to relocate civic uses like City Hall and the library to City Center. The city's help in developing and activating a large stretch of property within City Center can signal to the private-sector developer and investor community that the city is very committed to redevelopment and putting in active uses. To achieve

the relocation of civic uses from a financial perspective, the city could be a credit tenant for a private-sector developer or could enter into a public/private development opportunity, where the city purchases the land and works with the private sector to develop the property with both civic and private-sector uses.

**Consider strategic expansion of the MFTE program.**

The experts learned that multifamily residential development faces feasibility challenges—in many cases, revenue potential is insufficient to overcome upfront developer costs and meet developer return requirements. As one tool to improve feasibility outcomes, the city could consider a strategic expansion of the Multiple-Unit Housing Property Tax Exemption (MFTE) program by providing property tax abatements for feasibility-challenged projects.

**Identify and prioritize capital improvements needed to support development.** The experts emphasize the need to invest in the public realm improvements that help contribute to the quality-of-life and quality-of-place elements that they view as necessary to attract residents and investors. Because of resource availability, it is likely necessary to prioritize these improvements and amenities. For example, it might be worth deprioritizing some of the larger planned roadway improvements and really focus on the public realm and pedestrian and bicycle access improvements within City Center.

The experts also recommend that the city make a clear funding commitment to the central park (or parks) and establish clear plans for parks and recreation within the site. This commitment requires the identification of land acquisition capital and, critically, operations and maintenance funding sources. Funding sources need to be identified quickly and assertively: both to provide certainty and a signal to the development community, but also to access current land prices before they increase more in the future.

### City Center Public Realm Funding Options

As previously mentioned, the experts identified initial funding sources for programming opportunities—including grants, capital campaigns, crowdsourcing, and naming rights—and they strongly recommend aggressively pursuing these options to also fund upfront capital and operations for City Center parks and plazas. In addition, they outlined existing city sources of revenue, which can be used specifically for parks and the public realm, described below and summarized on page 29.

- **Park impact fees.** The city has a fairly robust park impact fee program that has the potential to generate an estimated \$5 million to \$10 million from new City Center development; however, the timing of those funds is irregular. Since the revenue is linked to development, the city also needs an upfront funding source for land acquisition and initial public realm improvements, which would strengthen the development opportunity for the private sector.
- **Real estate excise tax.** Also a somewhat irregular source of funding, the real estate excise tax is generated during property transactions in Lynnwood. The experts estimated that the tax could yield another \$1 million per year, specifically for park improvements and another \$1 million for other capital improvements.
- **Line of credit.\*** The experts learned that the city has a line of credit that has not yet been allocated, which is another option that could be leveraged to advance funds for land acquisition or to make public realm improvements. That line of credit is currently estimated at \$5.1 million, with a real estate investment trust identified as the payback source.
- **Economic Development Infrastructure Fund (EDIF).** The EDIF is a setaside of the construction sales tax on projects that exceed \$10 million. This money is specifically earmarked for strategic investments in public realm improvements. The experts learned that this fund has been used for only one project in Lynnwood to date. Although it has also been used as a funding backstop for other sources, a strategic approach to investing these funds in public realm improvements has not been fully developed. The experts think that City Center parks, recreation, and other public realm improvements are obvious candidates for EDIF monies, meeting objectives to stimulate economic development through public investments. The experts also see a strategy where the city could backfill EDIF monies using park impact fee revenue as it is generated; essentially the EDIF could become a revolving loan fund program, regenerating the EDIF with other parks revenue and eliminating any issues with using the EDIF for other competing infrastructure priorities outside City Center.

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\*All study visit recommendations were made in February 2020, before the widespread onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. Throughout the pandemic, interest rates have dropped and are substantially lower than at the beginning of 2020. Because of these lower rates and the expiration date of the current line of credit, the city is advised to secure a new line of credit from a bank for the purchase, as this type of debt is relatively quick to secure because no official statement and no bond rating are required. It should be noted that some legal work and an ordinance are required to secure a new line of credit.

## POTENTIAL CITY CENTER PARK FUNDING

Lynnwood source	Amount
Park impact fees	\$5 million–\$10 million
Real estate excise tax	\$1 million per year
Line of credit	\$5.1 million
Economic Development Infrastructure Fund	\$10 million

The experts also note that, as the city plans for public realm improvements in City Center, it is concurrently planning for high-quality operations and maintenance activities. Options include property taxes and other subarea district funding, such as a business improvement district.

Specifically, the experts have identified key city action items related to improving the attractiveness of City Center for private investment activity. The overarching goal should be to identify strategic investment, land acquisition, and regulatory interventions that are designed to encourage and facilitate desired private-sector investments.

1. Purchase land for the City Center park (or parks) and potential associated civic uses, such as City Hall and the library. Be assertive in determining where park spaces will be and how they will be programmed.
2. Identify public/private partnership opportunities to colocate civic uses with park and private development opportunities and consider issuing a request for proposals to seek a development partner.

3. Establish partnerships with other public-sector and institutional users, such as Edmonds College and Sea Mar Community Health Center, which is already located at the City Center site. Lynnwood has great potential institutional partners that can help activate and anchor City Center and would be important assets within a higher-intensity, mixed-use community.
4. Create a business relocation program to encourage the uses that thrive in an automobile-oriented environment to move to higher-trafficked areas in order to improve the development opportunity to achieve the ultimate vision of City Center.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS: CREATING A VIBRANT CITY CENTER

The experts know that the city has been thinking about City Center, and creating a central park space, for years now. Considering all of the specific recommendations they have, keeping in mind several important key takeaways can help the city achieve its goals with City Center and public space.

- 1. Taking no action is shaping Lynnwood.** Developers are already coming in and taking action in the City Center area, and the city's choice is to either act to shape development or let development happen.
- 2. The city needs to lead the way.** The experts believe that the city really needs to—and can—lead the way. Residents, and future residents, want to see something great happen, and the city has a wonderful opportunity to lead the change in City Center in an equitable way.
- 3. People—not cars—should drive the design process.** The city should prioritize people in every aspect of the design process for City Center: thinking about the experiences of people walking down the streets to access shops and services, the people who may not have access to cars and are commuting to the transit center on foot or by bike. How can the city best support the experiences of people, and not prioritize road design in favor of cars and traffic?
- 4. Diversity and cultural authenticity should be cultivated in design, programming, engagement, and leadership.** The experts heard from stakeholders that Lynnwood already has a rich, diverse community that is interested in celebrating its cultural diversity. This amazing asset should be allowed to shape the ultimate design of City Center, the engagement with programming, and the prioritization of improvements to the City Center site.
- 5. Lynnwood should be strategically bold.** The experts emphasize that now is the time to do something substantial with City Center.

Throughout their recommendations, the experts emphasize ensuring that current residents—from all ethnic and economic backgrounds—are involved in the planning and design of City Center. It is equally important to find ways to engage incoming residents. These approximately 1,500 new residents per year<sup>9</sup> need to feel like they are a part of Lynnwood from the moment they arrive. Work with developers of the new multifamily buildings to create “onboarding” materials to inform new residents about the area social media accounts to follow, annual events in Lynnwood, city advisory boards that are accepting new members, and generally ways to engage with the community.

As the city does the hard and important work of engagement, it also needs to celebrate successes with the community. Find ways to celebrate even small successes, far and wide, so everyone can be part of the excitement and start generating energy for a particular project and the City Center area overall.

And the experts encourage the city to remember that parks and community development are true economic development. The amenities the experts recommend—trails, parks, plazas, pet-friendly conveniences, fitness programming—are not just nice to have, they are expected by current residents, potential residents, and the development community. Lynnwood's competition will likely be providing them too. Consequently, the city needs to think not only about how to provide what people expect, but also about how to make these amenities special, unique, and authentic to the area, so that when people choose Lynnwood, they also choose to stay in Lynnwood.

The experts see the vision of City Center and the upcoming investments in the area as very wise and strategic and believe this is a very exciting moment for Lynnwood. Now is the time for all city departments to get enthusiastic about the potential and work together, in concert with the community, to realize a City Center with a mix of uses, seamless connectivity to the surrounding area, quality parks, and a vibrant public realm.



**As you work to keep the community engaged, remember to also celebrate your successes together**

—because that is how you ensure that you grow together as a community and encourage people to keep coming back.”

**ALETHA DUNSTON**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FORT HARRISON REUSE AUTHORITY

## NEXT STEPS FOR THE CITY OF LYNNWOOD: INVEST IN CITY CENTER

After years of planning, Sound Transit light-rail construction has begun, and the city of Lynnwood is proceeding with construction of the 196th Street SW improvement project. With major investment in transit and traffic infrastructure underway, it is now time for the city to advance investment in placemaking and quality-of-life amenities that will attract mixed-use and residential development to the core. While market demand for office and multifamily has shifted since the City Center Sub-Area planning, and office uses are proposed at Northline Village, the city is also looking at how to leverage long-term office uses along 44th Avenue West to pair with Northline Village while also facilitating the near-term demand for multifamily residential. The city of Lynnwood is committing to the following actions.

### Town Square Park

The key investment strategy will be to acquire and develop the future Town Square Park. The city has hired a real estate agent to begin an early analysis of property costs based on several factors, including current sales and tenant placements. The city is working to identify a preferred site to begin purchase negotiations with an ultimate goal of closing and acquiring a property within the next year. Funding for this acquisition will need to be secured. The city will have park impact fees available and will investigate the best financing options to complete this purchase.

### “Parks+” Opportunity

Lynnwood’s City Hall, North Administration Building, recreation center, and library are located outside City Center at a central Civic Center campus. Buildings on the Civic Center campus are at capacity and will be unable to accommodate future growth without significant modifications. The limited space has required city government to lease a satellite facility for Development and Business Services. The disjointed city facilities are confusing to the public, impede organizational excellence, and limit effective staff collaboration. This information is not new to city leadership: as previously identified in the City Center Sub-Area Plan from the early 2000s, the document called for the city to relocate civic facilities to City Center.

The city began a review of possible site considerations for Town Square Park with additional consideration for adjacent public uses. Possibilities include construction of new public facilities, such as a City Hall (housing all departments), library, other public facility, or affordable housing project. The city began this “Parks+” conversation to consider the symbiotic relationships between new public open spaces and new public facilities. The city is still engaged in considering the relationship of public facilities and public spaces and anticipates advancing the conversation with City Council throughout 2021.

### Placemaking Partnerships

The city staff is interested in developing a series of partnerships with property owners and businesses in City Center as a strategy to enliven physical spaces and bring community members into the core as a way to begin experiencing a new downtown lifestyle the neighborhood will offer. Partnerships with Northline Village to offer a drive-in movie series in fall 2020 and with the Lynnwood Convention Center for a community event in 2021 are early concepts. The Lynnwood Arts Commission will be exploring opportunities to initiate a mural program with business operators in addition to the *Love Lynnwood* sculpture being fabricated, with installation planned for mid-2021 at the prominent gateway of 36th Avenue West and 196th Street SW. Also underway are plans to update the city's wayfinding signage program to incorporate city branding and bring an updated visual appeal to the neighborhood.

### Walking and Biking Improvements

The regional Interurban Trail is an incredible asset to City Center that needs continued investment. A new urban plaza with drinking fountain, kiosk, and exercise station was completed in 2019. A plan for a better connection between the 44th Avenue pedestrian bridge and the 44th Avenue sidewalk is needed along with a sidewalk-widening project to create a multimodal connection under Interstate 5 linking to the Interurban Trail. These multimodal improvements are essential to support light-rail and transit users, as well as to serve new City Center residents with continuous and cohesive facilities in the core, while also creating 42nd Avenue, the 198th Street promenade, and interblock connections.



SARA HAMMERSCHMIDT/ULI

The experts at Lynnwood City Hall.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



The city is collaborating with several community partners to bring Lynnwood residents to the city core, including planning an event with the Lynnwood Convention Center, which anchors the eastern edge of City Center.

**ON BEHALF OF THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE,**

the experts would like to thank the city of Lynnwood for inviting the team to provide guidance and recommendations for the role of parks and public spaces in a reimagined City Center.

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## NOTES

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Aerial view of Lynnwood, looking west toward Puget Sound, with Alderwood Mall in the foreground and City Center at the top left.



