



## Tacoma Central Neighborhood Council

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October 9th, 2020

Subj: City of Tacoma's Proposed 2020 Annual Amendment to the One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Regulatory Code

Dear City of Tacoma's Planning Commission members:

**We write to express our opposition regarding the proposed re-designation of the subject site near Cheney Stadium from a Parks and Open Space to a Major Institutional Campus.**

- We believe, given the recent changes to our communities triggered by the pandemic, that the commission should recommend denying this application and instead direct the City of Tacoma's Planning Department to revisit its Institutional Campus Zoning Review.
- Should the commission advance this change, we request it also recommends an amendment to allow for a public process to define the type of projects the public is willing to support and that aligns with the community's future vision.

Over the past year, since this land use designation change request was brought forward, we have had the opportunity to [host informational forums](#), [survey people at local street festivals](#), attend several public meetings hosted by the City of Tacoma's Planning Department and Metro Parks, and took part in meetings with The Soccer Club of Tacoma representatives. While we have heard plenty of feedback and learned relevant information regarding the overall project potentially planned for this site (i.e., Heidelberg-Davis Sports Village), in this letter, we limit our comments to summarize the feedback and reservations we have heard about this specific stage of the planning process only. Along the way, we outline actionable items the commission may employ to address the perceived impact of this project.

We must first acknowledge we are currently living through some extraordinary times due to the COVID-19 pandemic, whose impact might extend for years to come. It is evident that our community's daily patterns and priorities have changed as we have had to adopt significant measures to prevent further spread of the disease. Some of these changes might become permanent to promote sustainability. For example, since early March, we have spent the majority of our time inside our shelters of residence. Walks to nearby neighborhood parks and open spaces have been a sought out reprieve from the

extreme physical isolation. Over this period of time, our community has begun to reevaluate how they interact with the spaces around them and have had the opportunity to rediscover the importance and role of parks and open spaces in their everyday life. This proposal seeks to re-designate a vital community resource and potentially allow for the development of projects which are in direct conflict with a post-pandemic community vision. Specifically, and in the near horizon, a 5,500-seat stadium planned and designed with pre-pandemic standards has the potential of becoming an undesirable hotspot for our community.

In 2016, the City of Tacoma’s Planning Department initiated an [Institutional Campus Zoning Review](#), which was stopped in the first stage of research and assessment with the potential to be resumed at a later time. According to the Planning Department’s website for this project: “The Institutional Campus Zoning Review will assess zoning changes, special use restrictions, additional development standards, or new administrative procedures to ensure that new or any expansions of existing major campus institutions successfully implement the goals and policies of the [One Tacoma Plan](#).” For its part, the [One Tacoma Plan](#) is the “City's Comprehensive Plan--it guides our community's development over the long term and describes how our community's vision for the future is to be achieved.” To our knowledge this is the first Institutional Campus-related project since that review had started and immediately halted. We believe, given the recent changes to our communities triggered by the pandemic, that **the commission should recommend denying this application and instead direct the City of Tacoma’s Planning Department to revisit its Institutional Campus Zoning Review.** The Central Neighborhood Council board would be pleased to partner with the City of Tacoma to assist the Planning Department to gather input which better aligns with the current, post-pandemic-shaped, community vision for the future of our neighborhoods.

The economic impacts of COVID-19 on our community and our local governments are also quite significant. Key stakeholders in this change request have been financially impacted, making the triggering project (i.e., Heidelberg-Davis Sports Village) less than certain. The City of Tacoma is projecting a fiscal year budget shortfall of \$40 million, while Metro Parks is projecting a budget deficit of \$13 million. Furthermore, both institutions have announced significant furloughs and layoffs. While we are not privy to economic projections from The Soccer Club of Tacoma, it can be anticipated that they (and this potential project) will face a similar financial impact to other major sports teams (e.g., Major League Soccer, National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, National Football League) which have seen a reduction in revenue due to pandemic responses. Lastly, several City of Tacoma council members and Metro Parks commissioners have gone [on the record](#) since the pandemic expressing little appetite for this project to proceed.

In the many opportunities we have had to learn about this proposed change, the Central Neighborhood Council board has not been able to find a discrete and binding definition to the term “Major Institutional Campus.” The One Tacoma Plan defines major campus institutions as high schools, higher education facilities, medical centers, and hospitals, typically on sites greater than ten acres in size. It is true that the 3 out of 4 already existing Major Institutional Campuses within the Central Neighborhood Council border--except Cheney Stadium, which precedes the One Tacoma Plan--meet this definition. However, on the Metro Parks website the definition is expanded to include [commercial office complexes](#) and [residential units](#), making it clear that there is some potential flexibility to the use and interpretation of the term. If the soccer stadium project fails to gather the necessary support to be implemented, any other project that may fit in this vaguely defined category of Major Institutional Campus may proceed in its place. We believe the central neighborhood community deserves an opportunity to help define what type of projects can be enabled by the change of designation if this proposal is to be moved forward. Thus, **our hope is that if this commission recommends this change, it also recommends an amendment to allow for a public process to define the type of projects the public is willing to support and that aligns with the community’s future vision.**

One last comment we will like to bring to the attention of the commission is in regards to the stipulated use of the subject site based on limitations listed on its title of ownership. The Central Neighborhood Council board received information from one of our members suggesting when this plat was donated to Metro Parks, it was restricted for baseball use only. While we have been unable to access and review the title, we believe it is in this Commission’s and City’s interest to request a full review of the land’s title to verify this claim and avoid potential future setbacks.

We are concerned with the potential impact of the proposed re-designation of the subject site near Cheney Stadium from a Parks and Open Space to a Major Institutional Campus. This proposal has the potential to disregard important lessons learned during this pandemic, and the Major Institutional Campus designation in general lacks the voice of an important stakeholder: the public. **We are willing to work together with the Planning Commission and the City of Tacoma’s Planning Department to find a community agreed-upon solution, which acknowledges the current times and the importance of aligning future developments with a community vision that supports health and safety.**

With best regards,

Central Neighborhood Council

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