



## Staff Report to the Planning Commission

Prepared August 19, 2025

**HEARING DATE:** August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**FILE NUMBERS:** L25-0086

**APPLICANT:** City of Tukwila

**REQUEST:** Planning Commission Public Hearing regarding amendments to Tukwila Municipal Code Title 18, relating to various standards for the Regional Commercial and Neighborhood Commercial Center zoning districts, the table of allowed uses, the minimum parking requirements, the multi-family and mixed-use design standards, the adoption of a development incentive program, standards for co-living housing, and changes to the locations where cannabis businesses may be permitted.

**LOCATION:** The action would result in a change to the zoning code that would affect areas throughout the City of Tukwila.

**NOTIFICATION:** Hearing notice was published in the Seattle Times and posted on the City of Tukwila website on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Staff has forwarded the proposed amendments to the Washington Department of Commerce for their 60-day review.

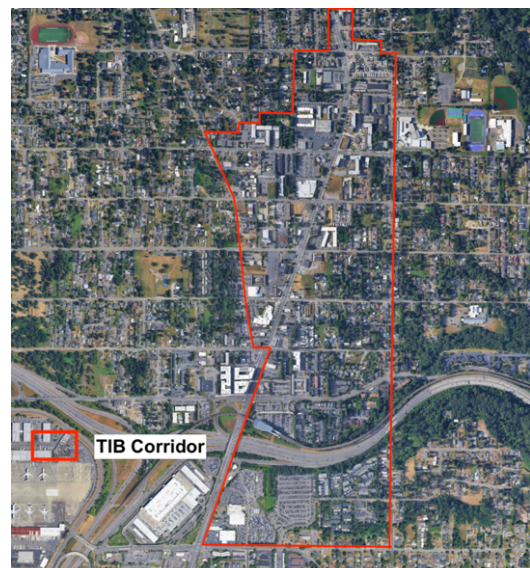
**SEPA:** Review for compliance with the State Environmental Policy Act has been conducted for this project under file numbers E25-0012, E25-0013, and E25-0015. Determinations of Non-Significance were issued on July 22<sup>nd</sup> and August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

**STAFF:** Isaac Gloor, Senior Planner

### **BACKGROUND**

#### Tukwila International Boulevard (TIB) Project

The Tukwila International Boulevard neighborhood (see Figure 1) has been one of the City's highest priority areas for revitalization for more than 25 years. The area is highly multicultural and contains many small businesses. It also contains Tukwila's sole Link Light Rail station, which is the City's highest value transportation asset. The area is connected to Seattle, SeaTac Airport, and Snohomish County via high quality and frequent rail service, and to Renton, Burien, and Federal Way via bus rapid transit. However, it remains a relatively low-density, auto-oriented neighborhood. Redevelopment of underused properties has been slow, piecemeal, and has generally required labor



intensive Development Agreements, which are one-off deals that allow exceptions from zoning standards.

Tukwila's 2015 Comprehensive Plan intended to lay the groundwork to achieve the community's vision for the TIB neighborhood and create a "complete neighborhood" with diverse, locally-owned businesses, a safe and walkable main street, and excellent transit connections. It envisioned the TIB neighborhood as a destination for its own sake, rather than an arterial highway leading to "somewhere else". The [2024 Comprehensive Plan](#) carried that vision forward, with the following goal<sup>1</sup>:

"The Tukwila International Boulevard (TIB) District is a thriving, walkable, well-rounded neighborhood and a desirable place to live, work, shop, worship, or play."

These visions and goals were formed following many previous planning efforts, including the adoption of the rewritten zoning code in 1995, and the Tukwila International Boulevard Design Manual, and the Tukwila International Boulevard Revitalization and Urban Renewal Plan, from the years 1999 and 2000 respectively.

In 2017, the City contracted with the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) to kickstart implementation of the Comprehensive Plan with a community workshop. After reviewing existing conditions, plans, and the community goals and visions for the neighborhood, the CNU then presented their recommendations to the City Council. The proposal featured more urban uses and development standards than the existing zoning. For example, the proposal would have prohibited most industrial uses and allowed a greater variety of residential and mixed uses.

However, the concept proposed only small adjustments in some areas, a reflection perhaps of the different real estate market and development pressures of the time. For example, the maximum heights in the concept were set at 4 stories. The plan also included large stepbacks for upper stories, and sizable setbacks for certain properties. Some of those setbacks reached 20 feet.

The concept included lower parking minimums than were in place at the time; it required 1 parking space for each dwelling. However, in the eight years since, residential parking requirements have been adopted city-wide that match the proposal.

See [pages 36-43 of the CNU report](#) for the full conceptual development standards.

In 2017, the City Council acted quickly to adopt measures that aligned with the recommendations of the CNU and established an immediate moratorium on certain uses within areas zoned Regional Commercial (RC) and Neighborhood Commercial Center (NCC) within the TIB area. Those uses included hotels, motels, extended-stay facilities, and auto-oriented commercial uses, such as gas stations, car washes, vehicular repair, service, or storage, commercial parking, and drive throughs.

The intention of the moratorium was to quickly take interim steps that would prevent investment in the neighborhood that was incompatible with the vision. It was expected that the moratorium would be replaced by permanent changes to the zoning code. However, the temporary six month moratorium was, in the end, extended 5 times. Finally, in March of 2020, the Council adopted an ordinance that permanently changed the permitted uses within the RC and NCC zones in the TIB

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<sup>1</sup> Tukwila Comprehensive Plan 2024-2044, Land Use Element, Goal 11.

neighborhood. Today, that remains the only outcome of the work from 2017-2020 that has been implemented.

The delay in adopting changes to neighborhood zoning was due to a City Council decision in late 2018. The Council determined that additional studies were needed to fully determine the impacts of rechannelization on traffic through the TIB neighborhood. As part of that decision, changes to the zoning code were placed on hold, as previous decisions had established that zoning changes could not precede a decision on rechannelization of TIB.

In March of 2020, [PW and DCD presented Fehr & Peers' final report](#) to the City Council's Planning and Economic Development Committee. The outcome of that meeting was mixed, as the councilmembers present did not have a consensus on a preferred outcome of the rechannelization efforts. A clear timeline was not established to forward the topic to the full City Council.

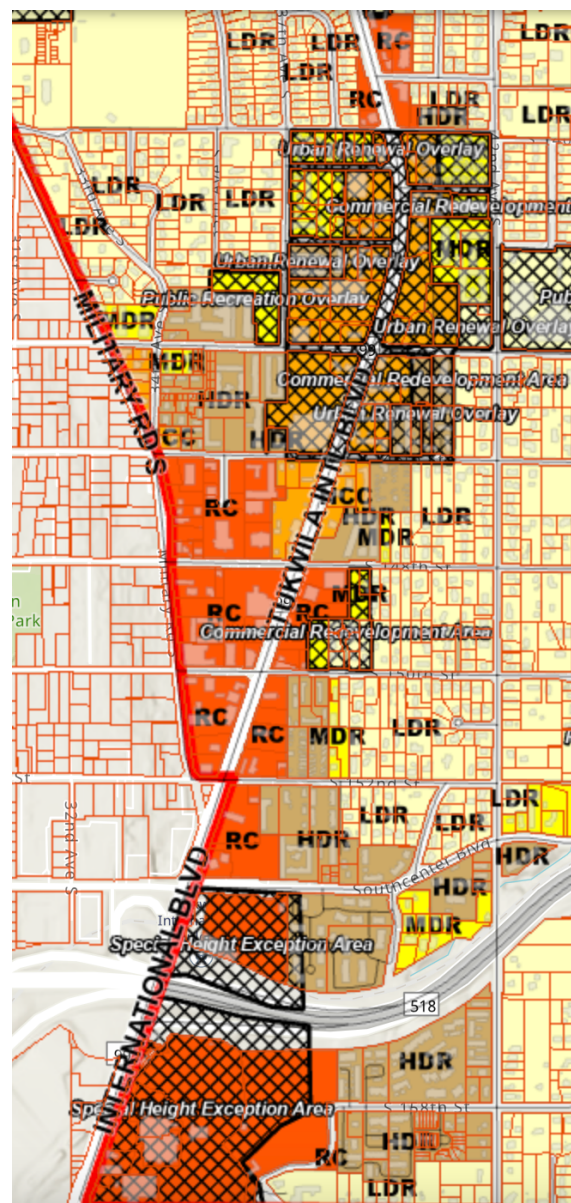
Shortly afterwards, the early scope of the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic became obvious. The Department and the City Council were required to cease all in-person activities and transition to fully remote operations. The pandemic contributed to unique budgetary constraints and affected work timelines for all projects and resulted in TIB rechannelization discussions being dropped from the City Council's work plan.

There has been little progress to implement the community's vision for TIB within the last 5 years. The sole change to development standards that resulted from the work from 2017-2020 was the previously mentioned minor change to the allowed uses in the RC and NCC zoning districts. The remainder of the zoning standards in the area remain largely similar to their original condition, established decades ago.

The area contains the following zoning districts and overlay areas (see Figure 2 for a map of zones and overlays):

- Regional Commercial (RC)
- Neighborhood Commercial Center (NCC)
- Community Residential (CR)
- High-Density Residential (HDR)
- Urban Renewal Overlay (URO)
- Commercial Redevelopment Area (CRA)
- Public Recreation Overlay (PRO)
- Special Height Exception Area

Figure 2



The RC and NCC zoning districts govern the development standards and allowed uses along Tukwila International Boulevard, and with some minor exceptions, exist only within the TIB neighborhood.

Within the RC and NCC, development standards are complex and disjointed. It can be difficult to ascertain which standards apply to an individual parcel, given the presence of overlapping overlays. Feedback regarding the current standards includes that they are relatively onerous to work with, outdated, and incompatible with the City's plans, including Comprehensive Plan goals and policies, as well as the community's vision for the neighborhood. Until the zoning code is amended, substantial development within the TIB neighborhood is unlikely.

#### Co-Living Housing

In 2024, the State legislature adopted, and the Governor signed, [House Bill 1998](#). This bill requires that all cities, including Tukwila, permit co-living housing on any parcel where the underlying zoning permits 6 multifamily dwelling units or more. The bill defines co-living housing as:

*“A residential development with sleeping units that are independently rented and lockable and provide living and sleeping space, and residents share kitchen facilities with other sleeping units in the building.”*

These kinds of homes are often also called boarding homes, single room occupancies, or congregate living facilities. These kinds of homes were more common historically; in recent decades, restrictive zoning codes have resulted in their almost complete absence.

Co-living housing is a type of housing that can provide rental homes affordable to people with moderate to low incomes without requiring any public funding. Rents in newly constructed, market-rate co-living housing in the Puget Sound region can be affordable to people with incomes as low as 50 percent of area median income.

The bill also included restrictions on the quantity of parking that a City may require for co-living housing. The state-mandated deadline for adoption of the co-living housing regulations is December 31, 2025.

#### Cannabis-Related Businesses

The City Council has asked to explore zoning code amendments that would expand the areas that permit cannabis businesses.

### **FINDINGS AND SUMMARY OF PROPOSED CHANGES**

Staff finds that zoning code amendments are necessary to implement policies of the Comprehensive Plan and the community's vision for the Tukwila International Boulevard neighborhood, comply with state requirements for co-living housing, and to satisfy the request of the City Council to expand the areas that permit cannabis businesses.

The proposed code update would:

- Amend development standards within the Regional Commercial and Neighborhood Commercial Center zoning districts to permit greater residential and commercial densities, with increases to permitted heights and reductions to required setbacks and setbacks.



- Amend and combine the tables of permitted uses to increase clarity and readability and permit a greater variety of residential and mixed uses in the RC and NCC zoning districts while discouraging auto-oriented, heavy industrial, and low-density uses.
- Simplify the table of mandatory parking minimums and reduce or remove minimum parking requirements for certain uses.
- Establish a development incentive program, wherein greater development rights may be granted to property owners who agree to provide community benefits.
- Amend the design standards that apply to multi-family and mixed-use buildings and vehicular areas to provide greater clarity to applicants and comply with State requirements regarding “clear and objective” design review criteria.
- Amend various other sections of TMC Title 18 to reflect the substantive changes detailed above, including the definitions and landscaping chapters.
- Add a definition for Co-Living Housing and establish it as a permitted use in zoning districts that permit six (6) multi-family dwellings or more, in accordance with State requirements.
- Expand the zoning districts in which cannabis businesses may be permitted and adopt new safety standards for such businesses, in accordance with the request of the City Council.

Staff has held three meetings with the Planning Commission, where staff and Commission have reviewed the current zoning code and past planning projects in the TIB neighborhood, considered gaps between the zoning code and the goals and policies of the comprehensive plan, and workshopped proposed code amendments. The draft zoning code considered at this hearing represents the result of this collaborative process. At the meeting held on July 24<sup>th</sup>, the Planning Commission recommended changes to the proposal; those changes are reflected in the current version of the draft zoning code. Those changes include a reduction in requirements for residential transparency and weather protection, the addition of cornices as a design option, the inclusion of additional standards for outdoor lighting, edits to the definition of blank walls, and alternative pathways for compliance with the green building incentive option.

The draft code amendment package also no longer includes a tenant displacement program. At the July meeting, the Planning Commission expressed concern that the program could require cross-departmental collaboration and workshopping with the City Council. Staff agree that the program is best administered outside of the framework of the City’s zoning code and will work with other departments to ensure that the program is considered by the City Council at a later date.

### **ANALYSIS AND CRITERIA**

TMC 18.82.030 requires that staff reports for proposed amendments to development regulations address five listed criteria. As criteria pertain to both privately initiated code amendment applications and those proposed by staff, some criteria may not be as relevant for all code amendment proposals. Criteria and staff responses are listed below.

#### ***1. An evaluation of the application materials.***

##### **Staff Response:**

These proposals to amend the City’s zoning code are staff initiated.

*TIB Project:* These amendments are proposed by Staff to resolve conflicts between the City’s goals and policies and the City’s regulations. Tukwila’s Comprehensive Plan, along with other neighborhood planning documents such as the “Tukwila International Boulevard Revitalization and Urban Renewal Plan”, have long envisioned the adoption of zoning code amendments to help foster dense and

walkable development within the TIB neighborhood; however, the last time the City made major amendments to the development standards within the neighborhood was in 1995, 30 years ago. The existing regulations that govern development within the TIB area do not reflect the community's vision for the neighborhood. Staff have proposed these amendments to implement the vision that was expressed by the TIB community as recorded by the recently adopted 2024 Comprehensive Plan.

*Co-Living Housing:* These amendments are proposed by staff to bring the City's zoning code into compliance with state mandates, as adopted by the legislature via House Bill 1998.

*Cannabis Businesses:* These amendments are proposed by staff in response to interest and support from the City Council.

2. *Impact upon the Tukwila Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code.*

Staff Response:

The proposed zoning code updates are consistent with and do not require amendments to the City's Comprehensive Plan.

3. *Impact upon surrounding properties, if applicable.*

Staff Response:

*TIB Project:* Increasing the permitted development capacity within the RC and NCC zoning districts will likely increase the amount of infill development within the neighborhood over time. The scale of development is expected to align with that of other development in the neighborhood, including that of Tukwila Village and on parcels under the jurisdiction of the City of SeaTac. Most development that occurs because of these amendments would be required to install frontage improvements, resulting in improved streetscapes. The proposed standards would allow greater building heights and massing than is currently permitted. Any possible visual impacts are expected to be mitigated by design and frontage standards.

*Co-Living Housing:* Allowing co-living housing is not expected to present any impacts to any surrounding properties, as the scale of such development is expected to align with that of development already permitted in each of the zoning districts that will permit co-living housing.

*Cannabis Businesses:* Expanding the districts in which cannabis businesses may be permitted may result in the siting of these businesses in areas of the City that have not previously hosted them. While no specific impacts are expected to be generated by the businesses themselves, cannabis businesses have disproportionately been the targets of armed robberies and smash and grab burglaries. The impact of these crimes can extend to other nearby properties. To mitigate these potential impacts, the proposed amendments include the adoption of mandatory safety features for new cannabis businesses, including the installation of safety bollards, lighting, and shatter-resistant film on all ground level windows.

4. *Alternatives to the proposed amendment.*

Staff Response:

*TIB Project:* Alternatives to this proposal include no action, or changes that could result in less or more development capacity. It is the perspective of staff that the proposal reflects the desires of the community and establishes standards that are likely to result in development within the TIB area that aligns with the City's goals to create a dense, walkable, transit-oriented neighborhood, with community amenities, retail, and housing. This proposal reflects decades of planning studies on this topic, ranging from the *Tukwila International Boulevard Revitalization and Urban Renewal Plan* in 1999 to the *Tukwila International Boulevard – Implementing the Vision* document in 2017. The proposal was shaped and amended over the course of several months after three productive workshops with the Planning Commission in May, June, and July of 2025. Staff has received public comment from interested parties and amended the proposal as necessary to ensure that the proposed standards align with the goals of the project.

*Co-Living Housing:* Failure to update the Tukwila Municipal Code to comply with House Bill 1998 would result in the City's development code being out of compliance with state law, which could limit the City's ability to receive assistance from the State. The City's existing prohibitions on Co-Living Housing would become unenforceable on January 1st of 2026.

*Cannabis Businesses:* Alternatives to this proposal include no action, changes that would permit cannabis businesses in less or more areas of the City, or changes to the development standards specific to cannabis businesses. It is the perspective of staff that the proposal best reflects the stated desire of the City Council and provides the greatest mitigation of the potential safety impacts to neighboring properties that may result from an increase of cannabis businesses within the city.

Decision Criteria:

TMC 18.82.020 provides criteria for the final City Council decision on proposed code amendments. The Planning Commission should consider these criteria when determining whether to recommend that the Council adopt this proposal.

Decision criteria are as follows:

1. Is the amendment consistent with the Comprehensive Plan?
2. Does the amendment meet at least one of the following criteria:
  - a. Eliminates conflicts between TMC and the Comprehensive Plan; or
  - b. Accomplishes policy directives of the Council or Administration; or
  - c. Corrects an error or errors in the TMC.

**REQUESTED ACTION**

Staff requests that the Planning Commission forward a recommendation for adoption of these amendments to the City Council for further consideration.

A sample motion to initiate discussion on this topic is as follows:

**I move that the Planning Commission forward a recommendation to approve the zoning code amendments pertaining to the TIB project, co-living housing, and cannabis businesses, based on the findings and analysis provided in the Commission packet, to the City Council.**

This motion requires a second, after which the Commission may deliberate on the motion before voting.

**ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment 1: DRAFT Zoning Code Amendments