



## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** February 13, 2024

**TO:** Chair Adigweme and Planning Commissioners

**FROM:** Rebecca Kennedy, Deputy Director; Dominique Martinelli, Senior Long-Range Planner, Community Development Department

**RE:** **OUR VANCOUVER – Alternatives and Assumptions**

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### **Intent**

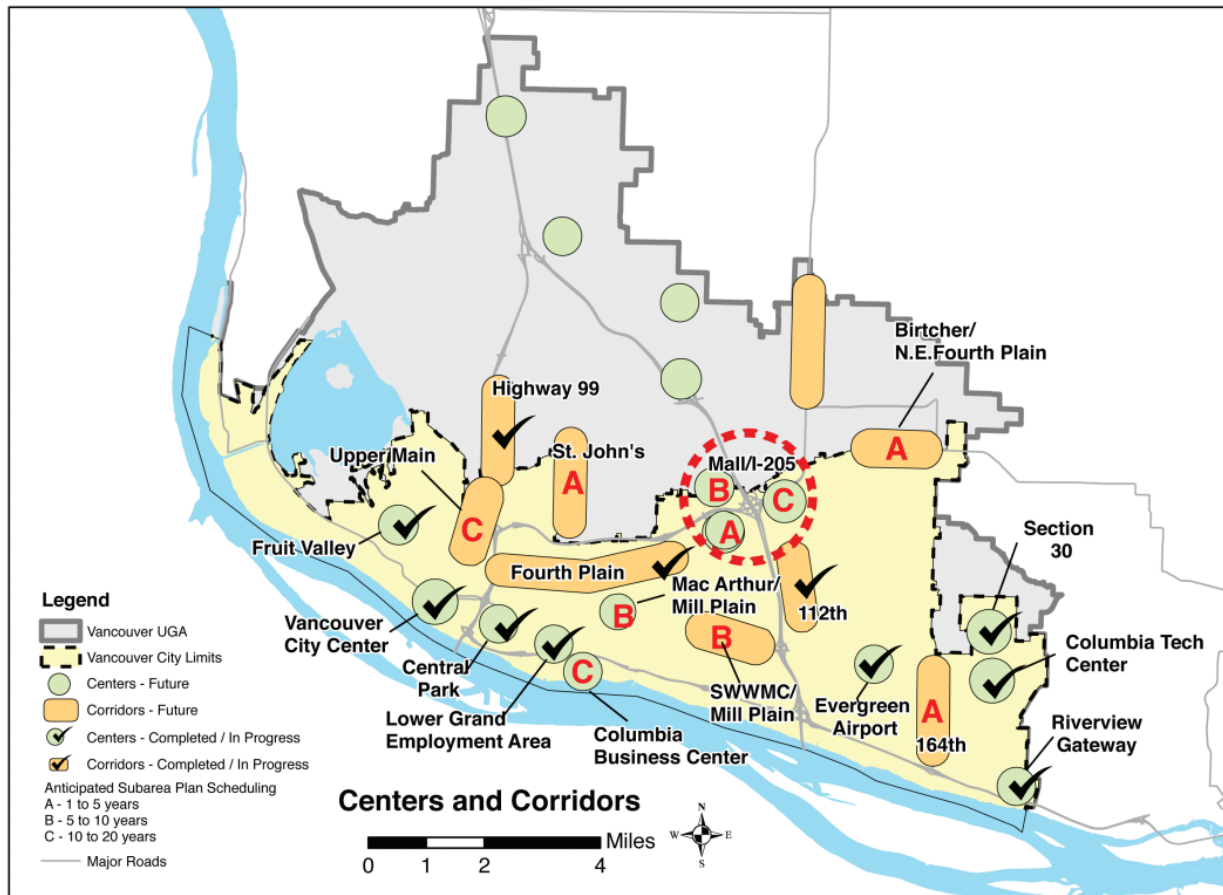
Provide Planning Commission with an overview of proposed data assumptions and inputs that will inform the development of three Land Use Alternatives for evaluation as part of the Comprehensive Plan update, including elements that will be common to each alternative.

### **Background**

The City of Vancouver's Comprehensive Plan provides the overall long-term vision and policy direction to manage the built and natural environment in Vancouver and provide necessary public facilities to achieve that vision. The City adopted its first comprehensive plan under Washington's Growth Management Act in 1994 (Chapter 36.70A RCW), with a major re-write occurring in 2004, and a less substantive update occurring most recently in 2011. The existing Comprehensive Plan builds its policy approach off of a Centers and Corridors strategy, which designates key areas where the City will grow and develop in the future, and an anticipated timeframe for these areas to develop on a short, medium and long term basis. The Centers and Corridors identified in this approach determine where the City undertakes more detailed subarea and district level planning. Since the initial adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 2004, the following sub-area plans have been adopted based on this broader overall strategy:

- Evergreen and Grand Commercial Corridors Strategy
- Fourth Plain Corridor Subarea Plan and Fourth Plain Forward Action Plan
- Lower Grand Employment Area Action Plan
- 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue Corridor Subarea Plan

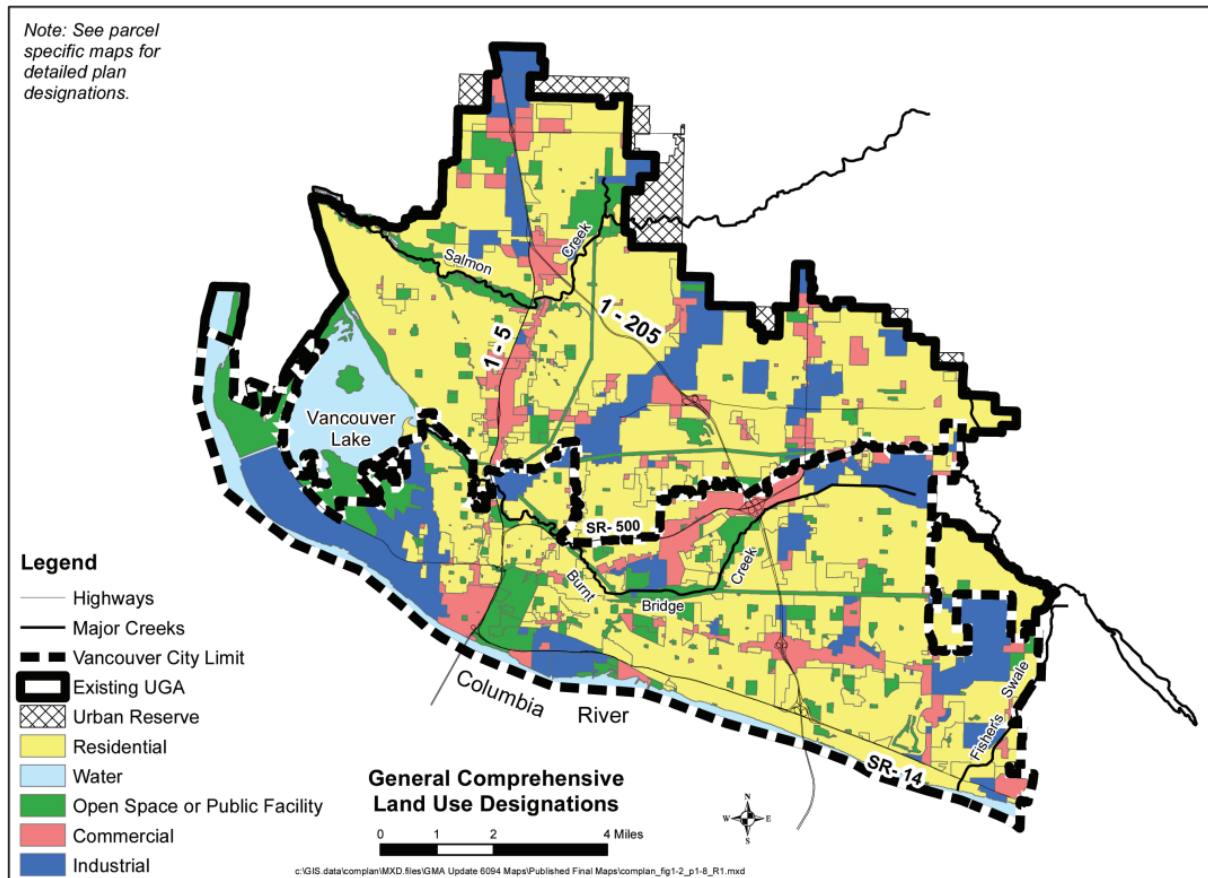
- Central Park Subarea Plan
- Fruit Valley Subarea Plan
- Heights District Plan
- Riverview Gateway Subarea Plan
- Section 30 Subarea Plan
- Vancouver City Center Vision Plan



**Figure 1-2.** Comprehensive land use map showing designated types and intensities of land use allowed throughout the City of Vancouver. Source: City of Vancouver GIS.

This strategy also informed the Land Use designations within the comprehensive land use map, which designates types and intensities of land use allowed throughout the City. The current map is broken down into five general designations – Residential (Urban Low Density and Urban High Density), Water, Open Space or Public Facility, Commercial/Mixed Use, and Industrial, which segments uses by geographic district. Seventeen specific zoning districts that the City utilizes for land use regulation within Vancouver Municipal Code (VMC) Title 20 are nested within these. In general, designations were based on the traditional Euclidian zoning model that aims to segment incompatible land uses based on perceived externalities and impacts, as was common with many Cities in the State of Washington and the country at large in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. As with many other Cities nationally, this pattern of development has both directly and indirectly contributed to sprawling land use patterns, auto dependency,

discrimination in access to housing, and increased energy usage and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG's) in our community. Given recent statewide legislation, Council policy direction on implementing 15-minute neighborhoods and complete streets, and a goal of net zero GHG emissions Citywide by 2040, it is necessary to explore alternative methods to regulate land use within our community. This includes creating designations and zoning districts that focus more on mixing and integrating land uses, providing flexibility, and allowing for a combination of market driven approaches and regulatory interventions where the private market doesn't deliver outcomes that are critical to the overall strategy and approach.



**Figure 1-6.** Comprehensive land use map showing designated types and intensities of land use allowed throughout the City of Vancouver.  
Source: City of Vancouver GIS

One of the key aspects of the process of developing a new Comprehensive Plan update will be the development of three distinct Land Use Alternatives to evaluate. Each will propose a new growth and development strategy that responds to current needs and reflects of the overall plan vision that was established for **OUR VANCOUVER** during the first phase of the project. The community vision statement reads as follows:

*“Vancouver is an equitable and prosperous community, which ensures that all residents, businesses and organizations benefit from the growth and advancement we make together. Vancouver will be recognized for our quality of life, as evidenced by affordable*

*housing in vibrant, safe and walkable neighborhoods, access to jobs and economic opportunity for all, and resilience to the impacts of climate change.”*

### **Alternative Components**

Each of the three land use alternatives will identify the **intensity** of land uses throughout the city and the Vancouver Urban Growth Area (VUGA), as well as define **nodes** of future growth and development and specific **place types**, such as commercial corridors, neighborhood centers, mixed-use centers, etc. that are applied within each node. A breakdown of these three elements are as follows:

#### **Intensity**

- **Intensity.** An assigned intensity rating of low, medium, or high will be designated for all areas of the City. This is intended to capture the generalized scale of development that is envisioned for future growth and development in the community. Intensity will be assigned on a parcel level basis. The policy development phase will identify measures to ease transition between areas of differing intensities where necessary.
- **Shift.** The degree of change envisioned from baseline conditions. How much are various portions of the City proposing to change from what exists today?

#### **Nodes**

Each of the three alternatives will feature *nodes* of activity, where the majority of growth and development will occur over the 20-year time horizon. These areas will be examined in greater detail and specificity to achieve stated outcomes.

- **Variation.** Each of the three alternatives may contain the same nodes or have nodes that are entirely different from one alternate to the next.
- **Type.** Each of the three alternatives will apply a place types (see next section) to each node.
- **Extent.** Each node will have a clearly demarcated geographic extent that defines the boundaries of the area.
- **Vision.** Each node will include a brief vision statement that identifies its intent, and what it's trying to achieve.

#### **Place Type**

Each node will be assigned a place type that includes the following elements:

- **Goal.** A description of the stated intent of a type. What is this designation trying to achieve, and how does it create a sense of place?
- **Form.** A description of the form and scale of buildings intended for this type, and other key design elements that need to be emphasized to communicate the vision. What types of buildings and structures will generally be present?
- **Use.** A statement of the typical land uses that are envisioned to be present in this type. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of permitted uses but will include uses that are incompatible with the defined goal. In general, more uses will be allowed in areas within a higher assigned intensity. Lower intensity

districts will have greater restrictions on allowed uses, while higher intensity districts will have fewer restrictions and will incorporate and expand upon allowed uses in lower intensity areas. The only exception to this general rule will be the clear separation of higher intensity industrial and residential districts.

- **Public Space.** A brief description of the type and quality of public and open spaces that are available in this type.

### Assumptions

The determinations that are made in each of the three Land Use Alternatives regarding **Intensity, Nodes** and **Place Types** will be based on available data sources and a set of assumptions derived from this data as well as guiding City policy direction. Being clear and transparent about the decisions (assumptions) and available data that inform the land use alternative base model is central to establishing a sense of shared understanding and ownership with Community Partners, community-based organizations (CBO’s), Planning Commission and City Council, as well as the general public. These assumptions will largely inform the development of a site selection model, which will be utilized as a quantitative measure to help guide the selection of the geographic extent and location of nodes. The model will be used in conversations with City Staff, Community Partners, and community-based organizations and the broader community to help inform where the City will concentrate growth and development. Each of the assumptions highlighted in this section will remain consistent between the three alternatives – for example, there won’t be a different population forecast and housing target assumption between Alternative A and Alternative B. Below is an overview of the inputs into the model, and the key assumptions that will drive it.

### Population

The Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) provides official state and local population estimates and projections for use in the allocation of funds, growth management, and other planning functions. Below is a summary of official population estimates from 2000-2023 to understand Vancouver’s population growth over the last few decades. Population growth and household formation are the primary drivers of demand for housing. The rate of population growth and household characteristics heavily influence the demand for specific housing types.

	2000	2010	2023	Change, 200-2023	% Change	Annualized growth rate
<b>City of Vancouver</b>	143,560	161,791	199,600	56,040	39%	1.4%
Clark County	345,238	425,363	527,400	182,162	53%	1.9%

Vancouver and the region have grown substantially over the last two decades and are projected to continue to grow over the 20-year planning period. From 2000 to 2023, Vancouver’s population grew by just over 56,000 residents, or 39%, which works out to

an annualized compounded growth rate of 1.4% growth per year. Clark County has experienced higher population growth than the City of Vancouver largely due to suburban housing development in greenfield areas outside of the city, particularly in unincorporated areas to the north, east and west.

Based on this context, the following is assumed:

- A 2045 forecast of **281,544** persons is assumed for planning purposes within current Vancouver city limits. This is based on general assumptions that Clark County will grow to **698,416**, persons which the Washington Office of Financial Management has projected is most likely, and that the City of Vancouver will maintain its current share of that growth. This forecast value does not include population increases associated with annexation.

### **Housing**

Along with assumed population growth, housing need will be one of the biggest determinants and drivers of growth within existing land resources and constraints over the next 20 years. In 2021, the Washington Legislature changed the way communities are required to plan for housing. House Bill 1220 (HB 1220) amended the Growth Management Act to require local governments to “plan for and accommodate” set numbers of housing units affordable to a set range of income levels provided by the Department of Commerce. In order to provide for housing needs and address affordability shortfalls, and assuming there will be an average of 2.3 persons per housing unit and 7.4% of units will be unoccupied, City staff and consultants estimate 38,128 units additional housing units beyond current levels will be needed in current city limits by 2045. Under the Department of Commerce estimates required under HB 1220, approximately 13,000 to 19,000 of the total housing units to be planned for and accommodated will need to be affordable to households earning 80% of area median income or less, and approximately 2,500 of the housing units will need to be permanent supportive housing.

It is important to note that the City is not directly responsible for the construction of new housing, but is required by state law to develop regulations, plans and policies that allow for and encourage private market delivery of the overall housing target. One of the most significant actions the City will take to demonstrate compliance with this requirement is developing land use regulations and zoning designations that provide enough capacity to reasonably achieve the identified target.

The other key housing assumption included in the model is allowing for a minimum of at least four (4) residential units per lot on all properties where the model assumes housing will be an allowed use, and at least six (6) residential units for all lots within ¼ mile of high-capacity transit stations (which includes C-Tran’s vine system). This is in accordance with requirements under House Bill 1110 and will provide for residential growth outside nodes. The redevelopment assumption rate for how many parcels currently zoned single-family will convert into middle housing may vary between each of the three alternatives.

## Land Use

As mentioned above, each of the Alternatives will need to be able to demonstrate the ability to reasonably accommodate the community wide housing allocation target, as well as employment, commercial and retail space to support population growth within existing land resources. To meet policy direction established by City Council within the 2023-2029 Strategic Plan, the alternatives will need to account for the development of 15-minute neighborhoods. This strategy will require access to a variety of amenities, essential services and places, and access to public transportation options within a 15-minute walk of each node where new housing growth will occur, as well as the location of existing housing stock. To facilitate this, each alternative will need to *define* a 15-minute neighborhood by establishing a minimum number of services and amenities that are required to meet the definition. The list of services and amenities that compose a 15-minute neighborhood have not been defined, but this work is underway and part of ongoing community engagement efforts.

Due to deficiencies within the County's Vacant Buildable Lands Model (VBLM), the land use alternatives will likely need to develop a methodology that assumes greater capacity for various uses than what the County model allocates to the City.

## Employment

Over the last fifteen years, Vancouver has added over 1 million square feet each of new office and retail space, and roughly 4 million square feet of industrial capacity. Given finite amounts of land, which are expected to accommodate a large share of Clark County's employment growth in coming years, policy decisions around efficient land use are becoming more critical. In recent years, Vancouver's commercial real estate trends have closely tracked Clark County and the broader Portland metro area, with several gaps closing for the city in the three years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, office, retail, and industrial vacancies have climbed in the four-county area, while Vancouver's commercial vacancies remained lower in all categories. In 2023 year-to-date the region has over 11 percent of its office space vacant, compared to only 5 percent in Vancouver. While the vacancy rate across the region has continued to increase since 2020, Vancouver and Clark County's office markets have remained below average and generally recovered quickly from pandemic-related impacts.

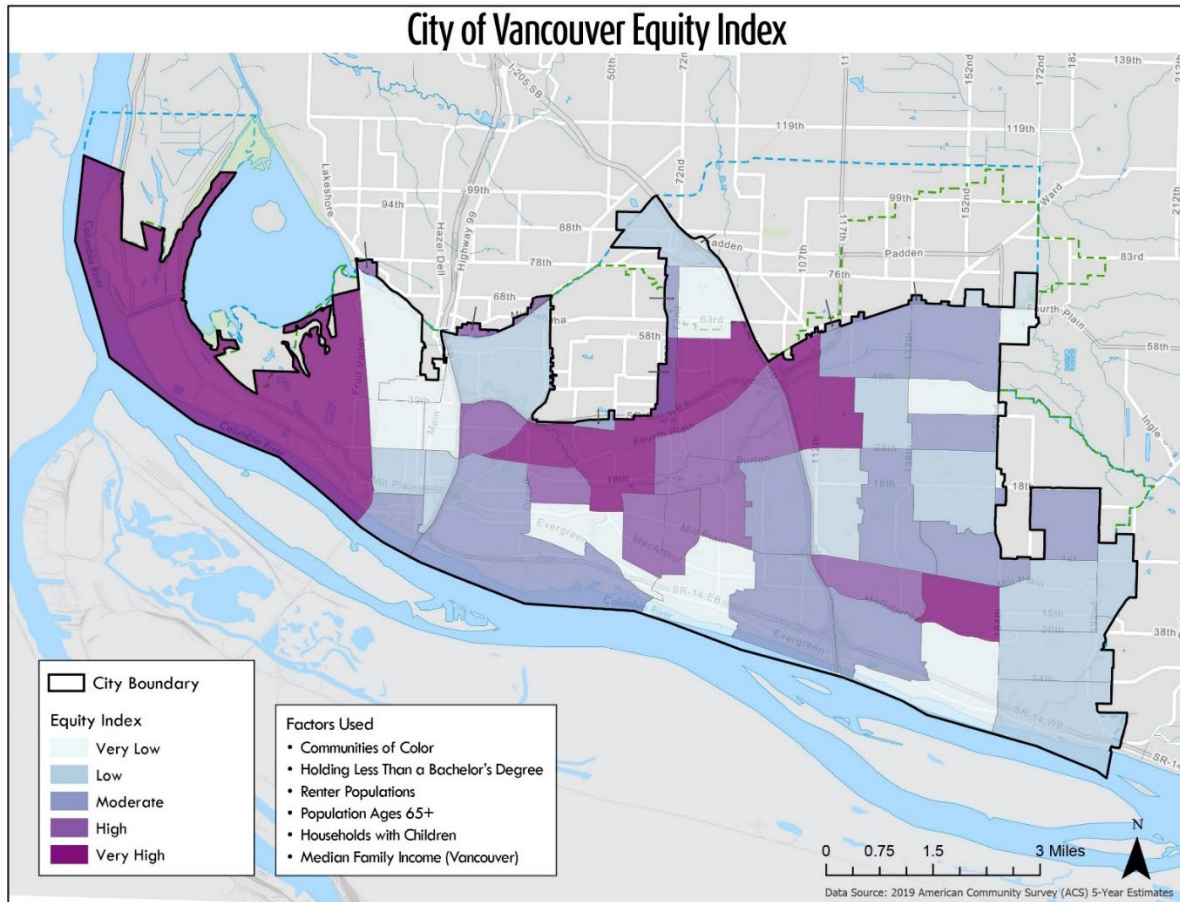
During its Comprehensive Plan Update process, Clark County established an assumption of 1 new job for each new unit of housing that is produced as part of its Comprehensive Plan Update. The City will likely assume a slightly higher ration in order to support future goals related to jobs-housing balance, GHG reductions, and 15-minute neighborhoods. One option under consideration is to continue using our existing jobs-to-housing target of 1:17 to 1.

## Equity & Inclusion

In order to ensure policy decisions are being delivered in an equitable manner that reduces displacement and targets investment in an equitable manner, the City's Equity and Displacement Risk indices will be used as a **context layer** to inform each of the land use alternatives. It is anticipated that this will occur by informing the scale and intensity of new developments that occur within areas with census tracts that have varying Equity



and Displacement risk values, rather than an input that constrains outright the concentration of new development in areas with high sensitivity.

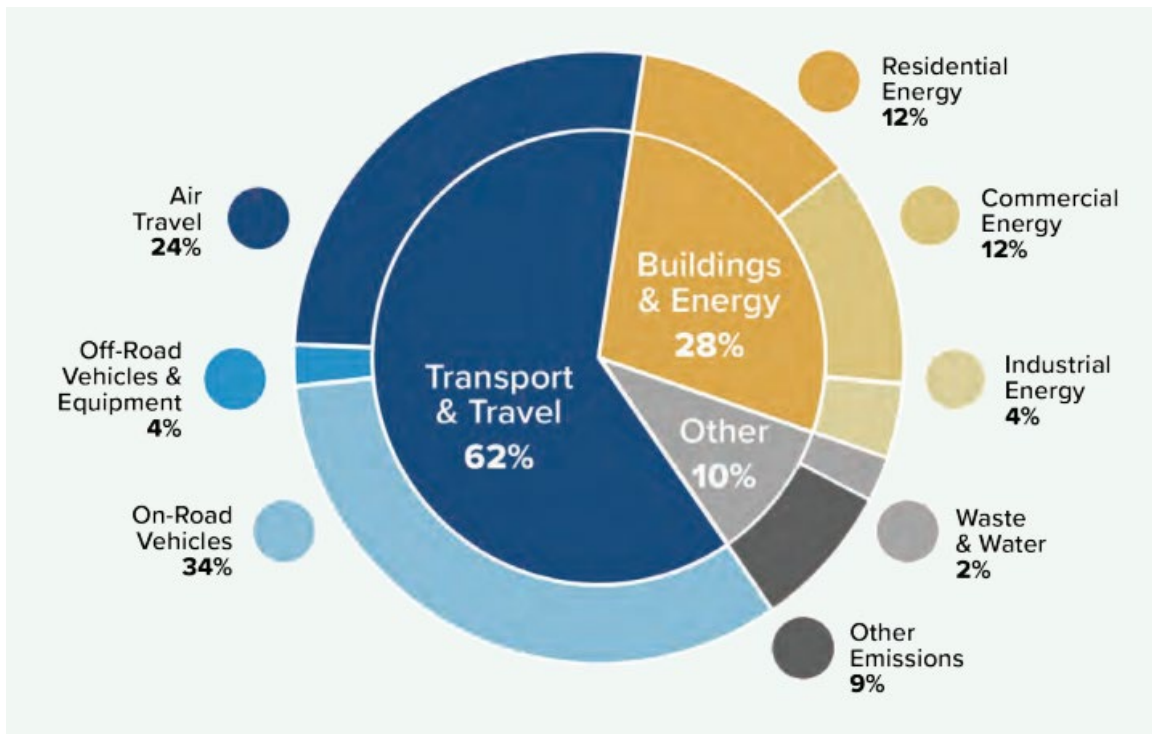


**Figure 2: Equity Index**

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

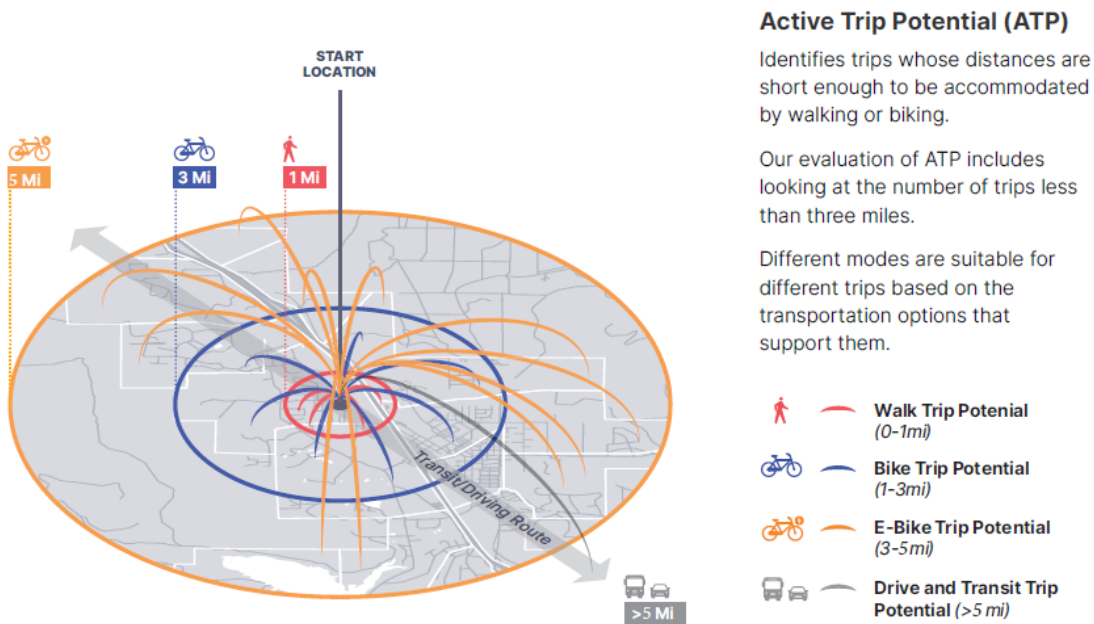
Each of the alternatives will assume reductions in community wide greenhouse gas emissions (GHG's) that lead to achieving carbon neutrality by 2040, to meet policy direction established by City Council in the Climate Action Framework (CAF). The Land Use Alternatives will only be able to model potential impacts on community wide GHG emissions through changes in land use, and how they impact travel demand and behavior (on road vehicles represent 34% of total community wide GHG's based on 2019 citywide inventory), as well as potential assumptions around energy reductions in the construction of new housing and commercial spaces by 2045 (a maximum of 28%). These modeled changes will only impact new housing units, jobs, and commercial space added over the 20 year timeline, rather than modeling the impacts of policy outcomes on existing buildings and structures.





**Figure 3: 2019 snapshot of Community Emissions (Climate Action Framework)**

This will be accomplished primarily through utilizing an *Active Trip Potential Analysis* as a context layer to inform the siting of new collocated housing, employment and commercial uses. The Active Trip Potential Analysis identifies areas of Vancouver where people are already taking short trips more frequently and where there is the strongest potential to see a reduction in vehicle trips if supportive infrastructure were available for people to choose active modes of travel.



**Figure 4: Active Trip Potential Graphic**

Active trip potential analysis will be conducting for walking and rolling trips, bike trips, E-bike trips and transit trips.

### **Critical Areas**

Critical Areas will be used as a **constraint** layer – meaning that areas with Critical Area designations will not assume any share of new housing, commercial space, or job growth. Critical Areas designated in the model include:

- **Geologic Hazard Areas:** areas that because of their susceptibility to erosion, sliding, earthquake, or other geological events, are not suited to siting commercial, residential, or industrial development consistent with public health or safety concerns.
- **Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas:** Areas that directly and indirectly impact fish and wildlife habitat quality, quantity, and connectivity to support long term, viable populations of fish and wildlife species. These areas are protected by placing buffers from shorelines, lakes, streams, rivers, and riparian areas.
- **Frequently Flooded Areas:** Lands within the floodplain which have at least a 1 percent or greater chance of flooding in any given year or are within areas that flood due to high groundwater. These areas can include streams, rivers, lakes, coastal areas, wetlands, and areas where high groundwater forms ponds on the ground surface.
- **Wetlands:** Areas that are inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater that serve many important beneficial functions, which generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas. Protection is designated by placing a buffer from these areas in accordance with Washington Department of Ecology Standards.

Critical Aquifer Recharge Area (CARAs) are defined as areas that have a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water. Given the entire City of Vancouver is designated as a CARA, this will not be included as a modeled assumption in the Land Use Alternatives. However, inclusion of specific Public Water Supply wells may be included as a constraint feature in the model.

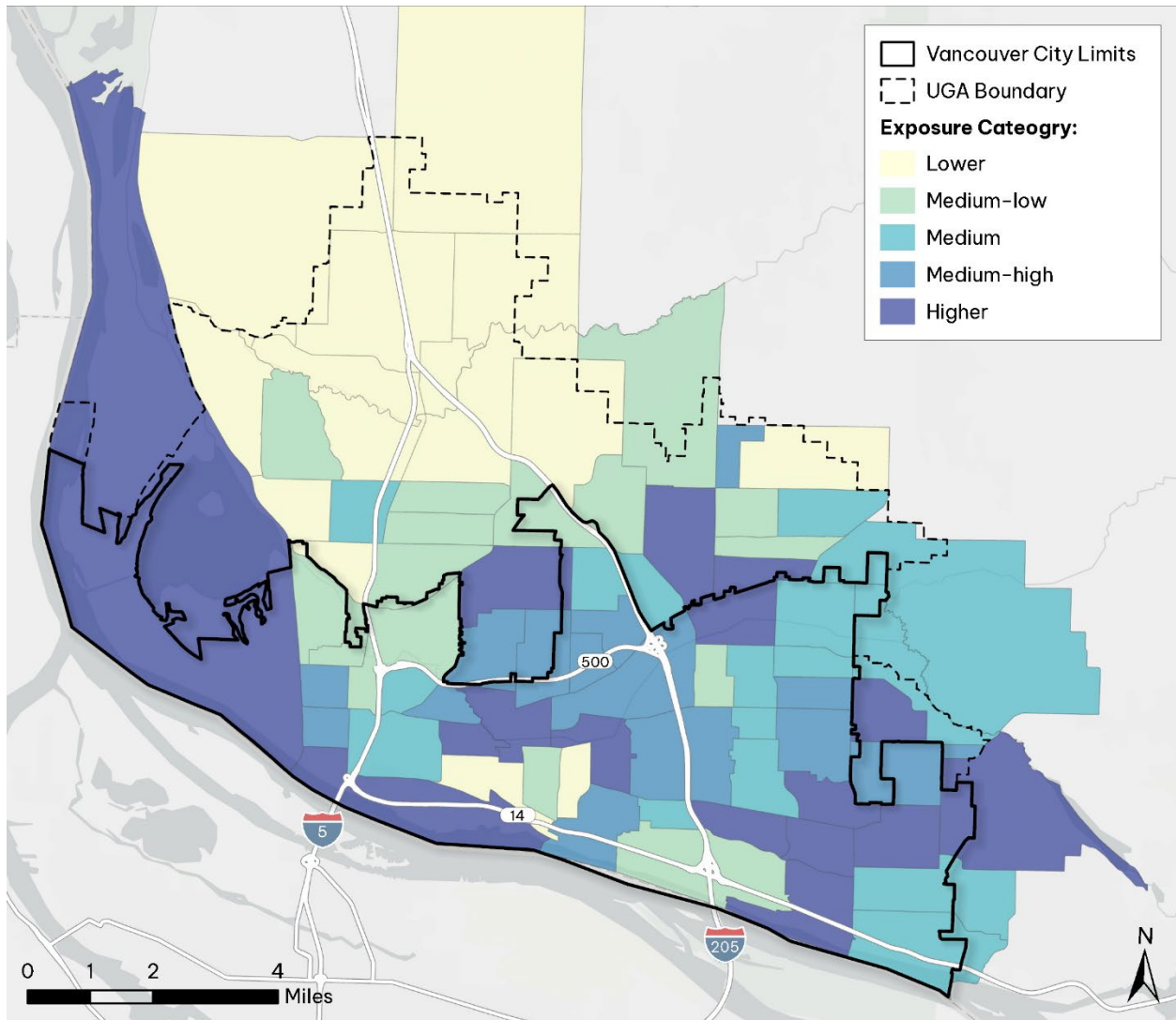
### **Climate Vulnerability**

Climate vulnerability is defined as the sum of exposure to a changing climate, and the capacity of the community and place to cope with impacts of a changing climate. Two separate indices will be used as **context** layers to inform the impacts of placing new housing, employment or commercial space in areas where people or the environment is inherently more sensitive to the impacts of a changing climate. The first index that will be used in the model is a *Climate Exposure Index*, which shows where exposure to heat, flooding/precipitation, and air quality/fire/smoke **overlap**, highlighting where people may experience a compounding impact of multiple climate exposures. The index consists of the following components:

- **Heat Exposure** - Impacts of extreme heat waves and hotter conditions may be more intensely felt in certain areas due to the urban environment. Higher

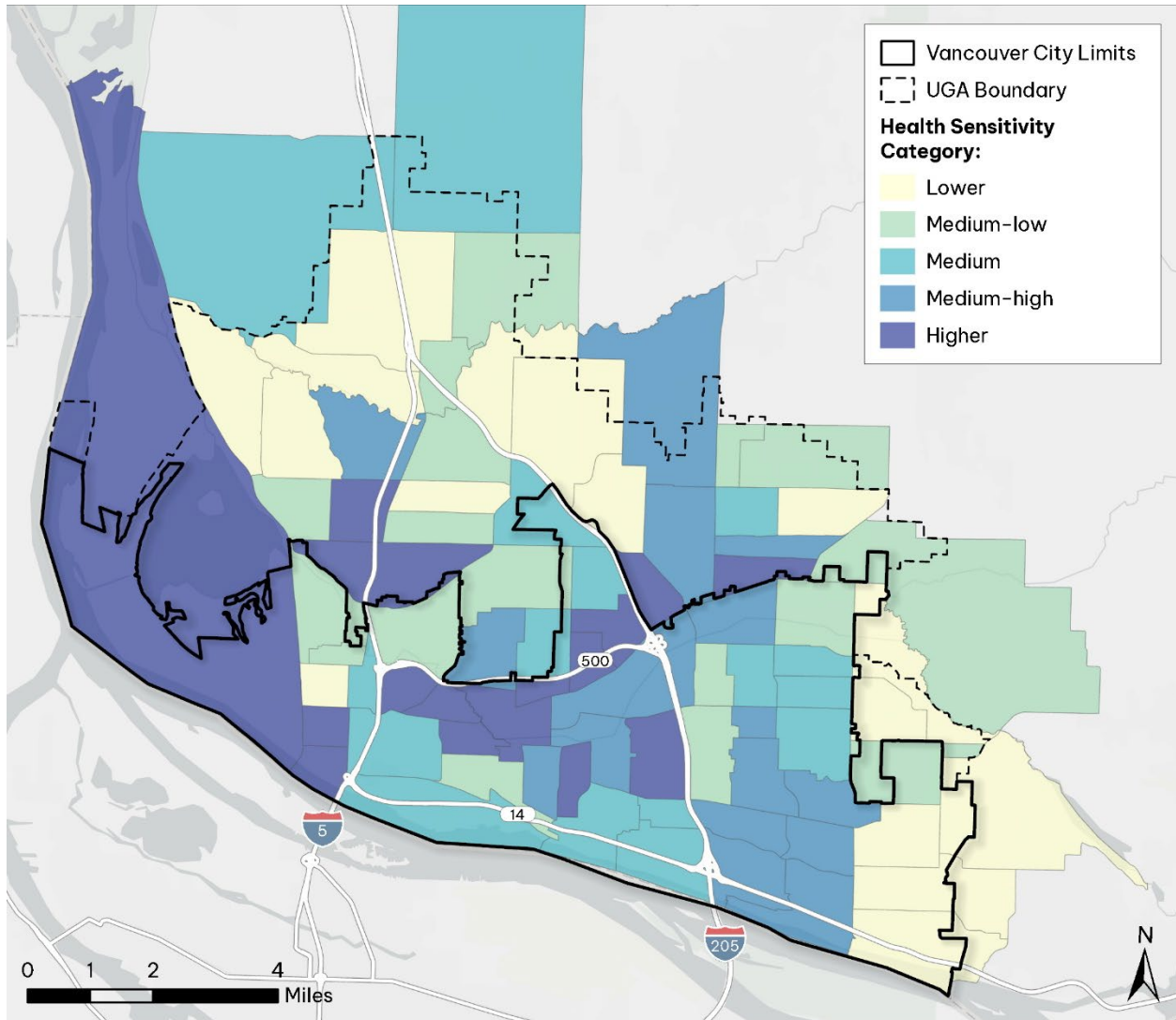
concentrated impervious areas are harder to cool and have less tree shade to help mitigate heat.

- **Flooding / Precipitation Exposure** - Highlights areas where extreme precipitation events may have a disproportionately strong impact relative to other parts of the Vancouver area.
- **Air Quality / Fire / Smoke Exposure** - Shows where there are existing areas of poor air quality and higher fire risk, and where the impacts of future smoke and fire conditions may be compounded.



**Figure 5: Climate Exposure Index**

The second index used in the model is a Health Sensitivity Index, which shows where there are higher shares of the population with overlapping health sensitivities to extreme climate exposures, and highlights potential community health disparities. The index is comprised of health indicators obtained from CDC data that include information on Asthma, Coronary Heart Disease, Chronic Pulmonary Obstructive Disorder (COPD), Diabetes, Poor Physical Health, Poor Mental Health, and Low Insurance Access.



**Figure 6: Health Sensitivity Index**

### **Parks, Transportation and Infrastructure**

Each of the alternatives will feature inputs for Parks, Transportation and Infrastructure that serve as a **context layer** to inform where new housing, commercial space, and employment growth should be focused in each of the alternatives. The data sources and layers that will inform them are as follows:

- The location of existing and planned park facilities as defined in the Parks Comprehensive Plan. The 2031 plan outlines a level of service standard of a 10-minute walk or roll (standard utilized in Parks Comprehensive Plan) for community members to access a public park or open space.
- The City's modal networks as defined in the Transportation System Plan, which designate the City's policy framework for investing in new networks for walking and rolling infrastructure, Bicycle and Small Mobility (BSM), transit and freight networks. Transportation and Land Use are highly interrelated – the ability to successfully implement 15-minute neighborhoods is dependent on collocating new housing and retail spaces in places where there will be targeted

programmatic investment in pedestrian and multimodal infrastructure. Commercial and industrial growth is highly dependent on freight access.

- The location and capacity of existing and planned water, sewer, wastewater, and electrical infrastructure.
- The location of new capital investments that support the growth of new housing and development.

Additionally, each of the alternatives will feature an analysis that looks at how they reinforce the chapter vision statements that were co-created with the Community Partners and technical staff and informed by existing City policy guidance. Each of the Alternatives may emphasize certain elements or key themes more highly than others or maintain an even balance between all the vision statement themes.

### **Next Steps**

Following a Joint Planning Commission and City Council work session on April 1, three discrete alternatives will be developed in partnership with the Community Partners and presented to Council and Planning Commission during subsequent work sessions. Other key stakeholders from equity priority communities, community-based organizations, topic-specific stakeholder groups and the community at large will be engaged in developing the alternatives, and the project team will compile and report back on the outcomes, findings, takeaways, and key tradeoffs between the alternatives. Each alternative will reflect Council's core policy priorities of safety, equity and climate action and the community vision statement. Based on the feedback and input received, the project team will develop a proposed preferred alternative for Council, Planning Commission and community review. The project team anticipates Council endorsement of a preferred alternative in September of this year. The preferred alternative will then be evaluated through an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process and become the basis for the policy development phase of the project and the re-write of Vancouver Municipal Code Title 20 - Land Use and Development. It is likely that the preferred alternative will contain components of each of the three alternatives in response to community input, rather than a discrete selection of one over the others.

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