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Kirkland redevelopment spurs plenty of comment at hearing

By Peyton Whitely
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Deciding how to redevelop Kirkland's Parkplace shopping center won't be easy.

More than 60 people signed up Thursday evening to voice their views on plans for the city's main downtown shopping area.

Spilling into hallways at City Hall, they waited to address the city Planning Commission.

People offered primarily opposing views: that the development proposals, including structures of eight to 11 stories, would irrevocably destroy the city's character; and that the city's future hinges on whether it embraces such change.

Seattle's Touchstone Corp. is offering two proposals for the development at Sixth Street and Central Way.

One would allow buildings of up to eight stories, with a 1.8 million-square-foot mix of office, retail and restaurant space. Approval would necessitate changes to the city's comprehensive plan, and the city would have to grant a variance to build higher than its five-story height limit.

The other proposal stays within Kirkland's existing guidelines; it would include buildings up to five stories and 1.5 million square feet, most of it for office space.

The Planning Commission has suggested a third alternative: some lower buildings of two or three stories and some up to 11 stories, said Angela Ruggeri, city senior planner.

"There will be more study," she said, largely for environmental reasons, if the taller concept progresses.

Douglas Howe, Touchstone president, said the proposals were "the result of 1 ½ years of thoughtful collaboration." He pointed out that the company is "about to invest nearly \$1 billion in Kirkland."

More than 20 speakers agreed with Howe's ideas, citing reasons such as a stronger tax base for the city and expanded shopping destinations.

"I love the community," said Sam Adams, who lives in the Juanita area and supports plans for mixed-use development. He spoke about taking his kids to T.G.I. Friday's restaurant and Parkplace movies, businesses that occupy the current Parkplace center.

"For this to be an office complex, I think it would be a big mistake," he said.

Jim Hitter, who lives in a condominium near Parkplace, argued that allowing the eight-story mixed-use redevelopment would revitalize the downtown area and make it truly functional.



"I walked here," said Hitter of the hearing at City Hall. "Every day I don't get in my car, that seems to add a day at the end of my life," said Hitter.

Nearly a dozen opponents were equally insistent that Touchstone's proposals would scar Kirkland.

Brenda Klos said the proposals threaten her family's plans to remain, and possibly retire, in Kirkland. She spoke about height and setback variances requested by Touchstone: "I'm opposed to granting the variance. I'm most fearful the project would forever change the character of the city."

The Planning Commission has scheduled a second hearing on the Parkplace proposals, and two smaller related projects, at 7 p.m. June 26 at Kirkland City Hall, 123 Fifth Ave.

The Planning Commission expects to make a recommendation to the Kirkland City Council, which will make a final decision on the proposals at a public meeting later in the year. No date has been set for the City Council decision.

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