

SAMMAMISH NOW

September 19, 2019

King County Executive and Local Leaders Celebrate Sammamish Town Center Vision

“A great part of being County Executive is being able to work closely with our cities to build great and unique communities. Sammamish developed a plan for an even stronger community, and I am here tonight to support the vision of a Town Center.”

With those introductory remarks, King County Executive Dow Constantine helped continue the festive mood established by Emcee John Curley and other speakers as about 120 people came together Sunday evening (9/15) to celebrate and demonstrate their support for the Sammamish Town Center project.

The “Taste of the Town” event, personally catered by renowned chef Tom Douglas under a large canopy adjacent to Sammamish City Hall, was hosted by the Sammamish Chamber of Commerce and sponsored by Innovation Realty Partners and Pillar Properties, the firms developing the Sammamish Town Center project.

Many business and community leaders were present including current City Council Members Pam Stuart, Jason Ritchie and Ramiro Valderrama, and former Mayors Don Gerend, Tom Vance, Kathy Huckabay and Bob Keller. Current City Council Members Tom Hornish, Christie Malchow, Karen Moran and Chris Ross were invited but did not attend.

The location adjacent to the Sammamish Commons was appropriate for a celebration of a vision formally adopted by the City and in the making for more than 10 years. A place described by Curley, a former Sammamish City Council Member, as the answer to questions like “What is the center of Sammamish? Where do people gather? Where do people talk? That’s the vision of building a Town Center. A place where people connect and memories are made.”

Sammamish Chamber Vice President Julio Richburg welcomed everyone to the event and described the Chamber as an advocate for business and the community. He noted that the business community includes more than 4,000 home-based businesses, including many founded by people who moved to Sammamish to bring their enterprises here.

“We at the Chamber are committed to a vibrant economy and a vibrant community,” Richburg said.

County Executive Constantine said, “The values underlying the Town Center Plan are a great example of our region’s future blueprint – to grow wisely and sustainably while protecting the incredible beauty of this place, and our strong quality of life.”

“This approach of this project is good for the environment,” Constantine continued. “It’s great for trails and open space. It envisions a central hub with more trail connections for pedestrians and bicyclists, for recreation and commuting. It creates new public gathering places – like the one we are in now.”

Constantine also noted that the Town Center would create more housing choices “so people can afford to live in the community where they work or to stay in the place where they were raised. It will give seniors the option to remain where they built their lives and their families.”

He said the project’s compact development “will enable people to do without a car, decreasing carbon emissions that contribute to climate change, while increasing affordability.”

And, Constantine said, “This project will be great for transit.”

“As King County Executive, I want to tell you that as the phases of the Town Center are completed, appropriate and adequate transit service must and will follow,” Constantine emphasized. “This can be the catalyst for Sammamish to finally become a transit-oriented community.”

“As your county executive and partner, that’s the future I am committed to working towards. We are building sustainable, welcoming communities with great schools, great parks, and great mobility, while protecting the quality of life unique to each of our cities, and unique to Sammamish.”

The emphasis on transit by Constantine, a board member of Sound Transit and overseer of King County Metro, served as a fitting transition to the remarks by Matt Samwick, operating manager of Innovation Realty Partners.

“We are pleased to announce tonight that we are committed to constructing a state-of-the-art multimodal transit hub in the Town Center,” Samwick said. “It will be a place which can accommodate a park and ride lot, serve mass transit and ride-share, and will connect to Sammamish’s walking and biking trails. With the addition of more transit and the transit hub, the rightful concerns over traffic will be largely and efficiently mitigated.”

Samwick thanked all the local officials who had a role in creating and beginning to implement the Town Center Plan that “tackles the many issues of an ever-increasing population in a way that protects the environment, reduces the burden on municipalities, and provides services, amenities and housing choices that promote diversity and harmony, as well as providing a great place to live.”

Samwick noted that his company's efforts to aggregate property for the Town Center began in 2014 and the final piece was acquired just last month, bringing the total to nearly 90 acres.

"The first phase of the Town Center will bring housing choices and amenities long overdue to Sammamish. Ace Hardware will return," Samwick said. "Much needed social retail, including restaurants, bars and other gathering places, will open on the plateau. We are looking to include commercial space, medical offices and other services. Much needed housing choices will come to life in the form of varied apartments and town homes."

He said that future phases will include a Merrill Gardens to enable seniors in Sammamish to age in place. Samwick also noted that in addition to the benefits of transit, a regional parking system will allow people "to park once and become pedestrians. Imagine how much Sammamish's already strong quality of life will improve if we can make it a more walkable community."

"The Town Center will give people their time back. The ability to not have to travel off the plateau to shop, dine or do other things will be a true gift. Imagine being able to watch the Seahawks on Monday Night Football rather than spending an hour in the car wishing your radio was a TV while you run a necessary errand. Time is a precious resource and the Town Center can and will give it back."

Former Mayors Huckabay and Gerend were the concluding speakers, giving a joint presentation on how the City acquired land for the City Commons and surrounding area "and how it became a major benefit for the future Town Center and the citizens of Sammamish." This included purchases of 10 acres where City Hall and the Library now stand, 20 acres for the lower Commons, nine acres where the Sammamish YMCA is now located, a gift of 35 acres from Mary Pigott that is now Big Rock Park, and a recent purchase of 10 acres across from Big Rock Park.

They also described the extensive City efforts to create the vision, plan, development zone and regulations, subareas for the mixed-use vision, and the "green spine to create a walkable connection throughout the Town Center and to the Commons."

They noted that a moratorium on development while the Town Center plan was developed, followed by the Great Recession, stalled progress. But a recovering economy and the land aggregation efforts of STCA, LLC, "made it possible to implement that vision we had so many years ago - a walkable Town Center that joins seamlessly with the Sammamish Commons and Big Rock Park."

"We need to remember that the future starts now," Don Gerend concluded. "Let's be proactive and deliver to our citizens what they asked for over 10 years ago, and in so doing support our retail, commercial and home businesses. What an exciting time for the City of Sammamish and the Puget Sound region to aggressively embrace the future. Again, thank you for coming and we look forward to walking."