

# City of Mill Creek Strategic Plan

*Creating our Vision for Mill Creek's Future*

## Executive Summary

The City of Mill Creek prepared a strategic plan to identify important actions it will need to take to address pressing community issues. The strategic plan is a big-picture document directing City efforts and resources toward a clearly defined vision for its future. This Executive Summary document summarizes the vision, goals and objectives of the strategic plan, and includes an action matrix and schedule designed to target Council action in multiple areas. The actions respect the larger community picture, reflecting policy direction and vision as provided in the comprehensive plan and based on broad community participation in the plan's development. For more detailed information, please reference the full strategic plan document.

Successful implementation of the strategic plan will ensure Mill Creek is well positioned to anticipate and respond to change while honoring those essential characteristics that make it a unique and desirable place in which to live and do business. Adoption of the strategic plan will also set the City Council on a course to address the community's fiscal condition and invest in specific actions to maintain what Mill Creek residents value most.

### Vision for Mill Creek's Future

The strategic plan's vision builds on Mill Creek's comprehensive plan goals and policies and reflects guidance from the City Council and from the community's response to this strategic planning process. It provides a vision for Mill Creek in the year 2030. It incorporates the community's priorities and applies them to a desired future state the strategic plan seeks to achieve. The vision is as follows:

**Mill Creek is a safe place.**

**It continues to feel like a small town while still benefiting from the metropolitan areas surrounding it.**

**The City maintains high development and environmental standards to ensure that its physical environment is a cut above what might be expected elsewhere and that its natural beauty is retained or enhanced.**

**Residents enjoy their walkable community, where people stroll during their leisure hours and have opportunities to interact with others.**

**It provides some local employment for those who want to work locally - but not in the form of heavy industry, transport or warehousing.**

Mill Creek acknowledges the needs of those who reside within its urban growth area as well, anticipating that they may at some point be city residents enjoying the same living experience as those within city limits today.

## Goals and Objectives

A plan is only as good as its implementation. Below are some of the community's strategic planning goals and objectives, which will provide a specific roadmap for the plan's implementation.

The following goals are derived from the City's comprehensive plan, results from the public outreach conducted during this project, and indications from the City Council on their preference for fiscal prudence. They address the issues motivating this strategic plan, build on its assumptions and reflect direction embedded in the plan's elements. **Goals** are high-level and inspirational. **Objectives** are more specific and finite. Attaining the objectives should lead to goal achievement. They set milestones for the City's progress, identifiable landmarks that define and meter the City's course. Each of the objectives identified here relate to the plan's goals, providing discrete and measurable targets the City can achieve as it pursues the plan's implementation.

### GOAL 1 – MAINTAIN MILL CREEK'S COMMUNITY CHARACTER

While focus on balancing the City's budget is crucial, fiscal actions should never lose sight of what makes Mill Creek so attractive to its residents and businesses. Mill Creek's streets and neighborhoods are generally well maintained and feel safe, peaceful, beautiful and walkable to its residents and visitors. The community's character must be maintained, ensuring that whatever actions the City takes to be fiscally sustainable it does not sacrifice what is precious.

**Objective 1:** Ensure that City development standards are maintained or improved to achieve high quality design in new development.

Community character is reinforced by the appearance of the built environment. Public spaces, street corridors, neighborhoods and community institutions convey messages in their physical appearance. Development standards regulate the appearance of the community's built environment, and maintaining the community's character relies on good, effective standards for design and development.

**Objective 2:** Take steps to ensure that Mill Creek continues to be a very walkable city.

Community members appreciate Mill Creek's scale and their ability to walk along its streets and trails safely and conveniently. Moving about on foot or by bike is part of Mill Creek's character, and the transportation system should be managed and maintained to ensure this can continue.

### GOAL 2 – PROVIDE AN ADEQUATE LEVEL OF QUALITY PUBLIC FACILITIES IN A FISCALLY PRUDENT MANNER

**Objective 1:** Continue to implement a long-term pavement preservation program by the end of 2013. (Also relates to Goals 1 & 4)

Roadway deterioration is a natural outcome of their use, and a regular maintenance program can prolong roadway life. Delays in instituting a comprehensive pavement preservation program will

increase the likelihood that roadways will need reconstruction earlier than if a preservation program is in place. By establishing this program now, the City can expect to defer more expensive capital road rebuilding projects.

**Objective 2:** Identify which new City-owned public facilities are needed in Mill Creek and identify when they should be constructed.

The police department needs more space than it has. Requirements for records and evidence storage and needs for increased staff to keep up with population growth make it increasingly difficult to remain within the existing facility. The City Council has indicated its preference that this large an expenditure should be considered and voted on by the community. The Council also identified the public works facility and new sports fields as important needs, referring to its 2009 community facilities master plan. Finally, there appears to be at least some citizen support for other community facilities, such as a multipurpose community center.

### **GOAL 3— PROVIDE A HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES TO THE CITIZENS OF MILL CREEK**

The outreach effort in this planning process underscores the community's desire to have Mill Creek continue its high service levels, particularly in terms of law enforcement and parks and recreation programs. The community also appreciates the efficiency with which the City provides all its services. These levels of service should not be sacrificed. It is important that the City invest in its facilities and services to support its vision, including retaining police services and providing adequate staff and facilities to support service levels.

**Objective 1:** Maintain an adequate level of City staff to ensure continued high levels of service to Mill Creek's citizens.

The City of Mill Creek provides public services that its residents and businesses appreciate. But providing those services requires adequate staffing levels to ensure the community's needs are met. An underlying theme in this plan's fiscal strategy is to contain costs. However, adequate staffing is equally important, ensuring that those services the community values are sustained.

### **GOAL 4 – ENSURE THAT MILL CREEK ACHIEVES AND MAINTAINS A STABLE FISCAL FOOTING**

**Objective 1:** Attain fiscal stability by the 2017/2018 biennium that does not require annually spending down reserves.

The 2011/2012 biennium is the first in which the City had to augment its revenues by drawing from its reserves. That is forecast to continue unless the City can increase its revenues. The City must overcome its deficit by the end of the 2017/2018 biennium or it will fully deplete its reserves and be forced to make radical reductions in levels of service. The City's current rate of reserves depletion allows it to take time to institute its revenue enhancement/diversification strategies, but it must act before those reserves are gone.

**Objective 2:** Limit increases in general fund expenditures to the minimum possible to maintain levels of service or to add/enhance services and programs to meet community need.

The community demands high levels of service, and the Council has repeated its commitment to deliver them. The costs to provide those services will likely increase as the community grows and as the costs associated with medical insurance, salaries, purchased services, utilities and other components of running a city also increase. This objective institutionalizes the philosophy of cost containment, reinforcing the need to keep cost increases to the lowest possible levels given the community's need for services. It also recognizes that the community's needs may change over time and that it may cost the City money to respond to those changes in needs.

**Objective 3:** Establish a desired level of City reserves

Past fiscal prudence and a high level of building activity resulted in the accumulation of a reserve account five times greater than that required by the City's budgetary policy. That reserve account is now being used due to the downturn in revenues and continuing increases in expenses. This objective speaks to the importance of keeping Mill Creek solvent, even operating at a marginal surplus in the near future to rebuild depleted reserves. Maintaining a positive reserve balance will also help the City weather future economic downturns, an asset whose value this downturn has emphasized.

**Objective 4:** Institute annual review of economic indicators by end of 2012. (Also relates to Goals 2 & 3)

Mill Creek's City Council is not eager to institute new fees or taxes. By incorporating economic and fiscal indicators into its budget-building process, the City can review the revenue instruments in place and test their appropriateness given economic trends and forecasts. Revenue recommendations included in Appendix A of this plan are based on current conditions and those forecast based on what is known or thought today. Future conditions, particularly related to the scope and pace of economic recovery, may motivate adjustments to the revenue strategy. Employing these indicators, and having them become an active part of the budget process, may help the City tailor its revenue strategies to ask only what is necessary given the best available and most current information.

## **GOAL 5 – ENHANCE ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN MILL CREEK**

**Objective 1:** Encourage development of the East Gateway Urban Village master plan.

Making progress on developing the EGUV is fundamental to this overall strategy. That project will generate property and sales tax income upon which the City's fiscal models are based. Failing to adopt development agreements for EGUV projects will delay their development and delay the City's receipt of needed revenue. The City must take the time it needs, however, to ensure that the proposed development projects meet the community's other needs. Development quality, provision of local employment and compliance with development standards are also important and should not be sacrificed solely in the quest for expedient development agreement adoption.

**Objective 2:** Encourage high quality design in other commercially zoned properties within Mill Creek.

High quality design will help retain and communicate Mill Creek's character, and it will also encourage continued investment in Mill Creek's commercial and residential districts. Quality design promotes activity and resiliency, communicating predictability that is fundamental to economic investment.

**Objective 3:** Assess the commercial land uses allowed by the City's land use map and zoning map to ensure they represent an optimal mix for Mill Creek.

Mill Creek's comprehensive plan designations and zoning districts establish areas for commercial development, but they may not provide for the land use mix or development standards that are appropriate for the type and scale of development desired. An assessment of the plan and zoning will help the City align its land use policy and development regulations with the future type of development the community envisions.

## **GOAL 6 – ENSURE THAT NEW GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IS HIGH QUALITY AND PROVIDES A BENEFIT TO MILL CREEK**

**Objective 1:** Annexation proposals shall be carefully evaluated for both short- and long-term benefits to Mill Creek.

Annexations are strategic by nature. They have immediate fiscal impact, but they also may position the City to take advantage of other future opportunities. The City's present annexation policy focuses on immediate fiscal impact, but it may not adequately address future opportunities annexations may present.

**Objective 2:** Mill Creek should monitor development proposals within its MUGA and take steps to protect the interests of the City.

Collaboration with Snohomish County, particularly concerning development in the MUGA, is essential to Mill Creek's strategic positioning. MUGA development will impact Mill Creek, either by creating additional demand for Mill Creek's services or by shaping the ways in which Mill Creek is able to annex territory. This is of particular concern along the arterial corridors, where land use, transportation, and economic development planning intersect.

### **Actions**

The following list of actions, presented in chronological order, is drawn from the plan framework and designed to attain the plan's objectives and achieve the strategic planning goals. Taken together, they represent an integrated approach to enhance and diversify Mill Creek's revenue stream, to adopt policies that will help ensure the community's continued economic and fiscal prosperity, and to sustain provision of high quality services.

While these actions will influence the City's long-term fiscal health, they are intended as short-term recommendations. The primary focus is on what the City can do within the next six years to help overcome its existing and forecast budget deficit. Longer term actions will also be significant and

will be addressed more fully as the City explores its policy options through its comprehensive plan update, capital facilities plan and other efforts that have longer planning horizons.

The matrix presented here lists individual actions, when they are recommended to occur and who has lead and partner responsibilities in their implementation. The matrix also highlights if an action addresses facilities, public services, fiscal balance, economic development or strategic growth and annexation priorities and which of the strategic plan goals it helps achieve. These implementation actions are included on a quarterly calendar to illustrate their relative timing and assist in their scheduling in departmental work plans and inclusion in the City's budget.

**MOST CURRENT MATRIX AND TABLE WILL BE INSERTED HERE**

## Conclusion

The strategic plan, through a series of goals, objectives and specific actions, provides the City a roadmap to ensure Mill Creek continues to provide high level services, maintain its valued community character, remain responsive to community needs and practice fiscal restraint. Residents and business owners appreciate the quality of life Mill Creek offers, and this strategic plan will ensure that quality of life is retained, even in the face of economic difficulty or political division.