



April 24, 2025

Via email

Kirkland Planning Commission  
Kirkland City Hall  
123 Fifth Avenue  
Kirkland WA 98034

Michaels and Goodwill Zoning Proposals

Dear Chair Rutherford and Commissioners,

The Board of Directors of the Finn Hill Neighborhood Alliance is writing to raise several questions for the Commission's consideration in regard to zoning changes for the proposed housing retail projects at the sites of the Goodwill and Michaels stores.

FHNA understands Kirkland's critical need for additional housing, with a particular focus on expanding the supply of affordable housing. We also understand that the Goodwill and Michaels proposals offer more dwelling units – up to approximately 850 new units across both properties – and therefore appear to be significant elements of the City's strategy for addressing its housing shortage. Nonetheless, we ask that the impact of projects built according to significant upzoning be weighed against the understandable focus on constructing more housing.

While the Goodwill and Michaels parcels are outside of the Finn Hill neighborhood, they are located on the two principal arterials that access Finn Hill. Thus, their development and, in particular, the traffic congestion generated by such development, will directly affect the residents of Finn Hill, who travel through the Goodwill and Michaels intersections on a daily basis.

We have been told by the City's planning staff that traffic concurrency analyses will be performed when specific project plans are submitted by the developers for approval – after the City has acted on the zoning changes they are now requesting. While we understand that this approach is consistent with the normal planning process, we urge the Commission to focus now on likely traffic impacts and base any zoning changes on a full and transparent analysis of how upzoning will affect traffic congestion around the Michaels and Goodwill sites.

More specifically:

- What is the level of service at each of the Michaels and Goodwill sites today?

- To what extent will development of the sites, as requested by the developers, degrade those levels of service? (We assume that this question can be answered quantitatively based on assumptions about the additional number of vehicle trips that a development, if built according to requested upzoning, will generate. Those numbers should be presented to the Commission and discussed in public).
- While it is appropriate that specific ingress and egress issues may be deferred until project plans are submitted, it is important that -- in the context of the upzoning decisions before the Commission -- substantive consideration be given now to impact that cars entering and exiting the proposed projects will have on traffic flows, particularly given that the Goodwill project is directly across the street from Juanita Elementary's entrance, which is used for picking up and dropping off pupils each weekday morning and afternoon. It is not clear to FHNA that, if the requested upzoning is approved, the City will thereafter be able to compel the developers of these projects to rectify ingress and egress problems meaningfully.
- What steps will a developer or the City be required to take to restore levels of service to acceptable thresholds? And what does the City regard as an acceptable threshold for traffic levels of service at these intersections?
- With respect to mitigation, when will it occur and who will pay for it? (We understand that if the traffic level of service is E, a developer will not be obligated to mitigate traffic impacts (or pay a fee in lieu of mitigation) unless its project contributes to a 15% increase in vehicle trips. If the developer will not have to pay for mitigation, does the City have the funds to do so?)
- Are the assumptions being made in regard to parking requirements realistic in light of the public transit services that will actually be available to future residents of these developments? The Commission should conduct a candid analysis of whether the current public transit services are consistent with reductions in parking requirements in multi-family housing projects. And if they are not, the Commission should consider the consequences of inadequate parking capacity. For example, will adjacent single family neighborhoods be burdened with more on-street parking?
- We also urge the Commission to factor into its zoning analyses such matters as setbacks, façade articulation, open space, variations in building massing, walkability, environmental impact (particularly with Michaels, which is adjacent to wetland and lake shore) and other civic amenities so that the developments are not blatantly incompatible with their surroundings.

Based on our discussions with Finn Hill residents in community meetings and informal conversations, we believe our neighbors are concerned that the kind of thoughtful planning decisions that have made Kirkland such a desirable place to live are being compromised by an admittedly important commitment to encouraging more housing as quickly as practicable.

With this concern in mind, we urge the Commission to be forthright in explaining the trade-offs between fulfilling demand for housing, on one hand, and addressing traffic congestion, visual appeal of development and protecting the environment on the other.

While we recognize that the City regards the upzoning of the Goodwill and Michaels sites as vital to its compliance with state and regional mandates to build more affordable housing in Kirkland, we urge the Commission to think more expansively about additional sites for affordable housing. Can the urban villages accommodate additional housing to compensate for dwelling units that would be “lost” if the Goodwill and Michaels sites were zoned for buildings with less than 600 units or 260 units respectively? While densification of broadly defined transit corridors was taken out of the Comprehensive Plan update, the plan’s definition of urban villages is flexible and may enable the City to say credibly that it can accommodate its quota of affordable housing within the perimeters of these villages. And, on Finn Hill, FHNA believes many residents would welcome more intense development of the one commercial center in our neighborhood (the Inglewood shopping center), particularly if such development would attract more public transit connecting to the intersections where the Goodwill and Michaels projects are located.

We know that the factors involved in evaluating the Goodwill and Michaels zoning proposals are complex. For those reasons, we encourage the Commission to deliberate patiently and thoughtfully, to explain its reasoning to the public transparently, and to bear in mind that the long-term desirability of this community requires that many factors, not just the need for additional housing, be weighed carefully.

Thank you for considering these observations and questions.

Respectfully submitted.

FINN HILL NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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