



American Planning Association

Tacoma Redevelops Its Dome District

Long considered a place to visit but not stay, the Tacoma Dome District has become a major transit hub, a development that the Washington city's leaders are trying to leverage to transform the area into a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood with the potential to boost tourism.

The 169-acre district is known for the Tacoma Dome, a multiuse arena off Interstate 5. But it's also home to retail and industrial tenants, several vacant parcels, and train and bus stations serving a growing transit ridership.

The Dome District might soon become home to a link to its more auto-oriented past. Backers of the planned \$100 million Harold E. LeMay Museum, which would house a collection of 1,000 cars and memorabilia, plan to begin construction in August. The public museum is expected to draw 400,000 visitors annually and to inject \$34 million a year into the economy.



Tacoma, a city of 200,000 people 34 miles south of Seattle, has endorsed an updated Dome District plan that includes higher population density and transit-oriented development. It was crafted by Seattle-based VIA Architecture, which specializes in architecture, urban planning, and sustainable community building.

The district is connected to the larger region by Amtrak, Sound Transit commuter trains, local and regional express buses, and Tacoma's downtown streetcar line. The popular Freighthouse Square, two blocks north of the Tacoma Dome, serves as both a place to eat and shop, and as a train depot for Sound Transit. "It's so full of opportunity,"

says Kate Howe of VIA Architecture.

Martha Anderson, assistant director of Tacoma's Community and Economic Development Department, says the city wants to see new ground-level retail, along with new residences, to help provide "24/7 activity."

Developers already are showing interest. The Landmark Group of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, has proposed a \$12 million project to convert an 1890s former mattress factory into a 90-unit apartment project. "Not only is it part of the redevelopment of the (Dome District)," says city planning division manager Peter Huffman, "but it also would rehabilitate a nice, old building."

— Aaron Corvin

Corvin is a freelance writer in Tacoma.