

TACOMAWEEKLY

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THAI GAME:
Biologist from zoo helps clouded leopards thrive.
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CULTURAL JOURNALS
Film series offers sounds and sights.
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An evolving vision for the **DOME DISTRICT**

By John Larson
Tacoma Weekly

Perhaps no other section of the city has undergone the sort of radical transformation in the past 50 years or so as the Dome District. At one point it was the Hawthorne neighborhood. Much of that disappeared because of the construction of Interstate 5. Other large sections just north of the freeway were razed in the early 1980s to make way for Tacoma Dome and the acres of asphalt parking lots around it.

In recent years it has become a hub for transportation. Sounder commuter rail trains and Tacoma Link light rail can be boarded on either side of Freighthouse Square. Across the street from that is Tacoma Dome Station, with hundreds of stalls for parking, a Greyhound bus station and a major hub for busses in the Pierce Transit and Sound Transit systems.

When the LeMay automobile museum is built on a parking lot across the street from the Dome, it will bring more transformation. Most observers expect



IMAGE COURTESY OF VIA ARCHITECTURE

TRANSFORMATION. In this conceptual image of how the Dome District might look in the future, existing structures are in gray, yellow represents residential development, red is retail or entertainment attractions, blue is office/commercial space and green represents parks and plazas.

that it will become by far the most popular of the museums in town, drawing car buffs from around the world to the neighborhood.

The city hired VIA Architecture of Seattle

to study this section of town and offer suggestions for future development and ideas for how best to integrate it into an expanding definition of downtown.

The firm has held

numerous meetings with property owners, business owners and others with a stake in the future of the Dome District.

Two representatives of the firm recently gave an update on their efforts

to Tacoma City Council's Economic Development Committee.

Alan Hart, principal, and Kate Howe, an architect, provided a report

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Schools to get on-duty protection

By Clare Jensen
Tacoma Weekly

Full-time, on-duty police officers will soon be a fixture at all five of Tacoma's comprehensive public high schools.

Tacoma School Board approved a \$400,000 contract between the district and Tacoma Police Department Jan. 22.

Two officers will begin at Mount Tahoma and Lincoln high schools in the coming weeks to finish out the remainder of the school year. As long as funding permits, an officer will be installed at the remaining schools, Foss, Stadium and Wilson, at the beginning of the 2009-10 school year.

In the past, the schools have been patrolled by a combination of armed security patrol, civilian campus security officers and off-duty police officers when needed.

Several district officials agree that having the same officer at the school all day every day will be beneficial to the schools, students, and the community at large.

Mount Tahoma Assistant Principal Lynn Gill noted the school is in use of law enforcement officials "almost every day."

"Unfortunately it is a sign of the times. Our schools need to reflect our communities," she said.

Full-time officers at the school provide consistency and can help build strong rela-

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Sounder route still generating controversy

By John Larson
Tacoma Weekly

They walked along the route, they discussed it during two meetings, and when it was all over, Tacoma City Council voted on a resolution about the extension of Sounder commuter rail through the Dome District to South Tacoma Way.

And not surprisingly, given the history of the project, not everyone is happy with the decision.

On Jan. 16 many of the council members joined with staff from the city and Sound Transit for a walk from Freighthouse Square to a few blocks past Pacific Avenue. They were joined by many business and property owners from the neighborhood.

Many members of the Project Advisory Commission, a group of citizens assembled to provide feedback to the city and Sound Transit, were both on the walk and at city hall Jan. 27 for the study session and council meeting. At the latter, the council passed a

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IMAGE COURTESY OF SOUND TRANSIT AND AHBL, INC.
SOUNDER TOWN. This conceptual artist rendering depicts the "Gateway Concept."

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Quote of the Week

"You achieve peace through understanding people."

— Bill Evans
Pacific Northwest Shop

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DOMESTRUCT, cont.

Alan Hart, principal, and Kate Howe, an architect, provided a report with their findings and suggestions.

The Dome District has the potential to be “a vibrant, 24-hour, urban area,” Howe said.

Hart sees opportunities for owners of small, undeveloped parcels that might be too small to develop in other areas of the city but to work well in a dense, pedestrian-friendly district.

Their report is based on several strategies. The first is to make the most of city-owned land around Tacoma Dome. The LeMay is already slated for one of the parking lots. But there is much more land that could be utilized.

The report encourages the city to pursue public/private partnerships to supply housing, hotels, entertainment venues and businesses in “green-collar” industries.

The next strategy is to align the Dome District

more closely with nearby Thea Foss Waterway. VIA Architecture recommends collaboration with Foss Waterway Development Authority as it moves forward with planning for a park at the southern end of the waterway.

Peter Huffman, director of the city’s planning division, mentioned the ‘D’ Street Overpass. Completed last summer, it has done much to connect the Dome District to Thea Foss Waterway, he noted.

A city-owned sewer and pump station has potential for education purposes and stewardship of tidal wetlands.

“The shoreline is the most exciting part of the plan,” said Councilmember Julie Anderson.

Taking pride in the neighborhood’s industrial character is another recommendation. The architects especially see this to the west of East ‘G’ Street, where the district stretches toward the Tideflats and railroad tracks.

Integrating the signature icon, Tacoma Dome, into the overall vision for the area is crucial.

Huffman told the council members about some of the challenges facing the neighborhood. One of the major ones is inadequate parking.

But its potential far outweighs any drawbacks. Huffman sees many things in the neighborhood that could serve as catalysts for housing, retail and more.

“It needs to be an attribute. It needs to serve the larger needs of downtown,” Huffman said.

Where some might see vacant lots in an industrial part of town, Anderson sees potential for modern development that could be on the cutting edge of green building techniques. “This could be an environmental gemstone,” she remarked.

“This is an area where everyone realizes the potential,” said Councilmember Rick Talbert.