City of Seattle
Seattle Planning Commission

McCaela Daffern and Jamie Stroble, Co-Chairs
Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION
Thursday, March 27, 2025
Approved Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Present:	Xio Alvarez, McCaela Daffern, Andrew Dannenberg, Dylan Glosecki, Matt Hutchins, Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson, Lauren Squires, Jamie Stroble, Kelabe Tewolde
Commissioners Absent:	Cecelia Black, Matt Malloy, Radhika Nair, Dhyana Quintanar, Monika Sharma, Dylan Stevenson, Nick Whipple
Commission Staff:	Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director; John Hoey, Senior Policy Analyst; Olivia Baker, Planning Analyst; Robin Magonegil, Commission Coordinator

Seattle Planning Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript and represent key points and the basis of discussion.

Referenced Documents discussed at the meeting can be viewed here:
https://www.seattle.gov/planningcommission/meetings

Chair's Report & Minutes Approval
Co-Chair Jamie Stroble called the meeting to order at 7:35 am and announced several upcoming Commission meetings. Co-Chair Stroble offered the following land acknowledgement:

> *'On behalf of the Seattle Planning Commission, we'd like to actively recognize that we are on Indigenous land, the traditional and current territories of the Coast Salish people who have lived on and stewarded these lands since the beginning of time and continue to do so today. We acknowledge the role that traditional western-centric planning practices have played in harming, displacing, and attempting to erase Native communities. We commit to identifying racist practices and strive to center restorative land stewardship rather than unsustainable and extractive use of the land.'*

Co-Chair Stroble noted that this meeting is a hybrid meeting with some Commissioners and staff participating remotely while other Commissioners and staff are participating in the Boards and Commissions Room at Seattle City Hall. She asked fellow Commissioners to review the Color Brave Space norms and asked for volunteers to select one or more of the norms to read aloud. She suggested to Commissioners that they collectively agree to abide by these norms.

Announcements

Vanessa Murdock, Seattle Planning Commission Executive Director, reviewed the format of the meeting. She noted that public comment may be provided in person in the Boards and Commissions room at City Hall, submitted in writing via email at least 8 hours before the meeting, or offered on the hybrid meeting platform MS Teams. Public comment must be able to be given in two minutes or less.

ACTION: Commissioner Rose Lew Tsai-Le Whitson moved to approve the February 13 meeting minutes. Commissioner Matt Hutchins seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Briefing: Using data to prioritize RSJI communities for place-based City investments

Diana Canzoneri and Phillip Carnell, Office of Planning and Community Development; Leslie Webster, Seattle Public Utilities; Serena Lehman and Jonathan Lewis, Seattle Department of Transportation

Ms. Canzoneri provided an overview of the Racial and Social Equity (RSE) Index. The RSE Index was developed in 2017 by the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) in collaboration with other departments. The RSE Index provides departments with a common set of data identifying where Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) priority populations make up a relatively large share of neighborhood residents. The Index serves as a tool for informing design, prioritization, and evaluation of programs, plans, and investments. OPCD maintains and refreshes the Index every three years, with the most recent update in 2023. The Index is used by many City departments and is a featured tool in the new "One Seattle Data Strategy" launched last year as part of the Mayor's Executive Order to inspire collaboration and systemization of data across the City.

Ms. Canzoneri stated that the RSE Index is a composite of three equally weighted sub-indices:

- Race, ELL, & Origins Index
  - Persons of color
  - English language learners (ELL)
  - Foreign born
- Socioeconomic Disadvantage Index
  - Income below 200 percent of poverty
  - Educational attainment less than a bachelor's degree
- Health Disadvantage & Disability Index
  - Low life expectancy at birth
  - Adults with no leisure-time physical activity
  - Adults with diagnosed diabetes
  - Adults with obesity
  - Adults reporting their mental health is not good

- o Adults with asthma
- o Adults with one or more disabilities

She stated that most indicators come from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. The components are mapped at the census tract level; the census tracts are then ranked and divided into five categories (quintiles). OPCD generally suggests that City departments use the two highest equity priority quintiles for focusing services and investments. Some projects may focus more narrowly or go broader to include the third quintile.

Ms. Canzoneri summarized some considerations for City departments and organizations as they identify how to use the RSE Index.

- The RSE index is intended as a starting point along with additional data relevant to the purpose at hand as well as community voices and input.
- The RSE index shows characteristics and conditions — not absolute numbers — of residents, so it is suggested that users consider viewing population density alongside the Index.
- There can be variation within, and not just across, census tracts.
- Neighborhood level data is limited for some RSJI populations, including persons experiencing homelessness and LGBTQ persons. Consideration of these and other marginalized populations should pair the index with programmatic and community-based knowledge.
- Persons in RSJI priority populations also live outside RSE Priority Areas. It is important to consider how place-based strategies can be complemented with programs that provide services to people regardless of the neighborhood in which they live.

Phillip provided an overview of resources for accessing and using the RSE Index, including an interactive mapping app, a printable map, and a users' guide. The interactive mapping app includes additional American Community Survey demographic and population data layers that may be turned on and off. The underlying data and mapping layers for the index can be accessed by the public on ArcGIS Online. Phillip described OPCD's efforts to support adoption of the RSE Index by other City departments, including introducing the Index to beginning users, giving presentations and technical assistance to departments, and acting as a thought partner for ongoing users. OPCD has explored a block-group version for more detailed analysis, as well as extending the RSE Index to index tracts in the remainder of the county to support departments with service areas outside of the City's political boundaries. OPCD also supports outside organizations by providing technical guidance on how to use the RSE Index.

Phillip stated that OPCD presented a mini workshop for the City's RSJI Summit with three partners who have used the RSE Index: Seattle Parks and Recreation's CommUNITY Fund, the Seattle Department of Transportation's Levy Equity Framework, and the Office of Innovation and Performance's Seattle Rescue Plan evaluation. Each table had a theoretical investment – tree plantings, new sidewalks, and spray parks – to determine how they could use the RSE Index to identify priority investment areas.

Mr. Lewis described work by the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) to incorporate the RSE Index. He stated that SDOT's Transportation Equity Framework has a section on decision-making, transparency, and accountability that includes the following strategy to incorporate equity in data:

#5 - Data: Coordinate data assessment and transparent data sharing among transportation agencies to ensure that BIPOC and vulnerable communities are not disproportionately burdened and that informed decisions related to revenue spending are made to positively benefit communities.

He shared an overview of the Seattle Transportation Plan (STP) Goals, including the following:

Equity - *Co-create with community and implement restorative practices to address transportation-related inequities.*

Mr. Lewis described the "how we work" and "where we work" components of the equity goal and stated that SDOT uses the RSE index to guide both. He highlighted the STP Performance Measures (Appendix C) that allow SDOT to track progress on key outcomes such as Vision Zero or reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Six of the eight Tier 1 measures can be tracked by the RSE Index. Twenty of the thirty-four Tier 2 measures can be tracked by the Index. The STP Prioritization Framework identifies four steps for the department to prioritize projects. These steps are organized around the STP goals. Mr. Lewis stated that this framework uses the RSE Index for equity in the second step.

Ms. Lehman provided an overview of SDOT's transportation investments. She stated that SDOT is funded by several sources. Transportation levies have been a significant source of funding, predominantly for work in the right-of-way. The 2024 Transportation Levy passed last fall will fund $1.55 billion in projects over the next eight years. She stated that these investments have a big impact (mostly positive) on community mobility, access to opportunity, safety, air quality, health outcomes, economy and affordability, and livability. It is important to SDOT to make sure the positive impacts are going where they are most needed, and the negative impacts are not disproportionately affecting people who are already experiencing systemic inequities.

Ms. Lehman described SDOT's Levy Equity Workplan, which had its origin in a 2020 COVID Impact Assessment Racial Equity Analysis. The goal is to improve the equitable distribution of Levy investments, ensuring improvements are prioritized in areas of greatest need/historical disinvestment, not just equal distribution citywide. She highlighted the following Transportation Equity Framework (TEF) tactics advanced through the Levy Equity Workplan:

- *Develop SDOT work plans that equitably allocate resources for capital projects and maintenance efforts in communities hit hardest by COVID.*
- *Focus maintenance resources in communities and neighborhoods currently underserved by government that have significant maintenance needs; use findings from the racial equity assessment.*
- *Add equity-related data layers into all SDOT-produced web maps and ensure that staff are trained and use this as part of their research, decision-making, project outline, etc.*

Ms. Lehman stated that the RSE Index has consistently been recommended and used for making decisions. She provided an overview of the Levy Equity Dashboard – 2024, which looks at investments across the city, summarizes distribution of deliverables by equity priority area and can be filtered by Levy program and quarter/year. She stated that every program has different goals. For example, safety is the primary goal of the Vision Zero program, but equity is also a goal. SDOT staff is working closely with various program leads to ensure they are consistently using the RSE Index.

Ms. Webster provided an overview of Seattle Public Utilities' (SPU) role in providing drinking water and managing sewer, drainage, and waste collection services for residents and businesses in Seattle. She described SPU's drainage and wastewater core services, as well as the Shape Our Water strategic planning effort. The Analysis Stage of this planning project involves identifying and prioritizing a range of risks, including flooding and sea level rise. Ms. Webster highlighted SPU's efforts to incorporate equity into this stage of planning. She stated that a complaint-based system demonstrates bias from those who have the time to call in and know what they expect from government. There are many reasons why others may not be calling in with complaints. To address this, SPU used models to identify risks citywide, focused outreach to identify problems in equity priority areas, and incorporated racial and social equity into their prioritization process. This process allows SPU to give a voice to historically underrepresented communities and distribute SPU investments more equitably.

Ms. Webster shared the following example of SPU's equity-based prioritization process:

- *Where do we have flooding in the drainage system?*
- *Which of those locations should we prioritize?*

She described how models are used to identify risks. SPU's reported flooding inventory was supplemented with the results of modeling simulations. These modeling efforts were supplemented with focused outreach to residents who live in the neighborhoods with flooding risk. Community partners helped with this outreach. The result of this work was an updated flooding inventory.

Ms. Webster further described the role of equity in SPU's project prioritization. She stated that SPU prioritizes based on risk, including the relative consequence and frequency of an event. SPU considers how many properties are potentially affected, as well as critical facilities and the transportation network. She stated that SPU tried two different approaches to include the RSE Index in their prioritization and added an equity score as a separate factor.

Ms. Webster stated that a similar approach using the RSE index was also used to prioritize different challenges, including the following:

- sewer overflows
- creek flooding
- extreme storm flooding
- sea level rise flooding
- wastewater system condition (rehab)
- drainage system condition (rehab)

- wastewater system seismic risk
- drainage system seismic risk

Ms. Webster shared information on additional resources, including a story map, analysis, and technical memos. The Power of Water story map integrates the RSE Index to show analyses such as Drainage System Flooding Risk. She also highlighted the Shape Our Water Community Vision and next steps. She stated that SPU worked closely with communities to identify goals in the Visioning Stage. They are currently in the Planning Stage, evaluating goals and hosting a series of workshops with other community partners and departments.

Commission Discussion
- Commissioners expressed gratitude to the presenters for their work to eliminate racial inequities.
- Commissioners inquired if there are ways to analyze equity in transportation patterns and characteristics to inform investments in affordable travel options. Ms. Lehman stated that SDOT is considering travel patterns – both origins and destinations – and that analysis will be included in the next phase of their work.
- Commissioners asked how OPCD is tracking data in the RSE Index to reflect neighborhood changes over time. Commissioners also asked how that data is being distributed to other departments. Ms. Canzoneri stated that OPCD has additional mapping tools that show change, mainly concentration of race and ethnicity, over time. She added that OPCD maintains a users' guide that can be updated to include integration of those components. Phillip stated that OPCD updates the RSE Index itself on a three-year schedule and includes both American Community Survey and Centers for Disease Control data. They stated that OPCD strives to make older versions available to its partners in case they need to look back at historic conditions.
- Commissioners expressed appreciation for how data is collected and curated by OPCD and utilized by agencies and departments across the city. Commissioners asked how data is used in controversial or contentious policy proposals. Ms. Canzoneri stated that OPCD's role is to be thoughtful in curating and disseminating the data. Phillip stated that they try to be responsible stewards of the data and ensure beneficial uses of that data for equity.
- Commissioners asked if the RSE Index is equally weighted. Ms. Canzoneri answered the Index is evenly weighted and that part of the rationale for this is to help make the Index easy to understand.
- Commissioners inquired about the potential expansion of the RSE Index beyond city boundaries (for example, King County). Phillip stated that the Index is designed as a tool for analysis by City departments. The version extended to include tracts in the remainder of King County is intended to assist City departments and programs that serve people who live outside the city's political boundaries in understanding how the tracts they are in compare to tracts in Seattle. Phillip stated that OPCD has not approached King County on use of the Index for similar purposes.
- Commissioners stated that the SDOT presentation did not include diesel emissions and air quality in the metrics. Commissioners indicated that they would like to see those metrics included in the future. Mr. Lewis stated that SDOT does not have jurisdiction over diesel emissions, but that would be an interesting idea to include in the Index. He stated that SDOT is focusing on greenhouse gas emissions as a meaningful metric.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:02 am.

Resources
RSE Index
Racial and Social Equity Index Users Guide
Seattle Transportation Plan and Appendix C
SPU Shape Our Water - Blue Water GIS
The Power of Water Story Map
One Seattle Climate Portal