

Thornton Place, Seattle, USA

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'A Town Center
for North Seattle'



Left: aerial view of Thornton Place in Northgate.
Below: plan of Thornton Place, bordered by NE 103rd St., 5th Ave NE & NE 100th St., Seattle, WA 98125

photo credit: Thornton Place Photostream at flicker.com



Thornton Place lies within the Northgate neighborhood just south of Northgate Mall. The area lies within the Northgate Regional Growth Center which was designated an Urban Village in 1994. The population of the center was 5,740 people according to the 2000 census, while employment in the area was 10,655. 2001 marked the beginning of the City of Seattle's effort to revitalize the area.

Specifications

- Client: Lorig Associates, LLC and Stellar Holdings
- Size: 50,000 sf of retail & commercial; 55 low-income apartments; 224 market-rate apartments; 109 condominiums

"What began as extra parking for the 50-year-old mall is now a model for sustainable, transit-oriented development. The Northgate south lot revitalization project fills eight acres with more than 500 units of housing and three acres of open space."



Northgate Branch Library
Thornton Creek Park
photo credit: Thornton Place Photo-stream at flicker.com

Context

Built in 1950, Northgate Mall has anchored the area's retail development ever since. Since 2001, the mall has been expanded and now provides a more pedestrian friendly experience in addition to strengthening its regional appeal through big-name tenants. Anchors to the mall include Nordstrom, Gene Juarez, Barnes and Noble, and Target. The mall also greatly increased the amount of dining available at the site.

The City of Seattle has built a library branch across 5th Avenue from the mall and upgraded street crossings at traffic intersections. The city is also currently investing in the construction of a large park at 5th Avenue and 112th Street, which is within walking distance of the development. This park replaces an old park-n-ride lot which has become obsolete due to the Northgate Transit Center located to the west of the Thornton Place development. Developers, meanwhile, have built new mixed-used projects in nearby properties, significantly altering and enhancing the once purely auto-centric area.



Figure Ground of Northgate Urban Village showing building density and park-and-ride in red.



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View looking East to Thornton Place from Northgate Transit Center.



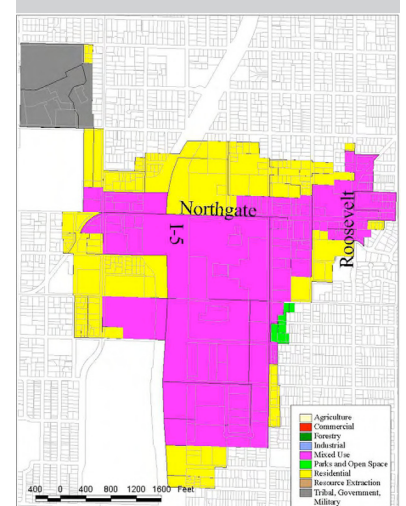
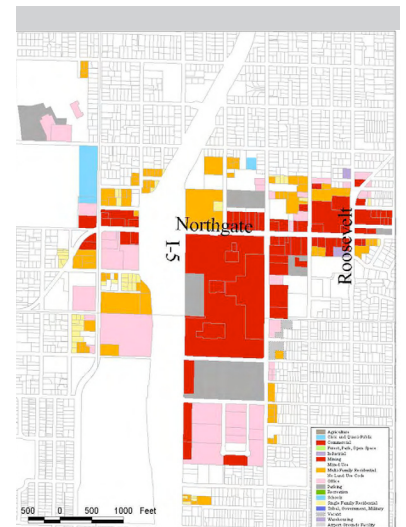
View from 103 Street looking West showing lack of pedestrian connection to Northgate Mall.

Connective Corridors

- I-5, NE Northgate Way, 5th Avenue
Significant traffic arterials
- Bus Transfer Station
60 express and local transit routes (2002 data)
- Future Link light-rail
2020 ridership anticipated to be 10,000 boardings per day

Anchors

- Regal IMAX 14-screen Theatre
- 50,000 square feet of retail space
- 278 Apartments
- 109 Condos
- 143 units of retirement living
- Thornton Creek

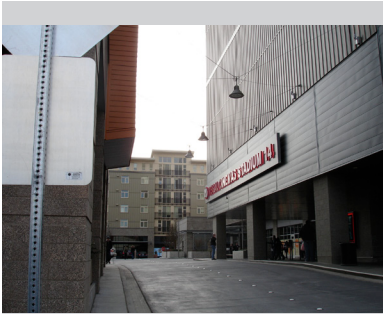


Current and Future Land Use for Northgate Urban Village showing zoning changes to primarily mixed use.

photo credit

2002 Regional Growth Centers Report.

"Light rail service is coming in 2020, but for now, the green soul of the neighborhood — with its park-like bioswale along with an urban mix of buildings and walkways — is there for all to see, and enjoy."



View from 103 Street looking South showing lack of pedestrian invitation.



View from West entrance walking East. Available ground level retail along the sidewalk and lower building heights in the SE allowing for pedestrian engagement and sunlight; however, large blank facade theater detracts from experience.



View along facing apartment block corridors showing more inviting human scale spaces.

Planning

The development was carefully planned to accommodate a wide range of uses as well as users. "Designed from the inside out," as the developer states, Thornton Creek contains its anchor tenants in the center of the development around a public square. Ingress and egress are then places at the center of the surrounding blocks allowing for circulation from each direction. Sunlight was also taken into consideration as there are shorter structures to the south, allowing for light to shine upon the interior of the development. Careful attention was also paid toward restoring the natural ecosystem of the Creek, which was carefully appointed with well-designed landscape features.

Issues and Initiatives

The issues surrounding the Thornton Place development lie in its ability to aid the city's strategy in creating an urban center that is less auto-centric. Due to the area's deep-rooted history in auto dependency, there is a need to recreate an identity for the Northgate neighborhood.



Thornton Place interior plaza looking Northwest.

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Neighborhood Parks

The park-n-ride lot at 5th Avenue and 112th Street is currently being converted into a significant neighborhood park. The open space built into the Thornton Creek project is mostly aesthetic and provides little in the way of opportunities for people to exercise beyond walking and jogging. Markers to engage and educate the public about the park's water filtration bioswale are placed around the park.

Lessons Learned

Even with thoughtful site layout and tasteful architecture, it is vital to consider connections to the surrounding urban fabric. The use of the natural slope and the creek to shape the design of the site is a positive aspect in the development. These in addition to consideration for passive solar help to create a warm environment for residents and visitors alike. However, vehicular circulation threatens to ruin an otherwise successful development as the interior facing retail anchors facilitate vehicle circulation through the courtyard. This dedicated vehicular realm creates a rift through the plaza as shoppers are encouraged to drive through to reach their destinations as well as the parking garage. Additionally, the theatre façade significantly stands out as monolithic from all four sides, anchoring what is arguable the most important corner of the entire site. This corner leads residents and visitors to the Northgate Mall. Therefore, as a visitor approaching from the Northwest, one is not particularly attracted to the development as its scale and design leave much to the imagination. A possible solution to this problem may have been to wrap the structure in other uses such as housing or office space.



Park markers explaining importance of water filtration to residents.



Thornton Place from 100th Street looking North showing Southern park space and bioswale.



Resources

Thornton Place
<http://www.thornton-place.com>

King Country – Transportation
<http://your.kingcounty.gov/kcdot/tod/northgate.stm>

City of Seattle – 2002 Regional Growth Centers Report – Seattle Northgate
www.psrc.org/assets/288/seanorthgate.pdf

Seattle Times
http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/business/technology/2008560673_northgate26.html

<http://mithun.com/>

<http://www.djc.com/news/ae/12008754.html>

Thornton Place Photostream at flicker.com