

Skyway-West Hill Community Center: Existing Conditions Technical Memorandum

September 2024

Background and Purpose

King County is gathering input for the design & construction of a community center in Skyway-West Hill, an unincorporated King County community. The project is funded by a dedicated resource of \$10M from King County Council budget, sponsored by King County Council member Girmay Zahilay. A portion of the funds (approx. \$2M) are being used to fund the renovation of the local US Bank building, across the street from the library, for use as a resource center. The primary focus of the resource center will be connecting community with supportive services such as healthcare resources, housing assistance and home buyer education, career connections and job skills programming, parent support groups, and small business support.

Since 2009, King County and Skyway-West Hill community organizations have led several engagement efforts to understand priorities for a community center. This memorandum is a high-level analysis of previous findings aimed at guiding programming for the new center, as well as future engagement and decision-making.

The Skyway-West Hill community has experienced demographic and economic shifts over the past 25 years, prompting a consistent desire among residents for a community center. The 2014 Skyway Conceptual Design Report emphasized the residents' vision of the center as a welcoming space for all ages. While the report's cost estimates were accurate for the economic conditions at the time, they were provided during a recession and didn't encompass the full scope of expenses for this intricate project.

The 2019 feasibility study explored the potential for a community center in Skyway-West Hill, considering alternative sites and addressing potential obstacles. Factors such as building and property size, site characteristics, and zoning designations were considered.

The economic success of the community center relies on accessibility, community presence, and attractiveness. Integrating site concept planning and analysis with existing community survey data will ensure an inclusive approach to programming needs.

West Hill Community Recreation Center

After a community center was identified as a priority in the West Hill Community Plan in 1993, the West Hill Community Recreation Center was designed in partnership with the community based on planning sessions conducted in 1996. The 5,200-square-foot Westhill Community Center was opened in April 1998 on the grounds of Dimmitt Middle School. An innovative partnership between King County and the Renton School District made it possible for this project to be completed in less than one year. Through the partnership, the school district supplied the land, and the county funded construction of the building. King County Parks operated a Teen Program out of the Community Center until 2002, when the lease was assigned to the Boys and Girls Club due to unprecedented KC budget shortfalls and associated

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changes in Parks policy regarding programming. As of fall 2024, the Boys and Girls Club is no longer providing programs at the Dimmitt Middle School location.

Previous Community Planning Efforts and Reports

This summary considered comments shared by community members between 2009 and 2022 in community planning and engagement efforts, listed in the table below, adapted from Skyway’s 2022 Community Service Area Subarea Plan. A decade of engagement has underscored the Skyway-West Hill community’s need for a community center and identified desired programming, design elements, and activities for the space.

Plan/Author	Description
West Hill Community Plan (1994) / King County, adopted via Ordinance 11166	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cited in economic development, human services, and implementation sections • Suggested programming: counseling, job assistance, childcare, elderly/handicapped services, arts and cultural events, and community outreach
Community Vision for Revitalization (2009)/ Skyway Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community center listed in overall community vision • Identified youth development as a priority
Skyway Community Center: Conceptual Design Report (2014) / Skyway Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathered community feedback on design, size, priorities, and costs for a community center • Included site visits to several other community center with community feedback
Skyway- West Hill Action Plan (2016, not adopted)/ Skyway Solutions and the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cited as actions in the “Healthy, Connected Neighborhoods” and “Thriving, Educated Youth and Community” goal areas
Skyway’s 2022 Community Service Area Subarea Plan and 2022 Skyway-West Hill Priorities Survey / King County, An Element of the King County Comprehensive Plan, Attachment B to Ordinance 19555	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reiterated the community center as a priority, as well as parks and recreation space • Identified top 14 prioritized actions/services for the community center • Residents expressed concern about limited recreation and open space and need to improve access to Skyway Park from Renton Ave South.
2022 Subarea Plan –Appendix C Community Center Feasibility / King County, Department of Local Services and the Parks and Recreation Division of the Department of Natural Resources and Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed previous documents and outreach • Considered 5 potential sites • Provided potential budget and size for planning

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Community Vision for Revitalization (2009)/ Skyway Solutions:

In 2008, King County's Enhancement Initiation enabled Pomegranate Center to work with Skyway residents to conduct a series of workshops to develop a community-driven revitalization plan. In their final report, Goal #5 was identified as "Foster youth development and engage young people in community life." As a specific action of this goal, the community wanted to "create momentum to build a Community Center to serve as the glue to hold the community together and become a home away from home for many young people."

Skyway Community Center: Conceptual Design Report (2014):

Skyway Solutions, a non-profit community development organization, hired Schemata Workshop to develop a conceptual design and construction cost estimate so that Skyway Solutions could determine the next steps towards funding the design and construction of a Community Center to serve as a social hub of the community.

Members of the community were invited to participate in three community workshops conducted in the fall of 2013. The workshops were highly interactive and allowed participants to express their hopes and desires. The focus of the first workshop, and simultaneous online survey, was to learn what kinds of activities the community envisioned taking place in a community center, to prioritize those activities, and then to group activities into general categories. At the second workshop survey results were reviewed and participants asked to visualize how spaces should be arranged. The third workshop reviewed floor plan options and discussed positive and critical comments on the plans. Some of the more common and recurring themes for the community center were: welcoming, inclusive, family-oriented, diverse, hopeful, and skyward.

Based on community input a non-site-specific one-story 32,000 SF building plan (including 7,000 SF for space for a pool) was developed. The plan represents a wish list of spaces - the intent was to aim high and reduce spaces as needed based on available funding. In 2014, the construction cost of a 32,000 SF building with a pool was estimated to be \$10M, at about \$300-\$350/sf. Soft costs were not included, which add 40% to the cost of a project. Including soft costs, Schemata's construction estimate for the 25,000 SF building without a pool translates to \$22M in 2024 dollars. Including a pool raises the 2024 adjusted estimate to \$36M.

The following spaces were included in the conceptual building plan in 2014:

- play (including children's area): 1,000 sf
- small groups: 210 sf
- learning space: 2,250 sf
- large gatherings: 6,000 sf
- administrative offices: 4 at 120 sf = 480 sf
- kitchen area: 800 sf
- basketball/ gymnasium: 5,040 sf

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- swimming pool: 7,200 sf – lap pool
- gathering areas: roughly 5% of overall square footage
- circulation and support: 15% of overall square footage



Concept rendering from 2014 Study by Schemata Architects.

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Skyway's 2022 Community Service Area Subarea Plan:

From the Executive Summary:

"The goal of the Skyway-West Hill Subarea Plan is to make real, equitable improvements to the quality of life for everyone who lives, works, and plays in Skyway-West Hill. The Subarea Plan is a 20-year plan that establishes a community vision and policies to help achieve that vision. Implementation of the Subarea Plan happens through the County's land use and zoning maps and application of development regulations, budget decisions, and a Community Needs List.

The Subarea Plan was developed by King County over several years with a robust community engagement effort. That engagement focused on building capacity, creating opportunities for meaningful input, and facilitating participation in the planning process by Skyway-West Hill residents and businesses, especially those that have not participated in community planning processes."

The report chapters include chapter 1 with a community generated vision statement, chapter 2 with a description of the Skyway-West Hill existing conditions (geography, population, demographics, government agencies, and existing services), and chapters 3-8 which are organized by topics that address specific conditions and needs of the community.

Vision Statement: "Skyway-West Hill will grow into a vibrant, walkable neighborhood where housing is affordable and local, community-based businesses are thriving. Skyway-West Hill will be an ethnically diverse and civically engaged community where the collective voice, wisdom, and expertise of its residents and business owners are vital in ongoing civic decision-making."

Subarea Plan chapters include:

- Land Use
- Housing and Human Services
- Parks, Open Space and Cultural Resources
- Transportation
- Services and Utilities
- Economic Development

Subarea Plan implementation measures and actions can be found in chapter 9 including a community center section.

The Subarea Plan includes three appendices:

- Appendix A is a collection of supporting maps and tables that cover a variety of technical topics in the Subarea Plan.

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- Appendix B is an equity impact review of the Subarea Plan. This equity impact review identifies, evaluates, and communicates potential impacts associated with the development and implementation of the Subarea Plan.
- Appendix C is a summary of the community outreach efforts completed during the development of the Subarea Plan. This summary describes the major themes and priorities expressed by the community.

Skyway's 2022 Community Service Area Subarea Plan Appendix C:

Beginning in the summer of 2018, during the first phase of the Skyway-West Hill Community Service Area Subarea Plan process, King County engaged with the public, including residents and key stakeholders such as business owners and non-profits, to identify land use issues in the community and update the Community Plan to reflect current needs and the current planning framework.

Then, in August of 2020, following adoption of the 2020 Skyway-West Hill Land Use Strategy: Phase 1 of the Skyway-West Hill Community Service Area Subarea Plan, an updated community engagement plan was drafted.

The second phase of the subarea planning included several engagement efforts:

- Starting during the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual community meetings, attendance at existing community-based organization meetings, phone interviews, and online engagement to distribute the subarea plan information and encourage community participation.
- Department of Local Services cooperated with the Department of Community and Human Services on an Anti-displacement Strategy Report and recommendations for the communities of Skyway-West Hill and North Highline. This project involved a series of 8 community workshops.
- April 2021, the Skyway Community Voices contract was signed with Urban Family, a local community-based organization to assist further with community engagement on the Subarea Plan and Community Needs List.

From the stakeholder interviews, the following key themes emerged which influenced how the Department of Local Services staff structured the focus groups and ongoing outreach with the community. One of the themes was a community center.

- Gentrification and Displacement
- Pros and Cons of New Development
- Affordable Housing
- Community Investments
- Sidewalks and Walkability
- Community Center: "A community center for Skyway-West Hill has been a long-articulated need by the community and groups representing residents. A feasibility study of a Skyway-West Hill community center was attached to the Land Use Strategy as Appendix C."

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- Open Space and Recreation
- Community Outreach / Focus Group Suggestions

Skyway-West Hill Land Use Strategy Appendix C:

A feasibility analysis was completed in 2019 (Skyway-West Hill Land Use Strategy Appendix C, Attachment G to Ordinance 19146). This study was developed in compliance with the 2019-2020 Biennial Budget Ordinance 18835, Section 84, Proviso P5 B. The report was prepared by the Department of Local Services and the Parks and Recreation Division of the Department of Natural Resources and Parks.

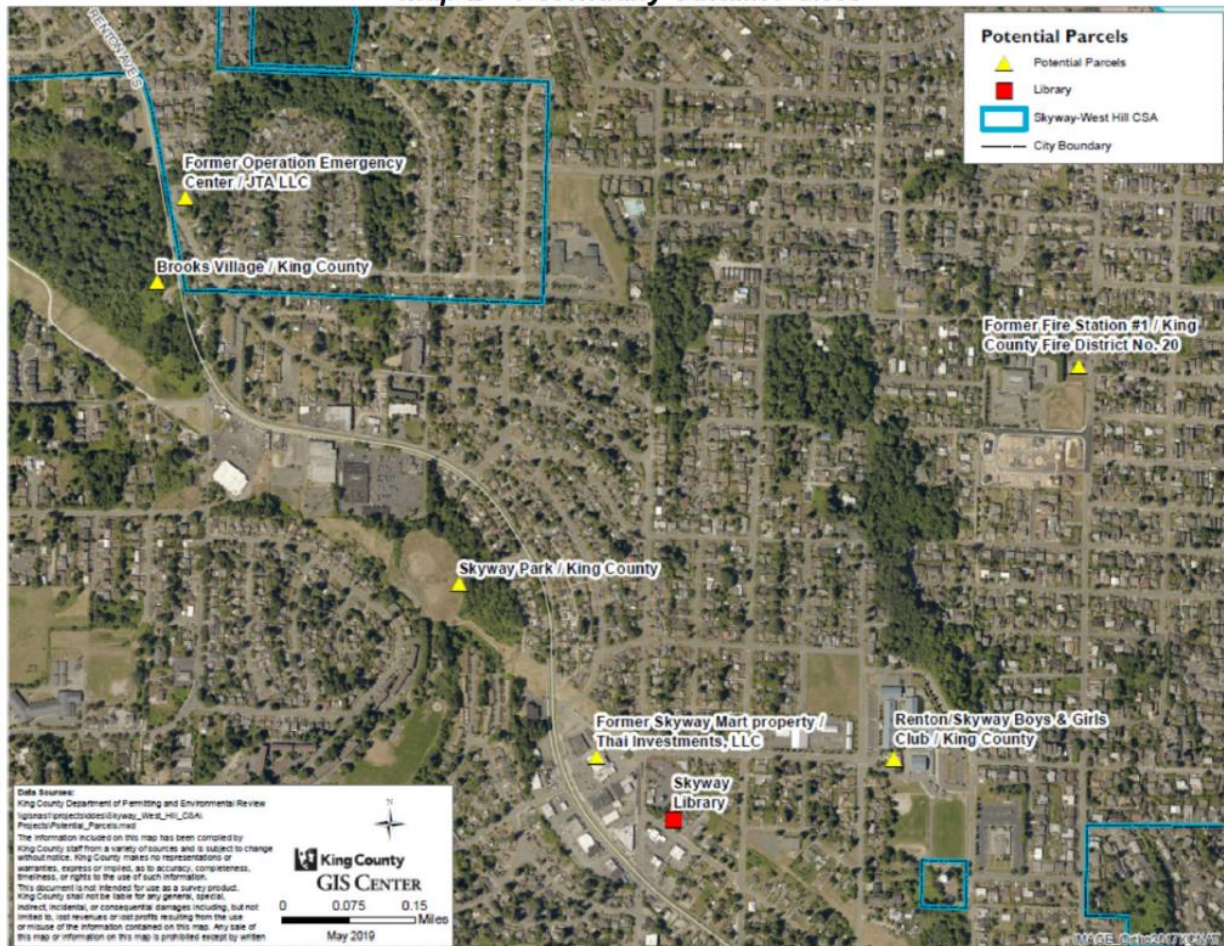
The study looked at the previous report and engagement from the Skyway Community Center: Conceptual Design Report completed in 2014, reviewed inventory of current public and non-profit community centers located within a 3 mile radius, and studied the current economic climate and construction costs.

Site selection process for surrounding jurisdictions was reviewed to shape the site selection process for the feasibility study. In 2013, when the Skyway Solutions planning effort was in progress, no site in the Skyway-West Hill community was readily identifiable as an appropriate and available location for a community center, although several ideas were contributed by the community.

The study estimated that the 2019 cost to develop a Skyway-West Hill community Center would cost in the range of \$35-\$50 million in total project costs, including soft costs. The report also included a section identifying barriers and potential methods to overcome them in the context of the economic climate at that time.

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Map 2 – Potentially Suitable Sites

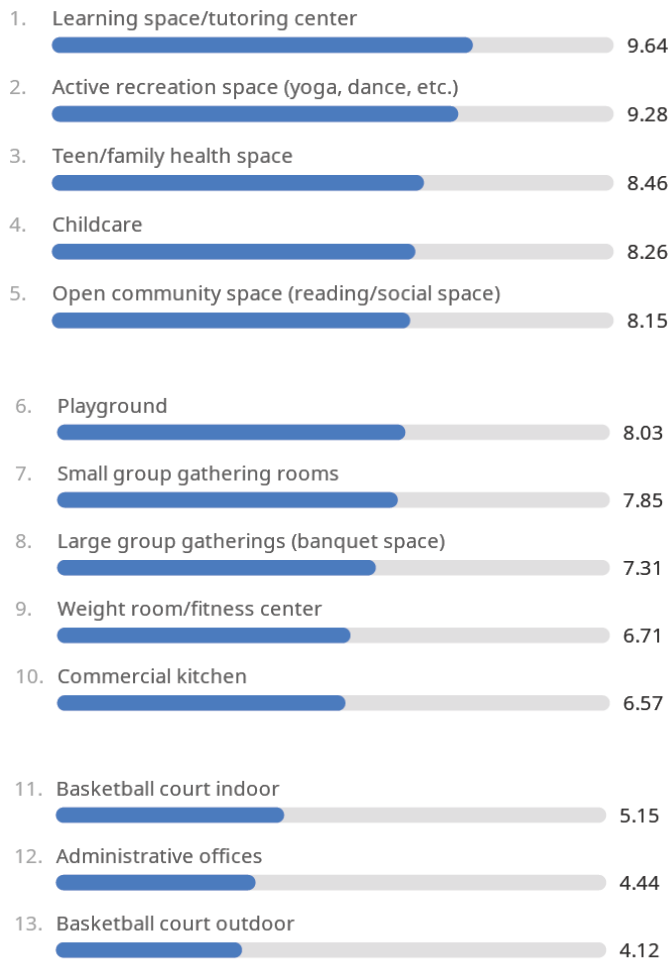


Potentially suitable sites from 2019 feasibility analysis.

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2022 Skyway-West Hill Priorities Survey:

The poll was completed by 65 residents and included both structured and open ended questions. The following were ranked in importance from 1 to 13 with 1 being most important to 13 least important.



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Previously Identified Community Priorities

The top priority areas are identified from prior engagement efforts summarized in the table above. Efforts included community interviews, meetings, workshops, and surveys. The most recent effort was the 2022 Skyway-West Hill Priorities Survey, which was summarized above.

Community Building

- Kitchen/dining space
- Gathering spaces for small and large groups
- Emphasis on supporting youth
- Cultural programming and events

Health/Fitness

- Gymnasium
- Swimming pool (indoor)
- Active recreation classes
- Weightlifting/fitness space
- Showers and locker rooms for fitness space
- Health resources, esp. for teens/families

Learning

- Tutoring space for students
- Opportunities for adult learning/ continuing education
- Access to technology

Connection to Resources

- Job training/employment supports
- Linkage to community services
- Resource center for teens and young adults
- Intra-community skill share

Play

- Kid-friendly activities and spaces
- Playground
- Basketball court/gymnasium
- Music, arts, and culture for all ages
- Childcare

Community Center Trends

Based on the public input that was received over time primary spaces were identified for a Community Center Program. The following identifies trends that existed with those components at the time of data collection.

- **Play:** The need for these spaces has been a constant in recreation center planning. Children's areas have fluctuated in terms of the definitions. Since the time of the public input the demand for licensed childcare has increased dramatically. Short-term (2-4 hour) child watch and/or care is a constant in recreation facility planning. In terms of revenue generation B*K typically refers to these areas as lost leaders. These areas provide a service that facilitates participation in other activities.
- **Small Groups:** These spaces fluctuate based on the location. As locations have identified themselves as small conference areas, they are prevalent. For those that are driven more by revenue generation these spaces are less desirable because they become difficult to monetize. In many instances they lend themselves to one v. one or small group instruction.
- **Learning Spaces:** Like the small group spaces these fluctuate based on the revenue generating goals of the facility. The learning space can support a great deal of what B*K would refer to as

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enrichment programming. At the time of this data gathering the National Endowment for the Arts was reporting significant increases in participation across a wide variety of activities.

Learning spaces like this can support enrichment programs, but also group exercise for a wide variety of age ranges and skill levels. The demand for group exercise was and continues to be strong.

- **Large Gathering:** These spaces are typically dividable into 2 or 3 independent spaces and are typically associated with a kitchen or catering kitchen. These have and continue to support community gatherings. Community gatherings have been supported by school district and other non-profits with facilities. Community Centers at this time continued to be a focus of community gathering opportunities.
- **Kitchen:** At the time of data gathering the focus of kitchens was to support the large gathering spaces adjacent to them. Since that time there has been an increased focus in community centers of healthy eating programs and teaching kitchen opportunities. There are also opportunities to monetize these spaces with private individuals or groups renting them out for personal use. Another area of focus are meal programs and their support.
- **Gymnasium:** There was an continues to be an accurate shortage of gymnasium space in most communities, King County included. The advantages of the large gymnasium space are that they can be programmed in conjunction with the large gathering space or independently. A gymnasium can support basketball, volleyball, pickleball, handball, badminton, etc. They support birthday parties and private rentals. The demand for these spaces has increased dramatically post-pandemic as access to school facilities has continued to decrease.
- **Swimming/ Pools:** The demand for pools in King County is very high. Swimming participation has been steady over the past 10-15 years and is typically one of the top 5 activities as reported by the National Sporting Goods Association.

Additional Considerations

For some residents, the lack of a community center is an example of how Skyway-West Hill has been underprioritized by King County ([The Seattle Times, 2022](#)). Organizations like the Skyway Coalition have advocated for increased funding to the area, resulting in the current project funding for site selection and design for the new community center.

Future engagement should recognize the past efforts and input from the community and acknowledge the advocacy efforts of the Skyway-West Hill community and communicate how they aim to overcome identified barriers.

The majority of community members living in the Skyway-West Hill are BIPOC and 36% speak a language other than English. The median household income was \$87,298, compared to \$116,340 in greater King County ([U.S. Census, 2020](#)). Over 30% of the population has a household income less than \$50,000. As housing prices increase across Seattle and King County, community members and businesses in Skyway-West Hill face an increasing potential for displacement and gentrification ([The Seattle Times, 2022](#)). As

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an unincorporated area of King County, Skyway-West Hill has less access to funding and social services than cities or towns. Given this information, future engagement should center equity and social justice with an awareness of Skyway-West Hill's demographics and needs.

Beekman, D. (2022, Aug. 13). Skyway fights for housing, parks and community at 'critical moment'. *The Seattle Times*. [seattletimes.com](https://www.seattletimes.com)

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020) *Quick Facts: Bryn- Mawr Skyway CDP*. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved December 2023 from data.census.gov.