

John Lombard, Candidate for City Council, District 5: Position Statement on Lake City

Lake City is a vital, vibrant, and diverse community, with a strikingly engaged group of leaders. They have a plan for their neighborhood's future, developed with input from hundreds of Lake City residents. The plan envisions an "ever safer, more beautiful, healthy, and connected" community, even as the core of Lake City's urban village and the entire Lake City Way corridor grow more dense. City of Seattle data, however, documents that some of the City's most vulnerable populations live in Lake City, facing some of the highest risk of displacement found anywhere in Seattle, because of that same growing density.

The Lake City community needs a partner in its District 5 representative, one who will listen closely to the entire community's concerns and aspirations, who will help leverage and guide City investments sensitive to those aspirations, and who will be accessible to everyone as Lake City undergoes what is likely to be profound change. Through my long history with the D5 Community Network, Thornton Creek Alliance, and the North District Council, I have shown I can be that sort of partner.

Lake City has suffered from inconsistent attention from City government for years. District 5 Councilmember Debora Juarez has recently championed full funding for replacement of the Lake City Community Center. But when community leaders and our state legislative delegation first met with her on the subject in the summer of 2016, she refused to identify this as a priority, even though that was all our legislators asked to offer state funding assistance. Councilmember Juarez has never explained her change of heart and, in general, has a poor record of listening to other Lake City interests. In February 2016, Mayor Ed Murray identified the Lake City neighborhood as the first place the City would apply a new paradigm of integrated planning across departments. But the Mayor's Office provided no clear guidance to City departments as to what this meant and Councilmember Juarez never demanded action, with the result that the City has avoided new commitments in Lake City since then, with the recent exception of the community center. In May 2012, the University of Washington facilitated a well-attended design workshop sponsored by the Pierre family, for the community to consider future uses of the 14 acres of land that the family owns along Lake City Way and in the Lake City core. Despite enthusiasm for the community recommendations from the Pierres, the City Department of Planning and Development opposed them. The project lost its momentum, although it has regained some recently, under the Durkan administration.

In contrast, the Wells Fargo Foundation chose Lake City in June 2016 as one of only six communities nationwide to receive a \$100,000 Neighborhood Planning Grant, for what became the Imagine Lake City Together (ILCT) project. ILCT, administered by the Children's Home Society of Washington in partnership with Lake City Future First and the Lake City Neighborhood Alliance, conducted a widely inclusive, neighborhood-based process that led to its June 2017 report, offering "A Vision for Lake City" (see <https://enjoylakecity.org/news/lake-city-wells-fargo-planning-grant/>). Wells Fargo was impressed enough with the ILCT report that in April 2018 it provided a \$550,000 multi-year grant to assist with its implementation.

The Lake City community largely did ILCT on its own. But implementation of the plan requires a true partnership—with City government first and foremost, given its control of most of the relevant infrastructure investments, land use planning, the Police Department, and much social service spending. The District 5 City Councilmember will play a crucial role in how well the City upholds its responsibilities in this partnership. Other implementation partners include the County, State, and Federal governments, as well as non-profits and community organizations. I would be much better for this than Councilmember Juarez, given her poor track record working with other governments.

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The ILCT plan calls for a “transformative project”: development of a “Civic Hub” in the Lake City core. Community leaders dreamed of something like that for many years, but the plan adds new dimensions to it as a central location for delivering critical services—including the community center, a multi-cultural center, a business incubator, vocational training, and a wide range of human services. As such, the Civic Hub would support each of the ILCT plan’s strategic directions: a venue for Lake City residents to Assemble and Connect; a point of local pride to Promote the neighborhood; and above all else, a place to Serve the needs of Lake City’s most vulnerable populations.

Affordable housing was the number one reason that residents surveyed by ILCT gave for choosing to live in Lake City. Nevertheless, according to ILCT’s research, half of all renters in Lake City are “cost-burdened” (paying more than one-third of their income in rent) and more than a quarter are “extremely” so (paying more than half of their income in rent). ILCT surveys found that displacement because of rising rents or redevelopment was the biggest fear of both residents and businesses—consistent with the City of Seattle’s analysis.

New development is, unavoidably, coming to Lake City. The market will drive this, attracted in part by the comparatively lower land costs that help make Lake City more affordable now. To maintain and add as much affordable housing as possible as this new development takes place, the community needs the City as an active partner, working together with thoughtful, responsible landowners and developers.

New development, together with strategic City investments, can also help transform Lake City into a much more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly place than it is today. Flashing beacon crosswalks on Lake City Way (coming soon on 35th Ave NE) have been valuable additions, but much more of the pedestrian grid still needs building out in the Lake City Hub Urban Village. Some of the larger blocks along Lake City Way could potentially incorporate pedestrian thruways. The Lake City Way corridor as a whole could add multiple pedestrian nodes to offer safer crossings.

Improving the pedestrian experience was a key part of what community participants sought in the 2012 workshop on the future of the Pierre properties. Participants also saw an opportunity to celebrate Lake City’s relationship to Thornton Creek, which runs under Lake City Way between NE 117th and 120th Streets. (The Pierres own property on both sides of this crossing, joined by a neglected natural area already owned by the City.) A third goal coming out of the workshop was to avoid the “canyon effect” of new development lining Lake City Way—instead breaking up the linearity of the street with a variety of unique features and striving to create different types of development along different stretches of the roadway.

The Pierre family’s ownership of 14 acres in a defining set of places for Lake City offers an extraordinary opportunity for a partnership between them, the City, and the community. Councilmember Juarez has neglected that opportunity, but I would not.

Lake City needs a District 5 representative adept at partnerships, who is committed to advocating that City government fulfill its responsibilities to Lake City as a partner. At a citywide level, Seattle’s Growth and Equity policies call for that, too. As District 5 representative, I will be committed to making it happen.