

February 03, 2004

Nickels wants to double downtown population

By [SAM BENNETT](#)

Journal Staff Reporter

In his mid-term State of the City address Monday, Mayor Greg Nickels set aggressive goals for downtown housing and job growth.

He wants the population downtown to grow from 33,000 to 66,000 in the next 20 years.

"Let's shift policy from capping residential growth downtown to unleashing it," he said. "Let's stimulate residential development, not just downtown, but also in the center city neighborhoods nearby."

In other city news, the City Council approved the appointment of Jorge Carrasco as superintendent of City Light. Reducing operations costs and environmental stewardship will be Carrasco's top priorities.

In his effort to spur development, Nickels said lifting of lease lid in the University District has already produced results. Unico is in discussions with the university on a mixed-use development with 32 units of housing at 15th Avenue N.E. and 42nd.

Though Nickels announced the deal has been made, the formal agreement has not been approved, according to Patrick McCabe, vice president of development at Unico. If the project is approved, it would begin in spring 2005, he said.

Repeating the phrase "Here is a need, let's act," Nickels said the city and Port should work with the Manufacturing Industrial Council to create blue-collar jobs.

"The [Port] acreage and opportunity are huge," he said. "When great homegrown companies like GM Nameplate need space to expand, the port supplies the land and we supply the permits," he said. "The issue is not complicated. It just takes commitment and hard work."

He said the city will also work with the Port to enhance the city's role in the maritime industry. "We will grow the maritime industry," he said. "We will help Trident [the seafood company] stay right here and expand."

On the housing front, Nickels asked the City Council to renew the multi-family tax exemption, to assist new private-sector affordable housing in areas such as the Central District, South Lake Union, Northgate and the University District.

He said the success in Belltown should extend to other areas near downtown. "We must show results in the International District, where 750 units of housing stand empty, and in Pioneer Square and the stadium

area. Growth in center city benefits all of Seattle. By attracting people into the heart of the city, there's less crime on our streets and less pollution in the air we breathe."

Nickels reiterated his goal for 23,000 new jobs in South Lake Union in 20 years -- stimulated by the biotech industry. "Seattle has an opportunity to lead a global industry -- find cures for cancer, malaria, HIV and other diseases that shorten life and bring misery to families worldwide -- and to do great things for our future," he said.

Since taking office, Nickels said his "Here is a need, let's act" approach has put City Light on the path to financial recovery and helped make Seattle the "most prepared city in America" for an emergency such as an earthquake.

Sam Bennett can be reached by [email](#) or by phone at (206) 622-8272.

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