5 redevelopment
5. Redevelopment Potential

The metric used in this map to identify potentially redevelopable parcels is a measure called ‘Improvement to Land Ratio.’ This is the ratio of the assessed value of improvements to the assessed value of land. The idea is that a site in its highest and best use would have a building-to-land value ratio of 50% or higher.

Areas that are potentially redevelopable include parcels area around the old Park and Ride, currently owned by King County, parcels south of Bellevue College currently occupied by the Lincoln Executive Center and other smaller uses, Eastgate Plaza (which has the Albertsons grocery store) and smaller parcels around it and the Sunset Village and smaller parcels around it.

Besides these sites, this analysis shows several parcels in the Richards Valley area as being underutilized. This is not unexpected given the land-consumptive nature of light industrial uses, and the relative age of the buildings in the area. Other sites that show up as underutilized are around the Boeing campus near 161st street.

Of these sites, the Richard Valley parcels, Sunset Village and Boeing properties are constrained by various factors. In the case of Richards Valley these are critical areas around streams, wetlands and steep slopes, power lines and existing zoning that permits a limited range of uses, mainly light industrial uses. In the case of the Boeing parcels, it is not likely that Boeing has any plans to redevelop its properties, thought this might be a longer term possibility. Sunset Village has recently seen some development with Michaels Toyota replacing a Safeway department store, and it is unlikely that the auto-dealership will redevelop in the near term. Sites around it may be more likely to redevelop, given their high visibility and access to the highway.

Some caveats apply to this analysis. This ‘Improvement to Land Ratio’ metric is an imperfect measure. It is useful as a method to preliminarily identify underutilized parcels, but is inadequate as a predictor of future land use change, since redevelopment depends on a variety of forces like market conditions, infrastructure, community needs and the appetite for change among land-owners. The City has commissioned a consultant to perform a market analysis of the study area, and a report of his findings that will shed more light on redevelopment potential is forthcoming.

Figure 14. Improvement to Land Ratio
6 urban design
### 6. Urban Design

The study area is characterized by low-density development in isolated single-use clusters with limited orientation to transit or pedestrians. This urban form is the result of three inter-related physical factors, the layout of streets, pattern of land holdings, and the design of buildings, and other non-physical forces such as regulatory frameworks and market realities. This section of the report focuses on the physical factors that have shaped the study area.

#### 6.1 Layout of Streets: Pedestrian Connectivity

Overall, relatively few continuous public streets run through the study area, and it lacks a fully connected, hierarchical, street and sidewalk system. Existing pedestrian facilities are mostly along high-volume, high-speed roads, reducing their appeal as good streets for walking. The absence of a regular, grid-based street network limits access to alternatives and offers few choices for direct routes.

Natural features such as wetlands and forested steep slopes, and the difficulty associated with negotiating the freeway add to the challenges facing pedestrians. In general, pedestrians make shorter trips, and think of the trajectory of the trip spatially, unlike automobile users who think of trips temporally and therefore the study area’s spatial features such as hilly terrain, forested areas, and the freeway have had negative impacts on walkability and pedestrian perceptions of distance and safety.

Existing pedestrian connections include the sidewalk network on public streets, and trails. Non-motorized connections across the freeway are at SE 35th Place (near Eastgate Plaza) through a tunnel, and grade separated crossings at 148th Avenue SE, SE 142nd Place (connecting to BC) and Factoria Boulevard. Informal pedestrian paths along SE 37th Street and through Bellevue College are also used by residents and students to travel through the study area.

A physical environment with high pedestrian mobility typically needs sidewalks of adequate width, in good condition on both sides of streets, connections to transit routes or other non-motorized transportation networks, and a sufficient number of crosswalks. Other factors of the built environment such as a diversity of uses within reasonable distances, densities, and smaller block sizes, and a variety of urban design factors have impacts on the pedestrian environment, but access to safe, walkable routes and a continuous sidewalk network is the foundation of a walkable place.

Based on this, the area around the L1 cluster has low pedestrian mobility because of the near absence of public sidewalks, and steep terrain. Office and retail areas of the study area have moderate pedestrian mobility, but pedestrians routinely encounter out-of-direction walking and circuitous routes, especially to cross the freeway, a discontinuous sidewalk network, sidewalks of inconsistent width with impediments such as utility covers and overgrown vegetation, wide intersections, long waits at signals, and expanses of concrete or parking. Within the shopping sites especially, the presence of large parking lots between the street and buildings creates access issues for pedestrians, and makes the sidewalk environment less appealing by reducing activity, weather protection and creating a perception of a lack of safety by reducing “eyes on the street.”
6.2 PATTERN OF LAND: LARGE PARCELS AND LAND HOLDINGS

Land in the study area was held and developed in large increments, a characteristic of coarse grained and large-scaled places. This historic land ownership pattern, with large land holdings concentrated among a small pool of property owners, was the main driver of three important features of the study area: the evolution of street networks, the scale of built environment and the relationships of streets, lots and buildings.

Streets in the study area were generated as large parcels subdivided, instead of being laid out in anticipation of development. This meant that the street network stopped expanding as soon as parcels became appropriately sized for redevelopment. Since very large parcels typically subdivided into large sites, the street system was limited to the function of providing access to these sites, and there was no opportunity to evolve over time into a finer-grained network.

Large parcel sizes have had implications of scale for almost all aspects of form, enabling wide streets and intersections, and large blocks and building footprints. They eliminated constraints on the shapes and orientation of buildings, which meant that buildings in the study area have not been ‘forced into a relationship with the streets’ or other buildings, allowing each parcel and its buildings to function separately, with its own unique, private circulation systems, landscaping and other features.

Historic land ownership patterns continued as late as 1978. Today, while the large land holdings that characterized the study area in 1978 have been considerably subdivided, it continues to have relatively big parcels, and consequently, fewer public streets and larger blocks than other parts of the city, with the possible exception of Bel-Red. For example, today, Downtown Bellevue has 387 parcels spread over a total area of 329 acres, while the study area has 211 parcels spread over a total area of 633 acres. Average parcel size for the study area is 2.9 acres, almost three times Downtown’s average parcel size of .85 acres.

Figure 16. Parcel Sizes
6.3 BUILDING DESIGN: AGE

It appears, from the information at hand, that the Bellevue Airfield and associated hangars and small buildings, dating from 1941, were the first development to occur in the study area. The airfield and associated buildings no longer exist, and two single story service buildings adjacent to SE 26th Street, built in 1947, are the oldest existing buildings in the study area.

There was very little development in the study area in the 1950s, but spurred by the airfield and the high visibility of the highway corridor, the pace picked up in the 1960s. Retail uses led the cycle with the construction of a shopping center in 1962, near 150th Ave SE, called Sunset Village, which had a grocery store in the beginning, a Safeway later and is currently occupied by Chaplin's Subaru and Michael's Toyota. This was followed by a few light industrial buildings, such as the transfer station in 1966, the buildings currently occupied by the Seattle Humane Society in 1969 and the main buildings of Bellevue College, also in 1969. Retail development continued into the 1970s with Eastgate Plaza in 1972, and Factoria Mall in 1977.

The study area went through a building boom in the 1980s and saw significantly more development activity than the previous decades, starting with additional retail at Loehmann's Plaza (now Factoria Village) in 1980, but mostly centered on office development. Perhaps because of developmental pressure, the Bellevue Airfield ceased operations in 1983, transferring 166 acres of land into a single developer's hands. This large swath of land was redeveloped into office buildings and hotels, such as the buildings now owned by Boeing, built between 1983 and 1986 and the Eastgate Office Park built in 1984. Office construction was not limited to the site of the former airfield, and additional office space was developed in Lincoln Executive Center, built between 1981 and 1987 and various buildings south of the freeway, built between 1983 and 1987.

Office space continued to be added in the late eighties and through the nineties with the construction of the Newport Corporate Center in 1988 and the Sunset Corporate Campus in the 1990s. Development in the study area slowed down considerably in the 2000s, but gained some momentum before the current "great recession," with significant investments such as the new Eastgate Park and Ride, the new Advanta Commons office building, currently occupied by Microsoft, Bellevue College expansion, and a smaller addition to the Newport Corporate Center.

The implications of the study area's architectural history are that most office buildings are of 1980s or 1970s vintage, with similar design biases and externalities. Office uses were designed with limited visual and physical connections to the street, surrounding buildings or transit, and as a consequence the study area's employees exhibit greater dependence on driving alone than ones in urban work settings such as Downtown.

The shopping centers in the study area, built in 1962, 1977 and 1980, are older than the office buildings and show similar design tendencies.

The study area has a mix of old and new buildings. Older buildings are more likely to provide the low-rent spaces required by light industrial uses, immigrant businesses, non-profit cultural centers and health clinics, and hence its supply of older building stock may have helped the study area attract and retain such businesses. While a supply of older buildings can be advantageous, some of the study area's office buildings and retail areas may be nearing the end of their economically efficient lives, and may be ripe for redevelopment.
Retail shopping areas are clustered across the study area in two main locations, Factoria Village near Factoria Boulevard and Eastgate Plaza near SE 36th Street, separated by a distance of about 1.5 miles. Factoria Village consists of five single-story buildings dating from 1980, with a total of approximately 122,650 gross square feet on a 9.8-acre site. It is configured as a "strip mall," with linear buildings, and a front setback of about 420' from the street, surrounded by parking and access driveways. Pedestrian walkways connect the different stores to each other but not to the public sidewalk network, since the design expects prospective customers to drive to the buildings.

Eastgate Plaza consists of three single-story buildings dating from 1972, with a total of approximately 78,300 gross square feet on an 8.3-acre site. It is similar to Factoria Village in configuration, with parking and access driveways surrounding a one-story linear strip of stores, and a front setback of about 200' but has more limited potential to link to the public sidewalk network. Direct connections to adjacent residential neighborhoods is challenging because of steep topography on its south side and the freeway interchange on the west. Eastgate Plaza is connected through a tunnel to residential uses on the north side of the freeway and this appears to be a well used link, and is perhaps a signal that people would walk to the stores, if it were better connected to other uses.

Both of these retail areas are in large land swaths; Factoria Village is in a rectangular swath measuring about 875' by 550' and Eastgate Plaza is in a thin, linear piece measuring about 2000' by 300'. Both shopping centers have little to no visual or physical connection to the public street network. Pedestrians encounter long blocks, chaotic visual and physical relationships between the street/sidewalk and store entrances, expanses of parking and an inconsistent sidewalk network.

Both these retail areas are in locations with a customer base of reasonable size in a five or ten minute walkshed, a distance at which people walk to destinations regardless of the quality of the walk, as long as there is a safe, walkable route. Today, only a small percentage of the large pool of prospective users of the shopping areas are able to walk to the stores though they live within a quarter or half mile of the shopping areas because there are few safe, walkable routes. Increasing such connections and improving the pedestrian environment might encourage more people to make the trip on foot.

Besides these two shopping centers, the other major retail use is auto dealerships. There are three auto dealerships in the study area, Chaplin's Subaru and Michael's Toyota east of 150th Avenue and north of I-90 and the Honda Center near SE 36th Street, south of I-90. Of these Michael's Toyota is a relatively recent development, and replaced a Safeway in the 'Sunset Village' retail area. As is typical with more recent dealerships, both of these are on large sites, and are less integrated with the uses around them. The Honda dealership is the older of the three, and is on a smaller site, though equally separated from other uses. All three dealerships, but especially Michael's Toyota and Chaplin's Subaru, are on highly visible and heavily trafficked sites in the corridor. They are designed with extensive outdoor surface parking, signs and nighttime lighting. These features add to the visual chaos of the area and may have negative impacts on pedestrians' perception of safety and comfort in the roadside environment.
6.5 BUILDING DESIGN: LIGHT INDUSTRIAL CLUSTER

The light industrial cluster in the Richards Valley area, cluttered mostly around SE 30th Street, is dominated by utilitarian buildings such as storage warehouses, light manufacturing and office warehouses, with a programmatic mix that has limited ability to contribute activity to the street. The predominant building form here is the box-like utilitarian, one or two story warehouse building and their architectural design has not used massing or scale to overcome programmatic challenges to pedestrian orientation.

The most common building type has three components, a warehouse space, small office space and storage space or back-office. They typically also have high ceilings, floors that can hold heavy loads and loading docks required by many industrial tenants. Buildings are low, and most are single story buildings of pre-1970s and 1980s vintage. A lot of older ‘flex’ buildings here accommodate multiple tenants who use the space for light industrial as well as office purposes. Not all buildings in the Richards Valley area are used for light industrial uses. Spaces have been carved out of flex buildings by space consumptive businesses looking for low rent spaces like a dance studio, health club/ gym and a shooting range.

No continuous, public street cuts through the area, creating a large tract of land bounded by SE Eastgate Way, SE 26th Street, Richards Road and 139th Avenue SE. Two stub streets SE 30th and SE 32nd Streets, provide limited permeability and divide the tract formally into three linear swaths, while in actual experience, the area functions as a loose system of yards broken up by informal driveways and walkways.

Pedestrians encounter large parking lots, unbroken, blank street level walls, and a near absent sidewalk network. All of these factors ensure that few pedestrians walk to or from the area, and anecdotal evidence is that the few who do are office workers walking across the freeway to Factoria Mall to access restaurants and other retail uses such as the QFC.

There are no public open spaces in the Richards Valley area (the Sunset Mini Park is adjacent) and no pedestrian oriented frontage or retail storefronts. As things are today, walkability is low. Topography, forested areas, large land swaths, discontinuous sidewalk network, low activity, and truck traffic on the frontage road, make it hard for people to access the area on foot or feel safe/comfortable walking.

Low walkability is in part, a function of light industrial uses in the area, since the geometrics of the roadway that enable easy and quick freight access, essential for light industrial areas, are often spatial barriers to walkability.
Office uses in the study area are spread over both the northern and southern sides of the freeway. On the north side, office uses are clustered around 161st Avenue SE and along the south and west sides of Bellevue College. Office uses on the south side show less clustering, with the exception of the Newport Corporate Center, and are generally scattered along SE 36th Street. Office development in the study area has had wide ranging impacts. They have helped make the study area a major employment center, and provided support for ancillary business uses such as restaurants and hotels. At the same time, the paradigms used to configure development, the auto-oriented suburban office park format, has had negative impacts on transportation, housing and the environment.

In terms of urban form, the various buildings individually exhibit typical patterns of suburban office park development such as freestanding buildings or self-referenced building ensembles set back at large distances (typically 100-200') from the public street, internal access roads and driveways, and large expanses of surface parking. Collectively, large setbacks from the street and between buildings have resulted in isolated islands of use and activity, reducing the ability of these buildings to interact with each other to define the street or form urban public spaces. (Scheer and Petkov, 1998)