

Annual Report 2022

Our team is extremely proud of the year we had at The Urbanist. Our coverage expanded across the Puget Sound region. We launched a [podcast](#) and a [book club](#). We offered a variety of in-person events and tours to pair with our continued monthly online speaker series that has replaced our monthly meetups. All in all, we produced more content than ever before.

Year in numbers

- Doubled readership on our website.
- 700+ articles published.
- 70 articles [on the Eastside](#), more than doubling our coverage over 2021.
- 40 podcast [episodes](#) released.
- 58 [op-eds](#) from local thought-leaders posted.
- 9 virtual meetups with special guests hosted and posted on [our YouTube](#).
- 9 tours and in-person social hours hosted.
- 43 candidate endorsement interviews completed.
- 36 candidates and ballot measures endorsed.
- 5 heroes and 5 zeroes named in our [annual state legislative recap](#).
- 7 new members added to our [board of directors](#).
- 300+ monthly subscribers who keep us going. ([Join them!](#))

This greater output helped steer the conversation and aided urbanists in making some major political strides this year.



The Urbanist hosted a walking tour in Bellevue's Wilburton neighborhood in August.

Abundant housing momentum

The Urbanist Elections Committee [endorsed](#) 28 state legislators in 2022 and the vast majority are headed to Olympia to lend greater support for urbanist issues than ever before. The 2022 session included plenty of letdowns, but we also saw the [emergence](#) of Rep. Jessica Bateman as a powerful champion for statewide zoning reform and housing abundance. While too many housing and climate bills [died](#), Bateman spearheaded a broader and stronger coalition than ever before, putting us in prime position to make 2023 a year of major housing wins.

The housing coalition will have new allies. Seattle elected four strong housing advocates in open seat races: Darya Farivar, Julia Reed, Chipalo Street, and Emily Alvarado. Tacoma elected an Urbanist-endorsed housing champion in Sharlett Mena in place of retiring skeptic Steve Conway. Plus, Democrats [picked up a senate seat](#) with the addition of Sharon Shewmake in LD42. These additional friendly voices and votes could make all the difference, as will a new committee structure that lessens roadblocks. And the governor [making it a top priority](#) does not hurt either. **The Urbanist will again join with allies to push for a statewide zoning reform bill and more funding for affordable housing.**

Cities and counties across the state are preparing their once-a-decade major updates to their comprehensive plans. The Urbanist has covered these efforts and pushed cities to boldly reform their zoning to welcome housing at all income levels across their jurisdiction. Cities across the region, like [Bellevue](#), [Redmond](#), [Kirkland](#), [Shoreline](#), [Lynnwood](#), and [Mercer Island](#), are gearing up to launch their comp plan processes to prepare their final plans by the end of 2024 deadline. Already, our coverage helped beat back a [housing backlash](#) that sought to slow growth near Lynnwood's "City Center" light rail station set to open in 2024.

Via editorials, op-eds, and letter-writing campaigns, The Urbanist pushed the City of Seattle to beef up its options to create a bolder Alternative 5 and joined with allies to call for an [even bolder Alternative 6](#) to be added to the study. Alternatives 5 and 6 won [overwhelming public support](#) during the scoping period, with two-thirds of comments backing 5 or 6. Thus far, the Harrell administration has declined to add Alternative 6 to its Comp Plan study, but Councilmembers Teresa Mosqueda and Tammy Morales have [come out in favor](#). **In the coming year, we'll continue to push the City to go big for housing and add Alternative 6.**

Tenant rights push

As part of the Stay Housed Stay Healthy Coalition, The Urbanist advocated for an expansion of tenant rights throughout King County and [scored major victories](#) in five cities: Burien, Kenmore, Kirkland, Issaquah, and Redmond. This builds on countywide and Seattle wins in 2021. The coalition is aiming to keep the momentum going in 2023 and is targeting Renton, Tukwila, SeaTac Shoreline, and Bothell. And of course tenant advocates will be renewing their push for tenant protections and rent stabilization [at the state level](#).

Election reform wins

2022 also saw the passage of even-year election reform in King County for county-level races via an initiative that The Urbanist endorsed and pushed. It passed in a landslide, [showing the popularity](#) of even-year voting. We'll be pushing the state legislature to [remove their prohibition](#) and allow municipalities to institute even-year election reform as well.

The Urbanist Elections Committee was **one of a select few endorsing publications to back Seattle's successful ranked choice voting measure** after both the Seattle Times and The Stranger backed a "no" vote. Voters vastly preferred ranked choice over the alternative of "Approval Voting," but on the first question of whether the voting system should be changed at all, the measure eked out a narrow win given the headwinds from the two big "no" endorsements. Our team is very proud to have gotten it right and to have aided in reforming elections to encourage participation.

A worsening traffic safety crisis

Momentum was harder to come by when it comes to transportation.

Tragically, the traffic safety crisis escalated nationally and Washington State saw the largest jump in pedestrian deaths in the country. In 2021, 145 pedestrians died in crashes in Washington State, a 32% jump, and 2022 is likely to set another new record high. The Urbanist was at the forefront of [reporting on this crisis](#) and advocating for solutions. That work was frequently referenced by policymakers, including a shoutout from Seattle Councilmember Tammy Morales, who said **nobody has sustained more coverage of traffic collisions and deaths than our transportation reporter and senior editor Ryan Packer.**

Working with allies at the Move All Seattle Sustainably (MASS) coalition, we pushed the City to accelerate safety projects, particularly in Southeast Seattle, which has emerged as an epicenter of Seattle's safety crisis, with more than half of deadly crashes occurring in Council District 2 alone. Unfortunately, we instead saw the City of Seattle [delay](#) a handful of bike projects in D2.

A year of delays on transportation projects

Delays were a theme for transit projects, as well, much to our chagrin.

We started the year thinking East Link light rail would open in 2023, but the project's likely opening is now spring 2025. An [Eastside-only starter line](#) could make a mid-2024 opening possible, as the agency finishes work to address construction defects on the problem section of track along I-90. We hosted an [op-ed](#) from our Bellevue reporter Chris Randels and Kelli

Refer, our board secretary and also executive director of Move Redmond, **making the case for an early Link opening on the Eastside.**

The catch is Sound Transit says opening part of East Link early would cause Lynnwood Link to open about three months later — pushing it to late-2024 instead of mid-2024. The Sound Transit Board will make its East Link phasing decision in January 2023 and must weigh the expected delay to Lynnwood Link against the benefit of an early opening on the Eastside. We'll be watching this story closely and advocate for rolling out the most useful transit upgrades as soon as possible.

The rail project delays were not limited to East Link. Federal Way Link (formerly expected in 2024) also is [pushed back](#) at least a year due to a landslide along an I-5 embankment that is forcing a redesign to add a bridge along this section. The Hilltop extension of Tacoma's streetcar was [delayed again](#), too. It's now slated to open some time in the second half of 2023, instead of the Q1 2023 target aimed for since an earlier delay announced in February. The Seattle Streetcar remains [in limbo](#). Despite the delays, plenty of reason for optimism remains. New Sound Transit CEO [Julie Timm](#) has pledged open communication and a more collaborative approach to get projects humming along again. And new Seattle Department of Transportation Director [Greg Spotts](#) seems enthusiastic about [saving the Center City Streetcar](#).

Transit openings on the horizon

If Sound Transit is able to meet its new Tacoma T Line extension timeline, it will be among the few major transit projects completed in 2023, along with the [RapidRide H Line](#) upgrading Metro's Route 120, due in March. Meanwhile, 2024 and 2025 are shaping up to be much busier with major openings, including a handful of RapidRide projects ([G](#), [I](#), and maybe [J](#) and [K](#) lines).

- RapidRide [H Line](#) - March 2023
- Tacoma's T Line streetcar - mid to late 2023
- Swift [Orange Line](#) - [2024](#)
- Lynnwood Link - mid-2024
- RapidRide G Line on Madison Street - 2024
- East Link (Judkins Park to Downtown Redmond Link) - spring 2025.
- RapidRide I Line (Renton, Kent and Auburn) - fall 2025
- RapidRide J Line (upgrading Route 70) - [2025?](#)
- RapidRide K Line (Kirkland to Bellevue) - TBD
- Federal Way Link - TBD (2026?)
- Stride S1 bus rapid transit (Bellevue to Burien) - 2026

Street cafes expanding

On a brighter note, street cafes continue to gain traction. In December, Seattle [made permanent](#) its street cafe program and eased [restrictions on food trucks](#), too. Cities like Bellevue, Tacoma, and Everett have sought to promote street cafes, as we recently [covered](#). We held leaders accountable who opposed the push to create people-friendly streets despite the groundswell behind it, none more than Seattle Councilmember [Alex Pedersen](#).



Food trucks like these at the Seattle Center could be a more common occurrence.

The clear popularity of street cafes has not led transportation departments to draw the connection that pedestrianizing streets to create safe walking and biking networks and [festive](#) commercial districts would be popular too, not to mention green, healthy, and gleeful. But it's a matter of time. We continue to call for broad pedestrianization along the lines of the [130-mile crowd-sourced plan](#) our friends at Seattle Greenways dropped in 2020. To get us started, [Pike Place](#), [University Way](#), and [Lake Washington Boulevard](#) are low hanging fruit when it comes to opening streets to people.

Our growing urbanist family

The Urbanist family is growing. Our managing editor Natalie Bicknell Argerious went on maternity leave and is coming back at half-time, but her podcast sidekick and columnist extraordinaire Ray Dubicki stepped in to fill her shoes while she was out and help shoulder the load while she is on reduced hours. The tag team has been exceptional whether it comes to podcasting, editing, reporting, or editorializing.



Christopher Randels had a run as our Eastside reporter at the beginning of the year, but pivoted to focusing his time on Complete Streets Bellevue, a fledgling organization he founded. He still contributes freelance articles and he penned 45 articles for us this year, greatly boosting our coverage on the Eastside.

Longtime reporter and contributing editor Ryan Packer has become a prolific staff writer, with a whopping 104 articles published this year. Packer often follows the transportation beat, but also hits important housing stories too. Their in-depth reporting has shown a spotlight on pressing issues, like the pedestrian safety crisis, Mercer Island pulling up the drawbridge, and the runaway train that is the \$7.5 billion [Interstate Bridge Replacement](#) megaproject between Washington and Oregon. Thanks to reader support, we were able to ensure they were compensated for their great work.

Another development in 2022 is that The Urbanist board doubled in size and has reached [12 members](#) as we prepare for more organizational growth in the years ahead. We're excited to welcome those new members and the considerable skills they bring to the table. Our board of directors will be looking to expand our resources and guide our path as we look to have a truly regional impact.

Support our work!

Join us on our quest to cover and advocate for more urbanist policies regionwide. Make a year-end gift to ensure that we go into 2023 strong and ready to pounce on the numerous opportunities we've laid out like the urbanist alley cats we are. Donate via our website form or better yet [subscribe](#). Or if you'd like to help save on processing fees, write a check to The Urbanist and mail it to PO Box 31196 Seattle WA 98103.

We are a 501(c)(4) nonprofit so our contributions are not tax deductible, but we are working on adding a 501(c)(3) arm that would be tax-deductible and eligible for corporate matching and foundation gifts. Please reach out to development@theurbanist.org if you are interested so we discuss options and let you know when that option is available.



A group of Urbanist supporters at an October fundraising event in Seattle's Capitol Hill.

Looking ahead

We have big goals in the years ahead. Help us:

- Expand our coverage, especially in the Eastside, Tacoma, Shoreline, South King, and Snohomish County.
- Advocate for measures to combat Washington State's housing affordability crisis such as statewide zoning reform and the adoption of pro-housing comprehensive plans by cities of all sizes.
- Advance actions that protect tenants like statewide [rent stabilization](#), anti-displacement policy, and [social housing production](#).
- Help pass the [social housing initiative](#) establishing a public developer in Seattle which goes to vote in February.
- Urge transportation agencies to increase bus service to rebound from pandemic cuts.
- Push regional leaders to prioritize walking, rolling, biking, and transit and jettison car-centrism
- Win support for best Sound Transit 3 light rail alignments to promote ridership and housing.
- Accelerate rapid transit projects after spate of [pandemic-related delays](#).