

Dear City of Seattle,

I am writing on behalf of GSBA, Capitol Hill's Chamber of Commerce and Washington State's LGBTQ+ and Allied Business Association, to encourage you to invest in improvements to wayfinding in and around the Capitol Hill neighborhood. Wayfinding encompasses all of the ways in which people orient themselves, navigate to a destination, and recognize when they have arrived. In city planning, this looks like the signage, graphic communication, and tactile components people use to navigate the city. Improving Capitol Hill's way finding is a low-cost effort that will provide high returns to the local economy.

The concept of wayfinding includes four basic processes:

1. *Orientation* – the attempt to determine one's location, in relation to objects that may be nearby and the desired destination
2. *Route decision* – the selection of a course of direction to the destination
3. *Route monitoring* – checking to make sure that the selected route is heading toward the destination
4. *Destination recognition* – when the destination is recognized

Below is a series of examples of areas of possible improvement.

1. Downtown to Capitol Hill Connections

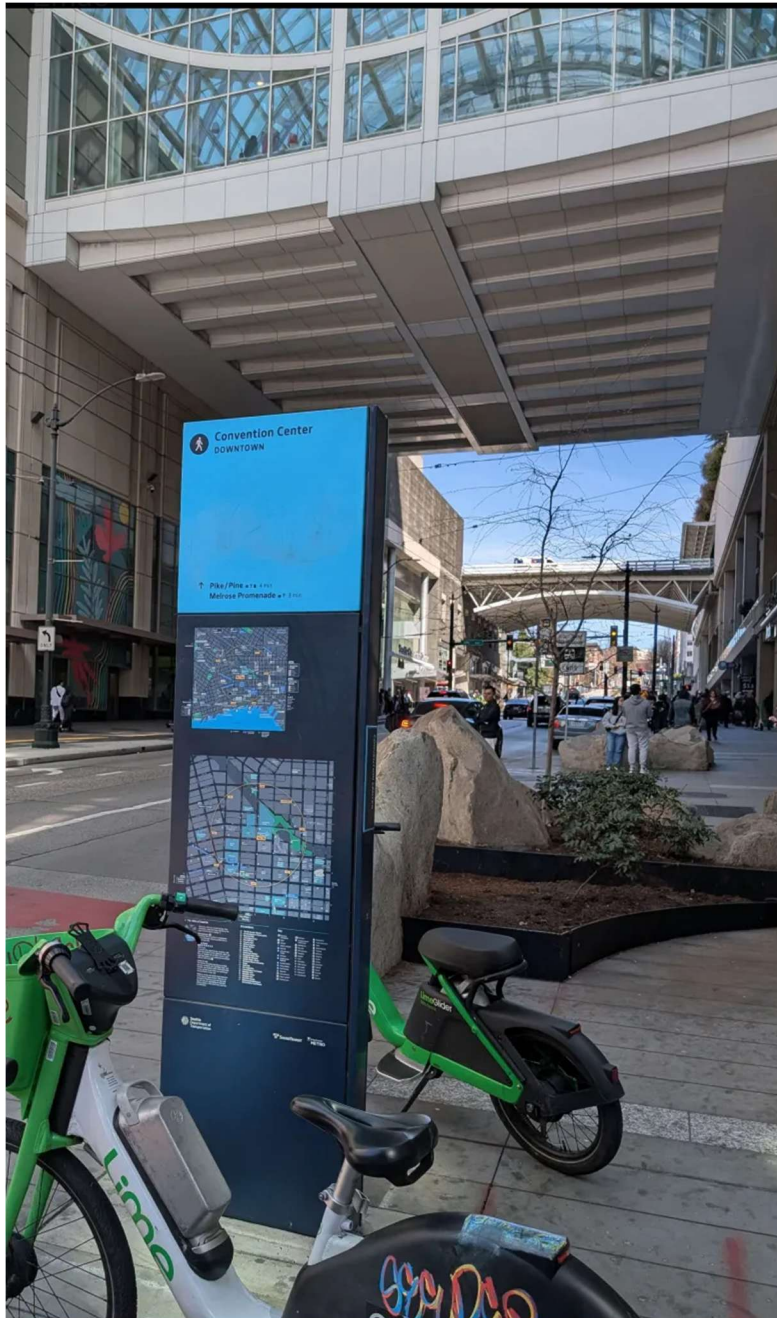
Improvements to signage downtown can increase pedestrian traffic to Capitol Hill. Pike and Pine both host hotels, venues, and the Convention Center, which host hundreds of thousands of tourists each year. The Capitol Hill neighborhood and its vibrant retail and restaurant scene is easily walkable from these locations, but many people don't know that.

Improving and adding more signage from downtown hot spots would increase traffic to Capitol Hill. For example, below is a photo of a current wayfinding sign outside the Seattle Convention Center. Note that the names of the streets are very small, "Melrose Promenade" and "Pike/Pine" are not descriptive, and the map is small and requires folks to bend down to read, making it inaccessible for many.

Businesses along the intersection between downtown and Capitol Hill have had an exceptionally difficult time since the Starbucks Roastery closed. The store was a major tourist attraction that encouraged people to walk up to that part of the neighborhood. Retailers nearby have reported losses of up to 40% since the closure, and many have stayed in business solely due to the support provided by their landlord.

Wayfinding could help bridge this gap by encouraging folks to visit the neighborhood – the *route decision* component. This can be done by creating a new sign that clearly invites people to visit the Capitol Hill neighborhood, points to where people should go, and lists some of the local businesses they’ll find. Signage up along the I-5 bridge on Pine would also be a helpful indicator to let people know they are going in the right direction.

Example of current Capitol Hill wayfinding outside of Seattle Convention Center:



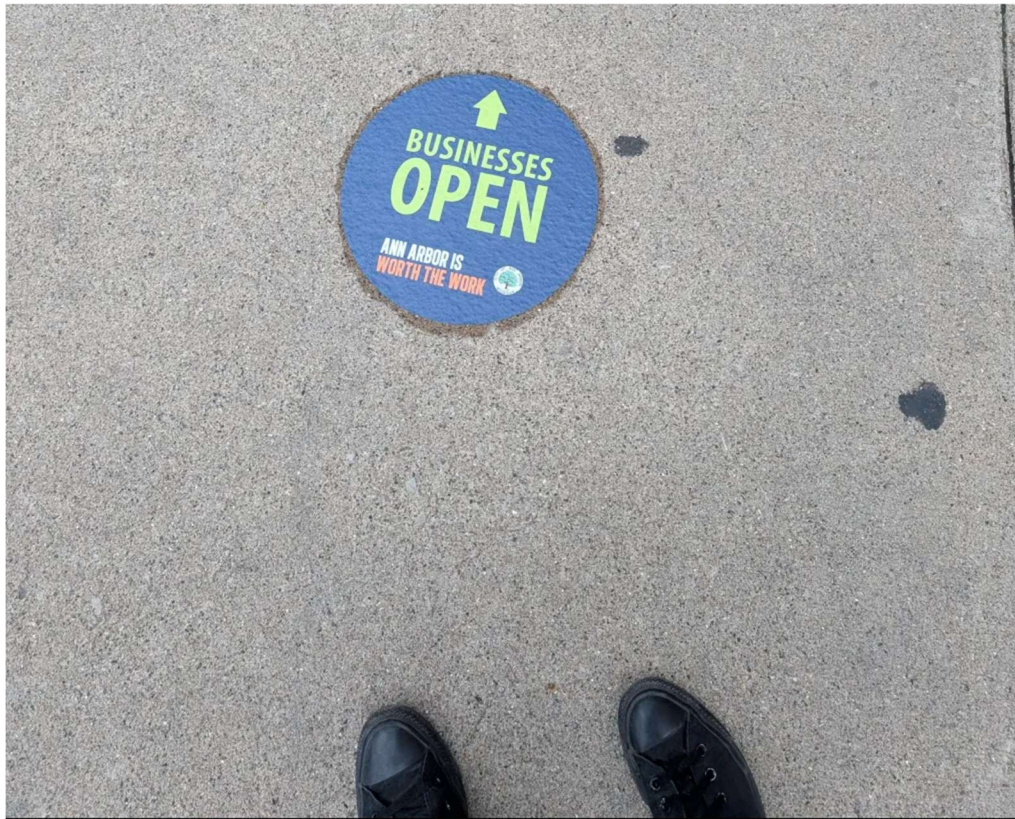
2. Navigation inside Capitol Hill

a. Sidewalk Stickers

Unlike many retail hubs, which typically encompass one or two streets, Capitol Hill is a dense neighborhood with many side streets, nooks, and crannies full of small businesses. As such, it can be difficult for a visitor to know when they have fully explored the neighborhood, or if there is something new at the end of an alleyway.

This can be improved simply by adding additional wayfinding along sidewalks. A sidewalk sticker that says “more businesses this way” along major alleyways or street crossings would encourage people to continue exploring and increase foot traffic. This is an example of improving the *route monitoring* aspect of wayfinding.

Example (sidewalk sticker in Ann Arbor, MI):



b. Directories/Window Art

The neighborhood also hosts several vacant properties, some of which (for example the Amazon Go building and Starbucks Roastery) can take up an entire block. The shuttered doors and boarded up windows make the area around them look “dead” or unsafe, disincentivizing visitors from continuing up that route.

This issue is not unique to vacant buildings – several gyms, dentists, and doctors’ offices have also moved into ground-floor retail spaces. The nature of these businesses necessitates windows be opaqued to protect the privacy of their patrons, resulting in often blocks-long stretches of nearly vacant windows along major arterial streets. When people see empty windows, they are often given the impression the area is unsafe or uninteresting, preventing the inclination to explore further.

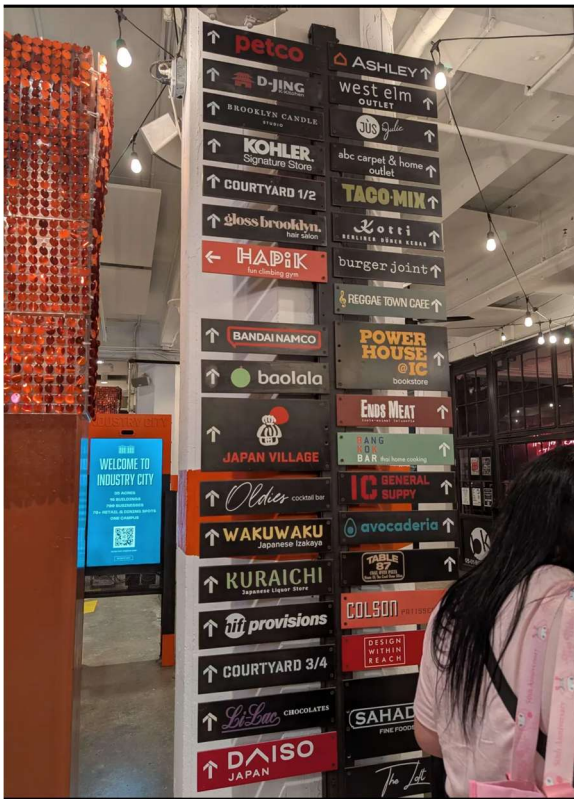
The walk along Broadway between the light rail stops and the Pike/Pine retail core is an example of this issue. Visitors have Seattle Central College on one side of the street and a series of doctors/dentist offices with vacant windows on the other. We want people to experience the retail environment on both sides of Broadway, but the lack of signage does not encourage visitors to make the trek.

There are several creative solutions to this issue. One could be to use vacant window space to advertise the Capitol Hill community. The city could financially incentivize owners of vacant properties and/or existing businesses with vacant windows to display murals from local artists, signs saying “more businesses this way,” a list of businesses, or other items. While art murals would bring additional art to the area, we encourage them to be accompanied by signage encouraging people to continue walking toward more retailers. This improves both *orientation* and *destination recognition* components of wayfinding.

Example of Window Space Use (Lansing, MI):



Example of Directory (Industry City, NY). Behind the directory is an LCD screen that shows news of neighborhood businesses, as well as a QR code to a business directory.

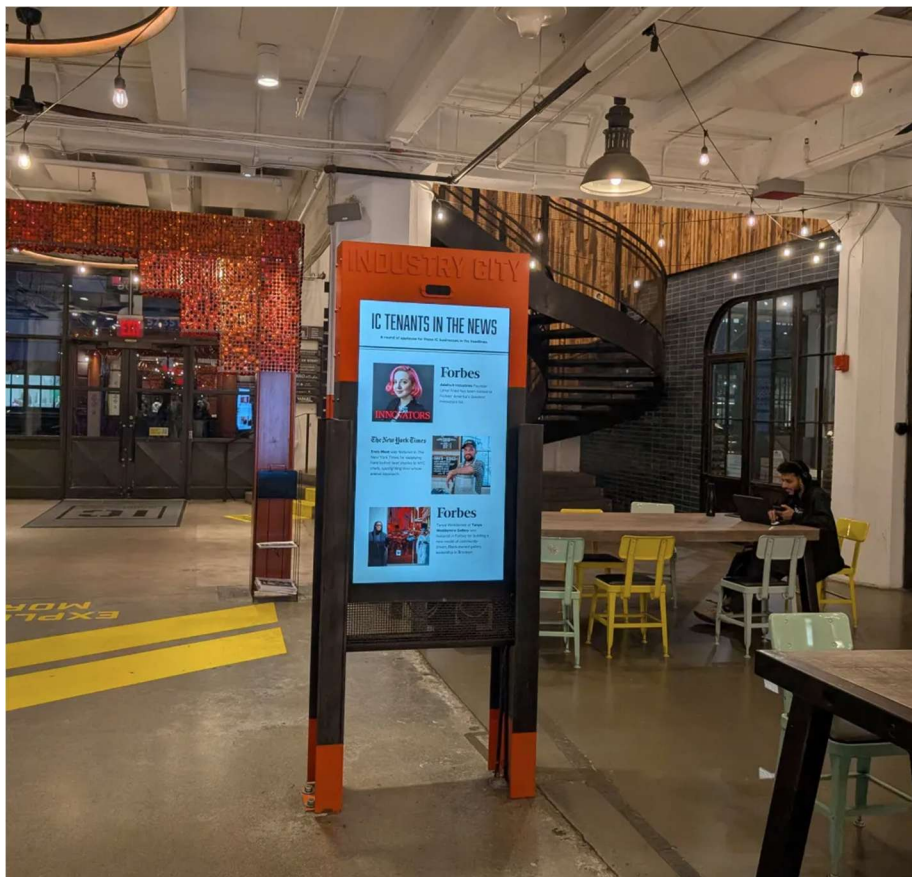


3. Capitol Hill Branding

Wayfinding not only helps people navigate the area but also creates a “brand” that increases the feeling of neighborhood cohesiveness and community pride and supports the local economy by attracting investment and boosting tourism. Investors and small business owners want to exist in a community with a distinct culture and vibrant community. Neighborhood branding through wayfinding is a key ingredient. While investing in these signage improvements, we can tailor the branding and signage to the specific vibe of the neighborhood by using consistent language, font, color, etc.

Below is some branding I saw in the Industry City neighborhood of New York. They use a consistent text font and neighborhood color of orange and black, which is repeated throughout the neighborhood on art, signage, business paint, etc.

Neighborhood Branding in Industry City, NY:



Capitol Hill is an exceptionally vibrant, retail-dense neighborhood of Seattle, but it has been hit hard economically over the past decade. Increasing costs of rent, goods, insurance, labor, and more have led to several business closures, while others struggle to stay open with exceptionally low margins. Unlike other neighborhoods, which are often serviced by one BIA, Capitol Hill is supported by a series of BIAs and community groups. This means that the neighborhood cannot self-fund a wayfinding program in the way that others may be able to. We encourage Seattle City Council to consider a one-time investment in a series of wayfinding programs to help retain Capitol Hill's economic sustainability by driving more growth and visitors to our historic neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Gabriel Neuman, Esq. Director of Policy & Advocacy

(pronouns [he/him](#))

GSBA, Washington State's LGBTQ+ & Allied Chamber of Commerce
400 E Pine St, Ste 322, Seattle, WA 98122

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