



CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN CITY PLANNING
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Gangnam-style 10-Minute City: A Locally-Driven Solution Shaping Global Urban Standards



Aerial view of Gangnam.
Image: Seoul Metropolitan Government

South Korea's mega-city capital, Seoul, is home to 10 million citizens. In 2014, recognising the constraints of a top-down approach for addressing the city's increasingly complex social issues and growth aspirations, the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) made a significant change to its governing framework with the roll-out of its 2030 Seoul Plan, the city's highest-level statutory spatial plan. Active citizen participation would be prioritised at all administration levels, from vision-setting and strategic planning to implementation of key solutions.

Introduction: Citizen Participation in 2030 Seoul Plan

The 2030 Seoul Plan's transition of urban planning leadership from bureaucrats and experts to its citizens marked a historic milestone. One of the most notable outcomes of direct citizen participation was the increase in public interest in urban planning, which led policies to shift from being administration-focused to resident-focused. The enhanced transparency and sustainability from citizen participation also drove the expansion of South Korea's citizen-led urban planning culture.

To enable citizens and practitioners to more easily understand and access the plan, the final report was significantly condensed from 700 to 200 pages. Data-driven analysis was also used to redesign the city's spatial structure, which resulted in a new polycentric model comprising three major hubs and seven regional centres. Collectively, these changes transformed the 2030 Seoul Plan—which had previously lacked implementation power—into a widely-recognised and actionable master plan.

2040 Seoul Plan: Expanding Stakeholder Involvement and Flexibility

In 2023, the SMG launched the 2040 Seoul Plan to succeed its 2030 Plan. While maintaining its citizen participation framework, this new plan placed greater emphasis on district government officials' participation in the planning process. This shift was driven by ongoing local urban issues raised by 25 district governments and 18 city departments within the SMG, following the 2030 Seoul Plan implementation.

Since city departments and district offices are primary users of the Seoul Plan, the 2040 approach actively incorporates local perspectives and concerns. It guarantees that neighbourhood-level issues are fully reflected in the city's strategic planning and directly embedded into its spatial policies.

District-driven proposals that have been officially incorporated into the 2040 Seoul Plan, include:

- Establishing AI-robot innovation hubs



The SMG's 20-year experience of working with the districts and the private sector has led to its introduction of a more flexible planning framework in the 2040 Seoul Plan.



- Expanding infrastructure for local job opportunities
- Revitalising ageing residential areas while securing waterfront spaces and cultural facilities through public contributions
- Integrating urban infrastructure with green and cultural spaces
- Developing more accessible childcare and administrative service centres
- Creating youth entrepreneurship spaces.

The 2040 Seoul Plan's more inclusive and decentralised approach allowed district governments to actively shape urban spaces based on local needs.

A Locally-Driven Solution Shaping Seoul's Urban Policy

The active participation of district governments in the Seoul Plan has led to several significant benefits. First, incorporating diverse resident inputs has increased the effectiveness of strategic urban planning. In the past, citizen opinions were often brushed off as NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) complaints. However, growing civic awareness and engagements has led to a rise in demand for public-interest policies. Active integration of citizen feedback and local issues into district-level plans and the broader Seoul Plan have resulted in more opportunities for inclusive spatial planning.

Second, greater collaboration between districts and the SMG to address local demands and coordinate resident feedback has strengthened their governance capacity. In developing the 2040 Seoul Plan, districts were able to propose more rational and well-structured solutions than in the past for redeveloping ageing residential areas, expanding green spaces, and improving welfare infrastructure. By revising the 2040 Seoul Plan to include a dedicated district-focused section, districts can now actively integrate and implement local policies effectively, with minimal administrative waste.

Third, the 2040 Seoul Plan has enabled the SMG to strategically shift its role and function to focus on reinforcing governance and management systems. This has been achieved through strengthening the districts' direct responsibility for planning and project execution.

The SMG's 20-year experience of working with the districts and the private sector has led to its introduction of a more flexible planning framework in the 2040 Seoul Plan. Key reforms that reflect Seoul's transition towards a more decentralised and adaptive urban planning approach include:

- Its "Beyond Zoning" system, allowing for more flexible land-use adjustments
- Relaxation of the rigid 35-floor height restriction on residential buildings, enabling context-sensitive development
- Transformation of urban planning facilities into mixed-use developments, to increase spatial efficiency

"Micro Seoul" Concept: A Localised Approach to Global Urban Challenges

One of the most significant concepts introduced in the 2040 Seoul Plan is the Pedestrian Daily Zone, which integrates commercial, business, cultural, administrative, educational, and residential functions within a walkable distance. This is Seoul's adaptation of the "N-Minute City" model—which surged in global adoption following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2040 Seoul Plan also incorporates more than 50 "Micro Seoul" zones. The core philosophy of Micro Seoul is rooted in rethinking past urban development, where economic growth was often prioritised over environmental

concerns and human well-being. Shifting away from previous macro-scale, citywide planning approaches, Micro Seoul emphasises restoring natural ecosystems and creating more liveable urban environments. It does this by focusing on regional identity and localised solutions that address diverse local issues and resident demands.

This approach is significant because it guides district governments to develop and implement plans that are directly centred on resident needs. Examples of projects that districts can plan and be responsible for include:

- Enhancing pedestrian-friendly environments

- Redeveloping ageing residential areas
- Establishing district unit plans
- Expanding green corridors
- Developing cultural and community facilities

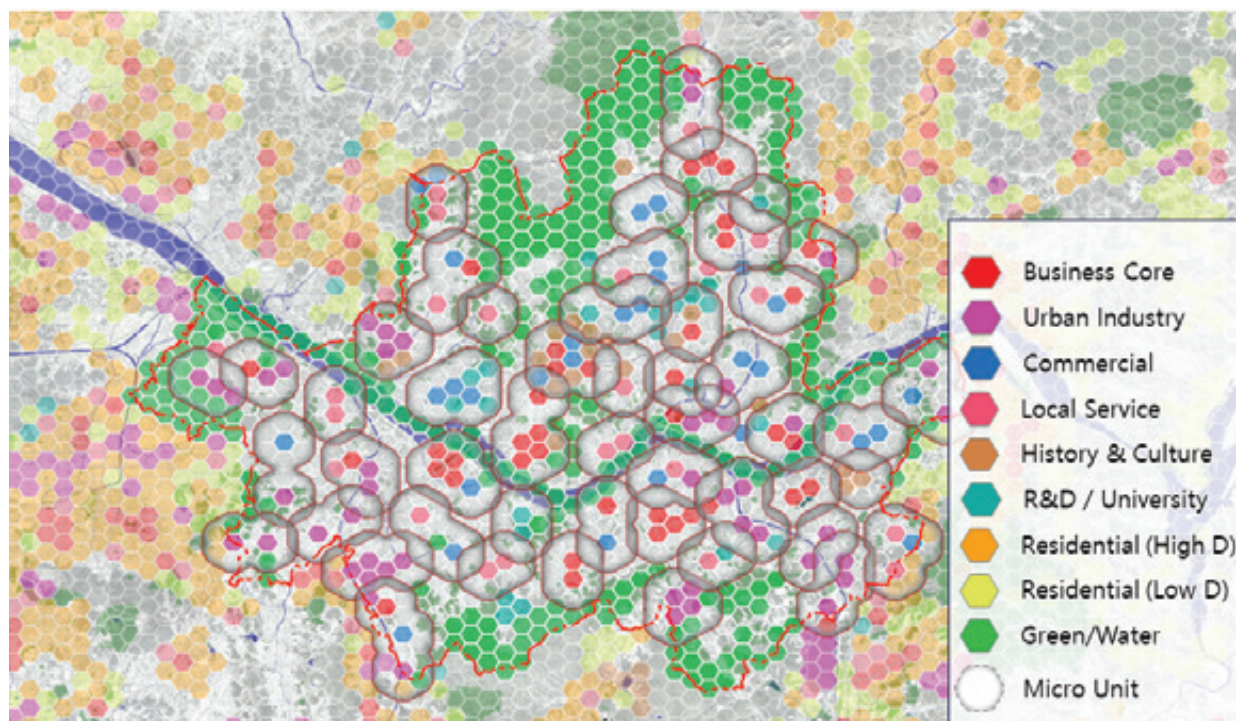
Among Seoul's 25 districts, Gangnam District has taken the lead in implementing the Micro Seoul concept. With its resident population of 560,000 and daily floating population exceeding 1 million, Gangnam spans 39.5 km² and consists of 22 administrative neighbourhoods. Despite being the top-ranking district in terms of GDP, number of businesses, and employment, Gangnam lacks green spaces and cultural facilities. It is

also dealing with ageing residential areas and severe traffic congestion.

In response, its residents have prioritised key urban solutions to address these challenges, including:

- Urban regeneration
- Improved pedestrian environments
- Park and green space development
- Expansion of cultural infrastructure

In December 2024, Gangnam District officially incorporated the "Gangnam-style 10-Minute City" as a core initiative in its 2040 Gangnam Master Plan.



Micro Seoul spatial structure reform: 50 self-sufficient cities.
Image: Seoul Institute

What is the Gangnam-style 10-Minute City?

A localised adaptation of the Micro Seoul concept in the 2040 Seoul Plan, the Gangnam-style 10-Minute City holds the key to addressing residents' demands for a more liveable, walkable, and sustainable city. It is customised to fit Gangnam's urban structure.

Gangnam District uses a four-category framework to classify its urban spaces. Fitting into the Large category, the 10-Minute City consists of self-sufficient hubs and their surrounding areas which provide citizens with access to jobs, public services, and transportation.

The first step to developing the spatial structure of the Gangnam-style 10-Minute City was determining its most strategic urban centres. Altogether, 30 key locations were analysed based on factors

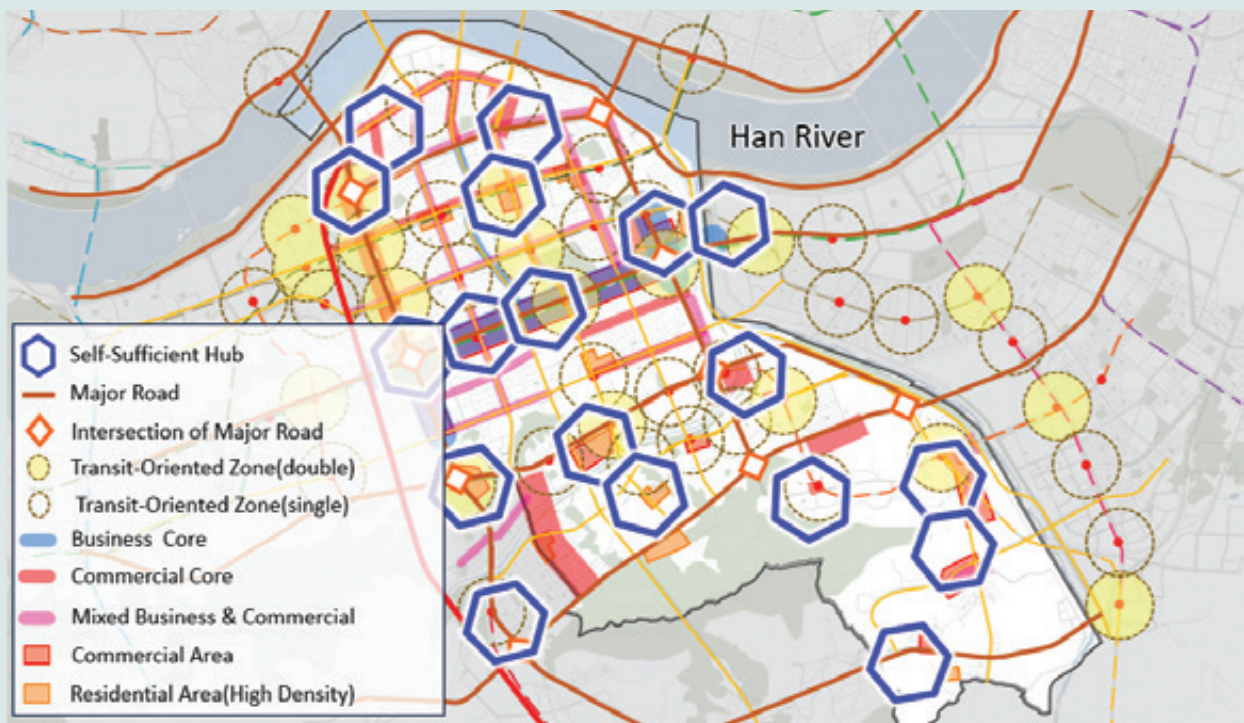


Classification of urban spaces in Gangnam District based on scale/size.
Image: Seoul Institute

such as transit hub scale, passenger volume at transfer stations, commercial zoning status, land use, and building use and density.

From the results, 12 self-sufficient hubs were identified and categorised as Global Business Centres, Metropolitan Connection

Hubs, Commercial and Retail Centres, Shopping and Cultural Hubs, and Residential Zones. These 12 hubs were then connected to 40 medium-sized neighbourhood units to form eight clusters. The key criteria for defining these clusters included centrality, local demand, walkability and accessibility.



Analytical findings for delineating nodes and boundaries within Gangnam District's 10-minute city framework.
Image: Seoul Institute

Each 10-Minute City cluster would extend across a radius of 1.5 to 2 km and encompass an average population of 70,000 as well as 3 to 5 subway stations. Each cluster would also integrate a diverse mix of land use, including Global Business Centres, R&D Centres, International Convention Hubs, Shopping and Leisure Areas, Residential Areas, and Cultural Spaces.

The 10-Minute City plan adopts an integrated approach, meaning that housing redevelopment, transportation, green space management, and urban development are planned and executed collectively, rather than as separate projects. This comprehensive strategy requires extensive interdepartmental coordination, resident engagement, and negotiations with private investors.

To manage this process efficiently, the Gangnam District Government holds direct responsibility for leading the 10-Minute City project implementation. A dedicated task force—comprising residents, private developers, urban experts, and government officials—has been established to work collaboratively on executing key tasks in the Gangnam-style 10-Minute City Master Plan, including:

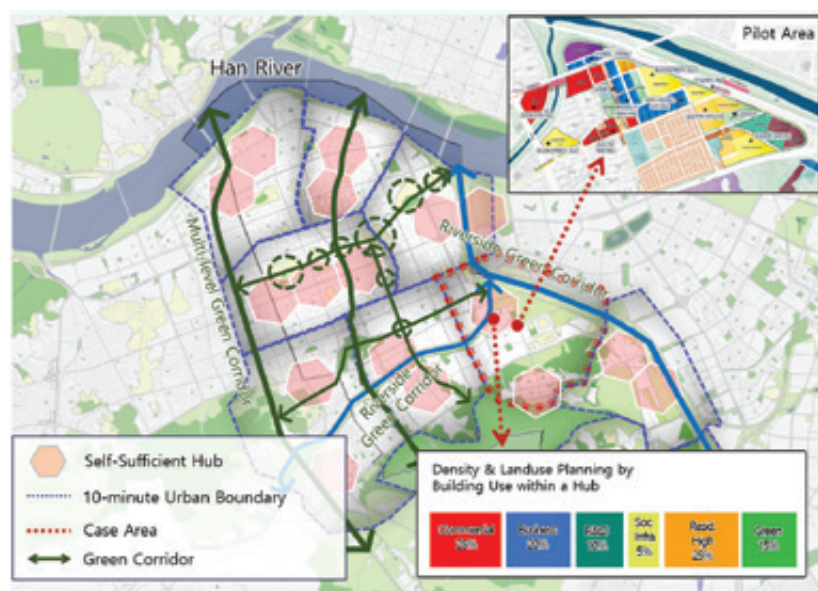
- Collecting resident feedback
- Conducting spatial analysis
- Identifying 3 pilot areas
- Establishing an operational governance system

Toward a More Collaborative Spatial Planning System

Seoul's urban planning approach is evolving. Traditionally, a single citywide masterplan incorporating residents' feedback was developed to guide Seoul's urban policies. However, this centralised model has limitations for addressing the diverse needs of a megacity, especially as our society continues to undergo major transformation—from demographic shifts and evolving lifestyles, to climate change and intensifying global competition.

To effectively respond to these challenges, Seoul must adopt a more flexible and decentralised approach that empowers district governments and citizens to play a central role in urban and spatial planning, to address local issues and shape their city for the future.

Innovative collaborative ecosystems comprising citizens and public-private partnerships—such as the Micro Seoul initiatives and Gangnam-style 10-Minute City Master Plan—will be critical to achieving their vision of a more globally competitive and sustainable Seoul. 🌐



Urban Boundaries of 10-minute cities within the Gangnam & Pilot Area.
Image: Seoul Institute