

CITY OF SEATTLE
ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR
OF THE OFFICE OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

SEPA Threshold Determination
for
Townhouse Reforms Legislation

Project Sponsor: City of Seattle

Location of Proposal: This ordinance would affect single-family and multifamily zones and townhouse and rowhouse development in other zones.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

The City of Seattle is proposing multiple changes to development standards in the land use code intended to support the development of townhouses and rowhouses.

The proposal would amend the density limit standard for Lowrise 1 zones to:

1. Increase the density limit for certain rowhouses and townhouses from 1 unit per 1,300 square feet of lot area to 1 unit per 1,150 square feet.
2. Apply the density limit to rowhouse development on interior lots of 3,000 square feet or greater, which are currently exempt from the density limit.

The proposal would amend bike parking requirements as follows:

1. remove the short-term bike parking requirement for townhouses and rowhouses
2. allow bike parking in a dwelling unit of a townhouse or rowhouse development
3. allow bike lockers and sheds in certain setbacks and separations
4. clarify that enclosed bicycle parking does not count toward floor area if it is in a freestanding structure used exclusively for bike parking
5. clarify that weather protection and freestanding structures used exclusively for bike parking don't count in measuring building length and width.

The proposal would implement the following additional modifications and clarifications:

1. Exclude from floor area calculation surface parking in single-family and multifamily zones that is only covered by:
 - projections of up to 4 feet that do not enclose floor area; or
 - projections of up to 3 feet that enclose floor area and are located at least 8 feet above finished grade.
2. Modify an existing provision that allows parking off an alley within 7 feet of a side property line so that parking can occur within 26 feet of the alley property line rather than 25 feet.

3. Change the minimum size of parking spaces in the individual garage of a townhouse from large to medium.
4. Clarify how development standards such as density limits apply to lots with multiple development types.

SEPA DETERMINATION: ☐ Exempt ☒ **DNS** ☐ MDNS ☐ EIS

☐ DNS with conditions

☐ DNS involving non-exempt grading, or demolition,
or involving another agency with jurisdiction.

PROPOSAL BACKGROUND

This is a non-project proposal. The City of Seattle’s Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) is proposing to implement multiple changes to the land use code intended to support the development of townhouses and rowhouses. The changes are intended to remove code barriers to efficient townhouse construction to facilitate supply of attached housing that provides housing options for community members. The changes would update the density limit in Lowrise 1 zones to reduce unnecessary permit process and update bike parking requirements to address the unique conditions of townhouses and rowhouses. The proposal also makes minor modifications and clarifications to code provisions to increase clarity and expedite review times. The changes would not increase allowable building height or total allowed floor area and would not substantially change the form of allowable development in zones.

ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Relationship to Plans and Policies

The proposal would primarily affect residential construction in single-family and lowrise multifamily zones. There are numerous goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan concerning zoning, housing, affordable housing, compatibility and other subjects that could be relevant to this proposal. Not every policy or goal can be summarized in this determination. Some of the directly relevant goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan are listed below:

HG 2: Help meet current and projected regional housing needs of all economic and demographic groups by increasing Seattle’s housing supply.

HG 3: Achieve a mix of housing types that provide opportunity and choice throughout Seattle for people of various ages, races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds and for a variety of household sizes, types, and incomes.

LU G8 Allow a variety of housing types and densities that is suitable for a broad array of households and income levels, and that promotes walking and transit use near employment concentrations, residential services, and amenities.

LU 8.7 Encourage multifamily developments with units that have direct access to residential amenities, such as ground-level open space, to increase their appeal for families with children.

LU 8.8 Allow a variety of attached housing types to accommodate a wide diversity of households in multifamily zones

LU 8.9 Establish lowrise multifamily zones to accommodate various housing choices in the low-to moderate-density range suitable for a broad array of households and incomes, including walk-up apartments, town houses, row houses, duplexes, triplexes, and cottage housing.

LU 8.10 Designate lowrise multifamily zones in places where low-scale buildings can provide a gradual transition between single-family zones and more intensive multifamily or commercial areas.

GS 3.15 Design multifamily zones to be appealing residential communities with high-quality housing and development standards that promote privacy and livability, such as appropriately scaled landscaping, street amenities, and, in appropriate locations, limited commercial uses targeted for the local population.

LU G5 Establish development standards that guide building design to serve each zone's function and produce the scale and character desired, while addressing public health, safety, and welfare.

LU 5.2 Develop and apply appropriate development standards that provide predictability regarding the allowed intensity of development and expected development types for each zone.

LU 5.6 Establish setbacks in residential areas as needed to allow for adequate light, air, and ground-level open space; help provide privacy; promote compatibility with the existing development pattern; and separate residential uses from more intensive uses

LU G6 Regulate off-street parking to address parking demand in ways that reduce reliance on automobiles, improve public health and safety, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, lower construction costs to reduce the cost of housing and increase affordable housing, create attractive and walkable environments, and promote economic development throughout the city.

LU 6.1 Establish parking requirements where appropriate for both single-occupant vehicles and their alternatives at levels that further this Plan's goal to increase the use of public transit, car pools, walking, and bicycles as alternatives to the use of single-occupant vehicles.

LU 6.5 Establish bicycle parking requirements to encourage bicycle ownership and use.

Several of the policies reference a need for more housing development, options and choices for a variety of households (LUG 8, LU 8.8, LU 8.9, HG 2, HG 3, and others). The proposal is consistent with these policies because it would facilitate increased townhouse construction – a form of housing that is in high demand but is limited by zoning and other regulatory factors. Policy LU 5.2 addresses predictability of the permitting process for residential construction, which would be directly supported by the proposal. Several other policies concern the design and configuration of multifamily construction. Townhouse development under the proposal would continue to be designed similar to today, and no major inconsistency with the design-oriented policies would be created by the proposal.

Consequently, no significant adverse impacts related to existing plans or policies would result from the proposal.

Land Uses and Development Patterns

The proposal is not likely to substantially alter the allowed land use and development pattern. The proposal would not change the allowed uses, allowed floor area ratio, or height limits in zones where it would apply. The proposal could slightly encourage the development of townhouses and rowhouses in comparison to apartments or detached homes.

The proposal would result in no direct impacts to land and shoreline use as it is a non-project action; however, some indirect impacts could occur due to the changes in development regulations. As described in the checklist, the proposal could result in minor changes in the type and amount of residential development that occurs, particularly in LR1 zones. Depending on the individual site conditions and objectives of the builder, the proposal could slightly increase the number of townhouse units in future development, resulting in a higher density. Encouraging development could also decrease the unit density if townhouse construction is selected by builders over apartment construction. Where density of development would be increased, the increase would be on the order of one additional housing unit on the redevelopment of a 5,000 – 6,000 sq. ft. lot. This could cause an incrementally greater amount of density, within the same overall allowed building envelope as in the absence of the proposal. The change could result in incremental impact with respect to the density of the development pattern. However, the incremental increase would be compatible with the context of other existing and future multifamily development and would be consistent with the intent and purpose of the underlying zones. Therefore, the degree of adverse impact is not more than minor.

Height/Bulk/Scale, Aesthetics, Shadows and Views

The SEPA checklist notes that there could be incremental height, bulk, and scale impacts as a result of infill development if the proposal encourages an increase in the overall pace or number of townhouse developments. The proposal could result in incremental bulk if it encourages bike lockers or sheds outside of buildings or in setbacks and separations. The proposal could also result in more overhangs or canopy coverage of surface parking areas, which could have negative or positive effects on design quality of new developments. The proposal would not modify existing regulations regarding total allowable building height or floor area and would not modify the design standards section of the code for townhouses.

If the proposal encourages a faster pace or increased amount of townhouse development compared to the absence of the proposal, some bulk and aesthetic impacts could result such as blocked views, creation of new views, creation of new shadows, or changes in the aesthetic or architectural character of some blocks or local neighborhood areas.

No changes to design review are proposed. Some project-specific proposed development would be required to undergo design review according to the codified thresholds, which would improve design outcomes and mitigate any potential impact on aesthetics for the development proposals design review applies to.

The impacts described above are minor, and would not alter the character, scale or pace of development enough to be considered significant adverse impacts.

Noise, Light/Glare

The proposal could introduce an incremental amount of density in the form of an additional one or two townhouse units in a typical development, depending on site size and other factors. The increment of the additional unit(s) could result in an increase in the number of households on site, which could have a minor impact on noises from typical household activities such as talking, use of balconies or outdoor spaces, and entering/exiting the unit. However, if the proposal increased the likelihood of townhouse development instead of apartment development, a decrease in density and resultant noise would result.

As discussed in the checklist some additional light or glare from infill development could occur under the proposal from residential construction. The pattern of light from development could be altered slightly if there is an increased prevalence of outdoor bike parking areas that would have exterior illumination. Additionally, the pattern of shade could be altered slightly if there is increased prevalence of building canopies or overhang areas.

None of the above-described noise or light/glare impacts would be a substantial alteration from existing patterns of noise and light/glare in the context of a residential neighborhood where development would be located. Impacts would not rise to the level of significant adverse impact.

Housing

The proposal is likely to encourage the production of more townhouses and rowhouses. Resultant townhouse or rowhouse units are likely to be smaller and less expensive compared to the absence of the proposal. As noted in the checklist, this would be likely to make units comparatively more affordable to a wider range of households, including some with slightly lower incomes. This result would be consistent with stated City policies and goals calling for increased access to housing, and therefore the affect would be positive.

The checklist considers potential adverse impacts on existing housing if the proposal results in an increase in demolition to develop new market-rate buildings. However, many of the same sites would be likely to have redevelopment with or without the proposal. Some of the replaced homes may be rented and have tenants that might be displaced. In these instances, more new homes would be created in the place of a demolished existing structure, leading to an increase in

the overall number of homes. Impacts would be experienced by displaced tenants, while the proposal would also provide benefits of increased housing opportunities for other seekers of housing. Developments would be required to contribute to affordable housing through Mandatory Housing Affordability requirements, which would partially offset the impact of housing units demolished through redevelopment.

Overall, the potential adverse impacts to housing described above would not be significant and would be similar to the dynamics of housing production and displacement in the absence of the proposal. The proposal would also provide positive housing affects.

Environmentally sensitive areas,

Development under the proposed regulations could occur in multifamily zones as well as townhouse and rowhouse development in other zones, including on sites with environmentally critical areas. Existing regulations for critical areas would not be altered and would continue to apply and mitigate the potentially adverse impacts of infill development. Standards for green factor landscaping and limitations on site coverage due to setbacks are not altered and would continue to apply. An incremental adverse impact could result only due to the increased potential pace or number of townhouse developments. Overall, the degree of impact would not be more than minor.

Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources

The SEPA checklist summarizes an analysis of sites in lowrise multifamily zones that contain landmark buildings including 11 parcels in the LR1 zone and notes the lowrise zoning in historic districts including the Harvard-Belmont District and Columbia City. There are also likely to be other buildings that might be eligible for designation but have not yet been designated. The proposal would not modify existing protections for historic landmarks. Existing landmarks would continue to be subject to regulations limiting modification or demolition. Development pressure on sites with landmarks would be similar with and without the proposed changes to development standards. However, if the proposal incrementally increases the pace or number of townhouse development compared to no action, there could be an incremental impact on the likelihood of development proposals for sites with historic resources. Future development projects would continue to be subject to the requirements of the Shoreline Master Program, State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), Historic Preservation Policy, and other state laws for potential archaeologically significant sites, as applicable.

Overall, any potential increment of impact on historic or cultural resources would not be more than minor.

Transportation, Parking

The checklist provides a summary of the changes to development regulations that could affect the configuration of both bicycle and automobile parking in new developments. The proposal does not change the overall quantity of required automobile parking but could make it incrementally easier to configure vehicle parking spaces on site. The proposal reduces short-term bicycle parking requirements and makes it incrementally easier to configure bicycle parking, including in areas exterior to buildings. The changes could incrementally reduce the

demand for spillover on-street parking of vehicles if parking can be more readily accommodated on-site. It's possible that the changes could lead to a slightly increased likelihood of builders including a vehicle parking spaces on site. Provision of vehicle parking could have minor affects on the choice of vehicle ownership, which could adversely affect consistency with city goals to encourage non-motorized and transit trips. The degree of these changes on the overall demand for parking and transportation networks would be very minor and do not rise to a significant adverse impact.

Public Services, Utilities

The City's existing regulations requiring improvements to utilities at the time of development would not be altered by this proposal. Required utility work associated with potential future development projects under the proposal would likely be sufficient to address any localized needs for utility improvement. The range of potential impacts on emergency services, compared to those estimated as part of past studies, are not like to be discernably altered. No more than a minor impact on emergency services or utilities would result.

Parks and Open Space

The effects of the proposal would not alter the ability of the City to meet goals in the 2017 Parks Gap Analysis for walkability to parks. Due to the very small amount of the incremental demand for park usage and the undefined timing and degree of additional demand on parks associated with the proposal, the overall impact on parks and open space is determined not to be significant.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Plants & Animals, Air Quality, Earth, Water (Drainage & Water Quality), Environmental Health

The proposal would not alter any Federal, State or City environmental protections. Existing regulations including the City's stormwater code, shoreline master program, and other regulations would address impacts to plants, animals, air quality, earth, and water at the time of future development. The magnitude of the potential impacts stemming from this proposal is determined not be significant.

Energy and Natural Resources

The proposal would not alter any Federal, State or City energy standards or natural resource protections. Existing regulations including the building code, energy code, and other regulations would address energy impacts or impacts to natural resources at the time of future development. The magnitude of the potential impacts stemming from this proposal is determined not be significant.

DECISION

Based on a review of the SEPA environmental checklist including its attachments, and the analysis of impact described above the following threshold determination is rendered:

- [**X**] Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).
- [] Determination of Significance. This proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).

Signature: [On file] Date: 11/09/2021
Geoff Wentlandt
Office of Planning and Community Development