

Housing Affordability & Livability Agenda

Themes from Community Open House Comments

The Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda Advisory Committee held Community Open Houses in three locations: Southeast (Ethiopian Community Center) on November 19; Central (Garfield Community Center) on November 20; and North (Olympic View Elementary School) on December 4, 2014. The following is a summary of the comments that attendees wrote on the posters and maps displayed on easels.

This summary incorporates comments from the public on displays and comment forms at the meetings, along with four letters delivered after the meetings.

OVERALL THEMES FROM COMMENTS

- Increase affordable housing for all income levels
- Increase affordable housing size options: from micro to housing big enough for families
- Increase locations where affordable housing is offered, including single-family zones: ADUs, room/house sharing
- Importance of developing housing near transit: access to transit, transit oriented development
- Importance of neighborhood character, schools, safety, amenities, walkability
- Use existing tools: zoning changes, taxes, impact fees, incentives
- Use creative options: land trusts, city ownership, rent-to-own
- Difference of opinion on upzoning single family areas

RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Where more housing should go:

- *North:* Aurora Ave N, Laurelhurst, Greenwood & 85th, Eastlake/University, Ballard/Interbay/North End (4)
- *Central:* Downtown, Capitol Hill, Madrona, Magnolia, Montlake, West Seattle (5)
- *East:* Somerset (1)
- *South:* Beacon Hill, Georgetown/South Seattle, Rainier Beach, Rainier Valley, Skyway, South King County, Southeast Seattle (14)
- In urban villages and dense areas (2)
- Throughout the city, including single family zones, using ADUs, basements, etc. (27)
- Near jobs and transit (15)
- Not in industrial/marine areas (2)

What type of housing is needed for affordability:

- Midrise multifamily buildings
- Mixed income housing; require every apartment building to have some affordable units

- Range of sizes and options, from micro-housing, houses converted to apartments and shared living space, to larger units for families
- Two houses per lot
- Accessible: ADA; near public transit

Challenges and barriers list:

- Affordability, rents exceed 50% of income, housing near transit too expensive, frequent rent increases (48)
- Credit checks (20)
- Turned away because of race/national origin (8)
- Cost of screening reports (8)
- Turned away because of children or relatives in household (8)
- Lack of choices for families (8)
- Lack of housing accepting Section 8 vouchers (6)
- Turned away because of gender (6)
- Turned away because of pet (4)
- Criminal background checks (4)
- Short lease periods (4)
- Turned away because of needing an accommodation/modification for a disability (3)
- Turned away due to gender identity or sexual orientation (3)
- Prior eviction (3)
- Turned away because of non-cash income source such as SSI (2)
- Cost of security deposits and pre-lease costs (2)
- *Write-ins:*
 - *Landlords:* Disengaged; want better English speaking ability; want more income; shady/unreasonable/absentee; unreasonable application; won't rent to unemployed (9)
 - *Homeowner costs:* High taxes coupled with cost of improvements; high cost of living (4)
 - *Safety and habitability:* Unhealthy air (near heavy traffic, gas stations); rodents; windows don't close, etc. (4)
 - *Size/quality:* Big enough for a family; few quality (well taken care-of) homes; lack of parking (3)
 - *Displacement/gentrification:* Displacement by tech money and higher income people (3)
 - *Location:* Good schools; access to university (2)
 - *Not enough supply:* Few entry-level homes to buy; cost of land too high (2)
 - *Market:* Question market rates when overpriced units sit empty for years (1)
 - *Accessibility:* Need for accommodation for special needs child (1)
 - *Age:* Lack of shared housing for adults over 30 (1)
 - *Foreclosure* (1)

Important factors in choosing current home:

- Affordability
- Characteristics: Size; quality architecture; good view; clean conditions; security; efficiency, livability
- Neighborhood character, safety, diversity
- Parking
- Access/proximity: transit; schools, work and shopping; walkable; bike path

Affordable and livable Seattle means:

- Affordable options for all incomes, ages, races/ethnicities, gender identities, abilities; homeownership accessible to people of all races and incomes; more types of housing
- Preserving buildings like Lockhaven, Theodora, Panorama House
- All neighborhoods are part of the solution
- Mixed-income neighborhood
- New housing that fits into existing neighborhoods
- Mixed use: commercial, residential, transit
- Upzones of single family, including making ADUs easier
- Housing open to animal companions
- Walkability/transit; expanded light rail; near amenities; community businesses by homes; active and vibrant; bike lanes and bike racks
- Community; stability for children
- Tools to help affordability: Publicly owned land trust; stabilized rents; tax the rich; developers and landlords are held accountable; incentives for private development; every new multifamily building has 10% to 20% of units at realistic rents
- Conditions promoting small businesses

RESPONSES TO EXAMPLE DRAWINGS

Multifamily area examples:

Like:

- Preserving historic structures, neighborhood character
- Accommodating more people even if neighborhood character not maintained
- Mixed residential and commercial space; options to operate a business from home
- Multiple transportation options
- Neighborhood grocery stores; services in walking distance
- Parks nearby; plantings along streets and near buildings

Don't like:

- Does not include housing for larger families
- Does not have parking needed because of transit cuts

Single family area examples:

Like:

- Small scale apts., condos, duplexes
- New housing IF affordable to neighborhood residents
- Improved transit options so that parking isn't such a big concern
- Architecture of new housing matches surrounding homes
- Zoning that allows a small apartment building behind an existing single-family home, backyard cottages/ADUs, interior and exterior ADUs
- Could one house be a boarding house?

Don't like:

- Houses replaced by huge apartment buildings
- Need more community businesses, jobs and transit
- Existing zoning allows 30-foot heights, which aren't shown in any of the examples. Infill is usually out of scale with existing.

Commercial area examples:

Like:

- Rail, frequent public transit
- Show both 5/6-story buildings and higher in future view since many areas are zoned for higher
- Commercial and residential mix
- Rent restricted housing
- Transit makes it work

Don't like:

- Not enough trees and plants
- What about low-income households and others occupying the area before the changes?
- Need more space for youth and older populations
- Need community driven design

SHARE YOUR IDEAS:

City/public actions to increase supply and affordability:

- Create a housing trust fund; community land trust; publicly-owned land trusts to make housing affordable in perpetuity
- Create affordable housing on surplus city-owned property
- City buys older, historic building stock and makes it available as affordable housing
- Declare eminent domain on abandoned/unused housing and turn it over to SHA for low-income housing
- Issue long-term bonds for development of housing for homeless people and a mix of households at 30% and 50% of area median income in the same building
- Re-establish the Growth Related Housing Fund, which dedicated 20% of incremental increase in property tax revenue from new construction to development of low-income housing

- Dedicate 20% of Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) revenue to production of housing for the homeless
- Better coordination between Metro and DPD
- Seattle Office of Housing should be involved in DPD pre-submittal conference for every development in an urban center, urban village or station area to inject the idea of including affordable units
- Use Housing Levy funds for a pilot program where Office of Housing partners with landowners to add affordable units to private developments
- Pass the Urban Center Minimum Density legislation proposed by former Councilmember Conlin
- Use the same inspection for Section 8 and other Seattle landlords
- Assistance for people laid off
- Community organizing with tenants
- Do outreach to immigrants, millennials, displaced people and others not represented at meetings
- Create a public awareness campaign on why it benefits everyone to have all incomes able to afford housing in the city

Financing:

- Tenant-controlled zero-equity cooperatives; rental community land trust
- 1 percent of low-income housing should be rent-to-own to build wealth
- Tax increment financing
- Government should offer low-interest loans
- Offer support for/assistance with preservation

Taxes and regulations:

- Tax land, like linkage fees, not renters
- Higher taxes unoccupied buildings and lots
- Higher taxes on development or require a higher percentage of affordable units
- Higher property tax on higher income homeowners and corporations, lower tax on people at or near poverty
- Rent control; change state ban on rent caps; rent cap linked to inflation; income-based or subsidized rent; incentivize rent stabilization connected to CPI; regulate rent add-ons (such as pet rent)
- No incentives given to development over 60% AMI
- Require a meaningful number of affordable units as a condition for lifting height restrictions
- Require 10% of units for those at 50% of AMI in all housing developments in Urban Centers
- Create an impact fee and a tax on new development that takes into account the ROI performance over time
- Rent-subsidized housing should be supported by residents and developers who benefit from upzoning or increased building heights
- Change zoning to increase housing capacity and variety

- Open single family zones to modest sized multifamily options; change the name so people don't expect only single family housing; encourage more ADUs/DADUs; allow both ADU and DADU on the same property
- Zone for dense housing near transit nodes with an affordable housing set-aside
- Inclusionary zoning to protect low-income tenants, immigrants and people of color from displacement in an upzone
- Use the best practice of the Urban Village system, not increasing density in single family zones— zoning does not contribute to affordability problem
- Improve affordability requirements in Urban Centers from 80% AMI target to 50% AMI
- Keep single family neighborhoods for single family homes; don't add structures (ADUs or multifamily) to single family neighborhoods with small lots, especially where there are no nearby amenities or transit and there is limited parking
- No unit size minimums; reduce/eliminate parking minimums
- Yes to apodments; No to apodments
- Hold developers and landlords accountable

Other:

- Multigenerational housing
- Use existing housing
- More supply = lower costs
- Survey felt biased, 2035 is too far away

DIFFERENT THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM EACH MEETING

- At the Southeast and North meetings there were more comments suggesting rent control as a possible strategy
- At the Southeast meeting there were more suggestions that affordable housing should be located in south Seattle
- At the Central meeting there were more comments about the importance of locating housing near transit
- At the Central meeting there were more suggestions that affordable housing should be located throughout the city, including in single family zones
- At the Central meeting there were a number of suggestions about parking – reducing/eliminating parking requirements, taxing parking, etc.
- At the North meeting, there were both pro and con comments about adding density in single family areas
- At the North meeting, there were more comments about allowing ADUs, but pro and con comments about microhousing
- At the North meeting, there were multiple comments favoring mixed income and mixed use neighborhoods