Department of Planning and Development (DPD)
DRAFT Recommendations For Amendments to the Multifamily Chapter of the Land Use Code

Frequently Asked Questions
October 5, 2007

1) What are the DRAFT recommendations?

DPD is proposing to update the multifamily zoning code, to advance the City's growth management objectives and better achieve the City's goals and policies for new development, and make the code easier to use and understand. In addition, this code update also presents the opportunity to address the important issues of climate change and the growing need for housing affordable to working people.

The proposal includes these key draft recommendations:

1. Maintain the current overall scale and density of zones, while increasing the height limit 5' in the new LRT, LR1 and LR2 zones.
2. Reduce number of zones by consolidating the existing L3 and L4 zones to make a new LR3 zone.
3. Allow alternatives to overly prescriptive development standards - "flexibility with limits," including:
   - use basic standards -- setbacks, floor are ratio and height limits -- on small (infill) lots;
   - apply additional standards – lot coverage, structure width/depth limits -- on larger lots;
   - recognize local conditions – to provide appropriate transitions, require greater structure setbacks from property lines on multifamily zoned lots abutting single family zoned lots.
4. Use an incentive program in the LR3, MR and HR zones to encourage affordable housing in exchange for additional height and floor area.
5. Encourage landmark preservation and new open space to be provided with transfer of development potential (TDP) in HR.
6. Improve the appearance and function of townhouses with new design standards (such as architectural details & lower fence heights in front yards).
7. Require green buildings when the incentive program is used.
8. Eliminate parking requirements in urban centers, urban villages, and station areas, and reduce parking requirements in other areas (consistent with changes in commercial areas).
9. Apply the Green Area Factor.
10. Update, simplify and organize regulations so they are easier to understand and use.

2) Why amend the multifamily code?
The basis for our current multifamily zoning was originally adopted in 1982. Since that time, the zoning has been incrementally amended over the years such that some objectives may be obscured by added layers of requirements and process. Over time, many of these added layers of regulation have become redundant and unnecessary. They often add to the cost of development and can work against Comprehensive and Neighborhood Plan goals for affordable housing and quality design. The issues to be addressed in the update include:

- The code is old and out of date (and was developed before Design Review);
- The code could better reflect the Comprehensive Plan;
- The code is overly complex, which has been exacerbated by multiple amendments over time;
- The code is not having the desired effect on neighborhood character; and
- The code does not effectively address climate change or the need for affordable housing.

3) Will these changes increase allowed densities?
Though simplification and improved design are the main impetus behind the amendments, the update also provides an opportunity to restore the capacity for additional multifamily development, originally anticipated to be available in the MF zones when the last major amendments were adopted in 1989.

Overall, the capacity under observed conditions is about 16% less (7,296 units) than what would have been expected under the assumptions used to estimate available capacity in 1989. The proposal would add capacity for about 4,000 additional units, largely due to the incentive proposal for LR3 and MR zones, to get to within 7% of the estimated capacity from 1989.

4) Is any remapping of single family zoned areas proposed?
No. Recommendations to change multifamily code provisions apply only to land that is currently zoned for multifamily development. No single family zoned areas are proposed to be rezoned. While Lowrise 3 (L3) and Lowrise 4 (L4) zones are proposed to be consolidated, no further remapping is anticipated.

A limited number of technical amendments, such as space requirements for garbage and recycling, apply to zones other than multifamily. Minor amendments are proposed to the standards for Residential Small Lot (RSL) zones to allow for features such as eaves and bay windows within setbacks areas, consistent with allowances in other residential zones. In addition, amendments are proposed for cottage housing, allowed in RSL and multifamily

zones, to maintain and clarify standards related to the permitted floor area of a cottage structure and open space requirements.

5) What is being proposed related to townhouse development?

DPD is proposing new flexible standards intended to improve the design quality of townhouses. These standards are intended to encourage creative design solutions to help ensure a better contextual fit in existing neighborhoods. Key design issues are addressed by these proposed standards:

1). Façades:

a. Windows and/or doors must account for a minimum of 20% of the area of street-facing facades to avoid the appearance of blank walls and help ensure "eyes on the street" (a public safety principle).

b. Facades over 750 sq. ft. in area must be divided into smaller areas by projections or recesses. This standard is proposed to provide visually interesting facades and prevent blank, monotonous walls, working in tandem with façade openings.

2). Building entries. Ground-level townhouse units abutting a street must have a pedestrian entrance facing the street; or if apartments, there must be a primary entrance facing the street. This design standard is proposed to foster a sense of community and create pedestrian connections between multifamily buildings and streets. It also helps to ensure "eyes on the streets" and promotes a sense of openness/access to light and air.

3). Appearance of Garage Entrances. Garages may not be closer to street lot lines than the remainder of the structures and street facing garage doors are limited to 75 sq. ft. in area. These standards are intended to help reinforce the pedestrian nature of multifamily neighborhoods.

4). Limit on surface parking areas. Except when parking access is from an alley, and where permitted on the lot, surface parking is proposed to be limited to six spaces, (allowing a reasonable amount of surface parking, without overwhelming the development site). Any additional surface parking needs to be separated by landscaping and/or screening.

In addition, standards are proposed to:

- Limit the height of fences in a street facing setback to four feet (4') in height;
- Limit building overhangs over driveways and aisles to 3';
- Require wider (2' additional) drives/aisles to facilitate maneuvering in the auto-courtyards (most driveways are currently 10' wide); and

- Allow for more flexibility in how the driveway slope is configured to aid in accommodating shared, underground parking structures.

Increased flexibility. The concept of increased development flexibility, within prescribed limits, is integral to the Multifamily Code Update overall and is based on the belief that simpler, less prescriptive code requirements can help new development better relate to local conditions. Flexible standards that would help improve townhouse design include:

Setbacks. New setbacks would allow more flexibility in site planning as structures will no longer be pushed into the center of the lot (only when lots abut other multifamily or commercially zoned lots).

Additional height. Five feet of additional height is proposed in the new LRT, LR1 and LR2 zones. This would expand the upper-floor area, allowing more varied roof forms and more flexibility to include flat and shed roofs. The allowance for pitched roofs would be a minimum pitch of 6:12.

Parking Requirements Parking quantity requirements would be eliminated in urban centers and station areas, reducing site and floor area used by cars.

Curb-cut location. More flexibility is proposed so that curbcuts from streets may be acceptable, even when an alley is present. This will expand site plan options beyond the too-common auto-courtyard.

Open Space. Residential amenity requirements are proposed to replace the current private open space requirement. Residential amenity space would be required in an amount equal to 5% of the total gross floor area of residential use.

This would replace current private open space requirements and allow options to provide individual and shared spaces such as rooftop decks, balconies and ground level, landscaped spaces.

Fewer standards on small (in-fill) lots. For the Multifamily code, fewer standards are needed to accommodate new development and help it fit into neighborhoods.

For example, on an infill lot, 9,000 sq. ft. or less, once basic standards like setbacks, height and density are applied, the building area is defined, making lot coverage and width and depth limits redundant. Additional standards would apply to larger sites.

6) How will the incentive zoning proposal work?

Incentive zoning programs operate by allowing a density bonus or other modification to regular zoning requirements in exchange for the production of or payment for a certain number of housing units affordable to moderate wage

workers or other public benefits. The Council adopted and the Mayor signed Resolution 30939 in December of 2006 to direct the use of incentive zoning as part of the multifamily code update. The incentive program for multifamily zones would be composed of the following elements:

- A portion of bonus floor area must be provided as housing affordable to moderate wage workers, or payment to a fund in-lieu of providing the affordable units would also be allowed;
- The program would only apply where floor area and/or height above the base is used; and
- In the HR zone, incentives also include open space and preservation of historic structures.

The public benefit incentive program would apply in Multifamily zones as follows:

- LRT, LR1 and LR2: not eligible;
- Eligible LR3 and MR zones: affordable housing only;
- HR: affordable housing, historic preservation and open space.

In recognition of the scale of development anticipated in each zone, the amount of bonus floor area and height is not sufficient to generate enough resources in the LR3 and MR zones to support other public benefits in addition to the priority housing benefit. The HR zone, mapped only in the First Hill Urban Center Village, allows for enough bonus development capacity to accommodate housing, open space, and historic preservation, which were confirmed at community meetings on First Hill to be important to that neighborhood.

7) What are the environmental benefits of the proposal?

Many of the proposed draft recommendations for new multifamily zoning are consistent with goals to reduce the city's carbon footprint. Proposed development standards would:

- Encourage growth where it is most appropriate and reduce development pressures on fragile natural environments and low-density, single-family areas;
- Promote housing affordability with zoning incentives;
- Incorporate green building practices;
- Emphasize the water-quality benefits of landscaping;
- Allow for more green roofs and wind and solar power generation on rooftops;
- Reduce automobile dependence by eliminating or reducing parking requirements based on local conditions.

8) What does the proposal do to help make housing more affordable?
Many features of the proposed multifamily code update will help encourage housing for moderate wage workers and others, ranging from low-income to market rate:

- Use of the incentive program will both stimulate additional housing development and ensure that a portion of it is affordable;
- Use of incentive zoning in combination will leverage the effects of other programs including the property tax exemptions through Seattle Homes Within Reach;
- Encourage housing in areas close to transit, employment and goods and services;
- Restore lost capacity – increase housing supply within limits anticipated in 1989, but never realized;
- Allow for more variety in the types of housing to be developed, not just townhouses;
- Parking reductions based on local conditions means people won't have to pay for parking they don't use.

More Information
For more information see DPD's website, where a Director's Report and DRAFT ordinance, among other documents and information, are available:

http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/Planning/Multifamily_Code_Update/Overview/