

# HALA Community Focus Groups

## Working Glossary of Terms



HALA Community Focus Groups help guide implementation of the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA), with particular focus on Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA). Discussion of MHA core tenets and implementation principles includes a variety of land use and planning terms and concepts that merit definition. This working glossary provides definitions for many terms, and we encourage participants to add more as the Focus Group process unfolds.

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## Affordable housing

Affordable housing is sometimes used informally to describe a home that a household is able to afford with sufficient remaining income for basic needs such as transportation, food, and healthcare. But in formal conversations about affordable housing, including HALA, the phrase "affordable housing" has a specific meaning: housing (1) that is available only to households with incomes no higher than a certain level and (2) where there are limits on rents or sale prices.

Affordable housing may be publicly or privately owned, can be found in a wide range of neighborhoods and types of buildings, and can occur as a portion of the units in a building, or an entire building may comprise all affordable units. In all cases, creating affordable housing requires proactive public policy and investment.

## Area median income (AMI)

Area median income (AMI) is the dollar amount for a given area where half the population earns less and half earns more. AMI levels for housing take into consideration household size. Programs and policies of the City of Seattle typically refer to AMI that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) establishes for the Seattle-Bellevue HUD Fair Market Rent Area. For 2016, median income for an individual in this area is \$63,300. [You can see more AMI information here.](#)

## Commercial development / zone (C)

A commercial development is a building where a commercial use occurs. In other words, the use of land is related to commerce. There are many types of commercial use, including offices, retail stores, hotels, eating and drinking establishments, research and development laboratories, and entertainment venues. These uses are distinct from other uses, such as industrial, institutional, and residential, and can generally occur only in a commercial zone. Most commercial zones in Seattle also allow residential uses, and mixed-use buildings that contain both commercial and residential uses are common.

## Comprehensive Plan

Seattle's Comprehensive Plan is a planning and policy document that outlines a 20-year vision for how the City will manage growth. Developing a comprehensive plan is a requirement of the [Washington State Growth Management Act](#).

## Development capacity

Development capacity is an estimate of how much development (measured in square footage) could theoretically occur over an indefinite time period. Development capacity is determined by (1) estimating which parcels could be redeveloped and (2) comparing the amount of development that could occur on each them with the amount of development that exists there today based on current zoning.

The City maintains a development capacity model that determines whether an individual parcel could redevelop based on the difference between the amount of development on the land today and the amount that could be built under current zoning. The model also considers site-specific factors, such as known site restrictions or public ownership, that affect whether a parcel could redevelop. Total development capacity for a specific neighborhood or urban village, or for the entire city, is the sum of this comparison for the parcels that the City's model determines are redevelopable.

Consider a piece of land (i.e., a "parcel") with a two-story building containing 15,000 square feet of floor area. Let's say the zoning for this parcel allows a larger scale and density of development than what exists on the ground today, such that someone could build eight stories and a total of 100,000 square feet of floor area based on the maximum height and FAR limits of this zone. The difference between the 100,000 square feet of floor area that could theoretically be built and the 15,000 square feet of floor area that exists today yields 85,000 square feet of development capacity for this particular parcel.

If the current zoning allowed only slightly more floor area (for example, 18,000 square feet) to be built than what exists today, the development capacity model would not consider this parcel to be redevelopable. It isn't

likely that someone would redevelop a site for such a small increase in floor area. This doesn't mean it could not or will not happen — only that it is not likely.

It is important to note that development capacity is not a prediction of when or where future development will occur. It does not reflect or predict market demand, but market demand has a major role in the timing, quantity, and location of actual development. Development capacity only estimates the supply of development that could eventually and theoretically be produced for a given zoning scenario based on many assumptions. For example, there are many parcels in Seattle where the zoning allows mixed-use buildings. The City's model estimates how much residential and commercial development a mixed-use project is likely to have based on recent trends, but ultimately a mixed-use zone could end up with more or less of one use.

### Family-size housing

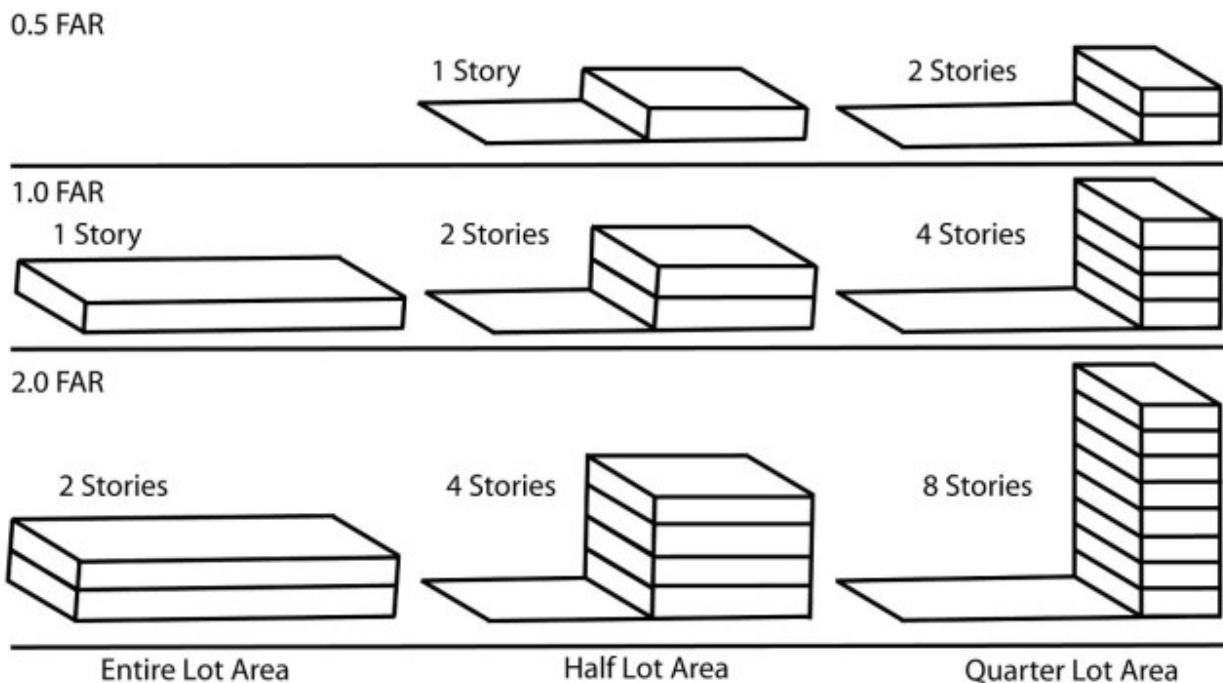
Family-size or "family-friendly" housing typically refers to housing that suits families with children. Family size-housing can refer to the size of the housing, the number of bedrooms it contains, and whether it has direct access to open space or other outdoor amenity area. While there is no single definition of a family-size housing unit, it often means a home with at least two bedrooms.

### Floor area ratio (FAR)

Floor area ratio is a number that expresses the ratio of building's total floor area to the size of the piece of land on which it is built. For example, if a building has 100,000 square feet of total floor area on a lot that is 25,000 square feet in area, the building has an FAR of 4.0 ( $100,000 / 25,000 = 4$ ).

FAR is commonly used to limit the size and scale of development allowed in a certain area. For example, a certain zone could have a maximum FAR of 5.0. In this zone, the floor area of a new building could be at most five times the size of the piece of land it is constructed on. A new building could cover the entire lot with five stories of development, half of the lot with 10 stories, or a quarter of the lot with 20 stories. This means buildings of various shapes and sizes can have the same FAR.

**Exhibit 23.84A.012 A**  
Floor Area Ratio



## Household

A household is composed of all people living in a housing unit. One person living alone, multiple unrelated people living together, and a family of related people are all examples of households. In affordable housing, an important concept is household income, which is the total gross income of all people comprising a household. In Seattle, the Land Use Code defines a household as (1) any number of related people or (2) a maximum of eight non-related people. This means no more than eight people can live in a single housing unit if any one of them is not related to another.

## Housing unit

A housing unit is one or more rooms that are intended to be occupied by only one household. A single-family house, a townhouse or a rowhouse, an apartment unit, and a condominium unit are all examples of a single housing unit. The concept of a housing unit is how we measure the amount of housing that a residential structure contains.

## Lowrise zone (LR)

In Seattle, a Lowrise zone is a multifamily residential zone. Like all multifamily zones, the only allowed use in a Lowrise zone is a residential use. This means someone can build housing in a Lowrise zone, but generally cannot build commercial uses like retail stores and offices. The term "lowrise" refers to the size and scale of buildings. Lowrise zones allow rowhouses, townhouses, small apartment buildings, and cottage housing, which are small individual houses arranged around a common open space.

There are three types of Lowrise zones in Seattle: Lowrise 1 (LR1), Lowrise 2 (LR2), and Lowrise 3 (LR3). The number of each Lowrise zone refers to the scale and density of development allowed in each zone. [This brochure](#) illustrates at a general level the development standards that apply to development in Lowrise zones.

## Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA)

MHA is one of the more than 60 strategies that the HALA Advisory Committee recommended for addressing the housing challenges facing Seattle. Under MHA, new market-rate multifamily and commercial development would be required to contribute to affordable housing by either including affordable housing in the building or making a payment to the City that the Office of Housing will use to build affordable housing. The City would also make zoning changes to add development capacity in all zones where MHA would apply — a State-approved approach for adding the new affordable housing requirement. The additional development capacity means buildings could be somewhat taller or larger than what current zoning allows — and would have a required contribution to affordable housing. Affordable housing created through MHA would support low-income households making at most 60% of the area median income (AMI).

## Mixed-use development / zone

A mixed-use development is a building that includes multiple "uses" of land. Typically, a mixed-use development includes a residential component (i.e., housing) and a commercial component (i.e., retail stores or office space). A common type of mixed-use building has retail spaces at the street level with housing above. But mixed-use buildings can arrange commercial and residential floor area in many different ways.

While a multifamily residential zone allows only residential uses, a mixed-use zone allows buildings that include multiple uses, such as residential and commercial space. Seattle has several mixed-use zones, including Neighborhood Commercial (NC) zones, Seattle Mixed (SM) zones, and many of our Downtown zones.

## Multifamily development / zone

Multifamily development is a type of residential development that refers to buildings that contains more than one housing unit. This includes small multifamily buildings, like a duplex or triplex, and large multifamily buildings, like midrise or high-rise apartment buildings. Multifamily development describes the configuration of the housing units, not their tenancy; multifamily buildings can include housing that people rent and/or housing that people own.

Multifamily zones are the zones that allow multifamily development and do not allow commercial development (i.e., retail stores and office buildings). In Seattle, we have a variety of multifamily zones. Lowrise zones primarily

allow rowhouses, townhouses, and small apartment buildings. Midrise zones allow apartment buildings that are generally six to nine stories tall. Highrise zones allow taller apartment buildings. While multifamily zones *allow* multifamily development, they do not *require* it: someone could build a single-family house in a multifamily zone. Furthermore, multifamily zones are not the only zones that allow multifamily development like apartments. Mixed-use zones allow both residential and commercial development.

### National Register historic district

Seattle has two historic districts on the [National Register of Historic Places](#): The **Pioneer Square-Skid Road Historic District** and the **Seattle Chinatown Historic District**. The National Register is the federal government's official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects deemed historically significant and worthy of preservation.

### Residential Small Lot zone (RSL)

The RSL zone is a residential zone that allows development of smaller detached homes. In RSL zones, smaller houses are allowed, and multiple smaller houses may be allowed on a single lot. This allows for densities between Single-Family Residential zones and Lowrise zones.

### Setback

In land use, a setback is the distance between a structure and a lot line, a street or other right-of-way, or an environmentally critical area such as a steep slope or riparian corridor. A minimum required setback determines the closest that a building can be constructed to a lot line, often to ensure space for light, air, and access between structures or to protect a natural feature or hazardous area. A maximum setback can limit the distance that a building could be from a lot line, for instance to ensure entries to stores are located close to the sidewalk.

### Single-family development / zone (SF)

A single-family development is a detached house. If it is located in a single-family zone, it has to meet certain development regulations. Single-family houses are the only type of development allowed in a single-family zone. There are three Single-Family (SF) Residential zones: SF 5000, SF 7200, and SF 9600. The number refers to the minimum size in square feet that any new lot must be. For example, a new lot in a SF 5000 zone must be at least 5,000 square feet, though many existing lots are smaller than this because they were platted before this requirement. Apart from the difference in minimum lot size, the single-family zones have the same regulations. In addition to a main house, a lot zoned single-family may also have one accessory dwelling unit. This accessory dwelling unit can be located in the same structure as the main house, often called a mother-in-law unit, or it can be in a separate structure called a detached accessory dwelling unit (a DADU or a backyard cottage).

### Step-down

A step-down describes an approach to zoning where the maximum height limit changes gradually in order to create a transition in scale from areas with taller buildings and denser development to areas with lower, smaller structures. For example, the zoning for the parcels that face a main commercial street might have a height limit of 65 feet (e.g., Neighborhood Commercial 3 – 65). To implement a step-down, the next block away on either side of the main street would have a slightly lower maximum height limit — perhaps 40 feet (e.g., Lowrise 3). As we move away from the main business district, there might be a few blocks of smaller-scale lowrise zoning with a 30-foot maximum height limit (e.g., Lowrise 1) before we reach a single-family zone, the lowest-density zone in Seattle.

### Zoning

Zoning is a type of law that regulates the use of land. A government divides areas of land into zones within which various uses are permitted. The regulations for different zones are contained in the zoning code.