



City of Seattle
Seattle Planning Commission

David Cutler, Chair
Barbara Wilson, Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

August 30, 2013

To: Diane Sugimura, Director, Department of Planning & Development

From: Seattle Planning Commission

Re: Commission comments on [DPD's Micro Dwelling Unit Preliminary Recommendations](#)

CC: Mayor Michael McGinn; Seattle City Councilmembers; Darryl Smith, Ethan Raup, Alison Van Gorp; Mayor's Office; Marshall Foster, John Skelton, Mike Podowski, Geoff Wentlandt; DPD; Rick Hooper, Miriam Roskin; Office of Housing; Sara Belz, Council Central Staff

Dear Ms. Sugimura,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with our Commission Chair, Vice Chair and Executive Director on July 9th regarding DPD's preliminary recommendations on Micro-housing.

As you are aware, the Planning Commission released our preliminary comments on this matter on June 21, 2013. The Commission's conclusion was that "*micro-apartments fill a unique niche in the Seattle housing market...*" and "*...this type of housing should be embraced and encouraged in appropriately zoned parts of the city. We find that these units are in high demand and provide housing for a range of people who are willing to trade off tight personal living space for other personal considerations such as proximity to work or school, life situations, tenure, etc...*" However the Commission suggested "*...some minor changes to the rules and regulations that govern micro-apartments... to ensure they add long-term value to Seattle's housing stock and community*".

In our [June 21 letter](#), we also made suggestions that help balance code changes to ensure that this desirable housing type is viable from the perspective of those who build housing and those who desire it. We recognize that micro-housing is one meaningful solution toward ensuring that a broad and diverse population has access to housing they can afford in Seattle. Our recommendations included

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creating more clarity in defining micro-housing, addressing thresholds for the design review processes, vehicle and bicycle parking requirements, size requirements for common space, locational criteria, as well as fire, life and safety issues.

In most cases it appears that the Commission's recommendations now align with the DPD proposal. However there are two issues where we would like to offer further comment and advice as you draft your final recommendations for Council.

1. Thresholds for design review

We concur with DPD that design review thresholds should be based on the scale (not number of units) of the development similar to other multifamily development types. Your recommendation is that the city will apply different forms of design review depending on building size as follows:

- 5,000 + GSF - Streamlined Design Review (SDR) – Type I Land Use Decision
- 12,000+ GSF - Administrative Design Review (ADR) – Type II Land Use Decision – staff review
- 30,000 GSF - Full Design Review – Type II Land Use Decision – board review

While these standards are generally reasonable we are concerned that the 30,000 GSF threshold is inconsistent with the thresholds for similar multifamily housing development types that trigger this type of review at a much lower scale. We recognize that design review processes can significantly lengthen the permitting process for any development, which in turn may impact the cost and supply of housing. However, if micro-apartment developments are treated differently (a speedier, less costly, and less risky path to completion than other development types) then the code will create a preference for this housing type in the market. This issue is predominantly about crafting code provisions that balance the City's priorities. We recommend the City make the thresholds consistent for all multifamily development types.

2. Development standards and requirements for common spaces

We also recommend that common space for micro dwelling units meet minimum standards, including a clear requirement about how space can be broken up for different uses (food prep, dining, laundry and other possible uses). Your recommendation is to require, in the Land Use Code, a minimum shared kitchen/common area of 120 square feet for each micro dwelling unit

and for congregate residences. It is our recommendation that a common space requirement not include the food preparation area and that it have a minimum dimension to ensure the space is usable as an area of congregation, for example 10' x 10'. We would also recommend placing at least a portion of shared common space on the ground floor to both create a place for community building among residents as well as to ensure equal access for all residents to this amenity. We understand the importance of this shared space, and would offer to work closely with you as this part of the land use code policy is developed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with our recommendations on micro-housing. We are available to answer any questions and would be happy discuss all of our recommendations in more detail. You can contact me or call our Director, Barbara Wilson, at (206) 684-0431.

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION RECORD OF DISCLOSURES & RECUSALS:

- Commissioner Catherine Benotto disclosed that her employer, Weber Thompson, advises housing developers and designs multifamily projects throughout Seattle that could be impacted.
- Commissioner Josh Brower disclosed that his firm, Veris Law Group PLLC, represents single-family and multifamily housing developers throughout the city of Seattle that could be impacted.
- Commissioner David Cutler disclosed that his firm, GGLO, works on a wide range of residential architectural projects for clients throughout the city of Seattle that could be impacted.
- Commissioner Colie Hough Beck disclosed that the firm for which she works, HBB Landscape Architecture, works on multifamily projects in Seattle.
- Commissioner Bradley Khouri disclosed that his firm, b9 architects, works on housing projects throughout Seattle that could be impacted.
- Commissioner Grace Kim disclosed that her firm, Schemata Workshop works on multifamily housing projects throughout the City.
- Commissioner Amalia Leighton disclosed that her employer, SvR Design, provides engineering and landscape architecture services to public and private clients that could be impacted.
- Commissioner Kevin McDonald disclosed that he lives in Capitol Hill, which is one of the neighborhoods in which much of the new micro-housing development has occurred.
- Commissioner Tim Parham disclosed that he works for the Puget Sound Regional Council and is facilitating the development of the Growing Transit Communities' Fair Housing and Equity Assessment.
- Commissioner Marj Press disclosed that she is a small business owner on Capitol Hill where many of these projects are located and currently being developed.
- Commissioner Matt Roewe disclosed that he works for VIA architecture who does work with multifamily developers.
- Commissioner Morgan Shook disclosed that he is representing the Planning Commission on the Mayor's Affordable Housing Incentives Committee and the consulting firm where is employed, BERK, commonly assists cities with land use and housing policies.