



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

June 20, 2018

Ms. Aly Pennucci
Seattle City Council Central Staff
via E-mail

Dear Ms. Pennucci:

The Planning Commission appreciates the opportunity to provide our comments on the Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). ADUs support many of the housing goals and policies in the City's Comprehensive Plan. We have been consistent supporters of ADUs as a means to increase housing supply while providing a mix of housing that is accessible to a variety of household types. The Planning Commission strongly supports proposals that would incentivize production of ADUs as we continue our work to provide greater diversity and supply of housing options in neighborhoods currently zoned Single-family throughout the city. This includes changing regulations in the Land Use Code to remove barriers to the permitting and construction of ADUs in Single-family zones.

In March 2016, we submitted a preliminary comment letter to Councilmembers Rob Johnson and Mike O'Brien with our guidance and recommendations to encourage increased production of ADUs. In October 2017, we submitted a scoping comment letter with our input on issues to be studied in the EIS. With the recent publication of the DEIS, we commend the analysis of the three alternatives and appreciate the responsiveness to our suggestions, especially in the Land Use, Housing & Socioeconomics, and Transportation chapters.

The purpose of this letter is to identify components of the alternatives studied in the DEIS that the Planning Commission recommends be included with the preferred alternative. We would like to reiterate our recommendations to modify the Land Use Code and add flexibility to development standards to encourage increased production of ADUs. These recommendations are:

- **Modify the Code to allow more than one ADU per lot.** Current City code states that a lot with or proposed for a single-family house may have only one accessory unit. Regulatory changes studied under Alternatives 2 and 3 would modify the Land Use Code to allow more than one ADU, either both an attached ADU (AADU) and a detached ADU (DADU) or two AADUs, on suitable lots with a single-family home as the primary unit. The Planning Commission supports allowing two ADUs to maximize opportunities for housing within the allowable

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building envelope of a single-family lot. This change would support creation of a greater diversity and supply of housing options in Single-family zones. The Planning Commission recommends additional flexibility in the Land Use Code to allow two ADUs of any combination (an AADU and a DADU, two AADUs, or two DADUs) if all other development standards on the lot are met.

- **Remove the requirement for off-street parking.** Current regulations require one off-street parking space for each ADU unless the lot is in an urban village. This requirement adds to the cost of and limits design flexibility for ADUs, which unduly reduces potential construction of these units. Parking also often adds impervious surfaces. We appreciate the analysis of this issue in the DEIS, especially the quantification of existing available on-street parking in single-family zones, as well as how many eligible single-family lots are within walking distance of frequent and reliable transit. As the DEIS concludes that increased ADU production would not have an adverse impact on the availability of on-street parking, the Planning Commission recommends no required off-street parking for any ADUs, regardless of whether a lot has one or two ADUs on the property.
- **Remove the owner-occupancy requirement.** The existing regulations require homeowners with an ADU to reside in either the principal or the accessory unit for at least six months of the year. ADUs allow a broader range of low-density housing in single-family areas and provide housing choices for both homeowners and renters. The 2010 Census estimated that approximately 52% of Seattle's housing units were occupied by renters. Removing the owner-occupancy requirement, as analyzed in Alternative 2, will eliminate a barrier to ADU production while increasing the supply and variety of rental housing options in single-family areas.
- **Reduce minimum lot size.** The current minimum lot size for an ADU is 4,000 square feet. Alternatives 2 and 3 analyzed reducing the minimum lot size to 3,200 square feet. This change alone would make more than 7,000 additional lots eligible for ADUs. In addition, smaller-sized lots tend to be located closer to the center of the city with good access to transit.
- **Increase maximum allowable floor area and remove garages and storage areas from the floor area calculation.** Currently, the maximum allowable square footage of an AADU is 1,000 square feet, while the maximum for a DADU is 800 square feet. The maximum allowable floor area for a DADU includes garage and storage areas within the structure. The Planning Commission suggests increasing the maximum square footage of a DADU to be consistent with that allowed for an AADU and removing garages and storage units from the maximum allowable floor area. This change is studied in Alternative 2. The current requirements substantially constrain the design and limit the functionality of DADUs, especially those built above existing garages. Modifying the maximum allowable square footage for DADUs to 1,000 square feet and excluding garage and storage areas from floor area calculations for both AADUs and DADUs will allow for more two-bedroom ADUs, especially when constructed above a garage.
- **Slightly increase height limit for DADUs on certain lots.** The current maximum height limit for a DADU depends on the width of the lot. On wider lots, a taller unit is permitted. Increasing the maximum height by 1 to 3 feet, as analyzed in Alternatives 2 and 3, would allow for additional living space, appeal to a wider range of occupants, and increase design flexibility on sloping sites.
- **Increase the rear yard coverage limit for single story DADUs.** Under current development standards, the total footprint of all accessory structures, including DADUs, may not cover more than 40% of the rear yard. Increasing the rear yard coverage limit to 60% would allow for more single-story

DADUs that are accessible for those with mobility limitations who want to live in a reasonably sized dwelling without the challenges of stairs in a two-story structure.

- **Encourage flexibility in the allowed household size on lots with an AADU and/or DADU.** Under current regulations, no more than eight unrelated people can inhabit a principal dwelling unit and any accessory dwelling units on a lot. The Planning Commission supports allowing up to 12 unrelated people on lots with both an ADU and a DADU, as studied in Alternative 2.

In addition to our recommendations to modify the Land Use Code, the Planning Commission has comments on the following issues studied in the DEIS:

- **Do not apply MHA requirements to ADUs at this time.** Alternative 3 studied the potential application of Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) requirements when a property owner applies for a permit to construct a second ADU on a lot that already has one ADU. The Planning Commission is supportive of MHA to increase the amount of affordable housing citywide. However, we do not support applying MHA to the production of ADUs at this time. The additional costs to a property owner who wants to create a second ADU could be a disincentive to do so. Applying MHA requirements to ADUs could suppress production of these units and be counterproductive to the intent of the proposed legislation.
- **Apply FAR limits to development in single-family zones.** The Planning Commission supports new floor area ratio (FAR) limits to address community concerns about new large homes, preserve existing housing, and incentivize adding ADUs to both new and existing homes. There are currently no maximum FAR limits for houses in single-family zones. The maximum size for a primary house is regulated by yard requirements, height limits, and lot coverage limits. Any ADUs on these lots are subject to maximum size limits set by the Land Use Code and discussed above. Alternative 3 in the DEIS analyzed maximum FAR limits for new development in single-family zones. New houses would be subject to a FAR limit of 0.5 or 2,500 square feet, whichever is greater. Any below-grade floor area and floor area in DADUs is exempt from these FAR limits, although existing ADU size limits would still apply. Any existing development that exceeds the new FAR limits can convert existing space to an AADU and add a DADU, subject to the previously described size limits.
- **Reduce predevelopment costs to encourage ADU production, especially for lower-income homeowners.** The Planning Commission encourages exploring a wide range of process improvements that would further incentivize development of AADUs and DADUs. The costs to develop an ADU can be a significant hurdle for property owners who want to add accessory units to their lots. In addition to the actual construction costs, predevelopment costs including design, permitting, and utility charges can also act as a disincentive to production of ADUs. Alternative 2 studies the benefits of reducing predevelopment costs by ten percent. Early ideas include streamlining project review and providing pre-approved plans. To increase affordable housing options, the City of Portland recently made the decision to indefinitely suspend all ADU development charges, which add up to as much as \$15,000 per unit, if they are not used as short-term rentals. One specific fee in Seattle that is a significant burden is the sewer hookup fee for DADUs. The Planning Commission recommends working with King County to re-evaluate those fees. We also recommend providing a sliding scale for predevelopment fees if different income levels are served.

Lastly, the Planning Commission supports providing potential ADU owners with additional resources to facilitate development of AADUs and DADUs throughout Seattle. Some ideas for resources include:

- A step-by-step guide to the permitting process for an ADU;
- A database or clearinghouse of other ADU owners, architects, and builders;
- Additional options to reduce the financial barriers to building ADUs, including access to financing for lower-income homeowners.

Thank you for considering our comments on the ADU DEIS. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or our Executive Director, Vanessa Murdock, at 733-9271.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Parham', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tim Parham, Chair
Seattle Planning Commission

Cc: Deputy Mayor Moseley
Seattle City Councilmembers
Sam Assefa, Nick Welch; Office of Planning and Community Development