

NEIGHBORHOODS FOR ALL

A Community Discussion with The Seattle Planning Commission

The Seattle Planning Commission hosted two community discussions in the spring of 2019. The first event took place at North Seattle College on April 27, the second was held at Southside Commons in Columbia City on May 4. Following these events, the Commission is making plans to attend regularly scheduled meetings of community-based organizations, and other community groups around the city.

Some themes the Planning Commission heard at both events include: urgency around housing affordability; a feeling that the City needs to do more and act faster; the connection between

transportation, density and environmental/climate goals; an interest in homeownership programs and land trusts; and support for Accessory Dwelling Unit's (ADU's), while observing that ADU production has been too slow to make a difference in the affordability crisis.

The summary of comments from community members included here are from the event on April 27th, which had 23 attendees from 14 different Seattle neighborhoods.

If you'd like to review the materials shared at this event, or read the Neighborhoods for All report,

What did Commissioners hear?

- The trend of housing size [single-family homes growing larger, but still only housing one family] is an issue
- We should be welcoming new people and supporting vulnerable [to displacement] community members
- We should expand urban villages, and make more of them, make "urban hamlets"
- Are there more financing strategies for helping renters become homeowners?
- The housing market in Seattle is very different than it was in the 1990s. Income inequality is much higher now than it was in the 1950s and 1960s. Generational wealth is providing a cushion for some, but that wealth may not be available for all people of color
- Current zoning laws are not incentivizing

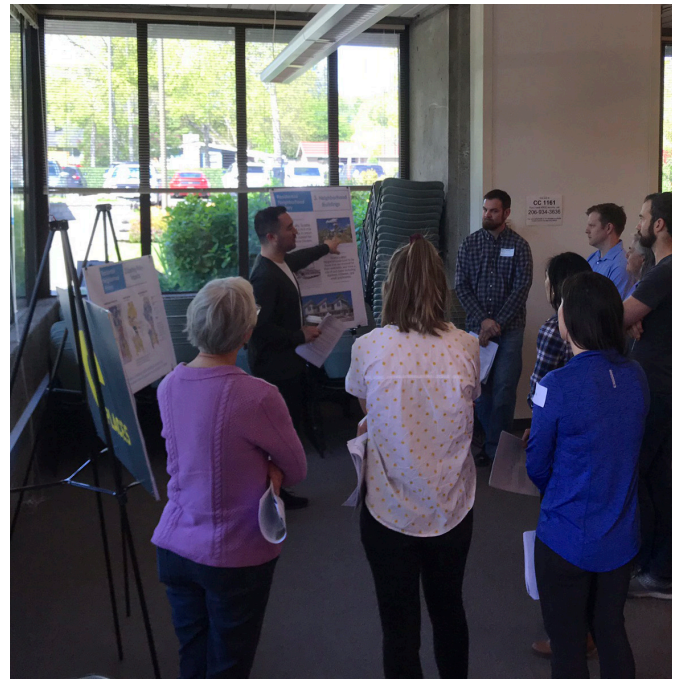


Commissioner Jamie Stroble explains historical events and policies that influenced housing in Seattle

Comments continued:

development that fills the missing middle/affordable homes gap, new development is predominantly all luxury housing

- The development process has lots of barriers, be careful about policies that slow down the process. We also need to make land use and building code more understandable and accessible to the general public (including fees/costs of permits)
- Minneapolis' recent zoning changes are citywide, equitable, and an example of making a change. Seattle needs to change, and it needs to be citywide
- Remove the label "single-family" from our zoning
- There is a climate change crisis. We need to be bold, and implement multiple strategies to make housing/development more sustainable (more density means more sharing of resources, less driving, less habitat destruction)
- We've made no progress [in terms of housing affordability], housing is a difficult problem to solve, we need to have more kitchen table conversations about the issues
- Need affordability for folks who aren't just low-income; working families can't just "work harder" to buy a house in today's market—need more programs for homeownership, and non-traditional ownership: community land trusts, limited equity co-ops, opportunities to buy the building not the land
- Show what different units in a single-family neighborhood would look like. Can we get visualizations of how it would fit into existing neighborhoods? It could help dispel fear, especially if the conversation is centered on values and compassion
- Emphasize that changes to single-family zoning



Michael Austin, Chair of the Planning Commission, presents findings of the Neighborhoods for All report

- don't remove/eliminate single-family homes
- When talking about history, need to show the nuances without alienating people. Racism can exist "without racists" (it's an aspect of privilege). Need to rely on data instead of making personal attacks.
- When discussing housing, we also need to connect the choice about where you live to your commute and transportation
- Focus density where land is cheaper, not places with nice views, so that development of non-luxury units is more feasible
- Up-zone the historically white neighborhoods
- Establish a public bank in order to finance homeownership programs
- Does increasing housing supply really decrease prices?
- Eliminate parking requirements, and make more space for units

Comments continued:

- We should encourage stacked flats as opposed to side-by-side units. Stairwells are to homes as parking spaces are to yards and bike lanes-- fewer stairwells = 1 extra bedroom/unit
- We should be able to have more split lots, with the ability to sell a portion to someone else who might want to make a house the size of an DADU (many homeowners don't have the finances to make one themselves)
- Set up a real estate trust that wealthy people can pay into to support financing of housing for lower income prospective buyers
- Who will build "missing middle" housing? Is it developers? Or homeowners? What are strategies to incentivize those types of developments for homeowners?
- What are economic power houses (i.e., Amazon) doing to tackle housing? Could we ask companies to take more responsibility?
- How important is style and aesthetics? Should style be prioritized over the number of units or number of people housed?
- Are property taxes inequitable? Are some types of homes getting tax increases more than others?
- What are strategies for converting homes with "empty-nesters" into rental opportunities/sharing those units
- We need a wide range of housing options. More access for low income home ownership programs

About the Seattle Planning Commission

The Seattle Planning Commission advises the Mayor, City Council and City departments on broad planning goals, policies and plans for the physical development of the City. The Commission's work is framed by the Comprehensive Plan and its vision for Seattle in the 21st Century. Our work is also focused by a commitment to engage citizens in planning efforts that work towards Comprehensive Plan goals.

The Seattle Planning Commission is an independent, 16-member advisory body appointed by the Mayor, City Council, and the Commission itself. The members of the Commission are volunteers who bring a wide array of expertise and a diversity of perspectives to these roles.

Seattle Planning Commission, 600 4th Ave, Floor 5; PO Box 94788 Seattle, WA. 98124-7088
Tel: (206) 684-8694, TDD: (206) 684-8118 www.seattle.gov/planningcommission