

MULTIFAMILY ZONING UPDATE

Seattle Planning Commission DRAFT Preliminary Discussion Notes March 25, 2009 City Council PLUNC

PLANNING COMMISSION INVOLVEMENT

The Planning Commission has been involved in the City's efforts to revisit the Multifamily Code. Starting in 2005 the Commission has been closely following this project and has been actively engaged in the public involvement process as well as providing our own independent and objective advise to the Executive in the development of code revisions. Most recently the Commission has closely studied the proposed Multifamily Zoning Update, which has recently been submitted to Council. While the Commission has not yet taken a formal position on this ordinance, we do have some preliminary thoughts to convey for Council discussion.

GENERAL COMMENTS

- Overall, the Commission supports the goals of the Multifamily Zoning Update, but it is not clear that the proposed code changes achieve them.
- The Commission would like to see a clear problem statement that the proposed code changes solve. For example, one concern about the existing code has been that it might be producing less housing than necessary to meet Comprehensive Plan targets. It is not clear (1) that multifamily zones are being under built to an extent that hampers the City's overall development potential; (2) what portion of new development should be directed toward multifamily zones given that they account for only ten percent of land; or (3) that the proposed code would address this if it is in fact a problem.

PROCESS

The Commission suggests approving legislation all at once rather than breaking it apart:

- While the Commission recognizes that the legislation covers a variety of topics, it is not clear that there is an advantage to approving the legislation piecemeal rather than all at once.
- Approving new regulations through a series of code changes could make the permit approval process more complicated for applicants as well as DPD staff.
- Most of the elements contained within the legislation need to be considered as a package in order to understand the overall impact of the changes as a whole.

CODE TOPICS

- Simplify the code provisions to be consistent with other code sections (i.e. Commercial Code).
- The Commission advocates for a 'zero-based' approach to updating the Multifamily Code. Rather than revising existing standards, each should be considered from the ground up.

Height, Bulk & Density

- Height limit should be at **least** 30 feet in LDT, L1 and L2; it does not make sense to have a lower limit than is allowed in SF.
- Height should be measured using the building code or shoreline method.
- Standards force roof shapes rather than allow flexibility.
- Eliminate bulk controls on lots greater than 9,000 square feet.
- Side setbacks prohibit east coast style row houses. What is the rationale for setbacks?
- Density limits probably encourage larger unit sizes.
- Support switch to FAR but not with other restrictions too.

Parking

- Support elimination of parking minimums in urban centers and station areas.
- Where parking is not required, consider allowing more flexibility about other requirements related to parking lot design, and particularly mix of stall types.

Sustainability

- Concerned about requirement for Built Green; it should not be a codified standard. LEED can be a cost burden for small projects.
- What regulations are really appropriate? ASHRAE 186 could provide a more appropriate approach with a stricter, higher standard.

Green Factor

- 0.6 seems too high and unrealistic to achieve on small projects. Could force green roofs in low-rise zones which create many challenges on sloped, wood roofs. Would be most restrictive aspect of new code.
- Corner lots should be treated differently than others.
- On-going maintenance of green factor areas is a concern.

Townhouses

- Proposed regulations are not likely to result in better design. Regulations should be further changed to encourage a better development.
- Sequential development under separate skirts SEPA regulations and other threshold requirements.
- If density of townhouse development is really a problem, perhaps minimum densities should be required.
- Minimum lot size of 10,000 square feet might contribute to better design.