



**HALA Community Focus Groups**  
**Medium Density Urban Village Focus Group | Meeting #2**  
Thursday, June 30, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.  
Seattle City Hall, Room L280

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**Meeting Summary**

**Opening Remarks and Introductions**

Susan Hayman, facilitator, welcomed the group and reviewed the purpose and schedule for the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) Focus Group process. She reviewed the process's timeline and the goals for the upcoming meetings. Susan also provided Focus Group members with an overview of the agenda and the objectives for the Medium Density Urban Village Group's second meeting.

Susan shared that over 65 people spoke at Seattle City Council committee hearing on the Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) Residential framework on Tuesday, June 21 and were about evenly split between those generally supporting the framework and those with concerns. She thanked those Focus Group members that attended the hearing and spoke.

**Small Group Discussions: Reflection on May MHA Implementation Principles**

Geoff Wentlandt, Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD), provided Focus Group members with an overview of how the City incorporated the Focus Group's feedback on the proposed MHA implementation principles from the May meeting. He also provided a brief overview of the meeting's interactive exercise and materials, which was informed by the May Focus Group feedback.

Geoff highlighted the following information:

- MHA principles would require that multifamily and commercial development contribute to affordable housing by either incorporating affordable units into construction or paying into a City fund that would support the construction and/or preservation of affordable units.
- MHA principles are divided into three categories:
  - Group A principles form the foundation of MHA, and they are not likely to change.
  - Group B principles are community-generated, and they will guide MHA implementation.
  - Group C principles include important ideas and input from the Focus Groups and others but are outside of the scope of MHA.
- The Focus Group's purpose during the May and June meetings is to act as a sounding board and engage in dialogue with each other regarding the Group B MHA implementation principles, noting areas of agreement and disagreement.
- Focus Group members should reflect on the tenets of the City's Racial and Social Justice Initiative and use its framework as a lens to consider MHA implementation.
- OPCD plans to provide the City Council with questions and ideas distilled from Focus Group discussion in advance of the Council's upcoming Planning, Land Use, and Zoning committee meeting on July 8. Focus Group members will receive the summary of information provided to Council.

Focus Group members divided into three group discussion stations, each one devoted to a collection of MHA Group B principles (one for **Urban Design, Historic Areas, Unique Conditions, and Neighborhood Design**, another for **Housing Options and Transitions**, and another for **Assets & Infrastructure and Urban Village Expansion Areas**). Focus Group members rotated through each of the three discussion stations throughout the meeting and shared thoughts and perspectives with one another. OPCD provided framing questions and supporting topical background information at each station.

Each station included a large sheet on the table illustrating preliminary Focus Group feedback on draft MHA principles following the group's May meeting. Discussion, comments, and suggestions from the small groups were written down on the sheet. The ideas, suggestions, and discussion from the small group session will be incorporated in a draft report of Focus Group input on the principles.

### **Small Group Sharing**

At the conclusion of the three station rotations, Susan invited a spokesperson from each station to share a summary of ideas and questions that emerged during group discussions at their final station. She then invited others to share additional key thoughts. Focus Group members identified the following key points:

#### **I. Assets & Infrastructure and Urban Village Expansion Areas:**

- Utilize a multi-node approach in determining urban village expansion area boundaries.
- Parks are underfunded. A lot of the current park spaces are small and in single family zones, so they would not be suitable centers for an urban village.
- Do not rely entirely on a computer-generated watershed models for determining urban village expansion area boundaries. Ground-truth the boundaries so that they make sense.
- How is expansion measured? The group was skeptical on any sort of clearly defined criteria, such as transit or existing amenities. Mapping expansion can be contentious because there will be disagreement about methodology.
- It makes sense to put housing where there are amenities, but the City has not done a good job of putting amenities in places with denser housing.
- Some urban villages lack grocery stores or services. Is there a way for the City to incentivize the development of these?

#### **II. Housing Options and Transitions:**

- These options are all contextual and should take into account different neighborhood settings, such as street size and topography.
- When analyzing a "unit," take into consideration the complexity and variety, not just its size.
- Can developers look into providing a variety of housing options?
- Take zoning into consideration for transitions. Transitions should follow a "wedding cake" model (ensure that the first level of the "cake" is scaled appropriately with subsequent "layers").

- Would it be possible to allow very small scale multifamily housing, such as a quadplex, in the transition area from a single family zone? This can be seen in parts of Ballard and Capitol Hill and helps transitions not feel as dramatic.

### **III. Urban Design, Historic Areas, Unique Conditions, and Neighborhood Design:**

- The group generally liked the upper-level setback that is typical in Vancouver.
- There was a lot of discussion about construction materials:
  - What are the merits of materials that are more durable versus something that uses less durable materials?
  - A lot of the current affordable housing looks cheap and poorly done.
  - Do materials have an impact on the cost of the building? How does that contribute to or hinder affordable housing? It would be unfortunate to hinder affordable housing because the regulations are too stringent and/or costly.
  - What sort of requirements can the City provide to ensure materials are environmentally friendly?
- Design guidelines for each neighborhood are important. If the City works with neighborhoods to ensure each has these guidelines, it would help with design, context, and scale.
- Developers should be required to follow urban design standards and design codes. That is, what is designed should be built.
- The group encouraged the City to catalogue historical buildings.
- There was general agreement around considering historic areas and buildings for zoning changes. While they support honoring historical areas, there is concern that these areas could become more expensive because of restrictions on future development.
- Is the City focusing more on capacity than affordability?
- Urban design should also include design of the public realm along the street. Retail strategies should utilize the public realm as much as possible.
- As the conversation about increased zoning capacity continues over the next year, it is very important to have updated design review guidelines developed and ready for application.

Susan noted that she overheard discussions around “payment and performance” in MHA. She said City staff intend to follow up with additional information/data for Focus Group members.

Geoff thanked the Focus Group members for their engaged discussion this evening, and asked that they encourage others in their group to attend future meetings.

### **Observer Comment**

Susan invited the observers to share brief comments with the group, which are roughly quoted here:

- One observer noted that they really liked hearing the conversations. They had read that less than one percent of the 30,000 new units being built are larger than one-bedroom apartments. The observer wanted to know: how do we get the money for two- and three-bedroom

apartment units for families rather than more single-family homes? Another comment was about the in-lieu fees versus building affordable units on site. At the City Council hearing, a lot of people were saying that there should not be in-lieu fees as an option, and that the percentage of affordable units in a project should be higher than seven percent.

- One observer was concerned about the cumulative effect of increased density on neighborhoods and how common assets, such as parks, quiet streets, and dark nights, may be changing because of tall buildings with a lot of people. The observer expressed a need to expand the design guidelines to talk about these effects and maybe bring in people from other departments, like Parks, to talk about this.

## **Next Steps**

Susan thanked the group for the discussion and noted that the group's next meeting will be held back at City Hall on July 28 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Susan explained that, at the next meeting, the City will share the feedback they heard about the principles from the focus groups and other public engagement. The City will share the final principles at the August meeting. Susan reminded the group that the "Consider.it" online tool is live and will be used throughout the process to facilitate an ongoing dialogue with the public. She explained that focus group members are invited to participate online as well.

Focus Group members shared the following questions and comments:

- When will the City share Focus Group input on these principles with City Council?
  - Geoff noted that the input (likely a draft report) will be shared in time for the July 8 City Council briefing. He also committed to sharing the draft report with the Focus Groups.
- Could there be some sort of sliding scale for developers about whether the performance or in-lieu fees apply?
  - While there wasn't time to discuss this, a number of Focus Group members seemed to support this approach.
- Why aren't single family homes a part of this conversation? And in that vein, not just single family, but two-, three-, four-, and five-family units?
  - This will be on the table for future discussion.

## **Attendees**

### **Focus Group members:**

- Andrea Akita
- Andrea Tousignant (Expansion)
- Barbara Guzman
- Brie Gyncild
- David Osaki
- Denechia Powell
- Haregu Kidane
- Hendrik de Kock
- Jin Lee
- Jingyang Chen
- Jon Jurich
- Mallory Kronlund (Lower Density)
- Laurie Torres
- Matt Hutchins
- Maureen Cartano
- Melissa Bailey
- Michael Lanthier
- Peter Amos
- Peter Hornyack
- Peter Wehrli
- Rick Hooper
- Ryan DiRaimo
- Sarah Armstrong
- Shanna Alvarez
- Sue Shaw (Hub)
- Toby Thaler
- Wendy Cho Ripp

**Observers:**

- Ian Langer
- Joan Weiser
- Glen Moore
- Walt Mason
- Miranda Berner
- Joe Malboeuf
- Buddy Burkhalter

**Project team and other City staff:**

- Geoff Wentlandt, Office of Planning and Community Development
- Jesseca Brand, Department of Neighborhoods
- Michelle Chen, Office of Planning and Community Development
- Susan Hayman, EnviroIssues
- Jentien Pan, EnviroIssues