



# City of Seattle

## Seattle Planning Commission

### Commissioners

David Cutler, Co-Chair  
Amalia Leighton, Co-Chair  
Catherine Benotto, Vice-Chair  
Luis Borrero  
Josh Brower  
Keely Brown  
Colie Hough-Beck  
Bradley Khouri  
Grace Kim  
Jeanne Krikawa  
Kevin McDonald  
Tim Parham  
Marj Press  
Matt Roewe  
Morgan Shook  
Maggie Wykowski

### Staff

Vanessa Murdock,  
Executive Director  
  
Jesseca Brand,  
Planning Analyst  
  
Diana Canzoneri,  
Demographer &  
Senior Policy Analyst  
  
Robin Magonegil,  
Administrative Staff

March 28, 2014

Honorable Councilmember Burgess  
Council President  
Seattle City Council  
PO Box 34025  
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

### **RE: Large Lots in Lowrise 1 and Lowrise 2 Zones**

Dear Council President Burgess, Councilmember Clark, Councilmember O'Brien and Councilmember Rasmussen:

The Seattle Planning Commission is an independent and objective volunteer body that advises City officials on broad goals, policies, and plans for the physical development of the city. When we review specific projects, it is always within the broader context of citywide policy. As stewards of the Comprehensive Plan we review land use, zoning, transportation and housing issues through the lens of Seattle's core values and principles articulated in the Comprehensive Plan.

We have finalized our review of your request for examination and recommendations on two-plus (2+) acre lots that exist in the Lowrise 1 and 2 Zones throughout the city.

### ***Design Review in Lowrise Zones should be examined.***

The Commission recommends the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) conduct a thorough review of Design Review thresholds in all three Lowrise zones. The Commission agrees with the assertion that developments that participate in the Design Review process are much improved, and that Design Review is currently the only forum for comments by the community on new

development concerns. The Commission also agrees Lowrise 1 and 2 zones of a larger size have an impact on communities. However, in total Lowrise zones make up a little less than 10% of buildable lands within the city and represent most of the opportunity for increased affordable family-sized units throughout the City. Therefore the Commission would caution against the addition of Design Review without proper evaluation. The Commission has concerns that a change in one zone may impact the amount of infill development achievable in the city.

***Design Review presents a limited but important opportunity for community input.***

Design Review is limited to the application of design guidelines and often does not address the community's concerns regarding potential impacts. For example Design Review cannot look at the impacts of parking, lack of open space or recreational spaces, and has no purview over land use. Allowed use is determined through zoning and cannot be changed through the Design Review process. The Planning Commission has great respect for the volunteers that sit on the neighborhood Design Review boards and their work to make the city and each neighborhood more livable. The Commission would caution that citizen perception of what is achievable through the Design Review process does not allow for resolution of many of the concerns outlined in [the Council's letter](#). That being said, Design Review is currently the only comment forum for a community. The Commission sees the opportunity for public involvement in large development projects as essential.

***Citywide Comprehensive Plan Update an excellent opportunity.***

The DPD is undergoing a comprehensive plan update, Seattle 2035, where citizens will be asked for input on the vision for our city now and in the future. Seattle 2035 provides an excellent opportunity to provide feedback on both the current plan as well as how neighborhoods would like to accommodate growth in the future. Based on Seattle's growth allocation under the King County Planning Policies, Seattle is planning for 70,000 additional households and 115,000 additional jobs between 2015 and 2035 years. The Comprehensive Plan update is a great opportunity to have the conversation about how growth will occur and how citizens would like to see the expected growth accommodated.

The Commission suggests using the comprehensive plan update process and the resulting plan when making decisions on growth and allocation rather than approaching growth parcel by parcel as it allows for a more complete look at the city and its goals. The Commission respects the uniqueness of each

neighborhood and has a history of working with communities through the neighborhood planning processes. While we understand that a large development can be a surprise to neighbors, it is imperative that the overall planning decisions occur at the comprehensive plan level and that those goals directly impact zoning in each neighborhood.

While the Commission appreciates that large development creates an impact on the neighborhood we caution against making multifamily housing less available or more difficult to construct as a city wide policy. Low rise zones make up less than 10% of the land within Seattle but create our biggest opportunity for housing more people most efficiently. In our recently released [“Family-Sized Housing Action Agenda”](#) we identified that more land should be available for multifamily housing that should be developed as infill projects in communities that are supported by transit, rich with amenities and are attractive to families.

Thank you for the opportunity to assist the City Council in addressing the concerns brought forth and the desire to make great planning decisions. We look forward to working with you on this and other issues in the future. If you have any further questions please feel free to contact either co-chair or Vanessa Murdock, Executive Director of the Planning Commission at 206-733-9271.

Sincerely,



David Cutler  
Co-Chair



Amalia Leighton  
Co-Chair

CC: Mayor Ed Murray  
Deputy Mayor Riniker, Deputy Mayor Kim  
Robert Feldstein, Kathy Nyland; Office of Policy and Innovation  
City Councilmembers  
Rebecca Herzfeld, Lish Whitson, Eric McConaghy; Central Staff  
Diane Sugimura, Marshall Foster, Susan McClain; DPD

**Disclosures and Recusals:**

**Commissioner Hough-Beck** works for HBB Landscape Architecture, and her firm may be impacted by changes to Lowrise zones.

**Commissioner Brad Khouri** disclosed that he works in the development of Low Rise and as a private citizen has advocated on this issue.