



HALA Community Focus Groups
Medium Density Urban Village Focus Group | Meeting #4
Thursday, August 25, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
Seattle City Hall

Meeting Summary

Opening Remarks and Introductions

Susan Hayman, facilitator, provided an overview of the objectives and agenda for the Medium Density Urban Village Focus Group's fourth meeting.

Susan introduced Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) staff Nick Welch, Geoff Wentlandt, and Vinita Goyal. Vinita is new to OPCD and will be supporting the HALA Focus Group process. Susan also introduced a reporter from KUOW observing the meeting for an upcoming article. Susan shared that he might ask Focus Group members for interviews after the meeting. She encouraged them to speak candidly but reminded them that their statements do not speak for the entire group.

Geoff announced that the City Council recently adopted the Mandatory Housing Affordability-Residential (MHA-R) framework legislation. Geoff noted that the legislation outlines a general framework for how the City would require residential development to contribute to affordable housing, e.g., the permitting processes and the length of time that housing must remain affordable. Geoff noted that the legislation does not include several important details, namely specific payment and performance requirements and the zoning changes throughout the city that will put MHA requirements into effect. Geoff reminded participants that future legislation will include those details and that the Focus Groups are a critical part of how the City develops its proposal.

Geoff highlighted that the City Council also recently passed renter protections that prohibit landlords from discriminating against prospective tenants based on the source of their income.

Finally, Geoff encouraged Focus Group members to continue use the online [HALA.Consider.it](https://www.halaconsiderit.com) platform to contribute to the citywide conversation about affordable housing strategies.

Examples of MHA Developments

Geoff introduced examples of development under MHA for three additional zones: Lowrise 1, Lowrise 3, and Neighborhood Commercial 75. Geoff invited Focus Group members to review illustrations of how buildings could look with the proposed MHA zoning changes and information about the affordable housing each example would create. Focus Group members then shared comments and questions, recognizing that the City was especially interested in hearing whether the examples illustrated an appropriate balance of additional development capacity and required affordable housing.

Focus Group members shared the following ideas and questions during their discussion:

1. What stood out in these examples?

- Lowrise I, with removal of the density limit as proposed would incentivize very small sized units. Maybe the density limit shouldn't be removed completely.

2. What aspects of the examples did you like? What aspects did you not like?

- Anything over 30 feet in height in the lowrise zones should be required to have an upper-level setback. In certain cases, however, this could become a disincentive to developers if it is taken too far.
- The payment and performance amounts for MHA should be more nuanced and ratio-based for particular zones, rather than an across-the-board amount.
- It would be helpful to have information about how the proposed increases in development capacity and the MHA requirements would produce a certain amount of affordable housing. For example, an equation that shows, "*if the market does this, then x number of affordable homes would be built,*" would be very useful for these conversations.
- To facilitate community understanding, the materials need to clearly show that the proposal includes the elimination of the density limit in the Lowrise I zone.

3. Are there any changes that you would recommend or other ideas the City should consider?

- The illustration of an example Lowrise I building should show how it could look next to structures on a single-family lot.
- The group needs to see the payment and performance amounts in cases with larger increases in development capacity.
- Developers would not want to build in areas with additional development capacity because the MHA costs would be too expensive. Does it make sense to apply the same equation across all of these different zones? There might be another way for lower-intensity zones to participate in MHA without risking the feasibility of new development.
- We need a variety of housing sizes in Seattle. If the density limit is removed for the Lowrise I zone, then the developer should pay an additional fee if they build a lot of small units. The City should not incentivize the development of tiny apartments in this zone.
- Instead of a single density limit approach indicated in these zoning changes (i.e. no density limit vs. density limit of 1:2000 s.f of lat area), there could be more of a compromise to encourage more variety in residential development. Could a density limit be constructed to require or incentivize some minimum variation in unit size?
- The displacement risk index map does not tell the full story. For example, it does not explain how the variables of displacement influence the results. It does not provide enough information about the causes of displacement in each area. How can the group take those causes into account? It would be helpful to see how the displacement risk index compares to the high-, medium-, and low-cost market areas to see what types of incentives would be created, especially if there are concerns about displacement in low-cost areas.

- Keep in mind that, while charging developers more when they build more housing is a good strategy, we do not want to unintentionally incentivize developers to build “McMansions.” That will not solve Seattle’s upcoming housing needs.
- Instead of a single density limit approach indicated in these zoning changes (i.e. no density limit vs. density limit of 1:2000 s.f of lot area), there could be more of a compromise to encourage more variety in residential development. Could a density limit be constructed to require or incentivize some minimum variation in unit size?
- In general, create incentives that advance good policy: no “McMansions,” limits on proportion of microhousing, a variety of housing.

Final MHA Implementation Principles and Focus Group Process Update

Geoff thanked the group for their comments on the draft summary of Focus Group input on the MHA principles that the City presented in July. He reminded Focus Group members that City will use these principles as a guide when developing the proposed zoning changes that will implement MHA.

Geoff briefly provided Focus Group members with an overview of how their perspectives and their feedback updated MHA principles. He encouraged Focus Group members to get in touch if they had any questions about the final language included in MHA principles.

The City responded to Focus Group members’ questions about the layout of the principles document and how the principles were finalized.

RSJI, Equity, and MHA

Geoff stated that many Focus Group members have expressed interest at past meetings in learning more about how the City was working to ensure that the broader HALA process (not just MHA) furthered the goals of the City’s Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI). OPCD staff presented four categories of HALA strategies aimed at advancing equality and expanding opportunity:

1. **Renter protections:** Policies to ensure fairness in the application processes and prohibit rent increases in substandard housing.
2. **Preservation of existing affordable housing:** The City will use funding from MHA and other sources to fund the acquisition and preservation of existing affordable housing through non-profit organizations. Other policies would incentivize private landlords to upgrade and maintain affordable rents.
3. **Creation of new affordable housing:** MHA would increase the number of affordable and market-rate housing choices for people.
4. **Investing in communities:** City- and community-led investments to increase community opportunity and wellbeing, including preschool programs, professional training, and pollution reduction.

Turning to MHA, Geoff noted that the City will be preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to analyze the potential impacts on housing, transportation, air and water quality, and other elements of

the environment. He said that the City is especially interested in using this EIS to evaluate how MHA could affect displacement.

Geoff explained that the City is currently in the “scoping” phase of the EIS process. The City expects to analyze three different scenarios (i.e., alternatives) in the EIS:

Alternative 1: MHA is not implemented (no action)

Alternative 2: MHA is implemented as outlined in the HALA Grand Bargain

Alternative 3: MHA is implemented with integrated program measures focused on reducing displacement in high-risk areas

Geoff asked Focus Group members to consider how implementing the MHA zoning changes and affordable housing requirements could affect displacement or advance the City’s goals for racial and social equity. Geoff invited members to share their ideas and questions about how Alternative 3 could be framed to minimize displacement. Geoff offered potential ideas, including limiting urban village boundary expansions in areas where risk of displacement is high, reducing the scale of zoning changes in areas where risk of displacement is high, or focusing the City’s affordable housing investments in areas where risk of displacement is high.

In response, Focus Group members shared the following ideas with the City regarding the EIS:

- The City needs to do an inventory of the current number of single-family residences in Lowrise I zones.
- If the City sets an incentive payment based on a property’s zoning area, then it needs to consider the market conditions and what those incentives would generate for both for-profit and nonprofit developers alike.
- Focusing investments in areas with a high displacement risk rather than evenly dispersed citywide may contribute to neighborhoods remaining segregated.
- There is a need for culturally relevant neighborhood gathering places, community centers and businesses to minimize displacement. Culturally relevant places and community centers in the city help keep people connected to the place and even encourage some who have moved away can come back to Seattle.
- Displacement is not just physical displacement due to specific development projects. Increasing rent is also pushing people away. The EIS must distinguish between *physical* and *economic* displacement then address how the entire neighborhood does or does not change. Holistically understanding the factors contributing to displacement would help the City determine the exact nature of the problems they MHA is working to solve.
- It would be great to talk to individuals who have been displaced in order to understand what drove them away and what could have helped them stay.
- The City should disincentivize developers from removing low-cost market-rate housing. The EIS needs to account for the loss of these inexpensive homes.
- The EIS should include a fourth alternative that considers additional affordable housing production beyond the 6,000-unit goal. People need to see the City’s justification for proposing specific policies.
- How does the City track backyard cottages (i.e., detached accessory dwelling units or DADUs)?

- The EIS must consider the transportation infrastructure in neighborhoods because this affects the livability and capacity of a neighborhood.
- There should be some mandatory prescriptive design criteria for the low-density areas, especially those with many single-family residences. The zoning changes could disrupt certain well-defined single family streetscapes.
- The City should share information with the community regarding the scope and the production of the EIS.
- Add culture and community to the EIS scoping.
- Affordable commercial space must be included in the analysis.
- Grand Bargain numbers are low.
- Need more education about why density and affordability are not at odds.

Geoff encouraged Focus Group members to continue thinking about the scope of the MHA EIS and to submit ideas or comments to the City by **Friday, September 9**.

Observer Comment

Susan invited the observers in attendance to share brief comments with the group:

- One observer stressed the importance of family-friendly housing, especially in apartment buildings, noting that the EIS should consider a projected variety of housing units. The observer was also curious about why Focus Group members seems so focused on zoning changes in historic districts, even though these areas comprise only a small part of the city. The observer asked the group to keep in mind that they needed to consider the Seattle's livability in coming decades.

Next Steps

Geoff thanked the group for their participation and discussion. He reviewed a timeline of upcoming meetings, meeting topics, and process outcomes. He noted that, based on preliminary feedback from the HALA Focus Group survey, the City was considering a joint Focus Group meeting in September. Geoff said the City and facilitators would be in touch once they determined the final date for this joint meeting. Geoff noted that the next meeting would likely include examples of MHA zoning changes for the Focus Group members to review and discuss.

Attendees

Focus Group members:

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| • Brie Gyncild | • Lauri Torres | • Ryan DiRaimo |
| • Hendrik de Kock | • Lynn Sereda | • Tiffany Chan |
| • Jessica Jones | • Maureen Cartano | • Toby Thaler |
| • Jin Lee | • Peter Hornyack | |
| • Jon Jurich | • Peter Wehrli | |

Observers

- Yafret
- Miranda Bewer
- Paul Cesmat

Project team and other City staff:

- Geoffrey Wentlandt, Office of Planning and Community Development
- Vinita Goyal, Office of Planning and Community Development
- Susan Hayman, EnviroIssues
- Jentien Pan, EnviroIssues