


FAQs

One Seattle Plan Zoning Update

Note: A list of the questions with links is available if you click on the bookmarks button ().

One Seattle Plan and Growth Strategy

What is the Comprehensive Plan and why update it now?

The Comprehensive Plan is a 20-year plan for growth that guides where we plan for housing and jobs along with public investments, including transportation, utilities, parks, and other facilities and programs to meet the needs of existing communities and projected population and employment growth.

Seattle is required to update its Comprehensive Plan once a decade. The existing Comprehensive Plan, **Seattle 2035**, was adopted in 2015. This update, which we are calling the One Seattle Plan, gives Seattle the opportunity to address many of our challenges including a persistent housing crisis, impacts of climate change, racial inequities, and effects of the pandemic. Updating our zoning is necessary to implement the vision contained in the One Seattle Plan.

What is the Growth Strategy?

The Growth Strategy is a central element of the Comprehensive Plan, with goals, policies, and maps guiding the location and types of development we want in the future. The new Growth Strategy in the One Seattle Plan will accommodate housing and employment growth through the year 2044 and beyond. The Growth Strategy is implemented through changes to our zoning regulations, including changes to the types of uses and densities allowed in different areas of the city.

How was the Mayor's Recommended Growth Strategy developed?

The City of Seattle began updating the Comprehensive Plan in 2022. We began this process by creating an interdepartmental team representing all of the major departments and offices within the City. This group meet regularly through the process of development to ensure that the Plan and Growth Strategy support goals across all of the City's work.

This work has been informed by public comments and engagement with communities across the city. To date, the City has received over twenty thousand individual comments. Public feedback from earlier projects, including the Racial Equity Analysis of Seattle 2035 and the Housing Choices project, also informed the One Seattle Plan. Finally, analysis of growth strategy alternatives in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement informed the development of the Mayor's Recommended strategy.

Neighborhood Residential Update

What is HB 1110?

In 2023, the Washington State Legislature adopted House Bill 1110 (HB 1110), often referred to as the Middle Housing Bill. HB 1110 requires cities in Washington to allow middle housing throughout residential areas and limits how cities can regulate this housing. The bill defines middle housing as “buildings that are compatible in scale, form, and character with single-family houses and contains two or more attached, stacked, or clustered homes including duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, fiveplexes, sixplexes, townhouses, stacked flats, courtyard apartments, and cottage housing.”

In Seattle, the bill requires zoning that allows:

- At least four units on all residential lots
- At least six units on residential lots within a quarter mile of major transit stops (such as light rail and bus rapid transit)
- At least six units on residential lots if two units are income-restricted affordable housing

What is Seattle doing to implement HB 1110?

Seattle will implement HB 1110 as part of our proposal to update Neighborhood Residential zones. A revised proposal for updating Neighborhood Residential zones is now available [on our website](#) including both a summary of the changes and a draft of legislation that implements these changes. This proposal would bring Seattle into compliance with HB 1110 and also goes beyond HB 1110 to address city goals. In addition to increasing the number and type of units allowed in Seattle, the proposed update would change development standards such floor area limits, lot coverage, and setbacks and includes new requirements for design and open space.

How has the proposal for Neighborhood Residential zones changed from the version released in March?

The City released a draft proposal for updating Neighborhood Residential zones in March of 2024. After significant public engagement, the proposal was updated based on feedback received and a [revised proposal](#) was released in October 2024. The proposal has been revised in the following ways:

- **Floor area:** The maximum floor area ratio was increased from 0.9 to 1.2 to encourage more middle housing development and more 3-bedroom units.
- **High-displacement risk areas:** A proposal to reduce density and floor area in areas of high-displacement risk was removed based on feedback that property owners in these areas should have the same ability to develop their property as homeowners in other areas.
- **Bonus for stacked flats:** Stacked flats on lots that are 6,000 square feet or larger and are located within ¼ mile of frequent transit are allowed a higher floor area of 1.4 and a maximum density of 1 unit per 650 square feet.

- **Accessory Dwelling Units:** A provision was added allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to be located with 5 feet of a rear yard as is currently allowed. The initial proposal would have required a 10-foot setback.
- **Additional detail** on standards related to parking, design, and trees was added.

Are the rules for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) changing?

ADUs are small, secondary residences located on the same lot as a principal unit. Standards for ADUs are changing as follows:

- The number of ADUs allowed will be based on the density limit rather than lot size. For example, on a lot where 4 units are allowed, the property owner could build four principal dwellings or 2 principal dwelling units with 2 ADUs but could not build 4 principal dwellings plus 4 dwelling units.
- Floor area in ADUs would count toward the new higher FAR.
- Rules limiting the height and location of ADUs beyond what is required for a principal dwelling unit would be removed.

The City would continue to limit ADUs to 1,000 square feet and would not allow more than 2 ADUs per lot. Similar to today, lots could not be subdivided to separate an ADU from the principal dwelling unit.

Zoning Map Changes

Why is it necessary to update zoning to allow more housing?

The Seattle region does not have enough housing for our current residents and is expected to grow significantly over the next twenty years. Zoning is one of the major barriers limiting the type and amount of housing that can be built in Seattle. The Mayor's Recommended Growth Strategy identifies locations where zoning changes are needed in neighborhoods across the city.

Increasing the supply and diversity of housing can:

- Help to make Seattle more affordable to more households.
- Create economically inclusive neighborhoods.
- Reduce market pressures that are forcing many to leave the city.
- Help address one of the root causes of homelessness.
- Reduce regional sprawl and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Support economic opportunity and mobility.
- Help businesses attract and retain employees.

How did the City develop the proposed zoning changes for Neighborhood Centers?

The draft One Seattle Plan describes zoning in Neighborhood Centers as follows: “Zoning in Neighborhood Centers should generally allow buildings of 3 to 6 stories, especially 5- and 6-story residential buildings to encourage the development of apartments and condominiums”. City staff used the following process to develop draft zoning for public review based on the vision established in the plan:

1. Initial boundaries for each neighborhood center were created by identifying all blocks where most of the block was within a 4-minute walk time of the central intersection or transit station after accounting for slopes.
2. We identified the range of zones that would be appropriate in each place type based on the place type descriptions in the One Seattle Plan. For neighborhood centers, these zones include primarily LR3, MR, NC-55 and NC-65, but also include some LR1 and LR2.
3. Initial draft zoning maps were created by applying the identified zones in a uniform manner across all areas.
4. Initial maps were revised to reflect local conditions based on field work and analysis of information about transit stop locations, parks, Environmentally Critical Areas, topography, noise and pollution generators, and other factors.

The City is now looking for feedback on the proposed zoning changes and will update the maps based on public feedback before transmitting them to City Council for consideration.

How did the City develop the proposed zoning changes in the expansion areas of Regional and Urban Centers?

The general size, location, and range of building heights in different place types is outlined in the One Seattle Plan. For Regional Centers, the Draft Plan directs the City to allow a wide range of higher-density housing and non-residential buildings and specifically says that high-rise tower construction may be appropriate. For Urban Centers, the Draft Plan states that Urban Centers should generally allow buildings of 3 to 8 stories but that buildings greater than 8 stories may be appropriate near light rail stations.

City staff used the following process to develop draft zoning for public review based on the vision established in the plan:

1. Initial boundaries for each expansion area were created by identifying all blocks where most of the block was within a walk time of the central intersection or transit station after accounting for slopes. These distances were an 8-minute walk for expansion in centers without light rail or bus rapid transit (BRT), and a 10-minute walk for expansions in centers with light rail or BRT.
2. The draft zoning proposal for the two Regional Center expansions (Uptown and First Hill/Capitol Hill) were developed on a case-by-case basis based on local conditions.
3. For urban center expansions, we identified the range of zones that would be appropriate in each place type based on the place type descriptions in the One Seattle Plan. These include a full range of lowrise, midrise, and neighborhood commercial zones. Initial draft zoning maps were created by applying the identified zones in a uniform manner across all areas. Initial maps were

revised to reflect local conditions based on field work and analysis of information about transit stop locations, parks, Environmentally Critical Areas, topography, noise and pollution generators, and other factors.

The City is now looking for feedback on the proposed zoning changes and will update the maps based on public feedback before transmitting zoning legislation to City Council for consideration.

How did the City develop the proposed zoning changes along frequent transit routes?

The Draft One Seattle Plan states that we should “allow moderate-scale housing of 4 to 6 stories in areas currently zoned for such housing and along arterials where zoned densities may be increased to provide more housing options near frequent transit”. City staff used the following process to develop draft zoning for public review based on the vision established in the plan:

1. Initial extent of rezones on frequent transit routes was created by identifying all lots that either abut a frequent transit route or are located within 125 feet of a frequent transit route.
2. Within the limited width of rezone area thus delineated, we generally applied LR3 or NC-55 zoning unless local circumstances suggested a different approach.
3. Staff conducted field work and analysis of information about transit stop locations, parks, Environmentally Critical Areas, topography, noise and pollution generators, and other factors to determine where different zones should be applied. Multiple areas with steep slopes were removed from the proposal entirely such as along 24th Ave East in North Capitol Hill and along NW Market Street between Ballard and Fremont.

The City is now looking for feedback on the proposed zoning changes and will update the maps based on public feedback before transmitting zoning legislation to City Council for consideration.

What impact could the proposed zoning changes have on small businesses?

The proposed changes could impact small businesses in multiple ways. The proposal to allow more housing around existing commercial districts that are the core of many Neighborhood Centers could help to invigorate existing businesses and support new businesses in these districts by providing more customers. The proposal could also encourage redevelopment of buildings with existing business if there are significant increases in development capacity on sites that currently contain small businesses.

In developing the current zoning proposal, city staff sought to minimize height increase in commercial districts where there were buildings with lots of existing small businesses spaces while placing more capacity for housing adjacent to these areas.

General

What would a rezone mean for my property?

A rezone is when the City's zoning designation for a site or areas is changed. Each zoning designation has a unique set of rules for the use, size, and design of buildings that are allowed. Consequently, a rezone changes what is allowed to be built on a property, but it does not require that any redevelopment occur. There are structures throughout the city that do not correspond to their current zoning -- such as single-family homes on properties zoned for midrise buildings, or older multifamily apartments on properties currently zoned for single-family. If your property is rezoned through the Comprehensive Plan update, you do not need to change the existing structure or use of your property. However, if you choose to add additional homes or commercial space to your property, a rezone could potentially allow you to build more homes or create larger or taller buildings.

What will a rezone mean for my property taxes?

The King County Assessor determines property taxes by multiplying a citywide tax rate by a property's assessed value. The assessed value is essentially the Assessor's estimate of the amount for which a property could sell. If the Assessor determines in the future that the value of additional development capacity provided through the rezone has significantly increased the overall value of your property compared to other properties, then your property taxes could go up as well. This change would not, however, happen automatically when a zoning change occurs. A property's assessed value increases only if evidence shows the value of properties with similar zoning and location has increased based on actual sales that have occurred in the area.

However, property taxes, excluding publicly approved levies, are also subject to regulations that limit the total annual increase in taxes within a city to one percent, with some limited exceptions. For example, if all properties in Seattle increased in value by exactly 25 percent, the tax rate would have to decrease so that the total property taxes collected go up by only one percent. As the proposed rezones would occur over a large portion of Seattle, this rule will limit the potential increase in property taxes across most properties. However, areas that received a larger change might see their taxes rise compared to other properties; while areas that received a small change or none at all might see their taxes fall compared to other properties.

Depending on their income levels, senior citizens and people with disabilities are also eligible for exemption from paying some property taxes. More information is available at the [King County website](#).

Will parking be required in new development?

Under existing regulations, no parking is required in centers near frequent transit. Consistent with HB 1110, we are proposing to expand the area without parking requirements to include areas within ½ mile of light rail and bus rapid transit stops.

Outside these areas, 1 space per 2 principal dwelling units would be required as part of new development, a reduction from the current requirement of 1 space per each principal unit. Accessory dwelling units would continue to be exempt from parking requirements.

What impact will the updated zoning have on trees? What is being done to protect and replace trees that might be lost?

The proposed zoning update would change development standards in Neighborhood Residential zones and rezone some area to allow larger buildings. Overtime, these changes would likely increase the amount and type of development in Seattle and allow more development in areas that are currently lower-density. New development generally results in a short-term loss of tree canopy as existing trees are removed as well as a longer-term reduction in area for trees due to less open space. At the same time, Seattle has numerous regulations that help to mitigate tree loss and require the planting of new trees in the right-of-way and on private property. These regulations include:

- **The Tree Protection Code**, which limits the number, size, and type of trees that can be removed from private property and establishes requirements for replacing trees cut down.
- **Tree planting requirements**, which require planting of trees as part of development.
- **Street tree requirements**, which limit removal of street trees and require planting of new street trees as part of development.
- **Environmentally critical areas (ECA) and Shoreline regulations**, which protect trees and vegetation around shorelines, creeks, wetlands, and steep slopes.

How would the proposal help to create more affordable housing?

The zoning update proposal is designed to promote overall more housing supply in Seattle and a greater diversity of housing types available in more neighborhoods. It is also designed to help to increase the supply of homes that are affordable to households who cannot afford market prices or rents in the following ways:

1. Areas upzoned within centers and along transit arterials will include requirements of the City's Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) program. MHA requires new development to contribute to affordable housing by setting aside a portion of units in new development as rent- and income-restricted affordable housing units or pay into a fund to create these units off-site.
2. The new Neighborhood Residential zoning will include an additional incentive for affordable housing to make it easier to build this type of housing. In this zone, development in which at least half the units are affordable to low-income households would be allowed additional height, floor area, and density.
3. Most rent- and income-restricted housing built in Seattle occurs with buildings that are in the midrise apartment range of 5-8 stories. The zoning update will add significant additional area within zones that allow this scale of development. Increasing the supply of potential sites for apartment construction will help to mitigate competition for development sites, including competition with market-rate developers.

Can infrastructure accommodate the potential new growth?

The creation of the One Seattle Plan, including the growth strategy, was stewarded by an interdepartmental team including representatives from all of the major city departments. As part of this process, staff met regularly with these departments to ensure that infrastructure issues were addressed as part of the plan. City staff and consultants worked with departments to develop an environmental impact statement that analyzed whether existing capacity and planning processes were sufficient to support expected growth. The EIS found that existing capacity and planning process were sufficient to accommodate growth, although local improvements will still need to be provided by developers in many areas to ensure adequate connections to distributions systems. The EIS also identified specific areas where ongoing coordination will be necessary particularly around the provision of transit and planning for schools.

Transit Definitions

What is a major transit stop?

Major transit stop is defined in Revised Code of Washington [36.70A.030](#) as stops on a light rail, commuter rail, bus rapid transit, or regional transit.

HB 1110 requires that the city allow 6 units per lot on lots located within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of a major transit stop. It also prevents cities from having parking requirements for middle housing within $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of a major transit stop.

What is a frequent transit route?

Frequent transit service is defined in Seattle Municipal Code 23.84A.038 as transit service with scheduled service in a typical week meeting or exceeding all of the following scheduled frequencies:

1. On weekdays from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., 15 minutes on average (i.e., 52 trips between 6 a.m. and 6:59 p.m., inclusive), and no individual hour with fewer than three scheduled trips in each direction;
2. On weekdays from 7 p.m. to 12 a.m., 30 minutes on average (i.e., ten trips between 7 p.m. and 11:59 p.m., inclusive), and no individual hour with fewer than one scheduled trip in each direction; and
3. On weekends from 6 a.m. to 12 a.m., 30 minutes on average (i.e., 36 trips between 6 a.m. and 11:59 p.m., inclusive), and no individual hour with fewer than one scheduled trip in each direction

For the purposes of this definition, "individual hour" means the 60-minute period beginning at the top of each hour; e.g., 6 a.m. to 6:59 a.m., inclusive, or 3 p.m. to 3:59 p.m., inclusive.

Commenting and Next Steps

How can I comment on the proposed zoning changes and Neighborhood Residential Update?

OPCD is looking for feedback on the proposed zoning changes, the proposal to update Neighborhood Residential zones, and draft legislation to implement these changes until December 20, 2024.

If you want to provide a comment relating to a specific location, we recommend you use the [Draft Zoning Map tool](#) which will allow you to place comments in specific locations.

If you want to provide a more general comment, we recommend you use the [Zoning Update comment form](#).

While OPCD prefers comments through the map tool and the comment form, you may also submit a comment by email to oneseattleplan.zoning@seattle.gov or by mail to

One Seattle Plan Zoning Update
Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development
P.O. Box 94788
Seattle, WA, 98124-7088

When will the proposed zoning changes be effective?

OPCD is currently seeking public feedback on the draft zoning changes and Neighborhood Residential Update until December 20, 2024. Once public engagement is complete, we will update the proposal and then transmit legislation to City Council. The changes will be sent to Council in two phases.

Changes to update Neighborhood Residential zones and comply with 2025 state deadlines would be transmitted to Council in March 2025. City Council will then review, amend, and adopt the legislation. We anticipate this legislation would be adopted by Council in May 2025 and become effective in July of 2025.

Legislation to implement zoning changes in neighborhood centers, in certain center expansions, and along frequent transit routes would be transmitted to City Council by May 2025. City Council will then review, amend, and adopt the legislation. We anticipate this legislation would be adopted by Council as early as September 2025 and would become effective as early as December 2025.