

# Public Comment Summary

## One Seattle Plan Zoning Update

### Fall 2024 Engagement

## INTRODUCTION

In Fall 2024, Seattle's Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) launched a public engagement process to gather input on proposed zoning changes to implement the new One Seattle Comprehensive Plan. This process represented the fourth stage of engagement in the overall One Seattle Comprehensive Plan Update.

This phase of engagement built upon [prior engagement](#) in spring of 2024, during which public comment was received on the draft One Seattle Plan. The draft Plan included a draft growth strategy that described planned uses and densities with identified place types and a Future Land Use Map that showed the area covered by each place type. Informed by public comment from the spring of 2024, OPCD revised the proposal and released the [Mayor's recommended growth strategy](#) in September 2024.

The Zoning Update implements the Mayor's recommended growth strategy. It aims to create more inclusive neighborhoods by allowing middle housing throughout the city and additional options for increased density in residential areas near frequent transit and existing services and amenities. In October 2024, the City released proposed zoning maps, a report on Updating Neighborhood Residential Zones, and draft legislation.

The public comment period, extending from October 16 to December 20, 2024, offered multiple ways to engage, including:

- Online materials and summary videos
- Interactive zoning maps with detail on proposed zoning map changes
- In-person and virtual information sessions with OPCD staff
- Virtual office hours with OPCD staff
- Multiple ways to submit comments including a general comment form, a web map that allowed location-specific comments, and email and mail addresses

Through these channels, OPCD received over 9,000 public comments from 5,800 commenters, reflecting a wide range of perspectives.

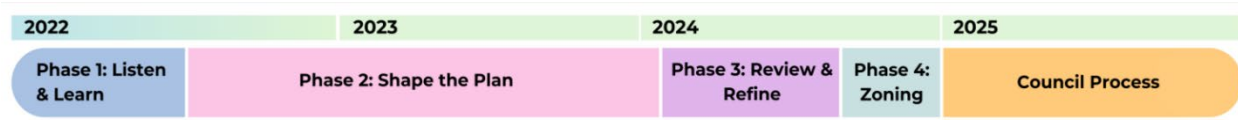
This document summarizes the engagement process and feedback that was received during this period.

## BACKGROUND

The City of Seattle has been working since 2022 to update our Comprehensive Plan. We are calling the updated plan the One Seattle Plan. The Plan is a roadmap for where and how Seattle will grow and invest in communities over the next 20 years, toward becoming a more equitable, livable, sustainable, and resilient city.

Engagement for the One Seattle Plan Comprehensive Plan Update has spanned three years across four phases.

- In Phase 1, “Listen and Learn”, we introduced the planning and engagement process to the public, gained insights into the major issue areas to be addressed, and established the tools and community relationships that informed the Plan Update.
- In Phase 2, “Shape the Plan”, OPCD deepened community engagement through comment periods and community conversations that informed and shaped growth alternatives, the scope of environmental analysis, and new and revised Comprehensive Plan policies.
- Phase 3, “Refine the Plan”, began with the release of the Draft Plan and Draft EIS. OPCD provided a range of opportunities for the public to learn about the draft analysis and the draft Plan and to provide input as we move toward a preferred growth strategy alternative and transmittal of a final “Mayor’s Plan” to City Council.
- Phase 4, “Zoning Update Engagement”, began with the release of an updated proposal for updating Neighborhood Residential zones and an initial proposal for specific zoning changes in designated centers and along frequent transit routes, including draft legislation. It included a comment period for public input on the proposal and draft legislation.



This document provides a summary of public comment received by the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) during Phase 4.

## SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The Zoning Update Engagement phase launched with the release of an updated proposal to update Neighborhood Residential zones and an initial proposal to implement rezones to allow for more apartments and condos. These zoning changes implement the Mayor’s recommended growth strategy. A 60-day public comment period extended from October 16 to December 20, 2024. Below is a summary of the materials released, events held, and the venues for commenting.

### Materials

OPCD released four key documents for public comment:

- [Updating Neighborhood Residential Zoning](#) which summarized the proposal for updating Neighborhood Residential Zones
- [Phase 1 Legislation text](#) which provided the full text of proposed changes to the Land Use code to update Neighborhood Residential zoning and comply with various state laws
- [Map of Proposed Zoning Changes](#) which summarized proposed changing zoning with information on existing zoning, proposed zoning, and links to resources explaining what the changes would mean; the website also had pdf maps for Neighborhood Centers
- [Draft “Phase II” legislation](#) which provided the full text proposed changes to implement changes in centers and corridors, including updates to Lowrise and Midrise zone development standards

The City also provided the following additional materials to help the public understand the proposal:

- [Zoning Update Frequently Asked Questions document](#) which provided answers to commonly asked questions
- Summary of development standards for [Lowrise zones](#) and [Midrise zones](#)
- [Video summarizing changes to NR Zoning](#)
- [Video on How to Comment](#)
- A series of [Neighborhood Center profiles](#) summarizing the characteristics of proposed Neighborhood Centers
- A summary of the Mayor’s Recommended Growth Strategy Proposal

### Events

OPCD hosted 10 information sessions and conducted eight virtual office hours to provide information and answer questions.

#### ***Zoning Update Information Sessions***

OPCD hosted a series of seven-in person open house-style Zoning Update Information Sessions to share information about the proposed zoning with the public. OPCD also hosted three virtual, citywide information sessions as a complement to these in-person information sessions. At the virtual events, OPCD staff presented an overview slide deck and answered questions via a live Q&A chat function. The

information sessions were attended by over 1,800 people. A list of event dates and locations can be found in [Appendix C](#) of the One Seattle Plan Engagement Summary.

Recordings of the virtual events are available below:

- Wed, Oct 23 [Virtual Information Session](#)
- Thu, Dec 12 [Virtual Information Session](#)
- Tues, Dec 17 [Virtual Information Session](#)

### ***Virtual Office Hour Sessions***

OPCD hosted eight Virtual Office Hours sessions to field questions and provide answers to questions submitted by session participants. Office Hours offered two to three hours of virtual availability to for members of the public to meet online with OPCD staff. This virtual format effectively maximized OPCD staff availability during Phase 4 engagement, affording staff ample time to provide detailed responses to questions.

## **Online Tools**

During Phase 4 engagement, OPCD launched a new Zoning Update website dedicated to sharing information about the proposed zoning changes to implement the growth strategy. The website encouraged the public to explore proposed zoning map changes in detail and to leave comments pinned to specific locations on online maps showing proposed zoning. A General Form provided an option to submit more general non-map-based comments.

## **Media**

OPCD made all project materials available on our Zoning Update website, as well as the OPCD's One Seattle Plan homepage. OPCD leveraged earned media to boost outreach and awareness about the Zoning Update, holding a press briefing to communicate the proposal, timeline, and commenting process to the public. OPCD promoted materials and information about the proposal and comment period through several owned and paid media channels, including:

- OPCD mailing lists, newsletters, and social media platforms.
- Print and online media outlets.
- Local public radio.
- Partnering with a service that posted Information Session flyers across the city in neighborhood community spaces and businesses.

OPCD partnered with Department of Neighborhoods (DON) staff to boost local promotion of Zoning Update Information Sessions. City staff promoted these events by handing out flyers and posting yard signs with meeting information at local businesses and community spaces. DON Community Liaisons promoted and attended Information Sessions to provide language interpretation within the communities they serve.

## Opportunities for comment

OPCD provided multiple venues for receiving public comment including an online comment form, a mapping tool that allowed for commenting on specific blocks and parcels, email, and mail. During Phase 4 engagement, OPCD received 9,221 comments:

- 3,103 comments were received via the online General Form hosted on the [Zoning Update website](#) (from 2,382 unique commenters)
- 4,351 comments were dropped onto the online zoning proposal map hosted on [the Zoning Update website](#) (from 2,055 unique commenters)
- 1,767 comments were emailed to the Zoning Update email and mail addresses (from 1,393 unique commenters)

In addition, OPCD received comment letters representing 38 organizations. Groups that submitted a comment letter during Phase 4 engagement are listed in [Appendix E](#) of the One Seattle Plan Engagement Summary.

## SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

The following pages summarize the feedback that was received. The comments are broken down into seven sections: Growth Strategy, Housing Outcomes, Development Standards, Infrastructure and Services, Environmental Impacts, Property Values and Taxes, and Historic Preservation.

### Growth Strategy

Public feedback captured a wide range of views on the growth strategy including the location, size, and purpose of place types. Comments included views on how well the overall approach meets Seattle's needs and more specific feedback about role of specific place types.

#### ***Views on Overall Approach***

There is near universal acknowledgement of Seattle's need for more housing, and particularly the need for more affordable housing. Most commenters appreciated the plan's intention to address this problem, even if they disagreed with its approach. Supporters of the growth strategy tended to focus on its potential benefits for affordability and accessibility while critics focused on potential localized impacts to neighborhood character and infrastructure.

Numerous commenters supported the Plan's overall approach, with many wishing the plan went even further. Commenters supporting the growth plan expressed the view that workers and young people will not be able to afford to live in the city unless bold action is taken. These comments tended to focus on the benefit of increasing housing production overall, creating more family-sized units, allowing more people to live in exclusive neighborhoods, and addressing climate change.

Common recommendations from supporters of the proposed growth strategy included:

- Increase the number and size of Neighborhood Centers; Locate more Neighborhood Centers near water bodies and major parks
- Expand the width of upzones along Frequent Transit Corridors so as not to limit new rental housing opportunities to arterial streets which have more noise, traffic, and automobile pollution
- Increase the amount of mixed-use neighborhood commercial zoning along arterials, particularly in areas without significant commercial presence
- Modify development standards such as FAR, height, and parking to make it easier to build apartments and condos

The City also received numerous comments that were critical of the growth plan. Concerns about proposed changes tended to focus on the scale of the new buildings and potential impacts on neighborhood character, traffic, parking, infrastructure, trees, property taxes, and runoff. Other common critiques were that the proposal would fail to create more affordable housing. Some also felt that Frequent Transit Corridors were insufficient justification for upzones in their area given that many Seattleites continue to rely on or prefer car travel.

Common recommendations from growth plan critics include:

- Reduce the size and number of Neighborhood Centers, especially in areas seen as having lower quality transit, fewer shops or services, historic districts, or high displacement risk as well as areas with issues like steep slopes or narrow roads
- Remove portions of Frequent Transit Routes from the proposal, especially in areas located on routes with less frequent transit, near the terminus of a bus route, on historic boulevards, on narrow roads, or in areas with steep slopes
- Reduce the intensity of zoning within Neighborhood Centers and along Frequent Transit Routes
- Incentivize redevelopment on lots with existing capacity in Regional and Urban centers, including through office to residential conversion projects
- Adopt changes incrementally and wait to see how markets respond before making additional changes

### ***Regional Centers***

OPCD received fewer comments about Regional Centers compared to other areas, as proposed zoning changes were limited to Uptown and First Hill/Capitol Hill.

Commenters in support of Regional Centers generally embraced the purpose of zoning found in these locations, which are the highest density areas of Seattle, particularly given their proximity to light rail. Many comments, in fact, suggested that significantly more housing should be allowed in Regional Centers.

Critical comments about Uptown Regional Center generally focused on the northeast boundary's steep slopes and roads with limited access. Critical comments about First Hill/Capitol Hill Regional Center tended to focus on:

- The overall scale of proposed changes.
- Potential impacts on gentrification and displacement in the Central District.

### ***Urban Centers***

Most commenters were supportive of allowing more housing in Urban Centers given the presence of significant shops and services, access to transit, and other amenities. The greatest number of comments about Urban Centers focused on proposed expansion areas. Most commenters supported the idea of widening the boundaries of these centers given their capacity to absorb more housing and proximity to light rail.

Commenters with concerns about rezones in these areas tended to focus on localized impacts. Concerns included:

- Potential impacts on neighborhood character, shading, traffic, parking, and infrastructure capacity.
- Engineering and environmental considerations.

## ***Neighborhood Centers***

Neighborhood Centers (NCs) were a major focus within the overall body of comments. Residents generally supported the concept of NCs, though opinions varied on locations and scale of change proposed in specific areas.

Supportive comments suggested:

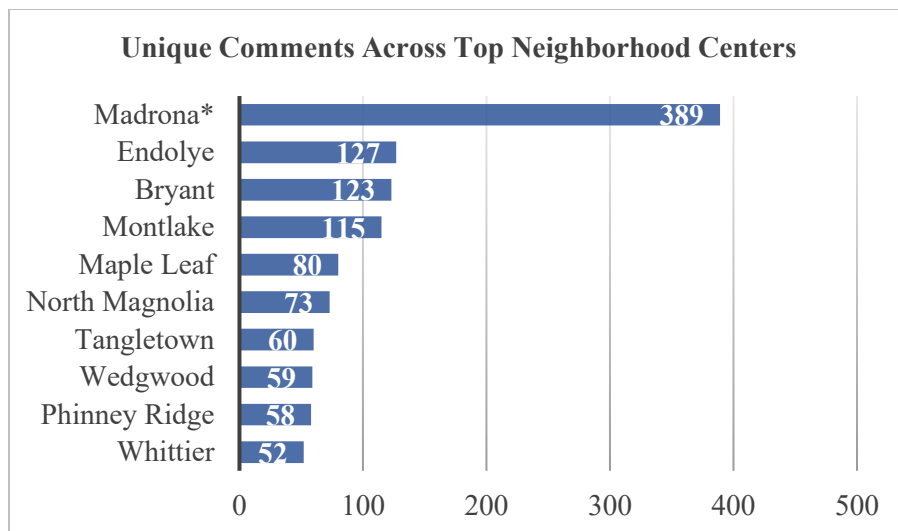
- Adding more NCs to the proposal, particularly near parks and in low-displacement risk areas that currently have few apartment buildings.
- Expanding housing options and encouraging growth around emerging commercial centers with transit access.
- Locating more NCs near parks and the waterfront to increase access to green space for renters and homeowners alike.
- Allowing taller buildings in NCs to enable more apartment buildings since LR1 and LR2 zones are less viable for multifamily housing.

Critical comments, primarily from residents near proposed NCs, expressed opposition to particular centers and/or requested reductions in planned density within them. Themes of these comments included:

- Concerns around building height, inadequacy of existing roads, limited on-street parking availability, potential strain on infrastructure, tree canopy loss, and disruption to neighborhood character.
- Consideration for local circumstances such as historical designations, steep slopes, traffic patterns, and the uncertain future of certain bridges and transit lines.
- Requests to remove NCs the amount of transit, shops, and services was felt to be limited.
- Desire for more gradual zoning and height transition between NCs to surrounding residential areas.

The following chart shows the number of unique commenters across the most referenced centers during the engagement period across all channels (general form, map-based and email submissions). Multiple comments left by a single individual are recorded as one unique commenter.





\*Numbers for the Madrona neighborhood include comments on the nearby frequent transit corridor, which was referred to as Madrona.

### ***Frequent Transit Corridors***

Comments indicated widespread support for increasing density in areas with good transit service. However, there was a variety of opinions about the specific locations, the width of zoning changes along transit corridors, and the zoning that should be applied in these areas.

Supportive comments included the following themes:

- Upzoning along Frequent Transit Corridors is essential to ensure residents can access jobs and services without relying on travel by car.
- Strong support for extending LR zoning further into surrounding residential areas by up to a quarter mile.
- Concern that limiting upzones to immediate transit route frontages constrains rental options to busy, loud, and polluted roadways; more rental housing is desired in quiet, walkable neighborhoods.
- Widening Frequent Transit Corridors would provide opportunities to gradually transition building heights from LR3 to NR areas whereas the current proposal creates a more abrupt shift within individual blocks.

Commenters cited the following concerns related to rezoning areas along certain Frequent Transit Corridor segments:

- Frequency of transit or the number of destinations served may be insufficient to justify a rezone in some areas.
- Local circumstances such as neighborhood character, historic boulevards, distance to services, adequacy of local roads, and topography should be more strongly reflected.
- Individual bus lines may not meet the needs of future residents, which could result in people continuing to rely on cars and exacerbate existing traffic and parking issues.

Most comments asking to remove portions of Frequent Transit Routes were concentrated in a small number of locations including:

- 10<sup>th</sup> Ave West in Queen Anne
- Mt. Baker Boulevard
- Madrona Drive
- Southeast Magnolia
- Haller Lake

Some commenters suggested that the proposed approach to Frequent Transit Routes resulted in too much LR3 zoning directly abutting NR zoning. Commenters suggested different approaches to address the issue, including:

- Retaining the current NR zoning
- Expanding the amount of LR3 zoning to cover full blocks
- Rezoning to a lower intensity zone such as LR1 or LR2
- Altering Frequent Transit Corridor zoning patterns to reflect a circular walkshed around transit stops instead of zoning along the entire length of a route

Some commenters also suggested adding more mixed use and commercial zoning along Frequent Transit Corridors to create better access to shops and services.

## Housing Outcomes

Most comments focused on the following themes related to housing outcomes:

- Amount, location, and type of new housing.
- Housing prices or rents that residents expect to see over time.
- Impacts of displacement pressures on lower- and middle-income residents.

### ***Overall Amount of Housing***

Most commenters acknowledged the need to create a lot more housing in Seattle. Many commenters either supported the amount of new housing capacity in the zoning proposal or felt the plan should go much further. Supporters cited the following considerations:

- Seattle's ongoing housing and affordability crisis.
- Anticipated population growth due to Seattle's strong job market, climate resilience, and livability.
- Need to increase supply to reduce market pressures.
- Importance of diverse housing types, including rental and ownership units as well as accessible units and family-sized units.

A significant number of commenters felt the One Seattle Plan overestimated the amount of housing needed in the next 20 years or that the proposed zoning would create more capacity than they thought was needed. Commenters expressed the following concerns:

- Impact of work-from-home policies potentially limiting future growth.
- Expansion of light rail to surrounding areas encouraging suburban expansion.
- High costs of living pricing families out of Seattle.

Other commenters felt that population growth could be accommodated without upzones in Neighborhood Centers and transit corridors. They cited the increased capacity that will be created through HB1110's middle housing standards and the developable capacity that remains in existing Regional and Urban Centers. Some also felt the proposal was too great a change and that the proposed upzones should be adopted gradually to provide the City more time to monitor impacts and make necessary upgrades to infrastructure and utilities.

### ***Housing Locations***

While most commenters support the overall goal of creating a larger diversity of housing in more neighborhoods with close proximity to transit, parks, jobs, shops, and services, many residents objected to the amount of change that was proposed or its location within specific neighborhoods.

Themes from those supportive increasing diversity of housing in more locations included:

- Importance of ensuring housing choice in each neighborhood so that people don't have to leave when their needs changes

- Need to address exclusivity of many neighborhoods
- Desire for more neighborhoods to participate in addressing citywide need

Themes from those concerned about the amount of change included:

- Preservation of unique architectural attributes in neighborhoods with historic designations.
- Local infrastructure constraints, such as steep slopes or narrow roads.
- Potential for new housing to result in changes to neighborhood character.
- Concerns about impact on privacy, parking availability, and tree canopy.
- Suggestions that the City should consider small zoning changes to limit the amount of change in specific areas.
- Requests to zone fewer blocks for 5-story apartments or to provide zoning “transition” in more areas (such as a block of 4-story zoning between blocks of 3- and 5-story zoning).

Many commenters expressed support that additional capacity for housing was predominately focused in low-displacement risk areas and felt that this additional capacity could reduce market pressure and impacts from new development in high-displacement risk areas. These commenters often suggested that this change would help address the exclusivity of many neighborhoods by creating options for those who can’t afford detached homes. Some commenters suggested that the proposal could go farther by increasing capacity in low-displacement risk or removing proposed zoning changes in high-displacement risk areas like Central District or Rainier Valley.

### ***Housing Types***

Nearly all commenters supported the plan’s goals to diversify housing options, but many commenter were concerned about the impact of apartments and condos in specific locations. Specific comment themes from those supporting diversification included:

- Support for stacked flats and lower-cost, family-sized units that would serve seniors, people with disabilities, and families with young children.
- Desire for increased FAR or zoning for taller buildings of 5 to 6 stories to encourage the construction of apartments.

Others called for reducing the number of new areas proposed for Lowrise and Midrise zoning due to the following concerns:

- Concerns about the impacts of taller buildings on light, privacy, and views.
- Belief that renter populations would change the neighborhood character.
- Concerns that the proposal would lead to buildings with less open space and production of more “cookie cutter” townhomes and apartments inconsistent with “character and scale” of existing neighborhoods.
- Preference for the creation of more density through ADUs and other middle housing types, rather than townhomes and apartments.

## ***Housing Costs and Affordability Bonuses***

Comments reflected broad agreement that housing costs far too much but also revealed contrasting views about the ability of the zoning plan to affect these circumstances. Those who support upzoning shared the following sentiments:

- Increasing housing supply is necessary to limit cost increases by reducing competition for limited housing.
- Zoning changes would allow for the creation of a greater diversity of housing, including ownership and rental options in more areas of Seattle.
- The City should consider increasing FAR, reducing setbacks, and reducing complex regulations as further means to increase the production of housing and lower costs.

Many commenters did not believe that enabling more market housing supply would affect housing costs. These commenters generally felt that new homes, especially townhouses, would be expensive regardless of how many were produced. Some of these commenters took the view that demand would continue to outstrip supply which would limit the impact of new housing on housing costs.

Almost all comments about housing costs reflected a desire to see the creation of more rent- and income-restricted affordable housing. Comments about the proposed low-income housing bonus in NR zones were generally positive, but some commenters felt the incentive should be changed to allow even greater flexibility. Suggested changes included:

- Apply affordable housing bonus to all areas of Seattle, not just near frequent transit.
- Provide more flexibility in development standards, especially to allow more lot coverage.
- Add a bonus for low-income housing in other zones.
- Increase the amount of zoning that allowed for 5, 6, and 7-story apartments generally since developers of affordable housing need to compete for land just like market-rate developers.

Comments reflected a range of opinions about how to apply the Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) program within the plan. Some commenters felt MHA should be applied in NR zones based on a view that the plan should not increase overall capacity without requiring contributions to affordable housing. Other commenters felt that NR zones should continue not to have MHA requirements as these requirements could make it difficult to build new housing and are especially challenging for homeowners that want to add housing to their lot and for the small developers that tend to build in these zones. Similarly, there were many comments about whether MHA requirements in LR and MR zones should be raised, lowered, or removed. Other commenters suggested that the City should consider changes to encourage more on-site performance, change the timing of payments, or exempt small projects.

## ***Displacement***

Given the heightened concern about how expensive Seattle has become, many commenters focused on how the plan might alleviate or worsen displacement pressures on lower- and middle-income residents. There were mixed views about whether the plan's efforts to increase overall

capacity would reduce displacement. Some felt that zoning capacity needed to be dramatically increased, particularly in low-displacement-risk areas, to reduce pressure on displacement-prone neighborhoods. Others felt that more incentives were needed to boost the production of rent- and income-restricted units in those locations.

Some residents located in high-displacement risk neighborhoods objected to further increases in density in these areas. A common sentiment was that such neighborhoods had borne the brunt of previous upzones and their residents were unlikely to withstand new property tax increases, especially seniors and other income-restricted homeowners.

Other residents in high-displacement risk areas welcomed the opportunity to add units to their properties to make space for family members and create opportunities for income generation that could increase housing stability. Many suggested that more resources should be offered to families at risk of displacement to help them develop their properties, including technical assistance or low-cost loans to help them build ADUs that could be rented to create income.

A common critique among those concerned about displacement was that the plan doesn't include enough anti-displacement measures. Adding zoning capacity without such measures, some asserted, would fail to meaningfully address the status quo for populations with a high risk of displacement.

## Development Standards

Development standards refer to all the regulations that apply in a specific zone such as height, floor area, setbacks, and design standards. Public comments on development standards ranged from a desire to strengthen guidelines to achieve certain aesthetic or massing outcomes to views that standards should be relaxed to provide greater flexibility and reduce housing costs. OPCD received specific feedback about proposed standards for Neighborhood Residential (NR), Lowrise (LR), and Midrise (MR) zones as well as numerous suggestions about design standards and the design review process.

### ***Neighborhood Residential Zones***

#### Density and Building Size

The City received a wide variety of opinions on proposed density and building size as regulated by Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and height.

Many commenters expressed support for the increased FAR in NR zones that was proposed as part of the October 2024 proposal. Comments in support of this change tended to focus on the benefit of increasing housing production overall and creating more family-sized units.

The City also received many comments suggesting that the density and building size should be reduced. Commenters' concerns included:

- Potential for large vertically oriented buildings that are out of character with existing homes.
- Reduction in area for tree planting and open space for residents
- More shading of adjacent properties.
- Discouragement of the production of smaller, lower cost homes.
- The number of people that would live in these properties and their impact on traffic and on-street parking.

A smaller number of people felt that the density and floor area ratio should be increased. These commenters often suggested that we should be consistent with the state's model code which suggested higher FARs for denser buildings or that we should increase the bonus for stacked flats. We also received many comments that the stacked flat bonus should be allowed on lots less than 6,000 square feet. Comments supporting increasing the scope of the stacked flat bonus tended to focus on the benefits of stacked flats to create more affordable and accessible homes and a concern that the minimum lot size requirement would prevent use of the stacked flat bonus in many central and transit-rich areas of Seattle where lots tend to be smaller while allowing it in more peripheral neighborhoods.

Some commenters expressed support for a higher pitched roof bonus to encourage pitched roofs and to allow for roof with a steeper pitch.

### [NR Setbacks and Amenity Areas](#)

The City received many comments requesting increased setbacks and amenity area requirements to:

- Create more space for trees to grow and for existing trees to be preserved.
- Maintain neighborhood aesthetics and privacy, especially along narrow streets

Some also suggested the amenity area requirement should focus on area for landscaping rather than porches, patios, or other hardscaped surfaces.

Another common view was that increasing setback and amenity area requirements would make it more difficult to build housing, limit flexibility in site layouts, and result in developments that had less light access in the interior of the site. The City also received many comments suggesting that the amenity area requirement should be removed. These comments suggested that the amenity area requirement, in combination with many other requirements for the ground floor, especially on-site parking, could:

- Make it difficult to design interesting or unique projects.
- Force designer to develop a “cookie cutter” approach to projects to meet all requirements
- Result in many roof decks which adds significant cost to new housing.

Some comments suggested that side setbacks should be reduced to allow more space in front and rear of the property, which might be better for trees and open space.

### [NR Design Standards](#)

We received many comments that the proposed design standards, particularly the materials standard, would limit design flexibility and lengthen permit review times. Most suggested we should remove design standards entirely, but a few suggested that we make the materials standard more flexible. We also heard concerns that new buildings would not be well designed, but there were few suggestions for how to fix this problem other than reducing the scale of new buildings or requiring design review.

### [Corner Stores](#)

Most comments on the corner store proposal suggested that it should be modified to encourage more small-scale commercial uses. Suggestions included:

- Allow commercial uses on more lots, particularly on arterial streets or next to alleys.
- Expand proposed hours of operation and allow outdoor patios in more areas to improve access to and financial viability of small businesses.
- Apply reduced setback for the ground floor to the upper levels to make them easier to build and to be more consistent with traditional corner stores.



### ***Lowrise Development Standards***

The city did not receive many comments on Lowrise development standards. Most comments about Lowrise (LR) standards focused on building heights, FAR, and setback widths. Many comments felt that development standards should be modified to make it easier to build apartments and condo. Suggestions included:

- Increase the proposed FAR and height for LR buildings to encourage the construction of apartments and condos, particularly in areas where the minimum parking requirements would necessitate underground parking
- Reduce setbacks in Lowrise (LR) zones
- Remove the allowance to build 4-story townhouses, which would be very expensive.
- Eliminate parking requirements
- Remove design standards that could increase housing costs or constrain desired density levels

Some commenters felt that setbacks should be increased for LR buildings to provide more space for trees and reduce the visual impact of new development. Without these adjustments, some commenters worried that clusters of LR3 buildings within centers and along transit routes will produce a canyon effect.

### ***Midrise Development Standards***

Similar to LR zones, the City received few comments about Midrise development standards. The comments that were received generally supported proposed changes as they would make it easier to build in these zones and would provide more design flexibility. A few comments suggested that stairwells and walkways should not count toward FAR as these design elements are exterior to the buildings and could be beneficial as they require less building material and don't have to be heated.

### ***Design Standards and Design Review***

Design standards refer to development standards that regulate building aesthetics, such as those regarding entrances, windows, and materials, and apply to projects that don't go through design review. Design review is a process by which city staff or Design Review Boards review projects according to design guidelines.

The City received many comments about the design of new buildings, but many of these comments focused primarily on the size and verticality of buildings rather than other elements of design. Many people expressed concern about how buildings would look, but most did not express clearly what factors would lead to bad design or how designs could be improved.

Many said that design standards should be removed or significantly reduced. These comment themes suggested:

- Designers should have flexibility to design buildings based on local conditions and resident desires
- Proposed standards are arbitrary and would result in “cookie cutter” designs.
- Design standards would slow permitting and increase housings costs.
- Design review adds significant time and cost to housing construction.

Other commenters expressed dissatisfaction with the design of recent housing and suggested design standards or design review was important. Many residents tied their opposition to zoning changes to the quality of buildings they expect will be constructed in upzoned areas. Those most concerned about the aesthetics of new housing often requested requirements for high quality materials and to maintain design review processes.

## Infrastructure and Services

The City received many comments about existing and desired future infrastructure and services including roads, utilities, parks, schools, and public safety. Views ranged from concerns about the current condition and the cost for updating public infrastructure to ideas about how to plan more proactively and ensure expanded access to essential services and amenities within growth centers. Some commenters expressed concerns that the plan was not sufficiently coordinated with other city departments to account for the proposed growth. Others said they wished to see infrastructure updates precede any zoning increases.

### ***Roads, Traffic, and Parking***

Numerous commenters raised concerns about the layout, capacity, and condition of roads and bridges. Concerns centered on the following themes:

- Potential impact of upzones on streets that were overly narrow, crowded, and difficult to navigate, especially on streets with only one travel lane.
- Concerns that streets may become so congested as to inhibit the passage of emergency and utility vehicles.
- Challenges of locating new housing in areas that are accessed by aging bridges such as the Magnolia and West Seattle bridges.

Meanwhile, others suggested that accommodating more housing in areas of Seattle with high access to transit, shops, and services would help to reduce congestion regionally by allowing people to live closer to jobs, transit, shops, and services and by allowing more people to meet their daily needs by walking and biking.

Commenters raised concerns regarding pedestrian safety, particularly in areas that lack sidewalks. Some commenters suggested that new apartments and condos should not be allowed in areas without sidewalks as it would force more people to live in less safe conditions. Many commenters felt the City and/or developers should build sidewalks in upzoned areas.

Parking availability was another frequently cited issue with a diversity of viewpoints. Themes included:

- Requests that the proposed parking requirements be increased to reduce competition for on-street parking.
- The importance of parking to ensure accessibility for senior citizens and small business patrons.
- Support for further reducing or removing parking requirements due to their expense and likelihood of driving up housing costs while limiting the amount of available buildable space.
- The view that high parking requirements would encourage more car ownership and lead to more congestion.
- Advocacy for the elimination of parking citywide or removal of parking in Neighborhood Centers and on lots without alley access.

Some commenters felt that transit service in some areas was not sufficient to justify new housing development. These commenters sometimes suggested that additional transit service should be added before zoning is implemented while others said that the introduction of new housing could lead to better transit service over time.

### ***Utilities***

Many commenters were concerned about the ability of existing utility infrastructure to accommodate new development and the potential for new housing to worsen existing issues such as flooding, sewer back-ups, or stormwater run-off. Commenters expressed the following concerns:

- Concern about the potential impacts of new development on stormwater runoff and how it might impact orcas, salmon, and other endangered species.
- Concerns that reduced tree canopy cover could exacerbate this issue.
- Desire to analyze utility infrastructure on a block-by-block or neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis rather than a citywide level before implementing rezones.

Some of the commenters who were concerned about infrastructure needs said that the City should increase fees on new housing to pay for the cost of any necessary infrastructure upgrades. Others felt it was the City's responsibility to maintain a functioning utility system and wanted to prevent additional costs on new housing which they felt would simply lead to the production of less housing.

### ***Parks and Community Spaces***

Many people commented that parks, community centers, and open spaces are critical to preserving Seattle's quality of life. Some said that parks are already becoming crowded and expressed concern about the impact of additional housing. Others wondered why more housing wasn't proposed near existing parks to allow more people to enjoy these amenities, pointing out that large parks such as Seward Park and Discovery Park lack growth centers near them. Residents also frequently wished that new parks and community centers could be added to provide more green space and public amenities for people living in new higher-density housing. Some suggested that implementing impact fees could help to pay for these improvements.

### ***Schools***

Some commenters were concerned that a growing population could result in overcrowding at specific local schools. Others suggested that a growing population could help address falling enrollment at Seattle Public Schools overall.

While some people expressed concern about new housing near schools as it might result in more traffic and competition for parking, others expressed support for new housing in these areas as it would allow more families to live near schools. Others pointed out that a lack of affordable housing prevented more families from living in Seattle, enrolling in, and supporting the school system to begin with.

***Public Safety***

Some commenters expressed concern about whether existing police and fire services would be sufficient to accommodate a growing population. Other commenters suggested that increased traffic could make it more difficult for officers and firefighters to respond to calls.

## Environmental Impacts

Seattleites' concern for environmental issues came through clearly in zoning plan feedback. Commenters focused on the plan's potential impact to the city's tree canopy and its climate resilience. Erosion, runoff, and degradation of wildlife habitat were other topics of concern. Meanwhile, others highlighted the environmental benefits to the region of Seattle accommodating more housing.

### ***Trees***

The City received many comments about the potential impact of proposed zoning and development standards on Seattle's tree canopy. Commenters concerns focused predominately on proposed changes to Neighborhood Residential zones but they also addressed areas where Neighborhood Residential would be rezoned to other higher density zones. These comments centered on the following themes:

- Concern that additional housing development would result in the loss of existing large trees and reduce the amount of land available for planting new trees.
- Concern that the proposed changes would make it more difficult to attain the City's goal of 30% tree canopy coverage by 2037.
- Concern about the impacts of tree loss on neighborhood character, climate resilience, stormwater runoff, and wildlife habitat.

Comments on Neighborhood Residential zoning generally focused on increasing building setbacks and open space requirements and reducing lot coverage. Comments on rezones to higher densities, such as within proposed Neighborhood Centers, generally focused on reducing the geographic area of these rezones.

Many also recommended updating the City's Tree Protection Code to require that more trees are retained during construction or to require more mitigation for the removal of existing trees. Other common suggestions included:

- Increasing monitoring and enforcement of tree establishment after planting
- Modifying tree planting requirements to further incentivize large species trees.
- Adding standards about the location or planting space of new trees.
- Creating a parking exception for developers who retain large trees.
- Encouraging site designs that allow for more planting spaces such as stacked flats or attached units.

Many commenters also pointed out that building housing in Seattle would help to preserve tree canopy regionally by reducing sprawl. These comments pointed out that development in areas outside of Seattle tends to result in the clearing of more area per home and the clearing of more intact forests.

### ***Environmentally Critical Areas***

Environmentally Critical Areas (ECAs) include landslide- and flood-prone areas, creeks, wetlands, and wildlife habitat conservation areas. Some commenters suggested that zoning changes should not occur on lots that have even small amounts of ECAs or are near landslide-prone areas. Other commenters said that the requirements on lots in NR zones with steep slopes were too restrictive. These commenters pointed out that some steep slopes are very small and felt that limiting higher density development on every site with steep slopes might be overly burdensome.

### ***Climate Change and Resilience***

Many commenters expressed support for zoning changes due to the role they can play in addressing climate change. These comments tended to focus on the benefits of allowing people to live in urban areas where they are close to jobs, transit, shops, and services and can meet more of their local needs by walking and biking. However, other commenters raised concerns about the impact of new housing on local climate resilience. These comments tended to focus on potential local increases in summer temperatures due to reduced shade resulting in heat island effects.

## Property values and taxes

Commenters frequently raised concerns about how zoning changes could impact their property values and taxes.

These comment themes included:

- Concerns about increasing property values due to redevelopment potential that could lead to increased property taxes.
- Concerns about lower property values due to the impact of larger buildings near their property or the loss of views.
- Concern that the need for new infrastructure would result in additional property taxes.
- Concerns about the impact of increased property taxes on seniors and those living on fixed incomes.
- Concerns that additional displacement would result from new tax increases, particularly displacement of homeowners on fixed incomes in lower- and middle-income communities.

Supportive themes included:

- Support for changes that could increase property value.
- Support for new housing as it could help to increase the overall tax base and increase revenue.

People who expressed concern about increasing property values and taxes often suggested updating or increasing advertising for existing tax exemptions and deferral programs for seniors and low-income residents or reducing the degree of change in high-displacement-risk areas.

## Historic Preservation

Some commenters expressed concern about the impact of rezones on historic buildings, historic districts, or park boulevards. These comments tended to suggest that rezones should not occur in national historic register districts (Montlake, Mount Baker, and Ravenna-Cowen) or along park boulevards such as Queen Anne Boulevard and Mount Baker Boulevard. Comments expressed concern that rezones would put pressure on historic properties to redevelop and would also change the overall character of the areas.



## NEXT STEPS

OPCD has used the feedback received in Fall of 2024 to update the draft proposal. Revised legislation to implement changes to Neighborhood Residential zones and comply with various state laws is now available for review on the [Zoning Update website](#) and was transmitted to Council in May 2025. Revised legislation to implement zoning changes in Centers and Corridors is expected to be released separately at a later date.

City Council will review the legislation and consider amendments before adopting final legislation. More information about the Council process is available at on the website for the Council's [Select Committee on the Comprehensive Plan](#).