



OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL - CITY OF SEATTLE

September 9, 2015

Mayor Edward B. Murray
City of Seattle
PO Box 94749
Seattle, WA 98124-4749

RE: Downtown Livability - Improved Urban Form

Honorable Mayor Murray,

As Downtown Seattle and Belltown experience significant increases in employment, retail, and residences, development of new buildings is having some unintended consequences. Specifically, some projects are crowding nearby buildings and eliminating light, sun, air, and privacy for those who live and work nearby.

This is most extreme when some high rise projects have no tower spacing requirements. When zoning rules were written for South Lake Union and Belltown nine years ago, 60' tower separation requirements were included. Contrast that with buildings in Downtown Office Core part of Seattle which does not require the 60' separation.

Several tall new buildings have been constructed or are on the drawing board, separated only by the 16' width of the alley. This has a negative impact both on the appearance of the City and more importantly on the people who live and work in nearby buildings.

Under our current zoning rules, the Downtown Office Core 2 (DOC2) areas do not require tower separation or other forms of bulk control. This means buildings may be built up to the alleys that separate them. When the Downtown and Belltown rezones occurred in 2006, tower separation requirements were included in areas targeted for residential growth.

However, Downtown has since experienced greater than anticipated growth in residential uses in both DOC1 and DOC2 zoned areas. This pattern of increased residential use in our urban core merits further study by planners to determine how to support growth while simultaneously preserving livability for workers and residents.

A recent example has come to our attention from residents at the Escala residence on 4th and Virginia. Immediately to the east, across a narrow alley, a 500' tall development by the Douglaston Development firm has been proposed. The building would face 5th and Virginia, but could be built within 16 to 20 feet of Escala and hundreds of feet higher, thereby eliminating residents' light, sun, air, and privacy on the east side of the building.

Although the Douglaston property may soon be vested, members of our design community have brought to our attention the need to find a long-term solution for tower spacing

and bulk requirements for the Downtown Office Core areas. We are writing to request DPD to establish development standards to address this issue for future buildings in areas currently zoned Downtown Office Core (DOC1 and DOC2).

We have seen other cities, including Vancouver B.C., successfully use flexible zoning tools that allow tower spacing and reasonable capacity development. Our goal is to adopt some of what has made Vancouver successful, and thereby build a more livable Seattle and improve development potential.

We have two requests: one for short term action and the other for longer term planning.

First, before the end of this year we ask that DPD develop language for, and perform State Environmental Policy Act review on, an amendment to the text of Seattle Municipal Code Section 23.49.058 establishing tower spacing requirements for DOC2 zoned properties located within the Belltown Urban Center Village. This is an approximately two and half block area. It is not clear whether this action will affect the proposed Douglaston development, but it will help provide current and future residents of the area with adequate light, air, and privacy, fundamental components to residential livability. Such requirements would have modest and flexible limits on the height, bulk and scale of future development on adjacent properties

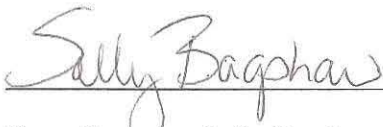
Second, we ask you to include in the 2016 work program for DPD or the proposed Office of Planning and Community Development a comprehensive review of development standards applicable to Downtown, Belltown and South Lake Union. We believe the City could increase development capacity while simultaneously ensuring that our Urban Centers are livable and affordable communities.

Tower spacing requirements are not the only development standard that can achieve residential livability. Development standards such as tower façade setbacks, maximum lot coverage requirements, and other similar standards, coupled with a rigorous Design Review process could be utilized to achieve similar or better urban design outcomes while simultaneously allowing for greater utilization of under-developed lots.

We have been contacted by stakeholders from the design and development professions as well as downtown residents who are willing to be part of an internal team considering appropriate changes. We feel a more livable, humane and civic minded form of development is possible downtown if we look closely and soon at these and other creative solutions.

Thank you for working with us to achieve these ends.

Best Regards,



Councilmember Sally Bagshaw



Councilmember Jean Godden



Councilmember Nick Licata



Councilmember Tom Rasmussen

Cc:

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