City of Seattle

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CITY OF SEATTLE
ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

SEPA Threshold Determination
for proposed revisions to Multifamily Zones,
Seattle Municipal Code 23.45, and other related provisions.

Project Sponsor:	City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development (DPD)
Location of Proposal:	The proposed amendments would affect properties City-wide in multifamily zones. Minor changes would also affect residential and nonresidential development in other zones.
Scope of Proposal:	The proposal would make a number of changes to provisions for multifamily zones, generally to clarify intent, simplify rules and provide greater flexibility in meeting standards for development in multifamily zoned areas. The proposal would add provisions for zoning incentives, green building features, the Seattle Green Factor landscaping requirement, and modify requirements for parking access and quantity.

BACKGROUND

Proposal Description

The proposal to amend multifamily zoning is summarized by the following:

1. Maintain the current overall scale and density of zones, including the height limit of 25' in LDT, L1 and L2 zones.
2. Allow alternatives to overly prescriptive development standards - "flexibility with limits," including:
   - use basic standards -- setbacks, floor are ratio and height limits -- on small (infill) lots;
   - apply additional standards – lot coverage, structure width/depth limits -- on larger lots;
   - recognize local conditions – to provide appropriate transitions, require greater structure setbacks from property lines on multifamily zoned lots abutting single family zoned lots.
3. Use an incentive program in the L3, MR and HR zones to encourage affordable housing in exchange for additional height and floor area.
4. Encourage landmark preservation and new open space to be provided with transfer of development potential (TDP) in HR.

5. Improve the appearance and function of townhouses with new design standards.
6. Require green buildings when the incentive program is used.
7. Eliminate parking requirements in urban centers and station areas, and reduce parking requirements in other areas (consistent with changes in commercial areas).
8. Apply the Green Area Factor.
9. Update and organize regulations so they are easier to understand and use.

Recommendations to change multifamily code provisions apply only to land that is currently zoned for multifamily development. No single family zoned areas are proposed to be rezoned. No remapping is anticipated.

A limited number of technical amendments, such as space requirements for garbage and recycling, apply to zones other than multifamily. Minor amendments are proposed to the standards for Residential Small Lot (RSL) zones to allow for features such as eaves and architectural features within setbacks areas, consistent with allowances in other residential zones. In addition, amendments are proposed for cottage housing, allowed in RSL and multifamily zones, to clarify standards related to the permitted floor area of a cottage structure and open space requirements.

ANALYSIS - OVERVIEW

The following describes the analysis conducted to determine if the proposal is likely to result in *probable significant adverse environmental impacts*. This threshold determination is based on:

- the proposal, as described above and in memoranda;
- the information contained in the *SEPA checklist;*
- additional information, including analyses, director's reports, the Multifamily Code, 1989 EIS and technical memoranda prepared by and for City staff; and
- the experience of DPD analysts in reviewing similar documents and actions.

ELEMENTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Adoption of the possible amendments would result in no immediate adverse short-term impacts because the adoption would be a non-project action. The proposed changes do not significantly increase the size or density of development projects or the likely number of projects that would be built in the affected zones. The discussion below generally evaluates the potential long-term impacts that might result from differences in future development patterns due to the proposed amendments.

A. Natural Environment

Earth, Air, Water, Plants/Animals/Fisheries, Energy

As Seattle and its multifamily zoned neighborhoods are generally urban areas, most of the area affected by the proposed action is dominated with impervious surfaces (paving, rooftops, etc) with some amount of vegetation (i.e. street trees and landscaped areas) and few animals except common birds, insects and urban mammals. Each neighborhood that will be affected by these code revisions has a network of sewer/stormdrain utility systems to handle much of its surface stormwater runoff. Despite daily traffic congestion, air pollutant levels rarely if ever exceed

significant levels, due to the progressively improving emissions-reduction performance of the region's automobiles.

Within the context of the affected areas, there is minimal potential for additional future development that may result from the proposed changes that would generate significant adverse natural environmental impacts, including related to green house gas emissions. By following the established rules that require proper design of sewers/stormdrains, construction practices that minimize grading, drainage and dust impacts, and other applicable City regulations, the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts will be limited. Future project-related SEPA review would also afford the opportunity to identify and mitigate any site-specific impacts, as anticipated in SMC 25.05.330.

Residential energy demands are relatively low compared to those of commercial and other uses. There is minimal likelihood that additional energy use from future development (related to this proposal) would cause significant adverse impacts on energy systems. One possible benefit to these elements of the environment from code changes will be the benefits accrued from additional landscaping designed to encourage water infiltration as a result of the green factor landscaping requirement and provisions that encourage wind and solar energy generators on rooftops. No significant adverse impacts are anticipated.

B. Built Environment

Land and Shoreline Use, Height/Bulk/Scale, Housing, Historic Preservation

Land Uses:

The proposal applies to approximately 4,954 acres of multifamily zoned lot area located throughout the city. As elsewhere in Seattle, these areas are, for the most part, developed. Consistent with the zoning, multifamily residential is the predominant use. This use is accommodated in a wide variety of building types and development densities, with a range that includes single family dwellings, attached townhouses, multi-story walkup apartment buildings, and highrise towers. Other uses, to a much lesser extent, are accommodated in these zones, such as schools, religious facilities, parks and other public facilities. Most significantly, 822 acres, or 17 percent of the total land area zoned multifamily, is subject to a Major Institution Overlay, accommodating such uses as universities and hospitals. Most of the development activity in these zones involves replacement of low-density residential structures by more intensive residential development. While the proposal modifies standards related to the type of development allowed in multifamily zones, and in some instances includes provisions allowing for some increase in development density, current provisions related to permitted and restricted uses are essentially retained, and no significant adverse impacts are anticipated as a result of this legislation.

Development Standards:

Many of the development standard revisions are restatements and clarifications to the existing zoning requirements and no changes would be made to significantly impact height, bulk or scale of development. A wider range of types of landscaping could be provided, street-level design might be more varied, and parking access would be allowed from streets in cases where this can be accommodated while minimizing impacts such as to on-street parking. No significant adverse impacts are anticipated as a result of this legislation.

Housing

The proposed action includes minor changes that could influence the type and density of residential projects built in the future. Density incentives for affordable housing, reduced parking requirements, elimination of density limits in some zones, and increased flexibility in development standards could increase the variety of housing types produced, which could accommodate a wider range of housing needs and promote more affordable housing. No significant adverse impacts are anticipated as a result of this legislation. However, zoning changes could influence the number of lots likely to become available for redevelopment and/or the density of projects that can be built on these lots.

Increased capacity for housing. It is estimated that, under current zoning, multifamily zones have development capacity for an additional 37,068 units. Under the proposed changes, this total could increase to 41,007 units, for a gain of 3,939 units, or an 11 percent increase above current conditions. Although the estimated capacity in multifamily areas 41,007 units, other areas, including Downtown, single family, commercial, and mixed use zones also contribute to the city's total capacity for new housing. Excluding multifamily zones, these other areas could accommodate 103,431 new units, or about 72 percent of the city's total estimate of housing capacity (144,438 new units).

Under Comprehensive Plan growth targets, an additional 50,000 units are anticipated in Seattle by 2024, which would utilize about 35 percent of the total estimate of housing capacity. Reviewing past development activity reveals that roughly 63 percent of the 31,254 housing units added since 1995 were built in areas other than multifamily zones, with the remaining 11,464 units, or 37 percent, developed in multifamily zones. If multifamily areas continue to accommodate a similar share of total growth, about 18,500 units of the forecasted 50,000 units would be built in multifamily zones, even though the capacity for new units is estimated to be much higher (18,500 units is about 45 percent of the 41,007 units of estimated development capacity in multifamily zones under the proposed changes). The amount of growth anticipated in multifamily zones could occur with or without the proposed changes, but some additional growth might be attracted to multifamily areas as a result of changes that will enable projects to increase development densities.

Affordability. New housing developed in multifamily zones accommodates the full range of affordability, including subsidized housing provided for low-income households by public and non-profit housing agencies, market rate housing available to renters and owners at a range of income levels, and high-income, luxury housing. Affordability will be influenced by many factors beyond the scope of land use regulations, including locational characteristics, such as proximity to amenities and employment, the overall demand for housing in the region, and construction costs. Individual projects that will be influenced by the provisions of this proposal will occur over time and cannot be evaluated in terms of affordability at this time.

The proposal includes provisions for increased height and density in specified Lowrise 3, Midrise, and Highrise zones for projects contributing to affordable workforce housing. Since current Lowrise and Midrise zoning does not include such provisions, there would be more new units affordable to targeted households produced under the proposed changes than what would otherwise occur under regular market conditions.

The following chart shows the number of affordable units that could be produced if all lots identified in the City's capacity analysis as potentially available for redevelopment in eligible locations are developed to the maximum height and density allowed with the bonus of affordable housing. The number of units likely to be produced under the amount of growth expected in these zones over the next 20 years would be much less.

Estimated Bonus Units	
Zone	**Bonus units**
L3	324
MR	159
HR*	224
TOTAL	**707 units**

*To calculate bonus units for HR, only lots greater than 9,000 sq. ft. were considered for development at maximum density as a tower; other lots would be developed as MR.

Loss of existing housing. As discussed above, there is capacity in multifamily zones under both existing conditions and the proposed changes to accommodate significantly more growth than is anticipated in multifamily zones over the next 20 years. Given that the amount of growth in these zones will not significantly increase under the proposed changes, there will also not likely be any significant increase in the number of existing units lost. In fact, if individual projects achieve higher development densities and accommodate more units on redeveloped lots than would otherwise occur under existing conditions, slightly fewer lots would be required to accommodate the same number of units, which in turn could reduce the loss of units because fewer existing structures would be demolished.

To provide an estimate of number of units that could be eliminated by redevelopment in multifamily zones, the units could be counted in existing structures on parcels identified in the City's capacity analysis as potentially available for redevelopment. However, this total would reflect a condition where all available sites would be redeveloped, which is very unlikely to occur over the time period considered in this analysis. To provide the estimated capacity of 41,007 new units, 8,119 existing units would be lost. More than half of theses units (4,335) would be existing single family dwellings, while the remaining 3,783 would be units in multifamily structures of some type. The greatest number of units lost would be in the L1 and L3 zones, which account for about 57% of the total lost unit. However, the ratio of lost units to new units (the percentage of lost units relative to new replacement units) is highest in the LDT and L1 zones.

Zone	**Capacity for new units**	**Units lost**			**Lost units as a percentage of new units**
		Single family	**Multifamily**	**Total**	
LDT	2,298	810	199	1,010	44%
L1	6,180	1,474	788	2,262	37%
L2	5,987	904	326	1,230	21%
L3	15,513	1,076	1,324	2,400	15%
MR	7,286	71	1,073	1,144	16%
HR	3,884	0	73	73	2%
TOTAL	**41,007**	**4,335**	**3,783**	**8,119**	

Noise, Shadows on Open Spaces, Light & Glare, Environmental Health, Public View Protection

No impacts on these elements of the environment are anticipated from the provisions in this legislation.

Transportation, Parking, Public Services and Utilities

Transportation and Parking

The extent to which there are any significant traffic impacts associated with the proposed changes to multifamily zoning is largely a function of how many additional residential units would be built in these zones, compared to what could otherwise occur under existing zoning. One indicator of how the proposed changes could increase the potential for new residential units in multifamily zones is the resulting change in available development capacity. To calculate development capacity, the City uses a set of assumptions for identifying lots most likely to be available for redevelopment and the number of units that could be built on those lots, based on what the zoning allows and observations of recent projects. Zoning changes could influence the number of lots identified as available for redevelopment and/or the density of projects that can be built on these lots. The capacity for development is not a prediction of the amount of growth that will occur (the number of new units that will actually be built), but it does provide a reasonable estimate of what is possible if available sites are redeveloped.

Overall, it is estimated that the total development capacity in multifamily zones under current zoning would allow for an additional 37,068 units, which could, under the proposed changes, increase to 41,007 units--a gain of 3,939 units, or an 11 percent increase above current conditions. What actually will be built in these zones depends on numerous factors, including market conditions, demand for certain types of housing, and opportunities for residential development in other zones. The nature of transportation impacts that could result from changes to multifamily zoning would depend on the additional amount of growth that could occur due to increases in density, the distribution of the growth throughout multifamily areas (i.e. widely dispersed growth throughout the city or concentrated growth in limited areas), and the transportation characteristics of areas where any significant growth might occur.

Because the current density limits are retained in the LDT, L1 and the L2 zones, the revised development standards associated with these changes are not expected to result in density increases that would have significant additional traffic impacts. While the density limits remain the same in these zones, the proposed changes to development standards are expected to increase the likelihood that more projects will be able to achieve the densities currently allowed. As a result, development capacity in these zones could increase by an estimated 686 units citywide, or about a six percent increase in the total capacity of these zones.

By eliminating the density limit, increased densities are possible in L3 and L4 zones. However, the greatest increases in potential development capacity are expected to occur in L3 and MR zones located inside urban centers, villages, and station area overlay districts as a result of the additional density possible through the height and floor area bonuses proposed for these locations. These locations account for about one third of the total area zoned L3 and slightly more than half of the total area zoned MR. This increase in capacity is estimated to allow for an additional 2,765 units, representing about a 23 percent increase above current capacity for the same zones. The capacity increase in these areas accounts for about 70 percent of the overall capacity increase of 3,939 units estimated for all multifamily zones.

Growth is expected to occur in locations where available capacity is sufficient to promote redevelopment. However, the capacity for development in an area will likely exceed the amount of growth that occurs over a given period of time. The capacity for multifamily areas under the proposed changes is estimated to be about 41,007 units. Other areas, including Downtown, single family, commercial, and mixed use zones elsewhere in the city also contribute to the total capacity for new housing. Combined, these areas outside of multifamily zones provide capacity for an estimated 103,482 units, or 72 percent of the city's total capacity for new housing (estimated to be 144,438 units).

The Comprehensive Plan's growth targets anticipate that 50,000 more units will be added in Seattle by 2024, which would utilize about 35 percent of the total estimate of housing capacity. Reviewing past development activity reveals that roughly 63 percent of the 31,254 housing units added since 1995 were built in areas other than multifamily zones, with the remaining 11,464 units, or 37 percent, developed in multifamily zones. If multifamily areas continue to accommodate a similar share of total growth, about 18,500 units of the forecasted 50,000 units (37%) would be built in multifamily zones, even though the capacity for new units is estimated to be much higher (18,500 units is about 45 percent of the estimated capacity of 41,120 units in multifamily zones under the proposed changes). The amount of growth anticipated in multifamily zones could occur with or without the proposed changes, but some additional growth might be attracted to multifamily areas as a result of changes that will enable projects to increase development densities.

For the purposes of this environmental analysis, it is assumed that if there is any additional potential impact for transportation impacts attributable to the proposal, it will most likely involve those areas where the changes will result in the greatest increase in capacity, relative to development under existing conditions. Under this assumption, those areas would include the L3 and MR zones located in urban centers, villages, and station overlay areas.

To put these increases in perspective, the increases in capacity as a percentage of total residential capacity of all zones was analyzed and used in forming the conclusion in this report. (This information is contained in the SEPA checklist prepared for this proposal). Of the 32 village locations that include L3 and MR zones eligible for the height and density bonus under the proposal, only five of these locations would have an increase in capacity exceeding five percent as a result of the changes. The greatest percentage increase in capacity is in the 23rd and Union-Jackson Village, where the 150 units of added capacity increases the percent of capacity in multifamily zones by 10 percent, from 29 percent to 39 percent. Only 14 of the 32 locations would have increases in development capacity exceeding 50 additional units. For five of these, 12th Avenue, 23rd and Union/Jackson, Ballard, MLK at Holly, and Uptown Queen Anne, the increase in

capacity would be between 100 and 200 units, and three areas, Capitol Hill, Northgate, and University District NW, would have increases ranging between 250 units (Northgate), and 508 units (Capitol Hill).

Furthermore, only two of the areas that have a gain in capacity of more than 100 units are also areas that have more than half of the development capacity in multifamily zones; 12th Avenue (54%, increasing to 60% under the proposed changes) and Capitol Hill (58%, increasing to 63% under the proposed changes). Therefore, not only are the overall increases in capacity modest in these areas, but there is significant capacity in other non-multifamily zones that would be expected to absorb much of the growth occurring in each area, as has been occurring over the past several years. While slightly more growth could shift to multifamily areas in locations that have increased capacity, this increase relative to development activity occurring in the other zones in the area would not be expected to add significantly to traffic impacts.

Data from the Institute of Transportation Engineers' (ITE) Trip Generation report (7th edition) help provide an estimate of how much additional traffic might be generated by the forecasted increases in development capacity. In general, the empirical data gathered by ITE indicate that 100 multifamily housing units likely would generate approximately 170 new daily trips, with about 51 of these occurring the morning peak hour and 62 in the afternoon peak hour. In denser areas with more transit service and a larger number of destinations within walking distance, these volumes would be lower.

As noted in the table above, the greatest increase in development capacity in L3 and MR zones is expected to occur in Capitol Hill and University District NW, both areas with good transit service and dense development. The additional development capacity forecast in these neighborhoods likely would generate no more than 200-250 peak hour trips. These trips would be distributed across developable parcels in each neighborhood, with no substantial concentrations of additional development on any one site. Given this dispersion of development, no particular intersection or roadway segment would be expected to carry a preponderance of additional traffic. Therefore, it is unlikely that these dispersed traffic volumes would have a significant transportation impact.

In other neighborhoods, the lesser amounts of additional development capacity resulting from the code changes likely would generate smaller traffic volumes. As in Capitol Hill and University District NW, these additional volumes would be dispersed across the neighborhoods, and would be unlikely to significantly impact any particular intersection or roadway segment. Transportation impacts of individual projects developing pursuant to these code changes would be assessed at the time of MUP application, unless the projects are small enough to be exempt from SEPA.

The proposed code changes are not anticipated to produce significant adverse environmental impacts. Some of the changes address the location of parking on a project site; these changes address the use of space on a site, and are not expected to have direct parking impacts, transportation impacts would be limited to increased use of the street and alleys network and other modes of transportation. Parking impacts would result from the extent that permit applicants provide fewer parking spaces than under the current code. This is not anticipated to have more than localized impacts. Larger developments, which are likely to have the greatest impact, would be subject to project-specific SEPA review of transportation or parking impacts.

Public Services and Utilities

Because the changes are not expected to change the amount or type of development that occurs in multifamily zones no potentially significant adverse impacts are anticipated as a consequence of the proposed changes. Any additional future development in the area will contribute to overall cumulative increases in demand for public services and utilities. However, the proposed changes are not expected to generate significant adverse impacts as a result of additional amounts or locations of potential future growth.

DECISION

[X] Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).

[ ] Determination of Significance. This proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).

Signature: on file Date: _____

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