



City of Seattle

Department of Planning and Development

Diane M. Sugimura, Director

June 25, 2013

To: Councilmember Richard Conlin, Chair
Planning, Land Use and Sustainability Committee (PLUS)

From: Diane Sugimura, Director
Mike Podowski, Land Use Policy Manager
Geoff Wentlandt, Senior Planner

Re: STAFF DRAFT – Micro Dwelling Unit Preliminary Recommendations

Background

In recent months there has been extensive public dialogue about micro dwelling units, including a Council Transportation Committee sponsored brown bag meeting on April 18, 2013, a community meeting on Capitol Hill on May 6th, 2013, as well as extensive coverage in local media. The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) has been tracking the production of such housing in Seattle for roughly two years, and has provided periodic communication with elected officials. The City recognizes micro dwelling units as a viable, emerging form of housing, which can help achieve goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan – particularly for affordable housing. However, we also understand there are strong public opinions on this innovative form of housing and acknowledge a need to clarify regulations and processes for permitting.

Define “Micro Dwelling Unit” as a subset of “Dwelling Unit” in the Land Use Code

“Micro Dwelling Unit” means a dwelling unit composed of up to 8 micros.

- Each micro contains a private bathroom, but does not include a complete food preparation area (no stove or cook top)
- Each micro shall be no more than 285 square feet, including the bathroom
- Within the dwelling unit, each micro shall have access to a shared complete food preparation area (kitchen)/common area of not less than 120 square feet (*see below for more on kitchens*).
- No more than 8 micros (or 8 unrelated individuals) may be located in a micro dwelling unit
- Micro dwelling units are to be indicated and noted on plans and permits
- Residential use that doesn’t meet the micro dwelling unit definition are deemed dwelling units, or congregate residence.
- Clarify that “Congregate Residence” definition applies to groupings of 9+ micros within a unit

Design Review. Apply Threshold for Micro Dwelling Units and Congregate Residences by Building Size (not # of units)

- Scale threshold for design review to the size of townhouses and other apartment buildings required to undergo design review
- Apply to micro dwelling units and congregate residences in all zones where Design Review is currently required. Apply different forms of design review depending on building size as follows:
 - 5,000 + GSF - Streamlined Design Review (SDR) – Type I Land Use Decision
 - 12,000+ GSF - Administrative Design Review (ADR) – Type II Land Use Decision – staff review
 - 30,000 GSF - Full Design Review – Type II Land Use Decision – board review

SEPA Thresholds. Clarify how SEPA thresholds apply to developments with Micro Dwelling Units

- Continue to apply SEPA thresholds on number of dwelling units, each of which may contain up to 8 micros.
- State law limits how much flexibility DPD has in interpreting dwelling unit for SEPA threshold purposes.

Growth Targets. Account for Micro Dwelling Units and Congregate Residences in progress toward growth tracking

- Count individual micros and congregate residence sleeping rooms when tracking progress towards comprehensive plan growth targets: 4 micros or 4 sleeping rooms would count as a unit for purposes of growth targets
- Whether a neighborhood has exceeded its residential growth targets is a factor in establishing SEPA thresholds for certain neighborhood under current City SEPA regulations.

Prohibit new Micro Dwelling Unit development in single-family zones

- Expressly prohibit new construction and major renovation of single-family homes that include micro dwelling unit configurations, with each micro having a bathroom, within single-family zones.

Adjust refuse collection areas in Micro Dwelling Units and Congregate Residence developments

- Amend the Land Use Code, giving DPD and Seattle Public Utilities additional discretion to consider quantity of micros in a building when reviewing for required size and configuration of refuse collection areas.

Adjust required vehicle and bicycle parking for Micro Dwelling Units and Congregate Residence developments

- Parking minimums are not required or are reduced in certain areas of the city, primarily urban villages, centers and frequent transit served locations.
- Outside the areas noted above, required vehicle parking for most multi-family residential uses is 1 required parking space for each dwelling unit (SMC 23.54.015).
- For congregate residences, and for assisted living facilities the vehicle parking requirement is 1 space for each 4 residents.
- In areas of the city where parking is required, add a parking requirement for micro dwelling units consistent to that of congregate residences: 1 space for 4 micros
- Currently the amount of required off street bicycle parking required for residential uses is one (1) bicycle parking space for every 4 dwelling units in multifamily housing, and 1 bicycle parking space for every twenty (20) residents in congregate residences. (Table E, SMC 23.54.015)
- Micro dwelling units appear to have higher demand for bicycle usage than other forms of development; increase the requirement for off-street bicycle parking for micro dwelling units to 1 bicycle space to 4 micros.

Size minimums for Micro Dwelling Units and Congregate Residences

- For Land Use Code purposes, do not apply additional minimum area requirements for the micros within a dwelling unit; rely on the building code minimums. The Seattle Building Code includes minimum requirements on the size and floor area of habitable spaces (SMC 22.206.020). These Building Code requirements control the minimum sizes in the following manner:
 - Every dwelling unit shall have at least 1 room with not less than 120 square feet of floor area
 - No habitable room may be less than 7 feet in any floor dimension
 - Every room used for sleeping purposes shall have at least 70 square feet of floor area
- Require, in the Land Use Code, a minimum shared kitchen/common area of 120 square feet for each micro dwelling unit and for congregate residences.

Restricted Parking Zone (RPZ): Clarify regulations or rules for Micro Dwelling Units and Congregate Residences.

- Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) administers the RPZ program.
- Current limit is one “eligible household unit” is entitled to have no more than four RPZ permits at any one time. In addition an eligible household unit may obtain one guest RPZ pass.
- Consistent with interpretation of “dwelling unit” or “household,” a “Micro Dwelling Unit” with up to 8 micros would be eligible for a maximum of four RPZ passes, plus guest pass.
- DPD will work with SDOT to monitor RPZ use for Micro Dwelling Units. The number of RPZ permits issued may be adjusted by SDOT Director’s Rule.

Closing

These preliminary recommendations are intended to recognize micro dwelling units as a viable and innovative form of housing and to continue allowing them to be constructed in appropriate locations. The recommendations also clarify and improve the application of land use regulations to the permitting of micro dwelling units, so they are regulated similarly to other comparable forms of multifamily housing.

Thank you for considering this information. We are available to answer any questions you may have.