

# Director's Report

## One Seattle Plan Zoning Update

### Interim State Zoning Compliance Legislation Summary

#### March 26, 2025

## Overview

The primary purpose of this legislation is to implement interim changes to zoning regulations necessary to comply with Washington State House Bill 1110. House Bill 1110 (also known as the “Middle Housing bill”) requires cities to allow a wider variety of housing types such as duplex, triplexes, and stacked flats in primarily single-family zones and places limits on the regulation of middle housing.

This legislation would also implement changes to comply with:

- House Bill 1293 which requires that design standards be “clear and objective”
- Senate Bill 6015 which places limits on requirements for off-street parking
- House Bill 1287 which establishes requirements for electric vehicle charging in new developments

## Background

The Washington State Legislature has adopted numerous bills in recent sessions to support the production of housing and other objectives. Below is a brief summary of the bills that are relevant to this legislation.

### HB 1110 (Middle Housing)

[HB 1110](#) requires cities throughout Washington state to allow a wider variety of housing in predominantly single-family zones. Minor changes to the language in HB 1110 were passed the following year as [HB 2321](#). Under these pieces of legislation, the following changes are required:

- Cities must allow in all residentially zoned areas six of nine types of housing (duplex, triplex, fourplex, fiveplex, sixplex, courtyard apartments, cottage housing, townhouses, stacked flats)
- Cities must allow in all residential areas four dwelling units per lot or six units per lot if within 1/4-mile walking distance of a major transit stop or at least two units on the lot are affordable; lots with ECAs may be partially exempted from this requirement
- Cities must allow unit lot subdivision, which facilitates fee-simple ownership of attached dwelling units
- Design review for middle housing may only be administrative
- Cities must not have any standards for middle housing that are more restrictive than those required for detached single-family residences
- Cities must apply to middle housing the same development permit and environmental review processes that apply to detached single-family residences

- Cities must not require off-street parking as a condition of middle housing within one-half mile walking distance of a major transit stop
- Cities must not require more than one off-street parking space per unit as a condition of middle housing on lots smaller than 6,000 square feet

Cities are required to adopt changes to development standards to meet these requirements by June 30, 2025. If they do not meet this timeline, a state-developed “model ordinance” will supersede non-compliant local regulations. The state requirements include both requirements that are clearly defined (like the number of units required to be allowed) and others that are open to interpretation (such as the requirement that standards for middle housing may not be more restrictive than those required for detached single-family residences). Consequently, the model ordinance contains specific standards for height, floor area, setbacks, and other standards as well as less well defined guidance that certain types of standards would be invalid. Without interim legislation, it would be very difficult to review projects against the model ordinance and it is likely that the City would have to defend against lawsuits over our interpretation of the model ordinance.

### **House Bill 1293 (Clear and objective design standards)**

[HB 1293](#) requires that cities may only have “clear and objective” design standards and places limits on design review processes. In Seattle, design standards occur in two places:

1. The City implements a design review program in which city staff or design review boards reviews larger projects against adopted design guidelines.
2. The Land Use code has design standards that apply to projects that don't go through design review.

The design review process, including the design guidelines, is proposed to be updated through a separate piece of legislation. This interim legislation would address changes to design standards in SMC 23.45.529. The deadline for compliance with these requirements is June 30, 2025.

### **Senate Bill 6015 (off-street parking)**

[SB 6015](#) requires cities to implement a variety of changes around off-street parking. Seattle's existing code is already compliant with most of these provisions; however, this law would require us to:

1. Reduce the minimum width of largest required parking space from 8.5 feet to 8 feet
2. Allow tandem parking to count as two spaces

This bill was adopted in March of 2024 and the provisions when into effect at that time.

### **House Bill 1287 (electric vehicle charging)**

[HB 1287](#) increases the portion of parking spaces in new development that must be “EV-ready.” EV-ready means that an electric service that is terminated at a junction box or receptacle outlet is provided in close proximity to a parking space. This level of infrastructure would allow a charger to be installed without laying new electrical lines or reopening the wall. Changes to meet this requirement were already made to Seattle's Electrical Code, but changes to the Land Use Code are also required to implement this law. This bill became effective July 1, 2024.

## Approach to Legislation

This legislation only modifies standards that are addressed in the state’s Model Ordinance or that are required to be updated to comply with state law. Where the State’s Model Ordinance and proposed permanent legislation are generally similar, the legislation would implement the specific standards proposed in the draft permanent legislation.

The legislation also includes sections that are necessary for interim legislation including findings, the length of time the interim legislation would be in effect, and a workplan for preparing permanent legislation.

## Summary of Legislation

This legislation would make the following changes to the existing code:

### Changes to **Neighborhood Residential (NR)** zoning

Below is a summary of the proposed updated development standards for NR zones and how they would compare to the permanent legislation and state’s model code, which would become effective if interim legislation is not adopted.

	<b>Interim legislation</b>	<b>Permanent legislation</b>	<b>State Model Ordinance</b>
Uses	Multifamily uses are allowed	Same as interim	Same as interim
Density	Four units are allowed per lot except that six units are allowed per lot if within 1/4-mile walking distance of a major transit stop or at least two units on the lot are affordable.  ADUs count toward the density limits.  Density on lots with Environmentally Critical Areas (ECAs) would be reduced in portion to percentage of lot that contains ECAs	Implements a density limit of 1 unit per 1,250 square feet  Otherwise, same as interim	Same as interim legislation except ADUs would not count toward density limit
FAR	1 unit on a lot: 0.6 2 units on a lot: 0.8 3 units on a lot: 1.0 4 or more units on a lot: 1.2	Same as interim	1 unit on a lot: 0.6 2 units on a lot: 0.8 3 units on a lot: 1.0 4 units on a lot: 1.2 5 units on a lot: 1.4 6 units on a lot: 1.6
Height	32 feet plus pitched roofs	Same as interim	35 feet plus pitched roofs.

Front setback	10 feet	Same as interim	15 feet, except 10 feet for lots with a unit density of three or more.
Rear setback	10 feet, except 0 feet if the rear setback abuts an alley	Same as interim	15 feet, except 10 feet for lots with a unit density of three or more and 0 feet if the rear setback abuts an alley
Side Setback	5 feet, except 0 feet if the side setback abuts an alley	Same as interim	5 feet
Garage setback	20 feet	Same as interim	Same as interim
Lot coverage	50 percent	Same as interim	55 percent for lots with 6 units 50 percent for lots with 4 or 5 units 45 percent for lots 3 or less units

Changes to **Residential Small Lot (RSL)** zoning

- Update density limits in RSL zones to comply with the requirement to allow at least 4 units on all lots and 6 units within ¼ mile of major transit stops or if two units are affordable; similar to NR zones, density on lots with Environmentally Critical Areas (ECAs) would be reduced in portion to the percentage of lot that contains ECAs
- Increase height in RSL zones from 30 feet to 32 feet similar to NR zones
- Increase the floor area ratio (FAR) so it would be equal to the proposed FAR in NR zones on lots with 2 or more units

Changes to **Lowrise (LR)** zoning

- Update density limits in LR1 zones to comply with the requirement to allow at least 4 units on all lots and 6 units within ¼ mile of major transit stops or if two units are affordable; similar to NR zones, density on lots with Environmentally Critical Areas (ECAs) would be reduced in portion to the percentage of lot that contains ECAs
- Increase height in LR1 zones from 30 feet to 32 feet similar to NR zones
- Shift from setbacks that vary by different building types into a single set of setbacks that apply to all projects in order to comply with HB 1110 standards that development standards can't be more strict for middle housing than for single-family residences, as summarized below:
  - Front setback: 7 feet average, 5 feet minimum
  - Rear setback: 7 feet average, 5 feet minimum, except 0 feet if alley

- Side setback: 5 feet
- Shift from maximum structure widths that vary by different building types into single maximum structure width of 90 feet for LR1 and LR2 zones and 150 feet for LR3 in order to comply with HB 1110 standards that development standards for middle housing can't be more strict than for single-family residences
- Remove certain design standards relating to façade articulation and location of windows to comply with the requirements of HB 1293 that design standards must be clear and objective
- Consolidate design standards that vary by housing type into a single set of standards relating to pedestrian pathways and entrances

#### Additional changes affecting **multiple zones**

- Remove residential parking requirements for middle housing within ½ mile of major transit stops
- Modify parking space size and tandem parking requirements to comply with SB 6015 as follows:
  - Reduce minimum width of largest required parking space from 8.5 feet to 8 feet
  - Allow tandem parking to count as two spaces
- Modify standards for pedestrian access and circulation and access easements requirements so they are based on number of units rather than type of unit to comply with HB 1110 requirement that development standards for middle housing can't be more strict than for single-family residences
- Exempt middle housing from bike parking requirements to comply with HB 1110 standards that development standards for middle housing can't be more strict than for single-family residences
- Update EV charging requirements to meeting requirements in HB 1287

## Topics Not Included in Interim Legislation

In addition to complying with state law, the permanent legislation would implement a broad range of changes to improve the clarify and predictability of the code, encourage better design outcomes, and address other city goals. Below is a list of topics that are proposed to be addressed by the permanent legislation but are not included in the interim legislation:

- Consolidation of NR zones
- Rezones from NR to RSL
- Bonuses for stacked flats and low-income housing
- Corner store allowance
- Amenity Area
- Building separation requirements
- Accessory dwelling units
- Tree planting requirements and tree preservation incentives
- Allowances for stormwater features
- Parking location and screening
- Parking requirements outside of major transit areas
- Facade length
- New design standards
- Institutions
- Essential public facilities
- Adult family homes
- Numerous edits to improve clarity and accuracy