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**Creating 'neighborhoods for all'*****Changes to single-family zoning necessary for the city's future, report concludes***

Restoring the flexibility in housing types seen in Seattle's historic residential neighborhoods is critical if the city is to achieve its goals of being a diverse, equitable and sustainable place to live, according to a new report from the Seattle Planning Commission.

In the report, *Neighborhoods for All: Expanding housing opportunity in Seattle's single-family zones*, the commission highlights recent data showing the impacts of current regulations, and presents a set of strategies to allow a mix of housing types that can help neighborhoods retain characteristics of lower-density areas while welcoming a broader range of residents.

The report points out that Seattle's current zoning map shows three times more single-family land than multifamily and mixed-use land combined. As a result, during this decade of record-breaking population growth, the vast majority of new residents were absorbed in areas zoned for multifamily dwellings, while areas zoned for one house per lot showed little change, and some even lost population. At the same time, the look and feel of many areas zoned single-family are changing as modest houses are replaced by larger, more expensive ones: The average house size has increased by 1,000 square feet since 1900, the report notes.

"Our current approach to zoning has created a bifurcated city, where two-thirds of residential land is off limits to all but those with the highest incomes," said Tim Parham, chair of the Planning Commission. "The fundamental goal of this report is to encourage a return to the mix of housing and development patterns found in many of Seattle's older and most walkable neighborhoods, thereby giving more people a wider array of living options."

Seattle's neighborhoods that grew around streetcar stops as compact walkable centers incorporated a mix of commercial activity and housing, including single-family houses, duplexes, triplexes, small apartments, and corner stores. Neighborhoods such as Wallingford, Queen Anne, and the Central District retain some of the mix of housing that was allowed in many areas until the 1950's and as late as the 1970's, when downzones made it illegal to build small multi-unit dwellings in neighborhoods zoned for one house per lot.

The report also takes a hard look at Seattle's history of redlining and racially restrictive covenants and the legacy it left: Over half of Seattle's white residents own homes, while the homeownership rate among black residents is 24%, leaving areas zoned single family highly segregated. Creating more housing options at different sizes and price points can create more housing access for people of all races and incomes, the report contends.

Rather than widespread re-zoning, the report offers a robust list of solutions to allow a mix of small-scale housing, without compromising the quality of Seattle's neighborhoods. These strategies range from reducing the minimum lot size, to revising parking regulations, to simply allowing homeowners to split their existing home into a duplex or triplex. Similar actions are already being taken in Seattle's peer

cities. Portland, OR, is developing overlay zones to allow increased density where compatible, and Vancouver, B.C. anticipates passing legislation soon to allow duplexes across the city.

In addition to promoting diverse neighborhoods, the Planning Commission notes that adding low-density housing throughout Seattle is also a way to bolster small businesses, increase environmental sustainability, expand transit access and walkability, and create more homeownership opportunities. The recommended strategies would allow gradual, incremental reintroduction of historic building patterns as Seattle welcomes more residents of all incomes, ages, and races.

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### **About the Planning Commission**

The Seattle Planning Commission advises the Mayor, City Council and City departments on broad planning goals, policies and plans for the physical development of the City. The Commission's work is framed by the Comprehensive Plan and its vision for Seattle into the 21st Century, and by a commitment to engaging citizens in the work of planning for and working to reach these goals. The Seattle Planning Commission is an independent, 16-member advisory body appointed by the Mayor, City Council, and the Commission itself. The members of the Commission are volunteers who bring a wide array of expertise and a diversity of perspectives to these roles.

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