

**Testimony - Residential Infill Project****Natural resource & climate benefits of smaller, space-efficient, & attached housing.**

November 14, 2016

Dear Mayor Hales and Commissioners,

Given the critical need for responses to climate change, it is timely that Portland is now in the process of updating its zoning code for low-density residential zones that cover nearly 45% of the city's land area, where we expect to accommodate 20% of our growth over the next 20 years. On behalf of local, state and regional organizations focused on waste reduction and greenhouse gas emissions, we encourage you to support zoning reforms that will steer home production towards compact, attached housing types with lower per capita carbon footprints than the large, detached, single-family homes predominantly being built today.

Whereas homes in high-density mixed-use zones tend already to be small and attached, the opposite is happening in single-dwelling neighborhood settings, where average new home sizes are back up to pre-recession levels of 2,500 square feet - even as average household sizes are at record lows and continuing to decline. This represents a major obstacle to achievement of Portland's stated climate action goals.<sup>1</sup>

Per recent Oregon DEQ research, smaller and attached housing types reduce waste and yield significantly smaller carbon footprints. Specifically:

- Of 30 material reduction and reuse practices evaluated, reducing home size and multi-family living achieved the largest greenhouse gas reductions, and significant reductions in other impact categories.
- The life cycle carbon impact of a code-built 1,600 square foot house is less than that of a 2,200 square foot home built to minimum green certification standards.
- As the house gets smaller and/or attached, the carbon reduction benefits continue to grow. For instance reducing home size by 50% results in a projected 36% reduction in lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions."

Although the market will always create some larger homes, we support code changes that allow for (and encourage) more environmentally-friendly alternatives, not penalize them. Specifically, we join Portland for Everyone, most members of the Residential Infill Project SAC, and Oregon ON, the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, and others, in calling on Portland to adopt zoning reforms that both reduce the scale of residential buildings *and* open the door to alternative development configurations within them, including:

- Allowing 2 Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) on a single residential lot,
- Allowing up to 3 units within the envelope of a typical single family home (and a 4<sup>th</sup> in exchange for long-term affordability and accessibility);

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<sup>1</sup> Climate Action Plan, Bureau of Planning & Sustainability, City of Portland, 2015  
<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/531994>



- Making it easier to preserve and adapt existing housing stock by adding a backyard cottage, internally dividing a home into 2 or more units, and/or offering density bonuses for preservation and adaptation.
- Offering density bonuses for smaller attached townhomes in the R2.5 zone;
- Amending the 'cottage cluster zoning' to provide a density bonus in exchange for smaller homes in subdivisions or planned developments.
- Supporting the elimination of on-site parking requirements for homes on 'narrow lots' and ADUs.

We recognize that these changes would shift the way our zoning code supports neighborhood compatibility of new development: by simultaneously tightening regulations on massing and setbacks while loosening up rules on exactly what happens within the building's envelope, in terms of numbers of units. But ***if Portland wants to reduce climate impacts and waste per person in the residential housing sector, this is exactly the direction we need to be heading.***

Lastly, we should also recognize the less immediately-quantifiable environmental, climate, and social benefits of locating more, smaller homes in existing cities and neighborhoods, rather than sprawling out.

- Allowing all of Portland's neighborhoods to be built under zoning that allows them to become walkable, bikeable, and transit-enabled is a critical step towards reducing VMT per resident over the long term.
- Allowing more affordable, smaller housing options in currently well-connected neighborhoods simultaneously eliminates or reduces both housing and transportation cost burdens on middle- and lower-income residents.
- Allowing flexible site plans and reducing total building footprints can actively help preserve and enhance Portland's tree canopy.

Signed,

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