



Portland Bureau of Planning & Sustainability  
1900 SW 4th Ave, Suite 701  
Portland, OR 97204  
Attn: Residential Infill Project staff

November 9, 2017

Dear Portland city staff and decision-makers,

Portland for Everyone, a coalition of individuals, affordable housing advocates, community-based, transportation, and environmental organizations, neighborhoods, and local businesses, came together last year to advocate for those land use changes that will support abundant, diverse, and affordable housing options for Portland residents.

We have reviewed the Residential Infill Project Discussion Draft, with one main question in mind: *“Will this plan meaningfully expand housing options and increase affordability for middle- and low-income Portlanders in every neighborhood?”*

The Discussion Draft represents a historic step toward re-legalizing the diverse housing types that helped create Portland’s most walkable neighborhoods. We recommend the following improvements to the draft to ensure that the worthy goals of this project will be successfully met:

- **Allow the “housing opportunity” provisions in all areas of the city** to improve equity outcomes and encourage the creation of additional walking scale neighborhoods.
- **Make the affordable housing incentives workable** to increase the likelihood that they will be utilized.
- **Allow internal conversion of existing houses into multiple units in all areas**, and provide additional incentives for housing preservation.
- **Create a true cottage cluster code** that will encourage the development of smaller, more affordable homes.
- **Rezone all historically narrow lots from R5 to R2.5**, with design improvements, to share land costs and provide housing options that more families can afford.

By incorporating the feedback that Portland for Everyone has gathered from our coalition members and from the community, we believe the City can seize this historic opportunity to help alleviate the chronic suffering of tens of thousands of residents, allow flexible options for families as their circumstances change over time, and give Portlanders a chance to grow up - or grow old - without having to leave their neighborhood.

Thank you for considering our feedback. We look forward to engaging further on this critical project, and we sincerely thank staff and decision-makers for their tireless work on it.

### **What the Residential Infill Project Discussion Draft does well:**

*Expand access to housing opportunity.* We support the proposal's inclusive definition of areas of "opportunity." First, that "opportunity" includes the ability to walk to school, neighborhood stores, a park, or employment opportunities, as well as being within ¼ mile of transit. Second, it does not freeze "opportunity" areas based on today's transit service or sidewalks; this is a long-range plan that must be accompanied by complementary infrastructure investments throughout the city. Indeed, supportive densities usually predate frequent transit and corner stores, not the reverse.

*Smaller housing options (duplexes, triplexes, cottages, multiple ADUs).* Providing the opportunity for smaller housing options: allows families of all sizes and ages to live in the same neighborhoods; enables aging in community; provides opportunities for teachers, first responders, and other middle-income people to live in the neighborhoods they serve; and supports population densities necessary to foster walkable neighborhoods and pedestrian-oriented commercial districts – all within residential buildings *smaller* than those allowed under current code. These measures also help ensure more resource- and energy-efficient homes, enhance the walking experience, and provide the opportunity for more trees and vegetation. Improvements to the R2.5 zone, in particular, will encourage more efficient use of urban residential land while complementing the visual appearance of existing neighborhoods.

*Preservation and adaptive reuse strategies.* Portland's independent economic analysis demonstrates that the proposed reduction in house scale will also reduce the number of demolitions of single-family homes, even as allowing more duplexes increases citywide unit count. The Project provides flexibility in some areas to preserve existing houses by increasing possibilities for reinvestment and renovation through internal conversion to smaller units, thereby serving families of all sizes, ages, and configurations. The Residential Infill Project supports "*gentle infill*": incremental changes to meet our changing housing needs, integrated into the fabric of existing neighborhoods.

### **How the Residential Infill Project Discussion Draft can be better:**

#### *Scale of Houses*

We support capping home sizes to be more compatible with neighborhoods and with Portlanders' housing needs. Changes we recommend include:

- **FAR for duplexes.** Investigate development of new duplexes in Portland and comparable cities/markets, and consider whether or not a small increase in FAR for duplexes may make them more likely to be built than single-dwelling homes.
- **Measuring height.** Consider allowing height of shed roofs to be measured from the mid-point of the shed if the low point of the shed roof is closest to the relevant property line, and if the highest point of the shed is at least twice the legal setback from another site property line.

#### *Housing Opportunity*

The housing choices included in the current "Housing Opportunity Overlay" (Recommendations 5-8) should be allowed in all neighborhoods, not just the proposed Housing Opportunity Overlay Zone. In its current form, this overlay is exclusionary, denying most of East Portland and other neighborhoods the benefits of density needed to support transit access, walkable neighborhoods, and greater housing choices for seniors, young families, and other low- to moderate-income households. East Portland is also

among the most affordable areas of our city at this time. The best way to create homeownership opportunities for households at/below 80% MFI would be to allow smaller housing options, coupled with incentives for affordability, in all neighborhoods--but particularly those where land and property values have not yet skyrocketed.

We appreciate the City's concern that application of the overlay could increase development pressure in areas where people are vulnerable to displacement. We don't share that concern when a mere 10% of new development on corner lots in single-family zones currently results in a duplex. If the City's concern is valid, however, it will be a result of scarcity—not enough land within the 'a' overlay to meet the demand. There is an easy solution: Increase the amount of land zoned for Housing Opportunity. If all neighborhoods citywide were allowed the modest proposed increase of one unit per lot, no area would receive too much development pressure.

Smaller housing types should also be allowed in areas where ROW infrastructure is *not* up to city standards. As proposed, much of many neighborhoods with incomplete streets would be excluded from the 'a' overlay options. So new single family homes could still be built there (and build half street improvements or pay an in-lieu fee), but the same option would not be available for alternative housing types. We should allow the full range of housing options in these neighborhoods too. To this end, we recommend the following changes:

- **Remove the current 'a' overlay.** Allow all housing types, affordable housing bonuses, and incentives for historic preservation and adaptive reuse currently allowed in 'a' everywhere. Instead:
  - **Transit or 't' overlay:** In neighborhood areas that are a quarter mile or less from frequent bus service as defined in the current parking code, or a half mile or less from high capacity transit, eliminate on-site parking requirements.<sup>1</sup>
  - **Anti-displacement or 'a' overlay or another anti-displacement strategy:** In neighborhood areas that have been identified as being vulnerable to displacement, identify additional anti-displacement and/or affordable housing incentives or requirements. Seek input from the the Anti-Displacement Coalition on citywide measures specifically tailored towards vulnerable populations, as outlined in Portland's recently adopted Comprehensive Plan.
- **Expand incentives for adaptive reuse:** In addition to allowing incentives for preservation and conversion of older housing stock everywhere:
  - *Encourage preservation & adaptation* of homes at least ten years old by allowing them to be internally divided into up to four units.
  - *For historically significant homes:* Strengthen and expand application of 33.445.610.C.2 to more homes, which allows up to one dwelling unit for each 1,000 square feet of site area. Consider no maximum density for historic homes.
  - *For all adaptive reuse projects:* Allow two detached ADUs to be attached to each other, rather than requiring three detached structures. Allow an internal ADU to exceed 800 square feet if it does not exceed one full floor or basement or has three or more

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<sup>1</sup> We call to attention to this benchmark from Portland-based transit consultant Jarrett Walker: "We generally assume that 400m is a rough upper bound for slow local-stop service, and that for rapid-transit (usually rail) we can expect people to walk up to 1000m or so." <http://humantransit.org/2011/04/basics-walking-distance-to-transit.html>,

and to this one from Puget Sound Regional Council "Research shows that riders will typically walk up to ½ mile to access high-capacity transit and ¼ mile or more to access bus transit." <https://www.psrc.org/sites/default/files/tsdluguidancepaper.pdf>

bedrooms. Keep provisions that afford greater site and FAR flexibility and that reduce or remove parking minimums.

- **Make the affordable housing bonus useable:** The current threshold - 100% of units on a site to qualify for a bonus - is too high. Reinstating a workable bonus scheme would make the development of affordable homes far more feasible for any developer, including non-profits such as Habitat for Humanity, Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, or Proud Ground. The bonus should also adequately incent private developers to opt in, thereby encouraging, not stifling, more of the beneficial non-profit/private partnerships being leveraged effectively in Portland today. We recommend adjusting the affordable housing bonus structure to:
  - Allow bonus units [and/or increased FAR] for providing one or more affordable units (up to 80 percent of area Median Family Income).
  - Provide increased FAR for family-sized (2+ bedroom) units utilizing this bonus.
- **Cottage cluster code.** We support staff's recommendation to allow cottage cluster developments on all suitable neighborhood sites. However, the current proposal does not produce a development type reflective of cottage clusters as they are known. Alter the proposal to:
  - Draw on cluster codes successfully implemented in other places<sup>2</sup> with key features like reduced home sizes, homes oriented toward shared courtyards, and parking located toward the periphery (if any).
  - Allow, by right, cottage cluster developments that meet these rules.
  - Allow a subdivision approach for cottage clusters to enable fee-simple ownership.
  - Give a density bonus in exchange for the provision of more, smaller homes.
  - Provide an additional density bonus in exchange for fully accessible homes.

#### *Narrow Lots*

Development of narrow lot homes represents a unique opportunity to share the cost of land among multiple homes, supporting the city's stated goal of providing more housing options, including smaller homes at purchase prices that more families can afford. This strategy has been shown to provide deeper affordability than typical single-dwelling homes when coupled with affordable homeownership programs. We support provisions that bring development on historically platted narrow lots into better alignment with design in current neighborhoods. We also support improvements and clarifications to the R2.5 zone, especially allowing property line adjustments that can help preserve existing housing while adding more, smaller homes. However, to expand space-efficient and more affordable housing options to all parts of the city, we recommend:

- **Rezone all historically narrow lots from R5 to R2.5.** This flows naturally from an expansion/elimination of the currently proposed 'a' overlay.
- **Alley access.** Many alleys are unimproved, and the cost of grading and paving an alley may be prohibitive and/or access may prove challenging to design and navigate successfully. In these cases, allow exceptions to alley access requirements.

#### *Other Recommendations*

- **Density calculations.** Calculate density before subtracting for ROW dedication, reflecting the fact that a wider sidewalk and planter strip affect the visual experience of a street in much the

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<sup>2</sup> Here is one example from the City of Langley prepared by the Cottage Company: <http://www.oregon.gov/LCD/TGM/docs/SpaceEfficientHousingReport.pdf> (p. 68-69); Here is another from Grants Pass: <https://www.grantspassoregon.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4685> (section 18.300). NB: Both of these examples display slightly lower densities than might be desirable for more urban Portland infill.

same way that a larger yard would. This is consistent with the city's current proposal for multi-dwelling zones.

- **Tree preservation.** A healthy urban tree canopy and offering smaller, discreet, and more flexible housing options go hand in hand. Design flexible code provisions that incentivize saving trees and creating less impervious surface. These incentives could include bonus units, parking requirement changes, and flexibility in building siting and setbacks, among others.
- **Fee-simple ownership options.** Rewrite provisions for mid-block duplexes and corner triplexes (or 4-plexes with a bonus) to mimic the current corner duplex code, which allows each unit its own lot, and allows units to be owned separately.

### **How these changes will help better meet Portland residents' housing needs:**

Portlanders share a desire for our city to be a place where all are welcome and everyone's interests matter, regardless of background, income, or age, whether renter or homeowner. An essential part of achieving this goal is to provide a wide array of housing options throughout our community.

The Residential Infill Project is long overdue, as Portland faces a housing crisis and increasingly large areas of our city have become unaffordable for middle- and lower-income residents. A successful Residential Infill Project will open all our neighborhoods to a wider range of housing options that are harmonious with surrounding homes.

A choice among downtown high-rises, five-story apartment buildings along certain corridors, and larger single-family homes misses the housing needs of many Portlanders. The majority of residential land in Portland is zoned to effectively leave out the young couple who has not yet started a family, the 70-something widow, and the single parent with 1 or 2 children. For young adults starting out on their own, saddled with college debt, smaller, flexible housing options like ADUs and duplexes might put first-time homeownership within reach. For Baby Boomers, the flexibility to downsize into retirement could yield senior-friendly options within existing communities, like an accessibly-built granny cottage or a flat within a larger home.

It is time to bring our zoning code into line with the needs of our families - today and tomorrow. Almost 2/3 of Portland households consist of 1-2 persons, and both Millennials and Baby Boomers are seeking more affordable, more accessible, and smaller housing options. The "Housing Choice" portion of the Residential Infill Project Discussion Draft would re-legalize some of these, including duplexes, triplexes, rowhouses, accessory dwellings, and cottage clusters. Diversity in housing options can be especially important for families of color, helping to address historic and long-term inequities that have kept generation after generation from achieving homeownership.

Allowing more compact, diverse housing types in all residential neighborhoods serves the quickly-growing desire for walkable, less-auto-dependent urban and main street living, while helping meet Portland's climate and sustainability goals. Smaller, residential-scale housing allows more tree canopy. And, smaller housing types are more affordable to construct per square foot than higher density forms of multi-family housing that require elevators, sprinkler systems, and adherence to commercial building codes. Finally, these housing options support population densities necessary to foster vibrant, walkable neighborhoods - as evidenced by older Portland neighborhoods built out with a mix of such housing types.

The October 2017 Project Discussion Draft is heading in the right direction by increasing housing choices and scaling down allowable home sizes. Adopting the key changes outlined above will greatly improve the proposal's ability to deliver more flexible and affordable housing options to Portlanders.