



# City of Olympia | Capital of Washington State

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**DATE:** October 30, 2013  
**TO:** Olympia Planning Commission  
**FROM:** Todd Stamm, Principal Planner *TS*  
**SUBJECT:** High Density Building Height Amendment (File 13-0118)

The proposal to change building height limits in the High Density Corridor zones has generated a number of questions from members of the Commission. When the public hearing was continued from October 21 to November 4, the staff offered to respond to questions in the intervening period. This memorandum addresses paraphrased versions of questions submitted by Commission members.

Are “mezzanines” considered “stories” for purposes of the step-back requirement?

No. The development code has substantially the same definition of ‘story’ as the building code. (Not identical only when out-of-step in amendment timing.) Mezzanines and similar partial floors within buildings are generally not ‘stories’ for purposes of either code.

Is the proposed 35-foot building height change limited to property within 100 feet of single-family home sites?

Yes. The code already has this height limit for HDC property near ‘single-family zones.’ The proposal would extend the same protection to single-family homes outside these zones.

Would any first-floor setbacks be changed?

No. The proposal would only change upper floor setbacks, known as ‘step-backs.’

Are single-family homes within HDC zones currently limited?

No, single-family homes are permitted uses in these and all land use zones of Olympia, except Industrial.

Where is the starting point for the 100-foot measure?

Generally a property line. The height limit applies within 100 feet of the ‘site’ which is the lot or parcel surrounding a single-family home, not just the building.

Is the staff proposing this change for PO/RM and GC zones as well?

No. The current (pre-December-2012) regulations in these zones are similar to the HDC zones. At the August briefing the Commission indicated a desire to consider including these areas, so notice of this possibility was provided to owners of those properties to avoid needing to reopen the hearing if the Commission wanted to include them in its recommendation. The Commission could propose the same or different provisions for these zones, or no changes at all.

Why does the Comprehensive Plan describe the vision for the City in terms of ‘stories’ while the zoning code limits are in ‘heights’?

The Plan is a general guide for the community's future - 'stories' may have been selected as simply an easy way to describe that vision. Until about ten years ago the zoning code included both story and height limits for most zones. A code amendment led to the Commission recommending and the City Council approving removing the stories limits from mixed use zones but retaining them in residential zones. More detailed information regarding the reasons for that amendment could be provided on request.

How are building heights measured?

The zoning code reflects the building code measurement of building height. In general this is from the ground to the 'midpoint' between top and bottom of the primary roof.

Does the step-back requirement apply to all sides of a building?

No. Like other setbacks, these upper floor step-backs are only required on the side in question. (Thus the 'wedding cake' analogy is not really accurate - maybe 'staircase' is better.)

What buildings in the HDC zones are not subject to the 'along public street' step-back provision?

Most new buildings in these zones are along public streets. However some existing buildings and a few new ones are on lots accessed by private streets or driveways. For example, Limited Lane northeast of the intersection of Harrison Avenue and Cooper Point Road is a private street.

Of the estimated 50 homes related to the PO/RM, GC and HDC zones, how many are in the HDC areas?

Due to the aggregation of mapping information a specific answer is difficult, but it appears that slightly more than half of the homes are associated with HDC zones.

Does the proposal extend to shared-wall housing like townhouses, duplexes, and apartments; and how many of these are in these areas?

No, the proposed new height limit is only near detached single-family homes. City staff does not have a specific estimate of these types of housing, but could prepare one if needed by the Commission. There are probably a few hundred such units on dozens of sites.

Would the limitations regarding development near single-family homesites continue if the home is removed or converted to commercial use?

No, the limit is only applicable to existing homes. In other words height limits would depend on use of the adjacent property.

Why was 100-feet selected for the height limitation distance?

This distance was drawn from current code provision limiting the height of buildings near single-family zoning districts and reflects the general depth of a single-family lot. The Commission may conclude that a different distance is more appropriate for the issue at hand.

Why is protecting single-family homes being proposed in these 'high-density' areas?

Single-family home owners and residents of such areas have an expectation that City regulations will minimize harm to their land uses similar to those residing in areas designated for low-density development. Of course, there is also an expectation that larger buildings will be built in these higher density areas.

Was it the Council's intent to protect homes or neighborhoods?

The mindset of a group is difficult to ascertain. The interim regulation is related specifically to individual homes. Ordinance 6820 describes the reasoning agreed to by the Council.

Please provide a 'visual design example.'

Such an example is being prepared and will be presented at the next meeting. Note that this will probably be two-dimensional representation.

Have any projects been proposed where Ordinance 6820 was applicable?

Not to date. Staff has discussed this regulation with one or more property owners, but no applications have been received.

Has most of the conversion of the single-family homes in the 4<sup>th</sup> and State area been under 'current code'?

Conversion of this area from residential to commercial use has been occurring for decades. However, we do not have information at-hand indicating whether 'most' are in recent years.

This proposal includes the height limit within 100-feet of a single-family home, and a change to the step-back requirement. Please explain the latter.

Pre-December-2012 regulations required that in the HDC zones building floors above the third floor be setback (i.e., stepped back) an extra eight feet where adjacent to a public street or residential zone. The proposal would change this to require the extra setback at the third floor and extend it to sites adjacent to existing single-family homes. It would also require 8 more feet of setback at the fifth floor, and 8 more feet at the 7<sup>th</sup> floor, etc.

