

Olympia Planning Commission

September 15, 2025

Olympia City Council
PO Box 1967 Olympia
WA 98507-1967

SUBJECT: Middle Housing Code Amendments

Dear Mayor Payne and Councilmembers:

The Planning Commission recommends approval, with revisions, of the Middle Housing Code Amendments. The Planning Commission appreciates the effort and time that City of Olympia Staff have invested in engaging with the Planning Commission. The Commission had a briefing on the Middle Housing Code Amendments on April 21, 2025. A public hearing was conducted on August 18, 2025. Commission deliberations were conducted beginning on the meeting on August 18, 2025 and completed at the meeting on September 15, 2025.

After completing deliberations, the Commission voted to recommend approval of the Middle Housing Code Amendments with the following revisions:

- Strike the design review requirement proposed under OMC 18.100.060(A)(8) on page 87 of the August 5, 2025 public hearing draft. The Commission believes that by removing this design review requirement that a potential barrier to development will be removed and that permitting of single family houses and middle housing homes will be streamlined. Issues of compatibility will be addressed by the application of other zoning standards, such as setbacks, lot coverages, and maximum building heights.
- Consider increasing the maximum building height in most lower density residential zones from 35 feet to 40 feet. Two of the six residential lower density zoning districts already allow a maximum building height of 40 feet. This change could encourage construction that builds up instead of out, which may encourage a higher degree of retention of yard and garden areas. An additional benefit is that it would also allow for more traditional roof forms to achieve a full three stories. The current 35 foot maximum building height makes it challenging to achieve three stories without flat roofs, or roofs with a lower pitch.
- Update rear setbacks for structures from the proposed 5' to 10' while maintaining the proposed 5' rear setbacks for ADUs. Maintain setback regulations for accessory structures. This proposed change was in response to concerns regarding the combination of height increases and reduced rear yard setbacks. As detached ADUs are currently limited to a height of 24' the Commission thought it reasonable keep the ADU setback at 5'.
- The Commission notices that Manufactured or Mobile Home Parks have a minimum site size requirement of 5 acres in size (OMC 18.04.060(P)). The Commission recommends that the minimum site size be reduced, potentially as small as 1 or 1.5 acres in size, or eliminated.

- We recommend adopting statutory additions as outlined in staff request *OPC Memo REQUEST RECOMMENDATION 09122025.pdf*.

Additional considerations:

- Design review risks increasing costs and delaying housing production. In addition to the revision to the proposed design review requirements above, the Planning Commission suggests that the City should evaluate the benefits and costs of the remaining design review requirements for middle housing which still apply in design review districts – including some of the older neighborhoods. Reducing uncertainty in, or further removing, the design review process could further reduce the cost and time of approving housing.
- The Planning Commission urges the city to update the Olympia Engineering Design & Development Standards (EDDS) to reduce barriers and support middle housing similarly to this zoning ordinances update. For example, Chapter 2.040 Street and Transportation Requirements currently has a series of exemptions related to building type, that could be expanding similarly to this ordinance to provide exemptions for middle housing (a development of 6 or fewer units).

Dissent:

Approval of this recommendation and the proposed Middle Housing Code Amendments was not unanimous, with one Commissioner opposed. The Planning Commissioner was supportive of the proposed code with revisions with the exception of the reduced rear setbacks on abutting properties.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregory R. Quetin".

Greg Quetin
Chair