

City of Olympia

Middle Housing Survey

Summary & How Input is Being Used

Survey Open: April 1 - May 18, 2025

Webpage Visitors: 819

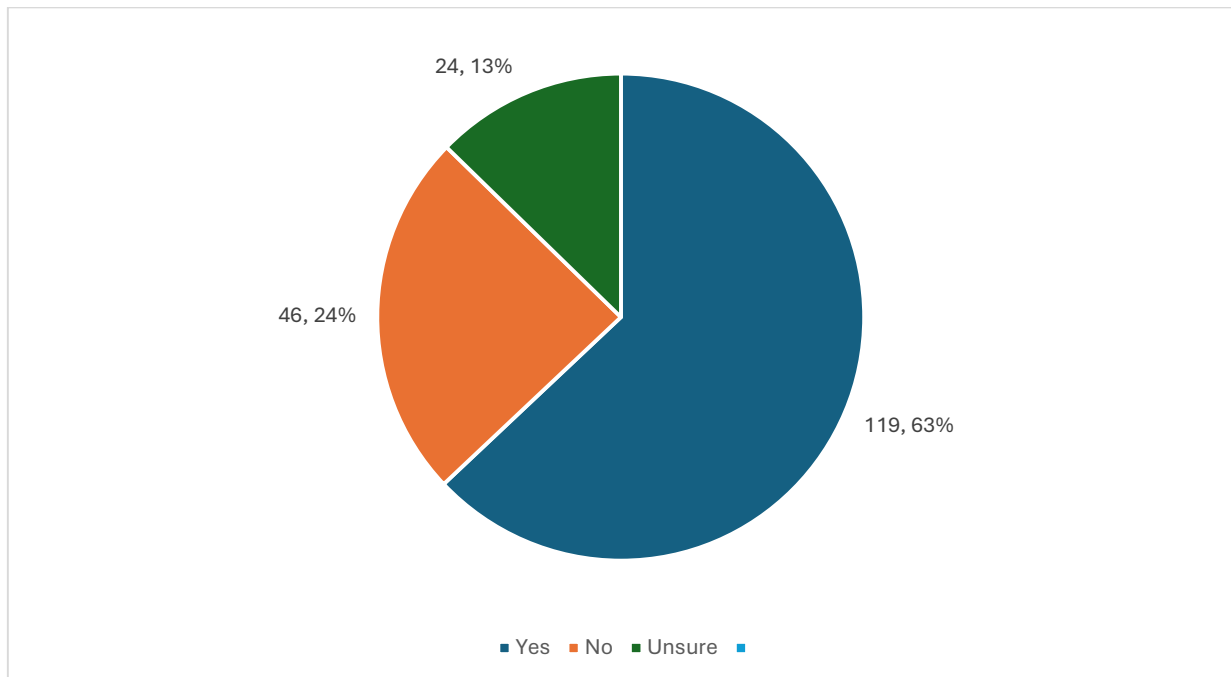
Survey Contributors: 189

Middle Housing Survey

The survey was one of several ways the City sought public comment and feedback on proposed code amendments to address new housing requirements in state law. The questions focused in on the parts of the draft where there is discretion on how to address those requirements. Input is considered as revisions are made to the first draft, prior to the public hearing.

This summary shares a high level overview of the comments received and a summary of how the input is being used. For a more detailed summary of all comments received, please visit olympiawa.gov/middlehousing.

1. Are there any housing types that you don't typically see in Olympia that you would like to see more of here?



Summary of responses from those who replied Yes:

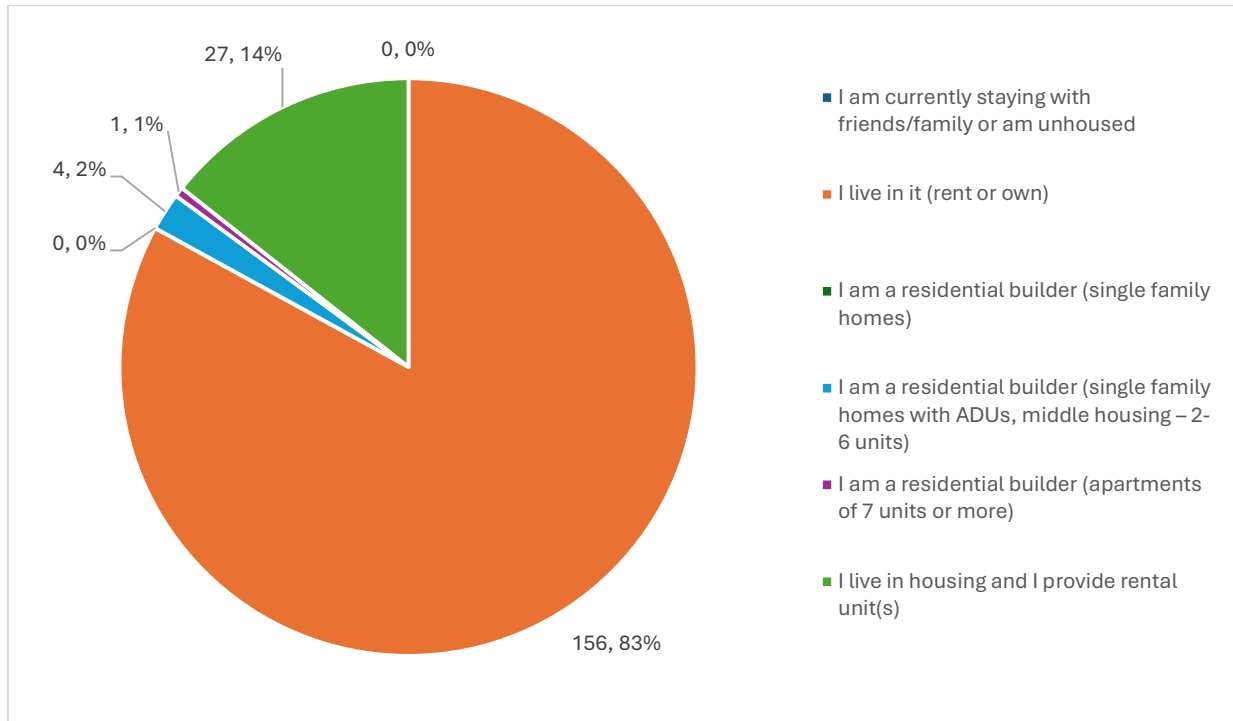
A wide variety of housing types were suggested by those who responded yes. These included Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), attached, detached, and interior space conversions; shared housing options and cooperative housing; cottage housing; small scale multi-unit buildings such as duplexes, triplexes, and four-plexes; row houses and townhomes; courtyard housing; affordable and low-income housing; workforce housing; manufactured/modular/prefab housing; mixed-use and high density housing; housing with ownership options; single family homes; single room occupancy; apartments; brownstones; condominiums; Tiny Houses on Wheels and park models; rent-controlled apartments.

How is this input being used:

These responses show support for a wide variety of housing types, most of which are specifically addressed in this proposal. While most of these housing types are already allowed in all or most of the city, the proposed amendments will make addition of ADUs and multiple unit buildings with 2-6 units more likely to be constructed in residential areas. Single family homes are also allowed and will likely be the primary form of development in most parts of the City and urban growth areas.

No specific modifications to the draft were made in response to these comments. However, staff is researching increased opportunities for Park Models (Park Model Recreational Vehicles) and certain types of Tiny Houses on Wheels. These would be for structures that are licensed through the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries.

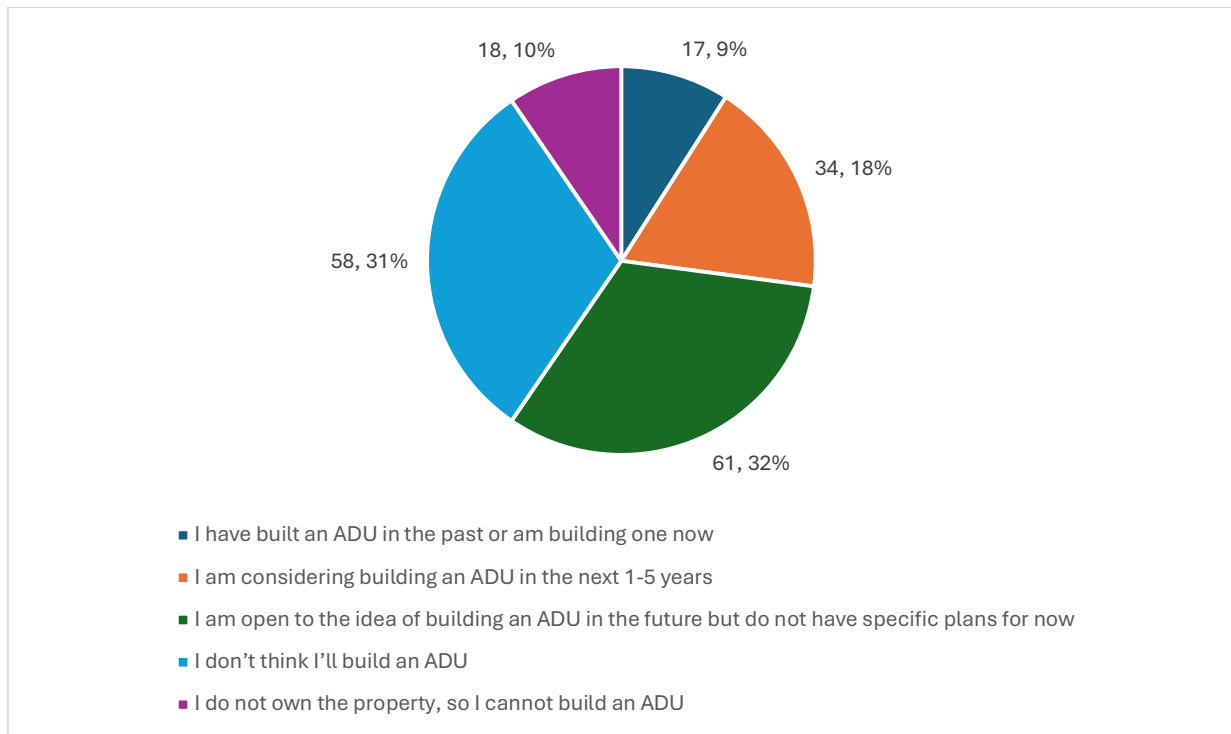
2. What role do you currently play in housing?

**How is this input being used:**

This question was asked for the purposes of getting a better understanding of the role survey respondents have with housing. We wanted to know if we were hearing from people who are also residential builders, from those who have rental units/are landlords, or from people who are currently unhoused.

No specific changes were made to the public hearing draft based on responses to this question.

3. Which option best describes you/your situation regarding Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU)?

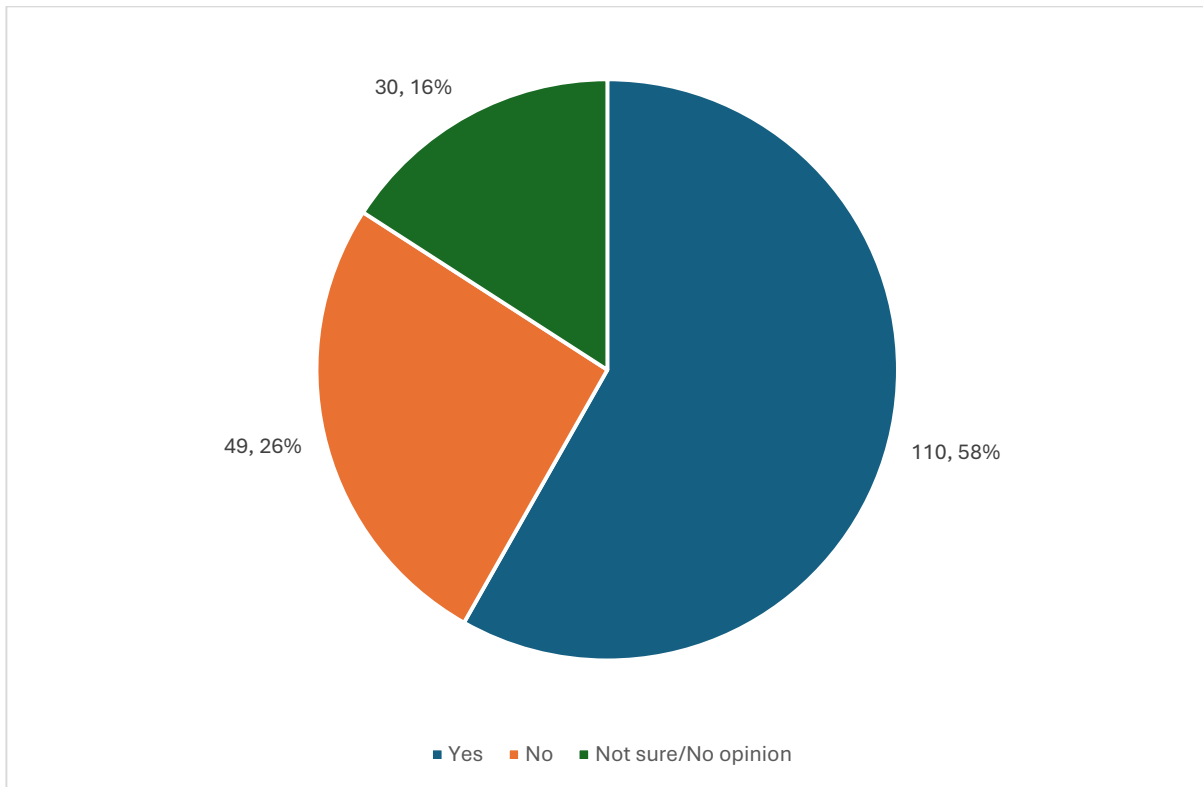


How is this input being used:

This question was asked to gauge the interest of community members in regard to building an ADU in the future. 18% of survey respondents indicated an interest in building an ADU in the next 1-5 years and 32% said they are open to the idea but do not currently have specific plans. 31% indicated they do not think they will build an ADU in the future. 10% indicated they do not own property so cannot build an ADU. The lowest percentage of respondents, at 9%, indicated they had or were in the process of building an ADU.

No specific changes were made to the draft in response to these responses.

4. Technically, the state law does not include Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in its definition of middle housing. In this draft, ADUs do count toward the total number of units allowed. Do you agree that ADUs should count toward the maximum number of units allowed per lot?



How is this input being used:

This question was asked to help assess the community's perspective on whether or not ADUs should count toward the "unit lot density" (the total number of units allowed on a lot, regardless of lot size). 58% of survey respondents support counting ADUs toward the total number of units allowed on a lot. This is consistent with the way the first draft was written.

This provision remains unchanged in the public hearing draft code language.

5. Summary of responses about ADUs as they relate to Middle Housing:

Good for smaller households; incentivize ADUs; update infill design guidelines; work to bring down costs of building ADUs; minimize impacts to neighbors and neighborhoods; allow for ownership opportunities; allow those on septic systems to add ADUs; remove setbacks; keep setbacks; allow small commercial uses in ADUs; don't allow new ADUs to be used for short term rentals; don't rely on ADUs to meet housing needs – incentive duplexes and other middle housing types; allow flexibility for ADU size or tie it to the size of the lot or the house; address impervious and hard surfaces; don't count them toward the unit lot density; allow where there is on street parking and sidewalks to transit; reconsider impact fees; they should have cheaper connection fees; consider tax breaks for ADUs (similar to multifamily tax exemptions offered by the city); consider impacts to property values; physical site considerations should be made for stormwater issues; should be located in areas supported by parks and community spaces and restaurants; they should not be allowed to be built on property lines; they expand housing options; still must protect the environment; they should be small and only 1 story to help maintain privacy of neighboring properties; consider reducing or eliminating development fees for a period of time to encourage construction of them; they won't solve the housing problems; allow lot splits for ownership opportunities; too many code requirements and costs are in place – make them easier to build; don't count them toward impervious surface limits; offer more ADU plans; protect rural and resource areas outside of urban growth areas by allowing more ADUs; allow them to be larger than 1,000 sq ft in size; they shouldn't be detached from the house or sold separately; more housing equals cheaper housing; consider allowing Park Model RVs and Tiny Houses on Wheels (like Port Townsend and Portland); reduce impact fees; limit number allowed by the size of the lot; don't require fire sprinklers in ADUs; don't require a full kitchen; streamline the permitting process; one of the least disruptive ways to add homes; offer relief on impact fees for ADUs that convert existing space into a new unit; they still rent for too much money; don't allow them on single family residential properties.

How is this input being used:

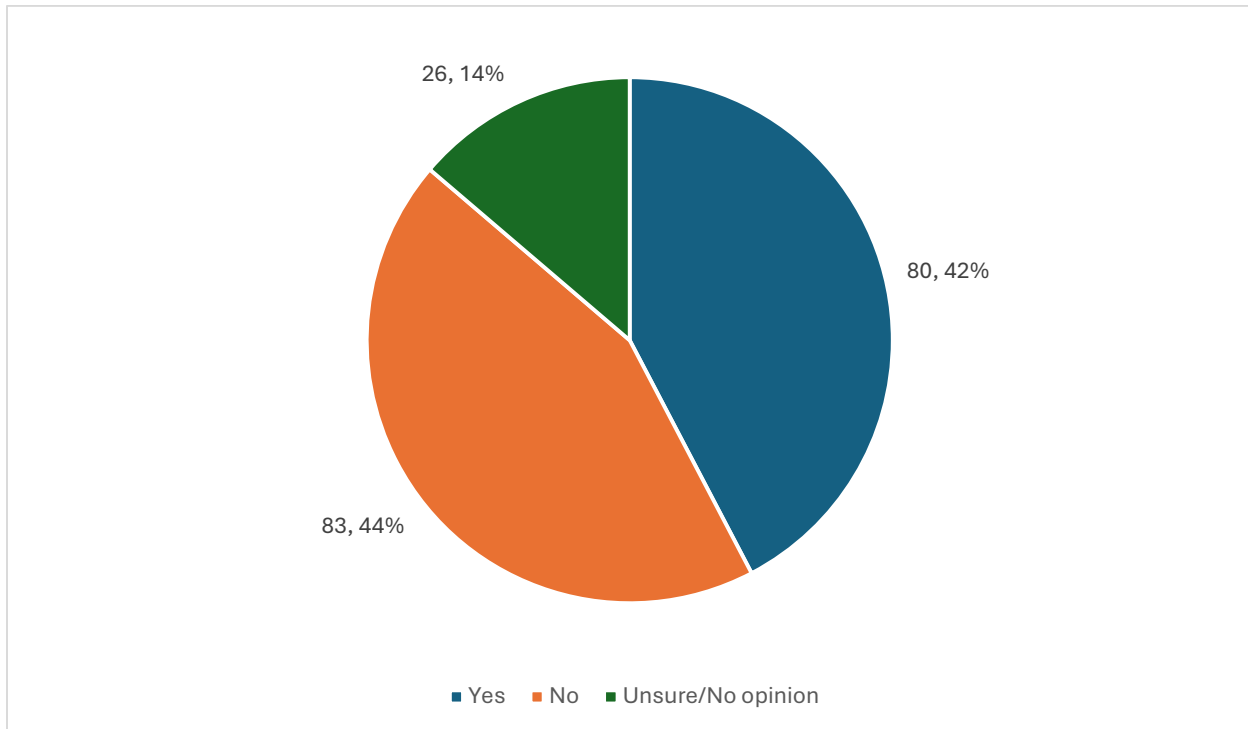
There are mixed responses to consider here. The most common responses were that ADUs should be encouraged and incentivized, while also looking for opportunities to reduce the costs of building them. Of those who mentioned short term rentals, they wanted new ADUs to be used for long term housing, not vacation rentals.

In the public hearing draft, the proposal is to keep the maximum size at 1,000 sq ft. Opportunities for home ownership of the ADUs will exist, either by completing a unit lot subdivision or condominium process. ADUs will have a lower impact fee assessment than a single family home (reduced by 50% or more). Outside of these code amendments proposed, City staff are working to provide 5 detached ADU plans (in a variety of sizes from studio to 2-bedroom) that will be pre-approved under the current building codes, which can result in savings to the property owners in time and money at the permitting stage.

ADU Size

Based on recently passed Washington laws, cities must allow an ADU to be at least 1,000 square feet in size. Olympia's draft code proposes increasing the maximum size of an ADU from 850 sq. ft. to 1,000 sq. ft to meet state law.

6. Do you think the City should allow ADUs to be larger than 1,000 sq. ft. in size?



How is this input being used:

This question was asked to help determine whether or not ADUs should have a maximum size included in the code. Under the new requirements, we must allow 2 ADUs per lot and each ADU can be up to 1,000 sq. ft. in gross floor area. 1,000 square feet is larger than many of the older homes within the City, although newer homes are typically much larger. There are fewer and fewer differences between housing types than there used to be. The main difference between ADUs and other housing types currently is that ADUs have a maximum size limit and pay reduced impact fees. 44% of respondents did not think ADUs should be allowed to be larger than 1,000 sq ft; 42% said they should be allowed to be larger, and 14% were unsure or had not opinion.

In the public hearing draft, staff proposes to limit the maximum size of ADUs at 1,000 sq. ft.

7. Summary of responses about ADU size:

Some felt that large ADUs are an inefficient use of space better used for multifamily housing while others supported allowing larger ADUs overall or in some instances. Some mentioned the need to retain pervious surfaces on lots and to consider placement, design, and neighborhood compatibility issues. Some respondents offered suggestions for when ADUs could be larger than 1,000 sq. ft., for example based on the size of the lot or the size of the existing home. Some did not support the larger size or the addition of an additional ADU being allowed. Some wanted ADUs limited to 1 story while other thought the should be allowed to be as tall as the maximum building height allowed in the zoning district and not limited to 1 or 2 stories. One suggested removing the size cap but incentivizing smaller units. Some people suggested larger ADUs to accommodate families. Some suggested increasing the size (e.g. 1,200

sq. ft.) for units that are 2 stories. There was some support for allowing tiny homes as ADUs. Some mentions included larger sizes helping to accommodate ADA-accessible spaces; being subordinate to the primary house; fitting in with the neighborhoods; letting the market decide the size; having a footprint limit instead of a size limit; offering suggestions for other size limits.

How is this input being used:

There were those who favored allowing larger ADUs and those who did not want the size increased at all. Some suggested allowing an increase in size as long as the ground floor level (or “footprint” were kept smaller, or if the existing house was large, or if the property were large. Some did not want ADUs to be larger than 1 story while others thought they should be allowed to be as tall as other housing types in the same zoning district.

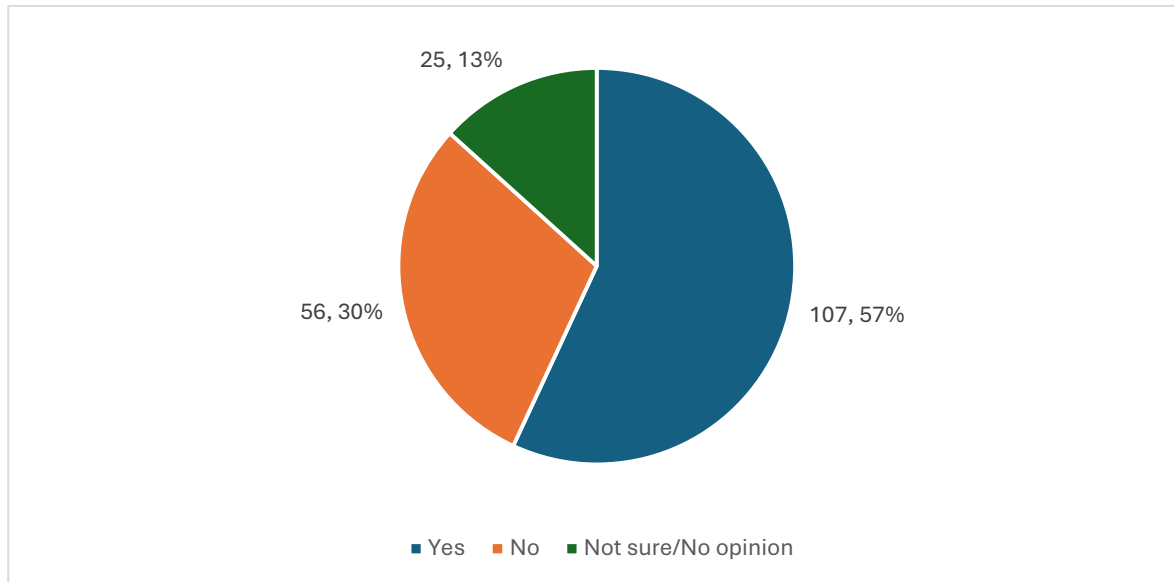
Staff proposes to keep the maximum size of 1,000 sq. ft., and the maximum height of 24 feet, in most cases. A modification was added to allow an exception for lots with an existing home of 1,200 square feet or less in size, to allow the existing home to become the ADU if a new home is proposed as the new principal unit. Staff is open to other ideas for additional allowances that may be proposed by the Planning Commission after the public hearing.

Tier 1 Standards

Middle Housing requirements vary based on the population of the city. The standards apply to “...all lots zoned predominantly for residential use, unless zoning permitting higher densities or intensities applies...” which means this applies to most residential areas in our community. The City of Olympia is currently categorized as a Tier 2 City and is projected to remain a Tier 2 City for twenty years (not including any annexations that may occur). However, if we include the Urban Growth Area, Olympia is projected to meet the Tier 1 City population threshold by year 2030.

Summary	Tier 1 75,000+ population	Tier 2 25,000-75,000 in population
All residential lots (except those with environmentally sensitive areas and buffers)	At least 4 units per lot	At least 2 units per lot
Lots within one-quarter mile walking distance of a major transit stop	At least 6 units per lot	At least 4 units per lot
When at least one unit is affordable housing for at least 50 years	At least 6 units per lot	At least 4 units per lot

8. The current draft meets Tier 1 requirements. Do you support meeting the Tier 1 standards now?



How is this input being used:

The responses to this question show that the majority of respondents (57%) support efforts to meet Tier 1 City standards now. The public hearing draft keeps the proposed language to meet or exceed the requirements for Tier 1 Cities.

9. Summary of responses about the Tier 1 Standards:

There are a mix of responses to consider. Most supported meeting Tier 1 standards now, to get a quicker opportunity to more fully address the housing crisis. Concerns included environmental protections, factoring in the unincorporated parts of the urban growth area, concern about impacts to historic neighborhoods, coordination with transit, using walking routes to transit rather than straight line distances, concern over becoming too much like Tacoma or Seattle, how helpful Tier 1 City standards would really be, loss of single family neighborhoods, prevalence of properties on septic systems instead of sewer, rent costs, lack of parking, water and other infrastructure supplies, budgeting and crime concerns, the change in the way density is calculated, and changing the character of our community.

How is this input being used:

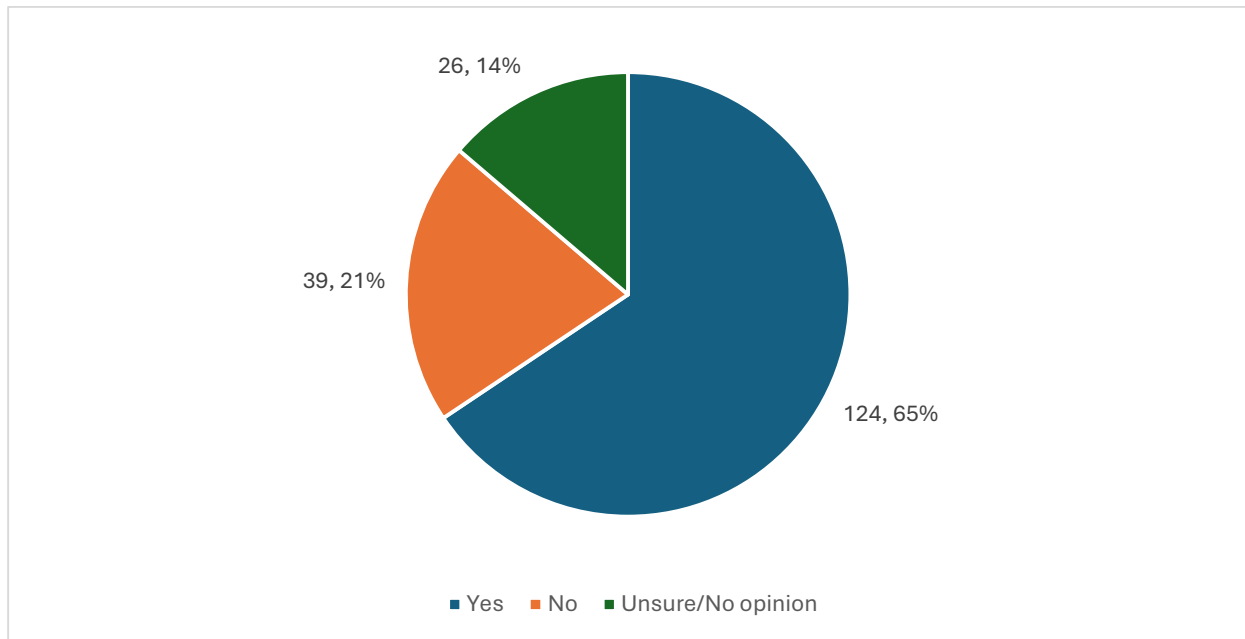
The amendments in the public hearing draft continue to meet or exceed the standards for a Tier 1 City. This consideration includes the fact that the critical areas ordinance provisions to protect environmentally sensitive areas and the historic preservation standards will remain in effect and apply equally to all development types.

Frequent Transit Routes

For cities, there are 1 (for Tier 2 cities) or 2 (for Tier 1 cities) additional units allowed for lots near a major transit stop. There is not a “Major Transit Stop” in the City of Olympia or the Urban Growth Area using the state’s definition.

The current draft uses a definition of “frequent transit routes (routes with 4 or more stops per hour for 12 or more hours per day, for at least 5 days per week).

10. Do you support using frequent transit routes (as locally defined) instead of major transit stops?



How is this input being used:

This question was asked to gauge the amount of community support for using our locally defined “frequent transit routes” rather than “major transit stops” as defined by the state. There are no “major transit stops” in Olympia or its urban growth area. 65% of respondents support using our frequent transit routes.

The revised draft amendments continue use of frequent transit routes.

11. Summary of responses about using frequent transit stops:

Most comments supported use of frequent transit stops. At least one person saw its use as a barrier to more housing. Other concerns noted the need for more transit (routes, stops, duration of service), crime, the need for more coordination between the City and Intercity Transit, the potential for routes to change, the need to build more transit supportive infrastructure, using walking distance to transit stops rather than a straight-line distance, considering changing frequent transit routes to stops with service 2 or more times per hour, expanding it to all bus stops, prioritizing sidewalk construction in these areas, encroaching into single family neighborhoods, and impacts on livability.

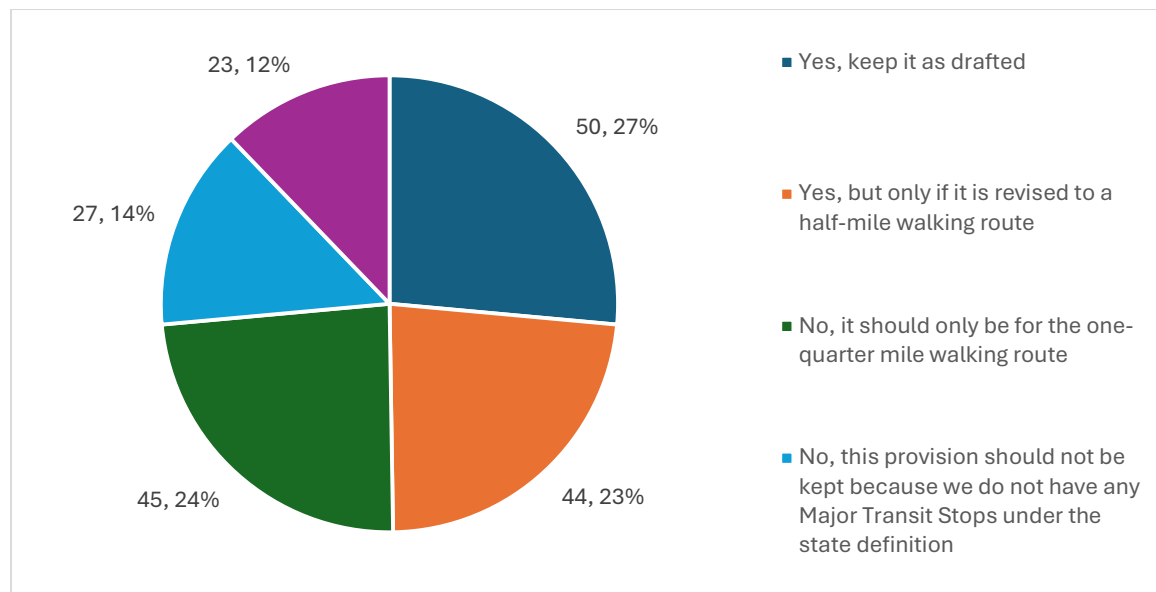
How is this input being used:

This input is being shared with Public Works Transportation staff, Intercity Transit staff, and others. Staff will continue to use the originally proposed frequent transit routes language in the public hearing draft but will share these comments with the Planning Commission and City Council for consideration during the public hearing and adoption process for this proposal.

Distance to Transit Routes

The state provisions regarding transit routes apply to lots within one-quarter mile of the stop. Olympia's current zoning standards that are tied to frequent transit routes use a straight ("as the crow flies") distance of one-half mile. The current draft is written using a straight line distance of one-half mile.

12. Do you support using the straight one-half mile distance?



How is this input being used:

This question had a more even distribution of responses. 27% said to keep it as drafted, 24% said to use a quarter mile walking route, and 23% said to use a half mile walking route. 14% said not to use this provision since it is not required and 12% were unsure or had no opinion.

Staff keeps the proposal as originally drafted but will highlight this issue for the Planning Commission for consideration at the public hearing.

13. Summary of responses about distance to transit routes:

Comments addressed things like encouraging the city to keep working on pathway connections to make walking easier, doing this to support affordable housing, using walking route distances, that half mile is too far in our rainy climate, asking those with disabilities to weigh in on this, using a straight-line distance to increase where more units are allowed, the need for increased transit service for this to be successful,

increasing the distance to one mile, consideration of sidewalks in addition to distance, prioritizing bicycle and pedestrian improvements in areas that see an increase in density, not using local definition since it is not required, letting people and the market decide, concern over bus safety, weather protection at bus stops, concern about distances for those with disabilities/mobility challenges/the elderly/young children/groceries, more appropriate to increase densities around transit stops or do transit oriented development, that proceeding this way helps reduce dependency on cars, straight lines of measurement are not fair because the street grid doesn't exist everywhere, and concerns about safety and equity.

How is this input being used:

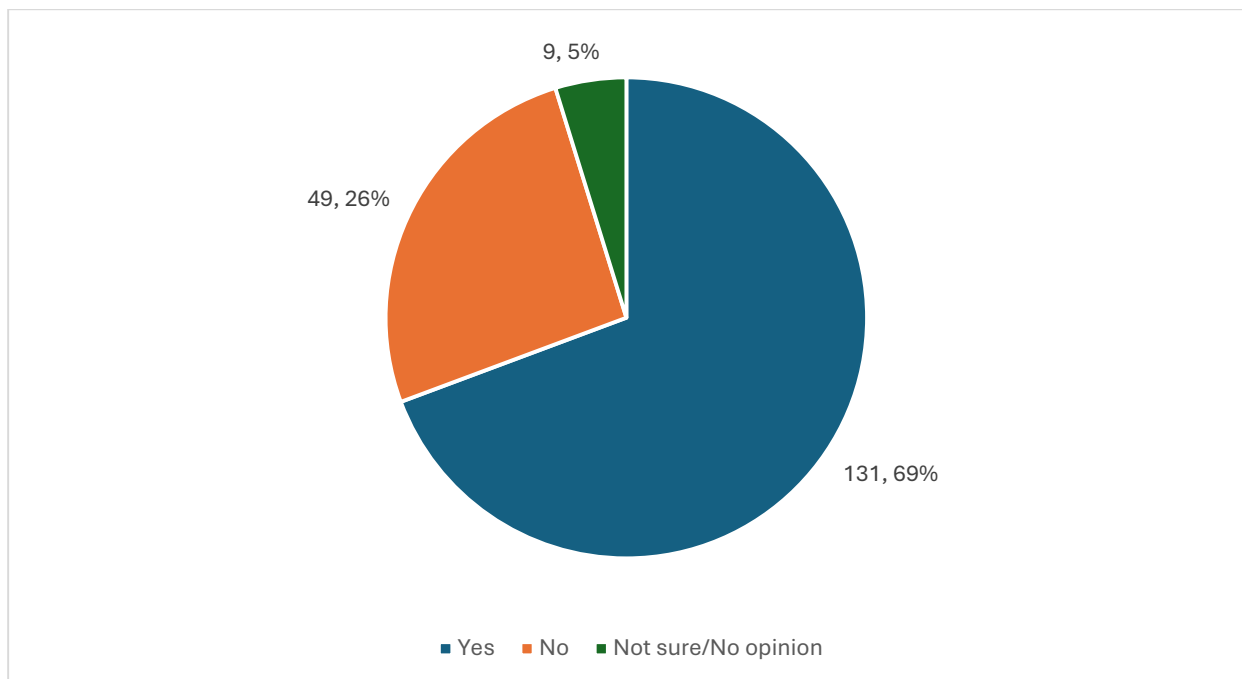
Staff proposed to keep the transit provisions as drafted, given the slight preference indicated in response to question 12, but does expect this to be a topic of discussion by the Planning Commission after the public hearing and during its deliberations. Staff will also share the comments with transportation planners at the City and at Intercity Transit.

Building height/maximum stories

In most residential zoning districts where the middle housing changes will apply, the maximum building height is 35 feet from the ground to the mid-point of the roof pitch/angle. Most of these zones also currently limit homes to 2 stories.

The current draft keeps the maximum height at 35 feet but eliminates the maximum number of stories. Allowing three stories allows more flexibility in site designs and may help retain more of the lot for yards, gardens, and trees while allowing the additional units.

14. Do you support allowing more than 2 stories in residential areas, while keeping the same height limit that already exists? (Note: ADUs are limited to 24 feet in height)



How is this input being used:

In most residential zoning districts, the maximum building height is 35 feet (as measured to the mid point of the roof pitch). However, Olympia currently limits residences in these areas to 2 stories. The first draft proposed eliminating the restriction of residences in these areas to only 2 stories, while retaining the maximum building heights of the various zones. This question was asked to help understand the level of support for removing the limit on the number of stories and instead relying on the maximum building height allowed in each zoning district. 69% of those who responded to this question supported the draft proposal.

The public hearing draft includes removing the maximum number of stories in residential zones.

15. Summary of responses about building height/ maximum stories:

- Most people support removing the limit on the number of stories allowed. People cited reasons of meeting our housing needs while still encouraging green spaces and tree protection, keeping yard and garden areas, reducing the amount of impervious surfaces, doing away with height limits altogether, and allowing the same heights for detached ADUs. Concerns noted include blocking views of others, lack of privacy for neighbors, concern about roof types (don't want to encourage flat or shed roofs if they are not already in a neighborhood), fire safety, design principles, promoting infill of new 2 story units rather than 3 story buildings, being respectful of current neighborhood architectural characteristics, ensuring greenspaces or courtyards, increasing setbacks, and measuring roof heights to the eave (so not promoting flat or shed roofs).

How is this input being used:

Staff considered these comments in determining whether or not to remove the maximum number of stories in the public hearing draft. The public hearing draft language removed the maximum number of stories. Staff is contemplating comments about design and compatibility. Under the current code, all middle housing types are subject to infill design requirements, even in areas where the single family homes are not subject to design review. Under the new state requirements, the development standards for middle housing must be the same as for those that would apply to building a single family home in the same location.

This means that all single family residences and middle housing must be subject to the infill design standards in the same areas, or that none of these housing types are subject to those requirements. In the first draft, infill design standards are applied within the infill design district but not anywhere else. In the public hearing draft, staff proposes to make all single family and middle housing types subject to the infill design regulation about neighborhood character and scale, across the City. The rest of the provisions in OMC 18.175, Infill and other Residential, will only apply to residences in the Infill Design District.

16. Summary of all additional comments people want the City to consider:

- There were a wide variety of comments to this open ended question. Responses touched on the high costs of rent and home buying, looking for opportunities to support housing development for those who make less than 100% of the area median income, support for cottages and ADUs, concern about impacts to neighborhoods, encouraging multi-unit buildings that fit into the neighborhood, limiting vacation rentals, accessibility for seniors or those with disabilities, support for not doing more than we have to under the state laws, parking, increasing home ownership opportunities, increasing bicycle connections near transit, let neighborhoods decide if they want more density, increasing the pace of development review, incentivizing cottage developments, concern about the amount of development in the County, the need to house marginalized people at prices they can afford, exploring public social housing concepts, acknowledging that most people still need cars to meet their needs, increasing density while retaining livability, retaining residential character and small town feel, expanding where ADUs are allowed, consider environmental impacts, encourage the sale of individual units, encouraging infill to help conserve areas beyond the urban growth area, property taxes, removing minimum lot sizes, create opportunities and remove barriers, allow more creativity

and design flexibility, provide tax incentives for detached ADUs, build hubs with more transit, build up to protect undeveloped areas, not wanting multi-unit buildings in some neighborhoods, allow tiny houses on wheels as ADUs, consider neighborhood characteristics, ensure immediate and long term infrastructure needs are met, allow subdivisions in the interim that show how density requirements can still be met in the future (aka ghost or shadow platting), the city has to make it easier and less expensive to build housing, protect wetland and other environmentally sensitive areas and tree canopy, should also increase open spaces and parks at the same time, parking concerns, consider using the state's model ordinances, don't build huge homes next to small homes, encourage tiny home communities, we need more social housing over market rate housing, grow while keeping our community's personality, stop growth when there isn't enough space, provide flexibility to keep more green spaces, stop trying to destroy character and livability, address rent control.

How is this input being used:

These comments were considered during the development of the public hearing draft. Many of the comments are about things already included in the draft (e.g. support for a wider variety of housing types) and others are beyond the ability to address within a zoning code (e.g. market forces and high costs of rent). Additionally, some issues that were raised (e.g. parking) are subject of new legislative requirements that need to be assessed to ensure our local code remains consistent with amendments to state law. Additionally, staff continues to research opportunities for additional housing types that may be appropriate as Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), such as Park Model Recreational Vehicles (also known as Tiny Houses on Wheels that are factory built and licensed by the Department of Labor and Industries).

Because middle housing is meant to be, and is defined as being, "...compatible in scale, form, and character with single-family houses...", the public hearing draft includes a new provision to require all single family and middle housing types that are not located within the Infill Design District, to meet the provisions of [OMC 18.175.020](#), which is about neighborhood character and scale for new structures.