

Housing Options Code Amendments

Response to Planning Commission questions about Low Density Neighborhoods

Language about balancing comprehensive plan goals and policies (From the Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan chapter, emphasis added)

The goals in this Plan identify what we hope to achieve as a community. Some goals will take longer than others to realize. Policies describe how the City will act in a broad sense to achieve these goals.

While some policies take a prescriptive approach by outlining what the City will specifically 'require' to achieve a goal, other policies present a more flexible approach whereby the City will 'encourage' or 'support' an action. Each type of approach has inherent trade-offs. Overall, the City's policy approach within the Plan aims to balance these trade-offs while meeting community goals.

As an example of a prescriptive approach, one policy requires land uses to prevent and treat stormwater runoff, which provides certainty that the City will use its authority to enforce practices that achieve our clean water protection goals. In order for the City to 'require' an action, it must have authority under the law to enforce it.

Sometimes a more flexible policy approach improves the capability of achieving certain goals. Having some flexibility over the 20-year planning period enables the City to respond more quickly when environmental or market conditions change. It also allows for tailoring implementation to geographic or land use type conditions at the zoning level. For example, a policy in the Plan states the City will require development to incorporate measures that reduce risks associated with rising sea levels. The policy includes, as an example, higher finished floor elevations, but does not specify what that particular measure will be. In order to respond appropriately to sea level rise, the City will need an adaptive strategy based on new information. The same adaptive methodology applies to policies regarding infill development. In order to meet our vision of a more vibrant and pedestrian-friendly downtown, the City will need flexibility to respond to changing market conditions over the 20-year planning period.

Where the City does not establish requirements, it may 'encourage' or 'support' actions. For example, one policy encourages the use of fruit and nut trees to support food self-sufficiency. This policy demonstrates the City's recognition of community support for trees that provide food, while also allowing flexibility for implementation through incentives or partnerships rather than regulation. To require fruit trees at the broad Plan level could hamper other goals during the implementation phase that call for providing a variety of tree species throughout neighborhoods and planting the right tree in the right place.

At times, goals or policies may seem to be in conflict with each other. For example, a goal to increase density may seem to be in conflict with a goal to preserve open space. Or a goal to

increase tree canopy may seem to be in conflict with a goal to increase solar energy access. Over the next 20 years, the complex challenges and opportunities we face as a community will often require us to strike a balance between different goals and policies to provide the best outcome for the community as a whole. Thus individual goals and policies should always be considered within the context of the entire Plan.

Throughout each and every year, City officials, along with the public, make a range of decisions about how community resources will be used and managed, and how both public and private development will occur. Community plans and programs often result from conscientious balancing among divergent interests based on the facts and context of a particular situation and on the entire set of Comprehensive Plan goals. Balancing these goals in a way that provides the best overall community benefit requires careful consideration, based on an understanding of multiple community objectives, the specific context and potential impacts.

This type of strategic decision-making can often lead to a selection of options that realize multiple goals. For example, when we protect the quality of our air and water, we improve our health and attract long-term investment in our City.

Description of Low Density Neighborhoods in Comprehensive Plan (Appendix A of Land Use and Urban Design Chapter)

Low-Density Neighborhoods. This designation provides for low-density residential development, primarily single-family detached housing and low-rise multi-family housing, in densities ranging from twelve units per acre to one unit per five acres depending on environmental sensitivity of the area. Where environmental constraints are significant, to achieve minimum densities extraordinary clustering may be allowed when combined with environmental protection. Barring environmental constraints, densities of at least four units per acre should be achieved. Supportive land uses and other types of housing, including accessory dwelling units, townhomes and small apartment buildings, may be permitted. Specific zoning and densities are to be based on the unique characteristics of each area with special attention to stormwater drainage and aquatic habitat. Medium Density Neighborhood Centers are allowed within Low Density Neighborhoods. Clustered development to provide future urbanization opportunities will be required where urban utilities are not readily available.

Some of the applicable Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies

Land Use and Urban Design Chapter

Goal 1: Land use patterns, densities and site designs are sustainable and support decreasing automobile reliance.

Goal 16: The range of housing types and densities are consistent with the community's changing population needs and preferences.

Policy PL 16.2 Adopt zoning that allows a wide variety of compatible housing types and densities.

Policy PL 16.4 Disperse low and moderate-income and special needs housing throughout the urban area.

Policy PL 16.5 Support affordable housing throughout the community by minimizing regulatory review risks, time and costs and removing unnecessary barriers to housing, by permitting small dwelling units accessory to single-family housing, and by allowing a mix of housing types.

Policy PL 16.9 In all residential areas, allow small cottages and townhouses, and one accessory housing unit per home --all subject to siting, design and parking requirements that ensure neighborhood character is maintained.

Policy PL 16.10 Require effective, but not unreasonably expensive, building designs and landscaping to blend multi-family housing into neighborhoods.

Policy PL 16.11 Require that multi-family structures be located near a collector street with transit, or near an arterial street, or near a neighborhood center, and that they be designed for compatibility with adjacent lower density housing; and be 'stepped' to conform with topography.

Goal 20: Development maintains and improves neighborhood character and livability.

Policy PL 20.1 Require development in established neighborhoods to be of a type, scale, orientation, and design that maintains or improves the character, aesthetic quality, and livability of the neighborhood.

Policy PL 20.4 Support development and public improvements consistent with healthy and active lifestyles.

Policy PL 20.5 Prevent physical barriers from isolating and separating new developments from existing neighborhoods.

Public Services Chapter

Goal 3: Affordable housing is available for all income levels throughout the community.

Policy PS 3.1 Promote a variety of residential densities and housing types so that housing can be available in a broad range of costs.

Definitions

Title 18 (Unified Development Code) of the Olympia Municipal Code (OMC) does not contain a definition of “multifamily”.

Related terms, as defined in OMC 18.02.180:

Accessory Dwelling Unit. A dwelling unit that has been added onto, created within, or separated from a single-family detached dwelling for use as a complete independent living unit with provisions for cooking, sanitation and sleeping.

Apartment. A dwelling within a structure designed and used for occupancy by three or more individual persons or families living independently of each other. These structures include triplexes, fourplexes, and other multi-unit configurations.

Duplex. One building containing two single-family dwelling units totally separated from each other by a one-hour fire wall or floor.

Single-Family Dwelling. A single unit providing complete, independent living facilities for a family, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, cooking and sanitation.

Proposed definitions to be added to OMC 18.02.180

Courtyard Apartment. A dwelling within a structure or small detached structures on one parcel designed and used for occupancy by four or more individual persons or families living independently of each other. The units are oriented around a shared open space courtyard from which all ground floor units have primary entrances facing.

Triplex. One building containing three single-family dwelling units totally separated from each other by a one-hour fire wall or floor.