



Planning Commission

Special Presentation: Small Infill Housing

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Title

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Issue:

This presentation will focus on three housing types: accessory dwelling unit, duplex and townhome. We will explore what infill development is, and how it relates to our community goals. What are the barriers and opportunities for a successful infill housing program? How can infill be made “compatible” with neighborhood character?

A panel discussion will follow, with representatives from the building and real estate sectors, and citizen representatives from the Planning Commission.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter/Panel(s):

Amy Buckler
Tom Hill, Olympia Building Official
Joseph Becker, Ion EcoBuilding
Off White, Brand X Design & Construction
Jim Greene, Greene Realty Group

Background and Analysis:

Since the 1970s, the population and economy of the Puget Sound region has been growing. According to the [Thurston County Profile <http://www.trpc.org/data/Pages/profile.aspx>](http://www.trpc.org/data/Pages/profile.aspx), the county’s population more than doubled between 1980 and 2010. Forecasters expect Olympia’s population and employment will continue to increase over the next 20 years. In 2010, the estimated population of Olympia and its Urban Growth Area was 58,310 residents. Forecasters expect our population will increase to 84,400 by 2035, a rate of approximately 2% per year.

In the early 1990s, the Washington State [Growth Management Act <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70A>](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70A) (GMA) was passed in response to rapid and sprawling growth in many parts of the state that was causing a decrease in quality of life, negative effects on the environment, and increased costs for municipal infrastructure and maintenance. Under the Act, urban areas (like Olympia) are to absorb more of the state’s population growth than rural areas, thereby preserving forests, animal habitat, farms, and other important lands. Focusing growth in urban areas also

reduces traffic, pollution, and the costs of providing city services that protect the health, safety and quality of life of citizens.

What is ‘Infill development’? Infill development is the process of developing vacant or under-used parcels within existing urban areas that are already largely developed.

The concept of infill as a smart growth strategy is not new. Olympia’s 1994 Comprehensive Plan explicitly encourages infill; in 1995, the Council established regulations and incentives specific to townhome development, and this has been one of Olympia’s most successful infill housing types. In 2004 the Olympia City Council adopted ‘Infill and Other Residential Design Requirements.’ These establish criteria for design and neighborhood compatibility for single family dwellings in designated areas or with specific criteria, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, cottages and accessory dwelling units (Olympia Municipal Code 18.175.)

Despite the focus on infill, for most of the past two decades infill housing development countywide was slow relative to development of greenfields. However, as the Regional Sustainable Thurston Plan and the cities’ comprehensive plans move toward implementation, there is a renewed interest in the concept of infill. Public meetings regarding various topics, such as economic development, historic restoration, environmental protection and community planning, all focus on the need to focus population and job growth in existing urban areas. Infill can save land, money and energy, provide opportunity to create more walkable neighborhoods, and in some areas increase residential densities high enough to support frequent transit.

Also pointing us toward infill are national and regional demographic shifts. The two largest segments of our population, the ‘Baby Boomers’ and ‘the Echo Boomers’ (Generation Y) are looking for housing options close to transit and other amenities. In addition, according to the Thurston County Profile, average household size is shrinking; Olympia has the lowest average household size in the county at 2.18, compared to the County average of 2.46. Olympia also has our region’s highest rate of one-person households at 36 percent.

Not everyone wants to maintain a traditional single family home or live in an apartment complex. Infill housing, such as accessory dwelling units, duplexes and townhomes can be a way to provide desirable, small, affordable housing options in existing neighborhoods. The presentation will explore these housing types, the barriers, opportunities and considerations to make infill housing compatible within existing neighborhoods.

Terms:

Types of ‘Dwellings’ are defined in the Olympia Municipal Code, Title 18.02. Some of the types mentioned tonight include:

Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU’s): 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.

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

Townhouse: A single-family dwelling unit which is part of a group of two or more such units separated by a completely independent structural wall (including utilities in separate walls), extending from the ground to the roof in accordance with the applicable Building Code and which has no doors, windows or other provisions for human passage or visibility through the wall. In certain zoning districts, such dwelling units are platted with common side and/or rear property lines between the structural walls.

For those unable to attend:

This presentation will be videotaped and replayed on Thurston Community Television, Channel 3; please see their website for dates and times. The video can also be viewed live or after October 8 on the City of Olympia's website.

Go to: <http://olympia.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>, and select "Media" in the subject line for the Planning Commission meeting dated October 7, 2013.

This event is the first in a series of special Planning Commission briefings intended to provide background for the community about important long-range planning matters.

- September 9 was "Visualizing Density"
- Save the date for Preserving and Enhancing Urban Green Space on December 9

Options:

Information only; review the staff report and attachments. Following the presentation, Commissioners will have an opportunity to discuss and ask questions of the presenter, panelists and staff.

Financial Impact:

N/A