



Planning Commission

Building Heights in High Density Corridor Zones - Public Hearing

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Title

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Staff Recommended Action

Following staff briefing, open public hearing and receive comment noting that written comments will be accepted until at least 5 p.m., Friday, October 23.

Report

Issue:

Olympia's land use zoning regulations state that building heights in the 'HDC-1' zone within 100 feet of low-density residential zones are limited to 35 feet, but also suggest that 'bonus' residential floor are available. City staff proposes an amendment stating that such bonuses are not available within 100 feet of historic districts. Following a public hearing, the Commission is to make a recommendation to the City Council on this issue.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter:

Todd Stamm, Principal Planner

Background and Analysis:

The Olympia Development Code, also known as the zoning code, provides that in the four 'High Density Corridor' zones any new building within 100 feet of a residential zone with a maximum density of 14 units or less per acre shall not exceed 35 feet in height. The code also provides that buildings within 50 feet of higher density residential and mixed use zones shall be limited to the lesser of the height allowed in the adjacent zone or the maximum height of the High Density Corridor zone.

However, the code also states with respect to the 'HDC-1' and 'HDC-2' zones, "Provided that one additional story may be built for residential development only." Additional provisions related to this 'bonus floor' are set forth in Olympia Municipal Code 18.06.100.A.6. However, the code does not indicate whether this bonus floor is available in the areas where heights are restricted near other zones.

The version of the Olympia Comprehensive Plan adopted in December of 2014 includes Land Use and Urban Design policy 13.7, applicable to the areas zoned as HDC-1 and HDC-2. That policy reads, in part:

Designate different categories of corridors generally as follows:

- Areas nearest downtown along Harrison Avenue east of Division Street and the upper portions of the State Street/Fourth Avenue corridor to the intersection of Fourth Avenue and Pacific Avenue should blend travel modes with priority for pedestrian, bicycle and transit systems. These areas should provide for a mix of low-intensity professional offices, commercial uses and multifamily buildings forming a continuous and pedestrian-oriented edge along the arterial streets. *There will be a 35 feet height limit if any portion of the building is within 100' from a single-family residential zone, provided that the City may establish an additional height bonus for residential development except in areas adjacent to a designated historic district.* [Emphasis added.]

Early in 2015 Jay Elder and other residents of the Bigelow neighborhood northeast of downtown proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan to address issues raised by a development application submitted by John Tanasse. The Plan amendment proposal was later revised to be development code issue instead of a Plan change and the City Council referred the matter to its Land Use and Environment Committee for consideration. On August 27, 2015, the Committee concluded that the specific development code issue related to height bonuses should be addressed as soon as possible. (Note: Tanasse did not propose to exercise this bonus option, but apparently his proposal did make the neighborhood aware of the code provision.)

The Comprehensive Plan policy quoted above suggests that the bonus floor provision may be available in all portions of the HDC-1 and HDC-2 zones, but should not be available near a historic district. A little over two blocks of HDC-1 zoned property along the north side of State Avenue fall into this 'near a historic district' category. City staff proposes that the Development Code should be amended to clarify:

1. whether the 'bonus' residential floor is available within 100 feet of a designated historic district - the quoted Plan policy would suggest that it is not;
2. whether the 'bonus' residential floor is available within 100 feet of low-density residential zones, i.e., HDC 1 & 2 areas otherwise limited to 35 feet; and/or
3. whether the 'bonus' residential is available in the areas within 50 feet of medium-density residential areas (as described above).

Maps depicting the specific areas potentially affected by these alternatives will be available at the hearing. As set forth in the policy, the attached code excerpt, with the proposed new clause underlined, would specify that the bonus floor is not available near historic districts.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Residents in the vicinity of the Olympia Avenue historic district and the Bigelow neighborhood in general have expressed interest in this issue. Notice of this public hearing was advertised in the Olympian, mailed to representatives of neighborhood associations within 1000 feet of the HDC-1 properties bordering the Olympia Avenue Historic District, and mailed to property owners of and within 300 feet of the HDC-1 zoned properties that would be affected.

Options:

Following close of the public hearing, the Commission may recommend:

1. That the City Council approve the amendment as proposed by City staff;
2. That the Council approve an amendment limiting height in other HDC-1 and HDC-2 locations as described.
3. That the development code be amended to clarify that a residential on bonus floor can be granted in areas otherwise limited to 35 feet; or
4. Any other alternative deemed appropriate by the Commission and consistent with the Olympia Comprehensive Plan.

Financial Impact:

No substantial impact to the City; impact to property owners would depend on future development prospects and interpretation of current development code.