



City of Seattle

Department of Planning and Development

Diane M. Sugimura, Director

February 14, 2014

To: Councilmember Mike O'Brien, Chair
Planning, Land Use and Sustainability (PLUS) Committee

From: Andy McKim, Land Use Planner – Supervisor
Mike Podowski, Land Use Policy Manager

RE: Small Lot Development in Single-family Zones

Background

In response to concerns voiced by residents of single-family neighborhoods that certain developments on undersized lots in single-family zones were incompatible with their surroundings, the City adopted Ordinance No. 123978 in September 2012, as an emergency measure. That ordinance included interim standards limiting the applicability of certain codified lot area exceptions, and limiting the height of homes on certain undersized lots that continued to qualify for separate development. The interim regulations were extended until March 2014 and an additional, final, extension is proposed. The interim ordinances commit to development of permanent regulations to replace the interim standards. Legislation for permanent regulations is expected to be ready for committee deliberation in March.

Permanent Recommendations

DPD has met with neighborhood and developer groups, held a public meeting, and reviewed and responded to a significant amount of correspondence on this topic. In addition, PLUS directed DPD to prepare legislation consistent with preliminary recommendations in March 2013. The following are consistent with PLUS direction to date as well as the City's Comprehensive Plan. The proposals generally fall into three categories:

1. Modifying and clarifying exceptions to minimum lot area requirements

- **Minimum Lot Size:** Establish a standard absolute minimum of 2,500 s.f. for lots established under most lot area exceptions, and require a special exception review process (a Type II decision with public notice, opportunity to comment and appeal) for development of lots under 3,200 square feet in area.
- **75/80 Rule:** Maintain the 75/80 rule and revise/clarify the lot calculation.
- **100 Percent Rule:** Provide a limited new lot area exception for lots with areas equal to or greater than the mean area of the lots within the same block front.
- **Historic Lots, Deeds or Contracts:** Continue not to allow use of old tax records; discontinue use of historic mortgages and contracts of sale; and clarify use of deeds for establishing historic lot exceptions.



City of Seattle, Department of Planning and Development
700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000
P.O. Box 34019
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

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- Developing Abutting Lots in Common Ownership: Where there are multiple, vacant historic lots averaging less than 3,200 s.f., require consolidation rather than separate development.
- Lot Line Adjustments: Clarify use of lot boundary adjustments for creating lot area exceptions.

2. Development Standards for Single Family Homes on Undersized Lots

- Structure Depth: Limit structure depth to twice the lot width on historic lots less than 3,200 s.f.
- Structure Height: Apply standard single family height limits (30', plus 5' for pitched roof) for lots that are at least 3200 sf. For lots under 3,200 sf, establish maximum height of 18 feet plus 5 feet for a pitched roof, or 22 feet plus 5 feet for a pitched roof for structures with no more than two floors and 10 foot floor-to-floor height on the ground floor. Extend these height limits to additions to existing houses as well as new structures.

3. Minor Code Adjustments and Clarifications

- Multiple Houses, One Lot Clarifications: Clarify that separate ownership for existing houses may be achieved through unit lot subdivision, and eliminate special subdivision provisions for multiple houses on a lot.
- Revise Code Language: Simplify lot area exceptions in subsection 23.44.010.B.1, and clarify that parcels that don't qualify for separate development must be included as a part of the building site when abutting property is developed.
- Minimum Dimensions Clarified: Clarify measurement for lot coverage purposes — at least 10 feet in all directions, rather than 10 feet in any direction.
- Eliminate Exhibits for 23.44.010: Delete graphics that are no longer relevant.
- Amend Definitions: Clarify "lot," "front lot line," "front yard," and "rear yard."

Closing

These proposals are intended to allow reasonable infill development opportunities on undersized lots in single-family neighborhoods while providing predictability to neighbors about what may be built in their area, and helping to ensure that what is built on these lots is compatible with the surroundings and proportionate to the lot size.

Thank you for considering this information. We are available to answer any questions you may have.