



**Legislative Department
Seattle City Council
Memorandum**

Date: September 5, 2014

To: Mike O'Brien, Chair
Tim Burgess, Vice Chair
Nick Licata, Member
Planning, Land Use and Urban Sustainability (PLUS) Committee

From: Lish Whitson, Central Staff

Subject: Minimum Floor Area Ratio Legislation (CB [118167](#))

Background

Last September, the Council adopted Ordinance [124270](#) creating interim regulations requiring that development meet a minimum density requirement in pedestrian-designated areas in urban villages, centers, and station area overlays. Council Bill [118167](#) would make those changes permanent. The proposed bill expands the areas where the minimum requirements apply and provides flexibility for large lots and small expansions.

The proposed bill requires a minimum floor area ratio for new development on:

- lots in pedestrian-designated areas in urban centers, urban villages and station area overlays;
- lots abutting Major Pedestrian streets in the Northgate Overlay district; and
- lots abutting Class 1 and Class 2 Pedestrian Streets in a station area overlay in Seattle Mixed districts.

All three of these types of areas have regulations that are intended to support pedestrian-oriented retail businesses, and are located at the heart of key business districts around the City. A map showing these areas from DPD's Director's Report (Clerk File [313935](#)) is attached.

By setting a minimum Floor Area Ratio, the proposed Bill intends to encourage a pedestrian-oriented mixed-use environment consistent with City plans and policies for these districts. The interim regulations encouraged the redesign of two proposed buildings. In one case, a single-story drug store was redesigned to include 31 units of housing on two stories above the ground floor. In the other case, rather than build a completely new single-story drugstore, an existing building is being reused and expanded.

In the areas where the regulations would apply, development must be built to a minimum Floor Area Ratio (FAR). FAR is a ratio of floor area within a building to lot area. A building with 3.0 FAR includes floor area that is three times the lot area (for example, a 30,000 square foot building on a 10,000 square foot lot.) In the zoning districts where the proposed regulations would apply, maximum FARs vary depending on the maximum height allowed in the district and the mix of uses in the building. The proposed FARs will lead to urban building forms with multiple stories, rather than an auto-oriented single-story building surrounded by parking.

Minimum and Maximum FAR Limits

	Height Limit						
FAR	30 feet	40 feet	65 feet	85 feet	125 feet	160 feet	240 feet
Proposed Minimum	1.5	1.5	2.0	2.0	2.5	2.5	3.0
Maximum for a mixed-use building	2.5	3.25	4.75	6.0	6.0	7.0	N/A
Maximum in Station Area Overlays	3.0	4.0	5.75	6.0	6.0	7.0	N/A
Maximum in Seattle Mixed zone	N/A	3.5	5	6.0	8.0	9.0	13.0

Discussion

Maximum Floor Area Ratios, which the City used to regulate the density but not design of development, cannot be waived through design review. The FAR limits are used to regulate the bulk of buildings and the amount of activity that can occur on a site.

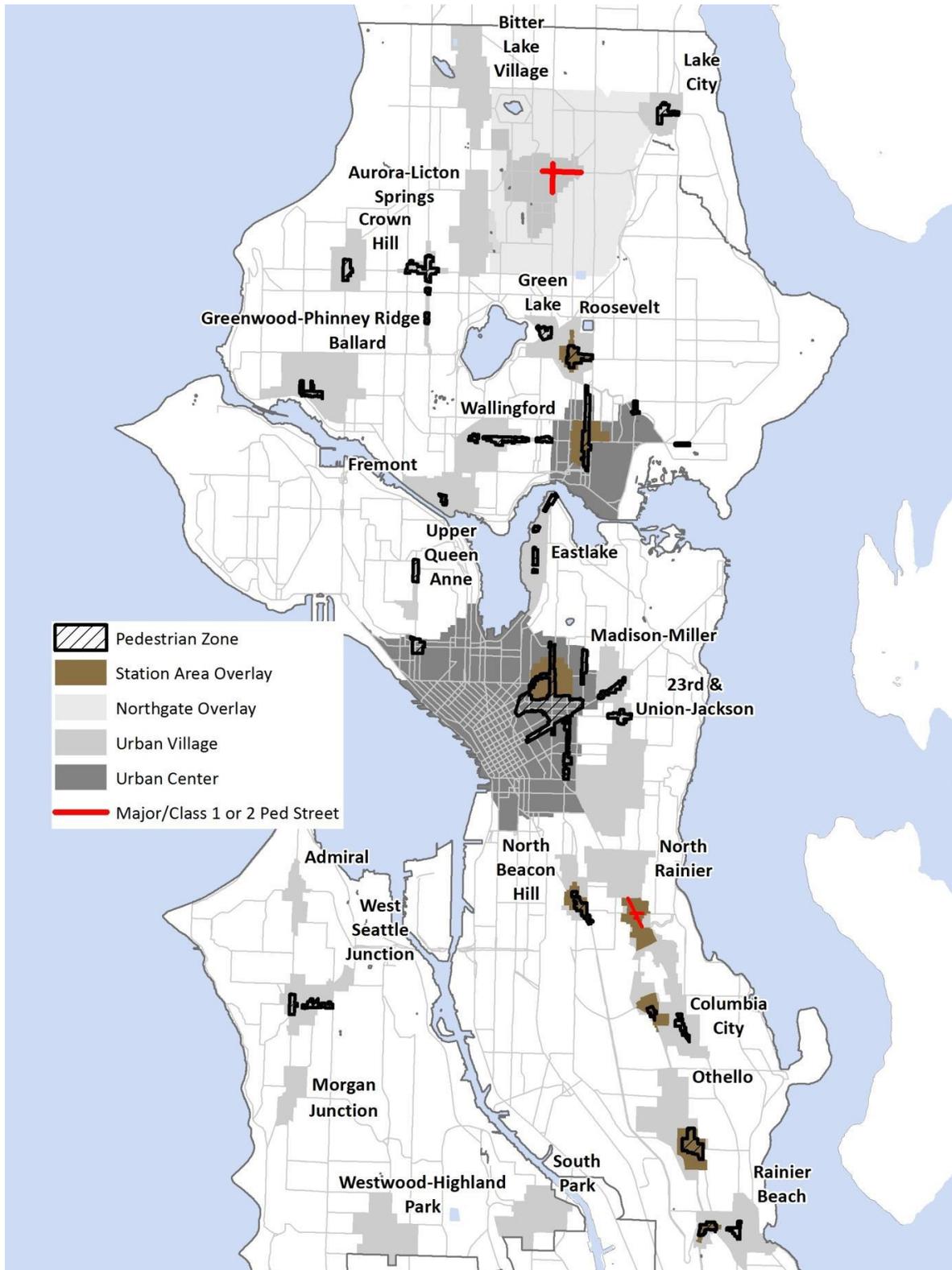
On the other hand, the proposed minimum FARs are proposed in order to support urban design goals. Minimum FARs are one tool used in pedestrian retail areas to create a strong urban retail experience. Other requirements used to create this environment, like transparency and limiting residential frontage are able to be waived through the design review program.

Consequently, the City Neighborhood Council (CNC) has recommended allowing waivers of the minimum FAR requirement through the design review process. This idea has merit, and I recommend that the Council ask DPD to review the CNC proposal as part of a broader set of reforms to pedestrian-designated areas that are currently underway. Including the proposal in the legislation before the Council today would require introduction of a new bill and would unduly delay implementation of the permanent regulations.

Next Steps

DPD is working on legislation to map new pedestrian designations in neighborhoods around the City. The Executive expects to deliver that legislation to Council at the end of the year or early 2015. As part of that legislation, DPD will propose changes to the regulations for pedestrian areas to enhance the experience of pedestrian-oriented retail districts.

Attachment: Locations where minimum density requirements would apply



Source: DPD Director's Report on Minimum Density (Floor Area Requirement) Legislation