



Legislative Department
 Seattle City Council
 Memorandum

Date: February 1, 2010

To: Councilmember Sally J. Clark, Chair
 Councilmember Tim Burgess, Vice Chair
 Councilmember Sally Bagshaw, Member
 Committee on the Built Environment (COBE)

From: Rebecca Herzfeld and Michael Jenkins, Council Central Staff

Subject: Phase 2 of Proposed Updates to Multifamily Zones

The City Council began its review of multifamily zoning in March, 2009. In August 2009, the Planning, Land Use, and Neighborhoods Committee (PLUNC) decided to split the proposal into two parts, beginning with changes to the Midrise and Highrise zones. The Council adopted amendments to those two zones in December 2009. Phase 2 of the multifamily code update will address the regulations for lowrise multifamily zones and the other issues remaining from last year.

Today we are asking for direction from COBE on the three items presented in this memo:

1. The schedule for review and adoption of Phase 2 multifamily zone updates;
2. The list of the issues and suggestions about multifamily zones that were raised last year during the Council’s review; and
3. A draft approach to amending the lowrise zones that addresses the listed issues.

1. Proposed Schedule

Table 1 summarizes the proposed schedule for action on Phase 2 of multifamily zoning update.

Table 1: Proposed Schedule for Council Review of Phase 2 Multifamily Code Update

Action	Date (all in 2010)
COBE provides direction to staff on proposed approach.	February 3
First briefing of Planning Commission on proposed approach.	February 9
COBE discusses and gives direction on issues identified on February 3.	February 24, March 11 and 24
Special COBE meeting on Lowrise zoning proposals	March 13 (Saturday)
Publish draft Phase 2 legislation, notice of COBE public hearing, and the environmental review (SEPA) determination.	April 19
End of SEPA appeal period.	May 10
Public hearing at COBE on Phase 2 legislation.	May 19 or 20
Introduce revised Phase 2 legislation based on public comment.	May 27
COBE review of Phase 2 legislation.	June 9 and 23, and July 14
COBE votes on Phase 2 legislation.	June 23 or July 14
Council vote on Phase 2 legislation.	June 28 or July 19

Committee direction on Phase 2 schedule:

2. Issues to Address in Phase 2 of the Multifamily Code Update

Many issues, concerns, and suggestions were raised during PLUNC’s review of the Department of Planning and Development’s (DPD’s) proposed multifamily code update. In addition to Councilmember’s concerns and suggestions about the initial proposal, valuable input was provided by the Planning Commission, architects and design professionals, and the public. In August 2009, the Council commissioned three teams of experts to perform an analysis of the effects of the proposed changes on lowrise zones, which was also very informative.

Section 2A below is a list of the issues raised last year about lowrise zones. Section 2B presents three proposed changes that would apply more broadly, either citywide or to all multifamily zones. Do Committee members want to make any changes to the lists of issues to address?

2A. Issues to address Lowrise (L) zones:

1. Consider encouraging different types of multifamily buildings (rowhouses, cottage housing, townhouses, and apartments) in different Lowrise zones, with the possibility of combining the L1 and L2 zones and L3 and L4 zones (more information about this proposal is presented in Section 3 below).
2. Consider increasing the height limit from 25 feet to 30 feet in Lowrise Duplex Triplex (LDT), L1, and L2 zones, and from 30 feet to 35 or 37 feet in L3 zones, to encourage better design and more livable units.
3. Determine appropriate Floor Area Ratio (FAR) limits. Consider whether the FAR exemptions approved by the Council last year for Midrise and Highrise zones should be applied in L zones, and whether FAR controls should replace density limits in LDT, L1, and L2 zones.
4. Do not apply incentive zoning requirements in L3 zones.
5. Determine appropriate Green Factor landscaping requirements.
6. Determine appropriate residential amenity standards to replace open space requirements.
7. Review the development standards for lowrise zoned lots that are across an alley or abutting a single-family zoned lot to provide the flexibility needed for better design while minimizing possible impacts.
8. Consider allowing access to parking from alleys across from single family zones, and from more than one access point as a way to reduce the amount of paving on a lot.
9. Consider whether to eliminate parking requirements in lowrise zones in urban villages, as is already the case in urban centers and Station Area Overlay Districts, and whether to waive parking requirements when a developer preserves an existing building on a site.
10. Consider whether to require Administrative Design Review for buildings with three units or more (the current threshold is nine units), instead of, or in addition to, setting prescriptive design standards in the code.
11. Review whether there should be greater regulation of units with large numbers of bedrooms.
12. Determine whether additional small commercial uses should be allowed in lowrise multifamily zones, and if so, the appropriate mechanism for doing this.

2B. Issues that affect more than just Lowrise zoned areas:

1. Establish new standards for the location and dimensions of waste disposal areas.
2. Establish a consistent and simpler method for measuring structure height that addresses different site conditions and works well with Building Code requirements.
3. Review subdivision rules in order to find ways to allow townhouses and rowhouses without the need for unit lot subdivisions, and/or consider changes to simplify the unit lot subdivision process.

Committee direction on issue list:

3. Proposed Approach to Lowrise Zoning Update

We have been working with DPD on the best approach to address the issues listed in Section 2 above, and recommend that the Council adopt an approach to lowrise multifamily zoning that is based on five specific housing types. The housing types, as shown in Attachment 1 to this memo, are: cottage houses, rowhouses, autocourt townhouses, clustered townhouses, and apartments. Depending on the intent of the zone, each housing type would be permitted, limited, or prohibited. The development standards would be tailored to each type of housing, also based on zone intent. Table 2 presents a summary of the proposal.

Table 2: Draft Staff Proposal for Approach to Lowrise Zoning

Current Zone	Area in Acres & Percent of multifamily zoned area*	Intent of Proposed New Lowrise Zone	Housing Types
LDT	318 8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly compatible with single family zones • Most appropriate for areas outside of urban centers, villages, and station areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages cottage housing and rowhouses • Allows townhouses with strict limits • Apartments limited to duplexes or triplexes
L1 & L2 (consider combining)	1,631 40%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides transition between single family and LDT zones and zones of greater intensity • Most appropriate for areas in or near urban centers, villages, and station areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages cottage housing, rowhouses, and townhouses, with limits on autocourt townhouses • Apartments permitted
L3 & L4 (consider combining)	1,830 44%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides transition between zones of greater or lesser intensity • Most appropriate in urban centers, villages, and station areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main zone for apartments • Encourages a broad range of housing types • Limits on autocourt and clustered townhouses.

*Lowrise zones make up 92 percent of multifamily zoned land, with the remaining eight percent zoned Midrise and Highrise. Multifamily zoning makes up about ten percent of the total land area of the city.

Committee direction on proposed approach to lowrise zoning:

Attachment 1: Proposed Multifamily Housing Types for Lowrise zones