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Balancing housing opportunity and compatibility in the Alphabet and King's Hill historic districts

News Article

Planners are seeking community input on potential zoning changes to balance affordable housing incentives with neighborhood compatibility in historic districts.

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**BETTER HOUSING BY DESIGN PROJECT:
POTENTIAL ZONING APPROACHES FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS**

Balancing housing opportunity with compatibility in historic districts

Historic district property owner:
You are receiving this notice because you own property in the Alphabet or King's Hill historic districts. The purpose of this notice is to let you know about potential zoning code and map changes. These proposed changes would affect the allowed scale of new development in higher density residential and mixed-use zones in historic districts. The changes would have little impact on existing buildings. The proposals are being considered as part of the Better Housing by Design project, which is updating Portland's mixed-use zoning regulations to better meet the needs of current and future residents.

These potential zoning changes for historic districts seek to provide more affordable housing opportunities and to ensure that new development is responsive to the scale of historic districts.

The concepts summarized below would provide incentives for new projects that include affordable housing and adjust regulations so the scale of new buildings is comparable to surrounding buildings.

WHAT IS FAR (FLOOR-TO-AREA RATIO)?
FAR regulates the size of buildings. An FAR of 4 to 1 (4:1) allows up to 40,000 square feet of building floor area on a site that is 10,000 square feet in size, typically a five-to-six-story building.

• RM4 zone changes: In the proposed RM4 zone (currently RM with a base FAR of 4.0), include the base FAR of 3.0 when located in historic districts that give projects that include affordable housing units an FAR of 4.2:1.

• Shift from RM3 to RM4 zoning in part of the Alphabet Historic District: In a portion of the Alphabet historic district that now has RM3 zoning with a base FAR of 2.1, change the proposed new zoning to RM4 (3.0 base FAR) to more closely match the scale of larger historic apartment buildings in the area. This would apply to properties between NW 21st and NW 23rd from Burnside up to NW 10th.

• Allow affordable housing bonuses in mixed-use zones (CMU): Allow bonuses primarily for affordable housing and FAR bonuses in historic districts. In the CMU zone zoning RM 21st and 23rd avenues in the Alphabet historic district, the maximum FAR increases from 3.0 through three density-stairing steps of 3.6, with no opportunity for developer bonuses. Proposed changes to the CMU zone in historic districts would allow a bonus FAR of 4.1 (up to four stories for a building covering the entire lot). A small number of CMU zoned properties in the historic district that currently have a base FAR of 3.0 would have a bonus FAR of up to 3.3.

To learn more or comment on these historic district proposals

- Visit: www.portland.gov/bps/betterhousing
- Email the project team: bettermhousing@portland.gov
- Visit the Better Housing by Design table at one of these Historic Resources Code Project Open Houses:
 - Tuesday, February 19, 2019, 5:30 - 7 pm
Architectural Heritage Center, 701 SE Grand Avenue
 - Tuesday, May 14, 2019, 4 - 7 pm
Center for Architecture (CFA) Portland, 403 NW 11th Avenue

For routes and times for accessing these locations call 503.228.7423 or go to their web site at www.311net.org

What happens next?

These potential zoning changes are conceptual only. They are not formal proposals. Bureau of Planning and Sustainability staff will consider community input when preparing for discussions with the Planning and Sustainability Commission (PSC). If the proposals become part of the PSC Recommended Draft, the public will have an opportunity to send input to the Portland City Council. The City Council public hearing date has not been set yet but will likely be sometime in Summer 2019.

For additional project information, visit the Better Housing by Design project page: www.portland.gov/bps/betterhousing

Did you receive a notice in the mail that looked like this? And/or do you live in the historic Alphabet or King's Hill districts in NW Portland? Or, are you

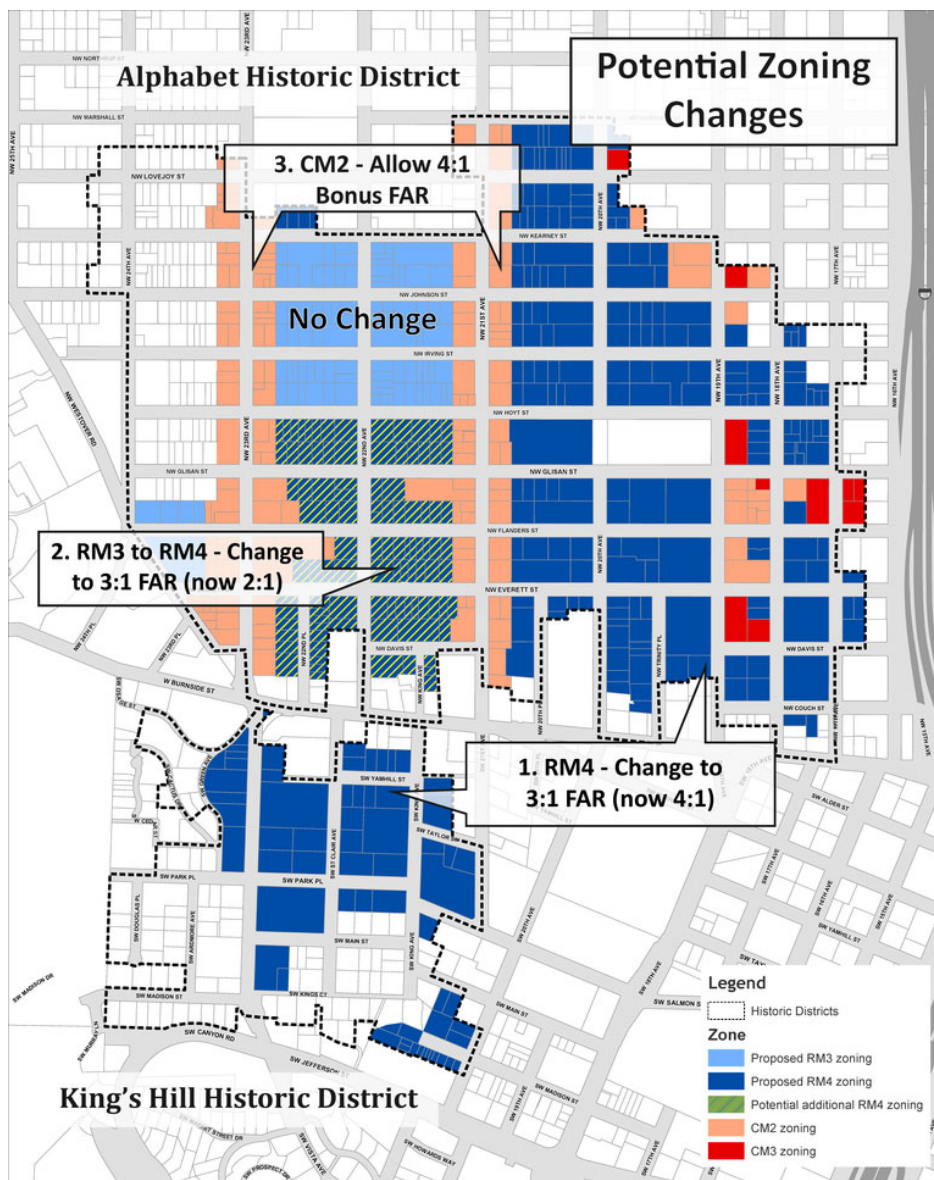
concerned about historic preservation or Portland's need for affordable housing options?

If so, the City of Portland is interested in hearing your thoughts on potential zone changes that would adjust the allowed size of new buildings to improve compatibility with historic buildings in these special neighborhoods. At the same time, the proposals would expand incentives for affordable housing options for Portlanders in these and other historic districts.

The Better Housing by Design project is considering zoning code and map changes to encourage housing opportunities and affordable housing as well as to foster new development in scale with historic districts.

The potential changes would affect high-density residential (proposed RM3 and RM4) and mixed use zones (CM) in historic districts and include:

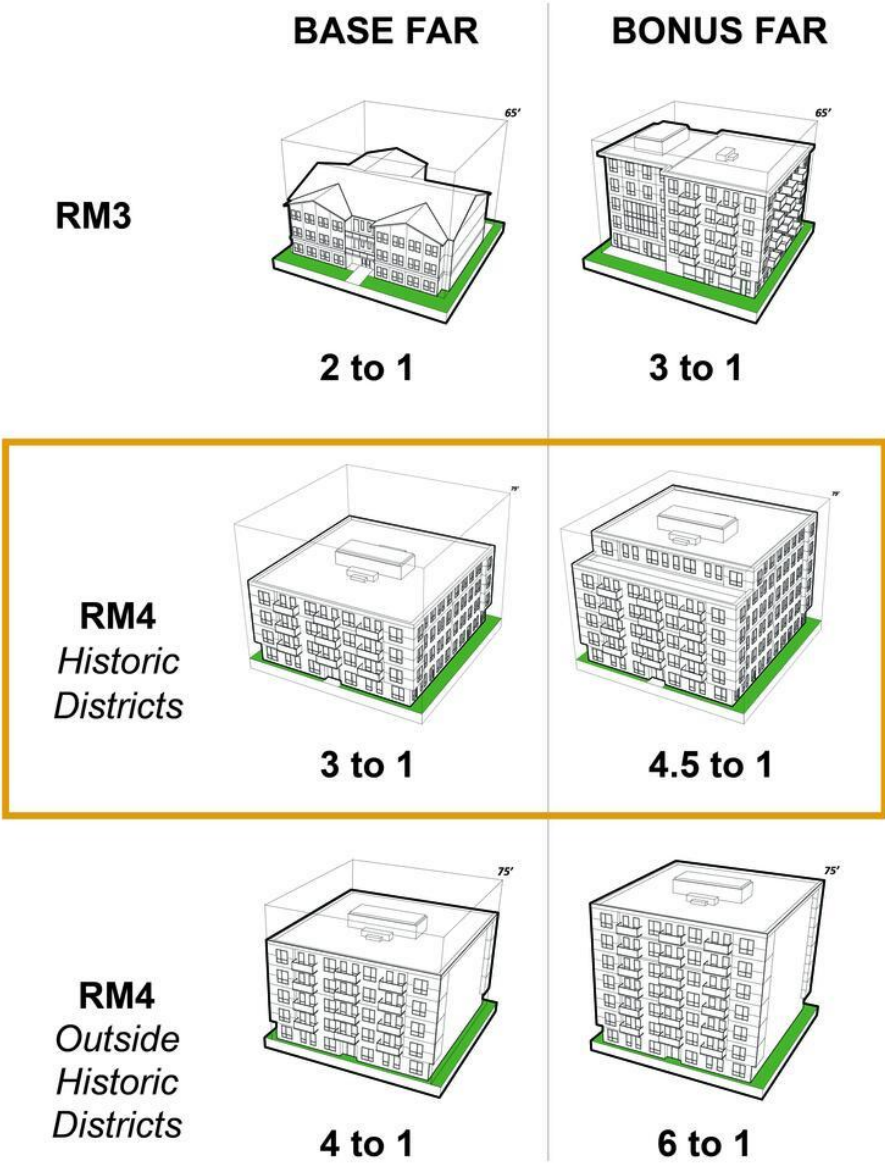
1. **RM4 zone changes** (dark blue on map). In the proposed RM4 zone (currently RH with a base FAR of 4:1), reduce the base FAR to 3:1 when located in historic districts but give projects that include affordable housing units an FAR of 4.5:1.
2. **Change RM3 to RM4 zoning in part of the Alphabet Historic District** (hatched area on map). In a portion of the Alphabet Historic district between NW 21st and NW 23rd that now has RH zoning with a base FAR of 2:1, change the proposed new zoning to RM4 (3:1 base FAR) to more closely match the scale of larger historic apartment buildings in the area.
3. **[Allow affordable housing bonuses in mixed use zones in historic districts](#)** (CM – pink and red on map). In the CM2 zone in historic districts, such as along NW 21st and 23rd avenues, development is now limited to an FAR of 2.5:1 (typically three stories), with no option for development bonuses. In the CM2 zone in historic districts citywide, changes would provide a bonus FAR of 4:1 (up to four stories) for projects that include affordable units. A small number of CM3-zoned properties in the Alphabet Historic District currently with a base FAR of 3:1 would have a bonus FAR of up to 5:1.



Map of zoning and potential changes in the Alphabet and King's Hill historic districts.

What is FAR (floor-to-area ratio)?

FAR regulates the size of buildings. An FAR of 4 to 1 (4:1) allows 40,000 square feet of building floor area on a site that is 10,000 square feet in size, typically five or six stories.



3 to 1



3.7 to 1



4.3 to 1



RM4 zone base and bonus FARs of 3:1 and 4.5:1 would accommodate the range of larger historic multi-dwelling buildings in the Alphabet and King's Hill historic districts, such as these examples.

Why are we doing this?

The intent of these potential zoning approaches is to:

1. **Provide incentives for affordable housing.** This is important because Portland's historic districts are places where people can live close to services and the employment opportunities of the Central City. These areas of the city have the highest densities outside of the Central City and are among Portland's favorite walkable neighborhoods.
2. **"Right size" zoning.** The proposals would adjust rules for higher density zones so the size of new development is compatible with larger historic buildings in the area. In some zones (particularly RM4), current regulations allow development that is much larger than historic buildings, while other zones (RM3 and CM2) do not allow new buildings to be as large as nearby historic buildings. New development would still need to go through Historic Resource Review, through which development is reviewed to ensure scale and design is appropriate for the surrounding historic district.

Existing buildings

These zoning amendments would primarily affect new development. For those who own or live in an existing building, the changes would have little impact (except in the case of major additions). Historic landmarks and contributing structures in historic districts are protected by demolition review, which limits demolition of historic buildings.

Learn more and/or comment

Please provide questions and/or concerns about these potential zoning code and map changes by April 2, 2019, to:

betterhousing@portlandoregon.gov

Or come see us in person at the **Better Housing by Design table** at one of the following events:

Tuesday, February 19, 2019, 5:30–7 p.m.

Historic Resources Code Project Open House
Architectural Heritage Center, 701 SE Grand Avenue, Portland

Tuesday, March 19, 2019, 4–7 p.m.

Historic Resources Code Project Open House
Center for Architecture (AIA Portland), 403 NW 11th Avenue, Portland

Next Steps



Alphabet Historic District (in area proposed to shift from RM3 to RM4 zoning)

These potential zoning code and map changes are ideas only; they are not formal proposals. Project staff will consider community input in preparation for a work session with the Planning and Sustainability Commission on April 9, 2019. Public testimony will not be taken at this meeting, but community members can attend to listen to the discussion (please confirm dates, times and agendas one week prior by visiting the [PSC Calendar](#)). The meeting will also be streamed live on the BPS [YouTube channel](#).

If the Planning and Sustainability Commission decides to include these proposals in the Better Housing by Design Recommended Draft, the public will have an opportunity to testify on them in front of City Council. That public hearing date has not been set yet, but it will likely be sometime in Summer 2019.

Additional Information

Potential changes to RM4 Zone

RM4 is the proposed new zoning designation for current RH zoning that allows buildings with a floor-to-area ratio (FAR) of 4 to 1. In historic districts, this zoning is primarily located in the Alphabet and King's Hill historic districts (a small part of the Irvington Historic District also includes this zoning, but is located in the Central City Plan District and is subject to different regulations). The original Better Housing by Design Proposed Draft continued the current base FAR allowance of 4 to 1 in the new RM4 zone and capped the amount of development bonus in the RM4 zone at a maximum FAR of 6 to 1 (buildings with 20 or more units, which are required to provide Inclusionary Housing affordable units, are provided with bonus FAR to help defray the costs of providing affordable units). This bonus FAR is considerably larger than the scale of historic buildings in the Alphabet and King's Hill historic districts, creating uncertainty regarding whether new buildings with this scale could be approved through Historic Resource Review. The potential change is to reduce the base FAR to 3 to 1 and to set the standard affordable housing bonus FAR to a maximum FAR of 4.5 to 1. These base and bonus FARs would allow for development that is similar in scale to larger historic buildings in the Alphabet and King's Hill historic districts (staff analysis of existing buildings in the Alphabet and King's Hill historic districts indicates that larger historic buildings in both these areas typically range in scale up to about a 4.5 to 1 FAR).

The proposal also includes a special "deeper housing affordability bonus" available only for projects where at least half of units are affordable to households earning no more than 60 percent of median family income. In the RM4 zone, this bonus would allow up to a 6 to 1 FAR for qualifying projects (the required level of affordability would not be feasible for most development and would likely only be used occasionally by affordable housing developers). Current regulations for the RH zone allow an FAR of up to 7 to 1 when projects use amenity bonuses or FAR transfers. The draft regulations would limit most FAR increases to a 4.5 to 1 FAR, allowing FAR beyond this amount only for the deeper housing affordability bonus to prioritize housing affordability in historic districts. Achieving this scale would be subject to review and approval by the Historic Landmarks Commission.

Potential RM4 Zoning Map Changes

In a portion of the Alphabet Historic District that currently has RH zoning (2 to 1 base FAR), consider changing the new zoning to RM4 (3 to 1 base FAR) to more closely correspond to the scale of larger historic apartment buildings in the area. This change would apply to areas with current RH zoning located between NW 21st and NW 23rd avenues, from Burnside up to NW Hoyt Street. As with other historic district areas with the proposed RM4 zone, this would provide a bonus FAR of up to 4.5 to 1 for buildings that include affordable housing units. Analysis of existing buildings in this



Block in the RH zone (2:1 base FAR) along NW Everett, where historic apartment buildings have FARs that range from about 3:1 to more than 4:1.

area indicate that 17 historic apartment buildings exceed the current base FAR limit of 2 to 1 and several historic apartment buildings are twice this scale.

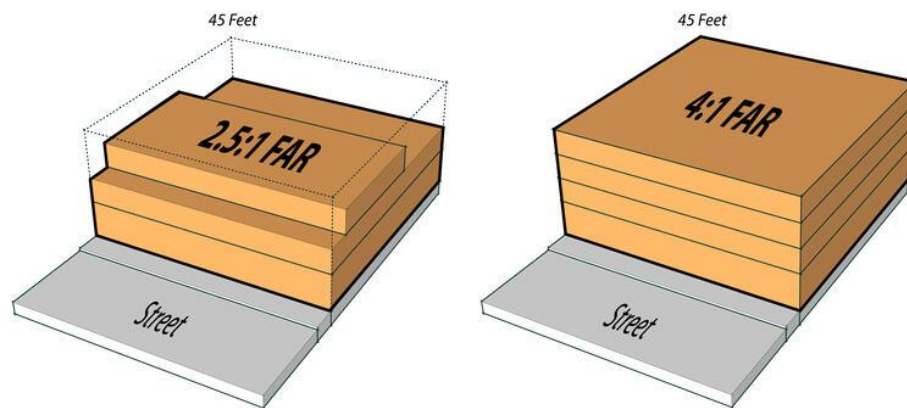
Mixed Use Zones (CM2 and CM3)

CM2. The primary commercial/mixed use zone in the Alphabet Historic District is CM2 (former CS zone), mapped along NW 21st and NW 23rd Avenues. Since May 2018, development in this zone has been limited to an FAR of 2.5 to 1 (equivalent to a three-story building covering most of a lot), with no opportunities for development bonuses (mixed use zone buildings with 20 or more units are required to provide affordable units but do not receive any bonus FAR when located in historic districts). Prior to May 2018, the CS zone allowed buildings to be built to a full four-story scale. The Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission has provided initial direction to amend the zoning code to allow development bonuses and FAR transfers to be used in mixed use zones within historic districts citywide. This would allow a bonus FAR of up to 4 to 1 in the CM2 zone (maximum building height would remain 45 feet). This development bonus would allow four-story development similar in scale to larger historic buildings along the Alphabet Historic District's main streets. This bonus FAR of 4 to 1 is the same that is currently allowed in CM2 zones outside historic districts. Smaller projects that are not required to provide affordable units could also achieve some additional FAR (but not the full bonus) through transfers of FAR from other sites where historic buildings are being preserved.

CM3. A small number of properties at the eastern edge of the Alphabet Historic District (along NW 16th Ave) have CM3 zoning, which has a base FAR of 3 to 1 (and a maximum building height of 65 feet). The proposed

amendments would allow a bonus FAR of up to 5 to 1 (maximum building height of 75 feet).

CM2 Zone



Base FAR: 2.5 to 1 (current maximum) and Bonus FAR: 4 to 1

Examples of existing buildings in the CM2 zone (NW 21st Avenue)



FAR: 3 to 1 (non-historic)



FAR: 3.2 to 1 (non-historic)



FAR: 3.7 to 1 (historic)



FAR: 5 to 1 (historic)