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Rubio, Development Services release results of housing production survey

Press Release



To better understand some of the constraints affecting the building of needed housing units in Portland, the City surveyed development professionals to identify changes that may achieve development more quickly.

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Commissioner Carmen Rubio and Bureau of Development Services director Rebecca Esau released the results of a survey seeking input on processes and policies related to the development of housing that may merit reconsideration as policymakers work to increase housing development.

“As we strive to build more housing units to meet the needs of Portlanders, it’s vitally important that we learn from stakeholders what actions we should take locally and at the state level to enable development more quickly,” said Rubio.

“As the Governor and Legislature pursue legislation that affects local zoning and development policies, it’s important that Portland contribute to that discussion with ideas that can increase the feasibility and production of housing,” said Esau.

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Highlights of the survey

The online survey was open from Feb. 16 through March 3. Participation in the survey was promoted via email to:

- Those who applied for construction permits for housing-related projects since January 2019
- Non-profit organizations involved in the development of new housing units
- Business associations serving companies and consultants involved in housing development
- Subscribers to the [Bureau of Development Services' Plans Examiner newsletter](#)
- Employees involved in permitting functions at the City of Portland's seven development review bureaus (Development Services, Environmental Services, Fire and Rescue, Housing, Transportation, Urban Forestry, Water)

The initial request for participation was sent to approximately 3,100 email addresses. The business associations that received a link to the survey were encouraged to share it with their members.

Participants were provided a list of more than 20 current requirements in the development of new housing and asked to rank the top five they believe should be suspended or modified to encourage new housing development. That list represented feedback the city had already received over recent years. Participants also were provided opportunities to offer additional suggestions not included on the list.

Six hundred eleven responses were received. The ten policies that received the highest numbers of top five priority rankings were:

| Policy | Priority 1 | Priority 2 | Priority 3 | Priority 4 | Priority 5 | Total count |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Bicycle parking requirements | 53 | 54 | 37 | 34 | 45 | 223 |
| System Development Charges (SDCs) - timing of payment | 66 | 35 | 46 | 26 | 45 | 218 |
| Floor area ratio (FAR) limits | 44 | 45 | 27 | 27 | 20 | 163 |
| First floor active use requirement | 31 | 44 | 31 | 27 | 23 | 156 |

| Policy | Priority 1 | Priority 2 | Priority 3 | Priority 4 | Priority 5 | Total count |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Reduced public infrastructure requirements | 29 | 27 | 25 | 36 | 28 | 145 |
| Demolition delay requirements | 29 | 23 | 32 | 26 | 26 | 136 |
| Non-conforming upgrade requirements | 24 | 23 | 26 | 37 | 22 | 132 |
| Parking impacts analysis | 30 | 19 | 35 | 18 | 28 | 130 |
| Maximum height limit | 35 | 28 | 21 | 27 | 17 | 128 |
| Bird-safe glazing requirements | 15 | 23 | 28 | 20 | 38 | 124 |

Survey participants were promised individual anonymity but asked to identify themselves in one or more of the following categories:

1. Architect, attorney, design professional, engineer, planning consultant, etc.
2. City staff
3. For-profit developer
4. Non-profit developer
5. Private sector permitting services or “permit runner”
6. Property owner
7. Other

The priorities identified were fairly consistent across these categories. Bicycle parking requirements, first floor active use, and timing of SDC payments ranked among the top four considerations across most participant categories. Only the two categories with the smallest numbers of respondents—non-profit developers and permit runners—did not mention SDC payments in their top five priorities. Non-profit developers are not subject to SDCs.

Participants were asked to provide information about the sizes of the housing projects they typically work on, both in numbers of housing units and numbers of stories. Most respondents across all categories indicated involvement with typical projects of 20 or more housing units and between three and four stories in height.

Copies of the full survey results, including all open-ended comments, may be [downloaded from the links below](#).

What comes next

The results of this survey will be shared with members of the City Council and the Portland-area state legislative delegation.

The results of the survey, and particularly the top 10 policies identified, require more research. The survey was the first step. Commissioner Rubio's office will work across city bureaus to learn more about each policy and its impact on housing production. That information will also be weighed against the city's stated core values of equity, good governance, and climate. Should Commissioner Rubio decide to move forward on any policy changes, proposals would first be subject to additional outreach to all stakeholders.

The one exception to this is the SDC payment schedule. For years customers have asked the city to consider changes to the schedule. Based on wide agreement, in and outside the city, Commissioner Rubio will bring an ordinance to Council to make this change.

"The city first called out the housing crisis in 2015, and that resulted in the passage of the Portland Housing Bond in 2017. That bond is exceeding expectations – and more actions have been taken since to build even more affordable homes for Portlanders," Commissioner Rubio added. "But all told, it's still not enough. We need to be looking closely at our development processes and policies to see what more we can do."

Background

Below are the affordable housing unit production numbers, since the city declared an emergency in 2015:

- Portland Housing Bureau opened and preserved more than 4,300 units of affordable housing, providing homes to an estimated 8,720 Portlanders.
- Additionally, more than 3,400 units in the Housing Bureau's affordable housing development pipeline will provide another 6,300 Portlanders with safe, stable, high-quality homes they can afford over the next few years.
- Moreover, since 2017, nearly 1,000 affordable units (either open or in some stage of permitting) have been created in the private market through the City's [Inclusionary Housing Program](#).

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