Better Housing by Design
Stakeholder Working Group Meeting Notes: March 23, 2017

Date: March 23, 2017
Time: 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Location: 4815 NE 7th Avenue (Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods Office)
Topics: Open Space Requirements, Scale-Based Approaches

Attendees:

Robert Mumford, Curt Schneider, Madeline Kovacs, Doug Klotz, Antonia Molina, Drew Chiasson, Alex Lortrakul, Rose Schaffer, David Schoellhamer, Simone Goldfeder, Alan Delatorre, Sam Noble, Michael Fu, Shawn Postera, Jim Gorter, Even Heidtmann, Bruce Nelson, Kate Piper, Sarah Iannarone, Katie Faisell, Michael Anderson, David Sweet, Graham Wright, Soren Impey, Marsha Hanchrow, Sam Fuqua

Staff: Chip Lazenby (Facilitator), Bill Cunningham (BPS), Radcliffe Dacanay (BPS), Marc Asnis (BPS), Neil Heller (BPS)

A. Open Space Requirements

Question 1: Should residential outdoor space be required in the high-density multi-dwelling zone?

- Vary requirements based on proximity to city park.
- Consider changing outdoor space requirements to per bedroom vs per unit.
- Open space requirements should be weighted toward shared space, requiring less open space per unit if combined into shared space as an incentive.
- Lack of street connectivity can make it difficult to reach nearby parks – ¼ mile distance to a park without connections should not count.
- Balconies are often not useful as outdoor space, often used as storage. More value in larger shared spaces.
- Requiring open space affects development costs. Allow inexpensive shared outdoor space options, like community gardens.
- Need more shared space. Shared spaces, including indoor community spaces, allow for social connections.
- Maybe require less outdoor space for Inclusionary Housing projects providing affordable units.
- Don't trade open space for affordability. Lower-income families need outdoor space, too.
- Keep in mind that any required open space on the ground also goes vertical for as many stories as the building is, so this can limit housing opportunities. This is especially so, and expensive, for small sites in high-density zones.
- Roof space is only so big and using as outdoor space can be expensive.
- Don't want outdoor space requirements to limit the ability to house people.
- Open space needs to be quality, useable space.
- Providing access to light needs to be a consideration in the design and location of open spaces.
- Need to consider outdoor space at different scales, such as shared outdoor spaces at the block scale, and outdoors spaces at the scale of individual properties. Need to consider context.
- Parking requirements compete with outdoor space in East Portland.

- Don't over-engineer outdoor space requirements based on lot sizes (such as the 20,000 SF threshold).
- Provide bonuses for Eco roofs. Eco roofs are a two-for-one, open space and sustainability.

Question 2: Should shared outdoors space be required for large sites (20,000 SF+)?

- East Portland should be treated differently – shared outdoor space is especially important there. Don't have just one citywide code.
- East Portland residents prefer family/community spaces and are willing to trade parking for it. Find a way to implement interior block pedestrian connections in East Portland.
- Use open space requirements as incentive for affordability.
- Requiring outdoor spaces won't create equality.
- Get away from arbitrary thresholds in your requirements (Inclusionary Housing thresholds will create many 19-unit buildings to avoid 20-unit threshold). Do not create incentives for breaking properties into smaller sites to avoid thresholds.
- Private vs public open space. City should provide public spaces/parks close to multi-family housing, rather than depending on each property to provide outdoor spaces. Need to look at bigger picture, not just what happens on individual properties.
- We could consider a suburban repair overlay in East Portland. Be innovative in East Portland.

Question 3: Should the amount of required outdoor space be increased in the lower-density multi-dwelling zones?

- Distinguish between useable and unusable space. Not only about amount required but quality of the space itself makes the difference - more is not always better.
- Shared social space (including indoor space) is key, rather than individual spaces.
- There is a danger in requiring too much that might limit innovative housing types.
- Access to light from two directions should drive outdoor space design, rather than a simple 48 square foot calculation.
- Look at changing R2 to not only be townhomes.
- Vary open space requirement based on proximity to city park.
- Consider the transition from single-family to multi-family, requiring more outdoor space adjacent to single-family zoning.
- Trade unusable side setbacks for better open space elsewhere on sites. We need functional, useable open space in the inner neighborhoods.

B. Scale Based Approach to Development Intensity

Question 1: What do you think about the idea of regulating by building scale instead of unit counts?

- Need to think about impact of this approach on size of units, family housing.
- Scale-based approach is good, especially if it provides more accessible units.
- Form-based approach is good. Neighborhood concerns are often about size of building, so scale can be more important than density.

- Experiment with FAR -based approach – it makes sense, but maybe start with an overlay area first.
- Scale-based approach makes sense to be cohesive with the Residential Infill Project.
- Just make sure that this approach doesn't allow large trophy houses (need minimum density).
- Provide development bonus to encourage family-sized units?
- Concerned about reducing allowed height/scale. May not win neighbors over anyway.
- FAR-based approach makes sense, but could reduce creation of family-sized units.
- Maybe tie this approach to particular housing forms, like courtyards (scale and access to light need to be considerations).
- Do away with side setback table. Sometimes requires 14' side setbacks, making it impossible to include courtyards or high-density development on small sites.
- What about a bedroom area ratio to encourage family units?
- Equity: private market encourages detached houses, which are not affordable. Need to create incentives for rental housing.
- Use extra FAR as bonus for affordability.
- We have a shortage of income and affordability, not family size homes.
- Parking requirements are a barrier to R1 zone development. Need to reconsider parking.
- Limiting by unit density results in large units and expensive housing, so FAR/scale-based approach is a good thing in allowing for smaller units that are more affordable. Still would allow family-sized units.
- 45% of Portland is zoned for single-family homes, we need more smaller units.
- Keep in mind that stacked units must be condos to be ownership housing.
- Form-based approach would provide needed flexibility.
- Housing with yards – maintenance is an issue for older adults.
- Need to find ways of incentivizing rental housing, such as through fee reductions.
- Consider creating incentives for small units, such as though lower "climate-impact" fees.
- Should also consider a minimum FAR.
- Even with changes, only a small portion of lots will get developed, so new approach will only have limited impact in housing production over the short term.

Question 2: What do you think about the idea of requiring buildings in the higher-density zones (45' or more height) to step down in scale to adjacent single-dwelling zones?

- No – should instead rezone the single-family housing next to higher density development.
- Transitions in scale next to single-family is important. Two most important neighborhood concerns are scale and then parking.
- Transitions are essential, and solar access.
- Should not just be a narrow corridor of density. The density needs to go back into the neighborhoods, instead of providing transitions in the narrow band of corridor density.
- Height step downs cause loss of housing units.
- Building height step downs provide space for socializing (with decks).
- Upzone the lower zone if there is a large disparity in scale.

- Instead of setbacks and step downs, look more at specific privacy issues – could be addressed by not having windows facing adjacent properties.
- Reduce setback requirements – these impact small sites.

Additional Comments

- Frontage requirements can be barrier to desired typologies.
- Eliminate parking requirements – adds costs and equity impacts.
- Housing type preference may change if they include desired amenities (outdoor space, storage).
- As population ages, yard care becomes increasingly difficult – shared space can help with this.

Submitted Written Comments

Garlynn Woodsong:

1) Using a Form-Based Code to regulate the multifamily R zones. I urge the City to do away with density restrictions in these zones, and instead to go with a form-based approach to regulate building scale. In order to maintain distinctions between the zones, I urge the use of height and/or FAR to distinguish between R1, R2, R3 and RH.

In that light, I think it makes sense for the height limits to be as follows:

RH: 55'+ more with bonuses
R1: 45'
R2: 35'
R3: 30'

The FAR should be a minimum of 1.0 for all of these, IMHO, with no max FAR within the height, lot coverage, and setback limits.

Currently, these zones can have a mandated 14' or more setback, when a tall wall faces an adjacent single family zone. This is excessive. The setback should be 5', though solar access provisions should be available to protect sunlight access for single family zones to the north, and to a lesser extent to the east and to the west. With a form-based code, all of this should be regulated in a simple manner; a retail street overlay would encourage a zero setback next to retail pedestrian streets, as well as active ground-floor uses that could include retail tenants in a flex space that could also allow for live/work.

2) Ground Floor Active Uses on Main Streets: I urge the City to allow / require space for active ground floor uses, including retail, for all multifamily R zones on corridors. I think that this would be a part of adopting a form based code to regulate the multifamily R zones. This would avoid the dead zones that happen on streets like Alberta where R zoning is interspersed with C zoning.

David Schoellhamer:

Thank you for the interesting discussion last night. Additional comments follow:

Open space:

question 2, Force large sites to have shared space?:

An advantage of large shared space is that it probably creates visual open space for the neighborhood.

General comment: Using balconies to satisfy open space creates a lot of opposition from adjacent neighbors who lose privacy. This would get worse if setbacks are reduced. Discourage balconies that invade neighbors' privacy. Favoring shared space would accomplish this. Private space is not necessarily private for everyone.

question 3: increase open space requirement for R1-3?:

Increasing open space adjacent to single family zones would help smooth the transition from single to multi family. To alleviate affordable housing concerns, perhaps decrease required open space further from single family zones and near parks.

Scale based zoning

Setbacks and stepdowns are needed. Adjacent property owners lose solar access, property value, privacy, and quality of life when a transition is poorly executed. Abrupt transitions like the one shown below foment opposition within neighborhoods to the best intended plans to increase density.

The City should consider the following principles when deciding how to change zoning to increase density:

1) Develop neighborhood scenarios for future housing demand. Consider the demand for housing created by population growth and the paradigm that more supply is needed to increase affordability. A simple scenario is to start with the Growth Scenarios Report estimate of 20,000 new households in Southeast Portland by 2035. Sellwood-Moreland has 8.1% of the land area of Southeast Portland. Therefore, if growth is uniformly distributed in Southeast, Sellwood-Moreland would grow by 1,620 households.

2) Estimate how much growth can be accommodated with existing zoning, property turnover, and construction rates in each neighborhood. This should be a holistic approach that considers commercial, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and existing multifamily and single family zones. For example, there are at least about 1,300 units presently under development in our neighborhood, a 22% increase from the total number of units in 2015.

3) If additional density is needed, introduce it gradually. Phase in the additional density by allowing only one additional unit per lot and years later evaluate supply, demand, and infrastructure resilience before increasing density further.

The housing scale and FAR slides at the meeting were very good, please post them.

David Schoellhamer
Sellwood Moreland Improvement League (SMILE)
Land Use Committee Chair
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Graham Wright:

I did have a couple of followup thoughts to share from the March 23d meeting:

Upon reflection all of the ideas presented were too incremental and cautious in light of the climate action goals (glad someone brought that up). I think you can't be too radical - go ahead and require co-housing, period, and you'd be doing us all a favor I think.
I saw a news item where one of the European countries plans to phase out gasoline cars by 2030; this is the kind of thing we need to be doing.

A few months ago I went to a Commission hearing about the climate action plan, and all the action items presented by staff for the next five years likewise amounted to just dinking around. One of the commissioners noticed that and asked "well all of this put together doesn't get us there does it?" The answer was no, and in response to the followup question about what would, the answer was well, we need to get off of coal and cars. So let us get on it. The land use planning stuff I have seen from the city seems to have this "centers and corridors" idea deeply embedded, but I am not convinced this idea is compatible with decarbonized transportation.