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Better Housing by Design Proposals Move Forward

News Article

Planning and Sustainability Commission votes unanimously to recommend new rules to improve development in Portland's multi-dwelling zones.

Published: May 23, 2019 4:44 pm

On Tuesday, April 30, Portland's Planning and Sustainability Commission (PSC) made their final amendments and voted to recommend that City Council adopt the Better Housing by Design Revised Proposed Draft.

Commissioners emphasized their support for the BHD proposals, which expand the range of housing options in multi-dwelling zones, provide incentives for affordable housing, and create more livable outdoor space in East Portland.

Key elements of the proposal

The revised draft keeps most of the elements of the original proposals, including design standards, greater flexibility for allowed numbers of units, bonuses for affordable housing, allowances for ground-floor commercial uses on major corridors, and provisions for outdoor spaces and green elements.

Final amendments the PSC voted to support include:

- Expanded allowances for daycare facilities in multi-dwelling zones.
- Allowances for narrower walkways when serving small numbers of residential units.
- Revised base and bonus FARs in the large scale RM4 zone in historic districts.
- Revised mapping of the RM3 and RM4 zones in the Alphabet and King's Hill historic districts to reflect the scale of historic buildings.
- Additional FAR transfer allowances for historic buildings with seismic upgrades in the multi-dwelling and mixed-use zones.

During this meeting staff also presented information on the BHD's potential effects on the production of affordable housing units and opportunities for less costly units.

What do the RM3 or RM4 zones look like?

The letters R and M stand for “residential” and “multi-dwelling.” The numbers refer to the scale of development allowed. RM1 is the lowest scale multi-dwelling zone and generally allows buildings up to three stories tall. RM4 is the largest scale multi-dwelling zone, allowing buildings as tall as seven to ten stories.

What does this mean for Portlanders?

Multi-dwelling zones cover only about 8 percent of Portland’s land area. Located in areas that allow people to live close to services and transit, these zones are expected to absorb about a quarter of the city’s population growth over the next 20 years. The Better Housing by Design project updates the regulations for multi-family housing to ensure that new development better meets the needs of current and future residents. The proposals will provide more opportunities for people to live in healthy housing that is affordable, accessible, and close to services and transit.

For these and other reasons, the PSC was enthusiastic in its support of the proposals. Commissioner Katie Larsell, a resident of East Portland, said, “There are some wonderful design changes, especially for East Portland, so that when development comes there will be more livable spaces for people.”

Commissioner Ben Bortolazzo stated, “The amendments bring greater flexibility and more options for people ... to live that they can afford, depending on where they are in life.” And Commissioner Jeff Bachrach felt the proposals could have a significant impact on development in the future.

You can view the meeting and discussion [here](#) (starting at 7:00).

The next draft of the proposal, the *Recommended Draft*, including all the approved amendments, will be forwarded to City Council for a public hearing and vote. Community members will be able to testify in person at the hearing or in writing before Council votes to adopt the proposals. Dates for the Council hearing and deliberations have not yet been determined.