



PLUSH COMMITTEE

Planning, Land Use, Sustainability, & Housing

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July 5, 2022

Bellevue City Council
450 110th Avenue NE
P.O. Box 90012
Bellevue, WA 98009-9012

Re: Affordable Housing & Housing Proposal

Dear Mayor Robinson and Councilmembers,

Thank you for your diligence and effort in following through on an inclusive and transparent policy making process for the Affordable Housing “Next Right Work” initiative. Engagement from staff and the City’s consultant has struck an overall positive and collaborative tone that we believe will ultimately result in supporting the growth of housing at all income levels in Bellevue. While the critical details of policy prioritization and implementation are yet to be addressed, we are strongly encouraged by the totality of the policies reflected in the current proposal.

As we continue our partnership on addressing the availability of affordable and attainable housing in our great city, we would like to offer the following suggestions for your consideration in reference to the proposal:

Yellow Highlights

- Allowing for unlimited FAR for residential is our highest priority, which will give industry the necessary flexibility to effectively develop in our communities. The City’s land use code dimensional standards already effectively restrict building forms, so there is no reason to add another layer of restriction on residential density.
- We remain strongly opposed to a commercial linkage fee, as we believe such a fee is not permitted under Washington state law. The only statutorily-allowed affordable housing fee structure that could effectively work with commercial development would be part of an incentive-based zoning system whereby the fee is assessed on the bonusable area within the project. This structure can only be implemented in the context of density increases, and bonus requirements calibrated properly to achieve dual goals of encouraging development and raising affordable housing funds. If calibrated improperly, development will be stifled. Fees must be calibrated carefully so that development can, instead, be encouraged. We request the opportunity to work carefully with you to craft this policy and these rates, should the Council consider this approach.

Green Highlights

- Items in green contain many high impact policies that will unlock a great deal of residential development. These items should all be included in the current 10-Year Comprehensive Plan update, over the next 16-18 months. In this housing crisis, it is essential these tools do not fall off the near-term work plan.

- Chief among the items to include in the 10-Year Comprehensive Plan update is allowing for contract rezones to eliminate some of the staff-heavy and duplicative processes currently required to develop property in Bellevue to appropriate densities and intensities.

Unhighlighted Items

- Five items in this tier are identified by staff as not having enough capacity to tackle. We ask that you evaluate these capacity concerns and make whatever necessary resources available to expedite completion of these items. Many of these issues could be included in the current ongoing Comprehensive Plan update. Additionally, the effort required to eliminate parking standards for residential developments, for example, is somewhat limited. Our coalition has offered to help resource the needed capacity to expedite this and similar items. We hope that you will consider ways that outside support can speed along Bellevue's housing agenda.
- Including a Planned Action component within the SEPA review that will already be done for the Comprehensive Plan update and subsequent rezones would have a high impact on speeding up housing unit production and is another item that should be acted upon during the Comprehensive Plan update that is already underway.
- The Land Use Code and permitting process should be simplified and streamlined. Eliminating processes like administrative design review for housing projects under certain thresholds could greatly increase the speed at which housing is delivered. Given the importance these policy areas have on the speed of development in the City, we believe we can work with Development Services on an ongoing basis and convene our members to prioritize those codes and practices that have proven most challenging during the development process. This effort could be scaled to fit staff capacity in addressing areas of improvement with the highest returns or lowest burden to implementation. Staff has indicated a prior willingness to participate in this kind of effort and we also ask policy makers to encourage this potential collaboration.

As this ongoing process to address housing in Bellevue continues, we look forward to serving as a resource at the City's disposal. In addition to the collection of technical and practitioner expertise with the Chamber's PLUSH Committee, our participation in co-leading the Eastside Housing Roundtable provides a powerful platform to find common ground with a diverse group of interested stakeholders.

We are again grateful for your leadership and for the meaningful engagement facilitated by the City of Bellevue's staff and its consultant. We are confident that this growing collaboration will result in a housing environment that is both thriving and affordable for Bellevue's current and future residents.

Sincerely,



Jodie Alberts
Vice President, Government Affairs



Jessica Clawson
PLUSH Committee Chair

Cc: Brad Miyake, City Manager, City of Bellevue
A-P Hurd, President, SkipStone