

Neighborhood context perspective

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RIPSAC Members advocating for the “Neighborhood context perspective”

Linda Bauer, Appointee – East Portland Action Plan
Sarah Cantine, Architect – Scott Edwards Architects
Jim Gorter, Appointee – Southwest Neighbors, Inc.
Rod Merrick, Principal – Merrick Architecture Planning
Rick Michaelson, Appointee – Neighbors West/Northwest
Michael Molinaro, Appointee – Southeast Uplift
Barbara Strunk, Appointee – United Neighborhoods for Reform

The SAC members above support the neighborhood context perspective and are opposed to one-size-fits-all zoning standards that we perceive as contradictory to goals in the adopted comprehensive plan, not respectful of the variety of neighborhood characteristics that exist in the city, and which would lead to simplistic and polarizing situations. Not only is it important to support the diversity of the neighborhood character, but the condition of housing, scale, history, and economic factors can play a significant role in defining what is appropriate.

During the entire SAC process, we repeatedly emphasized that “truth in zoning” is essential for rebuilding public confidence in the planning and zoning process and providing clear guidance for owners, designers, builders, and for the review process. We say that considering the primary metric for the zoning code is the density of dwelling units, and are concerned that the alternative housing proposals are further undermining the intent and purpose of this tool.

Current zoning density around centers is under-built and scattered middle housing defeats comprehensive plan goals to focus density around walking scale centers. This is a successful model advocated during the past 40 years and is yet to be realized, especially in the newer areas of the city. A complex of cyclical market forces, not existing zoning regulations, are driving the current housing price escalation and, consequently, the proposals under consideration will not mitigate the cost of housing. Rather the widespread application of “middle housing” is likely to accelerate price increases in an already overheated market, destabilize neighborhoods, and cause loss of viable and more affordable housing and increase demolition and displacement.

Key recommendations include:

- Test and model physical and economic impacts for proposed code changes prior to drafting and implementing zoning code changes.
- Create development standards that fit neighborhood context and aspirations.
- Ensure that scale of houses fits neighborhood context, protect solar access and privacy, and maintain individual green spaces.

- Use commonly understood terms and provide clear definitions of what is allowed in each zone, a concept known as “truth in zoning.” Avoid contradictory criteria such as the use of density when lot sizes are the governing criteria.
- Rezone areas in the City that are appropriate for higher density and alternative housing.
- Allow historically platted narrow lots to be recognized in zone R2.5.
- Save viable existing housing.
- Actively engage neighborhood and business associations to participate in decision-making during planning exercises and for major developments to improve understanding of context and needed design guidelines.
- Direct density to centers, as called for in the current and new Comprehensive Plan, to reinforce the establishment of centers, walking scale neighborhoods, use of transit and reduction of auto dependency.

Specific recommendations:

<i>Code element</i>	<i>Neighborhood context perspective</i>
Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure height from the low point of the lot • Maximum height: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 22 feet: Varies with lot width, up to 32 feet for lots greater than 90 feet wide. (Option: average of adjacent houses) ○ Measure to the average height of highest roof; include dormer roofs greater than 50 percent of the length of the wall of the house below.
Setbacks and projections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front: 20 feet minimum which may be adjusted to average of adjacent homes. • Sides: Average 7.5 feet, minimum 5 feet. Increase for larger lots. Exception: Minimum 3 feet for bay or bump out and for one level ADU or garage with up to 10 feet high sidewall, 10-foot side setbacks on corner lots • Rear: 20 feet; Detached ADUs 5 feet, 0 feet for 1 level ADU or garage. • Allow eaves to project within 2 feet of side setback to encourage shading and weather protection.
Bulk and building coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use floor area ratios (FAR) to regulate bulk in addition to building site coverage; exclude basements lower than 4 feet below grade in calculation • Use 0.5:1 floor area ratio in R5 regardless of lot size • Use 0.5:1 FAR in R2.5 with a significant bonus of higher FAR for attached housing. • Allow 10 percent bonus for accessory dwelling unit above the base FAR, for preserving existing to include an ADU. • Outdoor area: 15x15 square foot minimum in R5 zone.

<p>Parking / Garages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garage wall setback: align with or behind plane of main front wall. Attached garage width: 12 feet wide when above basement level or within 30 feet of front property line. • Garage door width less than 50 feet from front lot line: 9 feet maximum. • Narrow lots: Disallow street facing garages within 50 feet of the front lot line; do not require off-street parking. • Attached houses: Allow street facing garages only if other options are unfeasible.
<p>Main entrance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit the height of the main entrance to 4 feet above grade
<p>Middle housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicable for R2.5 and higher density zones: Total building envelope must match FAR for the zone; 0.5:1 for R5, 0.5:1 for R2.5, except as noted. • Zoning should regulate allowed density and lot size. • Form: Allow the following types in R2.5 and R2: Row houses, duplexes, internal conversions of existing homes, and ADUs, consistent with density standards. • Number of units under separate ownership: As allowed by the base zone. Accessory Dwellings may not be sold separately from the primary unit. • Location: Within 400-600 feet of centers, where services are available. • Location: Within 200' of corridors where services are available and where appropriate. • The particular areas need to mapped “where appropriate” in concert with Neighborhood Associations and Business Associations.
<p>Narrow lot development on historically platted lots</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Allow historically platted narrow lots to be developed only when zoned R2.5 and higher density. • Form: Regulate by scale, 25-foot lot width minimum; allow both attached and detached structures. • Do not allow development on a portion of a lot (i.e., “lot remnant”).