



Date: May 13, 2015
To: Planning, Land Use, and Sustainability (PLUS) Committee Members
From: Sara Belz, Council Central Staff
Subject: **Council Bill (CB) 118385 – Amendments to development regulations in Lowrise multifamily (LR) zones**

On May 19, 2015, the PLUS Committee will have its first briefing and discussion on CB 118385. The legislation proposes several amendments to the City’s regulatory framework for LR zones, including the following:

- Adding new upper-level setback requirements for all street-facing building facades in LR zones;
- Clarifying when exterior spaces such as hallways, breezeways, balconies, and stairwells must be included in the floor area calculations for projects in LR zones;
- Modifying density limits for projects located on small lots (less than 3,000 square feet in size);
- Placing limits on the use of clerestories and similar rooftop features in LR and other multifamily zones;
- Allowing projects in LR zones that receive certification from the Passive House Institute U.S. to qualify for additional floor area (three other green building certifications already qualify); and
- Establishing a new Design Review threshold for LR2 zones.

CB 118385 is Council-generated legislation; however, a draft ordinance developed by Department of Planning and Development (DPD) staff in 2014 served as the basis for the proposal (see “Background” section below). A matrix that provides greater detail about the content of CB 118385 is attached to the agenda for the May 19 PLUS Committee meeting.

Background

In 2010, the City Council adopted a comprehensive package of amendments to the multifamily zoning regulations in the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC). The legislation included major changes to existing development standards for LR zones. LR zones are residential areas where property owners may construct smaller-scale, multifamily projects such as rowhouses, townhouses, and three- or four-story apartment buildings. Single-family houses are also found in some of the

City's LR zones. LR zoning includes LR1, LR2, and LR3 zones, with LR3 zones allowing the greatest density of development. A map of the City's LR zones is attached to this memorandum. In total, LR zones cover about 10% of the City's total land area.




Following the passage of the 2010 legislation, Seattle residents began reaching out to Councilmembers to express concern about the scale of development occurring in some of the City's LR areas, citing, among other things, the construction of buildings with five-story street-facing facades in LR3 zones. At the request of Councilmember Sally Clark, DPD staff began a review of post-2010 construction outcomes in those areas and ultimately concluded that the regulatory adjustments had produced some unexpected height, bulk, and density outcomes.

In May 2014, DPD published a draft ordinance, Director's Report, and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) analysis that proposed several corrective amendments to the City's LR zoning regulations. An ultimately unsuccessful appeal of the SEPA determination delayed City Council consideration of the legislation by several months. In January 2015, Councilmembers O'Brien and Clark asked the City's Housing Affordability and Livability Advisory (HALA) Committee to weigh in on DPD's proposal. The HALA Committee's Zoning and Housing Types Work Group delivered their collective comments to Councilmembers and the Mayor on April 14. The HALA Work Group's comments recommended several modifications to DPD's draft proposal, many of which were incorporated into CB 118385.

Next Steps

A public hearing on CB 118385 is scheduled to occur at the June 2 PLUS Committee meeting. Further discussion and a possible vote will occur on June 16. If you have any questions about the content of CB 118385 or the PLUS Committee's schedule for reviewing the legislation, please feel free to contact me at any time (sara.belz@seattle.gov / 206.684.5382).

**Lowrise Multi-family Zones,
Urban Centers and Urban Villages**
(Except Manufacturing / Industrial Centers)

- LR3 
- LR2 
- LR1 

**Urban Centers and
Urban Villages.** 
(Except M/ICs)

