

Townhouse Reforms Legislation

Office of Planning and Community Development

SEATTLE
CITY HALL

Sept 2022



City of Seattle



Background

- Mayor Durkan's Affordable Middle Income Housing Advisory Council published recommendations in January 2020, which included reforming townhouse regulations
- Project was put on hold during pandemic
- OPCD published SEPA in Nov 2021 which was appealed
- Appeal was resolved in City's favor in March 2022

High Interest in Townhouses

- Townhouses are a relatively lower-cost ownership option as home prices rise
- In 2019 survey, 70% of people under 35 ranked townhouses as the number one type of housing that they would like to see more of in Seattle

Low Production

- Applications for new townhouse projects have been decreasing in last three years
- Many townhouse developers appear to be moving toward more single-family and apartment construction





Proposed Land Use Legislation

Goal is to remove code barriers to townhouse construction

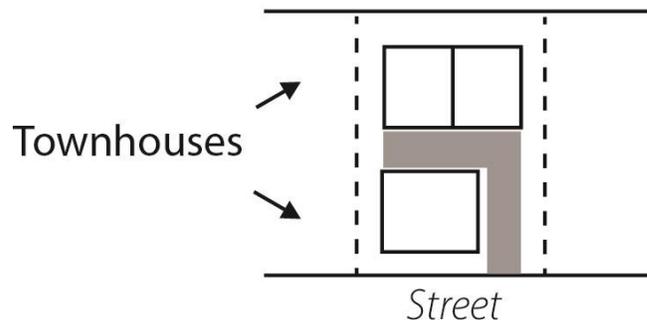
Three key changes:

1. Modify the density limit in Lowrise 1 zones
2. Update requirements for bike parking
3. Make easement requirements consistent with Fire Department standards

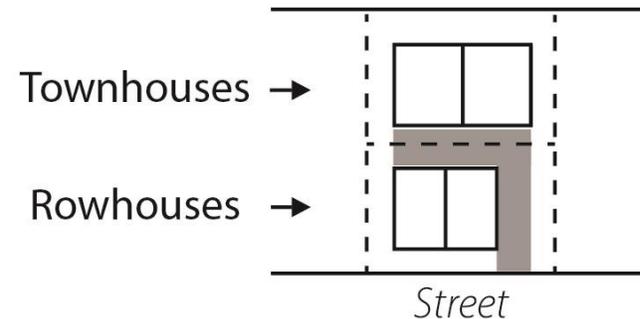
1. Density Limit in Lowrise 1 zones

- Currently, townhouses are subject to a density limit, but apartments, cottage housing, and most rowhouses are not
- Developers either:
 1. build larger sized townhouses
 2. subdivide lot and do rowhouses in front and townhouses in back

Example 1:
Without Subdivision



Example 2:
With Subdivision



1. Density Limit in Lowrise 1 zones

Proposal is to:

1. increase the density limit to from 1 dwelling unit/1,300 sq. ft. to 1 dwelling unit/1,150 sq. ft. so it is consistent with what can already be built by subdividing; and
2. apply the density limit to rowhouse development on interior lots to remove the incentive to subdivide

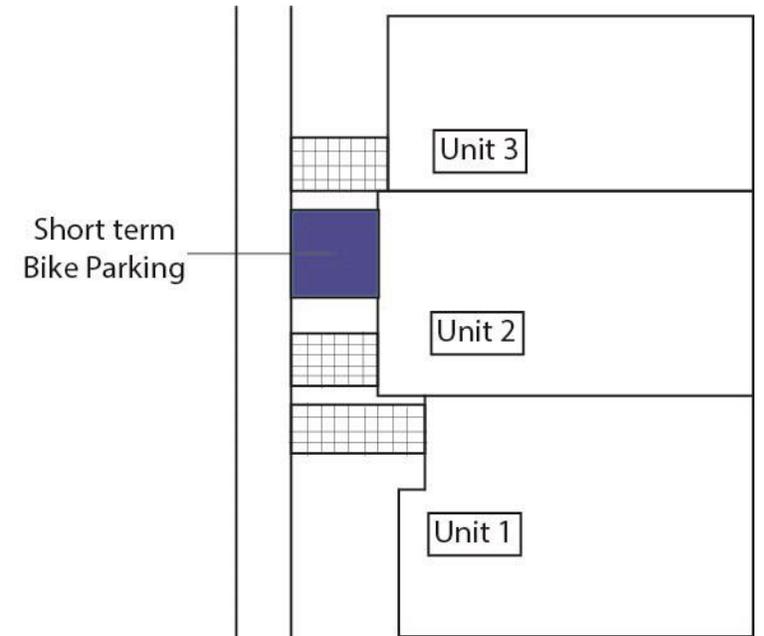
Benefits:

- Developers could continue to build lower cost homes. On 5,000 sf lot, 4 units at \$800,000 instead of 3 units at \$1,060,000
- Reduced time and cost for developers and City without subdivision

2. Bike parking

- In 2018, the City increased the amount of long-term bike parking required and added a new requirement for short-term public bike parking.
- The short-term requirement was designed for apartments and has been problematic for townhouses.
- Proposal is to:
 - Remove short-term bike parking requirement
 - Make it easier to accommodate bike parking in setbacks, between buildings, and within townhouse units

Example from Recent Project



3. Easement Requirements

- Currently, the Land Use Code requires a 20-foot-wide access easement for development with 3 to 9 housing units
- Fire Department has reduced their requirement from 20 feet to 10 feet as they no longer feel they need to drive a truck into the middle of the property
- Proposal is to reduce land use easement to 10 feet consistent with updated Fire Department guidance

Minor Modifications

- Allow minor overhangs over surface parking without counting surface parking in floor area calculations
- Modify an existing provision for parking off an alley to account for different alley sizes
- Change the minimum size of parking spaces in the individual garage of a townhouse from large to medium
- Clarify how development standards such as density limits apply to lots with multiple development types

Questions?

