SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL
CENTRAL STAFF

Missing Middle Zoning Requirements

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SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
MARCH 19, 2025

OUTLINE

1. MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING
2. SEATTLE'S NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTIAL ZONES
3. HB 1110 and OTHER STATE REQUIREMENTS
4. STATE MODEL CODE
5. OTHER CITIES' RESPONSES TO HB 1110
6. NEXT STEPS

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What is Missing Middle Housing?

Multifamily housing of a similar scale and form as detached single-family houses

These types of buildings were allowed under older zoning codes, but not currently allowed in Neighborhood Residential zones

Units are generally less expensive than single-family houses

Photos: King County Assessor

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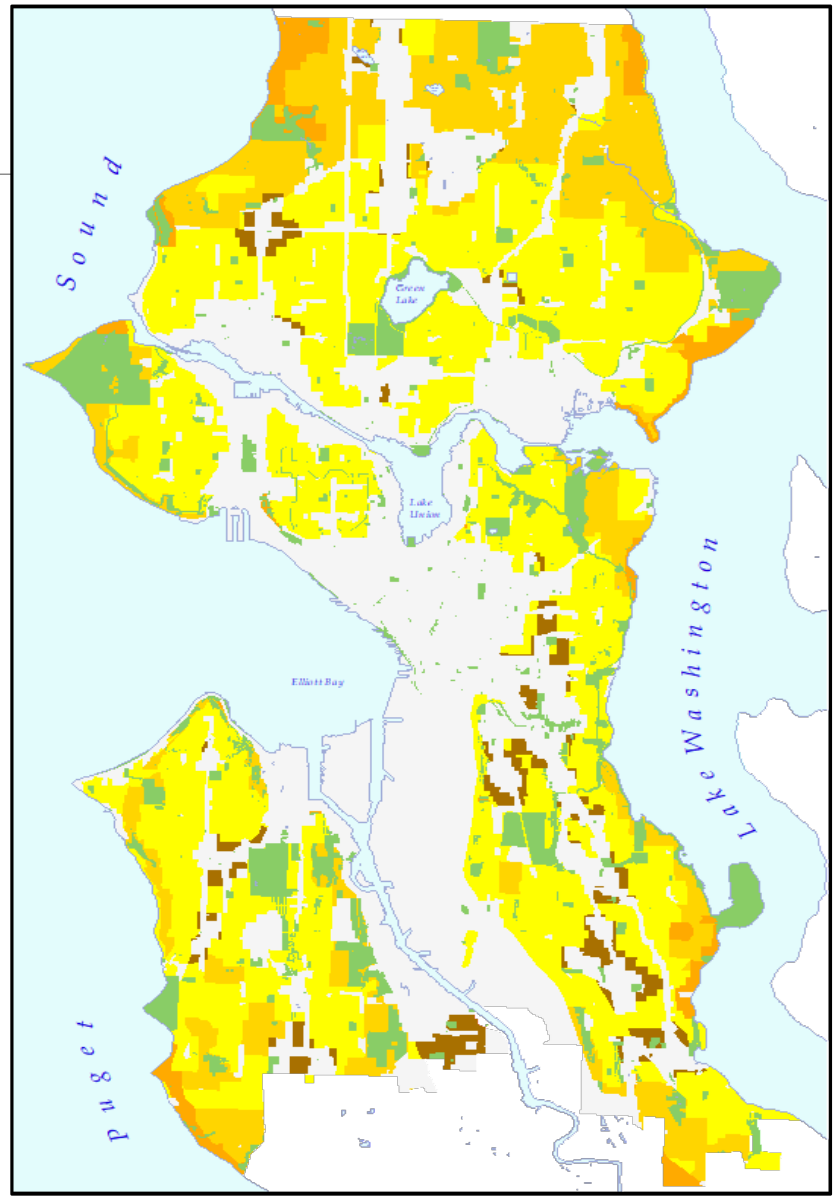
Seattle's NR Zones

Approximately 65% of Seattle is zoned with one of the four Neighborhood Residential (NR) zones:

- Neighborhood Residential 1 (NR1)
- Neighborhood Residential 2 (NR2)
- Neighborhood Residential 3 (NR3)
- Residential Small Lot (RSL)



NR Zones – Housing Types Permitted

NR1-NR3 Zones

Single family houses
Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)
Floating Homes
Adult family homes

RSL zones (5% of NR lots)

All of the above, plus
Apartments
Carriage Houses
Cottage Houses
Rowhouses
Townhouses

NR Zones – Densities

NR1: 1 unit per 9,600 sq. ft. + 2 ADUs

NR2: 1 unit per 7,200 sq. ft. + 2 ADUs

NR3: 1 unit per 5,000 sq. ft. + 2 ADUs

RSL: 1 unit per 2,000 sq. ft. + 1 ADU

NR Zones – Building Size Limits

NR:

0.5 FAR or, for lots less than 5,000 square feet, 2,500 square feet

+ 1,000 square feet per ADU (up to two allowed)

+ 500 square feet per other accessory buildings

RSL:

0.75 FAR (includes ADUs)

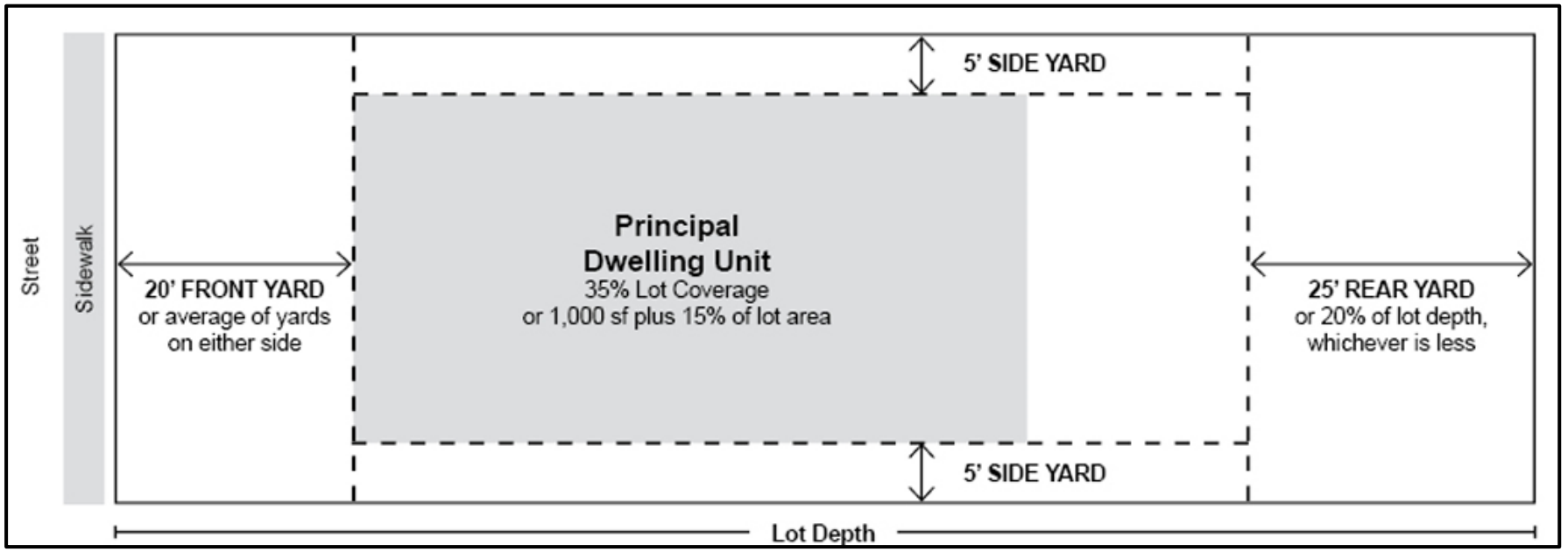
50% of existing single-family structures that remain not counted

Maximum size of each unit is 2,200 square feet

NR Zones – Other Development Standards

Height Limit: 30 feet + 5 feet for a pitched roof

Setbacks and lot coverage for NR1-NR3:



RSL: 50% maximum lot coverage, 10-foot front yard and rear yard requirements

NR Zones – Parking and Affordable Housing

Parking

- 1 space per unit
- No parking required for ADUs
- Parking generally must be located within a garage, or in the rear or side yard, with access from an alley if feasible

Mandatory Housing Affordability

- RSL zones only: 5.0% to 7.0% of floor area or units must meet affordability requirements depending on location

NR Zones – Trees

When single-family dwelling units are constructed:

- Lots over 3,000 square feet: at least 2 caliper inches per 1,000 square feet
- Lots under 3,000 square feet: at least 3 caliper inches of tree
- May be met through preserving existing trees or planting new trees

Street trees are required to be planted in the right-of-way planting strip when one or more principal units are added

RSL Zones – Trees

RSL zones when new units, non-residential uses, or parking are built:

- One “tree point” per 500 square feet of lot area

Type of Tree	Deciduous Trees	Evergreen Trees
New small tree	1 point	1.25 point
New small/medium tree	2 points	2.5 points
New medium/large tree	3 points	3.75 points
New large tree	4 points	5 points
Preserved trees	1 point per inch of diameter	1.25 point per inch of diameter

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Washington State Bills Requiring Zoning Changes

The city must implement the following bills within six months of Comprehensive Plan update:

- Missing Middle (2023 E2SHB 1110 and 2024 ESHB 2321)
- Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Reform (2023 EHB 1337)
- Design Review Reform (2023 ESHB 1293)
- Commercial-to-Residential Conversion (2023 ESHB 1042) (implemented by Ordinance 127054)
- Permitting Requirements (2023 2SSB 5290)
- Parking Standards (2024 SSB 6015)

Legislative Intent for HB 1110

Washington State is facing an unprecedented housing crisis for its current population and a lack of housing choices. It is not likely to meet its affordability goals for future populations.

State has a goal for 1,000,000 additional housing units statewide by 2044.

Increasing housing options that are more affordable to various income levels is critical to achieving the State's housing goals.

Higher density homes are more affordable in construction costs, reduced household energy, and transportation costs than lower-density homes.

The housing shortage requires both public and private investment.

Nine Middle Housing Types Under HB 1110

Photos: MAKERS for the Washington State Department of Commerce

HB 1110 – Density requirements

On all lots zoned for residential uses requires zoning to allow:

- At least four units per lot;
- At least six units per lot, if at least two units are affordable; or
- At least six units per lot on lots within one-quarter mile (1,320 feet) of a major transit stop:
  - Light rail
  - Commuter rail
  - Sound Transit bus stops
  - Amtrak
  - Streetcar
  - Monorail
  - Bus rapid transit
  - Trolley bus stops

HB 1110 – Housing Affordability Terms

To receive affordable housing bonus, affordable units must be included within the project:

- Affordable at or below 60 percent of Area Median Income (AMI) for rental units
- Affordable at or below 80 percent AMI for ownership units
- For at least 50 years
- Ensured by a covenant or deed restriction

Units must be:

- Comparable in size and bedrooms to rest of development
- Distributed throughout the project

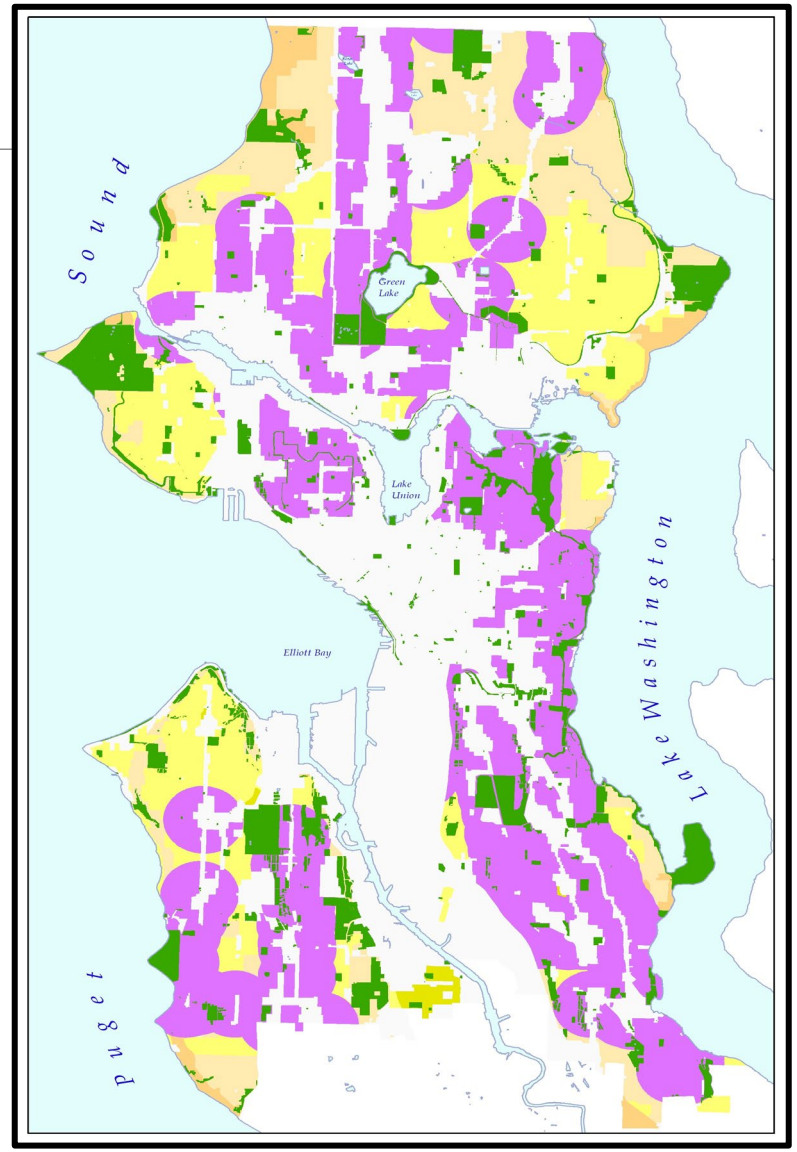
City may use an existing affordable housing program like MHA.

HB 1110 – Other Standards

Development regulations may not be more restrictive for middle housing types than apply to single family houses.

City may not require parking within a half mile of major transit stops.

Environmentally critical areas are exempt from requirements.



Approximate half mile from Major Transit Stops

HB 1337 – ADU Reform

Legislative Intent: Open single-family neighborhoods to a wider range of households by allowing for smaller units, providing options for lower-income households, seniors, and family members.

Most of the provisions of HB 1337 already apply in Seattle.

Changes required by June 30:

- Allow two detached ADUs
- Allow ADUs in all zones to be 1,000 square feet
- Allow conversion of existing structures into ADUs in all zones

HB 1293 – Design Review Reform

Design guidelines may only use clear and objective development regulations governing the exterior design of new development.

Applicants must be able to understand whether their projects will meet design review standards.

May not result in a reduction in density, height, bulk, or scale of development.

Design review processes are limited to one public meeting.

HB 1042 – Residential Conversion Bill

Applies in commercial and mixed-use areas.

Removes restrictions on adding residential units to existing buildings.

Ordinance 127054 implemented this bill for Seattle.

SB 5290 – Permitting Requirements Bill

Sets new deadlines for review of permits applications, including a maximum of 28 days to review completeness of permit application, followed by a maximum of:

- 65 days to review projects with no public notice required;
- 100 days to review projects that require public notice, but no hearing;
- 170 days to review projects that require both notice and a public hearing.

The City may be required to refund permit fees if it does not meet these deadlines.

SB 6015 – Residential Parking Bill

Removes parking requirements for middle housing within one-half mile of a major transit stop.

City can not require garages or carports as the only way to meet off-street parking requirements.

Requires City to allow tandem parking and parking on grass block pavers.

Sets maximum size requirements for required parking spaces.

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State Model Code

HB 1110 required the Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) to develop a model code to implement HB 1110.

The model code will go into effect on June 30, 2025, if the City does not implement the provisions of HB 1110.

The model code implements HB 1110 but also includes zoning requirements outside of the provisions of HB 1110. Those zoning requirements apply if the City does not implement HB 1110.

Provisions that explicitly implement HB 1110 are in **bold** on the following slides.

State Model Code – General Provisions

- Applies to all lots predominantly zoned for residential use except for portions of a lot with environmentally critical areas (ECAs)
- City may continue to allow single-family housing
- City may not apply stricter requirements to missing middle housing than apply to single family housing
- City may not use different permitting processes for missing middle housing
- City may require affordable housing through an existing affordable housing program (such as MHA)
- Building permits are still required

State Model Code – Densities

On all lots greater than 1,000 square feet that are zoned predominantly for residential use, allow:

- **Four units per lot;**
- **Six units per lot within a quarter mile of a major transit stop**
- **Six units per lot if at least two units are affordable for 50 years to renters earning 60 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) or homeowners earning 80 percent AMI**
- Accessory dwelling units do not count toward these limits (at least two ADUs permitted per lot that allows single-family houses)

State Model Code – Middle Housing Types

All nine middle housing types are permitted:

1. Duplexes
2. Triplexes
3. Fourplexes
4. Fiveplexes
5. Sixplexes
6. Townhouses
7. Stacked flats
8. Courtyard apartments
9. Cottage housing

State Model Code – Dimensional Standards

City may apply development standards as long as they are uniform across building types. This includes: building height, setback, lot coverage, floor area ratio limits (FAR), minimum lot area and lot dimension standards, impervious surface limits, open space requirements, and landscaped area standards.

Building height – maximum building height limit must be at least 35 feet.

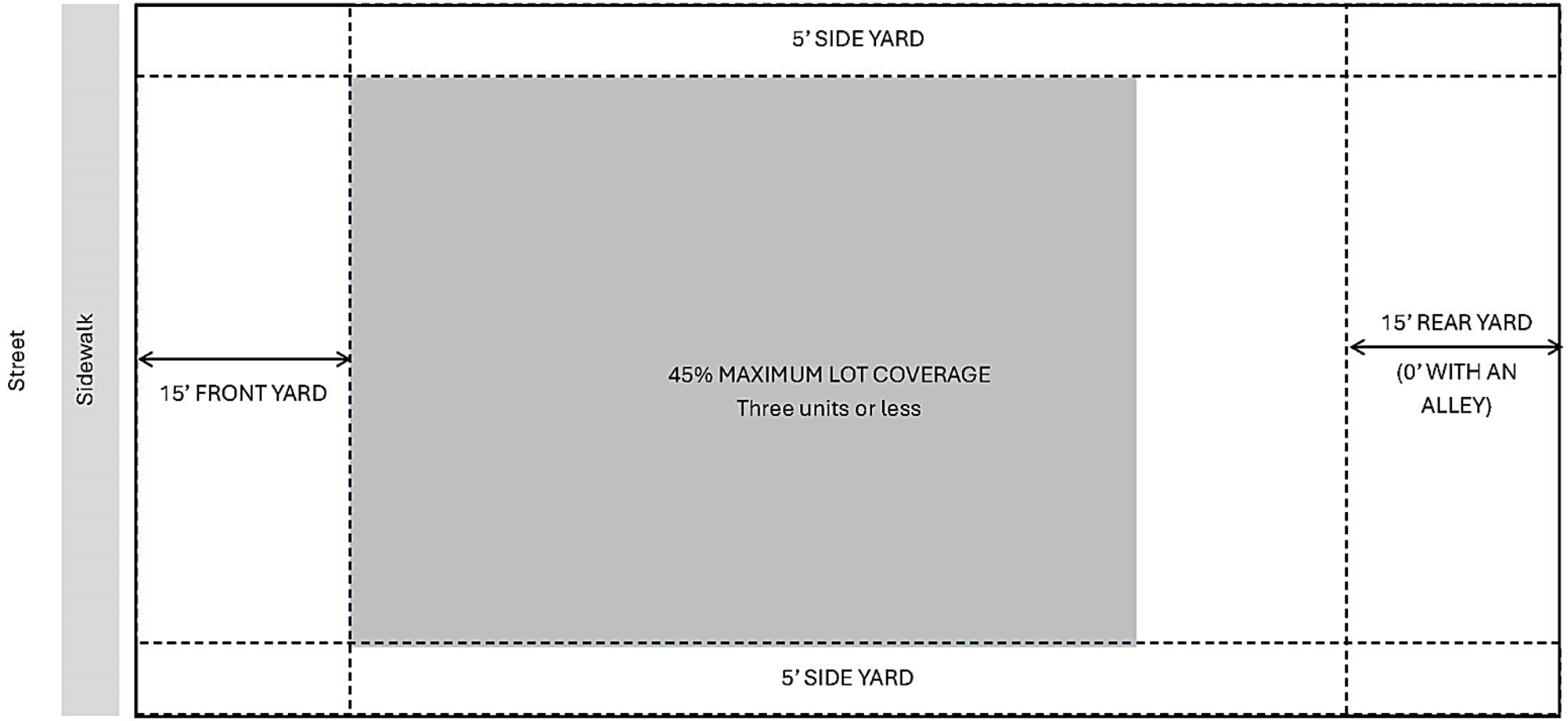
Floor Area Ratios vary by number of units on the lot.

Setbacks vary by number of units on the lot.

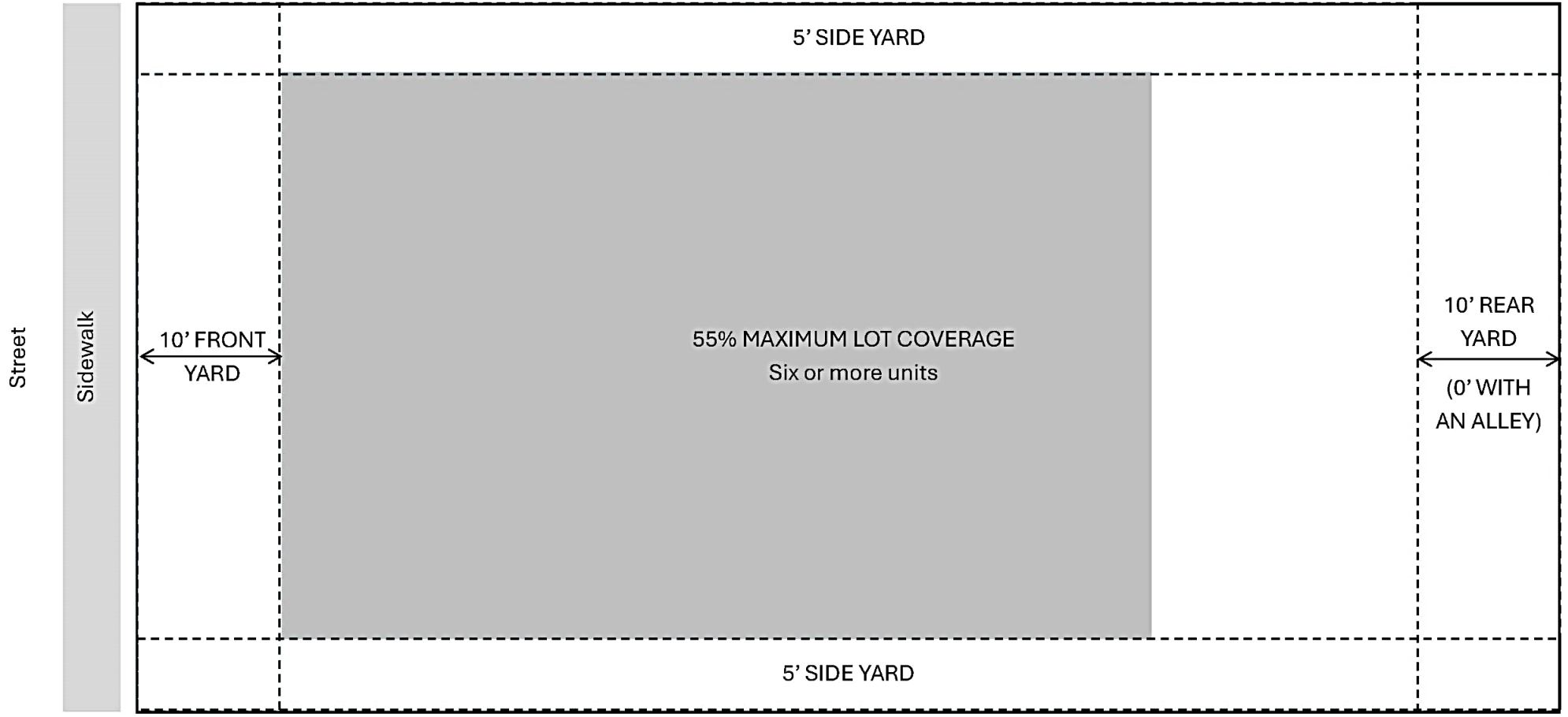
Lot coverage varies by the number of units on the lot.

Units	FAR	Lot Coverage
1	0.6	45 percent
2	0.8	45 percent
3	1.0	45 percent
4	1.2	50 percent
5	1.4	50 percent
6	1.6	55 percent

State Model Code – Setbacks (3 units/NR3)



State Model Code – Setbacks (6 units/NR3)



State Model Code – General Design Standards

Use an administrative design review process to review compliance with these standards.

Paved pedestrian connections are required between each middle housing building and the sidewalk, driveways may count.

Vehicular access shall be taken from improved alleys, if available.

Garages, carports, driveways, and other off-street parking areas are generally not allowed between a building and a street and may not protrude beyond the front building façade.

Driveways are limited to 32 feet per frontage.

Development standards for landscaping and trees shall be the same or less than standards for single-family housing.

State Model Code – Cottage Design Standards

Open space is required, equivalent to 20 percent of lot area:

- **A least one common open space is required**, equal to 300 square feet per cottage, bordered by cottages on at least two sides.
- Parking and vehicular areas do not count toward common open space.
- Critical areas do not qualify as common open space.

All cottages shall have a roofed porch.

Cottage housing developments may have no more than one community building.

State Model Code – Courtyard Apartment Standards

At least one yard or court is required.

The yard or court must be bordered by attached units on two or three sides.

The yard or court must be at least 15 feet wide on any side.

Parking may not be located in the yard or court.

Ground related apartments must have a covered pedestrian entry.

State Model Code – Parking

No off-street parking is required within one-half mile distance of a major transit stop.

A maximum of one off-street parking space is required per unit on other lots less than 6,000 square feet.

A maximum of two off-street parking spaces are required per unit on other lots greater than 6,000 square feet.

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Application of HB 1110

Of the State's ten largest cities, so far only Spokane and Tacoma had adopted new codes in response to HB 1110 by the end of February.

Both Cities allow all nine housing types in all residential zones.

Both cities have more than one lower-density residential zone.

Spokane – Densities and Heights

No density limit for lots smaller than two acres.

No FAR limits.

ADUs not counted as separate units.

Height limits:

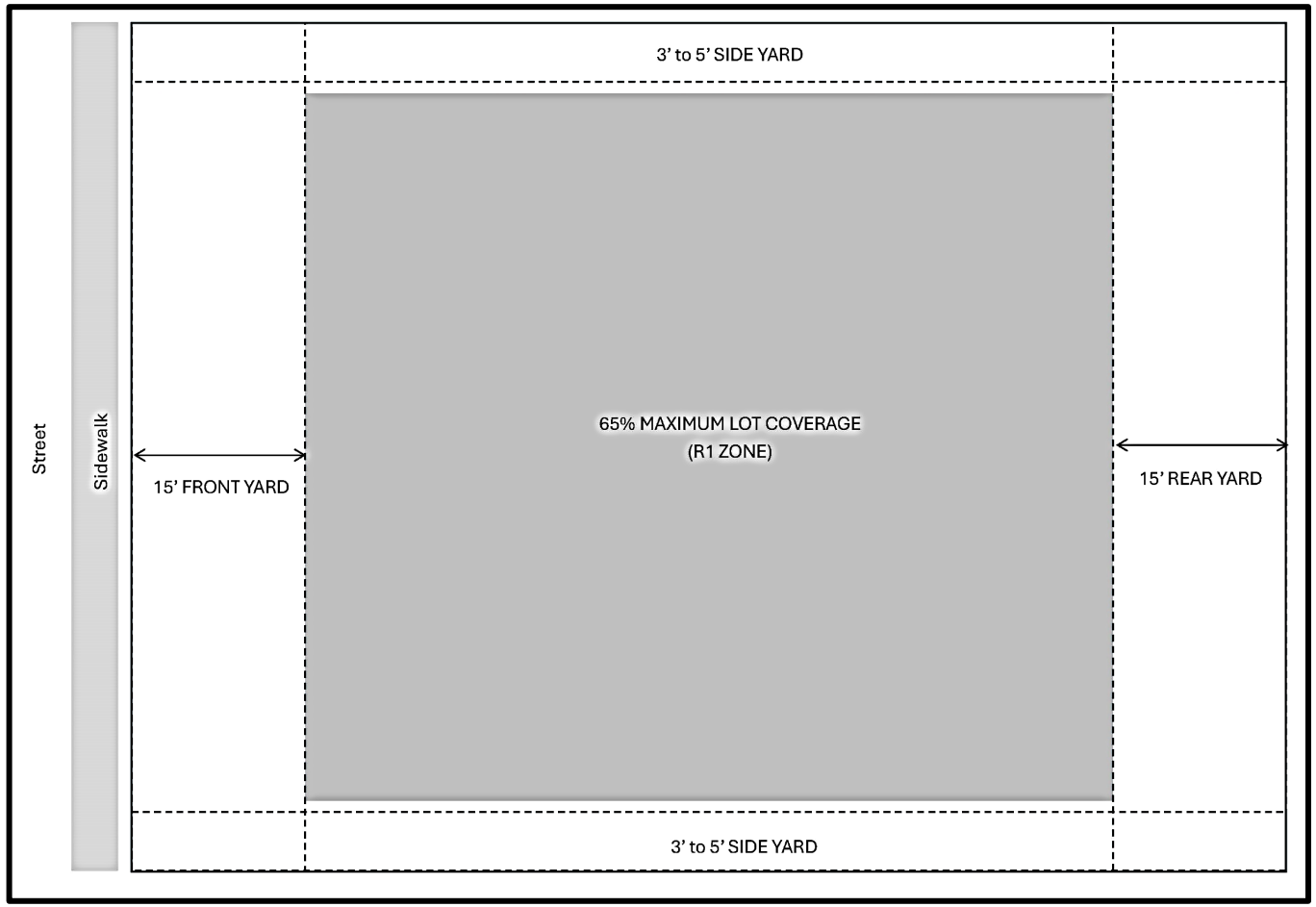
Principal structure: 40 feet

Accessory dwelling units: 25 feet

Other accessory structures: 20 feet

Spokane – Lot Requirements

- Lot coverage varies by zone (R1 = 65% and R2 = 80%)
- Primary building footprints limited to 2,450 sq. ft. or 35% of lot area
- Accessory building footprints limited to 1,100 sq. ft. or 15% lot coverage
- Other accessory structures limited to 15%-20% lot coverage
- At least 250 sq. ft. of open space per unit
- At least 50% of front yard landscaped



Spokane – Parking

- No parking required
- Parking not allowed within 20 feet of a street
- Limits on amount of front yard that may be paved

Spokane – Development Bonuses

Higher lot coverage limits (80% or 90%) available:

- Within a half mile of a major transit stop or the “Center & Corridor zone”
- When owned by a Religious Organization;
- For affordable housing
  - At least 25 percent of units affordable to low-income households (80% AMI);
  - Projects also qualify for Multifamily Housing Tax Exemption (MFTE)

Tacoma – Bonuses

Development Bonuses Allow

- Increased density (sq. ft. per unit and FARs)
- Higher building heights
- Reduced setbacks

Bonus Tier 1:

two affordable units, 20% of units affordable, or development retaining an existing building

Bonus Tier 2:

100% affordable units

Projects that retain trees, add ADUs or provide ownership housing are granted flexibility in building heights, alley access, and tree credits

Tacoma – Densities

Density limits

	UR-1	UR-2	UR-3
	1 unit per 1,500 sq. ft.	1 unit per 1,000 sq. ft.	1 unit per 750 sq. ft.
with bonuses	1 unit per 1,000 or 750 sq. ft.	1 unit per 750 or 500 sq. ft.	1 unit per 500 or 375 sq. ft.

(ADUs count as separate units)

FAR Limits

	UR-1	UR-2	UR-3
1-2 units	0.6 FAR	0.8 FAR	1.0 FAR
3 or more	0.8 FAR	1.0 FAR	1.2 FAR
with bonuses	1.0 to 1.2 FAR	1.2 to 1.6 FAR	1.6 to 2.0 FAR

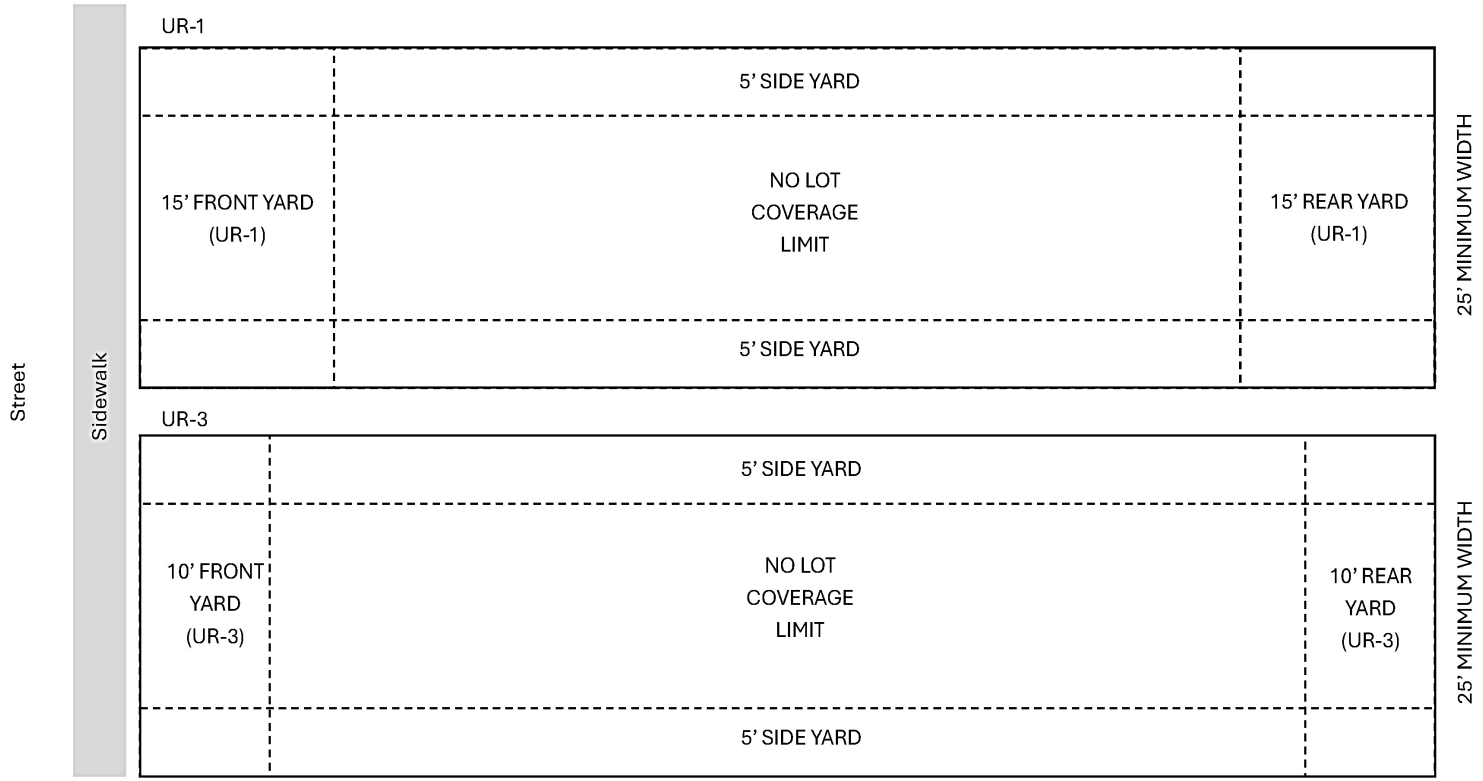
Tacoma – Lot Requirements and Heights

Minimum 2,500 sq. ft.

Minimum 25-foot lot width.

Height limits:

- 35 ft.
- 25 ft. in rear yard
- 45 ft. in UR-3 with bonuses
- 15 ft. for accessory buildings



Tacoma – Parking

Parking Requirements

UR-1: 1 space per unit

UR-2: 0.75 spaces per unit

UR-3: 0.50 spaces per unit

Access must be from the alley.

No more than one driveway per nine units.

Parking must be located to the rear, side, within or under a structure.

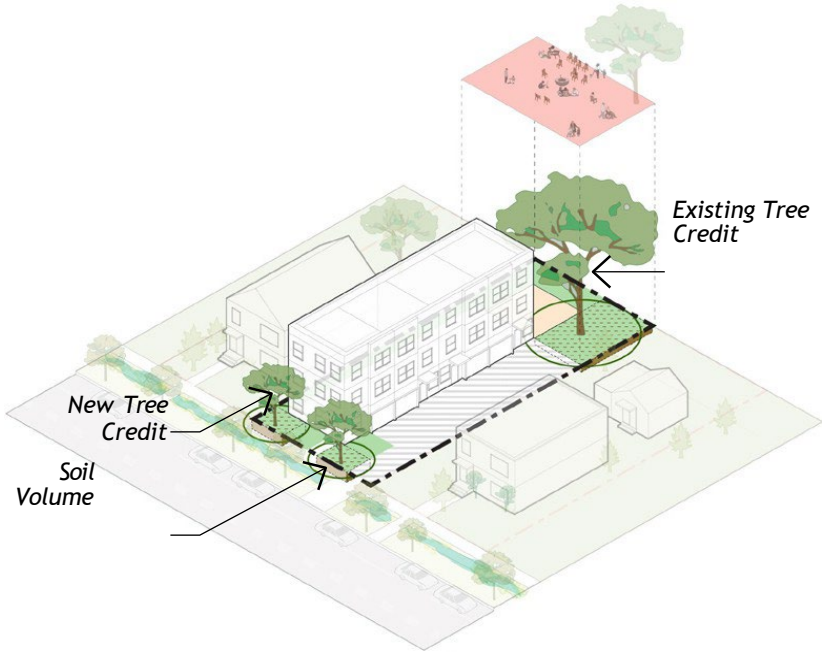
Tacoma - Trees

Tree Credits

Requires that a percentage of the lot area of sites being developed include new trees or retain existing trees

	UR-1	UR-2	UR-3
Minimum	30%	25%	20%
Bonus 1	25%	20%	15%
Bonus 2	20%	15%	10%

Credits are determined by trunk diameter for existing trees and tree species size for new trees



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Interim Zoning Regulations to Implement HB 1110

- Interim zoning regulations, sometimes called "interim zoning controls" are authorized by RCW 36.70A.390.
- Interim zoning regulations can be in effect for up to one year and expire unless they are renewed by ordinance.
- The Council must hold a public hearing on interim zoning regulations.
- Regulations that are intended to last longer than 6 months must have a work plan for developing and implementing permanent regulations.

Upcoming Select Committee Meetings

March 28	Proposed Interim HB 1110 Legislation
April 16	Discussion of Interim Legislation
April 30	Discussion of key issues
May 7	Discussion of possible amendments to the Interim Legislation
May (TBD)	Public hearing on Interim Legislation
May 21	Committee vote on Interim Legislation
May 27	Council vote on Interim Legislation

Questions?