

HALA Talking Points for Architects

Seattle is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States. The city's population is projected to increase by 120,000 in the next 20 years with an additional 50,000 units of housing needed the next 10 years.

Land area for close-in housing is limited by Seattle's physical geography and more than half of the city's developable land is currently zoned for single-family dwellings. This limited supply, coupled with sky-rocketing demand, creates housing scarcity, inflates land and housing prices, and limits the city's ability to accommodate the diversity of families and individuals that want to remain here or move to our city. Housing affordable to people at low or lower middle incomes is particularly limited. Seattle has one of the largest homeless populations in the United States, exceeding New York City in the absolute number of people who sleep on the street each night.

AIA Seattle

Center for Architecture
& Design
1010 Western Ave
Seattle, WA 98104

T (206) 448 4938

aiaseattle.org

To equitably meet the needs of our rapidly changing city, Seattle must rethink its housing policies at all levels of affordability, invent new models for housing at all scales, and publicly invest in housing for those most at risk of displacement. Increased housing supply must go hand in hand with a vision of a vibrant and livable city, and we endorse increased density as a means of achieving both of these goals. The quality of housing options and investment in community amenities, services and transit, are critical if Seattle is to remain a great and welcoming place for all to live.

At the same time, we recognize that HALA is a list of 65 recommendations, not legislation, and that any such proposal is an imperfect and controversial work in progress. Much remains to be done in order to implement these recommendations in a way that is effective and fair. We recommend the following in this effort:

- Demand good design and planning that supports it to enhance the quality of the city's urban fabric and public realm. Many agree that some recent development is substandard.
- Ensure that the HALA recommendations are applied within each neighborhood in a way that recognizes and enhances individual neighborhood character—a one size fits all strategy will not suffice.
- Ensure that concurrency, or the underlying infrastructure and amenities needed to support the city's quality of life as it grows, keeps pace with development throughout the city. This includes parks and open space, schools, access to transportation alternatives and the like.
- Expand the engagement of citizens (homeowners and renters alike) in neighborhoods throughout the city in an open and democratic dialogue regarding HALA and its potential impacts and opportunities.
- Ensure that a variety of affordable housing types are created such as larger, ground-related units for families with children.

Myth Busters

Misconceptions of HALA have led to the following 'myths' that architects can help dispel:



Seattle is building a lot of housing so we don't have a problem. While we are building more housing than any city in the country right now, we are only building half as much housing as we need to accommodate the people moving here.

Building new housing displaces people living in older, more affordable units. While there's some truth to this in the short term, the longer term result of not building more housing will be the elimination of all non-subsidized affordable housing as the demand for it outstrips supply. [To Build 1,764 New Homes This Year, Seattle Demolished... Just 21](#), Sightline

The housing being built is not affordable. This draws an artificial line between what is affordable and what is not. Seattle's housing costs are such that we have a broad housing affordability problem ranging from lower and middle income residents to even upper middle income families. People who bought homes here 10 or more years ago can have difficulty understanding this.

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The mayor negotiated the Grand Bargain with developers. This is not the case. The Grand Bargain was negotiated between for-profit developers and low income housing authorities and advocates.

The percentage of affordable housing we are asking of developers in exchange for upzones is too low. Other cities require more. Yes, some cities have required a higher percentage of low income units but they effectively stopped the construction of new housing in the process. HALA has been very careful to get the highest percentage of low income units without halting development.

We already have adequate capacity for projected growth so we don't need to upzone. This is misleading for two reasons. First, we are currently exceeding our projected growth. Second, 'capacity' is an abstract planning metric that is several steps removed from what is happening on the ground. The cost of housing relative to people's ability to afford it is a far more relevant means of gauging the need for housing capacity. [No, Seattle Does Not Already Have "Plenty" of Land Zoned for New Housing](#), Sightline