

HALA Endorsement

Executive Summary

- 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, well-designed and livable city, and we support increased density and related investments in community amenities, services and transit as a means of achieving both of these goals.
- AIA Seattle endorses Seattle's Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) as a comprehensive and timely response to the city's housing crisis. HALA provides the framework and the opportunity to have conversations about how density should happen, not whether it should happen. It also provides AIA Seattle with an opportunity to identify our housing and urban design priorities while inserting quality design principles into Seattle's ongoing housing discussions.
- AIA Seattle's endorsement of HALA is supported by our backing of the Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) program as well as proposals to reduce barriers to building ADUs and DADUs throughout the city.
- As part of our work on these issues, AIA Seattle's Public Policy Board has established Housing Task Force to provide meaningful feedback to the city and to connect AIA's priorities with specific policy actions.

Issue

Seattle is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States. Significant regional employment and population growth coupled with a generational shift in population away from the suburbs and toward the city requires us to find ways to accommodate unprecedented levels of population growth for the foreseeable future.

Land area for additional close-in housing is limited by Seattle's physical geography, land use and the fact that 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 who want to remain here or move to our city. Housing affordable to people at low- or lower-middle incomes is particularly limited.

HALA's initial aim is to create 50,000 homes by 2025, including 20,000 affordable homes – although we will need much more. The development of more affordable housing and market-rate housing is an important strategy for slowing housing cost increases and providing a wider range of housing choices.

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 vibrant, well-designed and livable city and we endorse increased density as a means of achieving both of these goals. The quality of housing options coupled with investment in community amenities, services and transit are critical if Seattle is to remain a great and welcoming place to live for all.

Current Status

To date, the following HALA provisions have been implemented:

- Support for renters: the city strengthened laws that protect renters from sub-standard housing and discrimination based on how they pay their rent.
- Seattle Housing Levy: in 2016, Seattle voters approved a doubling of the city's property-tax levy for low-income housing.
- Multifamily tax exemption expansion: the city expanded the reach of this program to allow new buildings to include rent- and income-restricted homes in more neighborhoods.
- Mandatory Housing Affordability: MHA was implemented in the University District, Downtown, South Lake Union, Chinatown-International District, along 23rd Ave in the Central Area and Uptown, and the city has proposed to implement MHA citywide in the summer or fall of 2018.
- Design Review reform: the city enacted Design Review legislation in 2017 intended to improve the overall function of the program.

Endorsement

AIA Seattle endorses Seattle's Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) as a bold, aspirational, comprehensive and timely response to the issue of housing affordability outlined above. In order to accommodate growth and to do it in a more equitable manner, Seattle must become a denser city. HALA provides the framework and the opportunity to have conversations about how that density should happen, not if. It also provides AIA Seattle with an opportunity to identify our housing and urban design priorities while inserting quality design principles into Seattle's ongoing housing discussions. Accordingly, our priorities for achieving density and increasing the affordability and availability of all housing types include:

- Advocate for a streamlined entitlement processes to make it easier and more affordable to build housing.
- Advocate for a variety of affordable housing types to be created, including larger units for families with children.
- Identify additional ownership and rental structures that can positively impact "missing middle" housing stock and overall housing affordability, such as legislation to allow more ADUs/DADUs or condos and more options for courtyard housing, duplexes, triplexes and townhouses.

- Promote creative ways to finance housing of all types, especially additional housing on single-family lots.
- Support efforts to provide alternatives to or help densify Seattle's single family-zoned areas, which account for 65 percent of land in Seattle (this number comes from HALA), including wider implementation of Residential Small Lot zoning.
- Encourage policies that positively impact carbon emissions by providing housing close to jobs and transit, thus reducing the transportation-related causes of climate change.
- Champion housing policies that lead to increased equity between income groups and among all races with the understanding that Seattle must address the fact that many communities of color have historically been kept out of its single-family neighborhoods. Also, understand that efforts to combat displacement may be contributing to fewer housing options and lower affordability in some areas.
- Ensure that the underlying infrastructure and amenities needed to support the city's quality of life as it grows keep pace with development throughout the city. This includes parks and open space, schools and access to transportation alternatives.
- Recognize the power of good design to enhance the quality of the city's urban fabric, neighborhoods and public realm.
- Tie AIA Seattle's homelessness efforts to our affordable housing goals.

Involvement

AIA Seattle embraces a vision of Seattle as an equitable, livable and sustainable city for all of its citizens. We are committed to the goals outlined in HALA, qualified to assist the city and its citizens as they navigate its complexities and ready to offer our professional skills and expertise through engagement, education and facilitation. While the city faces daunting challenges, we believe Seattle can grow in a more equitable, environmentally sensible way that leads to a strong sense of place and enhanced livability for all. We strive to convey this optimism through advocacy and action.

As part of our work on these issues, AIA Seattle's Public Policy Board will establish a Housing Task Force dedicated solely to addressing Seattle policies related to its affordable housing crisis. To help provide meaningful feedback to the city and to pair our priorities with specific actions, the Task Force will work to identify detailed policy components to address the housing and density goals outlined herein.

Positions on key HALA components

Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA)

Seattle's MHA policy is designed to ensure that growth brings affordability by requiring new commercial and multifamily residential development to contribute to affordable housing. MHA requires new development to either include affordable housing units or contribute to a city fund for affordable housing. To put MHA into effect, the city will make zoning changes that add development capacity and expand housing choices. The city estimates that MHA will provide at least 6,000 new rent-restricted, income-restricted homes for low-income people.

After putting MHA in place in six Seattle neighborhoods in 2017 (University District, Downtown, South Lake Union, Chinatown-International District, along 23rd Ave in the Central Area, and Uptown), the city is working to implement MHA citywide in 2018. This proposal – called Citywide MHA Implementation – will rezone (and in some cases expand) urban villages throughout Seattle. Other areas in the city that currently allow commercial or multifamily development will be subject to rezoning. These rezones are designed to ensure that, as Seattle grows, the city is able to create new rent-restricted homes for low-income households that might otherwise be priced out of the city.

Seattle's Urban Village Strategy has been in place since 1994. It identifies 30 communities where the city directs public investments in community assets such as transit and parks and where most of Seattle's future population and job growth is expected to be accommodated. Less intensive changes are proposed in areas with higher risk of displacement, environmentally sensitive areas and areas with fewer community assets.

Following the city's release of its Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Citywide MHA Implementation in late 2017, several neighborhood groups filed an appeal with the city Hearing Examiner. AIA Seattle will closely monitor the appeal process as it moves forward.

Endorsement

AIA Seattle endorses the MHA process as critical to ensuring that the city's growth and the growth of its affordable housing options go hand in hand. We support efforts to require developers to contribute to affordable housing while the city focuses on equitable development, particularly in areas where there are more assets to provide for a growing population such as parks and transit. MHA addresses AIA Seattle's goals of increasing housing supply while addressing the quality of Seattle's housing options and providing nearby urban amenities.

As architects, we are strongly rooted in urban design principles and our desire to make Seattle a vibrant, healthy and equitable place to live. While we have concerns about the way MHA might be structured or implemented in some neighborhoods, we remain committed to working with the city to review the program's performance and improve its functioning over time. In particular, AIA Seattle will push for early, third-party reviews

related to the balance between new fees and new development capacity and for a strong technical review committee that can ensure MHA's performance matches its promise.

Specific interests include:

- Determining if the affordable housing rates required of developers should be adjusted in the future.
- Identifying areas where MHA fees might outweigh the benefits offered given the city's other constraints on property.
- Ensuring good design principles are used in the development of affordable housing projects.
- Identifying urban amenities that Seattle must invest in alongside affordable housing.
- Asking that displacement trends be evaluated over time.
- Ensuring that the city remains committed to streamlining processes, improving agency coordination and accelerating the entitlement and permitting processes.

Reduce Barriers to ADUs and DADUs

The city has identified the need for more housing at prices accessible to people at all income levels, both for homeowners and renters. It has identified single-family neighborhoods as places where increased density can be achieved by making it easier for homeowners to build accessory dwelling units (ADUs) or detached accessory dwelling units (DADUs) in their backyards. In March 2017, Councilmember Mike O'Brien proposed a series of changes to make it more feasible for homeowners to build these units. A community council subsequently appealed to the Hearing Examiner, challenging the City's SEPA determination of non-significance. The Hearing Examiner subsequently reversed her determination, after which the city agreed to pursue a full EIS. AIA Seattle and many AIA members commented on the EIS scope in November 2017. The draft ADU EIS was released in May 2018; public comments will be accepted through June 25. The final EIS is expected to be completed by mid-2018, at which time city legislation will be reintroduced. The final EIS could also be appealed.

Endorsement

AIA Seattle supports the intent of the original O'Brien legislation and maintains that Seattle must make the creation of new housing units easier and more affordable in all areas of the city. We believe we can maintain uniqueness and character in our neighborhoods through creative policies and good design – but with the understanding that neighborhoods will change as they densify. AIA Seattle believes this represents a positive change for our city.

We support measures to make building ADUs and DADUs easier, from reduced regulatory requirements to creative ways to finance projects, and we will promote rules that allow architects to utilize the best possible design for each project. We also seek to influence the esthetic of lower-income ADUs and DADUs.

Related to specific policy prescriptions outlined in the draft EIS, we support:

- An option to choose two accessory dwelling units either both as attached to the primary dwelling or one attached plus one detached.
- Elimination of the parking requirement for ADUs/DADUs.
- Striking the owner occupancy restriction.
- A reduction of minimum lot size for ADUs.
- Incremental increases in size and height allowances and options for roof features such as dormers and green roofs.
- More allowable rear yard coverage.
- Increasing the allowed gross floor area and allowing both attached and detached accessory dwelling units to be the same size.
- Reducing pre-development costs and streamlining permitting by dedicating specialized reviewers to ADU/ DADU projects.

We also support a study that investigates the potential of limiting the FAR of new principal structures to incentivize the creation of additional attached and detached accessory dwellings and limit displacement, demolition and gentrification.

AIA Seattle looks forward to working with the city to craft a final proposal that will help to provide a greater range of housing options and prices throughout the city.

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