

Housing Policy Statement

12.2021

AIA Seattle embraces a vision of Seattle as an equitable, livable, and sustainable city for all its citizens. We recognize that the financial and social responsibility for reducing carbon emissions, increasing housing affordability, updating infrastructure, and building a better future for all is not limited to future residents and new development; these are shared challenges and responsibilities for the city and the region.

The Puget Sound region is projected to welcome an additional 1.8 million neighbors over the next three decades. Our region must produce significantly more places for people to live, starting with a focus on providing more diverse housing types that correspond to all income levels. Every resident should have convenient access to quality amenities and daily needs, as well as an array of mobility options to curb reliance on automobiles and increase transit ridership. New policies should keep the door open for homeownership and the wealth building capacity it provides while widening housing opportunities, especially for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) for whom access has been denied by past policies.

We believe that housing is a human right, and no one should have to live unsheltered. In Seattle, this vision stands in contrast to the limits of the city's historical approach to housing, exacerbated by an outdated growth strategy that has prioritized wealthier, white citizens over all others. Today, we must use our housing policies to create opportunity and access for all existing and future residents—reducing racial disparities and depressurizing demand in the neighborhoods that are most vulnerable to displacement and gentrification.

Architects can leverage our creativity to explore new and innovative housing options as our city and region develop policies to accommodate our future neighbors. We can use our sustainable building expertise to promote healthy homes and multi-modal mobility neighborhoods that support lower carbon cities. We can use design thinking to build better cities for all residents. This is a critical opportunity for architects to address the social inequities and environmental costs of our past housing policies by promoting equitable, well-designed communities that give rise to livable neighborhoods for all.

Key Messages

- Our region must address its historically racist and restrictive land use policies, and our work to develop housing policy and new typologies must lead with efforts to redress this legacy. This begins by advancing opportunities to access housing and amenities in all neighborhoods; supporting homeownership and wealth building opportunities specifically for BIPOC residents; and avoiding policies that spur further displacement.

- To equitably meet the needs of our rapidly changing region, we must rethink housing policies at all levels of affordability, streamline pathways for alternatives to detached single family homes, and publicly invest in permanently affordable housing. There is no one solution to our housing needs but, instead, many strategies that must work together.
- Increased housing supply must go hand in hand with a strong vision for vibrant, well-designed, and highly livable communities. Greater housing opportunity must be paired with thoughtful design strategies to consistently improve the quality of our built environment as we grow. As champions of design, AIA Seattle and our members should play a critical role in shaping policies that enhance the quality of the built environment while welcoming new neighbors.
- Housing and transportation issues are intertwined and directly impact the climate crisis. We must plan for, fund, and build more homes at all levels of affordability near existing and expanded transit and jobs, with walkable and rollable access to community amenities and services to reduce our reliance on the automobile.
- Seattle's single family zoned neighborhoods (now Neighborhood Residential) were intended to restrict access to renters, low-income residents, and communities of color, and they continue to do so today. To achieve a more equitable city for all, one focused on connecting housing to jobs and transit, we must provide more flexible zoning that creates a diversity of housing sizes and options.

Advocacy Goals + Actions

blue = architects have a direct role (vs. a supporting role)

Equity is Foundational

New housing strategies must redress our cities' historically racist and restrictive land use policies by opening opportunities to access housing and amenities in all neighborhoods, including homeownership and wealth building opportunities.

- Advocate for residential zoning policies that distribute housing opportunity at all income levels across every city.
- Champion zoning changes that allow more land use flexibility and additional building typologies to support greater opportunity for BIPOC communities.
- Support programs that create durable and affordable homeownership opportunities for communities historically excluded from intergenerational wealth building.
 - Support progressive state and local taxation mechanisms.
 - Promote programs to increase the number of housing units under public or community ownership.
- Support alternatives to existing development methods to combat displacement.
 - Promote anti-displacement policies as a form of societal reparations, the cost of which must be borne by society at large.
 - Make development mechanisms work for BIPOC communities and existing homeowners, reducing the risk of displacement and preserving people and culture.

- Incentivize, encourage, and support substantive BIPOC involvement in the development process through partnership, investment, and direct involvement of BIPOC community members in projects.
 - Work with communities displaced and at risk of displacement to create housing solutions with character and scale that address community needs.
 - Utilize and promote participatory development practices in housing and community projects.
 - Champion policy changes to allow BIPOC homeowners to create value from their properties through incremental development or development partnerships.
 - Amplify the work of organizations working to build ownership and equity in BIPOC communities.
 - Elevate and highlight successful projects that advance these goals.
- Support Seattle’s [Equitable Development Initiative](#).

Prioritize Growth Strategies that Reduce Climate Impacts

Growth and land use strategies must be developed in parallel with policies that reduce carbon emissions and energy use. Greater housing density is itself a sustainability action, as density and walkable/rollable access to goods and services reduce automobile use and support mass transit. By clustering housing around transit stations and close to jobs, cities can reduce their carbon impact and support more sustainable living.

- Maximize energy codes, incentives, and other policies to eliminate the use of fossil fuels in residential buildings.
 - Advocate for additional city incentives for high performance buildings.
 - Eliminate Design Review for high performance building programs.
- Champion ideas, practices, and regulations that reduce energy use in homes.
- Promote policies that encourage, require, or incentivize energy retrofits of single- and multi-family residential buildings.
- Support state and local policies to reduce embodied carbon in construction materials.
- Encourage policies that facilitate greater adaptive reuse of buildings.
- Support increased housing density around high-capacity transit stations to reduce single occupancy vehicle use.
- Advocate for the removal of parking minimums for all housing projects.

Promote A Range of Housing Options for All Residents

Existing residential zoning must be amended to allow greater flexibility of housing types and foster a more diverse range of households at all income levels. Barriers that prohibit new missing middle housing must be removed. Architects can elevate creative solutions that enhance housing capacity and diversity across all neighborhoods and for all residents.

- Advocate for greater flexibility of housing types in all neighborhoods, including the re-legalization of “missing middle” housing options.

- Provide expertise to policymakers on permitting, code, and zoning issues to enhance housing options, add flexibility, and promote creative design within residential zones.
- Promote state and local efforts to provide more missing middle housing options in residential zones, including ‘plexes, ADUs/DADUs, courtyard housing, and more.
- Explore ways to add additional housing capacity through code changes that amend existing building envelopes.
- Advocate for policies that support housing options for more types of people and families, including larger units for families with children and intergenerational families; downsized options for retirees; and smaller, more affordable market rate units for those just starting out.
- Drive conversations around what new zoning can look like in residential zones.

Elevate Livable Neighborhoods

Promote more vibrant and multi-modal mobility neighborhoods, led by zoning that enables greater quantity and variety of housing types and provides access to goods and services on a neighborhood scale for all residents.

- Actively participate in Seattle’s major update of its Comprehensive Plan (2021-24) through direct policy work, member outreach, and programming.
 - To distribute growth across the city, support the expansion of existing urban villages and advocate for a new growth strategy that provides greater land use flexibility in all residential zones.
- Promote policies that create “complete neighborhoods,” linking greater access to goods, services, jobs, and more to transit and housing.
- Support greater flexibility for mixed uses, corner sites, and additional development capacity within walking and rolling distance to frequent transit.
- Support a focus on the underlying infrastructure and amenities needed to support the city’s quality of life as it grows with development, including resource conservation, sidewalks, parks and open spaces, schools, and access to transit in all neighborhoods.
 - Advocate for the conservation of utility resources such as power and water; prioritize conservation and efficiency measures that lower overall use as density increases.
 - Support policies that create or improve pedestrian infrastructure such as pathways, sidewalks, stairs, ramps, and more, utilizing existing public rights-of-way to increase accessibility to transit hubs, urban villages, and parks, especially in the city’s historically underserved neighborhoods. All streets should be safe for walking and rolling.
- Prioritize mobility needs for people with disabilities, including transit accessibility and availability and robust connections between housing, jobs, and services. BIPOC individuals are more likely to be disabled and/or live with chronic health conditions; ensuring mobility for all will help to dismantle historically racist development patterns around access and inclusion.

Streamline Housing Production

Promote permitting and review process changes that streamline housing projects, offering quicker, more affordable, and more predictable development pathways.

- Drive administrative and legislative changes to Seattle’s Design Review process to reduce cost, promote greater efficiency, and provide predictability while clarifying the role design should play in our city.
- Champion permitting changes, including support for additional staff funding, that increase efficiency for housing projects, bringing housing online more quickly while maintaining public safety.
- Tie desired outcomes (equity, affordability, sustainability, accessibility) to process adjustments.

Support New Housing Investments for Low-Income Families

Support new public funding mechanisms to significantly invest in housing that the market does not provide, including publicly funded, rent-restricted housing and permanent supportive housing.

- Promote regional, state, and local funding mechanisms to enhance non-market rate housing options.
 - Support renewal/increase of the Seattle Housing Levy and JumpStart Seattle.
- Tie AIA Seattle’s homelessness policy efforts to our affordable housing goals in partnership with AIA Seattle’s [Committee on Homelessness](#). Advocate for funding mechanisms for rent-restricted housing options, housing vouchers, and homelessness services.
 - Support funding for diversion programs for individuals and families at risk of losing housing, which is the most effective way of preventing homelessness, and for high quality shelter and social services for anyone experiencing homelessness.
- Advocate for policies that support community land trust programs in our region.

Champion Design Principles to Inform Housing Policy Discussions

Demonstrate the power of good design to enhance the quality of the city’s urban fabric, its neighborhoods, and the public realm. Showcase the ways that a denser city becomes a better city, one that offers a higher quality urban experience.

- Advocate for excellence in housing design.
 - Showcase innovative housing designs that promote greater flexibility of housing types throughout the city—including infill design.
 - Lead efforts to reimagine the urban “neighborhood fabric” with a focus on residential form.
 - Champion civic, chapter, and other incentives and awards that recognize innovation and excellence in multi-family and affordable housing design.
 - Educate the public and policymakers through tours, AIA Seattle’s website, and gallery exhibits.
- Advance the discussion of what good design means across all housing types, demonstrating that we do not have to diminish design quality to support density or reduce costs.

- Encourage AIA members to participate in direct advocacy action on state and local issues related to housing.
- Utilize architects' strengths to advance the debate.
 - Employ architects' skills and technical expertise to inform public discussion and identify policy solutions.
 - Use AIA's reputation to champion housing policy in the areas where we have disproportionate power: city policy, the construction and developer community, and wealthier, white neighborhoods.
- Engage our members
 - Lead difficult conversations within our membership; make alternative voices feel heard and able to express their views.
 - Empower members to visualize the opportunities involved in designing creative urban housing that can be integrated into the fabric of our neighborhoods. More housing opportunities means more work for architects, not less.