

Housing Policy Statement

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 policies, 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.

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

We believe the city must produce significantly more housing to provide opportunity to current and future residents, curbing the impact of carbon emissions by reducing long commutes and increasing transit ridership, and allow individuals from all income levels an opportunity to participate in urban life near quality amenities and transit options. At the same time, architects can use this opportunity to foster principles of creativity, good design, and sustainability as the city works through policies to accommodate additional residents and explores new and innovative housing options.

Key Messages

- ⇒ 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. There is no one "solution" to our housing needs, but, instead, many strategies.
- ⇒ AIA supports policies that lead to more types of housing, for all kinds of people, in more places throughout the city.
- ⇒ Issues related to housing and transportation are intertwined and directly impact the climate crisis. We need to plan for, fund, and build momentum for more homes near transit and jobs, with access to walkable communities and affordable housing at all levels near existing and expanded mass transit.

- ⇒ Increased housing supply must go hand in hand with a strong vision for vibrant, well-designed and highly livable cities. Increased density must be paired with thoughtful design strategies to consistently improve the quality of our built environment as we grow. AIA Seattle and our members should have a critical role in shaping policies that affect the built environment.
- ⇒ Seattle’s single-family zoned neighborhoods have historically restricted access to renters, low-income residents, communities of color, and others. To achieve a more equitable city for all, one focused on connecting housing to jobs and transit, the city must find ways to provide infill housing options in these zones.
- ⇒ Architects are champions of design quality and can help shape policies to include elements of innovation, sustainability, and functionality as the city looks to add housing units across the city.

AIA Seattle Action

Advocacy Goals

Channel Growth to Reduce Climate Impacts

- Support mass transit funding, ridership, and expansion in Seattle and the region by locating more housing in close proximity to existing and expanding transit.
- Provide expertise as the city pursues climate policies related to buildings, including electrification, a reduction in carbon emissions, and greater energy efficiencies.
- Support policies to eliminate or reduce fossil fuels in all buildings.

Promote Equity

- Champion housing policies that lead to increased equity between income groups and among races, including more housing options for all income levels in all of the city’s neighborhoods.
- Support efforts to combat displacement while avoiding solutions that contribute to fewer housing options and lower affordability.

Support Efforts to Build Denser and More Livable Neighborhoods

- Support changes to existing zoning to promote greater freedom of housing types and increase “missing middle” housing options:
 - Support state and local policies to allow duplexes, triplexes, courtyard housing, and condos in single-family zoned areas.
 - Promote wider implementation of Residential Small Lot zoning (without MHA fees for owners).
 - Support greater flexibility for mixed uses, corner sites, and additional development capacity within walking distance to frequent transit.
 - Support other residential types such as courtyard housing, co-housing, privately-developed congregate microhousing, and co-ops.

- Revisit Seattle’s urban village growth strategy.
 - Apply a race and social justice lens to current and future growth strategies.
 - Support the expansion and/or creation of new urban villages and urban hamlets (smaller scale areas that include neighborhood commercial).
 - Modify existing urban village boundaries to incorporate walksheds and increase transit availability deeper into residential neighborhoods.
- Promote code changes to allow a wider variety of residential building types in neighborhoods:
 - Eliminate minimum lot sizes.
 - Allow increased lot coverage.
 - Allow more departures to single family buildings and to what is allowed in the existing building envelope.
 - Increase the number of people who can live on a lot.
 - Allow lot subdivisions by owner.
 - Incentivize additional units on single-family lots through FAR or other mechanisms.
 - Incentivize the preservation of existing single-family structures through FAR or other mechanisms.
 - Make it easier to convert existing single-family homes to duplexes.
 - Recognize lot typology (corner, alley, arterial) in addition to lot size and allow for increased development capacity on these parcels.
 - Reintroduce small-scale commercial spaces (corners stores, offices, etc.) into single-use single family zones to create more vibrant and walkable communities.

Promote Diversity in Housing Types

- Advocate for a variety of affordable housing types to be created, including options at all income levels and larger units for families with children.

Make it Easier to Build Housing

- Advocate for a streamlined entitlement process.
- Promote creative ways to finance housing of all types, especially additional housing on single-family lots.
- Advocate for transportation impact fees to support affordable housing.
- Champion changes to the Design Review process that make it more effective at improving our built environment while also making the process more efficient.

Champion 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.

- Support funding for diversion programs for individuals and families at risk of losing housing, which is the most effective way of preventing homelessness.
- Support funding for high quality shelter and social services for anyone experiencing homelessness.

Champion Design Principles as Part of Discussions About Housing

- Recognize the power of good design to enhance the quality of the city’s urban fabric, neighborhoods, and public realm. Lead the conversation about how to make a denser city a better city, one that offers a higher quality urban experience.
- Showcase and champion good design across all housing types, demonstrating that we do not have to diminish design quality to increase density.
- Advocate for incentives in the code that will promote good design. For example, incentivize adaptive reuse over replacement of existing structures.
- Ensure that the underlying infrastructure and amenities needed to support the city’s quality of life as it grows and keeps pace with development throughout the city. This includes parks and open space, schools, and access to transportation in all neighborhoods.

Proposed Actions

- ⇒ Connect AIA Seattle’s efforts on climate more directly to housing. Support policies to eliminate fossil fuel use in residential buildings.
- ⇒ Support the strategies outlined in the “Neighborhoods for All” report released by the Seattle Planning Commission in 2018.
- ⇒ Support Seattle’s reassessment of its urban village growth strategy and add flexibility to the zoning code to distribute growth more holistically.
- ⇒ Advocate for greater flexibility of housing types and expanded “missing middle” housing options.
 - Support state and local efforts to re-legalize missing middle housing options in single family zones, including ‘plexes and other types of non-single-family housing.
 - Work through AIAIWA to support statewide ADU reform.
- ⇒ Tie AIA Seattle’s homelessness policy efforts to our affordable housing goals and strongly support funding mechanisms for non-market rate housing options, including funding increases for rent-restricted housing options and homelessness services.
- ⇒ Advocate for excellence in housing design.
 - Showcase innovative housing designs that promote greater flexibility of housing types throughout the city.

- Educate the public and policymakers through tours, AIA Seattle’s website, and gallery exhibits.
 - Provide expertise to policymakers on permitting, code, and zoning issues that can facilitate more housing options for more types of people.
 - Champion civic, chapter, and other incentives and awards that recognize innovation and excellence in housing design. Create an AIA advocacy and outreach plan to identify goals, opportunities, and next steps.
- ⇒ Encourage AIA members to participate in direct advocacy action on state and local issues related to housing.
- ⇒ Lead efforts to institute a two-year review of any changes to housing policy once they are implemented. Engage with the city to take on this effort or conduct the review ourselves if it is not being done.
- ⇒ For all proposed actions, build coalitions with other organizations working on housing to maximize our voice.

Dec. 19, 2019