

Mandatory Housing Affordability Rezone Hearings

If you plan to testify, arrive at least 30 minutes early to sign up for a speaking slot.

The Basics: Mandatory Housing Affordability

What is Mandatory Housing Affordability? The new Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) program—or affordability requirements—that the City adopted last summer, mean that new residential and commercial construction projects also help create affordable homes, either by including income- and rent-restricted homes in the new building or paying into a fund that will be used to build income- and rent-restricted homes throughout the city. In exchange for these requirements, upzones will allow modest height increases to build more homes in already bustling, walkable neighborhoods, where all kinds of people live and work. Combined with upzones across the city, MHA will unlock over 6,300 income- and rent-restricted homes across Seattle for families and individuals who need them.

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 beginning 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 will 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 will be accommodated. Less intensive changes are proposed in areas with higher risk of displacement, environmentally sensitive areas and areas with fewer community assets.

The District 5 & 6 rezones are a part of the city-wide MHA package that will activate housing affordability requirements in Seattle's Urban Villages. By enacting these affordability rezones, we will not only be increasing the capacity for new homes, but will also ensure that Seattle's affordable housing stock continues to grow.

Why these policy solutions *matter*: Families and individuals across Seattle are struggling to keep up with rising rents and home prices. People with low and moderate incomes are left with fewer and fewer affordable options, which results in displacement from the city or making hard sacrifices to pay the rent. MHA is a tool to make sure that growth in Seattle helps to meet our city's need for affordable homes.

Tips for testifying

1. Tell your story. Talk about why you're here, why you care, and why this matters!

The City Council hears plenty of facts and figures. While one or two numbers can be helpful, what makes a particular piece of testimony stand out is a personal *story*. **Stories help people connect across shared experiences and values.** Talk about why you're here, why you care, and why this matters to you.

Your story is powerful: Were you priced out of your apartment? Have you experienced homelessness? Are you worried your kids can't afford to live in the city? Do you love your walkable neighborhood and think more people should be able to as well? Tell that story.

If you live in the council district where the hearing is being held, say so. If not, you can still testify.

2. Find common ground! **Emphasize our shared values and vision.**

When advocating for controversial policies, find common ground by naming our shared values and the hopes and dreams and vision most Seattleites agree on.

Talk about the values that are authentic to you and that connect with your own story. Here are some ideas, but it's best to say it in your own words. Seattle values include...

- Being a **progressive, social justice**-minded community whose residents care for one another → Building more homes in Seattle means...
 - Taking care of families and individuals with lower incomes or facing systemic racism who feel the worst impacts of soaring housing costs and displacement.
 - Greater opportunities for all to benefit from the city's good-paying jobs, great educational institutions, and rich cultural diversity. The promise and opportunity of our city shouldn't be reserved only for the wealthy or lucky few.
 - Our city remains a home for people of many diverse backgrounds, rather than become a playground for those lucky enough to afford it.
- **Pride of place** → Building more homes in Seattle means that...
 - Seattle leads on solving a problem shared by many cities across the US.
 - Our city continues to be defined by the people who live here, not the buildings they live in.
 - We're a welcoming city, not a city of walls and barriers.
- Enjoying and promoting our **natural beauty** through **purposeful city design** → Building more homes in Seattle...
 - Helps us avoid sprawl into our treasured natural places.
 - Means shorter commutes and thereby less air pollution from traffic.
 - Means more thriving, walkable neighborhoods—good for local businesses and good for public health.
 - The best way to accommodate all people in Seattle is to build more housing close to transit, schools, jobs, parks and services, and to require some of this housing be affordable.
 - Our city will change with or without the MHA upzones. Seattle should change in a way that:

- welcomes new people to our neighborhoods
- harnesses development for affordable housing
- protects those already here, and
- addresses the serious environmental issues we face.

3. Keep it brief. Stick to three main points and repeat!

You have **just two minutes** to make your case, and they pass *quickly*. (Two minutes is generally less than one typed page, double-spaced with large font.) A good rule of thumb is to stick to three main points. A powerful, memorable formula is to “sandwich” your policy point between two “values” statements--start and end with your personal take, why you care, and why this matters for people and our city.

Occasionally, if many people sign up to testify, Council will shorten your time to just 60 or 90 seconds. It’s a good idea to draft what you want to say and time yourself reading it out loud. Cut all but your key points and be prepared to cut further on the spot.

You may also email your comments to all City Councilmembers at: citywideMHA@seattle.gov.

More Resources

[Upzones: What are they and what do they do?](#)

[Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda \(HALA\) homepage](#)

[Rezone Maps](#)



Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) 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 – adding housing development in communities where existing residents are less vulnerable to displacement and where there are more assets to provide for a growing population, like 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. As such, we look forward to working with the city and others to improve the MHA over time. Specific interests include:

- Determining if the affordable housing rates required of developers should be adjusted in the future;
- Ensuring good design principles are used in the development of affordable housing projects;
- Identifying urban amenities that Seattle must invest in alongside affordable housing; and
- Evaluating displacement trends over time.

HALA 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 conversation. Accordingly, our priorities for achieving density and increasing the affordability and availability of all housing types include:

- Support streamlined processes to make it easier and more affordable to build all types of housing.

- Ensure that a variety of affordable housing types are created including larger units for families with children.
- Identify additional ownership or other structures that can positively impact “missing middle” housing stock and overall housing affordability – including ADUs/DADUs, courtyard housing, duplexes and triplexes and townhouses.
- Promote creative ways to finance housing of all types, especially additional housing on single-family lots.

Support policies that encourage the uniqueness, character and livability of each neighborhood even as new residents are moving in. We understand that retaining character does not mean no growth; our neighborhoods will change.

- Encourage policies that positively impact carbon emissions by providing housing close to jobs, 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 compensate for the fact that many communities of color have historically been kept out of our single-family neighborhoods.
- 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.
- Recognize the power of good design to enhance the quality of the city’s urban fabric, neighborhoods and public realm.