Washington State Legislature

May 6, 2024

The Honorable Bruce Harrell, Mayor
City of Seattle
P.O. Box 94749
Seattle, WA 98124-4749

Dear Mayor Harrell:

Thank you for the briefing your team provided to the Seattle legislative delegation on the initial draft of the One Seattle Comprehensive Plan. We appreciate the opportunity to share our feedback based on years of working with community members on these complex issues.

As legislators, we share the goals you and your team outlined in the plan, including increasing housing and affordability, promoting a more equitable city as we grow, and focusing investment on building complete, walkable communities. We have concerns that the first draft release of the One Seattle Plan falls short of these shared ambitions, particularly as it relates to encouraging diverse housing types, equitable development, affordability, and displacement protections.

Seattle legislators have led our colleagues in policymaking to address our statewide housing crisis which impacts our city most acutely, through the passage of landmark bills such as HB 1923 in 2019, HB 1220 in 2021, and HB 1110 in 2023, among others. We are deeply in tune with what Seattleites are asking for – a housing plan that encourages the development of dense and vibrant communities. As such, **we are asking to partner with you and your staff to update the housing provisions in the current draft plan to fully realize our collective bold vision for the city's housing future.**

Washington State is experiencing a housing crisis caused in large part by a shortage of homes and many of us have been working to address this for several years if not our whole careers. We are proud of the actions the legislature has taken to enable the construction of diverse housing options by legalizing permanent supportive housing, accessory dwelling units, middle housing, and co-living spaces. These steps are crucial to beginning to bend the curve of our housing shortage and begin building abundant housing. **Our local governments are essential partners in facing this challenge and taking adequate steps to address it.**

This is why we are asking for significant reconsideration of the draft Seattle Comprehensive Plan to address Seattle's decades-long underbuilding of homes. Seattle updates its Comprehensive Plan only once every eight to ten years, and the new housing it shapes will be in use for 50 to 100 years. The housing security of tens of thousands of current and future residents – along with their dreams of buying a home, raising a family, and truly belonging to our city – depends on the city embracing a plan to allow an adequate number of new homes over the coming decades.

We appreciate your stated goal to create, "One Seattle" where everyone belongs. We do not believe the initial draft plan goes far enough, fast enough, or equitably enough given the immense scale of the challenges we face, nor does it envision the livable communities that the people of Seattle have been asking for We need a final comprehensive plan that truly meets our shared vision of a modern, connected, climate-friendly city with abundant housing in every neighborhood.

We have identified a list of specific requested changes below. We hope you and your team will work with the Seattle delegation on these changes, and that we can support each other's goals to create a robust plan that will result in a stronger future for everyone.

Specifically, we would like to see a revised plan that will:

1. **Allow larger apartment buildings in more places throughout the city**: The draft plan recommends only a modest amount of upzoning for apartments. Seattle will never overcome its housing shortage without legalizing much more, including high-rise towers in all regional centers and near all light rail stations, eight-story buildings in all urban centers, and six-story buildings near bus stops and other community amenities like parks. It can also designate more and larger neighborhood centers with apartment zoning.

2. **Allow for Family-Sized Homes in Middle Housing**: Increase the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for fourplexes and sixplexes, to make it possible to build more family-sized homes. The proposed FAR would limit development of three- and four-bedroom homes, which are essential to meet the diverse needs of our growing city, accommodate families, and create new homeownership options.

3. **Allow More Homes Near Transit**: Allow midrise and mixed-use housing within a 10-minute walk of frequent buses. Building homeownership and rental opportunities near transit gives people more choices in how they get around their neighborhoods and makes transit a convenient option for more people. And building those homes off arterials but still near transit gives people the opportunity to live in quiet, green, car-light neighborhoods.

4. **Expand Neighborhood Centers**: Enhance the proposed Neighborhood Centers, to create lively, walkable hubs throughout Seattle. We suggest adding Neighborhood Centers studied in the DEIS but not implemented in the Draft Plan, like Alki, Seward Park, North Broadway, North Magnolia, and Northlake, along with increasing the radius of Neighborhood Centers from 800 feet to ¼ mile.

5. **Promote Equitable Development**: We have two recommendations in this area.

    a. **Revise the affordable housing density bonus** to ensure it is possible for a broad range of developers, including the social housing developer, to flexibly build affordable housing for sale and rent, without relying on scarce public funding.

    b. **Set a sunset on limits to development** for neighborhoods marked as high risk of displacement, and **specify robust anti-displacement measures** to implement during the "pause". HB 1110 allows cities to designate certain areas at high risk of displacement and exempt those areas from middle housing requirements. However, those exemptions are intended to be temporary, to allow cities time to develop and

implement anti-displacement measures to protect existing residents. The current One Seattle draft proposes permanent exemptions for multiple neighborhoods in the city, limiting the types of homes that can be built in those places and does not specify what anti-displacement measures would be implemented in the meantime Permanently limiting housing growth, without increased price pressures on existing homes, does not help communities stay in place, nor does it help young people belonging to those communities remain in or near their homes.

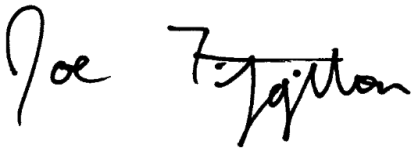
6. **Allow for Tall and Green Homes in Centers:** Increase height limits to 12-20 stories in Regional Centers such as Capitol Hill, the U District, Northgate, and Ballard, to allow more people to live in some of Seattle's most vibrant neighborhoods. Additionally, allow midrises up to 85 feet in transit corridors and Neighborhood Centers, to maximize the potential of wood-frame construction.

7. **Commit to Invest Resources in Affordable Housing for Extremely Low and Very Low-Income Households:** Adequately plan for a future that makes it possible for extremely low and very low-income seniors, families, and individuals to live in Seattle. While the Housing Element narrative recognizes that the greatest need is for housing affordable to people with the lowest incomes and acknowledges that subsidy is needed to build this housing, the goals do not reflect a commitment to pursue increased local resources to help meet that need. The plan should more clearly reflect the need at every level of government — local, state, and federal — to expand and invest resources in the production and preservation of housing for extremely and very low-income individuals and families.

Thank you for your work on the draft Comprehensive Plan for our city and for the opportunity to provide our feedback. We welcome the opportunity to connect directly with you and your team and look forward to continued collaboration on these issues.

Sincerely,

Emily Alvarado
State Representative
34th Legislative District



Joe Fitzgibbon
State Representative
34th Legislative District

Julia Reed
State Representative
36th Legislative District

Liz Berry
State Representative
36th Legislative District

Nicole Macri
State Representative
43rd Legislative District

Cindy Ryu
State Representative
32nd Legislative District

Noel Frame
State Senator
36th Legislative District

Darya Farivar
State Representative
46th Legislative District

Rebecca Saldaña
State Senator
37th Legislative District

Jesse Salomon
State Senator
32nd Legislative District

Javier Valdez
State Senator
46th Legislative District

Jamie Pederson
State Senator
43rd Legislative District

Joe Nguyen
State Senator
34th Legislative District

Chipalo Street
State Representative
37th Legislative District

Gerry Pollett
State Representative
46th Legislative District