

April 2019

Seattle Legislates Density... at a Cost!

Every 30 years or so, the city of Seattle makes a big change with regards to housing planning. On March 18th the city council made one of these changes by voting to adopt the citywide MHA legislation. This will change the zoning of certain parts of the city effective April 19th, 2019. Specifically, urban villages (areas with amenities and transit), were targeted as follows:

- many blocks that were zoned single-family 5,000 (SF5000) were changed to residential small-lot (RSL), reducing the minimum lot size from 5,000 to 2,000.
- some blocks that were zoned SF were changed to low-rise (LR), allowing buildings 30'-40' high and the construction of townhouses, rowhouses, and apartment buildings.
- for the most part, blocks that were already zoned lowrise remained with the same zoning... but the density limits were increased modestly.

In exchange for the increased density, all residential developments within the urban villages will pay a fee that will be put towards affordable housing. The fee will range from \$7.43 to \$34.77 per square foot of whatever is built.

In my opinion, overall, this will slow construction because the higher density limits are not enough of an incentive to justify the MHA fees in most circumstances. The exception is the few blocks where single family was upzoned to lowrise.

Ultimately, the city has added an expense to building without addressing the onerous permitting process which causes a simple 2-unit townhome project by your boy Lucas to suffer through a 1.5 year permitting process, running the soft costs (permit fees, engineering, architect) up to an astounding \$100,000. Just to build 2 townhouses.

The city will likely move towards addressing the mother-in-law and cottage housing legislation next.

Look up the upzoning effect on individual properties with the city's tool:

<http://seattlecitygis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=b0167cf4e63149e3b891307a41a639e5>

