



December 20, 2018

Hon. Jenny Durkan  
Seattle City Hall  
600 Fourth Ave.  
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Community Concerns Regarding Proposed DADU/AADU Legislation

Dear Mayor Durkan,

We are writing to express our continuing concern about Councilmember Mike O'Brien's proposal to convert all single-family areas in the City to triplex zones, and to express our hope that you as Mayor will help find a collaborative solution that has a positive impact on housing affordability, while respecting and preserving the character of the City's neighborhoods.

We, and others in our community, have had serious misgivings about the planned zoning changes since they were first proposed. Rather than simply opposing any changes, the Phinney Ridge Community Council (PRCC) conducted an online survey to gauge the community's feelings. We then formulated our own comments and proposals, which we forwarded (along with the survey results) to all councilmembers and former Mayor Ed Murray in March 2016. We received no response from any elected official. We have enclosed a copy of our original correspondence, and the survey results, with this letter. We urge you to review them.

**The biggest concern of the more than 360 residents who responded to our survey about the original proposal related to the effective elimination of the owner-occupancy requirement** for properties with Accessory Dwelling Units (AADUs and DADUs). Almost 60 percent of those surveyed opposed changing this requirement, which is widely believed to reduce speculative development and encourage owners of ADUs to be good neighbors.

When the legislation was first proposed, Councilmember O'Brien said that he supported a modified owner-occupancy requirement to help prevent speculation. The web page that accompanied the 2016 proposal said that the legislation would:

Requir[e] that the property owner live on-site for at least one year after a backyard cottage or basement unit is created... The requirement prevents speculative

developers from acquiring property and building backyard cottages that don't fit the character of the neighborhood, while allowing the owner future flexibility for those who don't want, or are unable to, continue living on-site.

When we pointed out that the legislation as written would in fact all but eliminate the owner-occupancy requirement, Councilmember O'Brien twice told PRCC representatives that this had not been his intention. For this reason we expected that some form of owner-occupancy requirement would be included in the legislation that accompanied the Final Environmental Impact Statement. It was not.

We continue to believe that retaining the owner-occupancy requirement is essential, regardless of other modifications that may be made, especially given the sweeping changes that have been proposed. These changes would effectively allow triplex zoning in all current single-family neighborhoods; we believe the result will be a rash of speculative development, especially in more modest neighborhoods with smaller homes. (We know that you have publicly expressed concerns about elimination of the owner-occupancy requirement, and hope that you press to maintain it in any legislation that emerges from the council.)

**It has been claimed that the legislation as currently proposed will help prevent demolition of small homes for “McMansions.” We believe that it will not;** by limiting the size of single-family residences but retaining the present generous height and setback regulations, the legislation will simply encourage the replacement of smaller homes with three-story triplexes (which may even include Air B and B units).

**In fact, the Final Environmental Impact Statement states that the plan's effects on housing affordability would be minimal.** Taken together with the fact that the City has concluded that it already has the capacity to absorb expected growth, we are left to ask: what purpose is served by the current proposal?

**We also continue to be concerned by the City's “one-size-fits-all” approach to the DADU/ADU legislation,** which stems from the false assumption that the same rules will work in neighborhoods as diverse as Lake City, Rainier Valley, View Ridge, Wedgwood, the Central District, Broadview, Magnolia, West Seattle and Beacon Hill. Some neighborhoods have large lots, wide streets, off-street garages and no curbside parking problems. Other neighborhoods decidedly do not fit this description. Yet the plan treats them as if they are all the same.

We continue to recommend that the City instead adopt a neighborhood-by neighborhood approach that varies depending on the neighborhood's situation and character. This includes the number of units allowed on each lot. It also includes parking requirements, which should vary depending upon parking pressures in the neighborhood and the number of ADUs proposed for a property. While we absolutely support the goal of reducing unnecessary automobile trips in the City, the fact remains that cars will continue to be a necessity for the foreseeable future and people will continue to park at home. Better and more convenient transit, walking and cycling, in connection with limiting

parking at employment centers, is a far more effective way to achieve the City's goal than simply making it hard to park your car at your house.

**We also continue to be concerned about the lack of design requirements or review in the proposal.** Increased density works much better, and will be better accepted, if it meshes with a neighborhood's character. Any increased density in single-family neighborhoods should include strict design standards. Density is one goal, but it should not be the only goal. Some have scoffed at the idea of "neighborhood character." But while it may be difficult to define, it is real and irreplaceable. (There's a reason why Houston isn't Paris.) In any event, we should be striving to build a City that not only fulfills the needs of today, but that will make the City a better place 20, 30 or 50 years from now.

**In addition, we are concerned about the proposal's effect on the City's tree canopy, much of which is on private property in single-family neighborhoods.** It is not environmentally sound policy to increase density at the expense of a forest cover that provides not only enjoyment but mitigates the "heat-island" effect and absorbs carbon dioxide. Tree protection and replacement must be built into any proposed zoning changes.

We have other concerns as well, most of which are set forth in our attached letter of March 12, 2016. We ask that you consider them. **We are also concerned about reports that a compromise solution has not been discussed. We hope that you will take this opportunity to revive the collaborative approach that used to characterize the City's neighborhood planning process.** Collaboration can be difficult and time consuming. However, such an approach will lead to a superior result and better community buy-in. It also may, in the long run, be a more efficient approach than the top-down model used by the City in land-use decisions during the past few years.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns. We would appreciate your written response.

Cordially,

Ted Inkley, Vice President  
On behalf of Board of Directors  
Phinney Ridge Community Council

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cc: City Councilmembers  
Nick Welch, Thomas Whittemore