

TO: SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL and MAYOR BRUCE HARRELL

FROM: NEIGHBORHOOD REALTORS

RE: SEATTLE ONE PLAN PROPOSED ZONING CHANGES TO MADRONA

December 16, 2024

Dear Mayor Harrell and City Council Members,

We are 13 Realtors who reside and have worked extensively with properties in the Madrona/Denny Blaine neighborhood of Seattle. Individually, we average 25 years in the business and the neighborhood. As such, we have deep roots in the community, extensive expertise, and between us, represent a large number of homeowners in the area.

We are in the unique position of having three intersection points with the proposed zoning changes: 1) we are hearing extensive feedback and calls for help from our client-neighbors; 2) we are Madrona residents ourselves; and 3) we bring a professional perspective on the likely impacts, informed by decades of practice in this area, as well as across the City.

While we are tied to Madrona, we work across all price ranges in all of Seattle's neighborhoods, helping clients develop, buy and sell condos, houses and land. We have witnessed the trajectory of Seattle's housing and development markets over several decades and are acutely aware of the need for more housing at all price points, including low- and middle-income housing. Working across the spectrum means each of us works directly with "real people" at the entry level (and at all stages of life) who have been priced out, and are looking for solutions.

### **SUMMARY STATEMENT**

We acknowledge the changes to density that are required statewide by the passage of HB 1110. We support the need for greater density and especially more diverse housing options, but believe the current proposal for Madrona is critically flawed in several respects.

It appears little-to-no assessment of on-the-ground conditions or impacts was conducted, particularly street-by-street, prior to the drawing of up-zoning lines on a map. The result is a proposal that, as written, is ill-fitted to the realities of Madrona and contains provisions that would significantly harm current residents, damage property values, negatively impact quality of life for both current and future residents and potentially destroy the charm and historical character of many of our streets.

We believe the unintended negative impacts of the plan as proposed would outweigh the gains. We believe better planning and visioning is possible. And we support the City adopting a more careful, inclusive, studied and strategic approach that can help us build a better neighborhood

with the capacity to serve current and future residents with a higher density and diversity of housing stock while preserving or even enhancing what makes Madrona a special and desirable place to live for all who move here.

Zooming out beyond Madrona, we have an overarching concern that Seattle seems to continue approaching urban planning, growth and development in a piecemeal, reactive way that ignores what makes each of our diverse neighborhoods special and creates as many (or more) problems as it solves.

We support a long-range, comprehensive urban development and growth plan for Seattle that can be iterated and evolved. We support the creation of a vision for how to build over time toward a city-wide network of individually and collectively sustainable, desirable, functional, integrated communities. We hope for a vision beyond simply encouraging more and more cheaply built, soulless housing units to be thrown up anywhere they can be shoe-horned in, without regard to their impacts to the fabric, character and livability of a neighborhood. Development like this threatens to break apart and dissolve what makes Seattle a great place to live, rather than evolving and enhancing it for the future as our population grows.

## **SPECIFIC FEEDBACK FOR THE PROPOSED PLAN**

### **Statements in Support**

- We support unit lot subdivision where redevelopment occurs; it makes much more sense than the current work-around of condominiumization on single-family lots.
- We support an increase of the current RS and LR1 height limit from 30 to 32 feet, and expanding the current exclusion for pitched roofs to include shed roofs.
- We do not oppose the proposal to up-zone the existing NC1-30 zone to NC2-55.

### **Statements in Opposition**

- We oppose increasing height restrictions to anything over 3 stories on current residential streets in Madrona outside of the core commercial section of 34th Ave, regardless of inclusion of affordable units (i.e. rezoning to LR2 and LR3). This is not required by State law and is ill-suited and ill-advised for most of the residential Madrona streets where it has been proposed.
- We oppose the proposed lack of requirement for off-street parking for any redevelopment.
- We oppose the current, rushed approach. We strongly urge the City to slow down, think systemically, and host a community planning process that can meet the needs of greater density and diversity of housing stock while preserving and enhancing what makes our neighborhoods special, desirable places to live.

### **Reasons for Opposition**

1. Madrona does not rise to the standard of being an urban village; it is a mostly single-family residential neighborhood with a 2-block-long strip of small restaurants and

shops and no daily-needs amenities. It is missing much of the critical infrastructure to make the transition to a significant up-zone tenable, or to serve resident needs locally.

- a. Routes into and out of Madrona, current public transportation and other infrastructure are not designed to handle a substantial influx of new residents. Madrona does not meet the “major transit stop” definition that drives much of the plan mandated by HB1110: *“A major transit stop includes: a stop on a high-capacity transportation system; commuter rail stops; stops on rail or fixed guideway systems; and stops on bus rapid transit routes.”* Madrona lacks all of this. East Union Street in particular has become highly congested in recent years. As is, it will not sustain an increase in commuters into and out of Madrona.
  - b. To become accessible and workable, Madrona would need a high-capacity transportation system linking it to downtown and other points: a rapid-ride bus line on Union or Cherry; an extension of the light rail into Madrona; or the return of the streetcar system that brought people here in the past.
  - c. Our small business district will require expansion and likely some re-designs to accommodate:
    - i. the increase in transit riders resulting from the creation of high-capacity transit into the area;
    - ii. the development of sufficient new commercial space to accommodate a grocery store and other daily-life amenities to create a functional urban village capable of serving a larger population in the neighborhood.
  - d. Meanwhile, there are other neighborhoods and corridors that do meet these criteria, but which are absent from the City’s proposal, including E. Madison Street in nearby Madison Valley. We are perplexed as to why more focus has not been placed on areas where the City has already invested significantly in infrastructure to support increased density.
2. Existing physical conditions along most of our residential streets (particularly east of 34th) mean the impacts of proposed zoning would be negative for most new and old residents.
- a. Narrow streets, already full of parked cars = parking and circulation challenges for residents, service trucks and emergency services.
  - b. Lack of East-West roadways connecting 35th, 36th, 37th and 38th further restricts circulation and parking options. We are a neighborhood of steep slopes and staircases.
  - c. ECA steep slope designations are cited as reason for not allowing such up-zoning in other parts of the City, yet much of the proposed areas for up-zoning in Madrona are also impacted by ECA designations, per the City’s maps.
  - d. The idea that new residents will eschew cars is unrealistic, given the relative remoteness of Madrona, the limited public transport and the lack of walkable essential daily needs like groceries. As realtors, we’ve seen this pattern over and over the past several years in all areas of the city except within a few blocks of light rail stations; and even then a high percentage of new residents bring cars that heavily clog the streets due to lack of planned off-street parking.

3. Expanding beyond the HB1110-required rezoning to LR2 and LR3 will destroy the historical character of the streets and surrounding homes impacted by it. Rezoning to the level of 4-6 units per lot will already challenge and alter the historical character of Madrona's streets; we hope the City will exercise care in design review for all new proposed redevelopments, to ensure they support and enhance the character of the neighborhood. But pushing beyond what is required by State law in these areas will degrade, not improve, the neighborhood (see "consistency" below).
4. While a few homes might see their property values rise due to up-zoning, the property values and the desirability of many more homes on these streets would fall. Current property owners are asking us if the City will reimburse for these losses. Depending on an individual home's proximity to new multi-family development and resulting impacts on light, views, street parking and quiet enjoyment, values could drop by anywhere from 10-50%. Here's why:
  - a. Ruining the historical character of some of the neighborhood's prime streets would, in itself, be a blow to property values.
  - b. Madrona is a view neighborhood—both facing east and west from its topographical ridge. Exceeding the current 3-story height limit will block existing views from many homes. In our area, views account for 20-50% of a property's overall value.
  - c. Consistency within a block or set of blocks is one of the foundations of neighborhood value, and individual property values. Allowing 5-story multi-family with maxed-out footprints to be inserted on streets currently lined with historical 2-3 story homes would create enormous inconsistency within individual blocks. Existing homes would be dwarfed by towering, neighboring structures. The incongruity alone would lower the value of the impacted homes.
  - d. Gardens, trees, open spaces and homes would all have light blocked and privacy compromised by the increased height and lot coverage of LR2 and LR3 structures.
  - e. More congested street parking, per the "physical conditions" notes above
  - f. Heavier traffic and more delays entering and exiting the neighborhood
  - g. Quiet enjoyment would almost certainly decrease with the introduction of 5-story multi-family.
5. Many residents have expressed concern about property taxes rising (even when actual market values may be negatively impacted) due to the possibility for the assessor's office to assign greater value to lots that have been up-zoned, based on their perceived redevelopment potential.
6. Impacts to tree canopy. Madrona is one of the neighborhoods in the city that meets the city's goal of 30%+ of mature tree canopy coverage. The proposed changes would decimate that, setting us backwards by decades as we increase lot coverage with built structures. Even where space might be left for trees, mature ones will be "replaced" with required saplings on the heels of redevelopment. These will take decades to grow.

## PROPOSED CHANGES OR ALTERNATE DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

- First and most critically, slow the process down and allow for a proper urban planning/community development process than can consider how to approach redevelopment in a holistic, sustainable, systemic manner that will result in a neighborhood that retains its character and desirability while meeting the needs of increased diversity and density.
- With respect to property taxes, work with King County to install a provision that assessed value should be tied to current use, rather than future potential, in residential areas. In this manner, when a property is redeveloped, the tax base can rise appropriately with the use. And until that time, older and/or middle-income residents who may have high-value properties but moderate incomes (not low enough to qualify for tax credits, but not high enough to sustain substantial tax increases) are able to remain in their homes.
- Allow LR1 zoning (but not LR2 or LR3) on residential streets with at least “normal” accessibility (i.e. ones that are not on steep slopes, exceptionally narrow, or are cut off to traffic circulation by lack of connecting cross streets).
- Require at least 50% off-street parking (i.e. 1 parking spot for every 2 units).
- If additional density is still needed, explore alternative corridors for up-zoning to LR2 and possibly LR3 after carefully considering impacts. Give special attention to corridors where greater infrastructure, more through streets, better connectivity and greater access to more public transit options already exist and would be easier to enhance...not to mention the absence of ECA zones. These areas will also be more cost-effective for developers, and thus are more likely to actually see the type of redevelopment the City desires. For example:
  - E Cherry St from 34th heading west
  - E Union St from 34th heading west
  - The MLK Jr Way corridor
  - Each of these is still part of, and walking distance to, the nearby smaller neighborhood pockets in Madrona currently targeted by the City’s Plan, if that is a goal. New residents along any of these corridors could still easily be included in, and enjoy the benefits of, Madrona without destroying its character. Residents along an enhanced MLK corridor would be roughly equi-distant between the commercial districts of 23rd and Union and 34th and Union, as well as being anchored in their own, growing commercial district on MLK. They would be walking distance to more options for the necessities of daily life, like groceries and services.

## CONCLUSION

We appreciate the needs of a growing city, and are acutely sensitive to the dynamics that have led to the high cost of housing in Seattle. We hope we can evolve our neighborhoods to become even more desirable and functional places to live, as they increase in density and population. We welcome a thoughtful process to support that outcome.

Thank you for being public servants, listening to all of us, and for all the hard work and consideration you put into your jobs.

Sincerely,

- Scott Perret, COMPASS - [REDACTED]
- Benjamin Chotzen, COMPASS - [REDACTED]
- Jennie Grant, Windermere - [REDACTED]
- Allie Howard, COMPASS - [REDACTED]
- Nan Kinnier, COMPASS - [REDACTED]
- Chris Koehler, COMPASS - [REDACTED]
- Kevin O'Doherty, Windermere - [REDACTED]
- Spafford Robbins, COMPASS - [REDACTED]
- Lisa Sears, Ensemble - [REDACTED]
- Presha Sparling, COMPASS - [REDACTED]
- Riley Sparling-Beckley, COMPASS - [REDACTED]
- Amie Stewart, COMPASS - [REDACTED]
- Anne Willoughby Nelson, COMPASS - [REDACTED]