



## Upzones: What are they and what do they do?

### What is upzoning?

Upzoning is just what it sounds like: growing a little taller to have more homes and businesses in our communities. In most areas of Seattle, this is a small addition—one or two stories. In busy, urban corridors like Downtown, South Lake Union, the University District, and Capitol Hill, it would be a few more floors.

### Why upzone?

Families and individuals across Seattle are struggling to keep up with rising rents, and few can even imagine being able to purchase a home here. There are simply too many people for too few homes, and that fact is weighing heaviest on people with low and moderate incomes, who find themselves displaced from the city or making hard sacrifices simply to pay the rent each month.

Upzoning allows for new buildings to help meet our city's need for more homes. It means homes come in a variety of shapes and sizes to meet different people's needs and give them options. It means more people can live here and take advantage of the many opportunities and amenities that Seattle represents: good jobs, great schools, beautiful parks, good transit, rich cultural diversity, beautiful surroundings, and more.

### Plus, this added height is paired with added affordability.

Seattle wants to make sure that as we build more homes, we make sure to support the families and individuals who are feeling the housing crunch the hardest. That's why we passed something called "Mandatory Housing Affordability" (MHA).

MHA requires that any new building in areas where there is an opportunity to build a little taller *also* contains a certain percentage of homes affordable to someone making 60% of area median income (AMI; in 2016, this figure was \$54,180 for a family of four). The percentage will vary depending on the location of the building, but taken together, MHA will unlock over 6,000 affordable homes for families and individuals who need them.

### Just how do these affordability percentages work?

Under MHA, builders will set aside 5-9% of the building for affordable homes. While that may not sound like a lot, this would achieve almost one-third of the 20,000 affordable homes Mayor Murray wants to build in the next 10 years. Plus, the City has recently updated the affordability levels to provide additional protection to neighborhoods where current housing is more at risk of demolition.



Photo credit: Dan Bertolet

If builders cannot or choose not to include the affordable homes directly, they will pay a fee which the City will use to build affordable homes. The Office of Housing considers multiple factors in deciding where these homes will be built, including potential displacement concerns and where the project which paid the fee is located. In the past, the City has funded affordable housing all over the city, with most being in Downtown and the urban core.

### **Where would the city upzone?**

Seattle plans to upzone primarily in our opportunity-rich urban areas—main thoroughfares and their surroundings that we as a city designated as our “urban villages” over twenty years ago. These are hubs of neighborhood activity and places best equipped to accommodate some additional growth, and they are spread near and far throughout Seattle to ensure that every neighborhood does its part to help build a Seattle for everyone.

### **Upzones help build...**

*...More equitable and diverse neighborhoods.*

- Living close to good jobs, transit, and services allows residents to spend less time and money commuting and running errands. This is especially critical for families and individuals with low incomes and for populations at risk of displacement, many of whom have limited access to jobs and services without public transit.
- Providing affordable homes in high-opportunity neighborhoods means that a diverse range of families and individuals have access to the same opportunities to thrive.

*...A healthier environment.*

- People living close to everyday amenities significantly reduce their carbon footprint—city dwellers have a much smaller carbon footprint than the average citizen.<sup>i</sup>
- Concentrating growth in Seattle’s urban corridors prevents sprawl and in turn preserves the region’s forests, parks, and natural areas that contribute so much to our quality of life.

*...Healthier residents.*

- Less car usage results in less pollution and cleaner air for residents to breathe.
- Deaths from car crashes are more than two times less likely in urban areas than in rural areas.<sup>ii</sup>

*...A stronger local economy.*

- Pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly neighborhoods bring more customers to local businesses – businesses in two New York neighborhoods saw significant sales increases after the City redeveloped neighborhood public space to make it more pedestrian-friendly.<sup>iii</sup>
- Driving less saves money – studies estimate that the average Seattleite who commutes by car could save almost \$12,000 per year if they began commuting by public transit.<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Jones, Christopher and Daniel M. Kammen. “Spatial Distribution of U.S. Household Carbon Footprints Reveals Suburbanization Undermines Greenhouse Gas Benefits of Urban Population Density.” 13 December 2013.

<sup>ii</sup> Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. “Fatality Facts: Urban/Rural Comparison.” 2016.

<sup>iii</sup> New York City Department of Transportation. “The Economic Benefits of Sustainable Streets.” December 2013.

<sup>iv</sup> American Public Transit Association. “October Transit Savings Transit Report.” 27 October 2016.