

Mandatory Housing Affordability Rezones

The Basics: Mandatory Housing Affordability

Mandatory Housing Affordability

The new Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) program—or affordability requirements—that the City adopted last summer, mean that new residential and commercial construction projects also help create affordable homes, either by including income- and rent-restricted homes in the new building or paying into a fund that will be used to build income- and rent-restricted homes throughout the city. In exchange for these requirements, upzones will allow modest height increases to build more homes in already bustling, walkable neighborhoods, where all kinds of people live and work. Combined with upzones across the city, MHA will unlock over 6,300 income- and rent-restricted homes across Seattle for families and individuals who need them.

What are upzones?

Upzones are just what they sound like, allowing certain places in the city to grow a little bit taller—the unique part of these upzones is the affordability requirements they will trigger. Through careful and modest zoning changes to height allowances, we will both provide more space for new homes and reserve a portion of new development for our low-income and working-class neighbors. We need to make sure we are building enough homes in all shapes and sizes and for a wide range of housing needs—including homes that are income- and rent-restricted.

Earlier this year, we showed up in numbers at the five public hearings and open houses that were a part of a city-wide outreach strategy to hear neighbors' views about this Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) program that will activate housing affordability requirements in Seattle's Urban Villages. By enacting these affordability rezones, we will not only be increasing the capacity for new homes, but will also ensure that Seattle's affordable housing stock continues to grow for years to come.

The hearing examiner's ruling released on Nov 21st on the MHA year-long appeal means that we should be able to move forward with the legislation and possibly get a Council vote by April 2019. Over the next two months, in addition to providing the additional information required by the Hearing Examiner's ruling, Council will finalize the legislation, adjust it to current code and submit potential amendments. It is important that we engage our Councilmembers and ensure that the final legislation priorities the maximum goal of affordable homes.

Why these policy solutions matter: Families and individuals across Seattle are struggling to keep up with rising rents and home prices. People with low and moderate incomes are left with fewer and fewer affordable options, which results in displacement from the city or making hard sacrifices to pay the rent. MHA is a tool to make sure that growth in Seattle helps to meet our city's need for affordable homes.

Tips for testifying

1. Tell your story. **Talk about why you're here, why you care, and why this matters!**

City Council hears plenty of facts and figures. While one or two numbers can be helpful, what makes a particular piece of testimony stand out is a *personal story*. **Stories help people connect across shared experiences and values.** Talk about why you're here, why you care, and why this matters!

Your story is powerful: Were you priced out of your apartment? Have you experienced homelessness? Are you worried your kids can't afford to live in the city? Do you love your walkable neighborhood and think more people should be able to as well? Tell that story.

2. Find common ground! **Emphasize our shared values and vision.**

When advocating for controversial policies, find common ground and call up people's "better angels" by naming our shared values and the hopes and dreams and vision most Seattleites agree on.

Talk about the values that are authentic to you and that connect with your own story. Here are some ideas, but it's best to say it in your own words. Seattle values include...

- Being a **progressive, social justice**-minded community whose residents care for one another → Building more homes in Seattle means...
 - Taking care of families and individuals with lower incomes or facing systemic racism who feel the worst impacts of soaring housing costs and displacement.
 - Greater opportunities for all to benefit from the city's good-paying jobs, great educational institutions, and rich cultural diversity. The promise and opportunity of our city shouldn't be reserved only for the wealthy or lucky few.
 - Our city remains a home for people of many diverse backgrounds, rather than become a playground for those lucky enough to afford it.
- **Pride of place** → Building more homes in Seattle means that...

- Seattle leads on solving a problem shared by many cities across the US.
- Our city continues to be defined by the people who live here, not the buildings they live in.
- We're a welcoming city, not a city of walls and barriers.
- Enjoying and promoting our **natural beauty** → Building more homes in Seattle...
 - Helps us avoid sprawl into our treasured natural places.
 - Means shorter commutes and thereby less air pollution from traffic.
 - Means more thriving, walkable neighborhoods—good for local businesses and good for public health.

3. Keep it brief. **Stick to three main points and repeat!**

You have **just two minutes** to make your case, and they pass *quickly*. A good rule of thumb is to stick to three main points. A powerful, memorable formula is to “sandwich” your policy point between two “values” statements—start and end with your personal take, why you care, and why this matters for people and our city.

Occasionally, if many people sign up to testify, Council will shorten your time to just 60 or 90 seconds. It's a good idea to draft what you want to say and time yourself reading it out loud. Cut all but your key points and be prepared to cut further on the spot. We are here to help if you need any assistance.

4. We're here to help.

Need a little help figuring out what you want to say or how to say it? Just need some encouragement before you testify? We've got your back. Please contact **Patience Malaba**, Advocacy Manager, at **(206) 343-0681 x** or at patience@seattleforeveryone.org.

More Resources

[Upzones: What are they and what do they do?](#)

[Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda \(HALA\) homepage](#)

[Hearing Examiner's Ruling](#)