

HALA subgroup of the Zoning & Housing Types Workgroup
Review & Recommendation on DPD Proposed Lowrise Multi-Family Code Corrections - V3 FINAL

Below are the specific recommendations of the subgroup, about the DPD proposed Lowrise Multi-Family Code Corrections legislation, from May of 2014. Please also see the subgroup letter articulating general recommendations.

2014 DPD Proposed Code Correction	Accept Proposed Change			Majority Recommendation Comments	Other Viewpoint Or Additional Comments
	Yes	No	Modify		
1. Remove FAR exemption for partially below grade stories (daylight basements).		X		Basements provide space in projects for storage, mechanical spaces, laundry, bicycles, parking, as well as relatively affordable housing units. Removing the FAR exemption for partially below grade basements would encourage developers to create buildings without useful functional features and/or to move features from enclosed space to the building exterior and roof. This change could also discourage creation of less expensive market rate units in the partially below grade story.	One member of the subgroup believed that the FAR exemption and +4' height allowance should be considered bonus development that should be contingent on providing rent restricted affordable housing through the incentive zoning program. Others agreed that extending an incentive zoning or similar program to the LR zones was a good goal, but felt this code change was not the right vehicle.
2. Remove the 4' height bonus for raising the first floor units above street level. (23.45.514.F and 23.45.514.F.2)		X		Elevating the main floor above street level is a key design feature in urban housing that maintains humane privacy relationships between people living on the ground floor and people in the public realm. See Seattle Design Review Guideline PL3-B2. The proposed code change could create a negative effect on privacy for people living in the ground floor units. Removal of the +4' height allowance could make it more difficult to build relatively affordable housing units in partially below grade stories.	
3. Count FAR for all interior spaces with a ceiling height of 36" or greater.		X		The clerestory area limitation is sufficient. This proposal could result in outcomes with ordinary storage lofts being penalized. If the change moves forward ensure it would not count crawl spaces or other spaces clearly intended for storage as occupiable floor area.	
4. Include exterior corridors, stairs, and other circulation elements in FAR calculations.			X	Many projects use exterior circulation elements in order to provide housing with lower energy use, better natural ventilation, and more generous circulation. A small minority result in projects with an unattractive aesthetic or increase in overall project bulk. Instead of counting exterior circulation as FAR, add a design standard requiring minimization of the visual prominence when viewed from the public way and adjacent properties. Require that when placed in highly visible locations, exterior circulation elements must be constructed of attractive, durable materials that will age well in Seattle's climate.	(See additional comment to 6 below related to design review.)
5. Change the density rounding threshold for all projects to .85 (from .5) of a housing unit.			X	Apply this new rule only to very small lots (ie. 3,000 sf or less). This will fix the existing practice of short subdivision into very small lots to take advantage of fractional rounding, without creating density reduction in all projects throughout the lowrise zones.	
6. Add a prescriptive height standard within 12' feet of the front lot line (34' in a 30' height limit zone, and 44' in a 40' height limit zone.)			X	The proposed code change could help reduce perceived height of structures from the public sidewalk especially on sloping sites. However, place the new prescriptive requirement in the Design Standards (23.45.529) portion of the code, not the height limits section. If located in the Design Standards section, projects not undergoing design review will be subject to the standard, but projects undergoing design review would be evaluated for fit into context through the design review process.	One member supported the proposed standard, but felt it should not be located in Design Standards or left to the design review process. This member believed the design review process could not be relied upon to ensure a good outcome, especially since some forms of design review are administrative, and not subject to a public process.
7. Limit clerestories to 30% coverage of the roof area.			X	The 30% area limit is fine. Remove the requirement to hold back projections 4' from the edge of the building. The area limitation is sufficient. Enshrining specific location restrictions can lead to unintended consequences and poor functional design of roofs.	
8. Require minimum 3.5' side setbacks for rowhouses		X		Rowhouses are a desirable form of housing that should be encouraged. Requiring a side setback will impact the feasibility of the rowhouse housing type due to constrained lot widths. However, there are concerns about the design of rowhouse sidewalls that should be addressed through design standards or the design review process.	One member who agreed with the design concerns about rowhouse sidewalls felt the proposed change to add a 3.5' side setback for rowhouses should move forward – noting that a setback of that dimension could lead to blank side facades because of building code limitations on wall openings.