

Urgent: Now is the time to speak up about development in Ballard!

The Seattle City Council is presently debating changes to the low-rise zoning code that will affect our neighborhood. The proposed changes that are being considered are a direct result of the Livable Ballard petition and other grassroots neighborhood efforts. There will be a public hearing about the changes at Seattle City Hall from 2:00 – 4:00 pm on June 2. The City Council has already heard a lot from property developers, who are fighting the modest changes we've proposed. Now council members need to hear from concerned citizens. If you care about the course of development in Ballard, please speak up on behalf of the neighborhood: email and call council members, and attend the public hearing if you can.

Background:

As you're most likely painfully aware, the single-family area north of downtown Ballard is being demolished at an alarming rate following changes to the zoning code made in 2010. The resulting new buildings are dramatically out of scale with the neighborhood, as the new code allows more and larger units, much closer to lot lines. Developers are able to easily avoid design review requirements, resulting in no opportunity at all for affected residents to provide meaningful comment or input as our neighborhood is torn down house by house.

The Livable Ballard petition (<http://livableballard.org/issues/>), which you signed along with more than 1,000 of your neighbors, proposed six modest code corrections that would close several developer loopholes and correct many of the unintended consequences we are seeing as a result of the 2010 code changes. As a result of your signatures, legislation was introduced in 2014 to address some of our concerns. Since then, intense lobbying by developers and their allies has resulted in those legislative proposals being further weakened.

We need your help to ensure that real action is taken, instead of empty symbolic gestures that will allow the new status quo to continue largely unchecked, with no notification of upcoming projects, no ability to comment or object, no design review of any kind, and the continued proliferation of unnecessarily large buildings, much closer to the sidewalk and existing homes than they need to be.

Public Hearing:

Tuesday June 2 at 2:00 – 4:00 pm
City Hall, 600 4th Ave., in City Council Chambers

Arrive early to sign up if you'd like to speak. Speakers will get two minutes each. If you don't want to speak, you can cede your time to someone else, but the number of people who show up is extremely important.

Council Members to Contact:

The legislation currently being discussed is proposed by the Planning, Land Use and Sustainability (PLUS) Committee of the Seattle City Council. **It's particularly critical to contact Councilmember Mike O'Brien**, who is running to represent District 6 (which includes Ballard) in the new district council elections this fall. He's the Chair of the PLUS Committee and currently appears to be placing the interests of developers over his constituents. Let him know you live in District 6 and your vote in the fall depends on his passing meaningful reform to the low-rise code. It is also important to contact the other PLUS Committee members: Tim Burgess, Nick Licata, and Tom Rasmussen.

Contact information for the four members of the PLUS Committee:

- Mike O'Brien, Chair, 206-684-8800, mike.obrien@seattle.gov
- Tim Burgess, 206-684-8806, tim.burgess@seattle.gov
- Nick Licata, 206-684-8803, nick.licata@seattle.gov

- Tom Rasmussen, 206-684-8808, tom.rasmussen@seattle.gov

Suggested Talking Points

Whether you're planning to speak at the hearing, send an email, or place a phone call to a council member's office, share your outrage with the City's presumption that our neighborhood should be demolished to achieve city-wide planning objectives. Seattle is a large city. Not everybody has to live in Ballard. Other neighborhoods need to accommodate their share of growth as well. Here are some key things to ask for:

- **Close loopholes that allow developers to put more units on a lot than intended.** Right now, developers are able to subdivide lots and exceed density limits due to a rounding loophole in the Land Use Code. This loophole must be corrected for all properties in the LR1 zones and developers should be required to comply with density limits.
- **Require reasonable side setbacks for rowhouses.** The 2010 code allows "rowhouse" style townhomes to be built right up to the property line with no consideration of adjacent homes. This is unacceptable. A 5-foot side setback needs to be required for rowhouses, except in special cases with input from neighbors and an appropriate public process.
- **Require new developments to be set further back from the front of the lot.** The 2010 code revisions reduced required front setbacks from the average of neighboring properties to just 5–7 feet. This has resulted in developments that are dramatically out-of-step with the neighboring properties, crowd the sidewalk and adjacent structures, and are visible from blocks away. Front setbacks should be the average of those on neighboring properties.
- **Require meaningful public involvement for all developments of three or more units.** When the 2010 code changes were made, developers were given more "flexibility" in exchange for participating in a new Streamlined Design Review (SDR) process that would let neighbors comment on all developments of three or more units. Not one development of three or more units in LR1 zoned Ballard has been subject to SDR because developers are able to use loopholes to avoid this process. This urgently needs to be corrected. All new projects with three or more units must be required to go through the SDR process, which needs to include a public meeting with the community with all decisions subject to appeal.

Our allies at Seattle Speaks Up are also proposing a number of smart, sensible low-rise code corrections that would encourage better development around the city. See what they have to say here: <https://seattlespeaksup.wordpress.com/>