



City of Seattle
Mayor Edward B. Murray

May 19, 2015

Councilmember Mike O'Brien
Seattle City Council
City Hall, 2nd Floor

RE: Lowrise Multi-family Code Corrections Legislation

Dear Councilmember O'Brien,

Today the Council's Planning Land Use and Sustainability (PLUS) committee will be briefed on CB 118385, a replacement to the Lowrise Multi-family Code Corrections legislation prepared by the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) in May of 2014. Because these code changes had the potential to impact housing affordability and livability, earlier this year I asked DPD to hold the proposed code changes until members of the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) committee had a chance to review them.

I am pleased that a HALA subgroup reviewed the material and made recommendations to improve the legislation. It appears most of their recommendations are carried forward in CB 118385. This revised bill does a better job preserving opportunities to add housing for individuals and families near services and transit – a critical part of efforts to address affordability. At the same time, a few new design standards to improve how new construction fits into context will help address livability.

I am concerned, however, about an addition to the legislation that would add a new design review threshold in the Lowrise 2 zone at this time. This was not discussed by the HALA subgroup, and could run counter to some of the emerging recommendations for ways to reduce the cost of new housing. Furthermore, DPD is conducting a process to evaluate comprehensive reforms to the City's Design Review process which includes a review of Design Review thresholds. This process will be completed by the end of the year for potential implementation in 2016.

I could be more supportive of this revised legislation if this unexpected addition of a new design review threshold in the LR2 zone were removed, and considered instead, as a part of more comprehensive design review improvements.

Sincerely,

Mayor Edward B. Murray

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