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December 8, 2020

The Honorable Cheryl Selby, Mayor
Olympia City Council
PO Box 1967
Olympia, WA 98507-1967

Dear Mayor Selby and City Council Members:

Subject: Comments on the Housing Options Code Amendments related to the Council Referral to the Planning Commission (2019-0036) recommended by the Olympia Planning Commission.

Sent via email to: citycouncil@ci.olympia.wa.us; housingoptions@ci.olympia.wa.us

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Housing Options Code Amendments. Futurewise strongly supports the Planning Commission recommendation and the improvements being considered by the City Council that would increase housing options.

Futurewise works throughout Washington State to support land-use policies that encourage healthy, equitable, and opportunity-rich communities, that protect our most valuable farmlands, forests, and water resources, and encourage growth in urban growth areas to prevent poorly planned sprawl. Futurewise has recognized the efforts of Olympia to further these goals by giving our Livable Communities awards to Walker John and Ron Thomas for their work to add density in your Downtown, the city's adoption of the Downtown Strategy, and the successful passage of the Home Fund. We have also recognized the efforts of all the jurisdictions in Thurston County to adopt an overarching growth management policy, Sustainable Thurston. Adopting the recommended Housing Options Code Amendments will further implement the goals of the city's comprehensive plan, Sustainable Thurston, and the Growth Management Act.

Futurewise supports the proposed Housing Options Code Amendments for many reasons. This letter focuses on two.

First, last summer's smoke events have brought home to all of us the need to reduce greenhouse gas pollution. A new peer-reviewed scientific paper has documented that to meet the necessary reductions in greenhouse gas pollution higher residential densities are needed.¹ Nationally, densities must increase on average by 19 percent.² The paper concluded this can be achieved by a "mix of small apartment buildings and modest single-family homes"³ However, "[h]igher densities (and mixed-use development) are likely needed to confer appreciable spillover effects, such as increased low-carbon transport ... and related economic, health, and social benefits"⁴

¹ Benjamin Goldstein, Dimitrios Gounaridis, and Joshua P. Newell, *The carbon footprint of household energy use in the United States* 117 PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (PNAS) 19122, p. 19122 (Aug. 11, 2020) last accessed on Dec. 8, 2020 at: <https://www.pnas.org/content/117/32/19122>.

² *Id.* at p. 19128.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.* citations omitted.





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The recommended Housing Options Code Amendments will achieve the densities and housing types required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions enough to prevent a global climate catastrophe. We urge you to adopt them.

A second reason to adopt them is that they will allow more affordable housing types. According to Zillow, the typical home price in Olympia is \$394,966.⁵ This price is seasonally adjusted and only includes the middle price tier of homes. The Zillow rent index as of January 2020 was \$1,884 a month up from 1,531 a month in January 2015.⁶ Olympia's increases in housing costs have many causes but providing more opportunities to build smaller homes on smaller lots can allow more affordable homes. The housing types proposed by the Planning Commission recommendation on Housing Options Code Amendments, accessory dwelling units, duplexes, triplexes and courtyard apartments, are also limited in size and scale to fit into Olympia's existing neighborhoods. We urge you to adopt the Planning Commission recommendation with the improvements proposed by the City Council that would increase housing options.

Thank you for considering our comments. If you require additional information, please contact me at telephone 206-343-0681 Ext. 102 or email tim@futurewise.org.

Very Truly Yours,

Tim Trohimovich, AICP
Director of Planning & Law

⁵ Zillow Olympia Home Prices & Values webpage accessed on Dec. 8, 2020 at: <https://www.zillow.com/olympia-wa/home-values/>.

⁶ Zillow Olympia Home Prices & Values webpage accessed on Sept. 16, 2020 at: <https://www.zillow.com/olympia-wa/home-values/>.

