



City of Seattle  
Seattle Planning Commission

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor  
Barbara Wilson, Executive Director

## MEMORANDUM

September 17, 2009

**TO:** Full Planning Commission

**FROM:** Diana Canzoneri, SPC Demographer and Sr. Policy Analyst

**SUBJECT:** Defining Key Policy Questions for the Affordability Trends Report

**CC:** Commissionstaff, Office of Housing staff, Council Central staff

**On September 24<sup>th</sup>, SPC's intern Mike Pickford and I will be briefing you on planning for the Commission's first biennial Affordability Trends report and asking for guidance in selecting the key policy questions to address in the report.** We will begin by briefly reviewing the purpose of the Affordability Trends Report, as one a series of ongoing trends reports that the SPC Demography program will produce to identify how well Seattle is doing in achieving Comprehensive Plan goals. For background, please see the "Affordability Trends Report Plan" attachment. **[NOTE: TO MAKE THIS CONVENIENT, WE'VE CONSOLIDATED THE MEMO AND ATTACHMENTS INTO THIS PDF. -Diana, 9/22/09]**

We will then take up where we left off with discussions we've had with the HNUC (Aug. 11<sup>th</sup>) and Executive Committee (Sep. 15<sup>th</sup>) in scoping the Affordability Trends Report. **Based on the HNUC's request, we've compiled a list of key affordable housing policy questions that could potentially be addressed in this trends report. At the Full Commission meeting on September 24, we will be asking you to help us select the priority policy issues you would like the Affordability Trends Report measures to address.**

In preparing for the meeting, please review the "Policy Questions" attachment. This covers both the specific quantitative goals in the Comprehensive Plan as well as other key policy themes Mike and I gleaned while pouring through the Comprehensive Plan. This list is also informed by the Commission's Affordable Housing Action Agenda. (We're also in the process of preparing a reference document for you that will contain the text of the Comp Plan policies, arranged by each of these policy categories. We will be sending this in a separate email, likely tomorrow.)

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# PLAN FOR AFFORDABILITY TRENDS REPORT

## Seattle Planning Commission (SPC) Demography Program

*The Affordability Trends Report will be the first of a series of biennial Trends Reports to be produced by the SPC Demography program. The Affordability report will be released in the fall of 2009 and will be focused primarily on housing affordability.*

### OVERALL TRENDS REPORT SERIES

#### Design and Purpose

The SPC's Demography Program will produce an ongoing series of bi-annual indicator reports measuring and analyzing progress in achieving Seattle's Comprehensive Plan goals. Each report will be focused on a single, though interrelated, topic.

Key policy areas were specified for inclusion in the reports by Council when creating the SPC Demographer position. Because these policy areas are so interconnected, the report series will consolidate these themes into three reports.

- Affordability
- Livability, and
- Sustainability

Mobility will be covered primarily under livability and sustainability.

#### Policy-Relevant, Measurable Indicators of Progress toward Comp Plan Goals

The reports will employ the best available measures for which data can be efficiently collected and interpreted in order to gauge progress in these policy areas.

#### Intended Benefits of the Trends Reports

Objective information about the degree of progress being made on key public policy goals is vital for the Planning Commission as the steward of the Comprehensive Plan. The independent analysis in these reports will assist the Planning Commission in making informed recommendations to City policymakers. It will facilitate greater accountability to the city's stakeholders in achieving these goals.

This report series will provide a basic and ongoing tool for monitoring and achieving the community vision and goals in Seattle's Comprehensive Plan.

### AFFORDABILITY TRENDS REPORT

One of the nine priority strategies the Planning Commission recommended in its *Affordable Housing Action Agenda* is to accurately measure the Comprehensive Plan's stated goals for affordable housing.

The Commission's Affordability Trends Report will implement this strategy, providing objective information and analysis on the degree of progress Seattle is making on these goals.

Report findings will inform further Planning Commission recommendations, helping policymakers identify affordable housing policies that may need to be reviewed or that may

need to be carried out more effectively. The report will also provide a resource for informed public participation on these policies.

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## **Identifying the Key Policy Questions Related to Measuring Affordable Housing**

### **Measures Related to the Comprehensive Plan**

**How well is Seattle maintaining sufficient zoned development capacity to accommodate housing growth targets, consistent with Seattle's Urban Village Strategy?**

**How well is Seattle achieving growth targets in Urban Center and Urban Villages and citywide?**

**Goal HG1:** Accommodate 47,000 addl. households in the 2004-2024 planning period

**How well is Seattle supplying housing units that are affordable to both low- and moderate-income groups, especially those in the lowest income category?**

**Policy H30:** Consistent with [Countywide Planning Policy AH-2], at least:

- a. 20% housing growth affordable to households earning up to 50% median income
- b. 17% housing growth affordable to households earning 51-80% median income
- c. 27% housing growth affordable to households earning 81-120% median income  
(Include both new units and existing units newly preserved for affordability)

**Policy H34:**

25%+ of existing housing stock affordable to HHs earning up to 50% median income

**How well is Seattle achieving a geographic distribution of affordable housing characterized by...?**

- Dispersion across all neighborhoods
- Ratios of affordable housing to all housing that are at least as high in urban villages and centers as is in rest of city
- Good access to transit and ped-bike transportation options
- Employment nearby
- Especially in urban villages/centers and in areas where there are cost pressures or potential for gentrification
- No net loss of housing affordable to extremely low-income HHs (up to 30 percent of median income)

## **Measures Related to the Comprehensive Plan (continued)**

### **How well is Seattle supplying a variety of housing unit types and options...?**

- Mix of housing types affordable to a diversity of
  - ages (especially families with children, seniors),
  - incomes
  - household types
  - household sizes
  - cultural backgrounds
- Creative/non-traditional options such as “grow-housing,” ADUs including cottage housing, live-work, cohousing, and “tools to preserve ...single-family character, while ...contributing to ... affordable housing.”
- Including townhomes

### **How well is Seattle increasing the rate of home ownership?**

### **How well is Seattle doing in reducing the number of low-income households in need of housing assistance?**

### **How well is Seattle doing in preventing homelessness?**

- Pursue prevention, transition and stabilization services to decrease potential homelessness...and promote long-term self-sufficiency.

## **Sampling of Programmatic and Regulatory Policies in the Comprehensive Plan**

Note: Some of these are more programmatic performance type measures or relate specifically to adoption of specific LU Codes, and may be more suitable to a different type of report.

- Encourage the **replacement of occupied housing** that is demolished or converted to non-residential use.
- Encourage use of **incentive zoning programs.**
- Provide for **lower off-street parking requirements...**to help reduce housing costs and increase affordability.
- To control the effects of regulatory processes on housing price, strive to **minimize the time taken to process ... permits...**Give priority in the plan review process to permits for very low-income housing.

## **Sampling of Recommendations from the SPC's Affordable Housing Action Agenda**

*Note: Recommendations in the Action Agenda include strategies that would strengthen existing policies in the Comp Plan and specific implementation actions to better achieve existing policies. These Action Agenda items may suggest additional measures.*

- **Accurately measure Comprehensive Plan's stated goals for affordable housing.**  
Data that could be collected includes:
  - **the demand for affordable housing**
  - **more information regarding those earning between 80-120 percent of median.**
- **Introduce principle [in Comp Plan]ensuring that those that work in the city should be able to afford to live in the city,** and introduce goal of providing housing to Seattle's workers who have been priced out of the market.
- **Coordinate increases in density with development of transportation strategies** or infrastructure, open space, and other public amenities.
- **Increase development capacity** citywide by implementing minimum densities or encouraging up-zones in certain areas.
- **Remove parking minimums** and possibly implement parking maximums for areas designated for TOD.
- Encourage preservation of **rental housing stock.**
- Explore new strategies for addressing **condo conversions.**