

INTERPRETING INFILL

The Role and Form of Community Involvement in Portland Housing Planning Politics

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Independent Study

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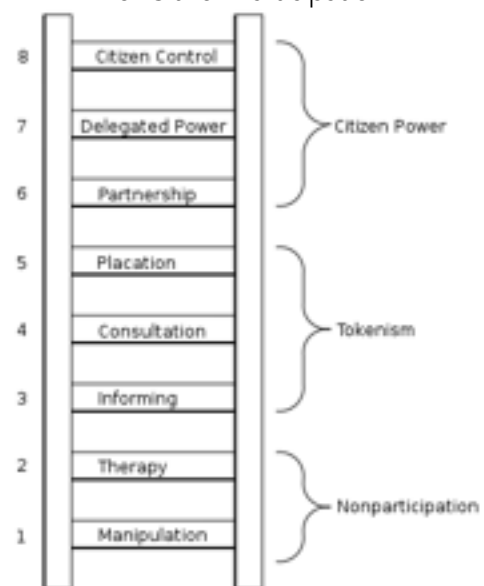
Portland's ongoing Residential Infill Project (RIP) illustrates important dynamics within the contemporary housing regime. Over the last year and a half, "missing middle" housing—small-scale multi-unit or clustered housing types such as duplexes, triplexes, rowhomes, townhomes, and cottage clusters—has rapidly become a new part of the planning paradigm. RIP is a two year, multiple stage planning process with a two-fold focus on limiting the size of new homes while allowing for "missing middle" housing options within a majority of Portland's single-family zones. The City of Portland created a Stakeholder Advisory Commission to draft a proposal for regulating infill under the guidance of several city planners, drawing together business stakeholders, neighborhood district coalition leaders, and other community-based organizations. Significant generational and ideological polarization regarding the merits of "missing middle" housing split both public feedback and the Residential Infill Project Stakeholder Advisory Commission. Within the Stakeholder Advisory Committee, a pro-densification coalition of nonprofit community-based organizations and developers emerged. The pro-density faction, paralleled outside RIP SAC by the YIMBY (Yes in My Backyard) group "Portland for Everyone," construed "missing middle" housing as key to affordability and livability, stressed the need for expanded housing supply, and challenged single-family zoning as a barrier to equity. These conceptions were contrasted by neighborhood preservationists, who decried demolition of naturally-affordable homes, condemned the effects of infill densification on parking, traffic, and neighborhood character, and posited that allowing "missing middle" housing would raise, rather than lower, housing prices. This opposition was ultimately marginalized in the planning process—neighborhood associations were dismissed as unrepresentative of their communities. By employing the language of equity and the framing of a housing crisis, this obstinate resistance to densification was circumscribed. This paper highlights the constructed nature of equity and the need to further critically examine its deployment as part of urban planning regimes.

Background

Two coincident dynamics underlie broad trends in urban planning since the 1970s: the shift from planning as government to planning as governance and a systematic orientation towards encouraging capital reinvestment in the core. These shifts are situated within the broader framework of neoliberalism, which has entailed both the “roll-back” of public services and the “roll-out” of devolved, entrepreneurial forms of state power (Peck and Tickrell 2002). Though chiefly identified with changes in the national state, neoliberalism has entailed a parallel process at the municipal level, outsourcing the functions of government to both local and business actors. By governance, I refer to the tendency that state agents play merely a facilitative role in the planning process, bringing together private business and civil society stakeholders in consensus-driven, participatory approaches to create policy (McCann 2003). This has broadly involved the creation and inclusion of neighborhood associations, community development corporations (CDCs), and community-based organizations (CBOs) within the planning process. Many of the social reproductive functions of urban policy (affordable housing development and management, tenants rights protections), devolved from the federal government in the post-Keynesian restructuring, are eventually taken on by these smaller quasi-governmental units (Stabrowski 2015). Meanwhile, the City itself is positioned as a simple mediator between “stakeholders”—a body politic that explicitly includes business interests. While the logic of neoliberal devolution of power is seductive, we must be careful not to fall into the local trap—the assumption that there is something inherently equitable or democratic about more localized forms of governance (Purcell 2006). Localizing power must not be understood as an *a priori* good, but rather analyzed in terms of the specific function of politics at any constructed scale.

The foundational model of levels of community participation remains Arnstein’s (1969) ladder formulation, shown at the right. Arnstein, drawing on her years of experience working in HUD, classified these levels according

Figure 1. Arnstein’s Ladder: Degrees of Citizen Participation



to the level of power that community engagement had to change decisions made by planners. As I will explore later on in reference to Portland in particular, the early days of citizen participation came with a fundamental disagreement on the ultimate goal of citizen participation—was it to be some sort of tokenism to grease the wheels of existing city planning? Or was it to attempt to embody power in more participatory forms of localized democracy? In interpreting community engagement, we must keep in mind how citizen involvement was birthed into a matrix of capital accumulation—the neoliberal model valorizes the employment of public-private partnerships which “should nonetheless work with the grain of market forces, not against it. In addition, partnerships should involve not only actors from the private economic sector but also NGOs, religious groups, community-action groups, or networks among individuals” (Jessop 2002, 467). Participation within this regime of partnership entails a softening of oppositional politics, an acceptance of the general form of municipal growth politics (Stabrowski 2015).

The municipal growth politics under neoliberalism have shifted away from suburban expansion and towards infill redevelopment and revalorization of the core, even as suburbanization continues at the periphery (Ehrenhalt 2012). The neoliberal urban regime is identified with competition. As Peck and Tickell note, the situation of cities in a context of greatly diminished federal and state funding is precarious—“cities must actively—and responsively—scan the horizon for investment and promotion opportunities, monitoring ‘competitors’ and emulating ‘best practice,’ lest they be left behind in this intensifying competitive struggle for the kinds of resources (public and private) that neoliberalism has helped make (more) mobile” (2002, 394). This competitive orientation towards the real estate market feeds the impulse of gentrification, transforming the process from a sporadic occurrence to a globalized phenomenon (Smith 2002). Attracting growth to cities constitutes the main aim of neoliberal urbanism, with gentrification being a major tool by which the competitive class restructuring is accomplished.

Transit-oriented development, smart growth, New Urbanism, and sustainable urban development have become central to contemporary growth planning. These paradigms are reactions against the aesthetic, economic, and environmental effects of suburban sprawl. The aims of smart growth are purportedly to return a triple-bottom line, bringing economic prosperity, ecological integrity and social justice (Gibbs et al.

2013). This win-win-win framing elides both the real dilemmas and difficulties faced in implementing a triple bottom line and the prioritization of these elements in the event of a contradiction between the financial feasibility and social equity. Smart growth has shifted into a framework of encouraging “sustainable” capital accumulation—“policies to revitalize cities; reform local zoning to encourage compact development and infill; coordinate state agencies and their growth policies; and overhaul capital investments to align with a sustainable agenda” (Ingram et al. 2009, 7). As Dale and Newman (2009) post out, the reality of smart growth infill often involves projects with no direct commitment to affordability; such projects of enhancing livability while ignoring the distribution of benefits will fuel displacement. Infill development has been found to have 1% spillover price effects on properties within 500m (Ooi and Le 2013).

Recently, increasing attention has been paid to the importance of enlarging the supply of “missing middle” housing—small, multifamily or attached structures such as duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, row homes, and townhomes—to both address affordability and create denser, more vibrant places. Daniel Parolek, of the urban design firm Opticos Design, coined the term in 2010, modifying the New Urbanist transect model of land use intensities to apply specifically to housing forms. He noted that, while these forms were prevalent throughout urban development in the prewar era, a combination of zoning, federal housing subsidies, and suburban expansion almost entirely displaced this form from urban development. Despite the emergence of planning intensified land uses, single family land uses still dominate the geography of many Anglo-American cities. The general planning compromise (until recently, at least) in relation to land use has been to concentrate mixed-use and multi-family

Figure 2. Diagram of “Missing Middle” Housing



Source: Opticos Design

development in transit-served commercial and industrial corridors or areas while leaving single family residential zones largely untouched. “Missing middle” housing in single family areas is thus a rather significant departure from the recent zoning and planning history. Single family zoning has come under recent criticism for its historical motivations as a mode of racial and class exclusion and present effects on tightly limiting development and housing supply and thus raising prices (Mangin 2014).

“Missing middle” housing began to spread rapidly as a concept shortly after the April 2015 American Planning Association Conference in Seattle. Two of the events pertained to missing middle housing, with Daniel Parolek, Eli Spevak (an important member of RIP SAC), and members of the Congress for New Urbanism speaking on the need to update zoning codes to allow more density in single family zones. This kickstarted Parolek’s nationwide tour to promote missing middle housing, which included conferences in Dallas, Phoenix, Austin, Washington, DC, Denver, Oakland, Palo Alto, Boise, Santa Barbara, Detroit, Omaha, Atlanta, Chattanooga, Atherton, CA, Portland, Arlington, VA, La Jolla, CA, Pasadena, Santa Maria, CA, and Des Moines, IA. The major recurring institutional affiliates of these conferences were the Congress for New Urbanism, the Urban Land Institute (a nonprofit organization geared towards the needs of for-profit developers), and, somewhat surprisingly, AARP. Shortly after the initial APA conference on missing middle housing, the City of Seattle began the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA), issuing a report on July 15th, 2015. This proposal called for instituting inclusionary zoning alongside upzones of urban villages and a transformation of single family zones into generalized low scale residential zones, allowing multiple units within the zoning-allowed building dimension. The report took an explicitly critical stance towards single family zoning, stating that “Seattle’s zoning has roots in racial and class exclusion and remains among the largest obstacles to realizing the City's goals for equity and affordability. In a city experiencing rapid growth and intense pressures on access to affordable housing, the historic level of Single Family zoning is no longer either realistic or sustainable” (HALA 2015, 24-25). The backlash was enormous. The City of Seattle was forced to withdraw the proposal relating to single family zones, with the package limited to upzones of areas within urban villages. In June 2015, Portland began its own study of “missing middle” infill housing, building it into a package that downsizes the allowable building area and scale.

Situating Community Engagement & Infill

To understand how policy was created in Portland through the Residential Infill Project, it is important to first examine the particular historical context and local manifestation of the concepts of community engagement and smart growth planning. Portland is commonly identified as an exemplary planning model, with a pleasurable European-feeling downtown, a serious commitment to sustainability, and a uniquely high level of public engagement (c.f. Ozawa 2004; Walton 2004). This reflects both a reality and a very successful branding effort. While all of the major elements of Portland livability and planning (light rail and transit-oriented development, bike lanes, an urban growth boundary, community engagement in and public feedback on the planning process, and strong discursive, if not material, support for equity) are by now commonplace in cities, its commitment to these elements of smart growth has a notably long history. Portland can be said to have, in part, generated the contemporary smart growth concept.

Portland has a long and celebrated history of formalized community planning. Putnam et al. (2003) go so far as to characterize Portland as a civically exceptional city, though a more nuanced understanding is certainly in order. In 1974, Mayor Neil Goldschmidt, the grassroots mayor rebel, established the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, formalizing the relationship between the nascent neighborhood associations and the City. These neighborhood associations had their precedent in both the Model Cities groups of the 60s as well as grassroots anti-urban renewal organizations (Leistner 2013). Mayor Goldschmidt was an enthusiastic booster of the neighborhood association framework and his term was followed by a successful expansion and institutionalization in the 80s, along with the creation of many neighborhood plans (Ibid.) Since then, however, the local dialectic of control has Matt Witt (2000) and Paul Leistner (2013) document and periodize shifting regimes of policy and orientation in Portland, noting how the Commissioner placed charge of the Office of Neighborhood Involvement has a large influence on shaping neighborhood policy; thus neighborhood-city relations ebb and flow with the political climate, oscillating between that of tokenist rubber-stamping and genuine democratic involvement (on the level of partnership, if not any higher).

There has been a recursive history of re-examinations of the Neighborhood Association structure by the City. Below these contingent shifts lies a set of tensions between the NAs and the City, driven by the ambiguous purpose of Portland's neighborhood associations. They are constituted within the City bureaucracy, receiving their funding from the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, yet independent. They receive their legitimacy by being independent organizations, expression of community power and watchdogs of the City, yet they maintain extremely limited formal decision-making power. Discursive commitment to the ideal of community involvement by the City forms the fundamental basis of the Neighborhood Associations' power vis-a-vis the city bureaucracy. The two divergent models of community engagement contained within Portland's NAs were noted in 1976, in Russ Dondero's analysis of citizen-participation, commissioned for Mayor Goldschmidt. Dondero reported that:

Generally, active citizens at the neighborhood level, who are non-experts in the planning process, and who are not elected officials, tend to see CP as a 'process' whereby citizens in the local neighborhoods, who wish to be, can be involved in basic decisions that affect them directly, focusing on the planning process... On the other hand, the experts, the elected officials, the persons on city-wide boards dealing with CP at the city-wide level tend to see CP as a process whereby citizens are brought into the decision-making network at some point as informants and secondary level decision-makers—but the final distinguishing mark of success is not participation but results—a product—be it a comprehensive plan in [Corbett-Terwilliger] or HCD monies expended for rehab in SE... One sense that while the rhetoric of commitment to CP is there, the real hope is that what will result is a more efficient mechanism for coopting citizens to the point that they will see the wisdom of the planners, the politicians, the larger city interests. (4)

This situation was tenable in the 70s and 80s, when a wedge had yet to be driven through these cracks and the whole enterprise buoyed by a "warm glow" that papered over the implications of the contradictory conceptions held. As Dondero continues:

the above generalizations seem important since they explain the commitment all sides have to CP—which is in a sense non-polarizing since nobody communicates that each of the two conceptions are mutually exclusive if taken to their logical conclusion. But few have admitted of the connection, hence possible conflict is avoided. But were the parties involved to see the issue as one of community power (in the neighborhoods) versus community cooption by the city (of the neighborhoods)—conflict would arise. (5)

By the 90s, conflicts grew between neighborhoods and city over both the City's increasingly obvious orientation towards facilitating development and the neighborhood associations' frozen funding. Neighborhood associations began engaging in increasingly oppositional politics in terms of development and densification as the evidence mounted that the City viewed community engagement as just a mechanism for more efficient (and they would add just, equitable) planning. The City, meanwhile, criticized oppositional neighborhood associations as being unrepresentative, reflecting the views of white, middle-class homeowners. By 2005, several district coalition leaders put together a damning indictment of the state of affairs of Portland community engagement, stating that the model of community cooption had dominated over that of community empowerment:

- *Neighborhood Associations often view Bureaus/Council as being less interested in listening and more interested in managing, directing or ignoring participation by neighborhood associations. Staff is often defensive around neighborhood associations. Council often chooses to view neighborhood associations as adversaries or allies depending on the political point.*
- *Bureaus engage in "punch list" public participation and seek engineered solutions rather than authentic collaboration. This is often Public Relations (management) rather than Public Involvement (collaboration). Public involvement intent varies from bureau to bureau.*
- *In land-use matters, there seems to be a systemic effort to avoid considering comment from neighborhood groups.*

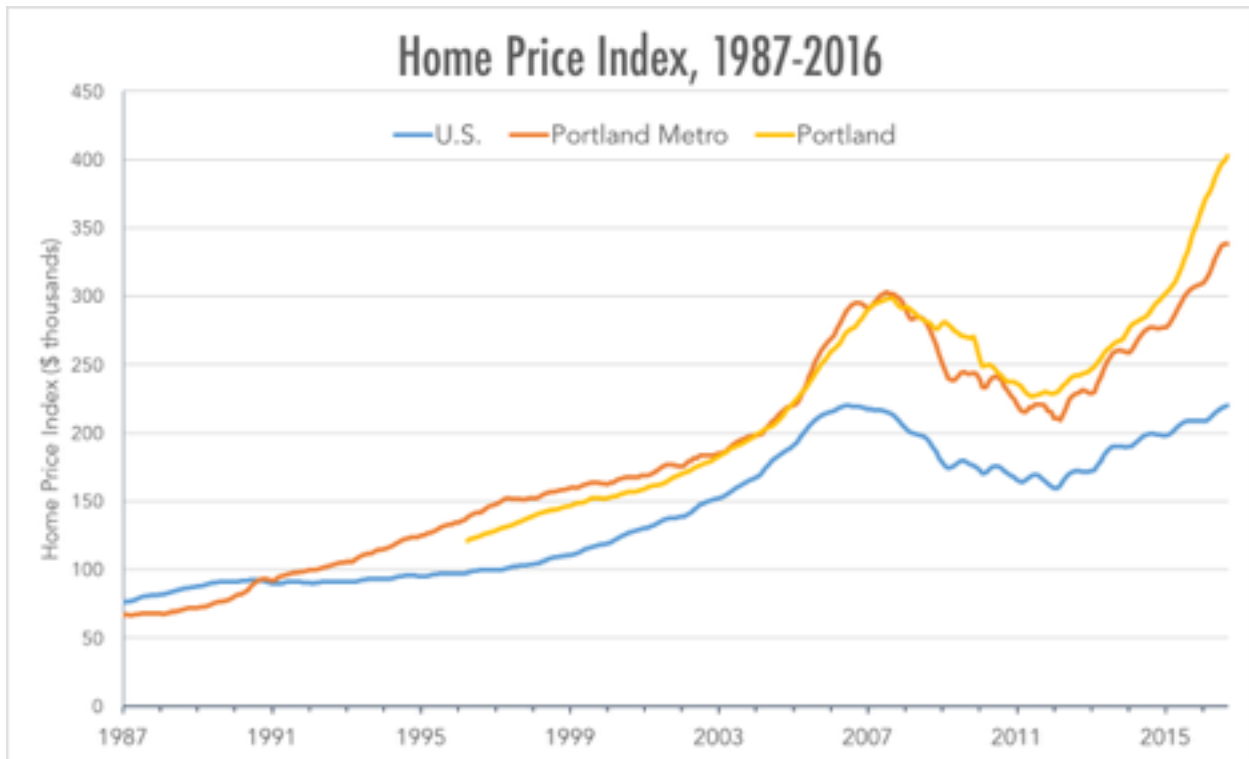
To resolve these tensions and reassert Portland's commitment to community engagement, the City has recently created several plans for providing more power to neighborhood associations and other groups, including the 2008 "Community Connect Report" and the 2016 "Community Involvement Program." Despite the formal reassertion of the importance of neighborhood associations, *Community Connect* contained clear language laying the groundwork for a deemphasis of NAs in favor of business interests and the community-based organizations (e.g. the Urban League, NAYA, the Latino Network), recommending to "broaden Portland's community involvement system to better include the City's diverse communities, with a recognition that Portlanders identify their "community" in more ways than just geographic (i.e. neighborhood-based)" while providing "formal recognition and access to City government for a broad range of groups and organizations representing the diversity of Portland's communities" (Community Connect 2008, 25). The neighborhood

associations are thus collapsed into one of the many stakeholders that the City (supposedly) consults and considers.

This history of neighborhood involvement must be understood in relation to the context of development models and growth. Portland's urban history up until the 1970s mirrored national suburbanization trends—the city's population stagnated while its suburbs exploded; it catered to automobile access by taking the bulldozer to the central city for highways and surface parking lots; and it engaged in prototypical urban renewal programs that involved the wholesale clearance of the “blighted” South Auditorium and Central Albina neighborhoods (Goodling 2015). A sea change in planning was brewing, however, with activists in inner neighborhoods like Corbett-Terwilliger and the Northwest District organizing to resist clearance (Abbott 1983). Goldschmidt's election, in addition to bringing substantial institutional support of neighborhood planning, shifted Portland into a new model of growth with transit and revitalization. Over the span of the proceeding decade, the basic structure of the Portland Way would be constructed. Freeway riots overturned the Mt. Hood Freeway planned to carve through Southeast Portland, the federal money apportioned for the highway set aside for the Banfield light rail. TriMet and the City coordinated to create the bus mall downtown, while the City's Downtown Plan envisioned revitalization with the transit access, with spillover effects from a more attractive downtown revalorizing the inner neighborhoods. Harbor Drive was ripped up and turned into a park named after the Governor who instituted mandatory urban growth boundaries within the state. And the “Nodes and Noodles” alternative of the Comprehensive Plan marked a commitment both to transit-oriented development and to large-scale preservation of the single-family zones of Portland.

Portland, then, shifted into the whole logic of contemporary smart growth well before it was formulated as a planning regime. Attracting infill growth was a primary focus of Portland planning; the plans formed a holistic ecosystem of reinvestment in the core to attract and retain the middle class and to maintain the position of Portland, and particularly downtown Portland, within the region. And now, 45 years later, the City has reaped the crop of gentrification. The results of this realized revitalization have proven problematic themselves, however, for both those who champion growth and those who detest it. The immediate context for the Residential Infill Project was a combination of rapid price appreciation and a spate of demolitions. Home prices have

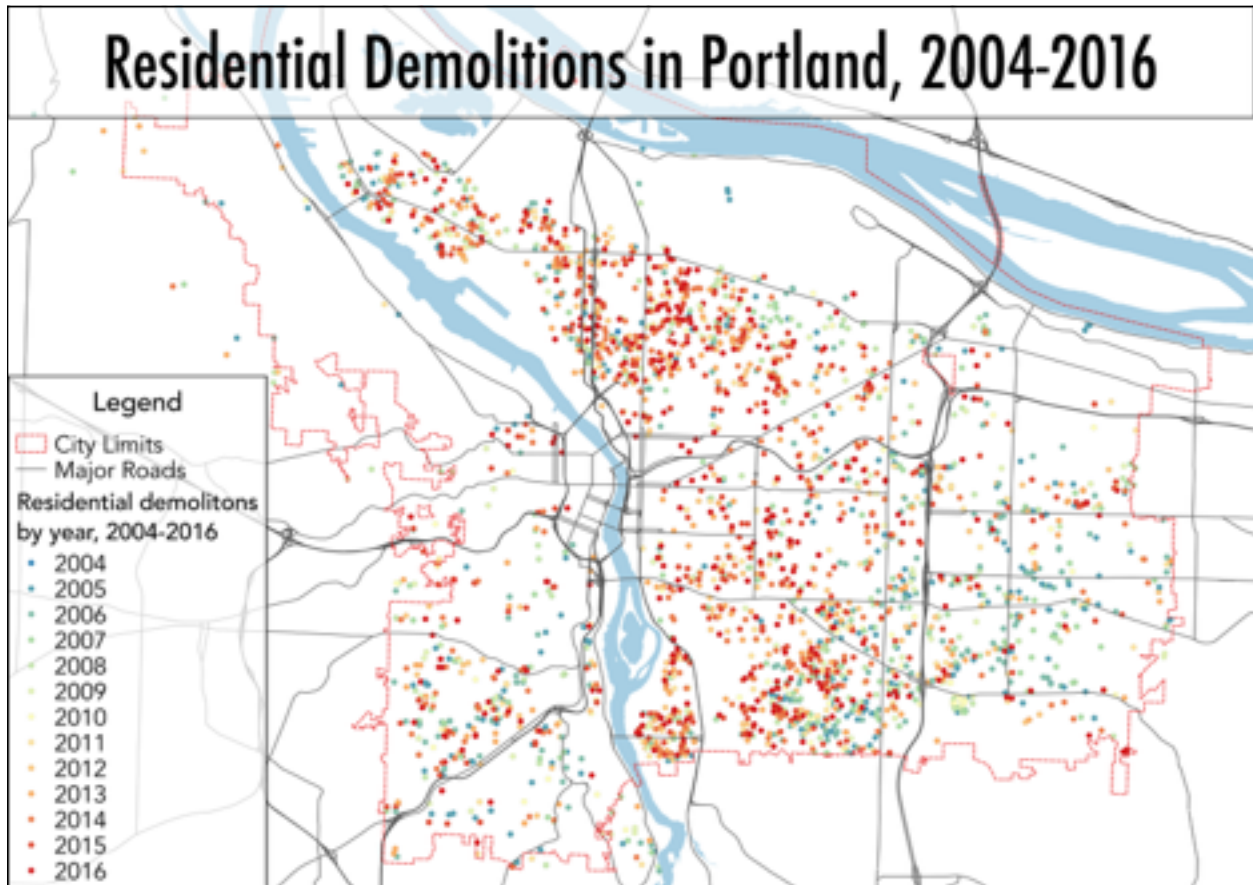
Figure 3 Graph of S&P500/Case-Shiller home price index, 1987-present



appreciated by approximately 12% annually over the last three years, increasing home prices to levels significantly above the pre-recession peak (See Figure 3). The City declared a housing emergency due to this rapid increase—not that that means anything beyond an intensification of the frames used to understand the magnitude of the problem. Diagnosis of the root source of the housing crisis is in dispute—whether this is a problem of supply and demand, soluble through a sheer increase in the number of housing units, or a problem of insatiable demand for real estate as a tool of speculation, with added development only adding to the froth?

Related to this price spiral is the recent high number of demolitions of single family homes and their replacement with infill that is built out much closer to the zoned maximum size. Since 2014, Portland has seen 1,000 demolitions of residential structures; housing price appreciation will tend to increase demolitions by driving up the underlying value of the land to a much greater degree than it increases the structural value. Lot costs on the Inner Eastside of Portland are already approximately \$250,000 for a 5,000 square foot lot (in other words, somewhat more than the average house in the U.S.). As land appreciates in value, more and more tear-down

Figure 4 Map of Residential Demolitions in Portland



Source: BDS Residential Demolitions Permits

redevelopments become feasible while the structural value of older properties plummets to nothing. Overall, this type of one-for-one redevelopment is particularly controversial, bestowing no increases in density or net unit supply while altering the neighborhood context, removing a comparatively affordable unit, and resulting in a large amount of embodied energy discarded as waste. The outgoing Mayor Charlie Hales is particularly concerned about this issue. To remedy this, Hales proposed a demolition tax. This was rejected as effectively being tax on development that would only decrease the total units produced and shift some costs onto the eventual purchaser of the new house. A deconstruction law was created during the course of RIP (not by RIP) that requires the deconstruction and salvage of materials from homes constructed earlier than 1916, out of response to the health and environmental hazards emitted from demolition. United Neighborhoods for Reform, a grassroots organization based on the Beaumont-Wilshire Neighborhood Association, campaigning against

infill/densification in general, galvanized support among neighborhood associations. Polling data conducted as part of the Residential Infill Project showed that affordability and demolitions ranked top in respondents' concerns about infill (Envirolssues 2016).

Forming RIP

Portland is growing and our housing needs are changing. Nearly 123,000 new households are projected by 2035. About 20 percent of new housing units will be built in Portland's single-dwelling residential zones. Increased cultural and racial diversity and an aging population will also affect housing needs. The average number of people per household is getting smaller and households with children are expected to decline to 25 percent over the next 20 years. Portlanders have expressed concerns about the size of new houses, demolitions and the rising cost and lack of housing choices throughout the city. In response, BPS is taking a fresh look at the allowances for development in single-dwelling neighborhoods. (BPS 2016a, 1)

The Residential Infill Project is a two year, multiple stage planning process that initially contained three elements of focus: limiting the scale of new houses, creating more middle housing options, and changing the convoluted rules pertaining to narrow lot development. It was intended to simultaneously address housing affordability and demolition, aimed at strongly discouraging the creation of new, large single-family homes while encouraging the densification of single family neighborhoods. Nationwide, the size of new single family homes has steadily risen, from 1,660 square feet in 1973 to 2,679 square feet in 2013, even as household sizes have decreased (BPS 2016a). As many of Portland's neighborhoods are dominated by older homes, this new construction frequently results in a major change in terms of building scale. The proposal overall aimed "to adapt Portland's single-dwelling zoning rules to meet the needs of current and future generations" (Ibid), largely to produce smaller, more affordable units to meet the trend towards smaller households. The proposal took significant growth of Portland, as modeled for the 2035 Comprehensive Plan Update, as a given—123,000 new households by 2035, with 20% of those settling in single-family zones (Ibid). Nominally, the proposal thus did not increase the forecasted densification of single-family zones, a fact which city planners emphasized at different points throughout the process. This assertion is a somewhat bizarre abdication of the ultimate linkage between zoning code and density, displacing the responsibility of growth ultimately onto the housing market as forecast by the model.

RIP's form is a particularly torturous variant of semi-devolved community engagement, utilizing two separate citizen commissions to guide the process: the permanent Planning & Sustainability Commission and a project-specific Stakeholder Advisory Commission. The broad scale process was as follows: First, the Bureau of Planning & Sustainability created the project objectives and bounds, drawing on concerns held by internal planners and/or people working within the broader structure of Portland municipal government¹; then, the SAC, under the guidance of several BPS planners, created general policy under each of the three objectives; then, the Planning & Sustainability Committee reviewed this concept report and submitted it to the City Council; then, the City Council heard public testimony on the concept and submitted its own amendments before sending the concept back to the Planning & Sustainability Commission. Over the next year, the PSC will turn these concepts into code amendments, before submitting the proposal back to the City Council for public testimony, amendment and approval.

The Stakeholder Advisory Commission (SAC) was to draft a proposal for regulating infill under the guidance of several city planners, drawing together business stakeholders, neighborhood district coalition leaders, and other nonprofits concerned with housing affordability. The SAC occupied a hybrid between outreach, strategic, and evaluative functions, providing a liaison between planners and the "public," providing a direction for the planers within the concepts, and providing evaluation of charrettes and proposals developed by planners and the consulting firms Enviroissues and Deca Architecture. City of Portland planners directed the process from the beginning, channeling the project and pro-density leanings of the SAC to form a set of policies in line with competing municipal interests to appease homeowners and encourage densification. In their introductory presentation, the City of Portland first defined the three topics to be addressed by the project—first, the scale of new houses and remodels; second, narrow lot development; and third, alternative housing options. The City posed questions under each of these topics, guiding thought towards the directions decided upon. For the scale of new houses, they asked: How can new houses complement existing neighborhoods? Should the rules be the same for all

¹ It seems likely it was Eli Spevak, perhaps among others, that brought the issue of "lack of housing options" up, given his position on the PSC, his own local development firm's focus on these small-scale multi-unit homes, and his advocacy for housing options at a local and national level.

areas? For narrow lot development, they asked: What should the lot dimensions be? What scale of house should be allowed? Should the rules be the same for all areas? And for alternative housing options, they gave secondary or junior ADU's, cottage cluster developments, internal conversions, and stacked flats as options to pursue (BPS 2015). The City further delimited the bounds of the project—it was to be concerned only with single-family zones, would not address formal zoning changes, would not consider trees, demolition taxes, deconstruction requirements, tiny-houses, micro-apartments, architectural style, street improvements, or development fees (BPS 2015a).

For several months, SAC members discussed their broad goals, what kind of future they wanted for Portland, and what they saw as the upsides and downsides of development. They were led on several neighborhood walks to see recent examples of infill, to discuss what ones they liked and ones they didn't, and to discuss the relative merits of different types of "missing middle" housing. City planners brought the group up to speed on the relevant zoning code and economic feasibility. From these discussions, general surveys, and models from other cities, EnviroIssues, Deca Architecture, and the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability led a charrette of

Members of the Residential Infill Project Stakeholder Advisory Commission

Name	Role	Associations	Orientation
Alan DeLaTorre	academic	Portland Commission on Disability; AARP	pro-density letter
Danell Norby	community dev. coordinator	Living Cully; Anti-Displacement PDX	pro-density letter
David Sweet	retired city bureaucrat	Central Northeast Neighbors	pro-density letter
Douglas MacLeod	developer	Home Builders' Association	pro-density letter
Eli Spevak	developer	Orange Spot LLC	pro-density letter
Emily Kemper	architect	Residential & Manufactured Structures Board; CLEAResult	pro-density letter
Eric Thompson	developer	Home Builders' Association	pro-density letter
Garlynn Woodson	developer	Northeast Coalition of Neighbors; Concordia NA	pro-density letter
Maggie McGann	nonprofit developer	Habitat for Humanity	pro-density letter
Marshall Johnson	developer	Energy Trust of Oregon	pro-density letter
Mary Kyle McCarty	policy director	1000 Friends of Oregon	pro-density letter
Mike Mitchoff	developer	Portland Houseworks; Home Builders' Association	pro-density letter
Tatiana Xenelis-Mendoza	realtor	North Portland Neighborhood Services; Portsmouth NA	pro-density letter
Teresa St Martin	realtor	Planning & Sustainability Commission	pro-density letter
Vic Remmers	developer	Everett Custom Homes; Home Builders' Association	pro-density letter
Rod Merrick	architect	Merrick Architecture Planning; Eastmoreland NA	RIP SAC 7
Sarah Cantine	architect	Boise NA; Scott Edwards Architecture	RIP SAC 7
Barbara Strunk	citizen	United Neighborhoods for Reform	RIP SAC 7
Jim Gorter	citizen	Southwest Neighborhoods Inc	RIP SAC 7
Linda Bauer	chair	East Portland Action Plan; Southeast Uplift	RIP SAC 7
Michael Molinaro	architect	Southeast Uplift	RIP SAC 7
Rick Michaelson	developer	Neighbors West/Northwest	RIP SAC 7
Douglas Reed	realtor	East Portland Neighborhood Office	
John Hasenberg	architect	Oregon Remodelers Association	

design options in January which further solidified the policy options. The process, then, was very intentionally shaped from the beginning with the topics, perceived issues, and general policy responses preordained. Developers on the SAC provided a receptive ear to urbanist narratives of infill and the solutions associated with those narratives, with many stating that densification to promote affordability was a primary goal of theirs in this process during the first meeting. RIP SAC eschewed majority votes; the balance and content of their opinions used as a sounding board by planners to write the concept report.

Perhaps the most important intervention of RIP SAC came during the 7th meeting, on February 2nd, when Mayor Charlie Hales proposed dividing RIP into two sequential sections. The first would deal only with the scale of houses while leaving the discussion of “missing middle” housing and narrow lot development for a later process in 2017, in order to “focus ‘where we could do the most good first’” (BPS 2016c). This proposed change was in response to the perceived need to move quickly on establishing the scale of housing limitations that received near-consensus support, while pushing the more controversial “missing middle” components off. Hales received huge pushback from the pro-density members of SAC, who recognized that the inclusion of the scale of houses section greatly increased the public palatability of densifying a wide array of single-family zones and further stated that affordability and housing options, rather than housing scale, were the most important issues addressed by RIP. Hales acquiesced to this majority opinion, but restated the need for SAC to move quickly to have something to present to the outgoing Council by the end of 2016. Following this meeting, the SAC process adopted a somewhat accelerated timeline, with city planners playing an even more explicit role, beginning each meeting with a set of three options for dealing with a subtopic.

Ultimately, RIP SAC settled on a set of proposals to limit new houses citywide to 2,500 square feet for a standard 5,000 square foot lot; establish a Housing Opportunity Overlay Zone (HOOZ)—areas within a quarter mile of centers and corridors or frequent transit or designated as Inner Ring or medium to high opportunity neighborhoods—within which up three housing units could be created on a single lot; and allowing narrow lot development on lots within the HOOZ by rezoning them to R2.5 (See Appendix A for full proposal, including the map of the HOOZ). The PSC made no changes to the report, though Eli Spevak, serving on the PSC, put forward a letter of

proposed modifications to encourage greater densification. These notably included allowing a fourth unit on lots within the HOOZ and removing the requirement to engage in design review for building the “missing middle” housing within the HOOZ. The rest of the commission was receptive to the motivation and content of his amendments, but had a process objection—there was very limited time to agree on changes to the concept report before submission to the Council, and the PSC would be able to incorporate many of these changes in the specific code writing phase, presuming that they were not in conflict with the direction of the concept report as a whole. The Council left its own modest mark on the process, proposing and accepting amendments related to each of the components. Their ultimate vote was unanimous, though there were clear differences of opinion on the effectiveness of increased housing supply to address affordability, as well as a strong desire by Hales and Amanda Fritz to limit demolition. The Council approved amendments that directed the PSC to limit the size of new single-family homes in the HOOZ even further to 2,000 square feet, leaving the sizes of multi-unit structures unchanged (though directing the PSC to continue to explore options for the exact size limit of structures); decrease overall building coverage; allow flexibility in front setbacks for tree preservation; explore requirements and bonus units allowances for age-friendly, (guaranteed) affordability, and tree preservation; allow additional units for internal conversion anywhere in the city; provide different options for the geography of the HOOZ; and prohibit historically narrow lot (less than 36 feet wide) development (BPS 2016d).

Polarization of Stakeholders

Assessment of infill options was polarized both within RIP SAC and the participating public at large. Rather early on, two competing modes of interpreting infill emerged, based on both the understanding of the economics of the housing market and the relative importance assigned to affordability and preservation of neighborhood character. The RIP SAC summary categorizes the two broad perspectives of the SAC as the “housing diversity” and “neighborhood context” (BPS 2016e). On RIP SAC, both of these perspectives accepted increased density within Portland, but the “neighborhood context” advocates opposed seeing this density throughout the single-family zones, preferring to continue to focus growth solely within Centers and Corridors, perhaps permitting some missing middle housing in areas one or two blocks from these growth

locations.² The housing diversity bloc saw housing unaffordability as both a vital issue of equity and matter of imbalance in supply-and-demand, requiring bold action by the City. They favored allowing “missing middle” housing broadly throughout Portland and emphasized that the intermixture of small multi-unit structures and single-family homes characterizes many of the most vital inner Portland neighborhoods. The housing diversity bloc, the report notes, composed a majority of the SAC. They attached a signed letter to the summary report urging greater densification of single-family zones than was ultimately proposed by the Residential Infill Project SAC. This letter advocated for allowing 4 units within a lot, as long as the fourth was affordable, and applying these allowed housing options citywide. Those with a “neighborhood context” perspective saw residential infill as contrary to the existing Comprehensive Plan. They argued that housing unaffordability is not due to zoning constraints or a lack of housing supply and decried the widespread allowance of middle housing as likely only to accelerate price increases and demolitions. In Council testimony, they very consciously identified themselves as a marginalized opposition, terming themselves part of the “RIP SAC 7.” Unlike the “housing choices” faction letter, the RIP SAC 7’s letter was not published in the summary report, instead buried within the hundreds of pages of letters and emails received from individuals. In the letter, they broadly agree with the proposals for scale, while calling for the strict limitation of middle housing to areas zoned R2 or R2.5 within a block of corridors and two blocks of centers and restricting narrow lot development to R2.5 zones.

For members of RIP SAC, perceptions of the virtue of the process itself aligned with perceptions of the virtue of the outcome, as attested to during the City Council public meeting. RIP SAC members in support of the concept spoke of a difficult but productive dialogue, culminating in a surprising consensus between nonprofit housing providers, disability rights advocates, home builders, community-based groups, and neighborhood associations. A developer testified that he was initially skeptical of the process, but had been pleasantly surprised by the level of common ground between nonprofits and developers, supposing that this might form the basis of a durable coalition. Gorter, Molinaro, and Struck, voicing the opposition faction, had a rather

² This is less the case in the public feedback at large; some of the open comment submissions decried the growth of centers and corridors and called for Portland to aggressively limit growth, often favoring displacing development to suburban areas at the edge of the Urban Growth Boundary.

different take on the process. They saw the process as having been hijacked by developers for their own profit, identifying a drift of the project away from what they perceived as the initial guiding principles. They called for a complete redo of the process, with a focus on basing the proposal on the desires of neighborhood associations. Observers of the process in opposition to the concept report echoed this assessment; the Irvington Neighborhood Association stated that “what began in response to grass roots anguish over demolition and inappropriate residential infill construction has morphed into a recommendation for major erosion of single family zoning in Portland” (Irvington NA 2016, 5).

Testimonial at the City Council public meeting replicated these ideologies within the public at large. Representatives of most nonprofits (except the Urban Forestry Commission and Restore Oregon) and developers aligned in support of the proposition, representatives of neighborhood associations in opposition, and nonaffiliated citizens roughly evenly split. Those broadly supporting the proposal lauded the allowance of more “housing choices”; generally interpreted densification as improving neighborhoods in terms of business vitality and walkability; called for spreading middle housing across the whole city; were direly worried about affordability and pricing younger generations and the working class out of the city; and saw RIP as a meaningful way to combat affordability. Those against RIP argued for “Truth in Zoning,” noting that this proposal would allow for three units on a majority of Portland’s single-family lots; worried primarily about demolition and rapid neighborhood change; called for a limitation of the proposed middle housing to select neighborhoods; saw the effects of densification in single family zones as broadly negative; and doubted that the proposal would help with affordability. Polarization was furthered by the presence of Portland for Everyone’s “I <3 Housing Choices” buttons, meant to express endorsement for the urbanist understanding of middle housing infill as part of a program for increasing equity, neighborhood vitality, and sustainability. These buttons rendered the positions immediately visible, signifying which viewpoint you were to hear next. Support of or opposition to infill were constituted as part of internally-consistent and mutually-exclusive ideologies.

There was a striking emotional undercurrent to many of the testimonies. One of the community activists opposed to the proposal said that her “heart is broken” by the RIP process, going on to characterize it as blindsiding the community with last-minute

shenanigans and stating that moving forward with the concept report “would be a mortal sin.” Others opposed to the proposal expressed strong qualms about violating the sanctity of single-family housing, seeing infill densification as encouraging the destruction of their beloved environments and as a betrayal of the promises embedded in zoning by the City. Likewise, everyone who supported the proposal foregrounded housing prices and equity. They expressed anxieties that, without this action, Portland would inexorably become a class exclusive place, displacing not only the working class but also their own children.

(Dis)Regarding Public Feedback

Please, please, please don't let the segregationist aesthetics of home-owning gentry drive this process! I am watching as my friends and neighbors are being driven out of the city and into homelessness. I am only somewhat protected because I am doubled up with family. We need as much housing for as many people as possible in every part of the city. This is an emergency!

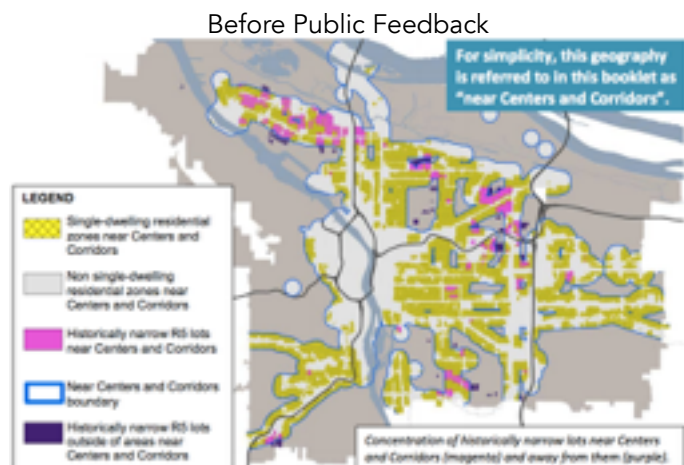
I am strongly AGAINST the proposal to permit additional duplexes and triplexes in current R5 and other single-family zones. The map of proposed areas to be rezoned (overlay) is shocking - it would represent a massive increase in demolitions, with no guarantee of affordability. Destroying existing, functioning homes that are affordable, to build new market-rate units, will just make neighborhoods less affordable. (BPS 2016f, 11, 35)

Nominally, the Residential Infill Project has engaged in a large amount of public engagement—at about halfway through the process, there have already been three stages in which citizens could weigh in on the proposals, along with ongoing public comments accepted at RIP SAC meetings and a series of open houses conducted by BPS. RIP SAC itself was regarded as a form of public engagement, with members selected as a way of engaging and informing the groups with which they were associated. There were two open surveys to gather people’s opinions about RIP, first from December 8th, 2015 to January 12th, 2016, to help policy concept formation, and then from June 15th to August 15th, 2016, to assess opinions of the RIP SAC’s ultimate proposal for final revision before submission to the Council. The City Council additionally heard public testimony on the concepts during two meetings, totaling approximately 10 hours. This was in addition to the ongoing letters by organizations and individuals accepted and read by BPS. The breadth of public engagement in this process is clear, with some 10,000 residents participating in the combined online

surveys. Nevertheless, we may seriously question its depth—to what extent did the process go beyond the lower tokenist levels of engagement?

The first online survey was a ranked choice survey, conducted primarily to ascertain the general concerns of citizens. It yielded results that residents were concerned about demolition, neighborhood character, and providing more housing choice, and affordability, thus confirming BPS’s pre-existing assessment of the situation. The second, conducted alongside the two months of public engagement in between the completion of RIP SAC’s involvement and the finalization of the concept report, asked residents to consider whether the proposals moved in the right direction or wrong direction, and whether middle housing and narrow lot development should be allowed in a broader or more constrained geographic area. The results (shown in Appendix B) reveal general support of the proposals, with ~80% supporting the limitations on home size and a majority approving of the various middle housing proposals. In terms of the spread of middle housing, roughly half the respondents supported applying the housing types more broadly, a quarter saw the original geography of near centers and corridors as appropriate, and a quarter desired a more limited implementation.

The feedback from neighborhood associations was contextualized with these generally positive survey results. Virtually every neighborhood association submitting an organizational letter on RIP, besides Sunnyside, Cully, and Hillside, came in opposition to the proposal, largely weighing in with objections that echoed the “neighborhood context” perspective on RIP SAC.³ These neighborhood associations were not used as the basis of neighborhood-specific changes to RIP, however. In fact, the major change resulting from the summer public engagement process was an expansion of the HOOZ boundaries, with the inclusion of



³ The one exception to this being the University Park Neighborhood Association, which argued that limiting middle housing infill to areas near Centers and Corridors would be racially unjust—the argument being that the proposal would increase the value of land predominately owned by middle-class whites.

medium to high opportunity and all Inner Ring neighborhoods in the areas with middle housing allowed. The two major neighborhoods included with this change were Eastmoreland and Irvington—two which were particularly strident in their rejection of infill housing as appropriate for most single-family zones. This change was motivated by arguments and public

After Public Feedback



feedback that indicated that infill housing should be applied more broadly throughout the city. The non-representativeness of neighborhood associations was noted at multiple points throughout the process by pro-density advocates; using equity as a cudgel, they called for ignoring (or at least minimizing) the input of neighborhood associations. Moreover, the very polarization of the overall commentary made the formation of consensus impossible.

Implications

The Residential Infill Project brings to bear several inherent tensions in contemporary planning: the constructed nature of the scale of the community and the contradiction between process equity and outcome equity. Over the course of RIP, nonprofit and for-profit developers came into significant alignment on both the issues (significant expansion of middle housing in single-family zones) and the framing of these issues (creating equity by addressing affordability). This coalition presents denser, real estate-led redevelopment of single family zones as a solution for gentrification and creator of equity. Neighborhood opposition to development was cast as regressive NIMBYism, ignorable because of its unrepresentative nature. Though the pro-density coalition included members of neighborhood associations and district coalitions, the vast majority of neighborhood associations opposed the widespread addition of middle housing to single family neighborhoods. The neighborhood associations which were at the center of earlier models of community engagement were disregarded, their composition of homeowners used to minimize the validity of their recommendations in terms of the overall equity goals of the city. The Portland Comprehensive Plan defines equity by outcomes—“Equity is achieved when everyone has access to the

opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well-being and achieve their full potential” (BPS 2016g). From this perspective, the importance of letting established homeowners having a say in the forms of development in their environs scarcely registered against allowing a greater number of people to buy a home in those neighborhoods of opportunity. The community that Council members thus worried about included not only citywide renters, but also the future residents and homebuyers, the housing affordability crisis galvanizing an alignment of developers and renters and making recalcitrant homeowners appear as narrowly self-interested entities.

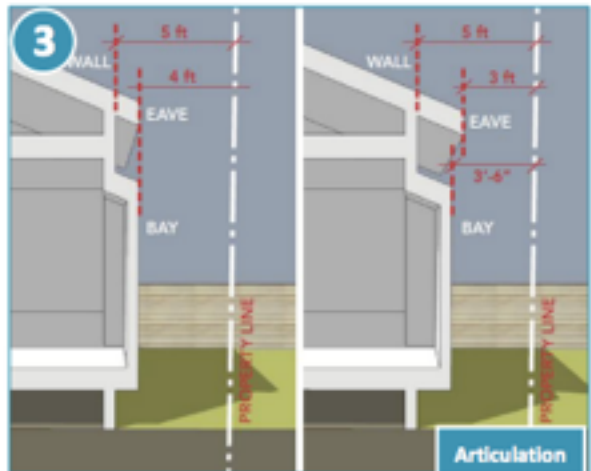
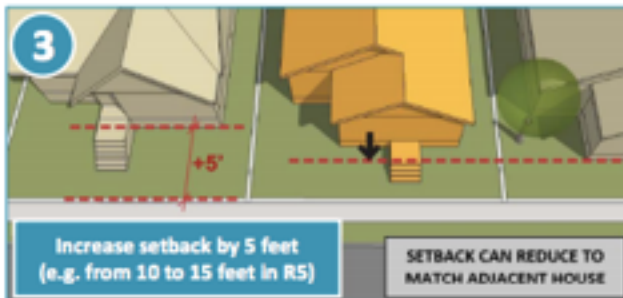
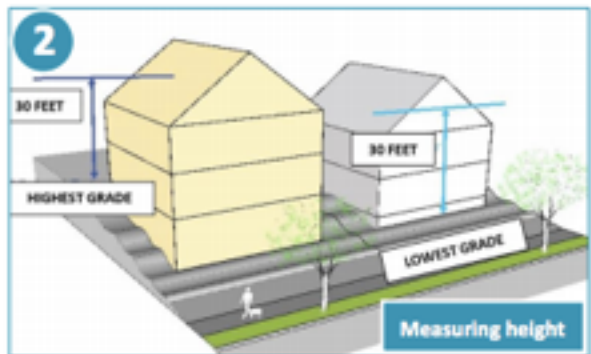
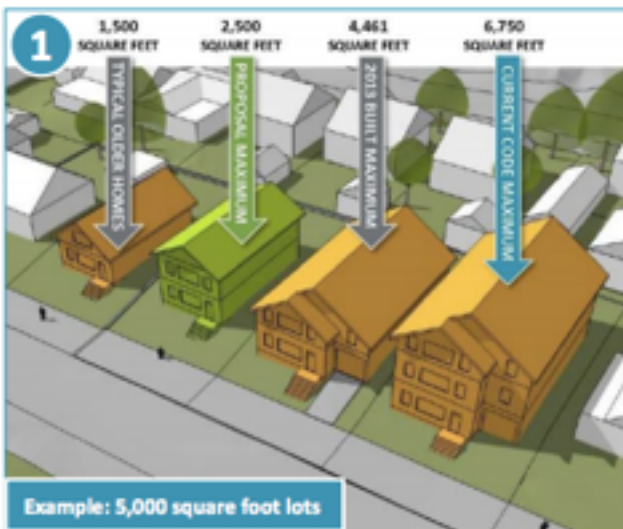
This study provides a snapshot into the contemporary and future dynamics of housing politics. This emergent politics of housing aligns properly-planned real estate-led development with solving gentrification and housing unaffordability. The issue of “missing middle” housing infill is far from localized to Portland. A search for the term “‘missing middle’ housing” in Google News reveals the geographic extensiveness of policy pushes for denser housing in response to an affordability crisis. Over the past two years, Seattle, Austin, Santa Rosa, Toronto, Austin, Cannon Beach, Ithaca, Charlotte, Melbourne, Sydney, Vancouver, B.C., Grand Rapids, Michigan, Noblesville, Indiana, Tahoe, Boulder, and Fayetteville, Arkansas have all seen calls for and proposals advanced to increase the supply of missing middle housing, ultimately through rezoning. The White House even weighed in on the issue of zoning, affordability, and equity, stating that “barriers to housing development are exacerbating the housing affordability crisis, particularly in vibrant regions with high job growth and few rental vacancies” (2016, 8) and calling for the expansion of ADUs, density bonuses, and multifamily zoning to address this crisis. The housing affordability crisis has become a generalized phenomenon, redrawing the battle lines of zoning and feeding the emergence of a YIMBY movement. Within this movement, land use restrictions are cast as the main driver of unaffordability and inequality, with increased development with expanding zoned density key in the struggle for equitable cities.

Appendix

A. Residential Infill Project Concept Report

SCALE OF HOUSES

- 1. Limit the size of houses while maintaining flexibility**
 - a) Establish a limit on house size that is proportional to lot size and zone using a floor area ratio (FAR).
 - b) Exclude basements and attics with low ceiling heights from house size limits.
 - c) Allow bonus square footage for detached accessory structures (0.15 bonus FAR).
 - d) Maintain current building coverage limits.
- 2. Lower the house roofline**
 - a) Restrict height to 2½ stories on standard lots.
 - b) Measure the basepoint from the lowest point 5 feet from a house, not from the highest point.
 - c) For down-sloping lots, allow use of average street grade as a basepoint alternative.
 - d) Ensure that dormers are a secondary roof mass.
- 3. Improve setbacks to better match adjacent houses**
 - a) Increase minimum front setback by 5 feet; provide an exception to reduce setback to match existing, immediately adjacent house.
 - b) Encourage building articulation by allowing eaves to project 2 feet into setbacks and bay windows to project 18 inches into setbacks.



4. Allow more housing types in select areas and limit their scale to the size of house allowed

- a) Within the Housing Opportunity Overlay Zone in R2.5, R5 and R7 zones, allow:
 - House with both an internal and detached accessory dwelling unit (ADU).
 - Duplex.
 - Duplex with detached ADU.
 - Triplex on corner lots.
- b) Establish minimum qualifying lot sizes for each housing type and zone.
- c) Require design controls for all proposed projects seeking additional units.

5. Establish a Housing Opportunity Overlay Zone in select areas

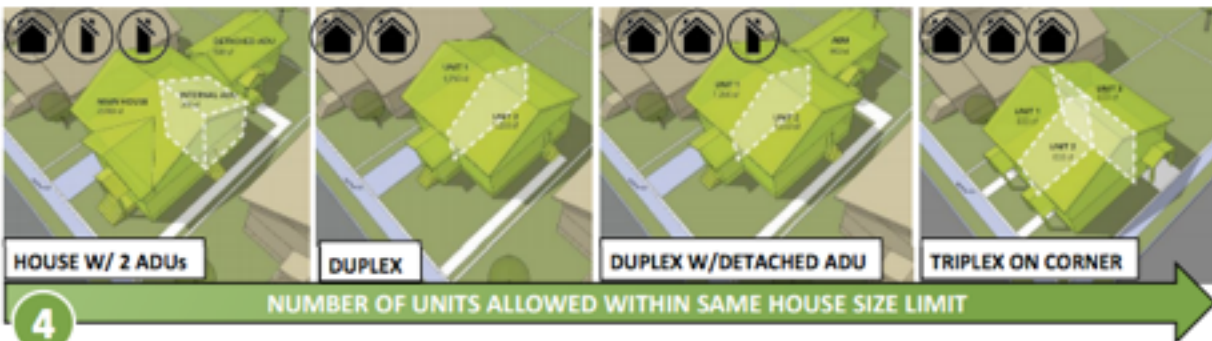
- a) Apply a housing opportunity overlay zone to the following areas:
 - Within a ¼ mile (about five blocks) of centers, corridors with frequent bus service, and high capacity transit (MAX) stations.
 - Within the Inner Ring neighborhoods, and medium to high opportunity neighborhoods as designated in the new Comprehensive Plan.
- b) Exclude areas within the David Douglas School District until school district capacity issues have been addressed.
- c) Prior to adopting any specific zoning changes, refine the Housing Opportunity Overlay Zone to produce a boundary that considers property lines, physical barriers, natural features, topography and other practical considerations.

6. Increase flexibility for cottage cluster developments on large lots citywide

- a) On single-dwelling zoned lots of at least 10,000 square feet in size, allow cottage clusters subject to Type IIX land use review.
- b) Cap the total square footage on a cottage cluster site to the same FAR limit [see Recommendation 1] and limit each new cottage to 1,100 square feet.
- c) Inside the Housing Opportunity Overlay Zone [see Recommendation 5], the number of cottages allowed equals the same number of units that would otherwise be permitted.
- d) Outside the Housing Opportunity Overlay Zone, allow one ADU for each cottage.
- e) Develop specific cottage cluster rules to ensure that development is integrated into the neighborhood.
- f) Explore additional units when the units are affordable and accessible.

7. Provide flexibility for retaining existing houses

- a) Scale flexibility:
 - Allow modest additional floor area for remodels, additions and house conversions.
 - Allow modest additional height when an existing house's foundation is being replaced or basement is being converted.
- b) Housing choice flexibility:
 - Inside the Housing Opportunity Overlay Zone [see Recommendation 5], allow an additional unit when an older house is converted into multiple units or retained with a new cottage cluster development.
 - Pursue additional flexibility for house conversions, such as parking exemptions, systems development charge (SDC) waivers or reductions, building code flexibility and City program resources that facilitate conversions.



8. Rezone historically narrow lots to R2.5 in select areas

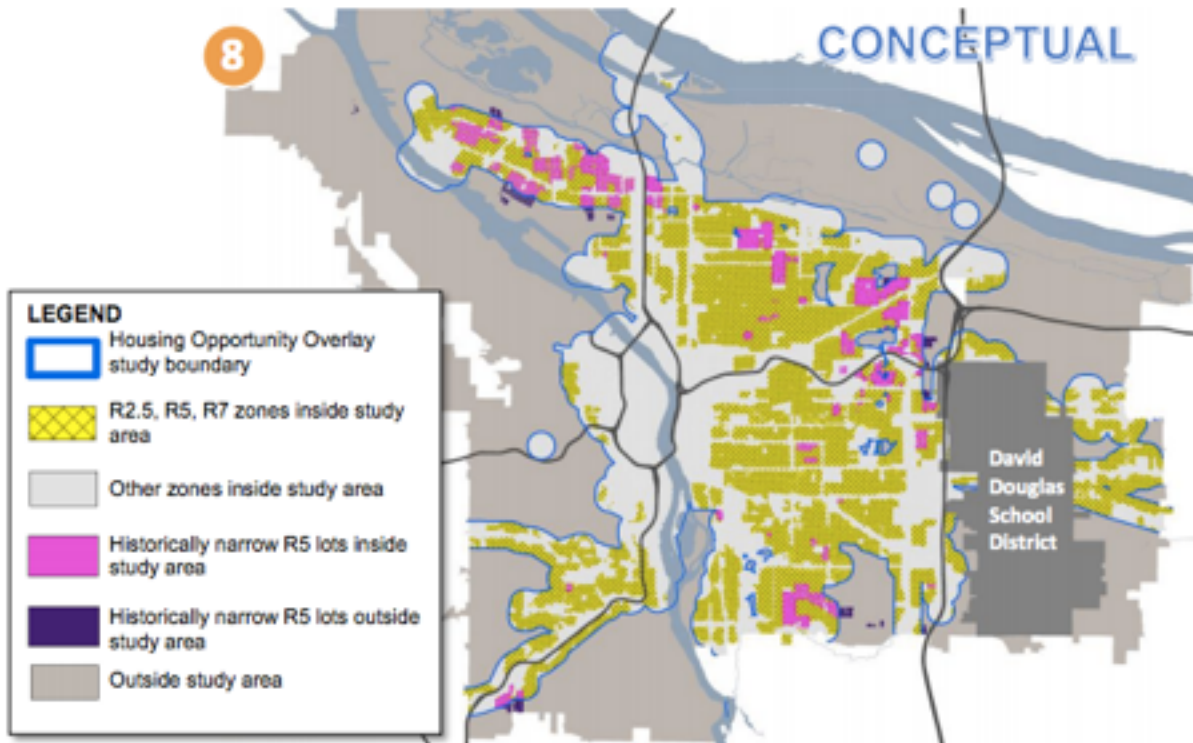
- a) Allow historically narrow lots to be built on by rezoning them to R2.5 if located within the housing opportunity overlay zone [see Recommendation 5].
- b) Remove provisions that allow substandard lots to be built on in the R5 zone.

9. Citywide improvements to the R2.5 zone

- a) On vacant R2.5 zoned lots of at least 5,000 square feet, require at least two units when new development is proposed. Allow a duplex or a house with an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) to meet the requirement.
- b) Reduce minimum lot width from 36 feet to 25 feet for land divisions.
- c) Allow a property line adjustment to form a flag lot when retaining an existing house.
- d) Require attached houses when a house is demolished.
- e) Allow 3-story attached homes and limit detached houses on narrow lots to 2 stories.

10. Revise parking rules for houses on narrow lots

- a) Allow, but don't require parking on narrow lots.
- b) When a lot abuts an alley, parking access must be provided from the alley.
- c) Allow front-loaded garages on attached houses on narrow lots if they are tucked under the first floor of the house and the driveways are combined.
- d) Do not allow front-loaded garages for detached houses on narrow lots.



LEGEND

- Housing Opportunity Overlay study boundary
- R2.5, R5, R7 zones inside study area
- Other zones inside study area
- Historically narrow R5 lots inside study area
- Historically narrow R5 lots outside study area
- Outside study area



B. Selected Survey Data on the Residential Infill Project

Figure 4: One set of changes will address the scale of houses and what may be allowed as new houses are built and old houses are remodeled in existing neighborhoods. For each of the following, please indicate if you think the proposed change to address the housing needs of current and future generations is moving in the right direction or in the wrong direction. (Question 8)

	Right direction	Wrong direction	Don't know/Uncertain	N =
Limit the square footage of new houses in relation to the size of the lot it's built on	79%	14%	7%	2,228
Allow additional square footage for basements	79%	7%	14%	2,213
Allow additional square footage for detached structures, like garages and accessory dwelling units (ADUs). ADUs are detached spaces that sometimes function as rental units or mother-in-law apartments	70%	19%	11%	2,225
Increase minimum front yard setbacks by 5 feet, but allow houses to be as close to the street as neighboring houses	67%	19%	14%	2,206
Reduce overall heights by measuring the height of new houses from the lowest instead of the highest point around the house	61%	19%	20%	2,205
Lower the allowed height of new houses with flat roofs by 5 feet (from 30 to 25 feet)	59%	20%	21%	2,213
Allow taller houses with a smaller footprint or shorter houses that are more spread out, but not houses that are both tall and spread out	59%	24%	17%	2,214

Figure 8: For each of the following please indicate if you think the proposed change for housing types near Centers and Corridors is moving in the right direction or the wrong direction to address the needs of current and future residents. These housing types would be limited to the same scale as a single dwelling house (Question 11)

	Right direction	Wrong direction	Don't know/Uncertain	N =
Offer a bonus unit for internally converting an existing or historic house	64%	22%	13%	2,127
Offer a bonus unit for providing an affordable or accessible unit	59%	27%	15%	2,131
Allow duplexes on all lots	54%	38%	8%	2,136
Allow houses to have two ADUs (one in the house and one in a detached structure)	53%	37%	10%	2,137
Allow triplexes on corner lots	52%	38%	11%	2,126
Allow a duplex to have a detached ADU	47%	41%	13%	2,126

Figure 9: To further encourage other housing types citywide, beyond just those in Centers and Corridors, the following changes are being proposed for all single-dwelling zoned lots. Please indicate if you think the proposed change to address the needs of current and future residents is moving in the right direction or the wrong direction. (Question 12)

	Right direction	Wrong direction	Don't know/Uncertain	N =
Allow cottage clusters on large lots (at least 10,000 square feet)	67%	21%	12%	2,131
Require at least two housing units for double-sized lots in the R2.5 zone	36%	43%	21%	2,132

Figure 10: For reference, historically narrow lots were created before modern zoning. Most are 25 feet wide and 100 feet deep. For each of the following, please indicate if you think the proposed change is moving in the right direction or the wrong direction as one solution to address the housing needs of current and future residents. (Question 13)

	Right direction	Wrong direction	Don't know/Uncertain	N =
Prevent street-facing garages for new houses on narrow lots; encourage shared driveways or alley-accessed garages instead	64%	24%	13%	2,079
Allow flag lots (one lot behind another) when keeping an existing house as an alternative to narrow houses	61%	23%	17%	1,555
Lower the allowed height of new houses with flat roofs on narrow lots by 3 feet (from 23 to 20 feet)	60%	19%	21%	2,076
Preserve on-street parking by not requiring new houses on narrow lots to provide off-street parking	39%	47%	14%	2,074
Require new houses on narrow lots to be attached when replacing an existing house	38%	24%	38%	2,071

“The new Comprehensive Plan and recent City Council direction seeks to encourage relatively smaller, less expensive housing types near Centers and Corridors with frequent transit service. These housing types could include multiple units within a structure and would be limited to the same scale as a single dwelling house. Do you think this is where this type of development should be focused?” (Question 10)

Differences between homeowners and renters

	Own	Rent
This is the right place to encourage these housing types.	27%	28%
These housing types should be more broadly applied throughout the city to offer more choices in more places.	45%	59%
These housing types should be more concentrated in specific, smaller areas of the city to focus change.	21%	7%
Don't know/Uncertain.	7%	5%
N =	1788	295

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