

Livable Phinney

6537 Greenwood Ave. Seattle, WA 98103

<https://livablephinney.org/>

January 15, 2019

Council member Mike O'Brien -Via email

Re: Amendments to MHA Legislation

Dear CM O'Brien,

Livable Phinney is a Washington non-profit corporation that focuses on reasonable development for the Phinney Ridge neighborhood. We have reviewed the proposed MHA legislation and have several concerns about its potential impact on Phinney Ridge. To that end, we are proposing several amendments that we hope you will consider and sponsor as MHA gets amended over the coming months.

For Council members who are unfamiliar with our neighborhood, it is important to understand that Greenwood and Phinney Ridge are really two separate neighborhoods, although they are considered together in the Greenwood/Phinney Urban Village Plan that was created in the 1990s. The neighborhood plan for these two neighborhoods recognizes Greenwood Town Center at the intersection of Greenwood Avenue North and North 85th as the focal point of development in this area. Around that location, there is north/south and east/west bus service, there is a concentration of mixed use and multi-family zoning over several blocks in each direction, there are large grocery stores, the neighborhood library, and several other features associated with an "urban village." This area is commonly known as "Greenwood," and we take no position on the MHA impacts in this area.

Phinney Ridge begins at North 75th Street and extends south along Phinney Avenue to where we intersect with the Fremont neighborhood at Market/46th. The Phinney Ridge portion of the Greenwood/Phinney Urban Village is the "tail" that terminates at North 67th. South of 67th, Phinney Avenue is the arterial, and that street is zoned mostly NC2-40 and LR3 (low rise residential, 30 feet). Every NC2-40 lot on the Greenwood arterial in the Urban Village, and every NC2-40 and LR3 lot on the Phinney Avenue arterial south of the urban village share their rear property lines with the adjacent single family zone. None of these are large lots and much of the LR3 parcels have always been developed with single family homes, some of which are divided into multiple units, but appear as single homes.

In the current MHA legislation, every parcel on the Greenwood and Phinney arterials in Phinney Ridge would be upzoned. The NC2-40 lots would be upzoned to 5-story, 55+ foot buildings, and the LR3 lots would be upzoned to 4 stories. While that might make sense in some areas, it would be a terrible and unnecessary mistake in Phinney Ridge. **We urge you to exempt Phinney Ridge from the MHA upzones, and we offer specific proposals to accomplish that at the end of this letter.**

Phinney Ridge is one of the only areas in the city where there is absolutely no transition between the NC2-40 lots and the adjacent single family zone. Every NC2-40 lot on Greenwood Avenue in the Urban Village and on Phinney Avenue outside the urban village boundary shares its rear boundary with the adjacent single family zone. **We recommend that you amend MHA to prohibit the NC2-55 zone for NC2-40 lots that abut a lot in the single family zone.**

The Director's Report on MHA recognized this anomaly on page 89 of that report. This edge condition is recognized in SMC 23.47A.014.B, of the current Land Use Code where the Code requires specific setbacks on all floors above the first floor for the buildings on the NC2-40 lots. The current MHA legislation proposes to increase the fifth floor setback by one foot. **But we do not think the City should allow five story buildings**

anywhere where those NC lots share a property boundary with the single family zone. **Therefore, we recommend that you amend Table A for Section 1 standard Zoning changes in the MHA legislation (this was the title in CB119184; we have not looked for amended legislation as of this letter) to specify that NC2-40 lots that abut lots in single family zones will not be upzoned to NC2-55.**

Next, we recommend that you maintain the LR3 height limits at 30-feet along Phinney Avenue south of the urban village boundary. Because these lots are on top of a hill, the increased height has even greater shadow impacts on the adjacent single family zone. The current Land Use Code at SMC 23.45.514 (Structure height in LR zones) includes Footnote 2 that limits LR3 height to 30 feet for LR3 lots in an urban village that are adjacent to the SF zone, where the zoning would otherwise allow forty feet. The proposed MHA legislation increases LR3 to at least 40 feet inside and outside the urban village and removes that footnote that would otherwise protect single family zones. **To preserve the LR3 at 30 feet in Phinney Ridge, we recommend that you keep Footnote 2 to Table A in SMC 23.34.514 and also specifically attach it to the LR3 zone outside the urban village where MHA proposes to upzone to 40 feet.**

These amendments also address the very real transportation constraints in Phinney Ridge that would be needlessly exacerbated by upzoning. Unlike most other urban villages, there is only one bus line (Route #5) that serves the Phinney Ridge neighborhood., running north / south through downtown, which means residents of Phinney Ridge have far fewer convenient transportation options than residents of other urban villages and their nearby areas. Upzoning all of Phinney Ridge will exacerbate this problem past the breaking point. We know from personal experience that this bus is frequently overcrowded, late and generally unreliable now, and Phinney Ridge is not even close to being developed to its current zoning potential under the existing code. Overcrowding on the #5 bus negatively impacts our neighbors in Fremont as well. Buses are frequently unable to take on Fremont passengers south of 43rd.

We have reviewed parking studies for several recent developments in Phinney Ridge, and all of those studies confirm that the surrounding streets are already parked up past their capacity. Upzoning will make things even worse. There is currently a 55-unit, no parking building under construction. If that building were built to MHA zoning, it would have over 70 units on one single parcel. Phinney Ridge does not have transit or street parking capacity for upzoning.

Furthermore, Phinney Ridge already houses numerous affordable units in the existing old buildings. The City should not incentivize the demise of those buildings by upzoning them.

Thank you for your consideration of these proposals.

Sincerely,

Livable Phinney

Michael Richards, Jan Weldin, Irene Wall