

University Park Community Club (UPCC)

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January 31, 2022

**TO: Nicole Macri, Representative, 43rd District and sponsor of this bill
Frank Chopp, Representative, 43rd District
Jamie D. Pedersen, Senator, 43rd District**

RE: HB 1782: “AN ACT Relating to creating additional middle housing near transit and in areas traditionally dedicated to single-family detached housing; amending RCW 36.70A.030 and 43.21C.495; and adding new sections to chapter 36.70A RCW”

Dear District 43rd Representatives and Senator:

The UPCC represents the University Park, a small family neighborhood nestled in the NW corner of the University District and just north of the University of Washington. We recently were notified by Seattle Fair Growth about HB 1782, which appears to be on a fast track through the House of Representatives.

Although the overarching goals of this bill may be admirable, that of increasing the inventory of affordable middle housing and access to this housing within cities especially to those families who have been displaced and disenfranchised, the entire bill is riddle with obstacles that will prevent the actual achievement of that goal in the near future or perhaps at all. The bill, furthermore, has the potential for doing great and irreparable harm to some communities.

Here we list several of its egregious flaws:

1. The centralized planning assumptions and forceful, inflexible demands from the state level can only lead to disasters, as the bill fails to acknowledge and address the fact that various neighborhoods have unique histories, population demands, infrastructural limitations, etc., which may greatly and potentially lead to negative and irreversible damage and which will not even achieve what the bill avows to accomplish. This top-down, one-size-fits-all approach is riddled with flaws of assumptions, a lack of appreciation of local dynamics, and the inflated belief that the State can micromanage on a local level.
2. “... any city with a population of 500,000 or may allow an average minimum density equivalent to 40 dwelling units or more per gross acre across the entirety of the city's urban growth area (UGA)” (NOTE: Seattle doesn't have a designated UGA): This assumption that large, 1-acre lots are even available for a minimum of 40 housing units seems very slim and would necessarily lead to the destruction of the existing historic and family homes of unique architectural features through the aggressive takeover of adjacent lots by developers and speculators. It is also interesting that this strictest

regulation is limited to those cities with a population of over 500,000 – Seattle alone fits that description! How conveniently suspicious.

3. One such unique neighborhood which will be greatly harmed is our own University Park Neighborhood. Nestled in the NE corner of the U District, this community is and has always been a family neighborhood. But more and more it is being infiltrated by absentee landlords, whose goal is the greatest profit with the least amount of effort, cost, investment, or inconvenience. And yet, our streetscapes are still lined with beautiful older homes, which are inviting to the pedestrian-friendly city. Seattle officials, however, fail to recognize that behind those facades are multiple, efficiently packed housing units, mostly for students. In other words, without any up-zone or forced compliance to state mandates, our neighborhood is already quite densely populated, with a variety for housing options for various incomes. This bill will do no good and may even produce more harm, because of a prior piece of legislation that was already passed; specifically, ESSB 5235, which includes this major regulation: It “*prohibits cities and counties from regulating or limiting the number of unrelated people who can occupy a house or other dwelling unit,*” You just gave permission to these absentee landlords to cram as many people as they can into their existing rental houses, so why would they go to the trouble, the cost, and the lengthy process of applications, permits, design reviews, and inspections to create costly multi-unit houses, which may also require the accumulation of continuous lots for this to be practical and beneficial?
4. This vague phrase must be defined: “Major Transit Stops”. In Seattle, this could include every neighborhood. How many buses and how frequent does the service have to be at a given stop to call it a major transit stop?
5. Where are the requirements that the City and the developers provide the necessary infrastructure, such as roads and schools, required to bring back families into the city neighborhoods?
6. The speedy and stealthy effort to pass the bill is fraught with doubt and frustration by those communities most vulnerable and most likely to be negatively impacted. What groups were most involved and influential in its wording? City Officials? Developers and speculators? Big time financial investors? There seem to all sorts of convenient carve outs for them and no real effort to hide their input. Note that Seattle has already failed to increase the inventory of affordable housing near light rail stations as promised during the creation of its Urban Villages, with concurrent up-zones to allow for increased density, bulk, and height, including skysrise buildings in the University District. With the legal enforcement of this bill, the City will now have the power to aggressively go after family neighborhoods, their final and ultimate target, and there they will also fail to live up to the goals of this legislation.
7. This is further proof that those goals are not realistic and not truly enforceable. Unfortunately, the impacts will occur quickly, without any meaningful requirements for on-going reassessment or objective reevaluation; and with no built-in opportunities for dynamic alterations to the law, the destructive impact on our communities will be irreversible, leading to large cities filled with transient populations and no truly stable neighborhoods enjoyed by families of all backgrounds.

Note also that life has changed since Covid19 had us sequestered in our homes. Now that many families work from home and study from home, they want homes that have some privacy and yards for their children.

For these reasons, we ask that you return to the drawing board to rethink the overarching goals of your legislation and to discuss how to make the bill practical, responsive, and applicable to all local communities. The first step is to recognize their amazing varieties and historical contributions, which should not be celebrated with a plaque in honor of the past, but be preserved and enhanced so that they can become accessible to people of all backgrounds and incomes.

This is what built the City of Seattle that we know and love today; this is what will keep Seattle livable and a wonderful place to live and visit into the city's exciting and optimistic future.

You should foremost rethink the role of State Government: should it micro-manage and create centralized plans meant to control local decisions? Or should it just provide general guidance? You need to finally realize that trying to institute state-wide, standard regulations is not the solution; it is local government that is most responsive to and responsible for its residents; it is local control that creates the greatest opportunity for a dialog that can lead to better and more productive compliance, after communities are invited into the process to share their concerns.

We hope that you will reflect honestly on these warnings before the ink dries on this bill and is stamped with a sense of permanency.

We are grateful for this opportunity to share our concerns during the process of this most impactful legislation. We appreciate your dedicated service to those you represent in District 43.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Aileen M. Langhans". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

The University Park Neighborhood and its neighborhood association, UPCC

Aileen M. Langhans, UPCC board secretary

CC: Jay Inslee, Governor of the State of Washington