146 - Residential Development and Compatibility Issue Paper

Topic:
Single and multi-dwelling design and compatibility (#146)

Issue:
Height, bulk, scale, and features of new infill single and multi-dwelling development

Problem Statement:
Certain forms of single and multi-dwelling infill development in many Portland neighborhoods do not reflect the established character of the area including:

- Construction of two or three story homes, with larger lot coverage, long side walls and little rear yard space, in areas where smaller homes predominate. This is particularly acute in neighborhoods where ranch and cottage-style houses predominate such as in East Portland, Southwest Portland and the Reed neighborhood.
- Homes on flag lots that are much taller than the home on the front of the lot, as seen mainly in East Portland and Southwest Portland.
- Demolition of modest-sized houses in established neighborhoods and replacement with homes built closer to the maximum capacity of development standards, as seen in neighborhoods such as Concordia, Arbor Lodge, Sellwood-Moreland, Laurelhurst and Eastmoreland.
- Additions to homes on corner lots to create attached houses or duplexes and/or duplexes and attached houses which are out of scale with surrounding homes as seen throughout the city.
- Multi-dwelling projects built in predominately single-dwelling ranch or cottage style neighborhoods zoned for medium and high density residential development. This issue is present around the 60th Avenue MAX station and in parts of East Portland which were zoned to multi-dwelling as part of the Outer SE Community Plan.

Background:
The Urban Design section of the current Portland Comprehensive Plan contains a policy titled Preserve Neighborhoods which states an aspiration to "preserve and support the qualities of individual neighborhoods that help make them attractive places." The underlying objectives contain several vague statements about encouraging new developments to respond to the "positive qualities of the place where they are to be built" and respecting the "fabric" of established neighborhoods, while accommodating increased density building on "the attractive qualities that distinguish the area." Although these statements allude to a desire for new single and multi-dwelling housing to be compatible with the height, bulk and scale of existing housing, the policy and objectives do not specifically mention compatibility of scale as an intention.

The purpose statements in the Portland Zoning Code for both single and multi-dwelling height, building coverage and setbacks standards mention promoting a reasonable building scale and relationship of one residence to another and controlling the overall bulk of structures.

Many neighborhood plans contain policies and objectives about compatibility of new development, however these policies/objectives have not been sufficiently integrated into citywide policy or zoning code development standards. One such example comes from the 1996 Mt. Scott-Arleta neighborhood plan and states "encourage development projects and alterations to respect the bulk, form, setbacks and detailing of surrounding buildings."

Several previous planning projects have touched on issues related to infill compatibility These projects include:

- The Supplemental Compatibility Standards (1993) developed as part of the Albina Community Plan were intended to ensure compatibility of development in single and multi-dwelling zones and enhance the character of Portland's neighborhoods, provided the opportunity to comply

with specific standards as an alternative to the design review process. (Superseded by the Community Design Standards.)
- The Base Zone Design Standards (1999) set development standards related to garages, main entrances and windows on the street-facing facades of single-dwelling homes in all zones.
- The Infill Design Project and Code Amendments (2005) set development standards for multi-dwelling development related to windows on the street-facing façade; vehicle areas, driveways and vehicle access; reduced side setbacks within the interior of detached house projects; impervious surface area; and reduced front setbacks to continue the established setback patterns of adjacent structures.

Challenges/Issues:
The overarching challenge is to find and clearly express a balance between infill development goals/allowances and providing unambiguous policy language that will help limit impacts to single family areas, and help guide transition of lower to higher density areas.

Inherent in this challenge is that different parts of town will likely transition from lower to higher intensity at different rates. In predominately single-dwelling areas where new development at a greater scale and density is planned, it will be challenging to develop a strategy that addresses compatibility in a way that does not preclude attainment of allowed development intensity, while safeguarding aspects of the existing neighborhood feel or form.

A subsequent issue to consider is how policy could translate into implementation. A lot of policy at various levels already speaks to compatibility and preserving neighborhood and design quality, however neighborhood members are often surprised and disappointed with the results of implementing these policies.

Other Related Themes:
Portland Plan: Housing, Vibrant Neighborhood Centers, 5 Portlands, Residential infill, buildable land inventory

Health Connection:
These include:
- Development at a scale which is more pedestrian friendly
- Reduced waste entering the land fill as existing quality homes are demolished and replaced with homes built to the maximum capacity of the zoning code development standards.

Equity Connection:
- Consider the potential for unintended consequences of any policy direction.
- Understand/consider how the approach plays out in a variety of settings throughout Portland – can the policies be applied equitably across Portland?

Expected Outcomes:
Development and/or revision of policy, implemented through potential amendments to the zoning map and zoning code regulations.