Residential Development and Compatibility Issue Paper

Topic:

Urban Scale Development Transitions

Issue

The height and massing of new urban scale residential and mixed-use development can affect the light, air and livability of residences in abutting single-dwelling zoned areas.

Problem Statement:

Infill developments in higher intensity commercial, employment and residential zones are building out to, or close to, the maximum allowed building envelopes. When located adjacent to lower density single family zones and existing single dwelling housing, they create compatibility and livability issues due to their larger mass and height, limited setbacks, and inconsistently applied transition requirements.

Background:

The *Portland Comprehensive Plan* promotes urban scale infill development along with neighborhood diversity and stability as part of accommodating future population and employment in our city. Specifically cited in the plan is promoting a range of housing types, infill higher density/intensity development along transit corridors and in mixed-use areas, and having people live closer to work. The Neighborhoods Goal in the plan acknowledges that with stability and diversity in neighborhoods, there will also be increased density to attract and retain long-term residents and businesses. Only one objective under 12.1, Urban Design, mentions preserving public access to light and air by managing and shaping mass, height and bulk of new development.

Throughout Portland, there are many places where higher density/intensity zoning is adjacent to lower density single dwelling or multi-dwelling zones. Also, in many corridors, these urban density/intensity zones do not have full block depth. Examples include Central Employment (EX) adjacent to Residential 5,000 (R5) on NE Alberta Street, Medium Density Multi-dwelling 1,000 (R1) adjacent to Residential 7,000 (R7) on SE 122nd Avenue, and Commercial Storefront (CS) adjacent to R5 along SE Hawthorne Blvd. The more urban commercial and employment zones such as Central Commercial (CX), EX, CS and Mixed Commercial (CM) allow a significant building envelope with building coverage up to 100% and massing that allows often four or more stories. An additional consideration is that the design overlay is not consistently applied to higher density/intensity zones. It is notable that a few projects that have undergone Design Review have incorporated transitions between the higher and lower intensity areas through building designs. This has happened during staff negotiations with the developer in implementing specific design guidelines. The zoning code provides for building setbacks between different zones but it does not in general apply to the overall massing and height of the building to the adjacent lower density zone.

Until the last few years, developers overall, were not building to or close to the maximum building envelope allowed by the more dense/intense zones. As property values and construction costs have risen along with the desirability of different neighborhoods, the issue of infill development compatibly transitioning in a sensitive way to adjacent single dwelling housing/zones has become a concern for local residents and neighborhood associations.

In planning projects from the year 2000 to the present, BPS staff has added some height transition requirements in specific areas. These are found in the following plan districts: East Corridor, Gateway, Hollywood, and Interstate Corridor, and in the Main Street Node and Corridor Overlay zones as applied along inner Sandy Blvd. and Division St. Again, this tool has not been applied citywide, nor has it addressed other massing elements that also contribute to a successful sensitive transition such as overall setbacks, building length, solar access, or site planning.

Challenges/Issues:

- 1) The Comprehensive Plan has numerous policies that encourage infill development along transit streets etc. but no detailed policies that address how this development should transition into adjacent and surrounding single-family neighborhoods.
- 2) The ½ block depth along corridors and other areas abutting single family residentially zoned and developed properties may not provide land area to allow an adequate transition between intensities when considering sufficient building wall height, setbacks, etc.
- 3) There is no citywide zoning standard application of requiring lower building heights within a certain distance from single-family or lower density/intensity zoned properties. There have been no recent studies completed to research other tools for transition between urban scale development and single family zones/uses. A citywide height map has been discussed by staff as a possible tool that may alter building heights along corridors, based on compatibility and infill development aspirations.
- 4) Design and transitions can be, but are not always be addressed when a new development has a design overlay designation and a developer chooses to use the design review process that utilizes the Community Design Guidelines, as opposed to Community Design Standards (CDS). The State mandates that residential properties in design overlay zones have clear and objective options for design review. In Portland outside of Central City, Gateway, and Historic districts, developers of property with a design overlay can choose to meet the Zoning Code's CDS, which is a less flexible and context-sensitive approach. Developers often exercise the option of using CDS as an alternative to discretionary review, which have no additional requirements for transitions between intensities. A developer can choose to build to the maximum building envelope and meet Zoning Code minimum setback standards. In design review, a project is subject to discretionary review and may include building height or massing transitions near residential areas due to evaluation criteria in the Community Design Guidelines.
- 5) There are locations in the city with higher urban scale development opportunities that do not have the "design" overlay applied, and have fewer tools to address these issues. These are typically places where specific area planning has not occurred in over 10 years.

Other Related Themes:

Portland Plan: Economic Prosperity and Affordability with access to housing and neighborhood business vitality, and Healthy Connected City with neighborhood centers and connections

Health Connection:

These include:

- Residential and businesses locate close to transit and other modes of transportation walking and bicycling (in inner neighborhoods especially).
- Lack of solar access affects adjacent residents, impacting Vitamin D intake from lack of sunlight and growing own food in back yard and also outdoor recreation.

Equity Connection:

- Consider the potential for unintended consequences of any policy direction
- Understand citywide implications of a new policy and its effect geographically and if it has any effect on the provision of affordable housing or housing types geographically.

Expected Outcomes:

Development of a new transitions policy, implemented through amendments to the zoning code, zoning map and a possible new building height overlay map for the city that responds to local context and other conditions.