



TO: Elizabeth A. Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Peter Huffman, Director, Planning and Development Services
Brian Boudet, Planning Manager, Planning and Development Services
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: Request for Resolution – Modifying the Residential Infill Pilot Program
DATE: December 12, 2017

SUMMARY:

Modifying the Residential Infill Pilot Program by increasing the number of allowed Detached Accessory Dwelling Units (DADUs) and modifying the design standards and review process pertaining to Two-family, Multifamily, and Cottage Housing development.

COUNCIL SPONSORS:

Council Member Walker Lee

STRATEGIC POLICY PRIORITY:

The implementation of the Residential Infill Pilot Program and the consideration for improving the program support the following strategic policy priorities:

- Foster Neighborhood, Community, and Economic Development Vitality and Sustainability.
- Encourage and promote an Open, Effective, Results-oriented Organization.

BACKGROUND:

The City Council adopted Ordinance No. 28336 on December 1, 2015, establishing the Residential Infill Pilot Program, as codified in the Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) Section 13.05.115. The purpose of the Pilot Program is to promote innovative residential infill development types, while ensuring that such development demonstrates high quality building and site design that is responsive to and harmonious with neighborhood patterns and character. The pilot program applies to the following four categories of residential infill: Detached Accessory Dwelling Units (DADUs), Two-family or Townhouse, Multifamily, and Cottage Housing.

The pilot program was launched at the end of 2016, and by the application deadline of March 31, 2017, sixteen applications were received, including twelve for DADUs, three for Cottage Housing, and one Two-family proposal. Following the review process and with the assistance of a special advisory review committee, a Planning Director’s official determination was made in May 2017, selecting three DADU projects and one Cottage Housing project to move forward. To date, only one of the four selected projects has proceeded.

Leading up to, during, and after the initial implementation of the pilot program in 2017, Tacoma residents and members of the development community have reached out to staff to express concerns about barriers to participation in the program and have suggested ways the program may be improved. Based on the feedback from the community and staff evaluation of the implementation of the pilot program, it is determined that appropriate modifications to the pilot program should be considered in order to increase access to and participation in the program, thus creating avenues for broader and more affordable housing choices in response to varied cultural norms, aging-in-place needs, and changing values about housing.

Potential modifications to the Infill Pilot Program may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Increasing the number of DADUs from three (3) to a greater number, such as to fifteen (15), to allow for more example projects in more areas of the community;
- Modifying the standards for Cottage Housing developments to provide flexibility on certain standards, such as open space requirements, to better accommodate small cottage housing developments;
- Modifying the process for Two-family and small Multi-family proposals to allow for a two-phase design review process, so that developers could receive preliminary approval by presenting a “concept design” before having to acquire a specific property; and
- Modifying pertinent aspects of the regulations to provide clearer authority for the design review and discretionary director review process to include consideration of flexible approaches to standard requirements.

The Council’s Community, Vitality and Safety Committee reviewed this issue at its meeting on November 9, 2017, and recommended that this issue be brought forward for consideration by the full Council.

ISSUE:

Due to the limited number of project slots for DADUs, particularly relative to very high demand, as well as unintentional barriers in code that discourage participation for two-family and small multifamily developers, program uptake has been limited. Minor modifications to code addressing the number of projects, encouraging flexibility to promote innovation, and dealing with process improvement should increase participation in all parts of the pilot program, particularly DADUs.

ALTERNATIVES:

Alternatives to any of the proposed modifications can be contemplated during the Planning Commission and City Council review process associated with the code amendments.

RECOMMENDATION:

The City Council is requested to adopt a resolution to recognize the need to increase access to and participation in the Infill Pilot Program and direct the Planning Commission and staff to initiate the process to consider modifications to the program to achieve this.

FISCAL IMPACT:

While there is no fiscal impact associated with this action, adding this project to the Planning Commission’s work program may necessitate some reallocation of staff resources.