City of Tacoma
Housing Equity Taskforce

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Human Rights Commission
Planning Commission

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Dear Fellow Commissioners,

It is our honor to present the Housing Equity Taskforce's (HET) Home In Tacoma Project housing policy recommendations. The primary objectives of these recommendations are to increase housing supply, housing choice, and housing affordability throughout the city in order to make progress toward Tacoma's equity and antiracism goals.

The HET was convened through joint action by the Human Rights Commission and Planning Commission in late 2019 to provide policy recommendations on equity and antiracism goals as part of the Home in Tacoma Project. The Taskforce was entrusted with a mission to bring diverse perspectives to a focused effort founded on our shared commitment to equity and antiracism in all actions. Our meetings involved City staff, Taskforce members, and were open to the public and covered topics ranging from expanding public engagement, recognizing patterns of institutional racism in housing, identifying key themes to improve equity in planning and zoning actions, and review of the housing policy framework. This effort answers the City Council's call for antiracism transformation in all City actions and spheres of our civic experience.

Housing meets a fundamental human need for shelter. Housing location can either connect or it can isolate us from family, community, education, employment, recreation, health and other opportunities that fundamentally affect the course of our lives. **Tacoma's housing crisis affects everyone and has disproportionate impacts on people of color and others facing economic disadvantages.** These are complex and difficult challenges, but we can make real progress through proactive action. We are striving to aim high, as called for by the City Council to address the enduring impacts of systemic racism as well as of today's housing crisis on those most in need.

Observations - HET's policy recommendations are founded on a set of seven observations made with an equity lens, pulling from local history, personal experience, and information on current conditions. Our stance is to right an historic wrong perpetrated by systemic racism and to advance the concept of welcoming all current and future residents to Tacoma. We identify deficiencies in the current housing growth strategy, disparate impacts to people of color and those facing economic disadvantages, and recognize that past housing policies were created without equitable representation. We identify one crucial mechanism to help reverse racially disparate impacts by enabling more diverse and affordable housing options citywide, commonly referred to as "missing middle" housing.

Seven Housing Strategies - To create a more equitable and antiracist housing reality for Tacoma, the Taskforce recommends seven strategies for (i) changes to Tacoma's housing growth framework; (ii) actions to promote housing affordability; and (iii) steps to empower under-represented people; improve access to opportunity; combat displacement; and undo the impacts of systemic racism. We do not intend a direct, one-to-one relationship between each observation and strategy-we believe the strategies would address multiple observations. We also recognize that this is and will always remain a work in progress-Tacoma must continue to ask difficult questions and believe we can do better to connect people with housing in inclusive, vibrant, and resilient neighborhoods throughout our City. We have sought to think holistically, recognizing that these strategies will be implemented collaboratively by multiple programs and teams. Many are already stated in city policy and being implemented as part of the AHAS and other actions.

In summary, our recommendations call for Tacoma to return to traditional, more inclusive, walkable neighborhood patterns and take steps toward a reality in which all of us benefit equitably from opportunities. These recommended strategies are rooted in (a) reducing regulations (b) restructuring systems founded on principles of exclusion and separation.

In the spirit of service,

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Attachment:
Housing Equity Taskforce Recommendations, January 7, 2021

OBJECTIVE: Increase housing supply, choice and affordability throughout Tacoma by providing more diverse and affordable housing options, in order to make progress toward Tacoma's equity and antiracism goals.

OBSERVATION 1

Tacoma's housing growth strategy is not meeting our community's housing needs (for supply, affordability and choice)

- The current strategy sets aside about 75 percent of housing land supply for single-family housing
- Single-family housing uses more land per unit, limiting capacity and choices while driving up cost
- Tacoma is growing rapidly along with the region
- Tacoma is a mature City with little undeveloped land, meaning that growth must generally be infill, redevelopment, or taller structures
- Many people today are seeking walkable, urban living close to jobs, shopping, schools and transportation choices

OBSERVATION 2

Tacoma's housing crisis has disproportionate impacts on people of color and others facing economic disadvantages

- Tacoma's housing crisis affects lower income households most severely
- People of color disproportionately earn less, have less accumulated family wealth and are less likely to be homeowners
- People of color have historically been barred from living in some neighborhoods and faced discriminatory lending practices
- Lower income households are at increasing risk of displacement as housing costs rise
- People with disabilities, non-English speakers and people with criminal records face heightened barriers in finding housing

OBSERVATION 3

Tacoma's housing policies were initially created without equitable representation

- We reside on the ancestral homeland of the Puyallup people which was stolen by people of European descent
- People of color and others facing barriers have historically been excluded or under-represented in policymaking around housing growth
- More vulnerable groups often face heightened obstacles to participating (language, physical access, childcare, work hours), and also have fewer resources to react to neighborhood change

OBSERVATION 4

People of color have less access to the vital livability, accessibility, economic and educational opportunities that come with housing location

- Tacoma's neighborhoods are unequal in terms of the opportunities that people can access
- Many people are finding themselves priced out of Tacoma's higher opportunity neighborhoods
- People of color are less likely to live in high opportunity areas, reflecting historic systemic racist practices including redlining

OBSERVATION 5

People care deeply about their homes and neighborhoods and rely on them as investments

- Home ownership is often a household's single largest financial investment and a major source of household and family wealth
- Poorly designed or out-of-scale infill could build opposition to further infill

OBSERVATION 6

Without public and nonprofit sector actions, market-rate housing construction will not be enough to meet affordability needs

- Market-rate housing constructed in Tacoma is typically not affordable to those earning 80% of Area Median Income or less

OBSERVATION 7

Increasing Missing Middle housing options is an essential part of a multifaceted solution

- Changing the housing growth strategy is within the City's power to implement
- Tacoma must also pursue all AHAS objectives
- Tacoma must seek to build household earning potential

OBJECTIVE: Increase housing supply, choice and affordability throughout Tacoma by providing more diverse and affordable housing options, in order to make progress toward Tacoma's equity and antiracism goals.

STRATEGY A

Encourage infill of Missing Middle housing types throughout Tacoma's neighborhoods

- Change the Single-family Land Use designation to Low-scale Residential
- Allow diverse housing types including small lot single-family, duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, fourplexes, cottages, tiny/mobile houses, shared housing and small multifamily
- Establish form-based design and site standards to ensure that infill complements neighborhood form and scale
- Ensure that infrastructure and services are adequate to support infill

STRATEGY B

Encourage infill of mid-scale, walkable urban housing near Centers, Corridors and transit

- Designate areas within easy walking distance of Centers, Corridors and transit for mid-scale housing
- Establish standards to ensure a smooth transition from higher-scale to low-scale residential areas
- Promote inclusion of larger housing unit sizes to accommodate larger households

STRATEGY C

Use multiple strategies to produce housing affordable for lower income people

- Partner with housing developers by exchanging bonuses (such as height/density bonuses, or parking reductions) for affordable housing units
- Tailor regulatory incentives to serve unmet need in Tacoma's housing market
- Locate affordable housing throughout the City, particularly in high opportunity and growing areas
- Partner with nonprofit affordable housing providers to serve unmet needs
- Establish affordability targets for new projects in designated Opportunity Zones

STRATEGY D

Empower people of color and other under-represented groups to fully participate in policymaking

- Educate and empower all community members to participate in shaping housing policies
- Commit to more diversity on City policymaking bodies such as boards and commissions
- Focus engagement efforts on empowering underrepresented groups to take more control of policy decisions that affect them
- Invest resources into crafting education and engagement opportunities to these groups
- Seek to build long-term relationships based on trust and sharing of power

STRATEGY E

Address inequitable access to opportunity in Tacoma neighborhoods

- Plan for and invest in low opportunity areas to address challenges, gaps or barriers
- Build walkability, transit service and amenities, particularly in low opportunity areas
- Prioritize funding to address deferred public utilities and infrastructure to neighborhoods with lower income people and people of color

STRATEGY F

Combat displacement for residents, businesses and community anchors

- Implement an anti-displacement strategy including resources to mitigate evictions, affirmative marketing tools, and resident preference for at-risk households
- Support local businesses and institutions to remain in their neighborhood

STRATEGY G

Actively address housing inequities resulting from systemic racism

- Promote access to housing and homeownership to build intergenerational wealth for people of color
- Identify and address unfair/discriminatory housing, lending and appraisal practices
- Educate and support people of color seeking to build infill housing or invest in their homes
- Seek to increase representation of people of color in building, lending and housing professions, and City employment/contracting
- Recruit developers that serve lower income households and people of color