



City of Tacoma
Transportation Commission

March 5, 2024

City of Tacoma
747 Market Street
Tacoma, WA 98402

Subject: Home in Tacoma Phase 2 – Transportation Commission Comments

Dear Planning Commission:

The City of Tacoma Transportation Commission (Commission) was very impressed with the presentation on January 17, 2024 from Alyssa Torrez on the proposed changes to be implemented to city code via the Home in Tacoma (HIT) Phase 2 Process. The stated goal of Home in Tacoma is to update, “Tacoma’s housing rules to promote housing supply, choice, and affordability.”

We think the presented plan will be an excellent path to achieve all of those goals. In particular, the Commission wants to commend the City and the Planning Commission on reducing parking requirements for a significant portion of the city - especially in those areas with frequent and rapid transit services. We also want to commend the City and the Planning Commission for finding a variety of ways to save the existing tree cover and expand it in the future in spite of a significant uptick in development. Lastly, the bonus structure that should drive significantly more affordable housing will hopefully lower the cost of housing in Tacoma and create the density needed for a successful transit system.

Overall, the Commission is excited about the future that HIT will bring to the city of Tacoma. That said, other cities have gone down the path of attempting to increase their missing middle housing, and they have not seen the expected growth materialize immediately. For example, Minneapolis connected the lack of immediate building of new homes to excessive parking requirements in the initial package. Other cities saw frustrations tied around slow permitting processes. The failure of HIT will increase the need for car trips from rural areas and have a detrimental impact on Tacoma achieving its sustainability goals.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement identifies three alternatives; the Higher Zoning Alternative identifies 53,620 homes built in the city by 2050, while the baseline scenario identifies 3,840 homes built by 2050. We urge the City to continually evaluate if we are on path to add the homes as part of the Higher Alternative or if we are not, identify changes we need to implement to ensure the success of HIT. We also have some additional areas of focus to highlight.

- **Bike Parking:** We are extremely excited about the bike parking requirements, and we think it will allow more opportunities for alternative forms of transportation. Ensuring a great city for biking will significantly reduce SOV trips and help us meet our sustainability goals. We encourage the city to continue to improve its bike infrastructure to ensure that active transportation is a larger mode share. E-bikes are an incredible transportation alternative that provides joy and transportation options for so many people; we are concerned about the risk of low quality batteries and homemade batteries that create fire risks. We encourage city staff to evaluate some of the new regulations put around poorly built batteries, and identify if there is a way to safely regulate them while ensuring we continue to promote alternative transportation solutions.
- **Tree Canopy:** As we mentioned above we are excited about the goals of retaining and extending tree cover throughout the city. Trees provide a variety of benefits to transportation needs throughout the city: providing cover for pedestrians and cyclists, slowing down vehicles, and cleaning the air we breathe so we can all enjoy our city more. We have concerns that the goal of retaining trees may create excessive

complexity and limit the ability for developers or property owners to build as many homes as they could, or would increase the costs to build those homes and limit the success of achieving our affordability goals. That's why we ask the City and the permitting agencies to maximize flexibility within the code in terms of tree retention and other requirements.

- Active Transportation: We have concerns about how development could impact right-of-way and negatively impact active transportation facilities such as bicycling facilities, walk paths, sidewalks, and curb ramps. We are lacking in those facilities in many places in the city, and we need to ensure that development will make it easier for individuals with disabilities to move within our city. Those improvements also need to be balanced with requirements for infrastructure that may put homes out of a reach.
- Impact Fees: Fifty-thousand new homes in the city within 25 years (2,000 new homes annually!) will put a large burden on our existing infrastructure. Our sewer systems, our electrical systems, our streets were all designed for less people than we'll have on them in 25 years. Developer fees and impact fees can assist in updating our infrastructure to embrace the number of people living in our city. Impact fees that dramatically increase the costs of creating a new home can also deter developers and homeowners from adding Additional Dwelling Units or building new structures. Impact fees are likely critical to updating our streets to meet the expectations for bike lanes, sidewalk improvements, and other critical transportation goals in the Transportation Master Plan. We implore the city to develop impact fees that are both reasonable but also allow us to pay for the infrastructure upgrades we need without transferring costs onto existing taxpayers and ratepayers.
- Transit Priority Corridors: We have concerns that the DEIS identifies South 19th St. as the de facto corridor for the next T-Line Extension. The South 19th St. corridor is still being evaluated as a BRT corridor and there are significant complications with running the T-Line over Highway 16. We think locking in South 19th St. as the de facto corridor for a T-Line Extension is not necessary at this time and would preclude other options that may be more beneficial or significantly less expensive for the city.

The planned expansion of homes in the city will result in significantly more trips, but hopefully we can reduce per capita both the number of car trips and the annual Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) for residents of the city. The goals of the Climate Action Plan developed by the city call for a significant decrease in mode share of Single Occupancy Vehicles and a dramatic growth in walking, biking and transit. Pierce Transit and Sound Transit are already evaluating how to increase the hours of operations and the number of transit options on a variety of routes. The DEIS is insufficient in how the city is going to work with the local transit agencies and ensure that the growth priorities of the city match the plans of the transit agencies. The DEIS is also too vague on how the city is going to successfully move more trips out of vehicles and onto bikes, walking, and transit. Though we see these as opportunities for improvement, not reasons to reject the plan.

The Commission is already working closely with the Joint Planning Commission and Transportation Commission Transit Oriented Development Task Force, and we urge the city and the transit agencies to continue to use that group as a tool and sounding board. The city permits process needs to work with the city to ensure that developers' plans also fit into the Climate Action Plan and the reduction in VMT. Ensuring that HIT is closely aligned with the Transportation Master Plan will ensure the success of the city goals and the changes coming in the next 30 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.



Bruce Morris
Transportation Commission Co-Chair



Matt Stevens
Transportation Commission Co-Chair

cc: Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability Council Committee