

## Smart Growth Seattle Guest Editorial

## SGS Three Years On: Are We Making Progress?



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At the end of each year since the original gathering of builders and developers to fully fund and support Smart Growth Seattle three years ago, I look back at what we've done on behalf of Seattle builders, and the idea that the solution to rising housing prices is to build more housing.

This year I've taken a longer view, asking "What have we accomplished since we started?" Today, I think we can say that we're part of a larger movement to change the way we talk and think about housing, even while our local government has failed to put these ideas into action.

President Obama's administration produced a Housing Development Tool Kit of recommendations not unlike

those from Seattle Mayor Ed Murray's Housing and Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) Committee.

**Here are the President's recommendations:**

- Establish by-right development
- Tax vacant land or donate it to non-profit developers
- Streamline or shorten permitting processes and timelines
- Eliminate off-street parking requirements
- Allow accessory dwelling units
- Establish density bonuses
- Enact high-density and multifamily zoning
- Employ inclusionary zoning
- Establish development tax or value-capture incentives
- Use property tax abatements

Looks like we "won" that discussion, right? As a broader community of developers, builders, and supporters of urban life and economies, we did succeed in narrowing the discussion in this national dialogue to the things that matter most for increasing housing options for people that

need it. The recommendations are almost the same as those from HALA. Reduce parking requirements, eliminate barriers to production, and reduce the time to market for housing products.

However, Seattle isn't moving on these things, and in many ways, is doing the opposite—adding parking requirements, increasing design review requirements, and reducing the capacity of low-rise zones best suited for townhomes and small apartments.

And the poison pill of Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning (MIZ) is still embedded in the threat of lowered barriers and costs and regulatory relief. Like HALA, the great ideas that aren't being implemented are wrapped around a really bad idea that's being realized. Seattle has shown no signs of relenting on imposing MIZ, a scheme that will add requirements and costs to new housing, making projects infeasible, raising prices, and pushing the legal boundaries of well-established case law and

state regulation against taxing new development.

The good news: our idea that housing production is not, like many are led to believe, a scourge that needs to be reviewed, taxed, and slowed, but is instead an important community benefit that stands strong on its own, is alive and well. The bad news: even while saying the right things, government still treats what builders of housing do as a negative impact that needs to be offset.

We still have lots of work ahead and we look forward to your continued support. Next year we'll keep our eye on Seattle's MIZ proposals, challenging them at every opportunity. We'll keep making the case that the work you do is good work that benefits everyone in the community, and that everyone—including non-profit developers—benefits from making building housing easier, less costly, and more predictable. 🏡

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