

March 28, 2025

Seattle City Council
Seattle City Hall
600 Fourth Avenue
2nd Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Councilmember Hollingsworth,

The members of the Montlake Community Club (MCC) board thank you for your expert management of the Select Committee on the One Seattle Comprehensive Plan and related zoning legislation. The Plan will change Seattle in many significant ways. We appreciate your commitment to ensuring that these changes are both equitable and thoughtfully executed. Thank you as well for your dedicated representation of District 3, including the Montlake neighborhood.

As MCC board members, we recognize the urgent need to create more housing options in Seattle, particularly affordable housing. We also want to convey some of the comments and concerns our community has with elements of the plan.

While acknowledging the Montlake community's widespread concerns about the One Seattle Plan and proposed zoning legislation, the Montlake Community Club (MCC) board has adopted a neutral stance on the issue in line with other community-association boards. A new group, the Montlake Rezoning Task Force, led by Janice Sears, has emerged to address issues concerning the One Seattle Plan and proposed zoning legislation. The MCC board values the Task Force's work and considers the group to be acting on behalf of the greater Montlake community. We believe the Task Force, working in partnership with the City, can help achieve our shared goals for growth, affordability, climate protection, and neighborhood livability.

The Task Force's members bring expertise in areas such as city, county and regional governments; transit; low-income housing; architecture; urban planning and other professions related to housing and land use. Janice has already engaged with your District Director, Alex Altshuler. Three Task Force members plan to meet with Alex in Montlake on March 28 for a discussion and neighborhood walk. The Task Force would also like to meet with you when you resume your neighborhood visits.

We have encouraged Montlake residents to send their thoughts on the One Seattle Plan directly to you. We know many have done so. Additionally, the MCC has received feedback from many of our residents. That feedback is summarized below. Most residents are in support of increased housing capacity and affordability, but almost all (over 95%) have serious issues with the Mayor's plan to achieve those goals as follows:

Outreach

One common complaint was about poor outreach from, and engagement with, the City throughout the Plan's development. Despite our efforts to inform Montlake's 1,200 households, many residents still do not understand the proposals and their potential impacts. We trust that collaboration with City Council can improve understanding and foster mutually acceptable solutions.

Scale

The most common complaints centered on the scale of the proposed changes. Although it appears that the plan aligns with the 800-foot radius guideline in the One Seattle Plan (Policy GS 5.4), the proposed Montlake Neighborhood Center takes up an enormous percentage of the area of our small neighborhood, affecting approximately 400 of Montlake's 1,200 properties. Many residents view this scale as seriously disproportionate, especially when compared to other Neighborhood Centers, which typically have a much broader range of shops, groceries, restaurants, entertainment, and services per household, and with smaller residential upzoning footprints. Montlake's small business district, even if fully developed under the proposed zoning, would extend only three blocks, insufficient to sustain the population growth envisioned by the Plan.

Compounding these concerns about scale are the size and design of the proposed buildings themselves. Four- and five-story apartment buildings, with practically no setbacks and potentially no parking facilities, would tower over existing homes and would damage the neighborhood's character, blocking sunlight, reducing privacy, greatly reducing tree canopy, increasing noise and street congestion, all of which would negatively impact quality of life. Montlake is an Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places and also qualifies for designation as a Seattle Historic District. The Plan should give greater consideration to the neighborhood's historical context and preservation of green spaces the proposed new buildings would displace.

Environment

The size of the proposed buildings and their minimal setbacks would greatly reduce green space and tree canopy, detrimentally affecting climate change, wildlife habitats,



and peak summer temperatures. Many residents view the One Seattle Plan as a huge step backward for environmental sustainability, contrary to the claims in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Small street trees will never compensate for the loss of mature yard trees. Replacing green spaces with concrete further exacerbates negative impacts. The proposed plan also lacks requirements for rooftop gardens or their maintenance, as well as solar panels to power the additional air conditioners needed to offset rising summer temperatures caused in part by tree-canopy loss.

Parking and Transit

Many residents seriously doubt the assumption that Montlake will not need additional parking capacity with the planned increase in housing density. They are concerned the elimination of mandatory off-street parking and the inadequacies of the Metro 48 bus route will lead to congested and gridlocked streets. This will make key commuter bicycling routes more dangerous. Traffic problems are exacerbated by Montlake's existing cut-through traffic from inefficient intersections near SR 520. Adding new residents, some of whom will depend on cars, will further compound the problems.

Some residents complain transit services have significantly declined over the past decade, despite improvements to SR 520 and the Light Rail station at the UW stadium. Eastside buses no longer serve downtown from Montlake. The Metro 43 bus now operates on a much-reduced schedule and less convenient route. The Metro 25 bus was eliminated entirely. With these diminished transit options, many residents doubt that Montlake's Metro bus stops qualify as "major transit stops" for the neighborhood.

Affordability

A common concern is that the current plan will fail to deliver affordable housing in Montlake. Residents have cited studies, such as those from Vancouver, BC, showing that increased housing volume does not necessarily result in increased affordability. Others, with experience in creating affordable housing in Seattle, argue that including Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) requirements in Neighborhood Centers are unlikely to meet their intended goals. They view the developer fees directed into the Seattle Office of Housing Fund that developers must pay when they don't build affordable units as inefficient. Some Montlake residents want the One Seattle Plan to require that affordable housing actually be built rather than providing developers a way out.

Recognize Two Montlake Business Areas

The former Hop-In convenience store and adjacent filling station is a second site that the



plan should—but currently does not—include as a business center. Quite a few residents highlighted potential opportunities at this site which was not rezoned in the current plan. The site is likely to become available this summer. The extensive NOAA site is expected to become available soon. Residents feel those locations would provide excellent opportunities for retail shops, restaurants, and prime residential properties, including affordable housing. They are also close to the new SR 520 transit center and the UW Light Rail station making them ideal for retail, dining, and residential projects.

Other Concerns

Additional feedback included concerns about declining property values for homes next to large apartment buildings, increased tax assessments based on King County’s “highest and best use” policies, and the lack of design review resulting in unsightly buildings. Residents also raised issues related to water, sewer, electrical, and communication utilities, as well as ongoing “construction fatigue” from years of noise and disruption caused by the SR 520 project, which is expected to continue for another six to seven years.

Support for the Proposed Rezoning Plan

Two respondents expressed support for the proposed rezoning plan, however one was not a Montlake resident, and the other did not specify their location. One Montlake resident was partially supportive, believing that the small lot sizes in Montlake would inherently limit the construction of four- and five-story buildings.

Thank you once again for your skillful work on the Select Committee. The residents of Montlake remain eager to collaborate and help shape a One Seattle Plan that reflects the best interests of all communities. A version of this letter will be sent to your City Council colleagues as well as OPCD Project Manager Hubner, OPCD Director Quirindongo, and Mayor Harrell.

Sincerely,

Miho Nasu, Co-President, Montlake Community Club Board

Danny Greco, Co-President, Montlake Community Club Board