

**CITY OF RENTON**  
**Community and Economic Development Department**

**#D-186 Cottage House Developments**

**Staff:** Katie Buchl-Morales

**Date:** February 12, 2021

**Applicant or Requestor:** Staff

**SUMMARY:** Cottage house developments comprise a group or groups of small, single family dwelling units clustered around a common area and developed with a coherent plan for the entire site. To diversify the City’s housing stock and incentivize the development of cottage house developments, staff proposes to adopt a cottage housing ordinance that defines cottage house development standards and regulations.

**Background:**

Staff briefed the Planning Commission on cottage house developments and provided a jurisdictional comparison of local cottage house ordinances on January 25, 2021. Following the briefing to Planning Commission, staff met to discuss and formalize the City’s cottage house development proposal and its associated development standards. This supplemental staff report summarizes that discussion and concerted recommendations. Finally, because Mirror Lake Highlands Cottage Development in Federal Way is the most recently constructed cottage house development in the county, staff amended the jurisdictional comparison to include Federal Way.

*Density*

Jurisdiction	Kirkland	Seattle	Langley	Marysville	Redmond	Poulsbo	Federal Way	Renton, Proposed
Density	2x	One dwelling per 1,600 sq. ft. of lot area.	15 d/u	2x	1.75x	Minimum lot size requirement is ½ of what is required for single family development.	2x	2.5

Given the cost of land acquisition and site improvements, and the reduced size of cottage house dwellings, increasing the allowed density of the development is critical to making them economically viable for developers. Among the neighboring cottage house ordinances, the underlying zoning is typically doubled. Despite these jurisdictions having adopted cottage house development ordinances, there are few examples throughout the region.

Staff recommendation: Allow cottage house developments in residential zones R-4, R-6, R-8, R-10, and R-14 at 2.5 times the density allowed in the underlying zone. Cottage house development proposals in low density zones, such as RC and R-1, would be considered via Planned Urban Development (PUD).

### Lot Size

Jurisdiction	Kirkland	Seattle	Langley	Marysville	Redmond	Poulsbo	Federal Way	Renton, Proposed
Minimum lot size	1,700 sq. ft. (unit)	6,400 sq. ft. (development)	11,616 sq. ft. (development)	n/a	n/a	3,000 sq. ft. (unit)	32,670 sq. ft. (dev) proforma site plan	n/a, proforma site plan

The City of Kirkland and Poulsbo adopted minimum lot size requirements per unit whereas other jurisdictions adopted lot size requirements applicable to the entirety of the cottage house development. In Marysville and Redmond, beyond density and lot dimension restrictions, there is no minimum lot size requirement for cottage house developments.

Instead of adopting lot size requirements, Federal Way requires cottage house development applicants submit a proforma site plan. The proforma site plan is used to depict the number of *conventional single-family dwelling units* that could be constructed on the site based on the underlying zoning. The site plan requires the following information: site area, lots meeting the minimum size requirement of the zone, required open space, on-site circulation system, required right-of-way dedication, area dedicated or utilized for surface water facilities, existing streams, ponds, wetlands, natural drainage courses, critical areas, wetland and stream buffers, and easement areas. The number calculated in the proforma site plan is then multiplied by the density multiplier. As noted above, in the R-4, R-6, R-8, R-10, and R-14 zones, City of Renton staff proposes a multiplier of 2.5.

Staff recommendation: Require and utilize proforma site plans for cottage house development proposals in residential zones R-4, R-6, R-8, R-10, and R-14. The total number of conventional single-family dwelling units, multiplied by 2.5, is the resulting number of cottage homes that could be permitted on the site.

### Number of Units per Development and Cluster

Jurisdiction	Kirkland	Seattle	Langley	Marysville	Redmond	Poulsbo	Federal Way	Renton, Proposed
Development (max)	24	12	12	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cluster	2, 12	4, 12	3, 12	4, 12	4, 12	3, 12	4, 16	3, 12

Cottage advocates assert that the size of the cluster and/or development should be restricted in foster and maintain a sense of community among residents. Some jurisdictions, including Kirkland, Seattle and Langley, have restricted the total number of cottage house units permitted in a single development *and* adopted regulations defining the total number of units per cluster or “grouping.” Other jurisdictions have opted to not regulate the number of units per development but instead have adopted provisions that limit the size of the cluster.

Staff recommendation: Allow cottage house clusters at a minimum number of 3 units, not to exceed 12, without restricting the total number of units within the development.

### Unit Size

Jurisdiction	Kirkland	Seattle	Langley	Marysville	Redmond	Poulsbo	Federal Way	Renton, Proposed
Maximum unit size	1,500 sq. ft.	950 sq. ft.	975 sq. ft.	1,200 sq. ft.	1,000 sq. ft.	50 or 60% of lot size, varies by zone	800-1,300 sq. ft.	1,500 sq. ft., see additional provision

The scaled-down size of cottage house dwellings make them more economical to build and maintain, which make them ideal for singles and/or smaller households, first time homebuyers, empty nesters, and those living on a moderate or fixed income, therefore size is integral to their attainability and appeal. The mean maximum unit size of the jurisdictions reviewed was ~1,154 sq. ft.

Staff recommendation: Adopt a maximum cottage house unit size of 1,500 sq. ft., with the condition that no more than 50% of all units in a development can be greater than 1,000 sq. ft.

### Open Space Requirements per Unit

Jurisdiction	Kirkland	Seattle	Langley	Marysville	Redmond	Poulsbo	Federal Way	Renton, Proposed
Common/shared (min)	400 sq. ft.	300 sq. ft.	400 sq. ft.	200 sq. ft.	400 sq. ft.	300 sq. ft.	500 sq. ft.	350 sq. ft.
Private yard (min)	n/a	150 sq. ft.	n/a	200 sq. ft.	300 sq. ft.	200 sq. ft.	400 sq. ft.	250 sq. ft.

Common open space or shared recreational areas, i.e., courtyards, gardens, and play areas, are standard components of cottage house ordinances. Of the ordinances reviewed, the minimum common open space requirements ranged from 200 – 400 sq. ft. The minimum private yard/outdoor space requirements ranged from 150-400 sq. ft.

Staff recommendation: Apply the City’s existing townhome open space standards to cottage house developments, which would require a minimum common open space of 350 sq. ft., and a minimum private yard space of 250 sq. ft.

### Parking Standards

Jurisdiction	Kirkland	Seattle	Langley	Marysville	Redmond	Poulsbo	Federal Way	Renton, Proposed
Parking spaces required (min)	Varies by size of unit	n/a, unknown	1.25 spaces	Varies by size of unit (sq. ft.)	1.5 spaces	2 spaces	1.8 spaces	Number determined by bedrooms

Parking requirements vary significantly among the jurisdictions reviewed. In Kirkland, the minimum parking requirements are determined by proximity to transit service and unit size. Developments within one-half mile of transit service with 15-minute headways during commute hours are required one space per unit. The parking requirements for cottage house developments that are located more than ½ (one-half) mile from transit service with 15-minute headways during

commute hours vary based on unit size. Units of 1,000 sq. ft. or less require one space per unit. Units greater than 1,000 sq. ft. require 1 ½ spaces per unit. A minimum of 10% of the total number of required parking spaces shall be provided for guest parking and located in a common area accessible by guests when the cottage house development is located within a residential medium and high density zones.

Staff recommendation: Apply the City’s existing multi-family parking requirements to cottage house developments, which regulates parking spaces by the number of bedrooms per unit. A minimum and maximum of 1.6 spaces for a 3 bedroom dwelling; 1.4 spaces for a 2 bedroom dwelling; and 1.0 per 1 bedroom or studio dwelling. Additionally, guest parking requirements shall be provided at a minimum of 10% of the total number of required parking spaces.

*Height Standards*

Jurisdiction	Kirkland	Seattle	Langley	Marysville	Redmond	Poulsbo	Federal Way	Renton, Proposed
Maximum Height (feet)	Varies by zone	22'	18' 25' with 6:12 roof pitch	18' 23' with 4:12 roof pitch 28' with 6:12 roof pitch	18' 25' with 6:12 roof pitch	20' 25' with 6:12 roof pitch	No "tall-skinny houses" 6:12 roof pitch	20' 25' with 6:12 roof pitch

In Kirkland the maximum height permitted is equal to the base zoning allowance. In Langley, Marysville, Redmond, and Poulsbo, where the maximum height permitted is 18’, additional height allowances are permitted based on roof pitch.

Staff recommendation: Adopt development regulations that would restrict the maximum height of cottage house units to 20’ or 25’ with a 6:12 roof pitch.

**Staff Recommendation:** City staff proposes the adoption of a cottage house ordinance to diversify and promote alternatives to traditional detached single-family development as described above.

**Impact Analysis**

Effect on rate of growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Plan

The adoption of a cottage house development ordinance would support the growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan. The proposed cottage house ordinance helps advance multiple policies under the City’s Housing Element; Policy L-3: Encourage infill development of single-family units as a means to meet growth targets and provide new housing. Policy HHS-4: Promote homeownership opportunities for households of all incomes.

Effect on the City’s capacity to provide adequate public facilities

There are no anticipated effects.

Effect on the rate of population and employment growth

There are no anticipated effects.

Whether Plan objectives are being met as specified or remain valid and desirable

Plan objectives are being met as specified or remain valid and desirable.

Effect on general land values or housing costs

If the adoption of the ordinance were to result in a cottage house development, staff anticipates that it would result alternative, more attainable homeownership opportunity.

Whether capital improvements or expenditures are being made or completed as expected

Not applicable.

Consistency with GMA, the Plan, and Countywide Planning Policies

The proposed amendments are consistent with GMA, the Plan, and Countywide Policies.

Effect on critical areas and natural resource lands

There are no anticipated effects on critical areas and natural resource lands.