

Dear Councilmember Strauss,

Thank you again for meeting with us earlier this summer. As Friends of Whittier Heights, we are committed to being constructive partners in shaping a livable, inclusive Seattle. We believe the City can and should pursue housing solutions that expand affordability and sustainability while also respecting and preserving the character, identity, and well-being of existing neighborhoods. Our intention is not to resist growth or density, but to ensure it happens thoughtfully and in collaboration with the communities most affected.

As the One Seattle Plan process moves toward a Council vote in September, we must share our continued disappointment with both the process and the direction of the plan. In particular, we are deeply concerned about:

- The lack of reflection of Whittier community concerns—regarding building height, scale, setbacks, landscaping, lot coverage, and livability—in the proposed legislative amendments.
- A plan that appears to prioritize the interests of developers and future residents, rather than balancing those with the needs of current residents.
- An ongoing planning process that:
 1. Fails to adequately inform affected property owners and residents of proposed changes that directly affect them.
 2. Does not provide easy access to timely and current information that is written in simple, plain language.
 3. Holds public hearings at times and in formats that are not readily accessible for ordinary working people.

We support zoning decisions that allow for increased density while seeking a level of compatibility with existing neighborhoods that lessen the negative impacts on current residents. We support land use and zoning regulations that ensure new development of any density is a good neighbor to existing residents. We support **not exceeding** state mandates for density.

We urge you and your colleagues to:

- Remove Whittier Heights from the list of proposed Neighborhood Centers in the Final Plan.
- If the Whittier Neighborhood Center is approved, then support zoning changes in the next phase that **do not exceed** the minimum state mandates.
- Conduct robust, direct outreach to all impacted residents before finalizing any zoning changes.
- Enact development regulations that require reasonable setbacks, tree retention, landscaping, and height limits to ensure new construction can coexist with existing homes. – to avoid displacement and destruction of our thriving neighborhood.

As a reminder:

- Almost a thousand community members have indicated their serious concerns with the city's proposal for Whittier by signing a petition opposing the designation of a Whittier Neighborhood Center, which would trigger dramatic upzoning in an area of modest one- and two-story homes with no commercial/retail core or amenities. (chnng.it/5GVPPvDWS8).
- Over 100 residents attended a Friends of Whittier Heights community meeting in May 2025, where they voiced significant concerns to you and Michael Hubner of OPCD.

Despite these repeated efforts, our concerns remain unaddressed, and the current proposal has moved further from community input. We were, for example, surprised and disappointed to see that the legislative amendment's currently before the council now include the potential for even taller buildings – which is in direct contrast to consistent community requests and concerns.

Review of Our Concerns

As we have shared previously, Whittier is the wrong location for a Neighborhood Center for the reasons listed below.

- **Incompatible with City of Seattle LR3 Guidelines:** Seattle Municipal Code section 23.34.020 provides locational criteria and functional requirements for LR3 zoning, stating that such zoning is appropriate in existing multifamily neighborhoods with a mix of low and moderate scale structures and sufficient street widths for two-way traffic and curbside parking. The Whittier neighborhood does not meet either of these criteria. It is also worth noting that two of the streets in the area of proposed rezoning are closed to traffic for school safety and a third street (17th Ave NW) is a designated “Seattle Healthy Street” closed to traffic.
- **Scale is Incompatible with Existing Community:** The current zoning in the Whittier neighborhood, with the exception of the 15th Ave NW arterial, is exclusively NR3, the least dense residential zoning classification in Seattle. Under the One Seattle proposal, the majority of NR3 properties would be rezoned to LR3, the city's most dense low-rise zoning. This change would permit medium to large buildings of 50-60 feet in height, introducing incompatible height, bulk, and scale to a neighborhood with smaller-sized lots, existing one- and two-story homes, and narrow streets.
- **Negative Effects on Whittier Elementary:** The proposed plan will have a negative impact on the neighborhood elementary school, Whittier Elementary. Cindy Watters, Principal of Whittier Elementary School, shared her concerns on behalf of the school community. She noted that nearly all students at Whittier Elementary rely on walking, biking, or parent drop-offs for commuting. This activity is facilitated by the above-mentioned traffic closures on 14th Ave NW and 13th Ave NW, as part of a school safety program implemented by the city at significant effort and expense. She also noted the lack of dedicated parking for faculty and staff—most of whom commute by car due to limited transit options to the area—would be exacerbated under the new zoning. The proposed zoning changes are incompatible with both established safety measures and the school's needs. Principal Watters emphasized that the type of housing contemplated in LR3 zoning would negatively impact local school enrollment, as it does not attract families with school-aged children. Whittier Elementary is a true neighborhood school that depends on the immediate community surroundings for its enrollment.

- **Insufficient Transit:** The neighborhood lacks sufficient transit options, with only a single north-south bus line and no direct east-west connections. By contrast, other centers like Crown Hill and Upper Fremont have robust transit infrastructure, including connections to Link Light Rail.

- **Insufficient Businesses:** Whittier lacks essential retail services and other businesses which are integral to supporting a Neighborhood Center. Other designated Neighborhood Centers have much more robust business infrastructure.

We also remain concerned about the following issues, as we have shared previously:

- **Environmental and Climate Risks**

Upzoning without protections for tree canopy and stormwater management will accelerate canopy loss and undermine climate resilience. We need stronger tools to protect the urban forest, not weaken it.

- **Loss of Naturally Affordable Housing**

Whittier's small, older homes provide some of the last relatively affordable housing in Seattle. These homes will be the first targets for redevelopment, displacing renters and long-time residents—teachers, nurses, seniors, and public workers—while driving up property taxes. The proposal risks fueling gentrification and housing insecurity rather than solving it.

- **Weak Affordability Provisions**

The plan does not require affordable units in new development. Without this, it opens our neighborhood to speculative development that prioritizes profit, not equity.

- **No Infrastructure Plan**

Our narrow streets, aging sewers, and outdated utilities are already strained. No funded capital investments are paired with the density increases, which is irresponsible and short-sighted.

- **Erosion of Community Character**

Designating a “center” where none exists—without a commercial/retail core or amenities—will invite high-density redevelopment without adequate standards. Without setbacks, landscaping, tree protections, and height limits, the identity that makes Whittier Heights livable will be eroded.

Our community is not opposed to growth or housing. We support inclusive, sustainable development that enhances affordability and livability. But we strongly oppose top-down planning that disregards neighborhood voices, displaces residents, and prioritizes developer profit over people and place.

Seattle deserves a future that is equitable, resilient, and respectful of communities. The legislation currently before Council does not achieve those goals. We respectfully ask for your leadership in amending the One Seattle Plan to reflect them.