



Burien Housing Stories & Strategies

Public Engagement Results June 2023

Purpose

Burien received a grant from the State of Washington Department of Commerce to evaluate the adoption of middle housing types in its plan and zoning code for at least 30% of low density lots. Middle housing includes housing like duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, courtyard style apartments, cottage clusters, or accessory dwelling units. The scope of the grant also includes developing and evaluating displacement, exclusion, and racially disparate impacts in housing. The results of the grant include draft goals, policies, and code changes that remove barriers to housing for all households regardless of race, income, age, income, etc. and that promote middle housing. These would be folded into the [Burien 2044 Comprehensive Plan Update](#). The grant included the development of an engagement plan and activities to help shape the work. This document shares the engagement activities and results that largely took place in Spring 2023.

Housing Engagement Plan and Objectives

The City of Burien developed a public engagement plan intended to reach the community as a whole as well as community based organizations (CBOs) and groups that serve overburdened communities. The objectives of the engagement plan included:

- ▶ **Share information about Burien’s zoning history and housing trends**, barriers, and potential solutions to encourage housing for all households regardless of race, age, gender and sexual preferences, and incomes.
- ▶ **Seek and hear about Burien community members’ housing stories**. The stories may be about exclusion, displacement, or barriers as well as how participants have persevered. The Burien

community includes both residents and business owners. Business owners may have stories of employees' struggles with finding housing in Burien and living in other communities.

- ▶ **Share draft policies and codes** meant to remove unintentional or intentional zoning barriers, and identify places for Middle Housing opportunities. Through engagement opportunities, these policies and codes would be vetted and improved.

The engagement plan identified phases and activities in Exhibit 1. Each of the events and activities is described in this summary. Materials are included in Attachment A. Individual event summaries are included in Attachment B.

Exhibit 1. Middle Housing Engagement Phases and Activities



*Website and Stories and Strategies Post: <https://connect.burienwa.gov/shape-your-city-initiative-asks-community-to-share-stories-and-strategies/>.

Participation and Engagement Themes

Over all events, the city reached about 200 people. See Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2. Spring 2023 Housing Related Engagement Activities and Participation

Event	Description	Date	Participants
Para Los Niños	Community based organization led group discussion.	April 20	14
Southwest Youth and Family Services Group Discussion	Community based organization led group discussion.	April 26	21
Highline Youth Engagement	Highline youth group mind map exercise at Burien Community Center led by City staff and consultants.	April 13	5
Shape Your City Spring 2023 Open House	City sponsored community wide open house with stations on housing, economic development, transportation, and parks.	April 18	60 approx.
Burien 2044 Advisory Committee	Ad hoc group meeting periodically as a sounding board for Comprehensive Plan Update.	March 28 and May 10	19 members
Business & Housing Survey	Online survey for businesses to share their employees housing needs and hurdles.	May	22
Wall of Ideas	Online forum to share housing stories and weigh in on middle housing, neighborhood centers, and economic development.	April-May	65

Key themes included:

- ▶ People often moved to Burien for its affordability and accessibility.
- ▶ Escalating housing costs are a concern heard from participants across all events. Burien is at risk of losing residents due to lack of affordable, quality housing, both ownership and rental.
- ▶ Improving existing housing (e.g., play areas, parking, unit maintenance) is important.
- ▶ Housing solutions for Burien should include middle housing to improve housing choices and help with affordable homeownership.
- ▶ Criteria for middle housing should address location, design, open space/landscaping, parking, access, infrastructure, and more. There is also a desire not to overburden the permitting process.
- ▶ Burien should place more density at intersections and in the Urban Center for improved design and walkability. There is a concern about rezones and what that means for existing residents.
- ▶ Burien should focus on housing opportunities for the workforce, multigenerational families, and more.

What we heard - a sample

- ▶ *I rent my house, but too expensive to buy a property here in Burien. We need new houses with affordable prices.*
- ▶ *When we moved here in 2016, we were looking for a place close to our children's schools. I would move out if I could.*
- ▶ *Great location with easy access to bigger markets like Seattle. Wonderful small town feel and vibrant food scene.*
- ▶ *I own a modest house in a great neighborhood. I'm disappointed that so much new construction is unaffordable and not aligned with the existing home size.*
- ▶ *We need affordable housing prices everywhere. So good alternatives to mitigate price hikes that don't mean building high story buildings are welcomed (i.e., middle housing or 2-3 story buildings).*
- ▶ *The urban core around downtown needs A LOT more density. The areas around Dottie Harper and the skatepark should be high density residential. This area is extremely close to TWO parks, a community center, the transit center, and grocery stores...*
- ▶ *Burien needs to bring down the pressure on landlords. Many people complain about the rising cost of rent ALL OVER WASHINGTON. This is not an issue specific to Burien. ... With rising rent increases (and no wage increases) we will see MORE houseless people. ...*
- ▶ *I lived in an apartment with my 2 young sons for years before I could afford a single-family home (700 sq ft). Was able to upgrade to a larger home several years later but face moving because our areas are being upzoned for more development.*
- ▶ *DONT spread tall (5 over 1) buildings outside of major intersections! Increase density overall by using middle housing. Small 3 story multiplexes or row homes should be used. Otherwise, Burien will become an ugly sprawling and congested mess.*
- ▶ *Burien needs housing that can accommodate multi-generational families. Encouraging developments of studios or micro-housing is not taking consideration of families that care for elders, or have small children. ...*
- ▶ *What housing type/style would you like to live in the next 5-10 years? "A place that cares about renters and regulates price rent." "A place for the youth/kids to have a place to play and enjoy time out safely."*
- ▶ *Make sure housing is affordable for library workers, young people and old people.*
- ▶ *Own a business in Burien but live outside: Pandemia Aumento los costos de vivienda, y ahora vivo en Pacific, a 45 minutos de manejo por que vivo compartiendo la renta. [Pandemic Increase in housing costs, and now I live in the Pacific, a 45-minute drive away because I live sharing the rent.]*

Discussions

Community Based Organizations

The City has established agreements with organizations such as [Para Los Niños](#) and [Southwest Youth & Family Services](#) (SWYFS) to engage with community members. These groups led small group discussions using a “meeting in a box” facilitators guide and translated fact sheets to obtain local housing stories.

Para Los Niños Group Discussion

In April 2023, Para Los Niños held a small group discussion with about 14 participants that were Hispanic/Latino. Most wanted to attain their own home for freedom, safety, and amenities. Many felt their apartments were not meeting their needs due to a lack of reliable parking and play areas. Many had felt exclusion or displacement for economic, racial, or safety reasons.

Results showed:

- ▶ Living in Burien
 - Participants live in Burien because of affordable housing compared to other parts of South King County, and its public transportation, and proximity to good and services.
 - Nearly two-thirds live in apartments, around a quarter live in homes and the rest in mobile homes.
- ▶ Housing desires and needs
 - All participants would like to own their own home in 5-10 years for stability, freedom, places for kids to play, privacy, and safety.
 - Many currently live in apartments and have expressed concerns of increasing rent, lack of repairs to their units and even retaliation when grievances have been vocalized.
 - To help people stay in Burien participants felt the following would help: raise minimum wage; lower the rent/place more restrictions on increasing rent; and address safety.
 - Just under half of the participants believed their housing did not meet their needs due to parking being arbitrary and there is towing at the expense of the car owner. There is a need for recreational spaces for kids to play.
- ▶ Exclusion or displacement experiences
 - One person worked in Burien but did not live there due to high and unaffordable housing. They wanted to live in Burien due to their community ties and employment.
 - Over half of the participants had moved between 1 and 4 times in the last 10 years since coming to Burien due to mold infestations, eviction or because of drastic rent increases.
 - Half of the participants found that they have had to move for economic reasons.

- Half of participants answered that they either had been evicted themselves or knew people who had been evicted. This was due to increases in rent. Some felt racism had been a factor.
- Intimidation, crime, or harassment led to just under half of the people moving neighborhoods or out of Burien. Examples included: faced retaliation or discrimination from management after asking for repairs to their unit or expressing grievances; increases to their rent increases were racially driven to evict Latino tenants; gang violence led to many youth being in unsafe situations within Burien and needing to relocate after threats.

Southwest Youth and Family Services Group Discussion

In April 2023, about 21 participants were part of a discussion group, and were Hispanic/Latino. All live in Burien in apartments because of its location and the community. They have faced expensive housing that is insufficient in quality maintenance, as well as small in size and lacking parking. They desire to live in quality housing in larger dwellings, with nearby parks and recreation programs. While most have stayed in Burien, increasing rents and intimidation may mean they have to move out of Burien.

► Living in Burien

- Participants live in Burien because of its location, community and comfort, available transportation, support from non-profit organizations, locations to play and have fun, available library, banks, schools, airport, mall.
- Participants live in apartment complexes.

► Housing desires and needs

- In 5-10 years, people would like to live in a place that cares about renters and regulates rental prices and affordable housing. Other desires included: places for kids to play, gardens, community center, more security, programs for families and students, programs for immigrants.
- People would stay in Burien with an affordable housing program, accessible housing, laws helping residents in the city.
- Current housing doesn't meet needs because the units are small, lack parking, lack locks, have pests and mold, lack outdoor place for families, and have office staff that harass.

► Exclusion or displacement experiences

- Families have not moved because it is expensive to move out with the deposits and not enough time in their schedules due to having to work far from Burien.
- After COVID many of the families have lost their jobs or have had their hours cut along with their salary not being fair and too low to manage basic home/ family needs.
- Participants have faced steep increases in rents. The rent tends to rise at an extreme amount from one year to the next, having the families struggling to pay monthly rent. This has created and made our families have to move out and far from Burien city.
- Participants felt harassment and intimidation from leasing offices including amount of utilities not matching right amount.

Community Center Youth Engagement

A Youth Engagement Event was held at the Burien Community Center in the Eagle Landing Room on April 13, 2023 in the afternoon. Five students with the Burien Green Teens program at Highline High School participated. The event was structured around a mapping exercise that asked each participant to illustrate their current Burien and then change it to their ideal Burien. Participants then finished the workshop by writing several policies that could be implemented to make these changes. In addition to policies about safety, climate resilience, and transportation, the students wrote policies about housing and goods:

- ▶ More affordable housing
- ▶ Food is cheaper
- ▶ Food gardens

Shape your City Open House

On April 18, 2023, the City held a Shape your City Open House in the Burien Library community room in the evening. Activities asked about community opinions on the Burien 2044 Comprehensive Plan periodic update, Transportation Master Plan Update, and Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan Update.

One activity asked people to Share their Housing Story. See Exhibit 3. Highlights included:

- ▶ People live in both rental and ownership housing, and many are concerned about housing costs.
- ▶ Some are concerned about rezones that could impact their neighborhoods.



Exhibit 3. Share Your Housing Story

Share Your Housing Story

I love in a neighborhood with a diverse mix of single and multi-family housing types (Sunnydale)

Lived at home all my life, want to age in place. We should not be upzoning + lose our homes.

I love my rental house, but I don't know if I'll ever be able to own one

I own a modest house in a great neighborhood. I'm disappointed that so much new construction is unaffordable and not aligned with the existing home size.

I lived in an apartment with my 2 young sons for years before I could afford a single-family home (700 sq ft). Was able to upgrade to a larger home several years later but face moving because our areas are being upzoned for more development.

I love our houses and neighborhood of 28 years! I am extremely distressed to have learned, by chance, last Tuesday, that the block I call home is not only being considered for rezoning (with no notification to the current homeowners) but is being proposed for residential high density zoning (6 or 7 stories). How can this be? The process for this has been extremely flawed in the form of both communication and the proposed zoning being considered.

Lived in my home 24 years, on the same street 51 years, with room to garden and play in my yard with children. I am sick to learn my safe space is being considered for rezoning of high density 6 story buildings with no public notification. Deplorable.

I rent my house, but too expensive to buy a property here in Burien. We need new houses with affordable prices.

Ability to subdivide large lot to multi-family. Ability to age in place. Ability to provide affordable housing. New home buyers look for smaller, easier maintained lots.

No alley access prevented me from putting in townhouses.

Another activity asked people to share their how the City can encourage more middle housing in the City. See Exhibit 4. Results showed ideas to place density near transit, provide sufficient infrastructure and protect critical areas, and making zoning and building more flexible, including streamlining permits.

Exhibit 4. Middle Housing

What could the City of Burien do to encourage more “middle housing” throughout the city?

Allow many more options. Don't limit to all these types, organic development will occur naturally. Eliminate setbacks in all multifamily zones. Allow building code and other codes to control building shape and form.

Allow all of these so that this is an interesting city.

Allow more density adjacent to transit

Roadway standards and zoning are too preventative. Remove arbitrary building codes and barriers. Remove/revise complex housing/building regulations.

Make sure housing is affordable for library workers, young people and old people.

Gentle density e.g., Eco Thonic

Streamline permit process for ADU. Add incentives for homeowners and limit story heights for residential.

More density. Creativity in designs to create more density that still feels spacious. Ease restrictions regarding subdivisions.

Middle housing. Allow more ADU's per lot. Limit taller buildings and only allow them at the biggest and major intersections.

Continue to protect critical areas.

Reparations for native residents of Burien. No home ownership.

How is missing middle defined?

Townhouses, courtyard houses, apartments, and mixed-use housing.

Waive or reduce permit fees. Faster permit process for reuse building with higher occupancy for example. Trickle down these benefits to buyers.

Burien Housing

What could the City of Burien do to encourage more “middle housing” throughout the city?

Rebuild old apartments before building new ones.

Be creative. Think tiny houses, shipping containers, etc. Changes in zoning to allow more residential divisions of large lots. Cottage housing in single family zones.

More cottages that are small and affordable in friendly neighborhoods.

Infrastructure is lacking, roads, parking, sewers.

Burien 2044 Advisory Committee

The Burien 2044 Advisory Committee is made up of representatives from different City commissions, a City Council representative, and the Community Connectors. The group reviewed racially disparate impacts evaluation and policy analysis and missing middle concepts and standards in March and May 2023. Meeting notes are included in Attachment B.

The six [Community Connectors](#) are trusted leaders in Spanish, Vietnamese, and Amharic speaking Communities. They interface with their communities in multiple ways and at multiple events. Connectors also participate on the Burien 2044 Advisory Committee. Their input at the Advisory Committee is shared in this document.

At the May 10, 2023 meeting, the Advisory Committee discussed Middle Housing. Highlights include:

- ▶ Desire for flexibility and variety everywhere
- ▶ Diverging views on design requirements
 - Design with good setbacks and landscaping
 - But don't make so **onerous**, allow whatever fits
 - Avoid blocking sunlight
 - Address transitions to single family areas
 - Port package for windows and soundproofing
 - Tree code compliance
 - Height, sociable design, front yards
- ▶ Desire for open space
- ▶ Support for a criteria-based approach to where middle housing is allowed.
- ▶ Middle housing on alleys could help improve currently impassible/overgrown alleys.
- ▶ Key messages for explaining to neighbors – examples:
 - Think ahead 20-30 years, should this place be exactly the same?
 - Property owners control their own property – no one will force them to sell.
 - Small individual choices make gradual change over time.
 - Required to do comprehensive planning, and having so much single family residential doesn't allow us to comply with the Growth Management Act.

- ▶ Need more education about programs to support middle housing (e.g., condos) and cost of construction.

Online Outreach

Business & Housing Survey

The City of Burien issued an online survey to Burien businesses to gain insights into the challenges and opportunities of attaining housing in Burien for their employees and themselves. The survey was conducted in May 2023. The survey was amplified through about nine outlets, business groups, and meetings. The City received 22 surveys with 2 in Spanish.

Businesses that responded tended to be in service industries and on average had three employees, employee counts ranged from 1-49. Many businesses found that their employees preferred to live outside of Burien but nearly the same number found that their employees did not live in Burien because of a lack of housing choices or affordability. Many thought that housing solutions for Burien should include missing middle housing (accessory dwelling units, duplex, triplex, small apartments, etc.) to improve housing choices and middle housing that helps with affordable homeownership (e.g., townhouses, small lot single family lots). Other ideas included adding mixed use developments to improve walkability, and generally to improve permitting and regulations.

Wall of Ideas

Over April and May 2023, the City of Burien asked for Burien residents and business owners to share input in a “Wall of Ideas” on Housing, Middle Housing, Neighborhood Centers, and Economic Development. Commenters could review prompts about each topic and background information and give ideas about how the City could increase housing choices and affordability, integrate middle housing, identify neighborhood centers, or improve economic development in Burien.

Through this effort the City received 65 comments, 211 up votes and 36 down votes, with slightly more comments on Middle Housing and Neighborhood Centers than other topics. See Exhibit 5. Comments and responses, agreements and disagreements can also be seen at the website: <https://burien.mysocialpinpoint.com/syc2cp/your-ideas>.

Exhibit 5. Wall of Idea Comments and Interactions

Wall Topic	Count of Comment Threads	Up Votes	Down Votes
Economic Development	15	49	13
Housing	13	52	1

Middle Housing	18	51	13
Neighborhood Centers	19	59	9
Grand Total	65	211	36

The City received 31 comments on housing or middle housing and 51 upvotes and 13 down votes. Most comments suggested greater housing choices for families of all sizes and incomes, and focusing higher growth at intersections and in the Urban Center, and offering renewed housing to existing residents where redevelopment happens.

Exhibit 6. Housing Themes and Comments

Theme	Example Quotes
Keep higher density to intersections.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ General: DONT spread tall (5 over 1) buildings outside of major intersections! Increase density overall by using middle housing. Small 3 story multiplexes or row homes should be used. Otherwise, Burien will become an ugly sprawling and congested mess. ▶ Ambaum Corridor: I believe that the proposed zones 'Mixed Use Low' and 'Residential High' seem backwards. Why would we allow a lower height of buildings on Ambaum than the parcels East and West of it? ... I thought the same thing! Larger buildings should be at major intersections and on arterials.
Upzone the Alcove at Seahurst.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Affordable rentals still, built originally as military housing in WWII, but definitely nearing the end of safe housing life. Is there a possible future where this property could remain affordable housing, but be upgraded? ... Yes, the Alcove needs to be upzoned to high density. The complex is large enough to require the developer to build one building at a time and rehouse people within the property.
Urban core needs more density.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The urban core around downtown needs A LOT more density. The areas around Dottie Harper and the skatepark should be high density residential. This area is extremely close to TWO parks, a community center, the transit center, and grocery stores...
Burien needs multigenerational housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Burien needs housing that can accommodate multi-generational families. Encouraging developments of studios or micro-housing is not taking consideration of families that care for elders, or have small children. ...
Address rents and homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Burien needs to bring down the pressure on landlords. Many people complain about the rising cost of rent ALL OVER WASHINGTON. This is not an issue specific to Burien. ... With rising rent increases (and no wage increases) we will see MORE houseless people. ... ▶ Get the HOMELESS FOLKS OUT OF 152ND...
Build affordable single-family homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ...start building affordable single family homes. Make sure that homes are being sold to people that intend to live there. I have 2 million dollar homes on my street that have been sitting empty for a year plus.

Most commenters were supportive of middle housing, with ideas about scale, height, and design. See Exhibit 7. Some were concerned about attached housing and crime. Regarding crime, studies

have shown that increasing housing that is affordable can help retain a stable population and reduce crime rates.¹

Exhibit 7. Middle Housing Comments

Theme	Example Quotes
<p>Improve vacant land by adding middle housing with amenities like urban farms/gardens.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There are numerous brownfields, empty or overgrown lots, buildings that appear to be abandoned, disused or vacant. ... In addition to considering these parcels for middle housing, what about urban farms ... gardens? We have increasing pressure on our food systems. ▶ I absolutely agree with the empty/derelict lot tracking. And happy to see gardens ... urban farms. ▶ Burien is already full of housing like this. We do not want more of it. Please stop pushing this on us. ▶ ...To be honest, I much rather see an increase in middle housing than larger 6-8 story apartment buildings... ▶ If it's a problem for everyone then let Laurelhurst, Medina, Montlake, and Magnolia take a turn on the problem....
<p>Middle housing should be allowed throughout Burien at low-rise heights.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ We need affordable housing prices everywhere. So good alternatives to mitigate price hikes that don't mean building high story buildings are welcomed (i.e., middle housing or 2-3 story buildings). ▶ Middle housing should be allowed throughout. Max 3 stories.
<p>Ensure good design of middle housing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ We need to be careful that multi-plex properties do not end up putting parking lots along the street front, and instead have parking behind the buildings so that buildings front the street. Some amount of trees should also be required to be planted along the ROW. ▶ I like the idea of allowing middle housing across Burien because it allows for more density while giving individual property owners the chance to build their wealth ...I think there should be some limitations around design so we don't end up with ugly box buildings and large car parks facing the street everywhere (trees pls!!). ▶ Limit stories. Allow ADU's. Allow condos as well as apartments. Require green spaces, play equipment, bus service.... ▶ Maybe free inspections for people that renovate their homes to accommodate more people? (i.e., granny suites) This might help combat unscrupulous contractors...
<p>Concern about apartments and crime.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The city should discourage apartments and the like, there are plenty already in other nearby cities. Do you want your town to turn into a crime-riddled dangerous neighborhood or do you want it to stay safe and attractive to people who are looking to put real money down into living areas i.e., a house? People will move out if you keep pulling this stuff on them, so just don't. ▶ Well, the city should discourage an overemphasis on big buildings with small apartments. There need to be more things like duplexes and fourplexes that provide some outdoor area around the buildings to encourage kids to play and people to hang out in a way that is interactive

¹ See: Higher-Density Development Myth and Fact, Urban Land Institute, 2005: https://uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/HigherDensity_MythFact.ashx_.pdf, Stanford, 2017: https://web.stanford.edu/~diamondr/LIHTC_spillovers.pdf, and Livable Cities Lab, 2022: <https://www.affordablehousingpipeline.com/blogs/california-affordable-housing/new-affordable-housing-lower-crime-connection>.

Theme	Example Quotes
	with their neighbors. Larger apartment buildings are isolating and do not foster community outside of the building itself.

Use of Input

These comments were collected in Spring 2023 as part of a multi-pronged effort to gather stories and strategies especially around housing. Input was gathered through surveys and small group discussions. The comments can help the City consider how to develop policies and plans for housing including middle housing that offers housing affordability and variety.

For more information, please see the project website at:
<https://connect.burienwa.gov/projects/comprehensive-plan-update/>.

