

Wednesday, January 3rd, 2018

DELIVERED VIA EMAIL

Eugene Mayor, City Council and City Manager
City Manager's Office
125 East 8th Avenue
Eugene, OR 97401

Re: Cottage Code Amendments

Dear Mayor, City Councilors and City Manager:

We, the undersigned organizations, respectfully request that the Eugene City Council instruct the City Planning Department to prepare a package of zoning code amendments, for review and approval by the Eugene Planning Commission and City Council, with the following aims:

- Remove restrictions on Secondary Dwelling Units that inhibit or complicate their legal development in residential zones in Eugene.
- Create "Cottage Clusters" as a by-right housing type in Eugene residential zones.

Housing Need in Eugene

Eugene is facing a multi-faceted housing crisis. Part of the problem is supply--there simply are not enough homes available for our growing population. Related to the short supply is a second problem: affordability. Some residents are homeless, while many more are having to spend much more than they can reasonably afford simply to keep a roof over their heads. A third aspect of our housing problem is limited choices. A growing number of local households consist of one to two people, and many of these would prefer "Missing Middle" housing options that are currently very uncommon in Eugene. A final aspect of the housing crisis is limited resources--especially land, but also public infrastructure, clean air and water, and time. An over-reliance on single-family homes exacerbates the challenge of living within our economic, environmental and equity limits.

In a sincere attempt to prevent incompatible infill development, over the past decade Eugene has adopted zoning code provisions that also inhibit needed construction of infill development that could comfortably blend into existing neighborhoods.

The issue of housing is complex, and a few code revisions will not solve the whole problem. But the first step towards encouraging local builders and homeowners to offer more and better housing choices is to make it legal for them to do so.

The Second Pillar of Envision Eugene is to "Provide Housing Affordable to All Income Levels." These recommended code revisions would help improve housing affordability within the Urban Growth Boundary in a manner that also supports the other pillars--namely, they would respect the character of existing neighborhoods, take advantage of existing infrastructure, support low-carbon travel options, and promote smaller, more environmentally sensitive construction.

Secondary Dwelling Units

Secondary Dwelling Units (SDUs, also known as Accessory Dwelling Units, backyard cottages, granny flats, or garage apartments) are single housing units that share the lot with a primary detached single-family home. They can take the form of a smaller, independent structure, or they can be attached to or

incorporated within an existing structure (e.g. the basement or second-story of the main home, the second story of a detached garage.)

SDU's can provide additional housing that is compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods, and benefits both homeowners and renters. Since they are small and are built on already-owned land, their cost is generally lower than for other new construction. They provide housing for renters, and income for homeowners. These are some of the reasons that many cities, including Springfield, are working to reduce obstacles to building SDU's.

SDU's currently face a variety of restrictions under Eugene's zoning code. For instance:

- SDU's are allowed only on property zoned R-1
- They are prohibited on lots smaller than 6,100 square feet
- They are subject to more restrictive height and design standards than other structures in R-1
- They require the owner to sign a deed restriction guaranteeing that the owner will continue to reside on the property.

These restrictions add time, cost and complexity to the construction of an SDU, and help explain why the number of applications to build SDU's have decreased since new code restrictions on them were put in place.

In the most recent legislative session, SB 1051 included language stating: *"A city with a population greater than 2,500 or a county with a population greater than 15,000 shall allow in areas zoned for detached single-family dwellings the development of at least one accessory dwelling unit for each detached single-family dwelling, subject to reasonable local regulations relating to siting and design."*

Eugene is not currently in compliance with this new directive from the state. Reviewing our zoning code to remove restrictions that are not "reasonable design and siting standards" will both bring us into compliance with the state law, and provide more Eugene homeowners with the ability to provide housing for their family and neighbors.

Cottage Clusters

Just as SDU's provide low-impact housing for renters, Cottage Clusters can offer similar opportunities for potential homeowners.

A Cottage Cluster is a group of small, detached homes clustered around a central outdoor common space. Typically, some of the homes face the common space, while others might face the street. The cottages in the cluster are small—typically less than 1000 square feet. Each cottage frequently has its own small yard and covered porch, and they share a central outdoor common space. Cottages are ideal for individuals and couples who don't want a big house, but would still enjoy some private outdoor space, a small garden or a patio. They can make ideal "starter homes", good options for busy working families who are able to live with less space and are short of time for maintaining a large home, or an option for retired adults to downsize in community.

Cottage Clusters can be developed under our current zoning code. Two examples, with differing purposes and scale, are the Amazon Cottages and Emerald Village. But both of these developments faced expensive and time-consuming land use processes as they struggled to "fit" into existing code. Emerald Village applied as a multi-family dwelling, and then had to seek numerous exemptions from

provisions that were intended for apartment or condo buildings. Amazon Cottages applied as a “Cluster Subdivision” process—but this, too, involved such costly and time-consuming exceptions and modifications that the developer indicated he would never take on a similar project again.

The City could simplify the creation of Cottage Clusters, and avoid lengthy processes that add time and cost to their construction, through a few simple changes in the zoning code:

- Include “Cottage Cluster” in the definition of housing types
- Explicitly identify Cottage Clusters as a permitted type of housing in residential zones (just as single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes and multi-family dwellings are)
- Include defining language, such as open space and form requirements.

These simple changes would help increase the supply and reduce the cost of small cottages, so people can invest in a home and be invested in their neighborhood.

Conclusion

We need more housing now. These two forms of housing provide compatible options that can be targeted at multiple income levels and meet many needs—from subsidized, affordable housing to “starter homes” or “downsizing” units.

Therefore, we respectfully ask that Council instruct City Staff to determine what code adjustments will be needed to remove roadblocks to these two housing types in Eugene’s code, and move forward with implementing these adjustments.

Signed:

- 1000 Friends of Oregon
- 350.org Eugene
- AARP Oregon
- American Institute of Architects Southwest Oregon, Committee on Local Affairs
- Democratic Party of Lane County
- Homebuilders Association of Lane County
- NEDCO
- LiveMove
- Board of Directors of the Rental Owners Association of Lane County
- SquareOne Villages
- Sponsors, Inc.
- Tiny House/Tiny Villages Eugene
- Walkable Eugene Citizen’s Advisory Network