



Making Development Work for Social and Economic Justice

What's at stake?

More and more development will be coming to Seattle in the next 10 years. There will be a push to build higher and bigger (also known as “density”). More density is being proposed from South Lake Union to SoDo to the Rainier Valley. The question is, can we harness this wave of development on behalf of a community vision for economic and social justice? Will communities be lifted up by more density - or pushed out?

How can we make new development work for social and economic justice?

Development works for community when change benefits all families and offers opportunity to existing residents. As market rate development changes a neighborhood, two things are needed: 1) housing affordable to residents living there *now* and 2) good jobs to support their families in the face of rising costs.

Puget Sound Sage proposes that we create bold, meaningful standards for new development that help create these necessary ingredients. Many tools are available – including community benefits agreements, more funding for low-income housing, tenant protections and local hiring requirements. The recently proposed “incentive zoning” ordinance can be one tool in this toolkit. But now is the time to put forward a social and economic justice vision for new development and increasing density.

Why should we care about “incentive zoning?”

Allowing developers to build higher and bigger is something that only Council and the Mayor can grant, primarily through changes to zoning law. Right now, our elected officials are debating what standards and public benefits we will expect from developers in return for increasing density. They propose to enact these expectations through “incentive zoning.” The incentive is increasing height and size limits so developers can make more money.

Once passed, these standards and benefits will apply across all communities and may be hard to change in the future. The proposed standards include affordable housing, but on a limited basis, and affordable to households making nearly average incomes in the region – up to \$65,000 a year. Are these standards enough? Should we expect more?

How can incentive zoning create truly affordable housing and good jobs?

- 1) Adequate housing for families of all incomes is the bedrock to ensuring development works for economic and social justice. Affordable housing standards should be deep and extensive enough to ensure existing families can afford to stay in their community. Incentive zoning will play a critical role in ensuring housing for lower-income families will be built along with market-rate units over the next decade or more.
- 2) Workers constructing new buildings should have paths to career opportunities, living wages, and family-supporting benefits. Most construction workers building in downtown make good union wages and benefits and receive extensive apprenticeship and safety training. Outside of downtown, construction workers often face unsafe and difficult working conditions with few or no benefits. And community residents rarely have job opportunities on projects in their own community. Incentive zoning can provide a tool to set standards for some of these workers, many of whom live in our communities, and create pathways for residents seeking a career in construction.