

Dear Stacie,

Here are my comments (in bold) on the Draft Goals and Policies of the Housing Element of the Mount Vernon 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update. This comment letter is in response to your memo dated 7/01/2025.

Thanks,  
-Liam Diephuis

*Policy 1.3: Maintain a variety of future land use classifications and implement zoning to accommodate a range of housing types with varying densities and sizes.*

**In my discussions with fellow MVCAC members who work in housing construction and development, a recurring issue is not that there are too few land use classifications (some assert that there are currently too many) but that the existing classifications are too restrictive of mixed-use development. The classifications that do allow for dense and/or mixed-use development are very sparsely used.**

*Policy 1.5: Continue to promote plans and policies that encourage in-fill residential projects in close proximity to neighborhood centers, shopping and retail facilities, parks, transit routes, and other service uses.*

**This is a good ideal that needs stronger promotion. The plans and policies mentioned here, whatever they may be, are not achieving infill residential projects near Skagit Station, retail, or parks that I encounter day-to-day in Mount Vernon.**

*Policy 1.8: Continue to promote high density development and re-development in the Central Business District (C-1 zone). Analyze ways to allow housing that steps-down, or transitions, in density immediately surrounding the Central Business District.*

**In Commerce's Middle Housing Quick Guide, the rules will require Mount Vernon to allow at least 4 units per lot, for all lots within a ¼ mile walk of Skagit Station. That area extends significantly farther than the current C-1 zone. A sort of step-down also is provided in that document with the standard that no off-street parking may be mandated within a ½ mile walk of Skagit Station. I think this policy should be made more specific in order to comply with (and maybe even go above and beyond) Commerce's requirements.**

*Policy 1.9: Consider allowing multifamily and mixed-use housing in parts of the General Commercial land use district to help meet housing needs at all income levels. Focus on adding housing near jobs to improve access to employment and support mixed-use neighborhoods.*

**I couldn't agree more with the idea of allowing multifamily and mixed-use housing in parts of the current C-2 zone with good access to transit (basically along Riverside south of College Way) as well as other areas.**

*Policy 2.1: Allow mixed-use development outright in commercially zoned, transit-served corridors. Relax or eliminate density limits in such areas.*

*Policy 2.2: Adopt "By Right" permitting in residential zones by eliminating discretionary review processes for submitted projects that meet zoning code.*

*Policy 2.3: Consider reduced parking requirements for affordable housing projects and housing located in transit accessible areas.*

*Policy 2.4: Consider reduced fees and utility connection fee waivers for affordable housing projects.*

**These policies from North Star are badly needed, and I'm happy to see them included in the draft policies.**

*Policy 2.7: Continually review and update City permitting processes and materials to lower the cost of building all types of housing by making the permitting faster, simpler, and more predictable with clear timelines and review steps.*

**This policy gets at a common issue that I hear from builders and developers on the MVCAC, and I'm glad to see it here. It could use a bit more specificity though.**

*Policy 2.8: Consider establishing a sales tax deferral program for conversions of commercial buildings on underutilized land into multifamily housing containing affordable housing.*

*Policy 2.9: Consider establishing a Multifamily property tax exemption (MTFE) program to provide property tax waives to encourage the development of multifamily and affordable housing.*

**I like any policy that incentivizes dense and affordable housing development, provided that zoning and other "poison pill" codes (minimum**

**setbacks, lot coverage requirements, parking, etc.) don't prohibit said development.**

*Policy 3.1: Promote infill housing that is compatible with abutting housing styles and contributes to the vitality of the existing neighborhood.*

*Policy 3.2: Encourage infill housing on vacant or underutilized parcels having adequate services, and ensure that the infill development is compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.*

**Without “compatible” and “vitality” being defined in this context, this policy risks preserving certain single-family neighborhoods from change, just as the term “neighborhood character” did.**

*Policy 3.3: Support the gradual integration of increased residential density within existing low-density residential neighborhoods to expand housing options and promote inclusivity. Recognize that, over time, this may result in an evolution of neighborhood character, and work to ensure that changes are thoughtfully managed through development standards, community engagement, and infrastructure planning.*

*Policy 3.4: Consider adopting flexible lot size standards that let multiple residential units share a lot and encourage clustering to keep density high while protecting critical areas, preserving open space, and using infrastructure efficiently.*

**These are good ideals to follow.**