

**4688**

ORDINANCE NO. \_\_\_\_\_

AN ORDINANCE relating to planning: adding new residential development and design policies to the Comprehensive Plan in order to accommodate townhouse developments in King County.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KING COUNTY:

SECTION 1. Findings and Declaration of Purpose.

(1) The Council finds that:

(a) Studies in King County and elsewhere have shown that townhouses (single-family attached dwellings) when properly designed and conveniently located with respect to employment, shopping and other urban services, are more energy-efficient, and offer greater opportunities for cost savings, than conventional single-family detached units at the same or lower densities.

(b) Encouragement of townhouse developments in King County would offer King County citizens a wider choice of housing styles and prices than is now available, as well as opportunities for significant energy savings in both site development and space heating.

(c) Townhouses have significant characteristics of both single-family detached housing and multi-family housing, as well as some unique features; therefore, proper development of townhouses in King County requires guidance from the Comprehensive Plan on major aspects of townhouse development, including density, site coverage, parking and location.

(2) The Council declares that the purpose of this ordinance is to amend the Comprehensive Plan so that it provides clear policies on major aspects of townhouse development to guide preparation of townhouse zoning regulations, to help the Zoning and Subdivision Examiner and other County officials expeditiously review townhouse development proposals, and to acquaint the development industry and the housing consumer with the potential energy and cost advantages of townhouses.

SECTION 2. Townhouse residential policies. The following text and policies are hereby added to the "Residential Development Policies" chapter of the Comprehensive Plan:

## TOWNHOUSE RESIDENTIAL AREAS

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The townhouse provides an alternative type of housing, to single-family detached and multi-family housing, which has some characteristics of both as well as some unique features of its own. Townhouses are basically single-family dwellings side-by-side, attached to each other by common party walls, which may have lot lines platted through them. Townhouses, like typical single-family detached houses, have individual access, private open space, and potentially separate fee-simple ownership of the lot on which each house is built. On the other hand, townhouses can be built at higher, multi-family densities with similar impacts and needs for public services.

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Since townhouses usually occupy the complete width of their lots, and since townhouse lots are usually narrower than those accommodating other housing types, some unique design problems result. First, the narrowness of the lot and structure results in less freedom to arrange the building on the site, to provide privacy for exterior spaces, and to lay out the interior floor plan. Second, the complete separation of front and rear yards (for interior units) reduces access to private open space. Third, and most important in terms of impact and demand on public services, these features make the townhouse less compatible with the automobile than other housing types, since it is sometimes difficult to provide more than one off-street parking space per dwelling, and the narrow lot shape means that without careful design, townhouse developments can severely impact on-street parking capacity.

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However, the unique features of townhouses also mean that with careful design it is possible to provide housing consumers (especially families with children) with the amenities of single-family detached homes at a considerable savings in both development cost and energy consumption.

## A. Location

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1. All townhouse developments should be located only in:

1 (a) Areas which are within a Local Service Area as desig-  
2 nated by the Sewerage General Plan, which are served by all major public  
3 capital improvements such as adequate roads and adequate water supply,  
4 and which have a high level of important public services such as public  
5 transit, fire and police protection, parks, schools and solid waste collec-  
6 tion, or

7 (b) Existing or new activity centers in outlying areas which are  
8 within a Local Service Area as designated by the Sewerage General Plan,  
9 and which are served by adequate roads, water supply and other public  
10 services.

11 2. High density (i.e. fifteen to twenty units per acre) town-  
12 house developments should be located only in areas which have convenient  
13 pedestrian access to major employment and shopping opportunities, and to  
14 parks, and which have a high level of public transit service (i.e. service  
15 twice an hour during rush hours) so as to reduce the need for automobile  
16 use.

17 3. Townhouse developments may be located within partly devel-  
18 oped urban single-family detached residential areas (i.e., areas suitable  
19 for RS zoning) which have adequate roads, utilities, a well-developed  
20 sidewalk system, parks and other urban services to provide a well-de-  
21 signed mix of different housing styles, sizes and prices, provided:

22 (a) Within single-family detached residential zones, average  
23 density within subdivisions does not exceed that allowed by the zone, the  
24 smaller townhouse lots being balanced by common open space;

25 (b) (i) Within townhouse zones density is limited to not  
26 more than twelve units per acre, and townhouse developments are re-  
27 stricted to sites that are small (one acre or less) and scattered (separ-  
28 ated by approximately one-quarter mile of lower density development or  
29 significant natural features such as major hills, water bodies or other  
30 permanently undeveloped open space, or (ii) such low to medium town-  
31 house zoning is located as a transition to higher density or non-resi-  
32 dential uses, (iii) single-family detached housing continues to predominate  
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1 (the townhouse zoning not being a justification for higher density zoning  
2 on adjacent properties in violation of the size and spacing requirements of  
3 this policy);

4 (c) Whether in single-family detached or townhouse zones,  
5 the townhouse dwelling groups are aesthetically compatible with the scale  
6 and character of their surroundings, which can be achieved by relating  
7 them to the existing buildings' height, exterior facade treatment and  
8 materials, roof forms and setbacks, landscaping and placement of common  
9 open space;

10 (d) Whether within single family detached or townhouse  
11 zones, local on-street parking capacity is not unduly reduced.

12 4. Townhouse and other urban density zoning shall not be  
13 located where sensitive areas, such as unstable slopes, severe earthquake  
14 hazards, coal mine hazard areas, wetlands or floodplains, predominate.  
15 On sites which contain problem-free land as well as such hazard areas,  
16 townhouse developments may be clustered on the problem-free portions.

17 Implementation of these location policies can be accomplished in a  
18 number of ways. A residential zone allowing townhouses at higher-than-  
19 RS densities can be applied, either through area zoning or individual  
20 rezone requests, in accordance with the principles outlined above. This  
21 would result in townhouses being substituted for low or medium density  
22 multi-family development in some locations and high-density single-family  
23 detached development in others, as well as mixtures of townhouses and  
24 detached houses at equal average densities in single-family detached resi-  
25 dential zones. As older urban areas redevelop, a mixture of townhouse  
26 and lower density zones might occur also, in areas where an appropriate  
27 overall density has been determined through the community planning pro-  
28 cess and where small groups of townhouses are compatible with lower  
29 density surrounding development.

30 The intent of Policy 4 is not to rigidly prohibit higher density devel-  
31 opment in areas with sensitive environmental features, but to discourage  
32 blanket high densities in areas where such features predominate, and to  
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1 insure that the issue is addressed when townhouse zoning is proposed for  
2 a site, rather than deferred to the subdivision or building permit stage.  
3 Dealing with such issues at the zoning stage can help make the plat and  
4 permit process faster and more efficient.

5 B. Design

6 5. Townhouse developments of all densities shall always include  
7 all of the following improvements:

- 8 (a) paved streets, curbs, and sidewalks;
- 9 (b) street lighting;
- 10 (c) storm drainage facilities;
- 11 (d) public water supply;
- 12 (e) sanitary sewers;
- 13 (f) street trees.

14 Implementation of this policy can be accomplished by allowing town-  
15 house developments only in areas with sewers and other urban services,  
16 and by clear site improvement standards set forth in zoning and subdivi-  
17 sion regulations.

18 6. Townhouse building groups in lower density areas should  
19 maintain the scale and character of surrounding development.

20 7. Townhouse building groups in higher density areas where  
21 townhouses are the dominant housing type should avoid excessive size,  
22 both to provide adequate light and air, and to allow convenient vehicular  
23 and pedestrian access between front and rear yards.

24 Implementation of these policies requires limiting the number of town-  
25 house units in a single group of attached units within areas containing a  
26 mixture of attached and detached housing types and limiting the amount of  
27 townhouse zoning on infill sites. In predominantly townhouse neighbor-  
28 hoods building groups can be broken up by either intervening streets or  
29 common open space.

30 8. Townhouses should offer amenities of privacy and sense of  
31 identity similar to those offered by single-family detached homes.  
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1           9. Townhouses, like detached single-family houses, should be  
2 built in a variety of styles, sizes and prices.

3           These goals can be achieved through different treatment of entries,  
4 windows, fencing, landscaping, and other architectural features. Variation  
5 in height and setback, rather than wide differences in facade materials,  
6 should be used to break up the frontal mass of townhouse groups. Each  
7 unit should have individual access to private open space. Sound control  
8 between units is crucial; therefore common party walls must be well-con-  
9 structed, and interior floor plans designed with acoustical privacy in mind.

10           As noted above, the narrowness and full-lot-width design character-  
11 istics of townhouses limit the ways in which variety can be achieved.  
12 Variation in townhouse widths allows different treatment of units, as well  
13 as being a form of diversity in itself. Greater width of each unit can  
14 make townhouses in low density areas more compatible with their surround-  
15 ings, as well as lessening potential impacts on on-street parking. Narrow-  
16 er designs allow higher densities, some potential economies in construction,  
17 and greater energy conservation opportunities. However, since narrower  
18 units have more difficulty in accommodating off-street parking, they should  
19 be built only when rear alleys are used for vehicular access, in order to  
20 preserve on-street parking and streetscape amenity.

21           10. Townhouse lots which are not wide enough to accommodate  
22 both on-street parking and a driveway should have vehicular access from  
23 an alley or common driveway which minimizes curb cuts.

24           11. Blocks of townhouses should be laid out so as to provide all  
25 units with the maximum feasible amount of natural light, for purposes of  
26 both amenity and energy conservation.

27           Design standards and building setbacks should make it possible for all  
28 units within a block of townhouses to have access to natural sunlight.  
29 This will make it possible for all units to maximize solar heat gain in the  
30 winter, thereby reducing space heating requirements. Sun exposure of  
31 private outdoor areas should be possible during spring and fall months.  
32 Proper orientation to the sun and use of windows or skylights become more  
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important the narrower units are, since an adequate level of natural light inside the units becomes more difficult to provide.

SECTION 3. Application to areas with adopted community plans. It is the Council's intent that proposals for townhouse developments in areas with community plans adopted prior to the effective date of this Ordinance be considered not inconsistent with those community plans when:

(1) All townhouse developments are located within a Local Service Area as designated by the Sewerage General Plan.

(2) In addition to meeting all applicable policies adopted by this ordinance, townhouse developments with an average density higher than that allowed in any RS zone are located as follows:

(a) Convenient to existing major or secondary arterial streets;

(b) Convenient to business areas, cultural or community centers, or locations having special amenities of view, water access or permanent open space;

(c) As a transitional use between single-family detached residential development and multi-family residential developments.

(3) if the townhouse zone conflicts with an adopted community plan's density policy, a community plan revision eliminating the conflict precedes or accompanies the reclassification, in accordance with Ordinance 4305.

(4) Clusters of townhouses in subdivisions or short subdivisions may locate in areas zoned RS or RD, provided the average density allowed in the zone is not exceeded.

1            SECTION 4. The policies adopted by this ordinance, together with  
 2 all implementing amendments to the Zoning Code, shall be evaluated by the  
 3 Council and the Planning Division thirty months after their effective dates  
 4 to ascertain how well they are accomplishing their purposes, and how they  
 5 may be improved.

6            INTRODUCED AND READ for the first time this 24th  
 7 day of September, 1979.

8            PASSED this 7th day of January,  
 9 <sup>80</sup>  
 10 1979.

11            KING COUNTY COUNCIL  
 12 KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON

13 Bill Keam  
 14 Chairman

15 ATTEST:

16 [Signature]  
 17 Clerk of the Council

18            APPROVED this 11th day of January, 1980  
 19 1979.

20 [Signature]  
 21 King County Executive