Memorandum

To: Thurston County Planning Commission
From: Tony Kantas, Resource Stewardship
Date: December 15, 2010
Subject: 2009-2010 Development Code Docket A-13: Cottage Housing

Attached: City of Tumwater Comments

At the October 6, 2010 work session a drafted cottage housing chapter for the Lacey, Tumwater, and Olympia Urban Growth Area Zoning Ordinances was introduced to the Planning Commission. The Commission expressed some concern of the drafted code.

The concerns included:
1. Setbacks/Density/Privacy
2. Parking
3. Height Limitations

1. Setbacks/Density/Privacy:
All the residential zones within the Lacey, Tumwater, and Olympia Urban Growth Areas have a side yard setback of 5-feet. The front and rear yard setbacks vary from 10-20 feet. If the side yard setback requirement was greater than 5-feet, developments would have a difficult time meeting the density requirements of the underling urban growth area zoning district. Furthermore, the intent of this type of development is to be dense urban development while creating a sense of community within the development through architecture and landscaping. Additionally, cottage housing is a tool of creating affordable housing and energy efficient housing by limiting the maximum structure size.

These pocket neighborhoods are not intended for everyone. The density, size, and style of a cottage development is geared towards a niche market of people who want to live in compact, connected, and walkable urban areas. The Growth Management Act requires urban growth areas with urban services to maximize residential infill opportunities and cottage housing uses innovative land-use strategies to maximize the infill opportunity.
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The no blank walls language could be stricken from the drafted code chapter if need be. The intent of the "no blank wall" requirement was to avoid a boxy appearance of the structure and require more architectural theme to the development. The boxy appearance could also be avoided by means of requiring an off-set front yard setback or through landscape requirements.

2. Parking
Parking is perhaps the most significant factor in the economics of cottage housing. The space needed to maneuver and park a car is nearly the same as the footprint of a small cottage. Moreover, clustering does not generally allow parking immediately adjacent to each cottage. Cottage projects must have enough land to provide a separate parking area, preferably out of view of the street. The presence of an alley can eliminate the need for a driveway and turn-around space.

The number of spaces required per unit will be determined primarily by the market segment the development is targeting. Smaller cottages (under 1000 square feet) will typically be owned by single adults, who will probably own just one car. Larger cottages are suitable for couples who may own two cars and even a third if they have teenagers. If there is no on-street parking for guests, additional spaces will be needed on-site. Parking requirements maybe lowered if good transit service is nearby.

If parking garages are attached to the cottage without an alley access, the garage may take away the attractiveness and character of the smaller structure and dominate the appearance of the façade.

3. Height Limitations:

The architectural styles favored in cottage developments built thus far tend to include lower plate heights on the second floor, placing part of the living space in the roof. This building style is common in most neighborhoods, so cottages built this way will fit in. But because this style uses dormers and results in complicated interior and exterior angles, it is a more expensive style of construction, as compared to a full two-story building with an attic. Going to a full two stories must be approached with great care with concern to "skinny houses."

Another architectural feature that will affect height is the desire to raise cottages off the ground. When cottages are clustered close together, a few steps up to the porch allows for a visual separation between community space and private space.

Comments:
The drafted cottage chapter was sent to the City of Lacey, Tumwater, and Olympia for comments. The City of Olympia informally stated they already have cottage regulations pertaining to cottage housing in the City and Urban Growth Area Zoning Ordinances. Note: The green building stakeholders group found the City of Olympia cottage regulations difficult to implement into a project proposal (TCC 23.04.060(8)).
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The City of Lacey informally stated that they like the drafted cottage code and will entertain amending their cottage code to emulate the UGA code, if adopted.

The City of Tumwater has submitted the attached comments. Tumwater plans to discuss the drafted cottage code with their Planning Commission and consider adopting a cottage housing chapter.

The cottage company was also sent a copy of the drafted cottage chapter. Their company specializes in designing and constructing cottage housing development and has completed many cottage developments within the Puget Sound region. Written comments have not been received from them to date, but they did verbally express the importance of including specific landscape standards within the cottage code and provide standards in allowing the cottages to be attached, similar to a townhouse. Staff concurs that required landscaping would ensure screening between incompatible uses, safeguard privacy, and would protect the aesthetic assets of cottage development. Allowing the cottages to be attached may increase the possibilities for this type of development to occur.

The Cottage Company has designed and constructed the following cottage developments. Additional information can be found at their website www.cottagecompany.com.

Conover Commons Homes – Redmond, WA
Greenwood Avenue Cottages – Shoreline, WA

Backyard Neighborhood – Whidbey Island, WA
Third Street Cottages – Whidbey Island, WA

Chico Beach Cottages – Silverdale, WA