

Sightline's Housing & Urbanism Program

Linking density to affordability

June 2017

Purpose: Sightline is structuring our work on housing affordability to achieve two ultimate goals:

- (1) Win adoption and **implementation of HALA's** recommendations.
- (2) Propagate the density+affordability model outside of Seattle by **telling the HALA story** in ways that reach key audiences elsewhere in the Northwest and across the United States.

Policy Opportunities:

2017

In early 2017, we focused our analysis and outreach on improving Seattle's proposed Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) program, which we regard as a promising but perilous model for reconciling growth with equity—more housing and more affordability. This work will continue in the background of our other efforts over the months ahead, as the city council considers one proposal after another for MHA upzones in different parts of the city. We will, for example, soon comment on the city's draft Environmental Impact Statement on MHA.

As the year has progressed, we have turned our analytical firepower toward other HALA recommendations, especially the question of how to win approval of "gentle density" in single-family zones and more missing-middle housing. This work is highly relevant not only in Seattle but throughout North America. So far this year we have published articles on single-family zoning and access to schools and parks, population declines in single-family zones, and accessory dwelling unit (ADU) regulations, and we will continue to work to influence the city's EIS on proposed ADU reforms. We hope to help pass a sweeping liberalization of ADU rules in the first half of 2018. Much more work making the case for gentle density and missing-middle housing is in the pipeline.

In the second half of 2017 we will turn our attention to another important HALA recommendation: to streamline the permitting process, so that construction delay no longer drives up the cost of homes. In Seattle, three public review processes dramatically delay construction, limit housing choices, and raise costs: design review, environmental review, and historic review. Each has a legitimate public policy purpose, but each is flagrantly abused by opponents of density. Because these review processes impede both private market development and non-profit affordable housing development, we believe a broad coalition supports HALA's policy fixes.

A longer-term effort we have begun in 2017 is a deeper analysis of displacement. As Seattle implements MHA, policymakers are grappling with the question of whether upzones should be scaled back and affordability requirements dialed up in areas with high risk of displacement—in other words, should private development be discouraged to reduce displacement in targeted locations? It's a raging debate in most high-cost cities. We have engaged a consultant on a GIS-based study of the relationship between private development and displacement, and we will publish findings this year. We also plan to complement this analysis with a continuing series of meetings with local low-income housing non-profits and neighborhood advocacy groups, and by highlighting other anti-displacement strategies, as we did in our article on Seattle's Equitable Development Initiative.

Also on the agenda for this year are analyses on the impact of foreign investment on home prices and on state rules that have quashed condo construction in Seattle. This fall, we plan a panel speaking event featuring Kim-Mai Cutler and Daniel Hertz, along with a Sightline representative in a discussion about "affordable housing lessons from unexpected places." The event is planned to coincide with the crescendo of the Seattle mayoral race and underline Sightline's key housing themes.

Our communications 2017 efforts, beyond regular media outreach, focus on shifting the debate away from buildings and toward people, through our series of 24 portraits and personal housing stories called #SeattleNeighbors. Roughly modeled after Humans of New York, the project launched this month on the web and social media, and we hope to extend it through crowdsourcing with allies over the months ahead. Other visual storytelling projects include an animation called "cruel musical chairs" that illustrates how building market rate housing reduces displacement.

Finally, we are continuing to assemble state-of-the-art framing and messaging guidance. We are embarking on a second round of focus groups this year, to test the messages and communications strategies—including #SeattleNeighbors—that flowed from our 2016 focus groups.

2018-2019

The election of a new mayor in late 2017 will change the dynamics around HALA in unpredictable ways. Thus, we will prioritize efforts that are important locally and transferable nationally with or without mayoral leadership on the HALA recommendations: ADU liberalization, for example, is championed by a council member. In spring of 2018, we plan a speaker panel on "legalizing small housing." It will capitalize on popular interest in "tiny houses" to advance the case for ADU liberalization in Seattle, plus call for a reopening of the debate about micro-apartments. All this work advancing gentle density and permit streamlining, for example, and all our visual storytelling and messaging guidance will remain relevant regardless of the outcome of the mayor's race.

The city council expects to fully implement MHA by summer 2018 (and we will remain engaged in trying to improve the details of the plan throughout the process). After it is done, we plan to write an in-depth, lessons-learned article for a broad audience in cities throughout North America. That work will mark a transition from the Seattle-focused to the outward-focused phase of our HALA-related housing and urbanism program. As 2018 and 2019 proceed, we will shift attention to placing stories in national media outlets and producing articles and videos that help replicate Seattle's density+affordability model elsewhere.

Sightline Housing & Urbanism Program Budget, 2017 & 2018

This page details a preliminary budget. Sightline produces two-year budget projections. We do not currently have a draft 2019 budget, but could create one if desired.

Jan 1, 2017 – Dec 31, 2017		Program Expenses		Jan 1, 2018 – Dec 31, 2018		Program Expenses	
Sightline Staff Time	● Senior researcher (100%) ● Junior research associate (75%) ● ED (25%) ● Communications Strategist ● 2 Communications Associates (15% each) plus overhead			Sightline Staff Time	● Senior researcher (100%) ● Junior research associate (50%) ● ED (25%) ● Communications Strategist ● 2 Communications Associates (15% each) plus overhead		
Enhancements	Ample budget for graphic design production, PR support to place national stories, special research such as GIS mapping, and third-party writers. Or basic video budget or focus groups and polling.		\$76,000	Enhancements	Ample budget for graphic design production, PR support to place national stories, special research such as GIS mapping, and third-party writers. Or basic video budget or focus groups and polling.		\$46,000
Other Operational Expenses	Travel, printing, supplies, etc.		\$13,245	Other Operational Expenses	Travel, printing, supplies, etc.		\$14,000
2017 TOTAL		\$368,095		2018 TOTAL		\$341,000	