



Courtyard Apartments & Single Room Occupant (SRO) Buildings: Design Review

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Question: Should there be additional design guidelines for courtyard apartments or single room occupant (SRO) structures? If yes, should they be incentive-based or prescriptive?

Current Olympia Approach:

All multifamily developments are subject to design review. There are multifamily residential design review standards that would apply, as well as any other design review provisions of certain areas (e.g. infill and other residential) if the property is located in a design review district.

Current City requirements are:

Multifamily design review provisions address (see code chapter for details about each requirement):

- Grading and tree retention
- Pedestrian and vehicular circulation
- Parking location and design
- Usable open space
- Fences and walls
- Landscape plant selection
- Screening mechanical equipment
- Site lighting
- Screening blank walls and fences
- Building orientation and entries
- Neighborhood scale and character
- Building modulation
- Building windows
- Materials and colors

Design Review is required for any multifamily structure containing three or more units. The code does not define or treat courtyard apartments or SROs any differently than other multifamily types.

What is current approach intended to accomplish?

The stated purpose of design review is:

- To promote those qualities in the natural environment which bring value to the community;
- To foster the attractiveness and functional utility of the community as a place to live and work;
- To preserve the special character and quality of Olympia by maintaining the integrity of those areas which have a discernible character or are of special historic significance;
- To raise the level of community expectations for the quality of the built environment;
- To encourage originality and creativity in site planning and architecture;
- To communicate these purposes to the applicant and to assist the applicant in achieving these purposes;
- To preserve and enhance property value;

- To ensure that new developments maintain or improve neighborhood character and livability; and
- To consider the applicants' needs and goals and the broader public impact of any proposal.

Alternative Approaches:

The City of Lacey defines multifamily as three or more units. Design review is required and it includes review of site design and parking; vehicular access and connectivity; pedestrian access and amenities; architectural character and scale; building details, materials, and color; service elements and outdoor storage; privacy and relationship to adjacent sites; landscaping and natural features; site lighting; sign guidelines; and fence standards.

The City of Tumwater defines multifamily as three or more independent units having separate kitchen facilities. Design review is required and includes review of site planning; pedestrian access, amenities, and open space design; parking area design; building design; and lighting.

Alternatives include:

1. Remove some current multifamily design review provisions for courtyard apartments or SRO buildings.
2. Apply the Infill and Other Residential design review provisions instead of the multifamily residential standards to courtyard apartments and SRO buildings.
3. Write specific design review chapters for courtyard apartments or SRO buildings.
4. Use the same design review guidelines for all multifamily development.

Analysis:

The factors for consideration discussed by the Missing Middle Work Group are:

- **Affordability**
Providing greater flexibility in the courtyard apartment and SRO housing provisions may affect affordability, depending on the configuration and existing situation on the property. Olympia has not had applications for courtyard apartments or SRO buildings in quite some time, so it is challenging to know if the existing design review provisions would increase the development costs to the extent that rental rates would increase.
- **Variety of housing types**
Increasing the type of units allowed will increase the variety of housing types in neighborhoods that currently do not have much variety in residential units available. Courtyard apartments could be designed to fit in to existing neighborhoods, such as those located near Olympia High School. There hasn't been much interest in the development of SRO buildings in Olympia, but there has been in some nearby communities in the greater Puget Sound area, so it is conceivable that it could be proposed in the future.
- **Ability to accommodate growth**
Courtyard apartments and SRO housing will accommodate more households without increasing the overall area of the city. They primarily will provide housing for households of 1-2 persons, which was 70.4% of Olympia's households in 2010 Census (*The Profile*, Thurston Regional Planning Council).