



# Tiny Homes, Townhouses, Duplexes, Triplex & Fourplex Units: Design Guidelines

August 2017

**Question:** Do we need additional design guidelines? If yes, should the guidelines be prescriptive or incentive-based?

**Current Olympia Approach:**

Olympia has a layered design review code. There are area design review districts (e.g. Infill and Other Residential) and design review provision for types of uses (e.g. Multifamily Residential). Depending on the type of project and location, there may be multiple sets of design guidelines that have to be satisfied.

Townhouses, duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes are all subject to design review standards. Tiny Houses (on foundations) would be subject to design review if located in a design review district, as is the case with any single family residence.

Current City requirements are generally:

The Infill and Other Residential Design Review provisions address:

- Neighborhood Scale and Character
- Building Orientation and Entries
- Building Modulation and Articulation
- Windows
- Garage Design
- Materials and Colors

Design Review can either be reviewed by staff or the Design Review Board, depending on the scale of the project. Any multifamily building with five (5) units or more, any townhouse building with five (5) units or more, and any multifamily development with twenty (20) units or more is reviewed by the DRB. Smaller residential projects are reviewed by staff.

**What is current approach intended to accomplish?**

The primary goal of design review in residential zoning districts is to ensure the new homes coming into the neighborhood are designed in a manner that integrates well into the surrounding area.

The Design Review chapter (18.100, OMC) provides a purpose statement about why design review is required, including:

- 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:**

Below is a table of some other cities’ approaches:

Jurisdiction/ Design Review Required?	Tiny House (stand alone, on foundation)	Townhouse	Duplex	Triplex	Fourplex
<b>Lacey</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes, when in low density zones	Yes, when in low density zones	Yes
<b>Tumwater</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Thurston County</b> Only in UGAs	No	If 5 units or more (O-UGA)	No	No	No
<b>Bremerton</b>	No	Only if over 4,000 sq. ft. and in the downtown	Only if over 4,000 sq. ft. and in the downtown	Only if over 4,000 sq. ft. and in the downtown	Only if over 4,000 sq. ft. and in the downtown
<b>Vancouver, WA</b>		No	No—but look at design to comply with infill codes	No (Not Allowed in Low Density Zones)	No (Not Allowed in Low Density Zones)
<b>Vancouver, BC</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Seattle</b>	No	Yes (3+ units)	Streamlined design review for multifamily over certain thresholds in certain zones.		
<b>Portland</b>	Can meet adopted Community Design Standards at time of building permit process or go through the Design Review Process using Design Guidelines				

Alternatives include:

1. Retain the requirements of Design Review as it currently exists.
2. Develop separate design review standards for townhouses, duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes.
3. Do not require design review on one or more of these housing types, unless located in a design review district.

## Analysis:

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

- **Affordability**  
Requiring design review may affect affordability, depending on the requirements and the plans of the property owner. When clear, consistent, and concise design review guidelines are adopted it is easier to design them into the project early in the process.
- **Variety of housing types**  
Design review is not likely to increase the variety of housing types in neighborhoods. However, it could improve compatibility of a wider variety of housing types within existing neighborhoods.
- **Ability to accommodate growth**  
Infill housing will accommodate more households without increasing the overall area of the city. These housing types primarily 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). If design review is required, it may decrease the likelihood of these infill housing types being constructed. However, design review can be a great tool to address neighborhood compatibility and to increase the acceptability of more density in existing neighborhoods.