

# HOUSING CHOICE POLICIES

LOCAL PLANNING  
HANDBOOK

## ELEVATE YOUR HOUSING PLAN ELEMENT INTO AN INNOVATIVE HOUSING POLICY

Addressing a full range of housing needs can be complex and challenging. And yet, in the last decade, the need for stable, affordable housing and healthy, resilient communities has only intensified. The need to work together and employ every available strategy and resource to address housing needs is greater than ever. Since your last Comprehensive Plan update:

- 1 Wages have declined while housing costs have increased
- 2 An unprecedented recession hit the nation, fundamentally changing the nature of the housing market
- 3 The number of cities in the region with at least one Area of Concentrated Poverty has increased from 2 (Minneapolis and Saint Paul) in 2000 to 16 in 2010-2014
- 4 The Supreme Court has issued a decision that clarifies the Fair Housing Act and the federal government has issued a rule on Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing
- 5 Resources to support housing, especially housing affordable to households at 60% of the area median income or less, have continued to decrease, especially at the federal level

The last decade has also seen strong research, innovative tools, pioneering research and strong partnerships that support the importance of a variety of housing choices within all communities. This momentum must continue if we want our region to succeed and thrive.

The Housing Element of your 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update is an incredible opportunity to address the mix of housing efforts in your community. Review the Housing Element of your last Comprehensive Plan Update. What's changed? Were there policies left unimplemented? Were there opportunities left unrealized? How did you prioritize housing choice then and how can you prioritize it now to advance your community's goals?

**You can make the Housing Element of your 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update a powerful policy that supports a full range of housing options!**

## WHAT WOULD A HOUSING ELEMENT THAT EXPANDS HOUSING CHOICES LOOK LIKE?

Don't limit your Housing Element to the minimum requirements in the Local Planning Handbook. Use it as an opportunity to elevate the conversation within your community about housing choices. Below is a list of resources that can inform policies and support implementation efforts that expand housing choices.

## POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT EXPAND HOUSING CHOICE

Without a lot of resource commitment, your community can start making incremental changes today. [Specific policies that can expand housing choice](#) include:

1. Reducing minimum lot sizes, setbacks, parking requirements, and other zoning ordinances that limit the types of housing that can be built.
2. Expand allowable housing types within residential zoning districts

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3. Increasing residential densities, utilizing design guidelines to address community concerns with higher density housing.
4. Mixed-income housing policies that increase housing choice and promote resilient, healthy communities.
5. Identifying sites in the community that would be good opportunities for affordable, workforce, or mixed-income housing, and reaching out to experienced developers to explore the options. Developers want to build housing in communities that will support them. Reaching out to developers with your specific locations and types of affordable housing proposals can significantly improve your ability to provide a full range of housing options in your community.
6. Considering recommendations in the recently published [MN Challenge: Addressing Affordable Housing Needs in Minneapolis/St. Paul](#) report.
7. Consider citing comprehensive plan policies in all city staff reports – both in planning reports and other city business reports. This approach keeps the document relevant and the adopted policies, including those in your housing element, at the forefront of development and planning decisions.
8. Consider incorporating an evaluation component into your comprehensive plan, ensuring that policies, including those that expand housing choice, are monitored for effectiveness and accountability.

## OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE MINNESOTA

The Urban Land Institute Minnesota (ULI MN) is a great resource for communities that want to provide a full range of housing options. For policymakers, staff, policy content, and more, explore the following resources:

- The [Regional Council of Mayors \(RCM\)](#), supported by the Urban Land Institute Minnesota, is a voluntary opportunity for mayors to convene and focus on issues of regional significance, such as housing. Since 2004, the RCM has grown from eight mayors to 53 mayors. If your community's mayor does not participate, consider joining the RCM for the breadth and depth of knowledge around housing issues and best practices.
- [Navigating Your Competitive Future](#) is a two-hour interactive workshop with policy leaders and volunteer real estate professionals to focus on the current challenges of development and redevelopment. Participants discuss strategies to position their community to be competitive and resilient and thereby attract quality development.
- The [\(Re\)Development Ready guide](#) outlines policies and practices to support a full range of housing choices, among many other important city goals. This resource is available online at no cost providing specific strategies and how they might apply to your community.
- [Technical Assistance Panels](#) provide an unbiased, interdisciplinary panel of volunteer real estate professionals who address a specific project, development or policy issue. Ranging from a half-day to two days, the workshops are preceded by analysis of background information provided by the sponsor, planning sessions, community interviews, and site tours.
- The [ULI MN Housing Toolbox](#) is an online resource for best practices and policy recommendations that support a full range of housing choices. The Toolbox's content includes information about finance tools for housing choice, preserving existing housing, opportunities for new housing, and supporting homeownership, livable communities, and sustainable development practices.

## LOCAL HOUSING COMMITTEES

Many communities take advantage of the collective wisdom of their residents, business owners, and other stakeholders to provide input on important local policies through organized advisory committee structures. Perhaps your community has an advisory committee structure in place already for issues such as human rights, pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure, or city budgets. Some communities (including [Inver Grove Heights](#) and [Brooklyn Center](#)) have created housing committees to advise policymakers on local housing needs and concerns. Typically appointed by the Mayor and/or City Council, local housing advisory committees create venues to proactively address local housing needs and opportunities with community engagement built into the process.

These types of committees can also enrich the variety of perspectives when discussing housing issues, including renters, seniors, and landlords. If your community has ever experienced a controversial housing proposal, you are aware of the intensive use of resources that can be necessary to resolve disagreements within the community. A local Housing Committee provides a constant link to the community and keeps housing conversations going even when no controversy is on the horizon.

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