

## ZONING AND SUBDIVISION ORDINANCES

Zoning ordinances are one of the most powerful ways local governments regulate development, and they should work to implement the policies in your Comprehensive Plan Update. [Minnesota Statutes § 473.858, subd. 1](#) directs communities to remove conflicts between their comprehensive plans and their zoning ordinances. When creating the Housing Element of your 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update, we recommend that you review your zoning code to ensure your community's policies and ordinances are working together to address housing needs; especially the housing needs of households earning 80% of the Area Median Income or less. Some of the common content within zoning ordinances that can inhibit housing affordability includes:

### Minimum lot sizes

Minimum lot sizes, or similar ordinances requiring minimum lot widths, lengths, or even minimum dwelling unit sizes for (usually single-family) residential land, can significantly limit your ability to provide a full range of housing choices. If your community is home to many low- and moderate-wage jobs, it may be important to create opportunity for affordable homeownership options. If your zoning code contains minimum residential lot or unit sizes, consider whether this requirement is necessary to achieve community goals. Often design standards, form-based zoning ordinances, and other tools can equally well address issues of neighborhood character. You should also consider whether your zoning's existing minimum lot sizes allows for the allowable density range for the corresponding land use guidance in your comprehensive plan.



### Density

Local governments can reduce the cost of building affordable housing through their density policies. While increasing allowable densities does not guarantee the development of affordable housing, particularly in markets with strong demand for multifamily housing, higher densities do allow for the possibility of significant cost savings per unit and provide room for conversations about mixed-income development.

The Land Use Policies in *Thrive MSP 2040* contain minimum density requirements related to your community's [Community Designation](#) and consistency with the [2040 Housing Policy Plan](#). However, we strongly encourage you to consider planning for greater densities, and a range of densities, wherever appropriate. Density increases not only the possibility of addressing affordable housing needs, but also your potential for tax base, commercial development, and amenities such as transit service.

Density bonuses, or allowing increased density for certain types of proposals such as affordable or mixed-income housing, also provide a way to encourage a full range of housing options.

Many resources are available to address concerns about property values, crime, traffic and an increased need for local resources. Properly applied, increased residential densities can have a positive impact on your community's goals.

### Missing Middle

"Missing middle" housing types – more dense than a single family home but less dense than a 4 to 5 story mid-rise building - are well represented in the urban core, where four-plexes and small buildings with 6-10 units were built frequently in the early 20th century and again in the 1960s. These types of buildings are rarely built today, with the exception of unique infill development in urban areas.

One of the reasons these housing types are rarely built today is because zoning often limits large areas with only one kind of density, low or medium-high. It can be tempting in suburban contexts to concentrate medium-high density residential

in certain areas, and keep single-family neighborhoods isolated from other housing types. The logic is reasonable: multifamily housing should be concentrated around amenities, jobs, and transportation options. And single family homeowners often want to live next to other single family homes.

But there are many ways to subtly increase density that can have a real impact without altering the character of the neighborhood.



This suburban subdivision is full of large lot single family homes. But look closely at the property in the upper left corner – the two driveways reveal a two-unit zero lot line structure, also known as a side-by-side duplex. Corner lots such as this provide a unique opportunity to build higher density housing that blends in seamlessly with the character of the neighborhood.

As you plan residential densities for your 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update, consider flexible guidance that allows some subtle mixing of densities and housing types that have similar form. Strong single family neighborhoods will maintain their desirability even if some slightly higher density developments are allowed within them. Where in your community might 4-6 units per acre help create more housing options and more inclusive communities?

### Parking minimums

The cost of providing parking, especially structured or underground parking, for a residential development can be significant. Developers pass these costs to future residents, inhibiting affordability. Many communities across the nation, including [Minneapolis](#), have reviewed their parking requirements and made adjustments that reduce or even eliminate parking minimums or introduce parking maximums.

Planning parking is tricky. Changing demographics, new transit opportunities, and funding requirements can all influence parking needs. The Housing Element of your 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update is an important opportunity to [explore ways to tie parking requirements to actual need](#) and increase your community's ability to provide a full range of housing options.

### Mixed-income housing policies

Mixed-income housing policies, also known as inclusionary housing policies, have recently gained traction in our region to address the desire for healthy, economically competitive communities. Mixed-income housing policies, whether voluntary or mandatory, address market-rate and publicly subsidized housing proposals, and relate to both rental and ownership opportunities.

The Metropolitan Council has partnered with [Urban Land Institute Minnesota \(ULI MN\)](#) and [Family Housing Fund](#) to support the growing interest in mixed-income housing opportunities. You can find [policy recommendations](#) and a [Mixed Income Feasibility Calculator](#) on the Housing Counts website.

### Distance minimums for certain types of housing

Some communities adopt zoning ordinances that limit how close certain types of housing can be to one another. For example, some cities restrict housing for individuals recently released from prison, transitional housing for households experiencing homelessness, or other types of supportive housing to locations that are at least 350 feet from similar housing.

Communities may wish to consider the impacts of concentrating high-need residents in one neighborhood. Important questions to consider include:

- What support services are located nearby and may benefit more residents if additional supportive housing is created?
- What are the impacts of existing supportive housing and what is the evidence that additional supportive housing would increase real or perceived negative impacts?
- What is the current health and resiliency of the neighborhood in question? Is it relatively stable with a mix of uses and incomes? Is there strong community capital? Research shows that strong, balanced communities are less likely to experience negative impact from affordable or supportive housing nearby.



### Accessory dwelling units

Accessory dwelling units, also referred to as “granny flats” or “mother-in-law apartments,” can add modest density and housing choices in a community without having a noticeable impact on the visual character of the community. Accessory dwelling units are contained within single-family home properties, and can be within the existing dwelling unit, connected to the existing dwelling unit or a detached garage, or detached entirely.

In 2014, the city of [Minneapolis](#) adopted a [zoning ordinance permitting accessory dwelling units](#) in some circumstances. As you update your Comprehensive Plan, consider whether accessory dwelling units are a reasonable strategy for your community to expand housing choices.

Want to learn more? Contact your [sector representative](#) for additional technical assistance.

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