

Home in Tacoma Project

Action is necessary as Tacoma faces a housing crisis with people finding it harder to find housing that is affordable, particularly if they have fixed or lower incomes. Housing provides basic human needs and connects us with family, friends, community, transportation, employment and more, which matters to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our community members.

As part of Tacoma’s Affordable Housing Action Strategy, the **Home In Tacoma Project** is forwarding recommended changes to Tacoma’s housing growth strategy, policies and programs to increase housing supply, affordability and choice for current and future residents.

PLANNING COMMISSION DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

March 3, 2021

WHAT’S IN THE HOME IN TACOMA PROJECT PACKAGE

As directed by the City Council, Tacoma’s Planning Commission has developed policy recommendations to help meet Tacoma’s housing needs and aspirations for our neighborhoods. The recommendations were informed by extensive stakeholder engagement and technical analysis. The Commission is currently seeking public input on the recommendations as well as on two housing growth scenarios through April 9, 2021. After the Public Hearing process, the Commission will finalize and forward its recommendations to the City Council. City Council action on this proposed new housing vision will initiate a second phase of public discussion and analysis in support of zoning changes, standards updates and other actions.

Proposals would change policies in Tacoma’s Comprehensive Plan – the City’s blueprint for community growth. If adopted, these policies would initiate changes to Tacoma’s housing zoning, standards and programs.

For more analysis and the full proposals, see the staff report, Housing Action Plan, proposed Comprehensive Plan changes, and environmental determination. The package also includes near-term code changes to clarify implementation of current housing rules and legislative guidance.

A NEW HOUSING GROWTH VISION

Utilize housing growth to create neighborhoods that are inclusive, welcoming to our diverse community, resilient, thriving, distinctive and walkable, with robust community amenities and a range of housing choices and costs.

The recommendations propose **a new vision for housing growth** that would allow Tacoma to adapt to changing housing needs by updating the current model that designates the majority of residential land for single-family houses. The recommendations would allow diverse housing types throughout our neighborhoods and mid-scale multifamily housing near shopping and transit. Diverse housing types, including smaller, attached or clustered housing such as duplex, triplex, cottages and smaller multifamily buildings, can increase housing choices and introduce a broader range of housing prices in our neighborhoods. The City can also take actions to ensure that housing growth meets multiple community goals, target unmet need for affordable housing, and put in place anti-displacement measures and other tools to ensure that all groups can benefit from housing growth.

UPDATING HOUSING POLICIES

To support the new housing growth vision, the proposals include updates to City policies, including:

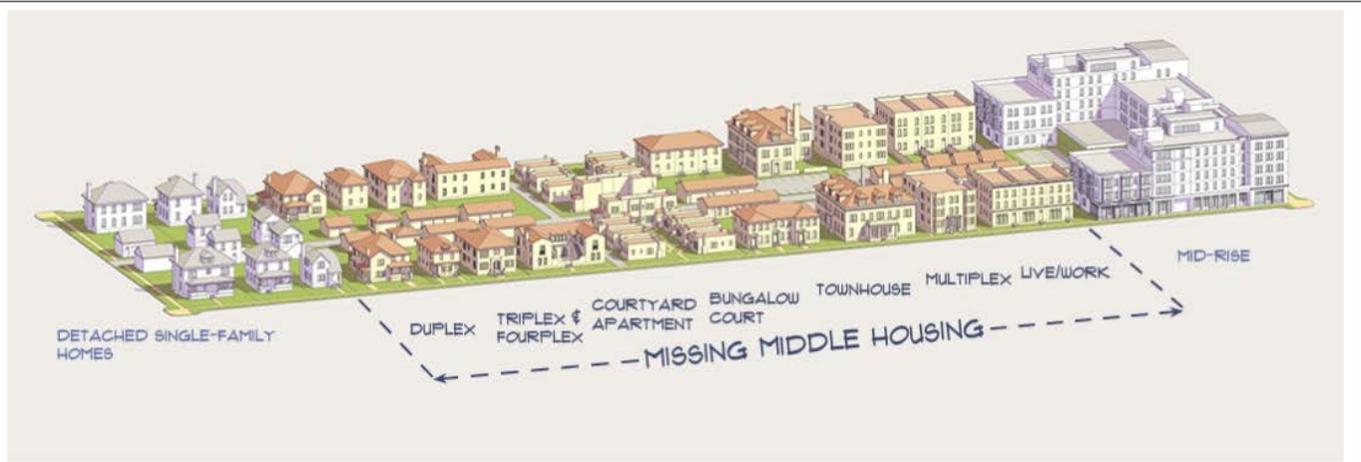
- Increase housing options throughout the City
 - Renew Tacoma’s longstanding vision for housing growth Downtown and in Centers
 - Expand Missing Middle housing options in Tacoma’s neighborhoods
 - Plan for the impacts of growth on urban infrastructure such as sidewalks, traffic and utilities
- Ensure that new housing is well designed and complements Tacoma’s distinctive neighborhoods
 - Use design standards to ensure that infill complements neighborhood scale and patterns
 - Provide for smooth transitions from low-scale to higher scale areas by preventing abrupt changes
 - Protect the character of historic districts and promote reuse of existing structures
- Evolve our housing vision to be more inclusive of all members of our community
 - Address inequitable access to opportunity in Tacoma’s neighborhoods
 - Shift regulatory language away from “family” to allow households to define themselves
 - Address lingering impacts of systemic racism and facilitate homeownership and wealth-building opportunities for people of color
 - Promote accessibility for people of different physical abilities
- Recognize that housing is a fundamental building block of community that affects multiple goals
 - Promote housing in Tacoma as an alternative to urban sprawl, building on long-term public investments
 - Build sustainable and resilient housing to address the climate emergency, urban forestry goals, and protect the health of the Puget Sound
 - Promote infill in walkable areas with transportation choices to reduce car dependency

ENABLING MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

The recommendations call for implementing the new housing growth vision by enabling diverse housing types, often called Missing Middle Housing, throughout Tacoma’s neighborhoods.

The term “Missing Middle Housing” describes a long-term trend in many American cities of limiting smaller, attached or clustered housing types. Many cities have set aside most of their neighborhoods for single-family houses, and directed tall buildings to high-density areas. What’s missing is space for mid-scale housing types, and the housing choices that they can provide.

Tacoma’s land use framework largely fits this model. Today, the City sets aside about 75 percent of our housing land supply for single-family houses. This was not always the case. Many of Tacoma’s most walkable and sought after neighborhoods, built before single-family zoning, offer a wide range of housing choices. Compatible design features, building height and scale, and attention to transitions help to create a strong and cohesive neighborhood identity, while the housing options support affordability, diversity, walkability and thriving neighborhood businesses.



“Missing Middle is a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types compatible in scale with single-family homes that help meet the growing demand for walkable urban living.” www.missingmiddlehousing.com

Proposed New Residential Land Use Designations

Recommended changes to the Comprehensive Plan support future zoning changes allowing diverse housing types (Missing Middle Housing) throughout the City’s neighborhoods. The proposal would create two new residential land use designations supporting diverse housing types, which would replace the current Single-family and Multi-family Low-Density Land Use designations, and establish infill design principles.

Land Use Designations	Housing types supported	Standards
Low-Scale Residential INTENT: Support diverse housing types in structures that are compatible in scale with houses.	Single-family Duplex Triplex Townhouses Cottage housing Shared housing <u>In some circumstances:</u> Fourplex Small multifamily Tiny/mobile homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building height and scale similar to houses • Accessory structures in rear yard • Limit the size/bulk of structures • Usable open space/yards • Pedestrian orientation to the sidewalk & street • Moderate onsite parking
<i>Standards common to both</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrian orientation to the sidewalk & street • Street trees • Reduced lot sizes and setbacks • Encourage alley access for cars • Design standards for specific housing types
Mid-scale Residential INTENT: Support mid-scale multifamily housing in areas close to shopping and transit.	Housing types listed above Mid-scale multifamily Live-work Limited retail/office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building height, width and depth mid-scale between houses and Centers • Transition standards to abutting low-scale areas • Smaller/shared yards and open space • Moderate to low onsite parking

Examples of Low-scale Residential Housing Types



House & ADU



Duplex, triplex



Cottage housing



Fourplex



Small lot house



Tiny/mobile house



Townhouses



Small multifamily

Illustration of Mid-scale Residential Housing and Transition to Low-scale Residential



Housing growth scenarios

The Planning Commission is seeking input on two housing growth scenarios to help determine the housing types and scale to be allowed throughout the City’s neighborhoods. In both scenarios:

- Single-family and Multifamily Low-Density Land Use Designations are replaced by the proposed Low-scale and Mid-scale Residential Land Use Designations, allowing more housing choices citywide
- Areas where housing is not the primary goal are excluded (such as parks, commercial & industrial areas)
- No changes are proposed to Downtown and Centers which already support high-density housing
- Areas near Centers, Corridors, and (in Scenario 2) bus routes are proposed for Mid-scale Residential

Scenario 1: Evolve Housing Choices	Scenario 2: Transform Housing Choices
Total Missing Middle Applicability area: about 15,500 acres (roughly half of the City’s total area)	
Current land use designations: 90% Single-family, 10% Multifamily (Low-density)	
Low-scale Residential 75%	Low-scale Residential 40%
Mid-scale Residential 25%	Mid-scale Residential 60%

The difference between the scenarios is the extent of each of the two proposed new Residential designations. Both scenarios include significant new housing options, with the most substantial increases in Scenario 2. The Commission will use public input to final recommendations.

Change will not happen overnight. These actions would open the door to housing growth, but we recognize change is incremental. Encouraging property owners and developers to build diverse housing types will take time. Nonetheless, the recommendations would position Tacoma to adapt more flexibly to meeting community housing needs into the future. To view the scenarios and learn about the pace of development we expect could result, visit www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma.

Getting housing growth right

Getting neighborhood growth right means making sure that we grow smart. The recommendations call for balance between housing growth and design, livability, historic preservation, urban forestry, public infrastructure and services, and other community goals. The recommendations include infill design principles so that new housing complements neighborhood scale and patterns, and provides transitions from higher-scale to lower-scale areas. Proposals include actions to reduce demolitions of viable structures, to ensure that housing growth is supported by infrastructure and services, and steps to assist people of color and others facing economic barriers to access housing and build family wealth.

City Council action on these options will set the vision for housing growth and establish the desired housing types and scale. This will initiate the next phase of public engagement and policy analysis, including:

- Zoning changes
- Design standards updates
- Actions to ensure that urban infrastructure and services are adequate to support growth
- Potential phasing of implementation, if directed by the City Council
- Actions to address the potential demolition of viable structures
- Actions to create green, sustainable and resilient housing
- Actions to promote physical accessibility
- Review of City permitting and processes
- Education and technical support for developers and the public

MAKING HOUSING MORE AFFORDABLE

Allowing diverse housing types is **an essential step toward meeting housing affordability goals**. However, by itself the for-profit housing market is not likely to produce housing affordable to moderate and lower income Tacoma residents. To address this unmet need, the recommendations call for **expansion of regulatory affordable housing incentives and requirements**, as well as **anti-displacement actions** intended to help lower-income residents remain in growing neighborhoods. These tools, in combination with increased public investment and other actions called for by the Affordable Housing Action Strategy, allow the City to partner with developers to make a significant difference in affordable housing creation.

These programs enable the City to partner with housing developers to create affordable units as growth occurs. Our analysis of Tacoma's housing market show that the market is strong enough to support expanded use of these tools. There are multiple policy options allowing the City to develop an approach that works for our market and community goals.

Affordability recommendations

- Strengthen policy guidance for affordability tools and set affordable housing production targets
- Update Tacoma’s existing affordable housing incentives and requirements to reflect lessons learned
- Recognizing current market strength, consider options to expand regulatory affordable housing tools
- Consider expansion of the City’s Multifamily Tax Exemption Program, 12-year affordable housing option
- Establish an anti-displacement strategy to help lower-income residents stay in growing neighborhoods
- Initiate actions to promote access to housing and wealth-building for people of color

If the City Council adopts these policies, the City will integrate updates and expansions to these programs in the next phase of work.

What is in the public review package?

Staff Report: Providing the policy basis and an overview of the process

Housing Action Plan: The analysis and full list of housing growth strategy actions to be implemented over time

One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan: Housing Element, Urban Form Element and Design and Development Element changes to reflect policy direction

Near-term code changes: Changes to address known code issues, and for consistency with state law

SEPA determination: City review of potential environmental impacts and mitigation actions as warranted

What comes next?

The Commission invites the community to ***make your voice heard on Tacoma’s housing future***. While there are many questions to address in developing zoning, standards and other implementation tools, the Commission believes that these recommendations will result in more housing supply, choice and affordability throughout the City that is compatible with existing neighborhoods. This will help everyone, as we all depend on housing, and support Tacoma’s vision of being an equitable, inclusive, sustainable and vibrant City. Stay involved!

Learn more and provide your comments on these proposals:

The full proposals are at www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma.

INFORMATION MEETING: Thursday, March 18th at 5:30 p.m. on ZOOM

PUBLIC HEARING: Wednesday, April 7th beginning at 5:30 p.m. on ZOOM

COMMENTS DEADLINE: Friday, April 9th to planning@cityoftacoma.org or Planning Commission, 747 Market Street Room 345, Tacoma WA 98402

The City Council is scheduled to take action on these proposals in June 2021. The City Council has directed staff and the Commission to provide zoning and development standards updates to implement the adopted policy direction by December of 2021.

