Austin

Missing Middle and Mixed-Use Zoning Study

January 2026

Contributors

Prepared By:

Austin Planning

Paul Ray Books, Senior Planner

Jordan Feldman, Principal Planner

Jonathan Lee, Senior Planner

Marcelo Molina, Undergraduate Intern

Alan Pani, Principal Planner

Makayla Ponce, Planner III

Warlan Rivera, Planner II

Contents

Contents

Unless otherwise noted, images in this document were taken by City of Austin staff and are property of the City of Austin.

Missing Middle and Mixed-Use Zoning Study Summary

The Missing Middle and Mixed-Use Zoning Study is intended to evaluate Austin's existing zoning toolbox and identify opportunities to create additional zoning tools that will better achieve City policy goals related to developing a complete, connected city with a broader range of housing options and economic opportunities. The study focuses on two significant areas with opportunity for improvement: 1) creation of new zoning tools that will better support transit-oriented mixed-use development, and 2) creation of new zoning tools that will better support development of new types of medium-density housing, sometimes referred to as "missing middle" housing. The study provides an overview of previous direction from City decision makers, analyzes the limitations of Austin's current zoning tools, presents peer city best practices, provides recommendations for development of new zoning tools, and identifies next steps. Should Austin City Council choose to initiate Land Development Code amendments based on the recommendations of the study, additional engagement and testing would occur before detailed proposed code amendments are presented to the public and City Council later in 2026.

Existing Conditions

A key feature of the City of Austin's Land Development Code, adopted in 1984, is its separation of commercial uses, offices, single-family homes, and apartments from one another. While some uses do need separation, the code's strict separation of uses reflects outdated planning principles and is misaligned with current City plans and policy goals. By prioritizing single-use development over mixed-use development, the code has contributed to Austin growing in a way where many residents live far from where they work, play, and access goods and services.

The code was also written to support only two main housing types: single-family homes and large apartment complexes. This has left few options for those looking for a home that is less expensive than a single-family home and not in a large complex. **Housing types like townhomes, cottage courts, fourplexes, and small multi-unit buildings, often called missing middle housing, are indeed missing in Austin – only three percent of Austin's current housing stock is in the missing middle range of 3-16 units.**

Prior Council and Commission Action

Within the past three years, Austin's City Council and land use commissions have initiated several amendments to the Land Development Code to address the need for zoning that supports missing middle and mixed-use development:

Code amendments initiated by City Council

- Home Options for Mobility and Equity (HOME) – Resolution No. 20230720-126 – Initiated July 2023
- Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) Amendments – Resolution No. 20230309-016 – Initiated March 2023
- Single-Family Ownership Bonus Program – Resolution No. 20230608-040 – Initiated June 2023
- Coffee Shops in Residential Areas – Resolution No. 20251009-024 – Initiated October 2025

Code amendments initiated or recommended by Planning Commission

- Town Zoning – Initiated April 2023
- Restrict Noxious Land Uses – Initiated November 2022
- Expand Non-Residential Use Allowances in Mixed-Use Zoning – Recommended October 2025

Code amendments recommended by Zoning and Platting Commission (ZAP) and Codes and Ordinances Joint Committee (COJC)

- Restrict Some Commercial Uses on Imagine Austin Corridors – Recommended for initiation in October 2024 by ZAP and in December 2024 by Codes and Ordinances Joint Committee
- Allow Some Commercial Uses in Residential Zones – Recommended for initiation in December 2024 by ZAP and Codes and Ordinances Joint Committee

Recommended Approach

To effectively respond to these separate policy directions and further City goals related to housing supply, affordability, and transit-supportive land uses, Austin Planning staff recommends creating new base zoning districts that permit a wide range of missing middle and mixed-use development types that are generally prohibited or disincentivized by the current zoning code. These include townhouses, cottage courts, house-scale multi-unit buildings, and mixed-use buildings, such as live-work units and apartments with ground-floor retail. Going forward, the new base zones could be used instead of the current ones to create complete neighborhoods where people can live, work, shop, and play.

The proposed zones would also support recent Council-adopted initiatives, such as Site Plan Lite Phase 2 and the single-stair allowance in the International Building Code (IBC), by enabling the kinds of development that these adopted policies are designed to facilitate. The proposed mixed-use zones also provide a tool to align zoning with new allowances created by Senate Bill 840 (SB 840), which requires cities to allow multifamily and mixed-use development in commercial zoning, while ensuring development still meets the City's goals. The recommendations in this study build on the extensive work and engagement done through efforts to update the Land Development Code since 2012, including the 2019 Land Development Code Revision proposal.

Staff recommends that Council provide additional guidance to move forward with code changes establishing the new zoning tools proposed in this study.

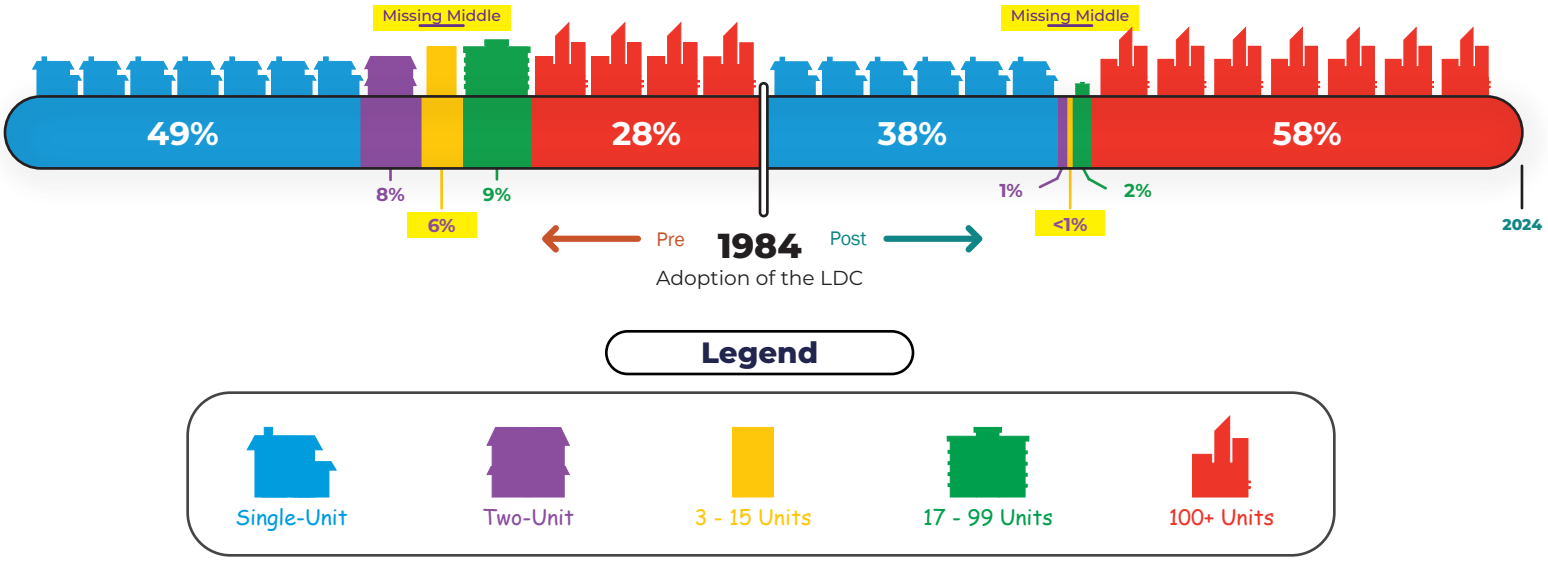
Limitations of Current Base Zones

Recent reforms, including HOME, ETOD amendments, Density Bonus 90 (DB90), removal of parking requirements, and updated compatibility standards will enable progress towards City housing supply, affordability, and transit-supportive land-use goals. The code, however, still presents obstacles to offering more housing choices and creating more walkable neighborhoods. Among the most significant barriers are the code's outdated base zoning districts, which remain substantially unchanged since the code was adopted over four decades ago.

Limitation: Base zones limit housing choice to single-family homes or large apartment complexes

Existing residential base zones are designed for either single-family homes or large, suburban-style apartment complexes. While HOME reforms have allowed more homes in single-family neighborhoods, builders mainly construct detached homes that remain unaffordable for many. More housing types are needed to provide greater housing choice and attainability in residential neighborhoods.

Since the code was adopted in 1984, less than one percent of housing units built have been in the missing middle range of 3-16 units, and over 95 percent have been single-family homes or units in apartment complexes with over 100 units. The limited missing middle housing that does exist in Austin was mainly built either before the current code or in Planned Unit Development (PUD) districts like the Mueller development. Over half (58 percent) of Austin's existing housing stock was built under the current Land Development Code.



Source: City of Austin 2024 Land Use Database

Limitation: Base zones allow auto-oriented development where inappropriate

Commercial base zones allow low-density, auto-oriented land uses like drive-thrus, self-storage units, and gas stations in locations where these uses may not be appropriate. The zones also lack pedestrian-oriented urban design standards, though Subchapter E of the Land Development Code does require varying degrees of pedestrian-oriented design features depending on the context. This has in some cases lead to car-dependent, suburban-style development where the City's plans instead envision walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.

Examples of auto-oriented commercial uses

Limitation: Mixed-use is prohibited in many places

Base zones that allow mixed-use development are limited to properties in Downtown, along major highways, or in special regulating districts. While the Mixed-Use (-MU) combining district allows mixed-use development by right in more parts of the city, it has suburban development standards, allows auto-oriented uses, and makes the code more complicated by applying on top of base zone regulations.

Much of the mixed-use development built in Austin was enabled by specialized zoning like Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) and regulating plans. Many of Austin's mixed-use places outside Downtown are in these specialized zoning districts, including North Burnet/Gateway, East Riverside, Mueller, the Triangle, and the areas around the Crestview, East Martin Luther King Jr., and Plaza Saltillo CapMetro Red Line stations. Density bonus programs, such as Vertical Mixed-Use (VMU), have also led to more mixed-use development along certain commercial corridors. Though these tools do support mixed-use development in certain areas, the code lacks a generalized transit-oriented mixed-use base zone that could be applied more broadly.

While Senate Bill 840 allows mixed-use residential development in commercial and office zones, new mixed-use zones are still needed to limit auto-oriented uses in urban areas, create a pedestrian-oriented built form, and require ground-floor retail where appropriate.

Missing Middle and Mixed-Use Building Types

Missing middle and mixed-use buildings form the foundation of walkable, transit-oriented neighborhoods in cities across the country and worldwide. Here are examples of common building types that are not currently encouraged by the existing Land Development Code, but that could be encouraged through the creation and application of new types of zones:

Cottage Courts

Cottage courts contain a group of small- to medium-sized homes surrounding a common green space. The green space enhances community by promoting casual interaction among neighbors and providing a safe place for kids to play. Smaller lot sizes and less private outdoor space can also make cottage court homes more affordable than comparable single-family homes.

Townhomes

Townhomes are the most popular missing middle housing type, in part because of the flexibility to either own the townhome and the land under it just like a detached single-family home, or share land ownership and common area maintenance with neighbors in a condo regime. Townhomes fit in a variety of neighborhood contexts from lower-density residential to medium-density mixed-use.

Stacked Flats

Stacked flats are a small multifamily development type appropriate in lower- and medium-density residential and mixed-use neighborhoods. Buildings typically have four or more units, and units are stacked on top of one another, making them more affordable than townhomes and also more accessible for people with disabilities.

Small-Scale Mixed-Use Buildings

Small-scale mixed-use buildings provide opportunities for more housing on the same site as neighborhood-serving commercial uses like corner stores, coffee shops, or physicians' offices. These buildings can bring everyday goods and services closer to where people live, helping create more complete neighborhoods.

Low- to Mid-Rise Mixed-Use Buildings

Buildings with several stories are the foundations of walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods in cities worldwide. In some locations, single-use buildings like offices or apartments are appropriate, while in other locations, a mix of uses in the same building should be required to create highly walkable and transit-oriented places.

Benefits of Missing Middle & Mixed-Use Development

Missing middle housing bridges the gap between single-family homes and large apartment buildings. These housing types offer many benefits, including:

Additional housing choices:
Different household types (singles, couples, families, seniors) have varying space requirements and preferences that a mix of housing types can accommodate.

More attainable housing:
Missing middle housing often sells or rents for less than comparable single-family homes, making housing in residential neighborhoods affordable to more people.

More access to opportunity:
Homebuyers and renters would have more opportunities to live in quiet, safe neighborhoods with good access to schools, jobs, parks, and other amenities.

Mixed-use zoning departs from traditional zoning by allowing residential, commercial, and office uses to exist on one property. Examples include live/work units, apartments with ground floor retail, or larger sites with multiple buildings and uses. Mixed-use zoning offers numerous benefits, including:

Increased walkability:
Residents of mixed-use neighborhoods can easily access work, shopping, restaurants, groceries, and other daily needs on foot, by bike, via transit, or with a short car trip. This enhances quality of life and reduces traffic, pollution, and parking demand.

Extended activity hours:
Buildings with multiple uses have more active hours, which stimulates local businesses, fosters vibrant street life, enables transit service improvements, and enhances public safety as more people move through the city on foot throughout the day.

Environmental benefits:
Mixed-use urban infill development reduces urban sprawl, per-capita resource consumption, infrastructure costs, and transportation emissions.

Peer City Best Practices

While Austin has been a national leader in land use reform in recent years, its Land Development Code is still out of step with missing middle and mixed-use zoning best practices in peer cities.

Missing middle best practice: Allow a range of missing middle housing types

Compared to Austin, peer cities such as Seattle, Washington; Portland, Oregon; Sacramento, California; and St. Paul, Minnesota have zoning that permits a wider range of missing middle housing in more places:

- **Seattle**: Four homes are allowed on a typical residential lot; eight homes are allowed per lot within a quarter mile of transit.
- **Portland**: Up to four homes are allowed by right; six homes are allowed if half are affordable.
- **Sacramento**: Allows missing middle housing citywide. While there is no cap on the number of units allowed, a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) limit determines how big buildings can be, which affects the number of units that are feasible.
- **St. Paul**: Allows up to five homes per lot in lower-density residential neighborhoods.

Mixed-use best practice: Allow residential uses wherever commercial or office uses are allowed

Many peer cities across the country, including Portland, Seattle, Sacramento, Charlotte, and Atlanta, allow residential uses by right in commercial and office zones. Other cities, including Raleigh, only have mixed-use and residential base zones, with special districts for industry, agriculture, or other specialized uses. Many cities require ground-floor retail in pedestrian-oriented commercial districts, either through base zones or overlays.

Due to Senate Bill 840, Austin also now allows multifamily and mixed-use residential development by right in office and commercial zones. The Land Development Code, however, does not yet reflect this allowance, and additional zoning tools are still needed to encourage development that supports City goals, such as limiting auto-oriented uses in urban areas, creating a pedestrian-oriented built form, and requiring ground-floor retail where appropriate.

Recommendation: Create New Missing Middle and Mixed-Use Zones

The primary recommendation of the study is to create new base zones that fully enable missing middle and mixed-use development. The zones could be used going forward as an alternative to existing single-family, multifamily, commercial, and office zones and could be applied to specific areas through rezonings initiated by the City or property owners. The mixed-use zones also offer a tool to align zoning with Senate Bill 840 and ensure development meets City goals.

Middle Residential (MR) Zones

Staff recommends exploring the creation of two new Middle Residential (MR) zones that would allow townhomes, cottage courts, and house-scale buildings with multiple units. The number of units allowed would be tied to lot size. The recommended lower-density zone, MR-1, would allow four units on a minimum size 5,750 sq. ft. lot, and the recommended higher density zone, MR-2, would allow six units on the same size lot. Other development standards would remain the same across both zones. These zones would create opportunities for more housing options in lower- to mid-density residential neighborhoods. They also would fully enable the kind of development that Site Plan Lite Phase 2, adopted in March 2025, was designed to facilitate through streamlined permitting.

Mixed-Use (MX) Zones

Staff recommends exploring the creation of at least four new Mixed-Use (MX) zones that would allow a mix of transit-oriented uses and prohibit auto-oriented uses. The recommended lower density zones, MX-1A and MX-1B, would support live/work, small-scale neighborhood retail, offices, missing middle-scale housing, and low-rise multifamily buildings. These zones could be appropriate in low- to medium-density areas. The recommended higher-density zones, MX-2A and MX-2B, would permit buildings several stories tall with homes, offices, hotels, and pedestrian-oriented ground floor spaces. The MX-2 zones would also support single-stair buildings up to five stories that were allowed by City Council in April 2025. “A” zones would allow but not require mixed-use and would be appropriate in most contexts. “B” zones would require active ground floor uses like retail and would be most appropriate near frequent transit routes. Additional zones that allow more height could also be considered.

Recommended Middle Residential (MR) Zones

Building height
A maximum height of 35 ft. would match the height limit of single-family zones.

Number of units
Lot size would determine how many homes are allowed, with more units allowed as lot size increases. MR-1 could allow construction of up to four units on a minimum size 5,750 sq. ft. lot. MR-2 could allow up to six units on a 5,750 sq. ft. lot. Further testing is needed to ensure support for intended missing middle types on various lot sizes.

Setbacks and frontages
Buildings would have 10 ft. minimum front setbacks, front-facing entrances, and frontages such as porches that project into the front setback and engage with the street.

Driveway, parking, and garage design
Parking would be to the rear of the site, accessed via alley, if available, or a single driveway if an alley is not available.

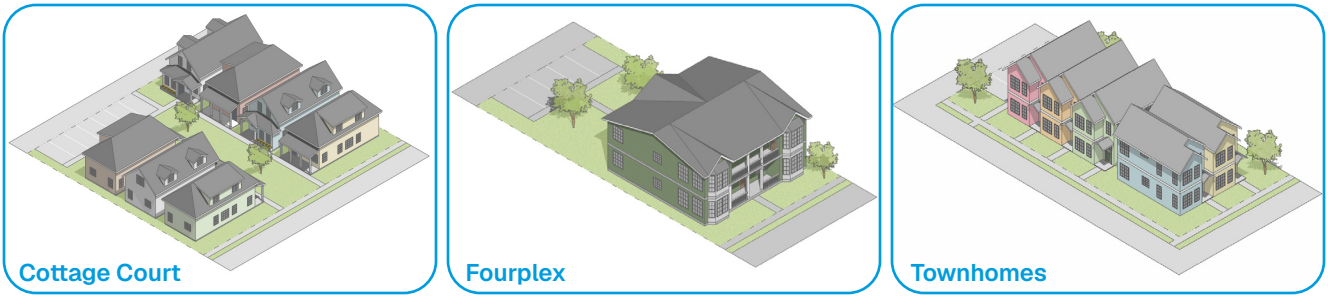
Specific-to-use regulations
Specialized standards for townhomes and cottage courts would ensure the intended building form.

Floor area ratio (FAR) – *Needs further analysis*
FAR limits would be tailored to produce an average unit size that addresses policy goals, such as creating family-sized units. MR-2 could allow more FAR than MR-1. More FAR could also be allowed with more units.

Impervious cover (IC) – *Needs further analysis*
Impervious cover limits would be calibrated to enable missing middle housing types. MR-2 would potentially allow more IC than MR-1. Allowing more IC with more units could also be considered.

Example Development Types

MR-1



MR-2

Additional recommendation: Right-size non-zoning regulations for missing middle
Engage partner departments to address aspects of technical codes, criteria manuals, and development review processes that may present barriers to missing middle. Topics to discuss include utility layouts and rate classification, fire department access, and allowing missing middle housing and live/work units to use the International Residential Code (IRC).

Additional recommendation: Explore a missing middle density bonus
Study the feasibility of a missing middle density bonus to create opportunities for affordable housing in smaller-scale buildings.

Recommended Mixed-Use (MX) Zones

Allows a mix of uses	Requires a mix of uses and an active ground-floor	Existing zone of comparable scale
Mixed-Use 1A	Mixed-Use 1B	Neighborhood Office (NO), Limited Office (LO), and Neighborhood Commercial (LR)
Mixed-Use 2A	Mixed-Use 2B	General Office (GO), Community Commercial (GR), Commercial Services (CS)

Recommended Development Standards and Considerations

Building height
Maximum height of 45 ft. in MX-1 and 65ft. in MX-2. Consider additional mixed-use zones with greater heights.

Mix of uses
Allow a mix of transit supportive uses in all MX zones; require an active ground floor with pedestrian-oriented uses in MX-1B and MX-2B.

Setbacks and frontages
Buildings close to the street with required frontages (e.g. porches, shopfronts) would create an urban built form with pedestrian-oriented design.

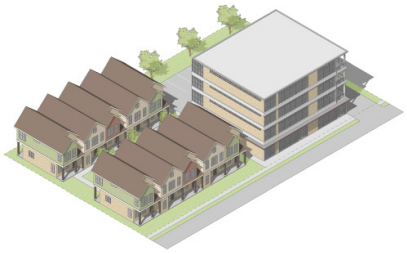
Impervious cover – *Needs further analysis*
Analyze impervious cover limits that would enable intended development types.

Relationship to density bonuses – *Needs further analysis*
Zones could be paired with existing bonuses such as DB90, DBETOD, or future bonus programs.

Example Development Types

MX-1

Mixed-Use 1A – Townhomes and a four-story office building



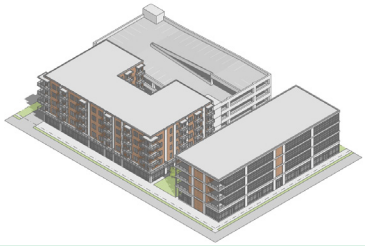
MX-1A

Mixed-Use 1B – Four-story mixed-use building with ground-floor retail and three floors of housing

MX-1B

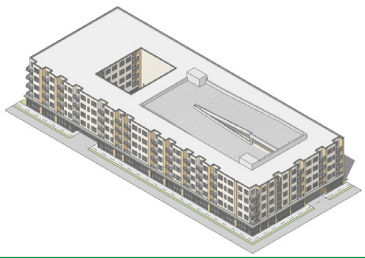
MX-2

Mixed-Use 2A – Five-story office and apartment buildings with ground floor retail



MX-2A

Mixed-Use 2B – Five-story apartment building with ground floor retail



MX-2B

Next Steps

Should Council choose to initiate Land Development Code amendments based on the study, staff would engage community stakeholders and conduct additional analysis and testing before bringing back a detailed proposal. Analysis and engagement activities would include:

- Refining initial recommendations presented in the study with the support of consultants
- Engaging the community to share information about missing middle and mixed-use development and gather feedback to inform final recommendations
- Conducting testing sessions with City staff and external stakeholders to determine whether the proposed development standards fully enable the envisioned development types on a variety of sites
- Completing a pro forma analysis to determine whether the envisioned development types are financially feasible to build under the proposed regulations
- Consulting with partner City departments to evaluate changes and coordinate any necessary updates to related regulations and business processes

Timeline

Should City Council initiate code amendments in early 2026, staff anticipates conducting engagement, testing, and proposal development on the following timeline:

Mixed-Use	Further develop and test mixed-use zoning districts and gather community feedback	January-July 2026
	Release final staff recommendation	August 2026
	Public hearing and adoption process	September-October 2026
Missing Middle	Further develop and test missing middle zoning districts and gather community feedback	March-September 2026
	Release final staff recommendation	October 2026
	Public hearing and adoption process	November-December 2026

1

Purpose & Existing Conditions

In this chapter

1.1 Response to Prior Council and Commission Action

Within the past three years, City Council and land use commissions have initiated or recommended amendments to the Land Development Code to address the need for zoning that supports mixed-use and missing middle development. To effectively respond to this guidance and support the creation of complete neighborhoods, Austin Planning staff recommends that Council initiate code changes to proceed with the work recommended by this study.

The following pages have more information about each policy direction and how the study's recommendations are responsive.

Council Action

Home Options for Mobility and Equity (HOME)
Initiated by City Council Resolution No. 20230720-126

On July 20, 2023, City Council initiated changes known as HOME to allow more housing options on properties zoned single-family. The goals included making homeownership more attainable for middle-income earners, allowing families to have multigenerational housing on a single property, and allowing homeowners to generate income from their properties.

Previous code amendments addressed aspects of the resolution:

- HOME Phase 1, adopted on December 7, 2023, allows up to three homes on single-family lots, including tiny homes.
- HOME Phase 2, adopted on May 16, 2024, reduces the minimum lot size required to build one unit on a single-family lot from 5,750 sq. ft. to 1,800 sq. ft.

This study addresses the remaining direction from the HOME resolution to allow single-family zoned properties to be developed with a variety of housing types, such as row houses, townhomes, triplexes and fourplexes, garden homes, and cottage courts.

The study would address this aspect of the HOME resolution by creating missing middle zones that allow a variety of housing types, and that could be applied in appropriate areas through rezonings initiated by the City or property owners. Some of the housing types identified by the HOME resolution are currently prohibited or disincentivized in residential neighborhoods. While townhomes are allowed in some zones, additional allowances and form-based standards are needed to support the creation of this building type in a way that is pedestrian-friendly and minimizes driveways and front-facing garage doors.

Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) Amendments
Initiated by City Council Resolution No. 20230309-016

On March 9, 2023, City Council accepted the Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) Policy Plan and initiated code amendments necessary to implement the plan. On May 16, 2024, Council implemented a key piece of the plan by adopting Phase 1 of the ETOD Combining District and Density Bonus Program, which prohibits non-transit-supportive uses, allows additional housing, and requires affordable units for properties along the Project Connect Phase 1 Light Rail Line and Priority Extensions.

The missing middle zones proposed by this study address the following Land Use Strategy identified in the ETOD Policy Plan:

> ***Soft Density by Right:***
>
> *Legalize the development of soft density (townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes) in single-family districts to increase the number of housing units near employment and transit hubs.*
>
> *- ETOD Policy Plan*

Going forward, the missing middle zones could be applied in appropriate areas through rezonings initiated by the City or property owners.

Single-Family Ownership Bonus Program
Initiated by City Council Resolution No. 20230608-040

On June 8, 2023, Council initiated code amendments to create an affordable housing bonus program for ownership units in single-family zoning. This study recommends staff evaluate a density bonus for developments of four or more units, which aligns with the direction of this resolution. The density bonus could be used in coordination with the proposed missing middle base zones or other base zones.

Coffee Shops in Residential Areas
Initiated by City Council Resolution No. 202501009-024

On October 9, 2025, City Council initiated code amendments to allow more small-scale commercial uses, such as coffee shops and cafés, in residential areas. In addition to responding to this direction through the mixed-use zones proposed in this study, staff also recommends exploring allowing limited non-residential uses in the proposed missing middle zones to enable the kind of small-scale, neighborhood serving non-residential uses identified in the resolution where appropriate.

Commission Action

Town Zoning
Initiated by Planning Commission

On April 11, 2023, the Planning Commission initiated amendments to the Land Development Code to create Town Zoning, a new mixed-use base zone and density bonus program with flexible development standards.

As proposed by the commission, Town Zoning would have development standards that mirror current entitlements in the Commercial Services (CS) base zone, including a 60 feet height limit, 95 percent impervious cover allowance, and 2:1 floor area ratio (FAR) limit, but only residential and/or transit-supportive non-residential uses would be allowed. To use Town Zoning, an applicant would have to provide at least 10 percent of the difference between the total number of units minus the number of units otherwise achieved under base development standards as affordable housing at 60 percent median family income (MFI) for rental and 80 percent MFI for ownership. Under the Planning Commission proposal, a rezoning applicant could request modified development standards (e.g., additional height) to better suit the proposed development.

The mixed-use, transit-oriented base zones proposed in this study partially respond to this policy direction. Staff also propose additional code amendments that would complement potential new mixed-use base zones and complete staff's response to the initiation, including:

- Additional tiers of density bonuses that grant additional height above base heights in exchange for community benefits through the Citywide Tiered Density Bonus code amendment.
- Future modifications to Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning to allow certain sites to use a more streamlined process.

Restrict Noxious Land Uses
Initiated by Planning Commission

On November 8, 2022, the Planning Commission initiated amendments to the Land Development Code in response to a practice by rezoning applicants of prohibiting undesirable and noxious land uses through a Conditional Overlay, or "CO". Applicants often "CO out" a long list of allowed land uses when applying for rezonings to higher-intensity commercial base zones to address concerns from neighbors and decision-makers about incompatible uses. Commissioners asked staff to recommend code amendments that would limit or end the need for this practice.

The study responds to this direction by recommending new urban, mixed-use base zones that prohibit noxious and undesirable land uses. City staff could recommend applicants apply for the new zones instead of existing commercial zones where appropriate.

Expand Non-Residential Use Allowances in Mixed-Use Zoning
Initiated by Planning Commission

On September 23, 2025, the Planning Commission recommended amendments to the Land Development Code to make non-residential use requirements in the Density Bonus 90 (DB90), ETOD Density Bonus (DBETOD), and any future mixed-use zoning or bonus program more flexible. Currently, density bonuses like DB90 and DBETOD prohibit non-residential uses above the second floor of a building. The commission recommended reassessing this requirement and potentially allowing non-residential uses on more floors or in different configurations.

Staff will further assess this recommendation when developing the mixed-use base zones proposed by this study.

Restrict Some Commercial Uses on Imagine Austin Corridors
Recommended for initiation by Zoning and Platting Commission and Codes and Ordinances Joint Committee

On October 15, 2024, the Zoning and Platting Commission (ZAP) adopted a recommendation to restrict certain uses along Imagine Austin Corridors. On December 18, 2024, the Codes and Ordinances Joint Committee (COJC) recommended that the Planning Commission formally initiate the code changes recommended by ZAP.

ZAP's recommendation is to put restrictions on low-density, auto-oriented uses like car dealerships, warehouses, and industry along Imagine Austin Corridors, which are envisioned as walkable, transit-oriented streets where housing and employment are concentrated. The study responds to this direction by recommending new urban, mixed-use base zones that prohibit these uses. These zones could be applied along Imagine Austin Corridors, in other urban, transit-rich areas, or in other areas where they would be appropriate.

Allow Some Commercial Uses in Residential Zones
Recommended for initiation by Zoning and Platting Commission and Codes and Ordinances Joint Committee

On December 3, 2024, the Zoning and Platting Commission (ZAP) adopted a recommendation to allow limited non-residential uses in residential zones. On December 18, 2024, the Codes and Ordinances Joint Committee recommended that Planning Commission formally initiate the code changes recommended by ZAP.

The commission recommended allowing uses such as counseling, consumer repair, personal services, restaurants, and small doctors' offices in multifamily zones and allowing them as conditional uses in single-family zones. Art galleries, consumer convenience services, and larger restaurants were recommended as conditional uses in both zones. Drive-thrus would be prohibited. The commission also asked staff to develop transportation demand management (TDM) standards for these uses in single-family and multifamily zones to limit potential new car trips.

The study responds to this direction by recommending lower-density mixed-use zones that would allow the uses identified in the resolution either as permitted or conditional uses. These zones could fit within a lower-density residential neighborhood and would provide easier access to daily needs and amenities in these areas, enabling more trips by walking or biking. The study also recommends further discussing whether to allow limited commercial uses in the proposed missing middle zones. Staff would also evaluate the recommendation to create Transportation Demand Management (TDM) standards to reduce car trips to and from neighborhood commercial uses.

1.2 Alignment with Recent State Legislation

Senate Bill 840 (SB 840), signed into law on June 22, 2025, and in effect on September 1, 2025, requires Austin and other large cities in Texas to allow multifamily residential and mixed-use residential development on sites where commercial, office, retail, mixed-use, or warehouse uses are allowed. The bill also limits cities' ability to regulate height, density, and setbacks for multifamily and mixed-use development on applicable sites.

The transit-oriented mixed-use zones proposed by this study include development standards that align with the bill. Applying these zones in appropriate areas, such as near transit stations, would align zoning with the provisions in SB 840 while ensuring development meets city goals, such as promoting transit-oriented uses, active ground floors, and pedestrian-oriented urban design.

Applying the proposed Mixed-Use 1B and Mixed-Use 2B zones, which would require ground-floor commercial, in existing commercial areas would help preserve legacy commercial districts, supporting businesses and maintaining access to goods and services. SB 840 requires that cities allow property owners to build fully residential buildings in existing commercial zones and prevents cities from requiring commercial uses in these buildings unless they are located in a mixed-use zone where ground floor commercial uses would be required of all development.

1.3 Adopted Plans and Policy Framework

In recent years, the City has adopted plans that envision neighborhoods where people can easily get around by walking, biking, or taking transit. Updating land use regulations to allow additional mixed-use and missing middle development is a key strategy to achieving this vision. While the City has made progress by adopting amendments to the Land Development Code that allow more housing, additional changes are needed to further support the goal of walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods. This section lists action items within plans adopted by City Council that recommend allowing more mixed-use or missing middle development.

Imagine Austin

The *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan* (2012) highlights the need to increase the supply and variety of housing, promote a range of infill housing types, and encourage a mix of housing and other land uses to support the plan's overarching goal of creating a compact and connected city.

> ***Land Use and Transportation Action 2:*** *"Promote diverse infill housing such as small-scale apartments, smaller-lot single-family houses, town and row houses, and garage apartments that complement and enhance the character of existing neighborhoods."*

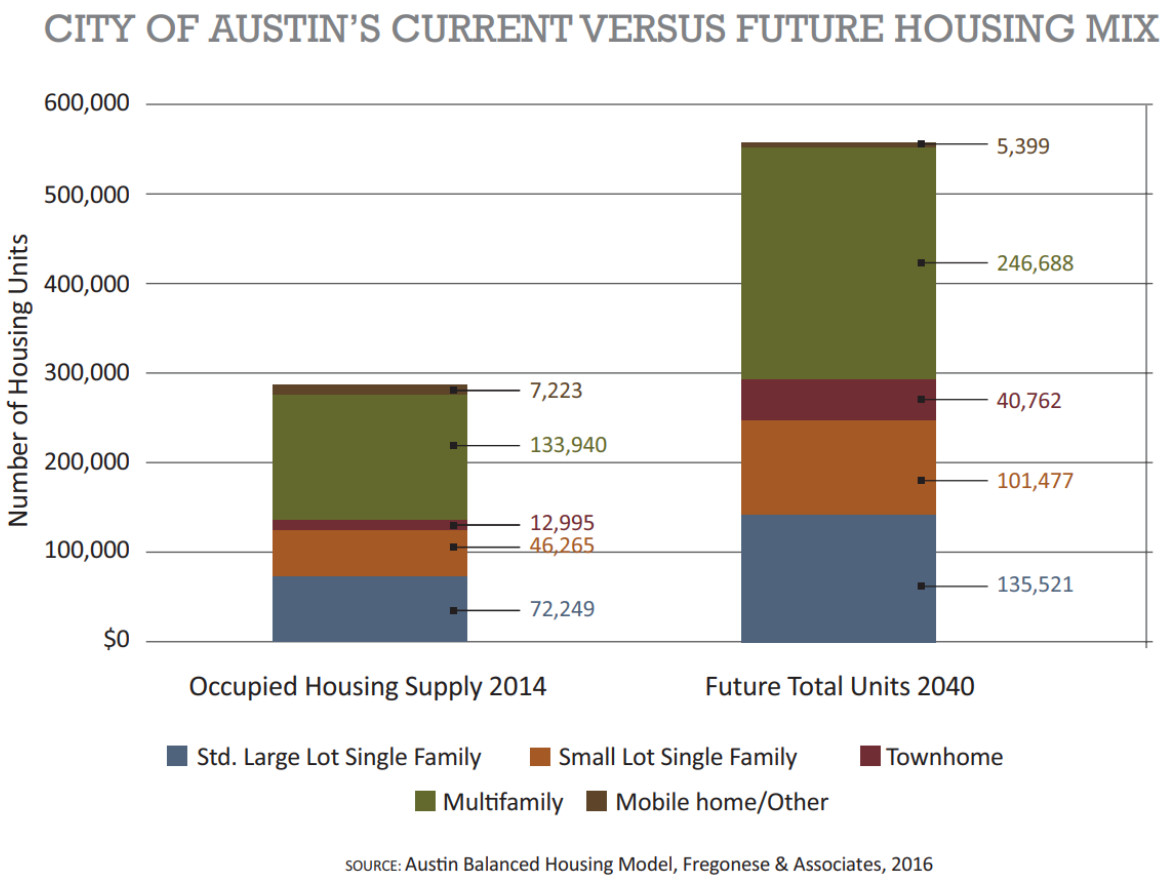
> ***Land Use and Transportation Action 8:*** *"Adopt policies and establish a regulatory environment that promotes the development of compact, mixed-use places that provide great public spaces accessible to people of all ages and abilities."*

> ***Housing and Neighborhoods Action 1:*** *"Establish regulations and programs to promote the development of a variety of market rate and affordable housing types within compact activity centers and corridors served by transit."*

> ***Housing and Neighborhoods Action 2:*** *"Develop incentives and policies to encourage more families with children to live in Austin's established neighborhoods by increasing the supply and variety of housing."*

Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint

The *Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint* (2017), Austin's 10-year housing plan, modeled an ideal breakdown of different housing types needed by 2040 compared to the current distribution of housing types. The Blueprint supports more small-lot single-family, townhome, and multifamily housing to accommodate anticipated demand for more affordable options that meet a wider range of housing needs. The Blueprint also recommends creating a density bonus program for missing middle housing types.



SOURCE: Austin Balanced Housing Model, Fregonese & Associates, 2016

Austin Strategic Mobility Plan

Land use policies play a key role in reaching the core *Austin Strategic Mobility Plan* (2019) goal of a 50/50 mode share split between single-occupancy vehicles and other modes, like walking, biking, or transit. The plan advocates for land use regulations that support a mixed-use, transit-oriented development pattern and enable more housing options in lower-density neighborhoods.

Land Use Policy 3

"Land use regulations should require a proper density and mix of uses, encouraging complete communities by placing residential, employment, and commercial land uses in close proximity to one another. Regulations should also promote infill development."

Action Item 23

"Revise zoning and/or bonuses to allow for and incentivize transit-supportive densities and require an appropriate mixture of land uses along the Transit Priority Network and within a 1/2 mile of planned high-capacity transit, in a manner that blends-in with, and is sensitive to, existing forms of housing."

"Allow for missing middle housing types and mixed-use infill development types."

1.4 Context and Recent Land Development Code Updates

Though the *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan* (2012) called for a new Land Development Code, efforts to entirely rewrite the code have not been successful. Since 2023, the City Council has instead passed targeted code reforms, including:

- **Removing parking minimums:** Removing minimum parking requirements to allow developers to choose how much or how little parking to build
- **Allowing more homes in single-family neighborhoods:** Allowing up to three homes on most single-family-zoned lots through HOME Phase 1
- **Reducing minimum lot sizes:** Reducing the minimum lot size for one home from 5,750 sq. ft. to 1,800 sq. ft. through HOME Phase 2
- **Fostering Equitable Transit-Oriented Development:** Creating the Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) Combining District and Density Bonus Program to restrict non-transit-supportive uses and allow more housing, including affordable housing, along future light rail corridors
- **Updating compatibility standards:** Reforming citywide compatibility standards to allow taller buildings, including more housing, near single-family homes

A project with three homes on a single-family lot enabled by HOME Phase 1

1.4

Recent Updates to Non-Zoning Regulations

Recent updates to subdivision regulations, the site plan process, and the commercial building code have removed some non-zoning barriers to missing middle and mixed-use development:

Site Plan Lite Phases 1 and 2 and Infill Plat Process

Recent changes to the City's site plan requirements have reduced drainage and other requirements applicable to missing middle development, reducing the cost of building and enabling faster permit approval. Site Plan Lite Phase 1, adopted on July 20, 2023, moved review for three- and four-unit housing projects from the more complex site plan process to the more streamlined residential review process. Site Plan Lite Phase 2 and Infill Plat Process, adopted on March 6, 2025, streamlined review for missing middle housing with five to 16 units and for subdivision of infill lots by right-sizing drainage review requirements. While these code amendments facilitate permitting for smaller residential projects, zoning and other code changes are still needed to enable these housing types where appropriate.

Single-Stair Building Code Amendments

On April 10, 2025, City Council adopted local amendments to the International Building Code to allow buildings up to five floors with four or fewer units per floor to be accessed by a single staircase. The amendments will allow residential development of four or five stories to fit on smaller sites by reducing stair and hallway space. Floor plans in single-stair buildings also tend to support units with more natural light and cross-ventilation. The proposed mixed-use zones and a potential missing middle density bonus would support the taller single-stair development allowed by these building code amendments.

1.5 Overview: Limitations of Current Zoning Districts

While recent reforms support progress towards City goals, major obstacles remain. Among the most significant are the Land Development Code's outdated base zoning districts, which have remained substantially unchanged since the code was adopted more than four decades ago.

The multifamily residential, commercial, and office base zones permit low-density, auto-oriented land uses and building types, do not generally encourage the creation of walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods, and allow a limited range of housing and development types. The zones also separate commercial, office, and residential uses from one another and separate single-family and multifamily uses. This means that the code allows limited opportunities for mixed-use development and more attainable housing, such as units in small multifamily buildings.

Limited Mixed-Use Zoning

The code largely prohibits by-right mixed-use development outside of Downtown and limited overlay and transit-oriented development districts. Mixed-use development is more broadly allowed through density bonus programs, though these are still not available to all properties where a mix of uses would be appropriate. Office and commercial base zones, which are applied along the City's major corridors, do not allow housing at all.

Limited Missing Middle Zoning

Most missing middle housing types, including cottage courts and small multiplexes, are prohibited in single-family zones and are challenging to develop under existing multifamily zones, which are better tailored to larger suburban-style multifamily development. Townhomes are allowed in residential zones, but requirements to ensure high-quality urban design are lacking.

While SB 840 allows multifamily and mixed-use development in commercial and office zoning, new mixed-use zoning is still needed to align the Land Development Code with the state law and promote transit-oriented uses, active ground floors, and pedestrian-oriented urban design where appropriate.

See Chapter 3 for a more detailed summary of how the existing code regulates missing middle and mixed-use development.

1.6 By the Numbers: Austin's Population and Housing Trends

The story of housing in Austin in recent years is clear: Within the past decade or so, Austin's dramatic growth, demographic shifts, and COVID-specific factors have caused demand for housing to increase faster than supply could keep up, leading to rising prices. These and other trends summarized in this section point to a need for more housing, and more types of housing, across the city.

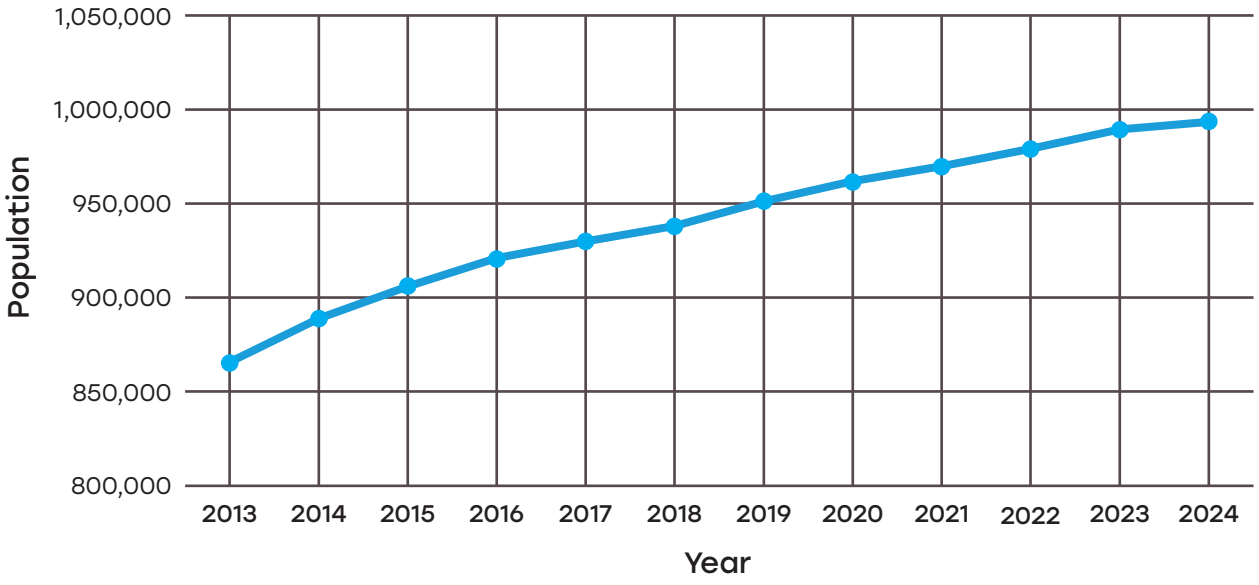
Over the past decade, Austin's population has grown by more than 14 percent, adding over 100,000 new residents. During this time, Austin's population growth rate was higher than many of its peer cities.

Population Growth in Peer Cities 2013-2023

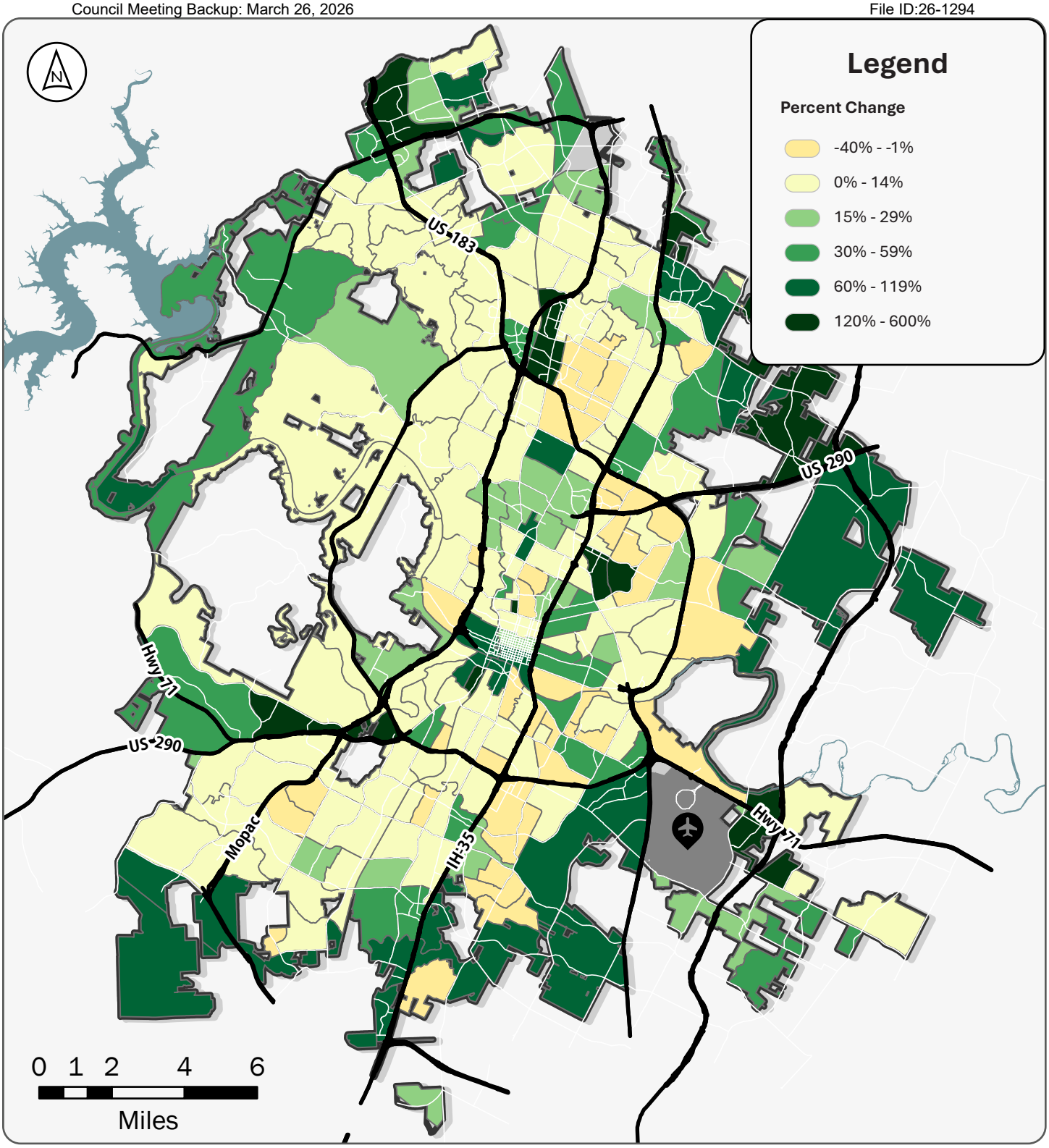
City	2013	2023	Percent Change
Seattle	644,816	764,182	18.5%
Raleigh	429,352	491,078	14.4%
Austin	865,512	989,583	14.3%
Denver	643,452	721,367	12.1%
Sacramento	480,693	529,792	10.2%
Minneapolis	399,430	426,569	6.8%
San Antonio	1,367,287	1,502,711	9.9%
Houston	2,192,094	2,346,908	7.1%
Dallas	1,245,559	1,317,163	5.7%
Portland	608,977	634,314	4.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2010, 2020 Decennial Census; 2001-2009, 2011-2019 Intercensal Estimates; 2024 Vintage Population Estimates

City of Austin Population Growth: 2013-2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2020 Decennial Census; 2011-2019 Intercensal Estimates; 2024 Vintage Population Estimates



Population Growth by Census Tract: 2010-2020

However, growth has been uneven across the city and metro area. Growth has generally been slower in central Austin than in suburban areas of the city, with many census tracts in the urban core only seeing modest population increases between the 2010 and 2020 Census despite booming growth in the region.[1]

1 *2010 to 2020 Tract Population Change by Tennessee State Data Center, US Census Bureau. Geographies normalized to 2020 Census Tracts to account for boundary changes.*

1.6

Although areas with the greatest population growth were mostly located along the perimeter of the city, there were multiple areas closer to the urban core where the City has encouraged dense growth that saw similar increases in population, including Downtown, East Riverside, some Central East Austin neighborhoods, Mueller, Crestview, the Domain, and West Campus.

Austin's suburbs have also been growing faster than the city itself. The Austin-Round Rock Metro Area grew by 32 percent between 2013 and 2023, meaning the suburbs have absorbed more of the area's growth than Austin has.

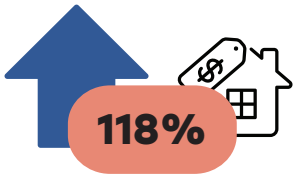
Some of this can be explained by a lack of suitable infill development sites in the urban core, and the difficulty of infill development generally, compared to the relative ease, availability, and lower cost of developing greenfield sites in suburban areas. Restrictive zoning, however, also significantly limits development in urban areas, especially high-opportunity areas, where the City's plans say growth should be concentrated to take advantage of access to public transit, jobs, amenities, and existing infrastructure.

While population grew 14 percent between 2013 and 2023, the number of households increased by 36 percent during that period, with 126,000 new households added. This is partly explained by a decrease in household size with the recent influx of younger residents, who are more likely to live alone or with only a partner and not have children. Austin has added housing units at a slower pace than household growth between 2013 and 2023, adding 85,050 housing units, or a 21 percent increase. Despite prices leveling off, the housing choices available are still not meeting households' needs and preferences in terms of location or housing characteristics.

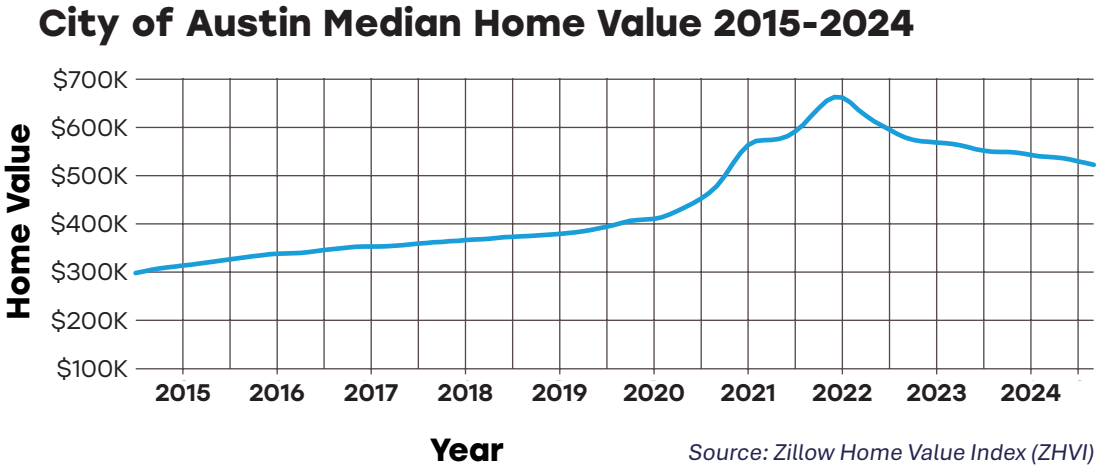
1.6

Housing costs remain stubbornly high

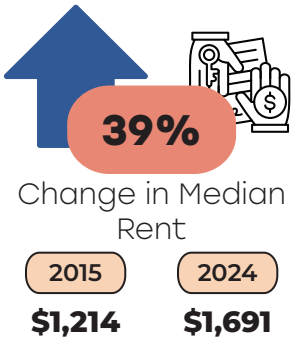
While market values for homes have fallen from their peak in 2022, they remain well above pre-COVID levels. Home values have fallen more than rents, though high interest rates keep the cost of homeownership expensive. In 2024, the median home value was $544,000, with some areas seeing median home values over $1 million. Median rent in 2024 was $1,691, with some areas seeing a median rent of over $2,500 per month. Since 2013, rents have increased by 39 percent, and home values have increased by 118 percent[2].



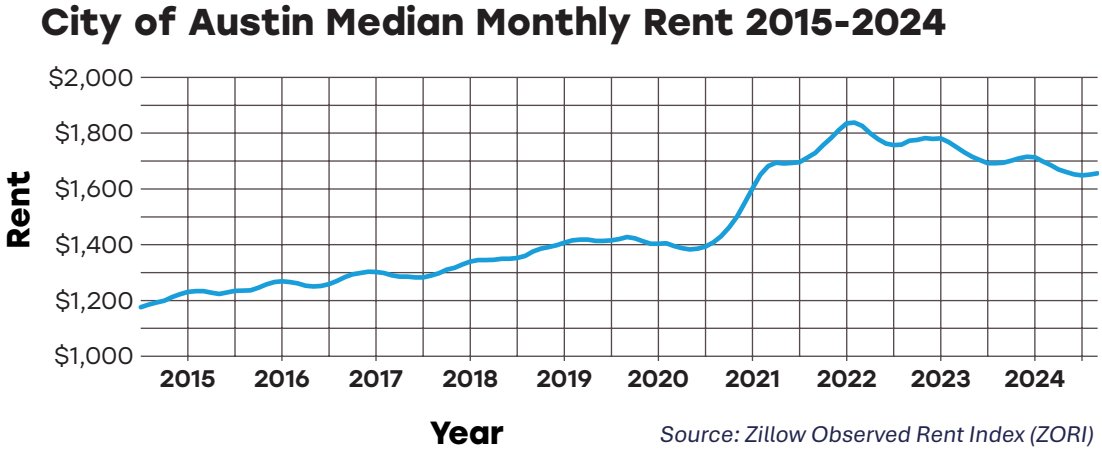
Source: Zillow Home Value Index (ZHVI)



Source: Zillow Home Value Index (ZHVI)



Source: Zillow Observed Rent Index (ZORI)

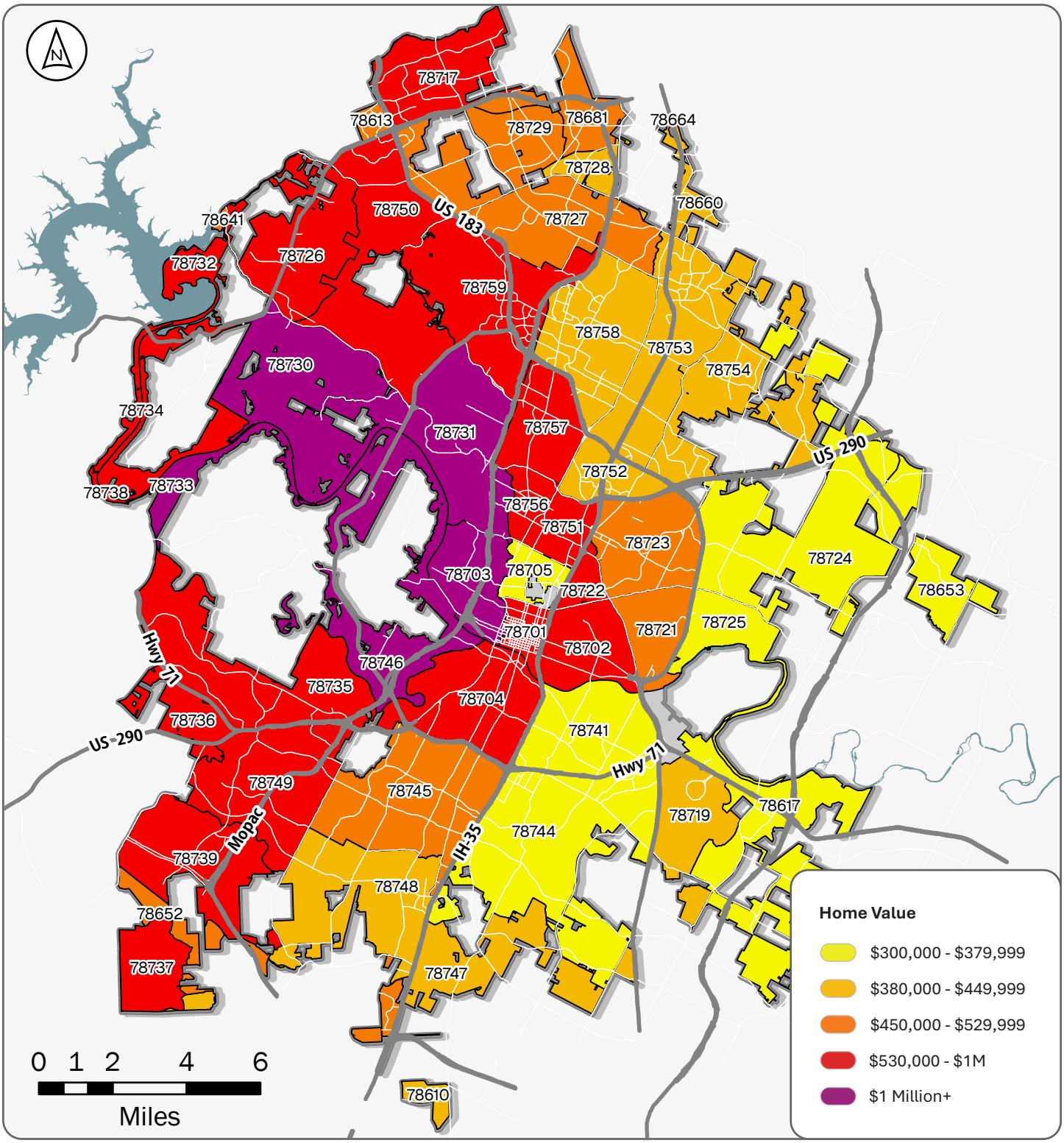


Source: Zillow Observed Rent Index (ZORI)

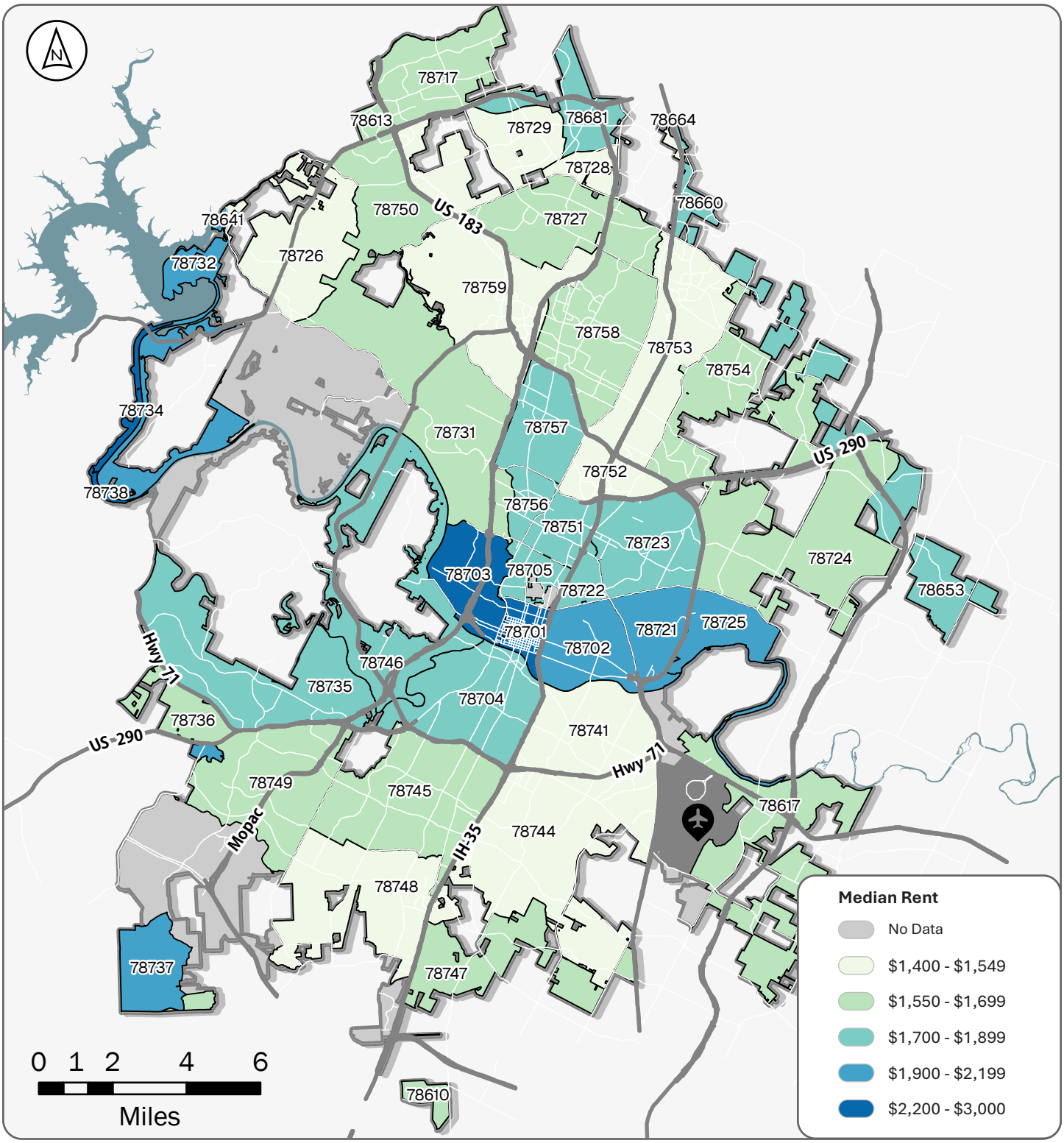
This rise in housing prices is felt by residents across Austin. In only five years, home values have increased by 45 percent or more, and rents by 25 percent or more, in more than half of Austin's ZIP codes. These housing cost barriers impact the ability of current and future residents to access the city's schools, jobs, parks, and other amenities. The next pages include maps showing 2024 median home value and rent by ZIP code and the change in home value and rent since 2019 by ZIP code.

2 *Rent and home value data is from the Zillow Home Value Index (ZHVI) and Zillow Observed Rent Index (ZORI). Home value is defined as the typical market value for homes in the 35th to 65th percentile range. For more information on ZHVI and ZORI methodology, visit the Zillow Housing Data webpage.*

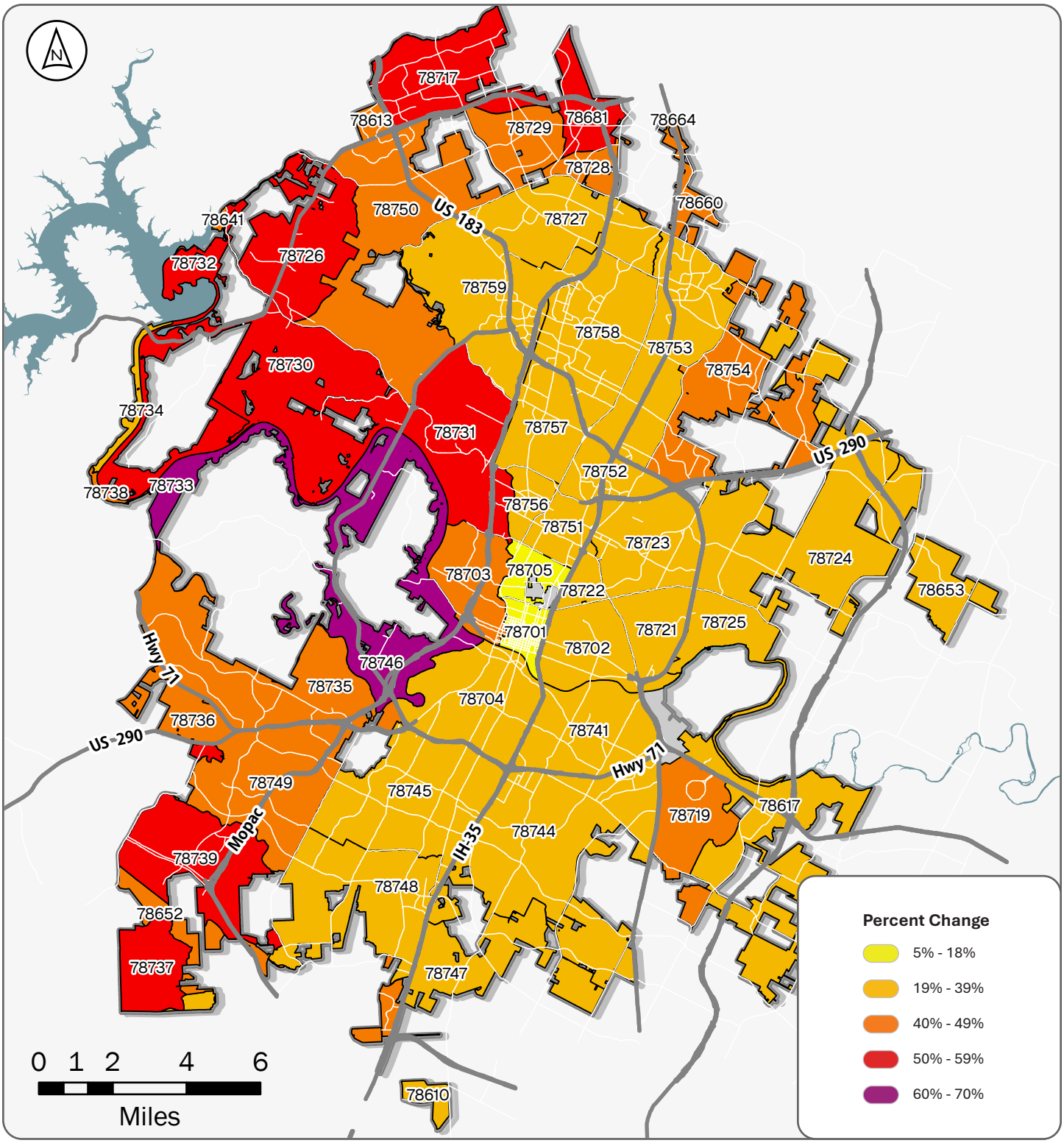
2024 Median Home Value by ZIP Code



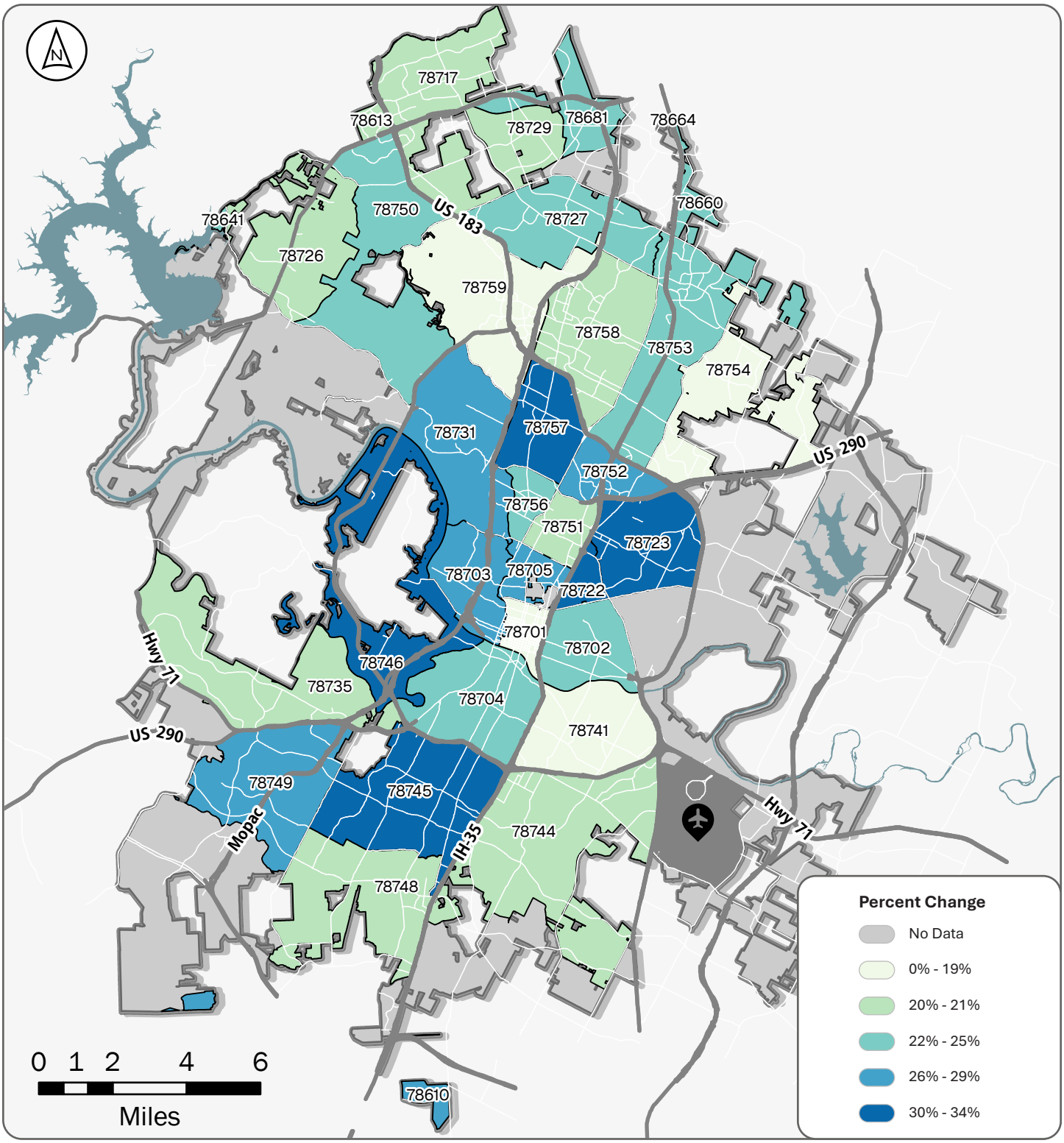
2024 Median Rent by ZIP Code



Percent Change in Home Value 2019 - 2025



Percent Change in Rent 2019 - 2025

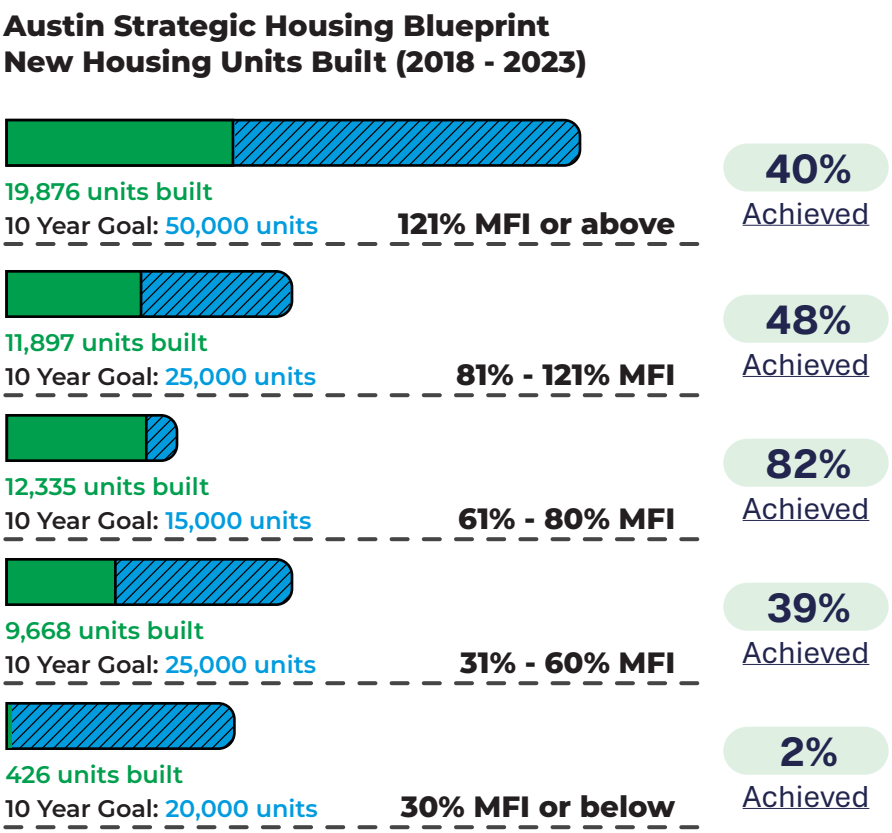


1.6

Housing supply not keeping up with demand

While the housing market is complicated, and many factors affect housing affordability, the Land Development Code impacts housing costs and the range of housing types available in various locations. The code has limited the housing supply and the types of housing that could meet a wider range of needs and price points. If the Land Development Code allowed more housing – and more kinds of it – in places people want to live, people of different income levels could have more housing options.

In 2017, the Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint set production goals for housing affordable at a range of median family income (MFI) levels to account for future demand as Austin continues to grow. Since then, substantial progress has been made towards these goals, and the latest data from 2023 show particularly encouraging progress made that year. The City, however, is still less than halfway to meeting most of its housing production goals five years into the 10-year plan, and some parts of the city are seeing much more housing production than others. To meet Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint goals and continue to absorb additional population growth in the long run, more housing affordable to all income levels is needed throughout the city. Code changes that allow housing supply to better respond to demand have the potential to moderate price increases, and even to extend the decline in prices seen in the past two years.



Source: HousingWorks Austin's 2023 Strategic Housing Blueprint Scorecard

An analysis by students from the University of Texas at Austin also identifies a need for more housing supply targeted at middle- and higher-income renters.[3] The research finds that Austin has a "rental housing mismatch" in which higher-income renters are increasingly occupying units that would also be affordable to those in lower income brackets. This leads to higher housing costs and fewer options for lower- and middle-income households because they compete for units with households that can afford to spend more on housing. The report recommends allowing more missing middle housing to help correct the rental housing mismatch and reduce pressure on lower-income renters.

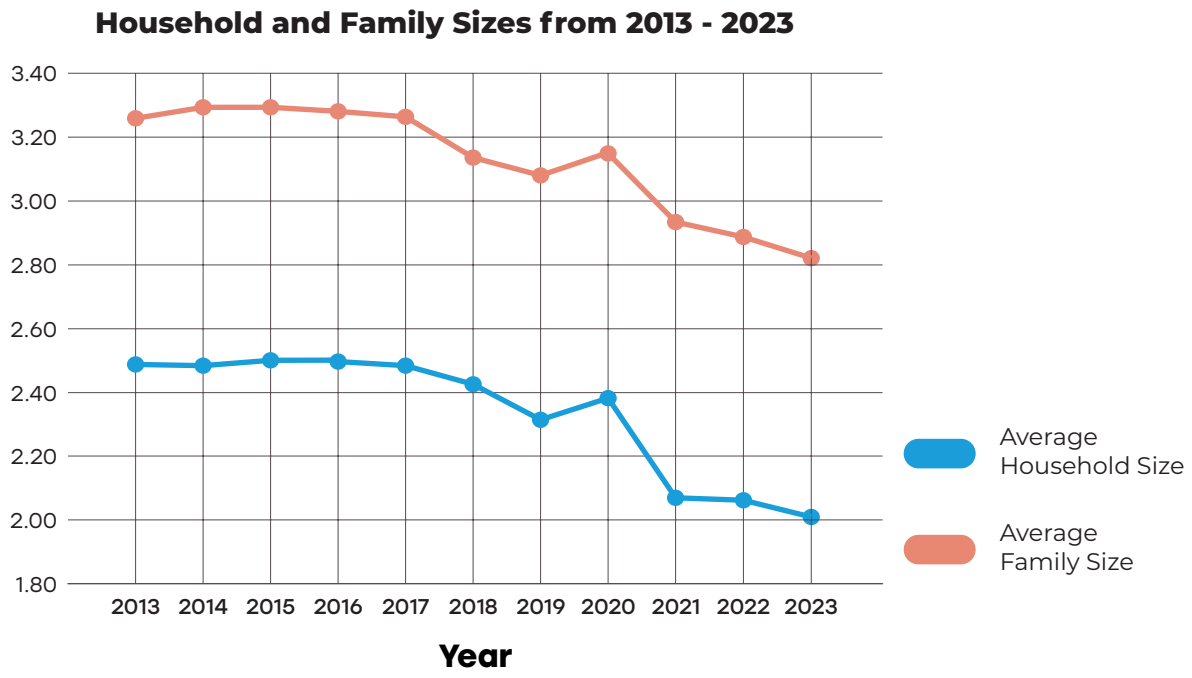
Different housing choices are needed to meet diverse housing needs

Lack of supply alone does not describe the full picture of Austin's housing need. Housing choice – the ability to afford a home that best suits one's needs and preferences – is also severely limited in Austin. The main kinds of housing that have been built under the current Land Development Code are single-family homes and large apartment complexes with 100 or more units. Since Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint data tracking began in 2018, 71 percent of housing units produced have been in apartment complexes with more than 100 units, and 23 percent have been single-family homes on their own lots. Missing middle housing – defined here as 3-16 units – makes up less than 2 percent of the total units built since 2018[4]. This leaves little choice for those who would like more space than what apartment units in large complexes typically provide, but cannot afford or do not want a single-family home. (See Chapter 3 for more information on housing types produced before and after the current code was adopted.)

More abundant housing that better meets the needs of families could also reverse the decline in school enrollment in Austin. In the past decade, average family size has dropped significantly from 3.24 people in 2013 to 2.92 in 2023, and average household size has dropped from 2.48 to 2.01, indicating that families may be choosing to locate elsewhere or have fewer children, and that newcomers may skew younger and childless. Although the overall number of family households grew during this period, there was a decline among Black and Latino families with children, with the steepest declines found in many historically Black and Latino neighborhoods.

Austin ISD school enrollment has also declined more than 10 percent in the past several years, from 81,650 during the 2017-2018 school year to 72,830 in the 2023-2024 school year, even as the population of the city has grown. While many factors influence family size and school enrollment, housing costs are among the most significant considerations when planning for a family.

3 *"Missing Middle Housing Rental Mismatch" by Vergi Agustini, Kenadi Maupin, and Justin Minsker*
4 *Housing stock data is from the City of Austin 2024 Land Use Database*



Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimates 2013-2023

Providing more opportunities to live in walkable neighborhoods can also meet younger generations' neighborhood preferences. According to the National Association of REALTORS®, Millennials and Gen Zers tend to favor walkable neighborhoods, which mixed-use and missing middle zoning can provide by allowing more homes, and more types of homes, closer to jobs and everyday destinations.[5]

The new missing middle and mixed-use zones are important additions to the larger zoning toolkit that could allow for creation of neighborhoods with a variety of housing types and easy access to everyday goods and services. While the proposed new zones will support broader efforts to mitigate the rise in housing costs, it is important to remember that these are complex issues that no one policy can fix, and that the City is pursuing an "all-of-the-above" strategy to create an Austin where everyone can thrive.

5 *2023 Community and Transportation Preference Survey conducted by the National Association of REALTORS®*

2

Missing Middle and Mixed-Use Development

In this chapter

2.1 What is Missing Middle and Mixed-Use Development?

Missing Middle Housing

Missing middle housing refers to house-scale buildings with multiple units. Missing middle types include townhomes, triplexes, fourplexes, cottage courts, and small multi-unit buildings. In Austin and most other American cities, this housing category is considered “missing” largely due to Euclidean zoning, an approach to zoning characterized by the separation of office, commercial, residential, and industrial uses from one another, as well as the separation of single-family and multifamily housing.

Missing middle housing breaks from the approach of separating housing types, by offering various options within the same neighborhood, accommodating a range of price points to suit varying income levels, household sizes, and housing type preferences. This provides more opportunities for people to buy or rent a home in a quiet, safe neighborhood with high-quality schools, good jobs, parks, and other amenities. By gently increasing density, missing middle housing can create more walkable places and support new or upgraded transit service in more parts of the city.

Mixed-Use Development

Mixed-use zoning differs from Euclidean zoning by allowing residential, commercial, and office uses to coexist in close proximity. This integration of uses can occur vertically within a multi-story building, horizontally across a building, or through multiple single- or mixed-use buildings on a site. Mixed-use zoning offers numerous benefits, including:

- **Increased walkability**: Residents can easily access work, shops, schools, and parks on foot, by bike, or via short car rides. This fosters healthier lifestyles, reduces traffic congestion, and supports a range of mobility options. Mixed-use development can also reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) by car, thereby reducing emissions that contribute to climate change.
- **Economic vitality**: Ground-floor retail and services with housing or offices above can support local businesses and strengthen street-level engagement. Residents form built-in customer bases for businesses.
- **Extended activity hours**: Mixed-use areas remain active throughout the day and evening, fostering vibrant street life, enabling transit service improvements, and enhancing public safety as more people move through the city on foot throughout the day.
- **Improved housing options**: By integrating housing with commercial uses, mixed-use zoning supports more diverse and affordable housing types, enabling more people to live closer to jobs and amenities.
- **Environmental benefits**: Compact, mixed-use urban infill developments can reduce urban sprawl, preserve open spaces, efficiently utilize existing infrastructure or new capital infrastructure investments, and support public transit by concentrating development in transit-accessible areas.

2.2 Missing Middle and Mixed-Use Building Types

Missing middle and mixed-use buildings form the foundation of walkable neighborhoods. This section describes what these buildings can look like, focusing on building types that the current code does not allow or incentivize.

Missing Middle Housing Types

Missing middle housing types include cottage courts, townhomes, and small multi-unit buildings. The models and examples below show different kinds of missing middle housing types that are currently prohibited or are unrealistic to build in most types of zoning in Austin.

Cottage Court

A cottage court contains small- to medium-sized homes around a common green space. The green space enhances community by promoting casual interaction among neighbors and providing a safe place for kids to play. Smaller lot sizes can make cottage court homes more affordable than single-family homes.

A model of a typical cottage court

A cottage court in Central Park, the neighborhood on the former Stapleton Airport site in Denver, Colorado. Image by Opticos Design, Inc. courtesy Sightline Institute.[6]

6 *Throughout this document, images attributed as "courtesy Sightline Institute" are from the Sightline Institute Missing Middle Homes Photo Library and are made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.*

Townhomes

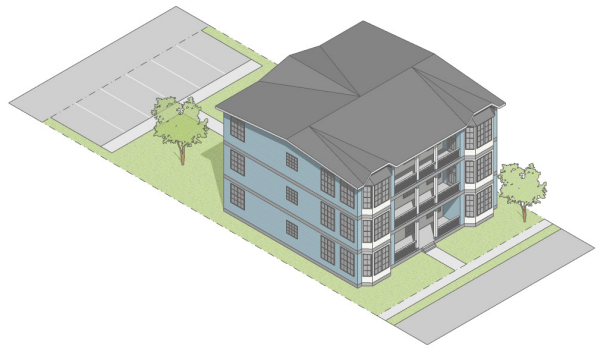
Townhomes are a missing middle type appropriate for various contexts, from lower-density residential to medium-density mixed-use neighborhoods. They are also the most popular missing middle housing type, partly because of the flexibility to either own the townhome and the land beneath it through “fee-simple” ownership like a detached single-family home, or own the home itself and share land ownership and common area maintenance in a condo regime. Townhomes can front a street, a common green space, or a driveway.

A model of a typical townhome development

A row of townhomes in Mueller

Stacked Flats

Stacked flats are a small multifamily development type appropriate in lower- and medium-density residential and mixed-use neighborhoods. Buildings typically have four or more units stacked on top of one another, making units more affordable than townhomes and ground-floor units more accessible for people with disabilities. When parking is provided on site, it is often to the rear of the property. Residents typically share a backyard, which allows space for gardening, children’s play, grilling, or letting pets out.



A model of a typical stacked sixplex with two units per floor

A stacked sixplex in Portland, Oregon. Courtesy Sightline Institute.

Mixed-Use Building Types

Mixed-use buildings bring jobs and everyday needs closer to where people live, making trips outside the house more convenient on foot, by bike, or via transit. Buildings can range in size from neighborhood-scale corner stores or live/work units to large apartment buildings with ground-floor retail. This section describes some mixed-use development types that are discouraged or prohibited under the current base zones.

Small-Scale Mixed-Use

Small-scale buildings with neighborhood-serving commercial uses, such as corner stores, coffee shops, or bakeries, can provide convenient access to everyday goods and services without requiring people to drive. They also offer opportunities for more housing on the same site as non-residential uses, such as with residential above a ground-floor commercial use. These types of buildings were once commonplace in primarily residential neighborhoods but have largely been prohibited since zoning codes across the country, including Austin's Land Development Code, adopted a standard practice of separating commercial and residential uses.

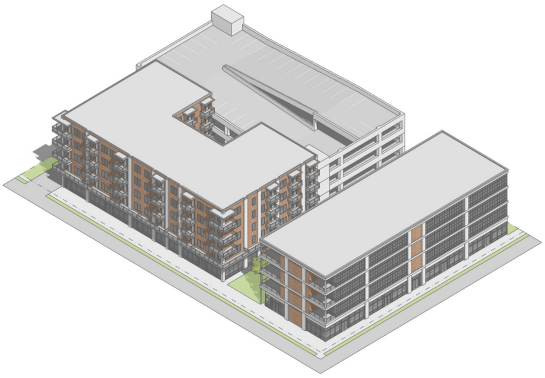
A model of a small-scale mixed-use building with ground floor retail below two floors of housing

Pettaway Square, a small-scale mixed-use development in Little Rock, Arkansas. Photo courtesy Becca Bona.

2.2

Low- to Mid-Rise Mixed-Use

Buildings with four to six stories form the foundation of walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods. In some locations, single-use buildings like offices or apartments are appropriate. In other locations, a mix of uses in the same building should be required to create highly walkable and transit-oriented places.



A model of a development with a vertical mix of retail and apartments

A mix of ground-floor retail and offices in the Mueller neighborhood

2.3 Missing Middle and Mixed-Use Zoning in Peer Cities

Missing Middle Zoning in Peer Cities

Cities across the country, including some of Austin's peer cities, have recently changed their zoning to allow a broader range of missing middle housing types in more locations compared to what Austin's zoning allows. Below are summaries of missing middle initiatives in Seattle, Washington; Portland, Oregon; St. Paul, Minnesota; and Sacramento, California.

Seattle, WA

In May 2025, Seattle updated its Neighborhood Residential zoning – the equivalent of single-family zoning in Austin – to allow missing middle housing. Seattle now allows at least four units on all residential lots and at least six units on residential lots within a quarter mile of major transit stops, such as light rail and bus rapid transit. Standards to accommodate these new development types include increased floor area ratio (FAR) and maximum lot coverage and reduced front and rear setbacks.

Portland, OR

In 2020 and 2022, Portland adopted zoning code changes that enabled more types of housing to be created in single-family neighborhoods. These new types of housing include accessory dwelling units (ADUs), multiplexes with three or four units (or up to six if half are affordable), clusters of cottages, and other types of missing middle housing. Portland reduced the limits on the size of residential buildings to prevent oversized, expensive houses and encourage more affordable living spaces in the city.

St. Paul, MN

In October 2023, St. Paul adopted zoning changes to allow up to five primary housing units on lots in lower-density residential neighborhoods. A density bonus allows up to two additional units if they are rented or sold below-market, provide three or more bedrooms, or are part of a conversion or an addition to an existing structure.

Sacramento, CA

In September 2024, Sacramento adopted an ordinance broadening the range of housing types permitted by right within single-unit residential zones, becoming the first city in California to allow multi-unit housing in every neighborhood. Sacramento regulates building scale instead of the number of units allowed on a lot. A "sliding FAR scale" ties the size of the building to the lot size and the number of units proposed, with additional floor area granted with more units.

2.3

Mixed-Use Zoning in Peer Cities

Austin's Land Development Code differs from some of its peer cities by separating base zoning districts into single-use office, commercial, or multifamily zones. Peer cities implementing best practices generally have one set of mixed-use base zones where office, commercial, and residential uses are all allowed. Peer cities also often require ground-floor retail, limit auto-oriented uses, and promote pedestrian-oriented design in appropriate locations, such as near transit or along existing shopping streets. Below is more information on how some of Austin's closest peer cities, Portland, Seattle, and Raleigh, implement mixed-use zoning.

Portland, OR
Instead of separate office, commercial, and residential zones, Portland has several commercial mixed-use zones that allow various uses, including residential uses, at many scales, ranging from small neighborhood corner stores to large sites with tall mixed-use buildings. Portland's equivalent to Austin's multifamily zoning also allows limited ground-floor retail uses to support easy access to everyday needs while maintaining a primarily residential neighborhood character.

Seattle, WA
Seattle has several commercial zones that allow development that ranges in scale from low- to high-density. Like those in Portland, these zones also allow residential uses mixed in with commercial and office uses. Certain zones also have size limits for commercial uses to prevent "big box" stores in areas where they are not appropriate. In areas where high pedestrian traffic is desired, such as shopping streets, Seattle applies a "pedestrian zone" overlay to ensure that buildings and streetscapes support a high-quality pedestrian environment.

Seattle is also considering a proposal, which could potentially be adopted in mid- to late-2026, to allow limited commercial uses on corner lots in Neighborhood Residential zones, the equivalent to Austin's single-family zones. Regulations around hours of operation, delivery, noise, odor, and the location and screening of solid waste and other outdoor activities would mitigate impacts to neighbors.

Raleigh, NC
Raleigh's base zones are distinct from those in many other cities, with only mixed-use and residential zones. Special districts are also available for industry, agriculture, large office campuses, or other specialized uses. In mixed-use zones, pedestrian-oriented design is required in certain areas through build-to lines, active ground-floor use requirements, and screening of parking garages.

A cottage court in Mueller

Chapter 2 Summary

Missing middle and mixed-use zoning have numerous benefits compared to single-use zoning practices. They allow for various housing types and a mix of uses that can create more complete, livable neighborhoods. Recognizing these benefits, some peer cities are changing their zoning codes to allow more missing middle and mixed-use development. This study recommends that Austin follow suit.

3

Analysis of Current Zoning Districts

In this chapter

3.1 Limitations of Current Zoning Districts

The current Land Development Code was created during a period when Texas city planning heavily favored auto-oriented development, driven by highway expansion and growing dependence on personal vehicles. The City adopted a code that permitted and often encouraged car-centric growth by strictly separating commercial uses, offices, single-family homes, and apartments. As Austin has evolved and embraced a vision for more compact and connected development, the city's Land Development Code – the primary tool for determining what can be built and where – has not kept pace, remaining reflective of planning principles from the 1980s. This section summarizes the main barriers to missing middle and mixed-use development in the Land Development Code.

3.1

Barriers to Missing Middle Housing

Maximum three units per lot in single-family zones

The most common single-family zones, SF-1 through SF-3, for decades allowed only one or two units, and were only recently updated to allow up to three homes per lot. While this recent change through HOME Phase 1 enables more homes on a lot, missing middle housing types with four or more units are still prohibited in single-family zones. As of October 2025, builders using HOME regulations have applied to build almost exclusively detached homes rather than townhomes or stacked units, and over 65 percent have opted to build two houses instead of the maximum three allowed on a lot. This points to a need to permit and further incentivize missing middle types like cottage courts, townhomes, and stacked flats to provide additional housing that may be more affordable than the detached units that are mainly being built using HOME regulations.

Multifamily zones do not allow or incentivize missing middle types

Because multifamily zones have not been updated since the current code was adopted in 1984, they are designed primarily for the desired multifamily development type of that era: garden-style apartment complexes with hundreds of units spread across separate buildings on large sites.[7] The main barrier to missing middle in the multifamily zones is high minimum site area requirements. These requirements dictate how much land area is necessary per housing unit, depending on the number of bedrooms in a unit. They generally do not allow enough density to support missing middle housing on sites where missing middle would be feasible. Existing missing middle housing in Austin largely predates the current code or was built in a Planned Unit Development (PUD) district, a zoning tool intended for large, master-planned sites, such as the Mueller redevelopment.

Lack of specific standards for missing middle housing

While some multifamily zones allow enough density for missing middle types, there are no form-based standards that ensure these types are built. This lack of form-based standards can lead to auto-oriented development, poor urban design, and not enough density to support transit. See Chapter 4 for preliminary recommendations for regulations required to allow and incentivize missing middle housing.

7 *See p. 67 for an example of a garden-style apartment complex.*

3.1

Barriers to Mixed-Use Development

Austin's zoning code generally separates office and commercial uses from residential uses. Over time, the City has added a variety of zoning tools that allow a mix of uses in some locations; however, these tools have some significant limitations and fail to fully meet the Imagine Austin goal of creating a more "compact and connected" city where daily needs are close by and reachable by various modes of transportation.

Senate Bill 840 (SB 840) has removed a primary barrier to mixed-use development by allowing mixed-use residential and multifamily residential uses by right in commercial and office base zones. However, several significant barriers remain.

Outside of downtown and several specific regulating districts (e.g. East Riverside Corridor, Transit Oriented Development, and North Burnet/Gateway), the Austin Land Development Code does not have a purely mixed-use base zone. While several combining districts allow or incentivize mixed uses, these tools typically do not require a mix of uses or active ground floors. Under SB 840, commercially zoned sites in legacy commercial districts could be redeveloped with fully residential projects, and mixed-use zoning tools do not currently exist that would allow the City to require active uses on the ground floor.

While mixed-use is now allowed in most commercial zones, these zones continue to allow a wide range of non-transit supportive commercial uses. It has become common when approving rezonings to allow mixed-use development – through application of the Mixed-Use (MU) Combining District and/or density bonus programs – to also apply a Conditional Overlay (CO) that prohibits certain uses on the site. Creation of a mixed-use zone would allow for the list of permitted uses to be standardized and appropriate to a transit-oriented mixed-use site.

In addition, non-residential uses are generally not allowed in residential zones, and the Land Development Code lacks a zone that would allow small-scale mixed-use buildings in more residential areas. While many non-residential uses are not appropriate in residential neighborhoods, a zone that allows limited commercial uses could expand access to goods and services within walking distance from homes while maintaining neighborhoods' primarily residential character.

Staff recommends creating new transit-oriented mixed-use base zones proposed by this study. These new zones would encourage development that better aligns with City goals in a variety of ways, including by requiring transit-oriented uses, active ground floors, and pedestrian-oriented urban design where appropriate.

3.2 Where Mixed-Use Development is Currently Allowed

Prior to Senate Bill 840 (SB 840), by-right mixed-use development was only allowed outside of downtown under limited circumstances. With SB 840, however, multifamily and mixed-use residential development is allowed in more places by right. This section summarizes the various zoning districts where mixed-use development is currently allowed.

Senate Bill 840

SB 840 allows multifamily or mixed-use residential development by-right on any property where mixed-use, office, commercial, retail, or warehouse uses are permitted. Multifamily residential is defined as any site with three or more dwelling units within one or more buildings. Mixed-use residential is defined as any site in which the residential uses are at least 65% of the development's total square footage.

The bill also establishes minimum height and density allowances, as well as maximum setbacks, for applicable development. Under SB 840, multifamily and mixed-use residential developments in commercial zones have the following entitlements:

- Maximum height that is the greater of 45 ft. or the height that applies to commercial uses on the site
- Density of up to 54 units per acre
- Unlimited floor area ratio (FAR)
- Setbacks that are the lesser of 25 ft. or the setbacks that apply to commercial uses on the site

Mixed-Use (MU) Combining District

The Mixed-Use (MU) combining district allows a mix of uses on sites zoned commercial or office. However, the combining district has several limitations:

- High minimum site area per dwelling unit requirements lead to low-density, suburban-style residential development. These requirements vary by zoning district and by unit size, ranging from approximately nine dwelling units per acre (du/acre) for projects with two-bedroom units in Neighborhood Office (NO) zoning to 54 du/acre for projects with all studio units in Community Commercial (GR), General Office (GO), or Commercial Services (CS) zoning. Because these limits are less than or equal to the minimum 54 du/acre allowance under SB 840, they are now unenforceable.
- The MU combining district is not currently applied to many properties where mixed-use may be appropriate.
- A mix of uses is not required, and owners could choose to develop sites with auto-oriented commercial uses, as a fully residential project, or as a mixed-use project.
- Developers building mixed-use residential projects using the MU combining district often apply a conditional overlay (CO) during the rezoning process to prohibit specific land uses allowed in higher-intensity commercial base zones that tend to prompt concerns from neighbors and decision-makers about negative impacts on nearby residences. While this practice allows property owners and stakeholders to tailor uses to be sensitive

to a site's context, it also adds complexity to the code, making it difficult for property owners, neighbors, and decision-makers to understand what can be built on a site. If the code had base zones that already prohibited uses that are generally incompatible with residential uses, the need for this practice would be reduced, and it would be easier to understand what is allowed to be built on properties.

- Because of SB 840, the MU combining district is now redundant. Staff generally recommends creating new transit-oriented mixed-use base zones going forward instead of allowing mixed-use through combining districts, which add unnecessary complexity to the code. The simplicity of base zones also makes them a better tool for the City to use in City-initiated rezonings to implement planning initiatives.
- MU lacks requirements for pedestrian-oriented design and an urban built form, leading to auto-oriented, suburban-style site and building design in places where that may not be desirable. See Chapter 4 for recommendations for urban design requirements to create more pedestrian-friendly mixed-use buildings.

Specific Regulating Districts – Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Station Areas, North Burnet/Gateway, and East Riverside Corridor

Much of the mixed-use development built in Austin outside of downtown has been located in North Burnet/Gateway, East Riverside, and in the Crestview, East MLK Jr., and Plaza Saltillo Station Areas. These areas are governed by regulating plans, which apply distinct, customized zoning regulations to implement station area, district, and corridor plans.

Since the regulating plans were adopted in the late 2000s to early 2010s , these areas have been transformed into walkable, mixed-use urban centers that support transit and allow easy access to daily needs. In addition to supporting higher-density mixed-use development, the regulating plans also provide zones that facilitate missing middle types like townhomes to serve as a transition to single-family neighborhoods.

Going forward, however, staff recommends implementing new station area or other area plans through new base zones coupled with density bonuses instead of regulating plans to avoid the complexity of applying customized zoning regulations to specific areas.

Planned Unit Developments (PUDs)

Some mixed-use developments outside of downtown have occurred in Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), which allow zoning tailored to the kind of development envisioned on a particular site, usually a larger greenfield or brownfield site. Examples of PUDs with significant mixed-use components include the Mueller and the Triangle developments. Many PUDs, however, only allow limited mixed-use and are instead tailored to single-family residential subdivisions with supporting commercial strip centers or civic uses, like schools. In recent years, PUDs have been granted on smaller sites. In the future, some of these smaller sites may be able to use the new mixed-use base zones coupled with a density bonus program. For larger sites, PUDs will continue to be a valuable tool to achieve high-quality development with a variety of community benefits.

3.2

Neighborhood Plan Infill Options

Special zoning tools known as “infill options” are available on certain sites within some neighborhood planning areas. Where applied, the Corner Store tool allows non-residential uses such as food sales, personal services, and restaurants in residential districts (SF-3 – MF-6) with form-based building design standards. Where applied, the Neighborhood Mixed-Use Building tool allows buildings with housing and ground-floor retail in office and commercial zones. These tools have not been well-used and are not allowed in most neighborhoods. Only about half of the several dozen neighborhood planning areas have opted to allow neighborhood mixed-use buildings, and only four have allowed corner stores.[8]

Density Bonus Programs

Much of the mixed-use development seen along the City’s major corridors has been the result of the Vertical Mixed-Use (VMU) overlay. Adopted in 2010, VMU has led to the construction of over 8,592 homes, 851 of those affordable, with more projects currently planned or under construction[9]. VMU was mapped along some major corridors on an opt-in basis following a neighborhood planning process. Many individual sites have also been rezoned to VMU by property owner-initiated rezonings.

Density Bonus 90 (DB90), adopted in February 2024, has become an attractive option for developers to build taller mixed-use buildings up to 90 ft. in exchange for community benefits, including affordable housing. Property owners can rezone to add the DB90 combining district with City Council approval.

The Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Density Bonus (DBETOD), approved in May 2024, allows additional height near the Project Connect Phase 1 Light Rail and Priority Extensions. In exchange for community benefits, including affordable housing, the program allows mixed-use buildings up to 90 ft. in height within a half mile of the future rail line and up to 120 ft. within a quarter mile on multifamily, office, or commercial zoned properties.

DB90 and DBETOD supersede most base zone regulations to produce a more urban built form with a required mix of active ground-floor uses and housing.

Senate Bill 840 impacts the likelihood that a property owner will choose to participate in these density bonus programs, since the bill provides additional mixed-use entitlements in commercial zones by right. Under related work, staff will be evaluating each of these density bonuses and developing a recommendation for a new system of citywide tiered density bonuses.

Outside of downtown, density bonus programs generally require a particular type of mixed-use development – a primarily residential building with a prescribed amount of ground-floor retail – that may not be appropriate in all areas and does not allow flexibility for more than two floors of non-residential uses. Staff is considering streamlining ground-floor active use requirements and tailoring them to specific contexts as part of the Citywide Tiered Density Bonus amendments; however, density bonuses will likely continue to be focused on incentivizing primarily residential projects. The recommendations from the tiered density bonus work will inform the development of active ground-floor requirements in the transit-oriented mixed-use zones proposed in this study.

8 https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Housing_%26_Planning/Adopted%20Neighborhood%20Planning%20Areas/infill_tools.pdf

9 https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=444955

3.2

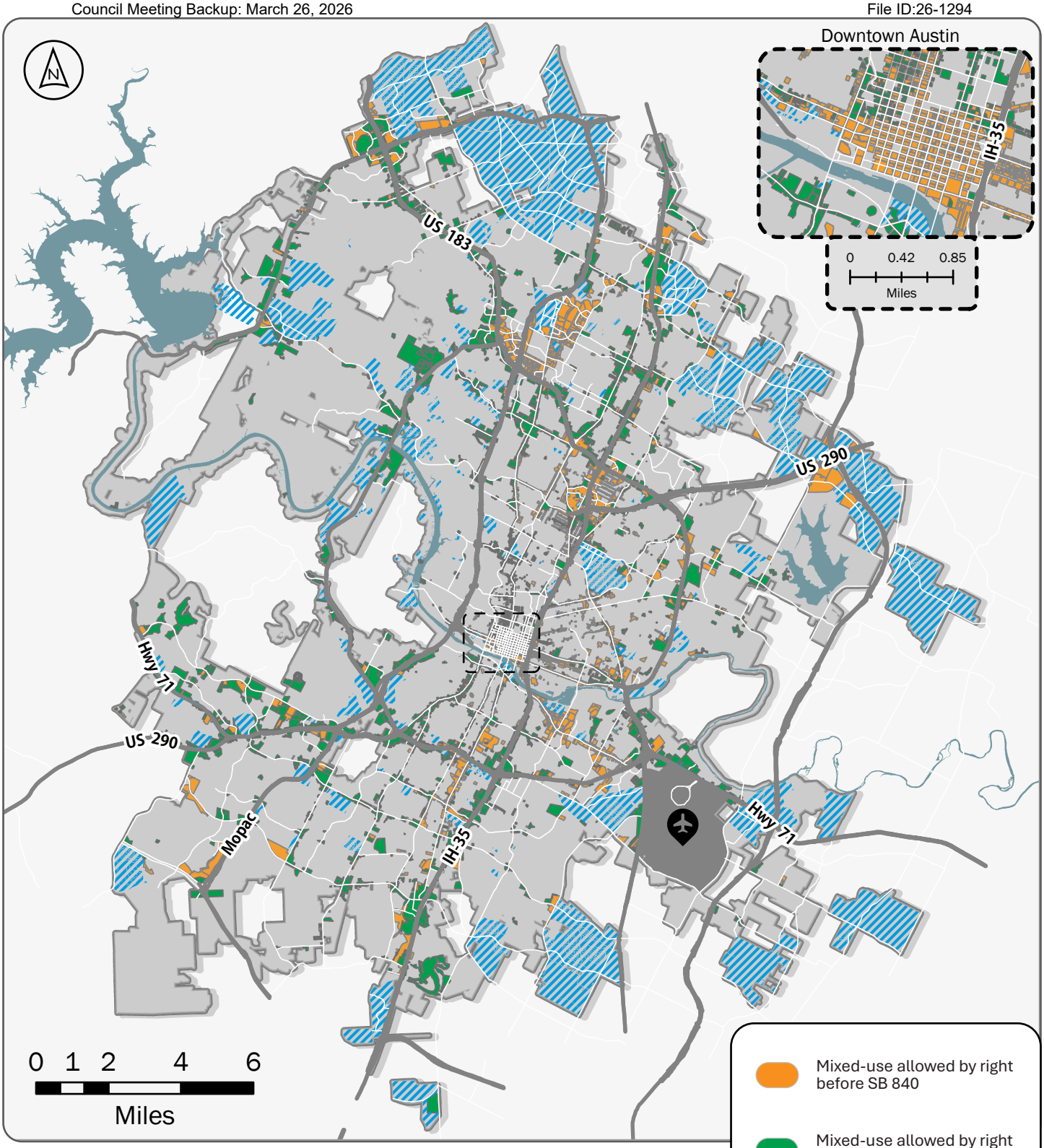
Current Development Types by Geography

The following maps show where mixed-use and residential development is allowed.[10] For mixed-use areas, land area is broken down by where mixed-use development was permitted by-right before SB 840, where mixed-use or multifamily is allowed by right because of SB 840, and where mixed-use or multifamily may be allowed by right but would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis. For residential areas, land is broken down into Single-Family (SF) and Multifamily (MF) zones.

Mixed-Use Areas Statistics

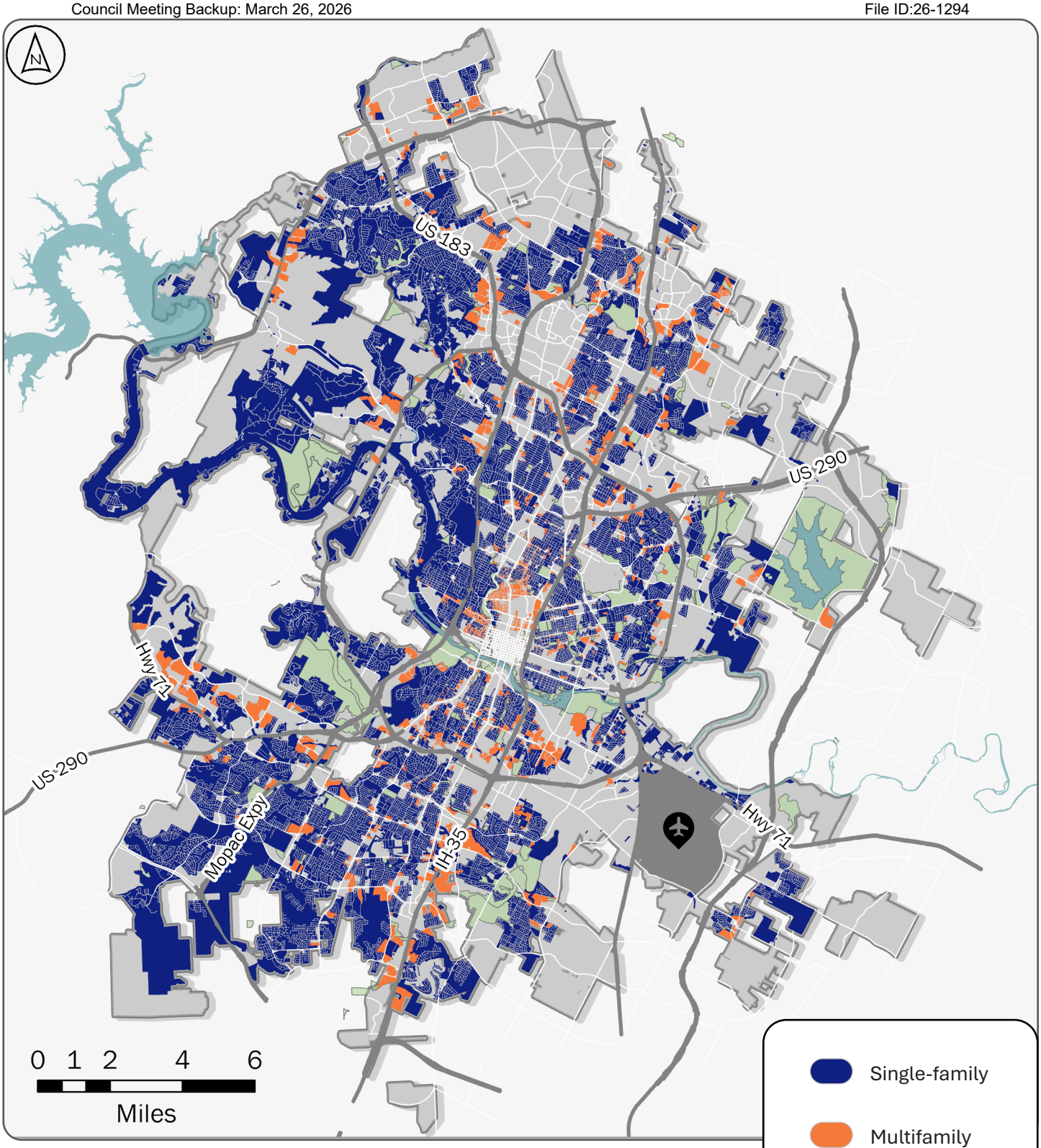
Before Senate Bill 840, mixed-use residential development was only permitted on five percent of Austin's land area. SB 840 now allows mixed-use or multifamily development on an additional nine percent of land area, so that mixed-use residential development is allowed on 14 percent of land area in the city. While an additional 19 percent of land area may allow a mix of uses on a case-by-case basis, much of this land is comprised of suburban Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) that generally do not allow a mix of uses.

10 *These maps are for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes. They do not represent an on-the-ground survey and represent only the approximate relative location of property boundaries. These products have been prepared by the City of Austin for the sole purpose of geographic reference. No warranty is made by the City of Austin regarding specific accuracy or completeness.*



Mixed-Use Zoning

By-right mixed-use development is allowed in more places now due to SB 840. Before SB 840, by-right mixed-use development was only allowed in limited places outside of downtown.



Single-Family and Multifamily Residential Zoning

There are two main types of residential base zoning in Austin: single-family (SF) and multifamily (MF). Most residential zoning in Austin is single-family, which generally allows up to three homes. Before 2023, single-family zones allowed one or two homes.

	% of residential land* zoned SF or MF	% of total land in the City
Single-Family (SF)	85%	29%
Multifamily (MF)	15%	5%

**Does not include Lake Austin (LA), Rural Residential (RR), or Mobile Home (MH)*

3.3 Development Types Produced, Development Standards, and Statistics

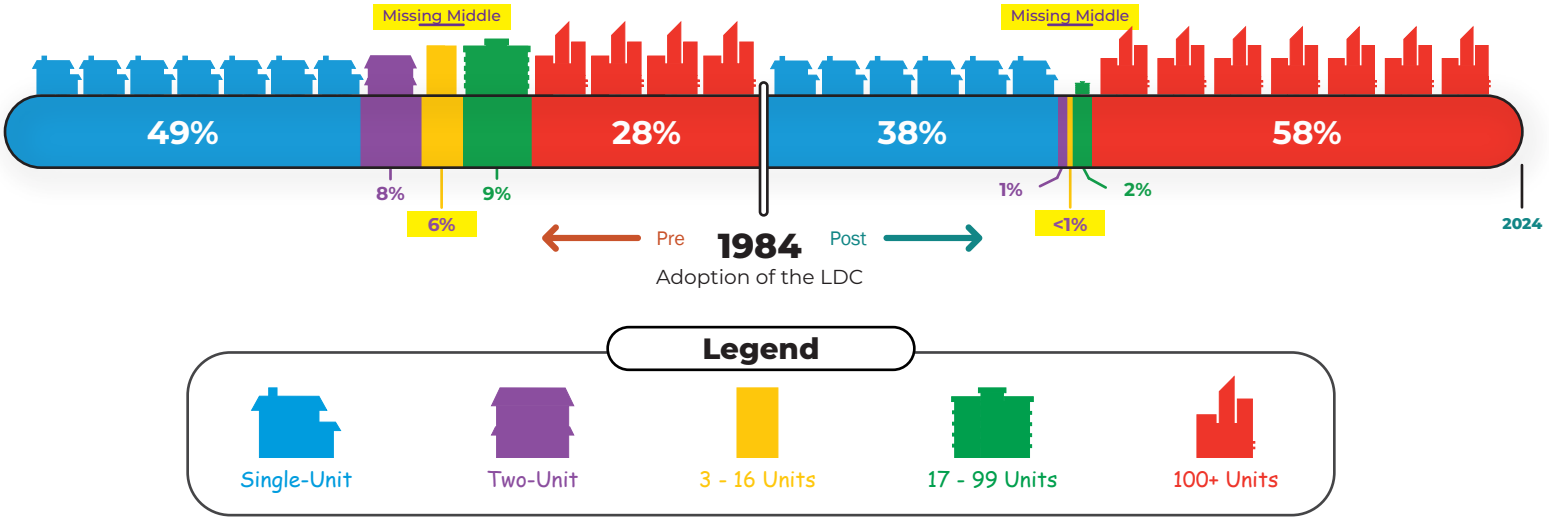
Because Austin's 1984 Land Development Code was designed to produce auto-oriented, suburban-style development, this is what has primarily been built since the code was adopted over 40 years ago. This section describes the city's housing stock, summarizes residential, commercial, and office base zone development standards, shows the most common development types built using the zones, and evaluates the extent to which the zones support walkable, mixed-use places.

Austin's Housing Stock Pre- and Post-1984 Land Development Code

Over half (58 percent) of Austin's current housing stock was built under the current Land Development Code.[11] Below are some statistics showing how the LDC has almost exclusively produced only two types of residential developments: single-family homes and large apartment complexes.

- Of homes built since the code was adopted in 1984, 38 percent are single-family, and 58 percent are in complexes with 100 or more housing units, leaving less than five percent of units in developments with two to 99 units.
- Less than one percent of units built since 1984 are missing middle housing, defined here as buildings with three to 16 units.
- The share of large complexes built compared to other housing types has only become more pronounced in recent years: 71 percent of new homes built since 2018 were in apartment complexes with 100 or more units.

A wider range of housing types were built before the current code was adopted. Six percent were in missing middle housing, and 23 percent were in developments with two to 99 units. Fewer large apartment complexes were built as well; 28 percent of units built pre-1984 are in complexes with 100 or more units compared to 58 percent of units built post-1984.



11 *Housing stock data is from the City of Austin 2024 Land Use Database. See Appendix D for a table showing the number of units in each housing range before and after the current Land Development Code.*

3.3

Residential Base Zone Development Standards[12]

The Land Development Code has six single-family residential zones and six multifamily residential zones. The single-family zones allow one to three units on a single property, and the multifamily zones allow larger apartment and condo projects with a range of heights and densities. The zones have the following key development standards:

Development Standards for Single-Family Base Zones

	SF-1: Single-Family Use	SF-2, SF-3: Single-Family Use	SF-1-SF-3: Duplex and Two-Unit Use	SF-1-SF-3: Three-Unit Use	SF-1-SF-3: Small-Lot Single Family Use	SF-5	SF-6
Minimum lot size	10,000 sq. ft.	5,750 sq. ft.	5,750 sq. ft.	5,750 sq. ft.	1,800 sq. ft.	5,750 sq. ft.	5,750 sq. ft.
Height	35 ft.	35 ft.	35 ft.	35ft.	35 ft.	35 ft.	35 ft.
Impervious cover	40%	45%	45%	45%	40 or 45%	55%	55%
Floor area ratio (FAR)	None or > of 0.4 FAR or 2,300 sq. ft.	None or > of 0.4 FAR or 2,300 sq. ft.	> of 0.55 FAR or 3,200 sq. ft.	> of 0.65 FAR or 4,350 sq. ft.	0.55	—	—

Development Standards for Multifamily Base Zones

	MF-1	MF-2	MF-3	MF-4	MF-5	MF-6
Minimum lot size	8,000 sq. ft.	8,000 sq. ft.	8,000 sq. ft.	8,000 sq. ft.	8,000 sq. ft.	8,000 sq. ft.
Height	40 ft.	40 ft. or 3 stories	40 ft.	60 ft.	60 ft.	90 ft.
Impervious cover	55%	60%	65%	70%	70%	80%
Floor area ratio (FAR)	—	—	.75	.75	1	—

12 *See Appendix A for a more detailed site development standards table for single-family and multifamily base zones*

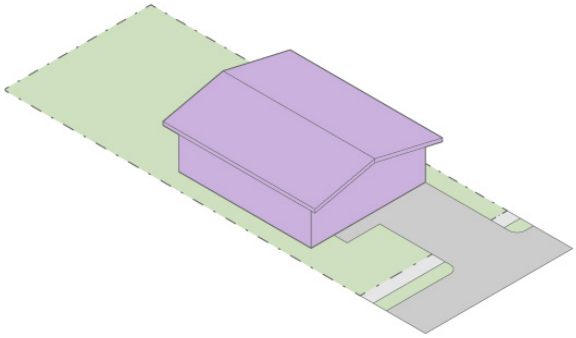
3.3

Development Types Produced by Residential Base Zones

This section shows the most common types of residential development built under residential base zone regulations since the code was adopted in 1984. For each development type, this section includes the number of developments, the total number of units, and the median lot size in projects built since 1984. In general, the residential base zones have produced either large single-family homes or big apartment complexes. While some multifamily zones have produced a small number of townhomes and multiplexes, the zones do not incentivize these housing types and are instead tailored to garden- or wrap-style apartments on large sites. In general, the zones have not produced development that is transit supportive. More detailed information on each development type is shown in Appendix B.

Single-Family Home (Infill or Subdivision)

A single-family home near Southpark Meadows in SF-2 zoning

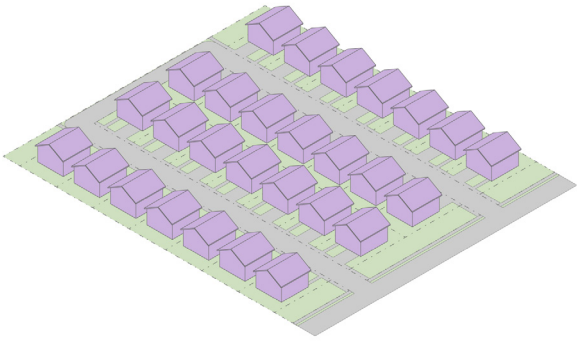


Single-family homes on individual lots are the most common residential development type in Austin. While single-family homes are appropriate in many areas and provide family-sized homes with ample outdoor space, they are also the most expensive housing type and are generally not dense enough to support transit service.

Zoning districts	SF-1 - SF-6
Total number of units	45,788
Median lot size	8,241 sq.ft.

Single-Family Home (Condo)

An SF-6 development along Menchaca Road

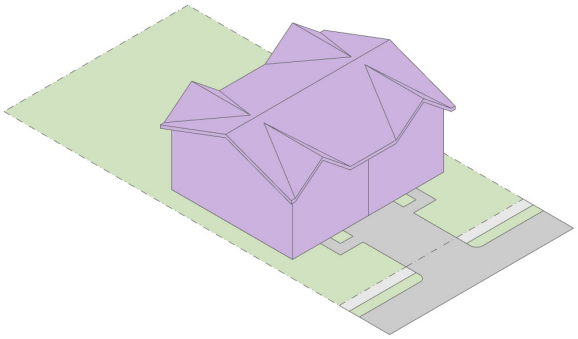


Some single-family homes are not on their own lots and are instead in condo regimes, where owners share land ownership and common area maintenance. These developments are typically located in SF-6 zoning, which can provide more flexible and efficient process alternatives for large properties than going through the subdivision process. They have some of the same issues as other single-family developments in that they are not transit-supportive and can be as expensive as single-family homes on individual lots.

Zoning districts	SF-6
Number of developments	49
Total number of units	1,070
Median site size	3.3 acres

Duplex (HOME Phase 1)

A duplex near Mueller in SF-3 zoning



Duplexes have been allowed in some SF-zones since the code was adopted, though high minimum site area requirements existed until 2023 when HOME Phase 1 removed them. Duplexes can be more affordable than comparable single-family homes in part because they have shared walls.

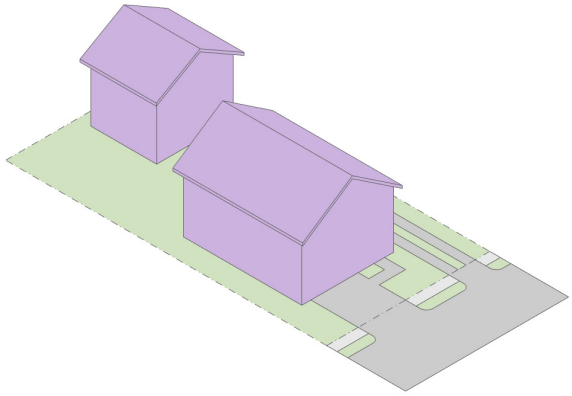
Zoning districts	SF-1 - SF-3
Total number of units	63
Median lot size	10,023 sq.ft.

Data only includes permits submitted since HOME Phase 1 was adopted in December 2023.[13]

13 *Pre-HOME data that distinguishes between attached homes (duplexes) and detached two-unit projects is not available; however, there are 2,080 properties that have developed with two units since 1984, for a total of 4,160 units.*

Two Detached Homes (HOME Phase 1)

Two detached units on a lot near Mueller in SF-3 zoning



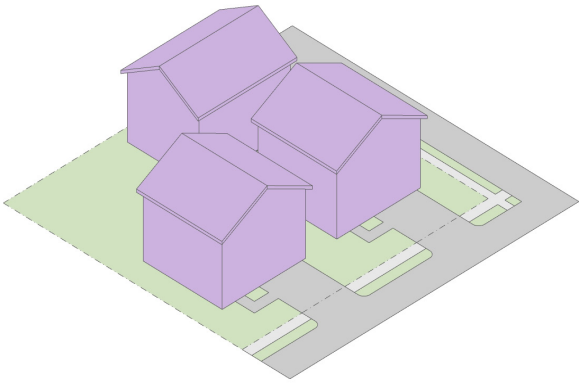
Two-unit developments with detached homes were allowed in some SF-zones since before HOME and were granted additional entitlements when HOME Phase 1 passed in December 2023. These developments often take the form of a main front house and a smaller rear house, though there is no longer a requirement that the rear house be secondary to the front house. Two-unit developments are the most common HOME Phase 1 development type.

Zoning districts	SF-1 - SF-3
Total number of units	454
Median lot size	7,738 sq.ft.

Data only includes permits submittted since HOME Phase 1 was adopted in December 2023.[14]

Three Detached Homes (HOME Phase 1)

A three-unit HOME Phase 1 project near Menchaca Rd in SF-3 zoning



Three-unit developments allowed through HOME Phase 1 provide additional housing capacity on single-family lots, potentially reducing the land costs associated with each unit and thereby the sale price. Developers have mostly built detached single-family homes instead of attached homes; permits for seven triplexes have been submitted.

Zoning districts	SF-1 - SF-3
Total number of units	459
Median lot size	8,961 sq.ft.

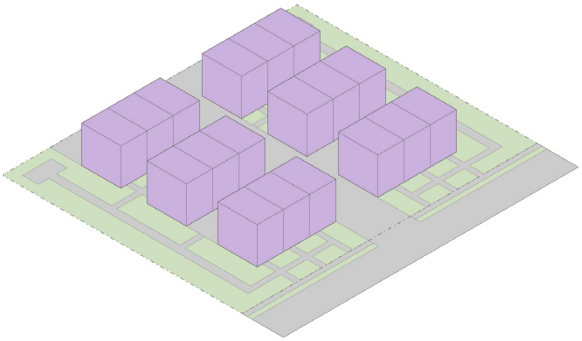
Data only includes permits submitted since HOME Phase 1 was adopted in December 2023.[15]

14 *Pre-HOME data that distinguishes between attached homes (duplexes) and detached two-unit projects is not available; however, there are 2,080 properties that have developed with two units since 1984, for a total of 4,160 units.*

15 *Three units were not allowed on single-family lots before HOME Phase 1 was adopted.*

Townhomes

Townhomes on Tillery Street in MF-2 zoning

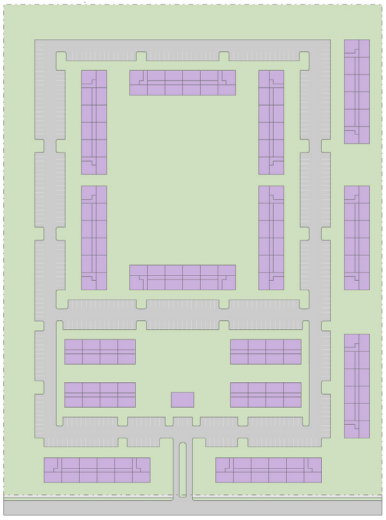


Townhomes are the missing middle type that has been built the most in Austin. They are typically built in lower-density multifamily zones, often on large sites. These developments are not dense enough to support fast and frequent transit service due to high minimum site area requirements for townhome use. There are also no requirements for good urban design, such as street-facing facades and entrances. Townhomes are often more affordable than single-family homes.

Zoning districts	MF-1 - MF-3
Number of developments	77
Total number of units	1,226
Median site size	41,248 sq.ft.

Suburban Garden Apartments

Garden apartments near South Park Meadows in MF-2 zoning

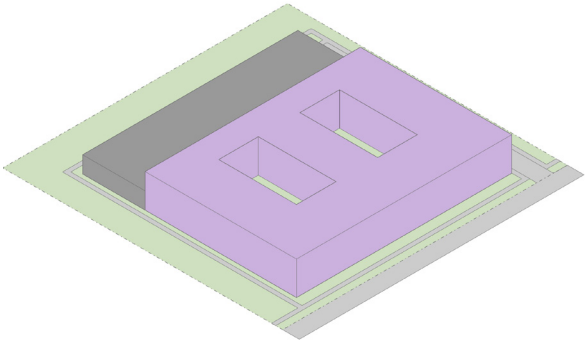


Garden apartments, characterized by several or more multifamily buildings spread over a large site with surface parking, are among the most common multifamily development , especially in suburban areas. Garden apartments are often market-rate affordable, but they are also auto-oriented and generally not dense enough to support frequent transit service.

Zoning districts	MF-1 - MF-3
Number of developments	127
Total number of units	10,398
Median site size	17 acres

Urban Wrap and Podium Apartments

A podium-style apartment complex in MF-6 zoning along North Lamar Boulevard



Zoning districts	MF-6, MU Combining District
Number of developments	25
Total number of units	4,073
Median site size	2.2 acres

Urban wrap apartments contain four or more stories of housing surrounding an interior parking garage. Podium apartments are often both wrapped around and built above a garage. These building types are the densest, and therefore most transit-supportive, of all the types produced by base zones. They also tend to be among the most affordable. Because of the minimum site area requirements in the MU combining district, the density of these projects varies depending on the base zone, though no MU urban wrap projects are as dense as those in MF-6 or density bonus programs like Vertical Mixed-Use (VMU).

3.3

Development Produced by Commercial and Office Base Zones

The Land Development Code has six primary office and commercial base zones ranging from lower-density neighborhood-scale to higher-density, commercial corridor-scale.[16] The zones have the following key development standards:

Commercial and Office Base Zone Development Standards

	Neighborhood Office (NO)	Limited Office (LO)	Neighborhood Commercial (LR)	General Office (GO)	Community Commercial (GR)	Commercial Services (CS)
Height	35 ft. or 2 stories	40 ft. or 3 stories	40 ft. or 3 stories	60 ft.	60 ft.	60 ft.
Impervious Cover[17]	60%	70%	80%	80%	90%	95%
FAR	0.35	0.7	0.5	1	1	2

Under SB 840, multifamily residential and mixed-use residential projects are allowed up to 45 ft. of height in NO, LO, and LR, and no FAR limit is applied to multifamily and mixed-use development as defined by the bill.

A wide range of non-residential uses are allowed in these zones. While some of these uses would be appropriate in walkable, mixed-use places, many would not. Higher-intensity commercial zones in particular allow many uses that do not support the type of urban environment envisioned in plans and policies, including:

- Agricultural Sale and Services
- Automotive Sales
- Automotive Rentals
- Automotive Repair Services
- Building Maintenance Services
- Campground
- Carriage Stable
- Convenience Storage
- Drop-off Recycling Collection Facility
- Electronic Prototype Assembly
- Electronic Testing
- Equipment Repair Services
- Equipment Sales
- Research Assembly Services
- Research Testing Services
- Research Warehousing Services
- Scrap and Salvage
- Service Station
- Stables
- Vehicle Storage
- Indoor Crop Production
- Exterminating Services
- Funeral Services
- Marina
- Recreational Equipment Maintenance & Storage
- Recreational Equipment Sales

16 *There are also Community Recreation (CR), Lake Commercial (L), Warehouse/Limited Office (W/LO), and Commercial Highway (CR) zoning districts, but these are for specialized uses or contexts and are not widely applied.*

17 *Impervious cover may be lower based on a property's watershed regulation area.*

Examples of Auto-Oriented Commercial Uses

Some of the allowed commercial uses would likely no longer be developed in many locations due to high property values, greater demand for other uses, and higher potential return on investment from other uses, including residential development allowed by SB 840. However, some property owners could still pursue auto-oriented uses in places where they may no longer be appropriate.

Chapter 3 Summary

The current residential and commercial base zones present barriers to creating more housing supply, housing choice, and neighborhoods where everyday goods and services are accessible by short trips. The residential base zones are tailored towards single-family homes or large, suburban apartment complexes, and these are the two main housing types that have been produced. Since the current code was adopted, 95 percent of housing units have been in single-family homes or apartment complexes with 100 or more units. Commercial base zones also allow suburban, auto-oriented development that is misaligned with City goals to generate more pedestrian- and transit-oriented development in urban areas.

4

Recommendations for New Zoning Districts

In this chapter

4.1 Overview of Proposed Zoning Districts

To respond holistically to City Council and commission policy direction, staff recommends the creation of two missing middle and four mixed-use base zoning districts:

Missing Middle Zoning Districts

- Middle Residential 1
- Middle Residential 2

Mixed-Use Zoning Districts

- Mixed-Use 1A
- Mixed-Use 1B
- Mixed-Use 2A
- Mixed-Use 2B

Each base zone would regulate allowed uses, building size, and building placement, along with other standards to promote pedestrian-oriented urban design. Additional form-based standards are recommended for certain missing middle housing types, such as townhomes and cottage courts, to create predictable building types that fit in existing neighborhoods while maintaining development flexibility. Changes to non-zoning regulations that may be needed to enable these development types are also discussed in this chapter.

Staff recommends first adding the new base zones to the Land Development Code as "paper zoning districts," meaning they would not yet apply to specific properties. Once the zones are codified, property owners could apply for rezonings, and the City could initiate zoning changes in specific areas to achieve policy objectives or implement station area, small area, or district plans. See Chapter 5 for more information on the recommended process to implement the new zones. Staff also recommends further analysis and discussion about whether it makes sense to retire any existing zones or regulations.

The recommendations in this report build on the extensive work and engagement done through efforts to update the Land Development Code since 2012. While the work to comprehensively update the code was halted in 2020, the draft Land Development Code Revision remains a valuable resource for this study, given that the proposed changes resulted from the expertise of many staff and consultants, as well as robust community feedback and consensus-building among stakeholders. The study's recommendations also draw heavily on regulations for the Mueller redevelopment and regulations in peer cities. Throughout this chapter, the Precedent icon shows where similar regulations exist in peer cities or in Austin.

This study presents initial recommendations for some specific site development standards based on staff research and analysis. Other development standards or topics, however, need further analysis and/or community and decision maker input to inform staff's final recommendation. These are identified with Further Analysis and/or Discussion Topic icons.

The Further Analysis icon shows where additional research and analysis are needed before forming final recommendations. The Discussion Topic icon highlights specific topics where input would be particularly helpful to inform further analysis and final recommendations. All the recommendations in this study are preliminary and serve as a foundation for upcoming community discussion and additional analysis by staff and consultants.

Areas Appropriate for Missing Middle and Mixed-Use Development

In future phases of work, staff will develop criteria to identify areas where missing middle housing and mixed-use development could be appropriate in Austin. This analysis will help staff consider factors such as lot dimensions, presence of alleys, access to amenities, and environmental features when crafting the final recommended standards for the new zones. Below are some criteria staff plans to use to identify properties that may be appropriate for missing middle and mixed-use development:

- Current zoning
- Current land use
- Lot size
- Connectivity
- Proximity to transit
- Street type
- Floodplains, creek buffers, and erosion hazard zones
- Watershed regulation area
- Displacement risk area
- Existing infrastructure
- Access to amenities
- Presence of legacy commercial uses

Before recommending specific properties where the new zones could be applied as part of any future city-initiated rezoning, staff would engage the community and conduct further analysis.

Displacement and Missing Middle and Mixed-Use Zoning

Displacement refers to the situation where residents are forced to move due to redevelopment or the inability to afford housing costs, often resulting from higher rents or property taxes. Austin's rapid growth has led to both the direct and indirect displacement of residents, especially people of color in the city's Eastern Crescent. New base zones to enable missing middle and mixed-use development could affect displacement pressure by increasing the market value of property or making property more likely to redevelop.

Discussion Topic and Further Analysis: Implement anti-displacement strategies

Before recommending that new missing middle and mixed-use zones apply to specific properties, the City should analyze displacement risk and implement strategies to mitigate displacement:

- Consider applying zones in high-opportunity areas where displacement is less of a threat over areas with active displacement or that are vulnerable to displacement.
- Implement the recommendations of the forthcoming Equity Overlay Study when applying new missing middle and mixed-use zones.
- Identify barriers to housing development in high-opportunity areas, including zoning that is overly restrictive. Consider allowing Middle Residential and Mixed-Use zones to supersede Neighborhood Conservation Combining Districts (NCCDs), which generally place additional restrictions on base zone regulations.
- Maintain and increase support for ongoing anti-displacement efforts, including for building and preserving income-restricted affordable housing in all parts of the city and for the numerous programming options for renters and homeowners offered by Austin Housing.

4.2 Middle Residential Zones

Middle Residential zones are designed to allow more homes in existing neighborhoods to increase housing options at a range of prices. Below are the preliminary recommended site development standards for the Middle Residential zones:

	Min. Lot Size	Max. Height	Min. Site Area per Unit	Max. Floor Area Ratio (FAR) per Site	Max. Impervious Cover	Front Yard Setback	Street Side Yard Setback	Interior Side Yard Setback	Rear Yard Setback
Middle Residential 1	5,750 sq. ft.	35 ft.	Calibrated to allow 4 units on a minimum sized lot	TBD	TBD	10 ft.	5-10 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft. or 0 ft. on an alley
Middle Residential 2	5,750 sq. ft.	35 ft.	Calibrated to allow 6 units on a minimum sized lot	TBD	TBD	10 ft.	5-10 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft. or 0 ft. on an alley

See *Appendix A* for a table showing the differences in development standards between the proposed Middle Residential zones and the existing single-family and multifamily base zones.

Middle Residential 1 (MR-1) at a Glance

Scale: Buildings would be house scale with a 35 ft. maximum height (generally up to three stories).

Density: Minimum site area requirements would be calibrated to yield four units on a minimum-sized 5,750 sq. ft. lot. The number of units allowed would increase with lot size. A maximum number of units per lot could be considered.

Allowed uses: Small-scale housing types, including single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, cottage courts, and small multiplexes, and potentially limited ground-floor non-residential uses.

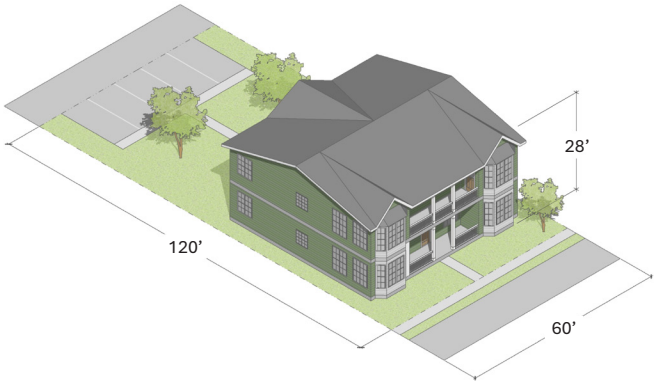
Potential context: Lower-density residential neighborhoods.

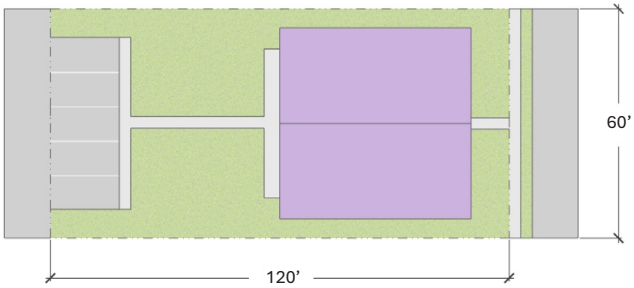
Middle Residential 1 (MR-1) Example Development Types

This section shows examples of development types that could be built using the proposed Middle Residential 1 zone. The models are shown on common lot sizes in Austin.

Fourplex

Stacked fourplex, alley loaded



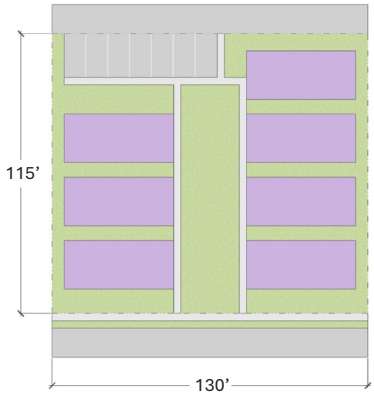


Lot size	7,200 sq.ft.
Height	28 ft.
Average unit size	980 sq.ft.
Stories	2

A fourplex built before the current Land Development Code in the Clarksville neighborhood

Cottage Court

Cottage court with seven units, alley loaded

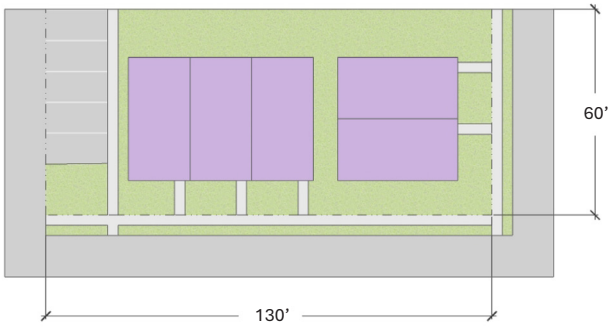


Lot size	14,950 sq. ft.
Height	24 ft.
Average unit size	1,200 sq. ft.
Stories	2

A cottage court in Mueller

Townhomes

Five townhomes, alley loaded



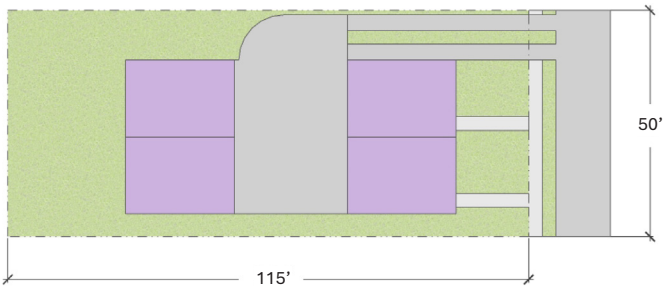
Lot size	7,800 sq. ft.
Height	32 ft.
Average unit size	1,200 sq. ft.
Stories	2

Townhomes in Mueller

4.2

Front and Rear Duplexes

Front and rear duplexes, front loaded



Lot size	5,750 sq. ft.
Height	35 ft.
Average unit size	820 sq. ft.
Stories	3

Front and rear duplexes in Seattle, Washington. Courtesy of Sightline Institute.

Middle Residential 2 (MR-2) at a Glance

Scale: Buildings would be house-scale or slightly larger with a 35 ft. maximum height (generally up to three stories).

Density: Minimum site area requirements would be calibrated to yield six units on a minimum-sized 5,750 sq. ft. lot. The number of units allowed would increase with lot size. A maximum number of units per lot could be considered.

Allowed uses: Small- and medium-scale housing types, including single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, cottage courts, and small and medium multiplexes, and potentially limited ground-floor non-residential uses.

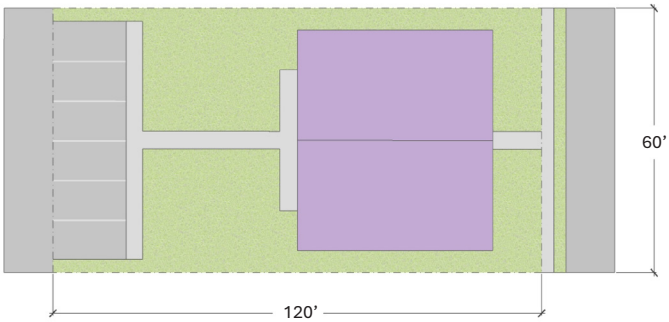
Potential context: Lower- and medium-density residential and mixed-use neighborhoods.

Middle Residential 2 (MR-2) Example Development Types

This section shows examples of development types that could be built using the proposed Middle Residential 2 zone. The models are shown on common lot sizes in Austin.

Sixplex

Stacked sixplex, alley loaded

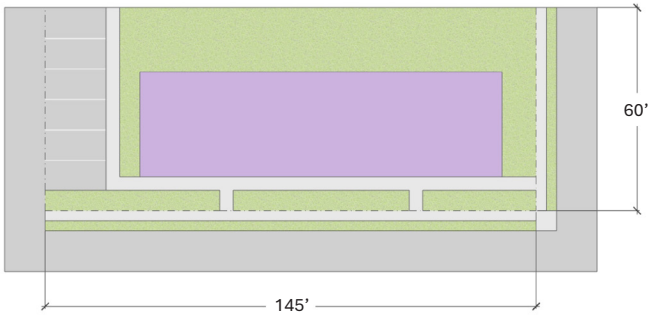


Lot size	7,200 sq. ft.
Height	35 ft.
Average unit size	980 sq. ft.
Stories	3

A recently constructed sixplex in Portland, Oregon. Photo courtesy Sightline Institute.

Eightplex

Stacked eightplex, alley loaded

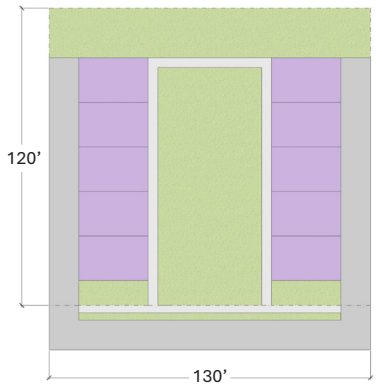


Lot size	8,700 sq. ft.
Height	28 ft.
Average unit size	700 sq. ft.
Stories	2

Eightplexes in Central Park, the neighborhood on the former Stapleton Airport site in Denver. Image by Opticos Design, Inc. courtesy Sightline Institute.

Townhome Court

Townhome court with ten units, front loaded



Lot size	15,600 sq. ft.
Height	35 ft.
Average unit size	1,000 sq. ft.
Stories	3

A townhome court in Mueller

Allowed Development Types for Middle Residential (MR) Zones

Middle Residential zones would allow a variety of small-scale housing types, including single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, cottage courts, and small multiplexes. In the higher-density MR-2 zone, the City could consider requiring a minimum of four units per site. A maximum number of units per lot could also be considered for one or both zones.

Staff recommends avoiding classifying existing uses that don't meet the new zoning standards as nonconforming by allowing them to be maintained and redeveloped, subject to appropriate limitations.

Discussion Topic: Allow limited non-residential uses in Middle Residential zones

The City could consider allowing or making conditional limited ground-floor non-residential uses in Middle Residential zones. This would enable easier access to neighborhood-serving businesses, such as small coffee shops and corner stores, or civic uses like art galleries or makerspaces.

Shop Houses in Mueller

Goals:

- Enhance the quality of life for residents in lower-density neighborhoods by providing easier access to everyday goods and services.
- Create more opportunities for small local businesses to start up and thrive.
- Support local artists by allowing small arts and culture spaces in more places.

Limit the amount of non-residential space on a site. Consider limiting either the percentage of a building that can be non-residential or the total square footage of non-residential space on a site.

Ensure uses are compatible with primarily residential contexts. Do not allow uses that negatively affect residents' or neighbors' quality of life, and recommend additional limitations on permitted uses, including rules related to sound, light, signage, and hours of operation.

Explore the feasibility of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) standards that encourage people to walk, bike, or take transit and reduce the number of cars on primarily residential streets.

4.2

Proposed Middle Residential (MR) Development Standards

This section provides more information on recommended development standards for Middle Residential zoning districts. Only projects with four or more units would follow Middle Residential development standards. A project with one, two, or three units could potentially be built on a site zoned Middle Residential, though these uses would develop under separate, existing regulations.[18]

Height

The recommended height limit in both Middle Residential zones is 35 ft., matching the height limit in single-family zones. This height allows buildings with up to three floors.

Setbacks

Setbacks determine how close a building can be to a property line. Staff recommends setbacks that fit within a single-family residential neighborhood context. The table below shows the recommended minimum setbacks for both Middle Residential zones:

Front Yard	Street Side Yard[19]	Interior Side Yard	Rear Yard
10 ft.	5-10 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft. or 0 ft. on an alley

Discussion Topic: Maximum setbacks and reduced minimum setbacks

The City should consider a maximum front yard setback to ensure buildings interact with the street and leave enough usable open space on the rear of the lot. Also consider allowing a 0 ft. interior side yard setback for properties adjacent to mixed-use or other higher-intensity zones.

Lot Size

Minimum lot size

Staff recommends a 5,750 sq. ft. minimum lot size for Middle Residential zones. This is the current minimum lot size required to build two or three homes using HOME Phase 1 regulations on a property zoned single-family. Matching this minimum lot size ensures a logical transition from one-, two-, and three-unit development to four or more-unit development using Middle Residential regulations.

18 *A single-family home on a lot zoned MR would use SF-3 base zone site development standards. Two or three homes on a lot zoned MR would use the standards for Duplex, Two-Unit, or Three-Unit Residential Uses. Consider requiring a minimum of four units on properties zoned MR-2.*

19 *On a Level 1 street, the street side yard setback is the greater of five feet from the property line or 10 feet from curb, or in the absence of curbs, from the edge of the pavement. On a Level 2, Level 3, or Level 4 street, the street side yard setback is 10 feet from the property line. This requirement matches HOME Phase 1 and 2 and ensures adequate sightlines for road users at intersections on higher-traffic streets.*

Density

Regulate density with minimum site area requirements and floor area ratio (FAR) limits

Density refers to how many homes are allowed on a property and how large the homes can be. The number of homes is often regulated through maximum dwelling units per acre or minimum site area per unit requirements. The size of homes is often regulated through a maximum unit size and/or maximum floor area ratio (FAR), defined as the ratio of habitable building space allowed on a property to the size of the property.

Staff recommends regulating the number of units allowed in Middle Residential zones via minimum site area requirements, which would result in more units being allowed as lot size increases. The minimum site area requirements would be calibrated to allow four units on a minimum-sized 5,750 sq. ft. lot. in the lower-density MR-1 zone and six units on a minimum-sized lot in the higher density MR-2 zone.

Peer City Precedent: Seattle, Washington

Seattle has a minimum site area requirement of 1,250 sq. ft. per unit in their single-family-equivalent zone. In Austin, this would equate to four units on a minimum-sized 5,750 sq. ft. lot.

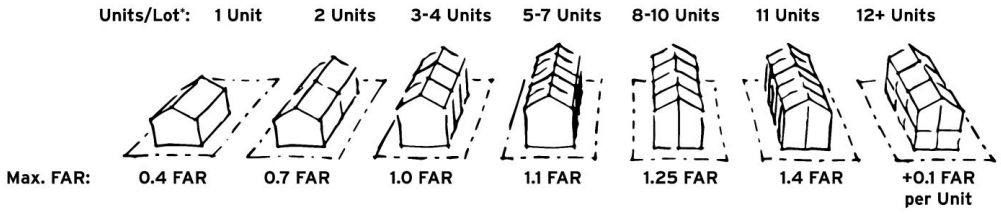
Discussion Topic and Further Analysis: Recommend floor area ratio (FAR) limits that achieve desired policy goals

FAR limits, which regulate the amount of building area allowed as a function of lot size, affect the sizes of homes allowed on a site. Striking a balance of how much FAR to permit is a challenging assessment of tradeoffs and policy goals. Typically, less FAR leads to smaller, more affordable units on average, and more FAR produces larger, more expensive units on average. The larger units, however, may be more financially feasible to develop and would better accommodate families with multiple children or multigenerational living arrangements. Further discussion and analysis are needed to determine the recommended FAR limits that 1) maintain development feasibility and 2) respond to community and policymaker feedback around incentivizing smaller, more affordable units versus larger, more expensive units.

The amount of FAR could remain constant across lot sizes and number of units proposed, or it could increase with the addition of more units to the development in what is known as a “sliding FAR scale.” A sliding FAR scale may incentivize more units on a site, which could better support housing supply and transit-supportive land use goals. More FAR would potentially be allowed in MR-2 than in MR-1. Both the minimum site area requirements and maximum FAR would work together to support policy goals around incentivizing particular kinds of housing units.

Peer City Precedent: Sacramento

Sacramento uses a sliding FAR scale, shown below, which grants more FAR for projects with more units to incentivize the construction of more homes per site:



Set a maximum unit size

In addition to FAR limits, staff recommends limiting how big any one home can be to keep prices attainable. The maximum unit size for two- and three-unit developments is 2,300 sq. ft per unit. The same or smaller maximum unit size could be considered for Middle Residential zones.

Building Dimensions and Placement

Discussion Topic: Consider limiting the number of lots able to be combined

The City should consider limiting the number of lots that could be combined through a unified development agreement (UDA) in Middle Residential zoning districts to protect against overly wide buildings that span across several lots, which would be out of character with the typical development pattern in lower-density residential neighborhoods. For the lower-density MR-1 zoning district, consider prohibiting UDAs to maintain the existing pattern of building and lot widths. For the higher density MR-2 zone, consider allowing development across two standard lots through a UDA. Exceptions to these limitations could be considered for rows of townhomes or for lots that are substandard and ineligible to develop without a UDA.

A 90 ft-wide courtyard sixplex in Mueller provides a sense of the building width that could potentially be achieved in MR-2 zoning by combining two standard 50 ft-wide lots.

Discussion Topic and Further Analysis: Require units to be attached

To help keep missing middle responsive to the primarily one-home-per-lot character of many Austin neighborhoods, Middle Residential zones should generally allow just one building per lot, and units should be attached vertically and/or horizontally. Exceptions should be made for homes in a cottage court, which can be attached or detached, and for projects with just two or three units. Further discussion and analysis are needed to develop this recommendation, including whether to allow some groups of detached units on sites with four or more units (e.g., front and rear duplexes, as shown page 79).

Impervious Cover

Impervious cover refers to surfaces that do not allow water to soak into the ground, such as buildings, driveways, and sidewalks. Limiting the amount of impervious cover on properties is one way to limit runoff, which can exacerbate flooding and decrease water quality.

Further Analysis: Impervious cover limits

Identify what impervious cover limits are necessary to facilitate the housing typologies envisioned on common lot sizes in Middle Residential zoning districts. Consider allowing more impervious cover in MR-2 than in MR-1 to accommodate the additional units and floor area ratio that would be allowed. Also consider a graduated impervious cover limit based on the number of units proposed, which would incentivize the construction of more units. Additional coordination with Austin Watershed Protection is needed.

Compatibility

Because missing middle is designed to be compatible with existing single-family residential neighborhoods, compatibility standards should not apply to Middle Residential zones. Middle Residential zones should also not trigger compatibility standards onto other properties.

Compatibility standards create a transition between single-family homes and larger buildings by limiting building height, requiring a landscape buffer, and restricting uses within 25 ft. of a property line shared with a single-family home. Compatibility applies to properties zoned commercial, office, or higher-intensity multifamily within 75 ft. of a property with a single-family home.

Specific-to-Use Requirements

Townhomes

Discussion Topic: Consider additional standards for townhomes

Townhomes are homes that are attached to one another horizontally. They may be on their own lot, or all units may be on a single lot.[20] Units are typically multi-story. While townhomes can fit well in many neighborhood contexts, they require additional regulations to ensure pedestrian-oriented urban design, as well as sufficient light, open space, and privacy for residents on the site and on adjacent properties.

Thoughtfully regulating building orientation, street interaction, and the placement of driveways and parking is essential to making sure townhomes fit within existing neighborhoods and contribute to a pleasant streetscape. Without these standards, developers may choose to orient townhomes towards the side yards of a lot instead of towards the street in what is often called a "slot home" site layout. Developers build this configuration on deep lots, which are common in Austin, since more homes can fit oriented widthwise on the lot versus lengthwise. Slot homes, however, can cause noise, light, and privacy conflicts for both residents in the development and neighbors on either side, since the front façades of buildings are oriented towards one another and entrances and outdoor spaces abut side yards, which are typically narrower than front and rear yards. This type of development also has poor street interaction, since most or all units on a site are oriented away from the street and towards a private driveway.

Townhomes facing a common green in Mueller.

Recommended approach: Require townhomes to front a public street or a common green.

Countless great residential streets around the world are made up of rows of townhomes oriented towards the street or towards common greens. Requiring townhomes to be oriented towards the street or a common green fronting the street, similar to the site layout in the image above, would reduce impacts on neighbors, ensure adequate open space and privacy for residents, and create

20 *The Land Development Code currently defines townhomes on their own lot as "townhouse use." City staff refer to multiple townhomes on a lot as "multifamily rowhouses," which fall under the more general "multifamily use" in the code. Additional discussion is needed to determine how the new zones would define or redefine townhome as a use.*

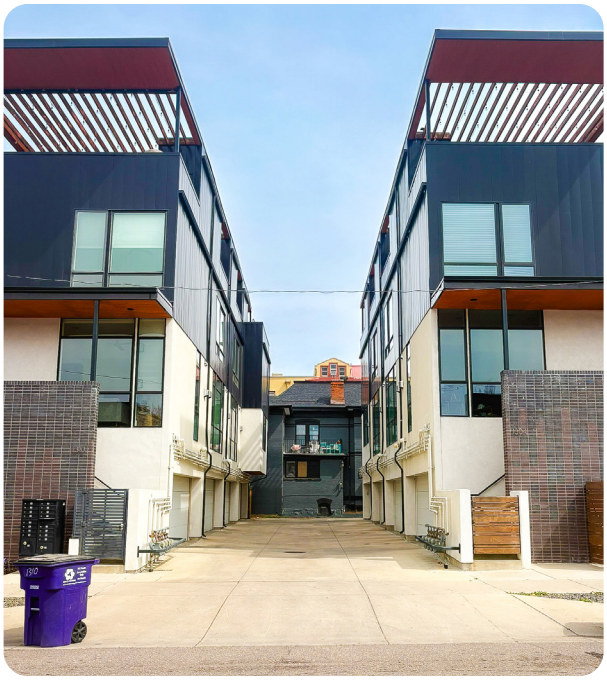
a pleasant streetscape. Explore the feasibility of requiring development on through lots and corner lots to face both street frontages, instead of just one, to prevent the side or rear façades of townhomes from abutting the street.

On lots where developers may have otherwise chosen to build slot homes, developers could build stacked flats instead to achieve a similar unit yield. Stacked flats often have more green space per unit than slot homes, may offer more attainable homes due to smaller unit sizes and shared walls, floors, or ceilings, and provide better ADA-accessibility with one-story units compared to two- or three-story townhomes. Their street-facing orientation also means fewer noise, light, and privacy concerns for residents and neighbors.

Austin Precedent: Mueller. All townhomes in Mueller front a street or a common green.

Alternative option: If townhomes without street frontage are allowed, require the units with street frontage to have a street-facing entrance, and consider requiring units to the rear of the lot to also be oriented toward the street instead of the side yards.

Peer City Precedents: Denver, Portland, Seattle



Examples of slot homes in Denver

Allow townhomes on their own lot or in a condo regime. One of the benefits of townhomes is their flexibility to be on their own lot, like a detached single-family home, or in a condo regime with shared land ownership and maintenance of common spaces. Middle Residential zones should accommodate both types of arrangements. This may involve revisions to subdivision requirements and the allowance for a smaller minimum lot size for individual townhome lots.

Consider additional requirements and allowances for townhomes on larger sites.

- Townhomes should front the length of public right of way except for driveways, side setbacks, or a common green.
- Townhomes interior to the site should front a private drive, a dedicated public right of way, or a common green and have a private frontage (e.g. porch, stoop).
- Parking spaces or attached garages should be located behind the row of townhomes.

Cottage Courts

Cottage courts require an additional set of regulations to ensure they are built according to their intended form – with units surrounding a common green space and parking, if provided, located behind the cottage court. Below are some of the requirements to consider when regulating cottage courts:

- Require units to face a common open space and have front porches.
- Set a minimum common open space requirement per unit and a minimum width for the common open space to create a usable courtyard and allow room for underground utilities.
- Require parking, if provided, to be to the rear of the lot, behind the homes.
- Consider requiring minimum spacing between units in Middle Residential 1 to preserve a detached cottage character. Units could be attached in Middle Residential 2.
- Allow units in the front of the court to have a private frontage on the street or on the common green.

A cottage court in Mueller

Further Analysis: Utilities and fire access in cottage courts

Due to the unique layout of cottage courts, in-depth discussions are needed with Austin Water, Austin Energy, and Austin Fire regarding utility connections and fire and maintenance access.

Pocket Neighborhoods

Middle Residential zoning districts would mainly be designed for lots in existing residential neighborhoods. With additional requirements and allowances, however, larger properties could also utilize Middle Residential to develop new pocket neighborhoods featuring a variety of housing types, offering an alternative to traditional single-family subdivisions. While pocket neighborhoods with missing middle types are technically allowed in multifamily zones, as well as in commercial and office zones due to SB 840, additional regulations may be necessary to encourage a variety of missing middle types, create good urban design within the site, and require connectivity between sites.

Further Analysis: Pocket neighborhood regulations

Recommend regulations that would enable pocket neighborhoods with different missing middle types, encourage good urban design, and require connectivity between sites.

Missing Middle Density Bonus

Further Analysis: Missing middle density bonus

A missing middle density bonus could create an opportunity for more housing, including income-restricted affordable housing, in small-scale buildings. Staff recommends studying the feasibility of a density bonus for four or more units that could be coupled with Middle Residential zones. The density bonus could allow more height (enough height for a 4th story) and/or other additional entitlements in exchange for affordable units or a fee-in-lieu. A financial feasibility analysis should be conducted to identify viable options for percentages of affordable units, affordability levels, and fees-in-lieu. Consider whether the bonus could also apply to existing single-family base zones. Additional coordination with Austin Housing is needed to determine administrative feasibility.

Peer City Precedent: Seattle, Washington

Seattle proposes a density bonus program for neighborhood residential zones (the equivalent to single-family zones in Austin) that would allow a fourth story and additional FAR in exchange for affordable units.

Four-story stacked flats in Seattle. Courtesy Sightline Institute.

Non-Zoning Regulations

Existing regulations outside of the zoning code also tend to be tailored to either single-family homes or large apartment complexes. This section identifies non-zoning regulations that may need to be right sized for missing middle housing.

Austin Planning staff will have detailed discussions with partner departments about changes to the Land Development Code, building code, criteria manuals, and development review processes that may be needed. Staff plans to consult with partner departments on the following topics:

Austin Transportation and Public Works	Driveway and parking design
Austin Development Services	Tree planting and preservation requirements, visitability requirements, criteria manuals and technical codes, development review processes
Austin Watershed Protection	Drainage and water quality protections, criteria manuals, impervious cover requirements
Austin Housing	Anti-displacement initiatives, density bonuses
Austin Financial Services	Mueller and Colony Park redevelopment lessons learned
Austin Water	Water and wastewater utility connections, criteria manuals and technical codes
Austin Energy	Dry utility connections, criteria manuals and technical codes, rate classifications
Austin Fire	Emergency vehicle access, criteria manuals and technical codes, hydrant placement and hose length, deployment areas, fire suppression requirements for residential buildings, and building setback requirements
Austin Resource Recovery	Waste management

The following sections provide additional information on potential non-zoning barriers to missing middle and initial recommended changes to discuss in more detail with partner departments.

Driveways, Parking, and Garage Design

Though Austin eliminated minimum parking requirements in 2023, developers building missing middle projects will still likely provide off-street parking in most locations. Regulating the design of parking and driveways is essential to ensure missing middle buildings fit into a lower-density neighborhood context and contribute to safe and pleasant streets. Additional discussions with Austin Transportation and Public Works and Austin Fire are needed to develop these recommendations further.

Limit the number of driveways

The number of driveways should be limited to reduce curb cuts. Excessive curb cuts make streets less safe by creating additional points of conflict between cars and other road users, like pedestrians and cyclists. They also reduce the space for street trees, preventing an urban tree canopy that keeps the city cooler in hot weather, adds aesthetic appeal, leads to slower, safer driving, and creates wildlife habitat. Below are driveway recommendations to consider:

- Consider prohibiting driveways if a property has an accessible alley. If no alley is available, consider allowing only one driveway per lot. A driveway on a corner lot should generally connect to the secondary, lower-ASMP level street instead of the primary, higher-ASMP level street.

Update driveway width and spacing requirements

Current driveway width requirements are a barrier to missing middle development. Driveways serving four or more units are classified as major driveways, which can be up to 20 ft. wide and serve two-way traffic. This is too wide to fit on many lots suitable for missing middle development, and a requirement to accommodate two-way traffic may not be necessary for most missing middle types.

The City should consider updating driveway classifications to allow narrower driveways for missing middle development. The classifications could be based on the number of parking spaces served, not the number of units, as is currently the case, since the number of off-street parking spaces per unit varies and is not regulated by the City.

Regulate the design of off-street parking

To avoid an uninviting and auto-centric “wall of garages” facing the street, consider requiring garages or parking spaces to be at the rear of the building and not visible from the street. If garages facing a street are to be allowed, considering requiring them to be 50 percent of the width of the building façade or less.

Townhomes with front-facing garages near South Park Meadows.

Garage facing an alley in a sixplex in Mueller.

Sixplexes in Chattanooga, Tennessee, with shared parking to the rear of the site. Photo via Creative Commons.

4.2

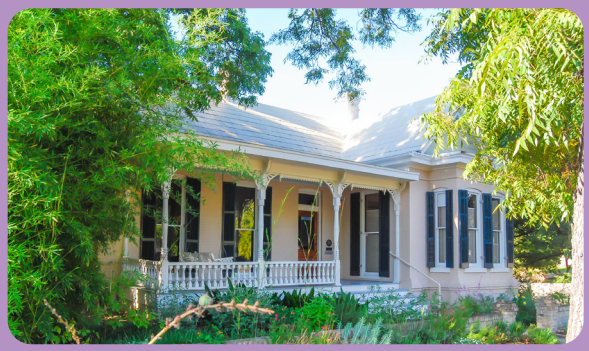
Building Frontages

Frontages are the building elements that connect the public and private realms. Porches, stoops, and other frontage types invite residents to spend time in front of their homes, creating opportunities for neighbors to interact and build community while keeping eyes on the street for safety. Frontages are typically located within the front or street side yard setback. Frontages should be allowed to encroach into these setbacks to promote street interaction. Objective dimensional standards would create predictable requirements while maintaining design flexibility. Additional coordination with utility providers and external stakeholders is needed before presenting recommended dimensions for frontage types. Below are examples of frontage types that could be required:

Porch: Projecting

A projecting porch has three sides open. The main facade of the building is set behind the porch.

Porch: Engaged



An engaged porch has at least two adjacent sides of the porch attached to the building.

Dooryard

A dooryard is a yard or entry space by the front door of a building. A dooryard may be raised, sunken, or at grade.

Forecourt

A forecourt can be used as an entry court or shared garden space for buildings with multiple units. Most of the building sits near the sidewalk with a small percentage of the building set back, creating a small court space.

If non-residential uses are allowed in Middle Residential zones, additional frontage types should be allowed. See Section 4.3 for examples of non-residential frontage types.

Tree Planting and Preservation

Middle Residential zones present an opportunity to preserve and expand Austin's tree canopy, providing environmental, health, and livability benefits.

Street Trees in Mueller.

Require street trees

The City does not require street trees to be planted in all areas. To expand street tree coverage, explore requiring Middle Residential developments to plant and maintain shade trees in the public right of way or the front yard and street side yard, if applicable. Further discussions related to license agreements and maintenance may be needed to ensure street tree planting requirements are not too burdensome for missing middle projects.

Allow reduced setbacks to preserve trees

Austin already has a robust tree preservation ordinance, but the City can take additional steps to incentivize tree preservation for missing middle developments. Consider allowing front yard, interior side yard, or street side yard setbacks to be reduced up to a certain point if doing so will preserve existing healthy trees by allowing more room for buildings elsewhere on the site. Recommend a minimum tree size in caliper inches that warrants the reduced setback allowance.

Peer City Precedent: Sacramento, California

For missing middle projects, Sacramento requires trees to be planted in the front or street side yard setbacks and allows reduced setbacks to preserve existing trees.

Building Codes

Developers of residential buildings must follow either the International Residential Code (IRC) or the International Building Code (IBC). Projects with one or two housing units can generally be built under the IRC, while projects with three or more attached units must generally be built under the IBC. Other factors, like building height and building square footage, can also determine which code applies. The IRC may have lower construction costs per square foot compared to the IBC, which has more stringent requirements, particularly around fire safety, that are tailored towards large buildings and may not be necessary for house-scale structures. Allowing some missing middle housing to be built under the IRC could lead to cost savings in both materials and labor, since an established network of single-family homebuilders and contractors could easily transition to building missing middle without having to learn a separate building code. Builders familiar with the IBC typically work on larger projects and may be less interested in bidding for smaller missing middle projects or may charge more. To enable these potential savings, other jurisdictions have changed their building codes to allow some missing middle projects to be built under the IRC.

Discussion Topic and Further Analysis: Allow missing middle to use the residential building code

Consider allowing some missing middle-scale housing to be built using the International Residential Code (IRC). Coordination is needed with Austin Development Services and Austin Fire staff, as well as engagement with external stakeholders, including infill builders and architects.

Peer City Precedent: Dallas, Texas

In April 2025, Dallas permitted residential buildings with up to eight units, including live-work units, to be constructed using the residential building code rather than the commercial building code typically required for three or more units.

Peer City Precedent: Memphis, Tennessee

In 2021, Memphis was one of the first jurisdictions in the country to allow buildings with up to six units to be reviewed under the residential code.

4.3 Mixed-Use (MX) Zones

Mixed-Use at a Glance

Staff proposes four new transit-oriented mixed-use zoning districts:

- Mixed-Use 1A (MX-1A) and Mixed-Use 1B (MX-1B): Two lower-density zoning districts would allow missing middle-scale and low-rise multifamily housing, as well as neighborhood-serving commercial and office uses such as corner stores, coffee shops, and physicians' offices.
- Mixed-Use 2A (MX-2A) and Mixed-Use 2B (MX-2B): Two higher-density zoning districts would allow buildings several stories tall with low-to mid-rise residential uses and a wider range of pedestrian-oriented commercial and/or office uses located on the same site and/or within the same building.

Allows a mix of uses, arranged horizontally or vertically on a site:	**Requires a vertical mix of uses, including ground-floor pedestrian-oriented space:**	**Existing office or commercial zone of comparable scale**
Mixed-Use 1A	Mixed-Use 1B	Neighborhood Office (NO), Limited Office (LO), and Neighborhood Commercial (LR)
Mixed-Use 2A	Mixed-Use 2B	General Office (GO), Community Commercial (GR), Commercial Services (CS)

4.3

Mixed-Use (MX) Zoning Districts

Commercial/Office Precedent

A commercial and office development in the Hyde Park neighborhood

Mixed-Use Precedent

The Chicon development in Central East Austin

Residential Precedent

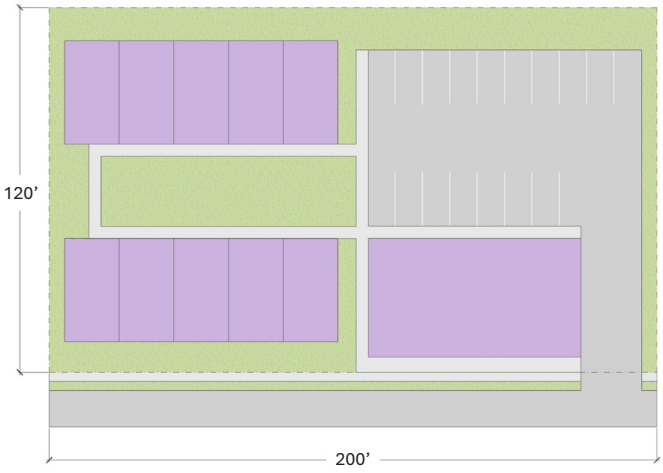
Townhomes near Mueller

Mixed-Use 1 (MX-1A)

Scale: Buildings range from house-scale to low-rise multifamily. The maximum height recommended is 45 ft., which generally allows up to four stories.

Allowed uses: A horizontal or vertical mix of uses would be allowed, including residential and limited non-residential uses compatible with lower-density residential uses.

Potential context: Corner lots on Level 2 streets within existing lower-density residential neighborhoods.



Example Development Stats

Lot size	24,000 sq. ft.
Height	18-45 ft.
Stories	2-4

The Chicon Joyce building in the Rosewood neighborhood

Mixed-Use 1B (MX-1B)

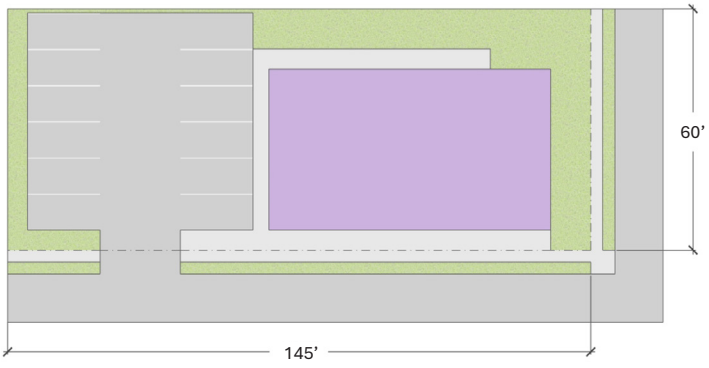
Scale: Buildings range from house-scale to low-rise. The maximum height recommended is 45 ft., which generally allows up to four stories.

Allowed uses: A vertical mix of uses would be required. Ground-floor uses would be required to be pedestrian-oriented, and upper-floor uses could be residential, commercial, office, or hotel.

Potential context: Corner lots on Level 2 streets in existing or planned mixed-use nodes within lower-density residential neighborhoods.

Example Development Stats

Lot size	8,700 sq. ft.
Height	45 ft.
Stories	4



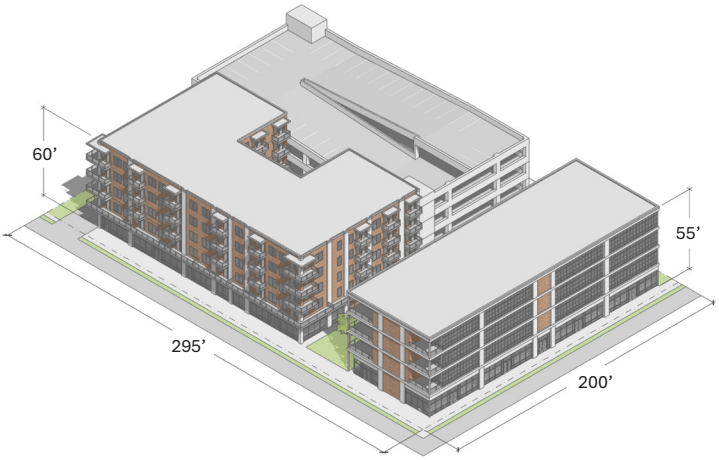
The Bouldin mixed-use development on South Lamar

Mixed-Use 2A (MX-2A)

Scale: The maximum height recommended is 65 ft., which allows up to six stories.

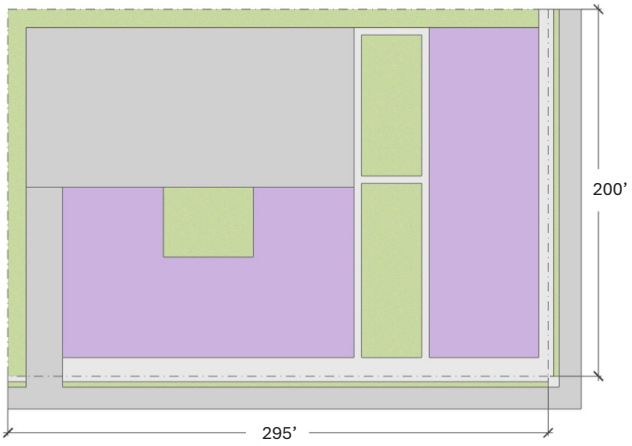
Allowed uses: Transit-supportive residential and non-residential uses would be permitted. Different uses could be arranged horizontally or vertically on a site.

Potential context: Along larger existing or planned mixed-use corridors or higher-density nodes.



Example Development Stats

Lot size	59,000 sq. ft.
Height	60 ft.
Stories	4-5



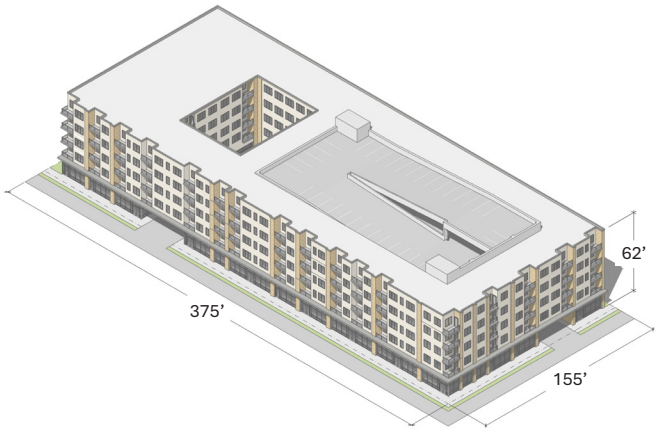
Buildings with ground-floor restaurants below residences in Mueller

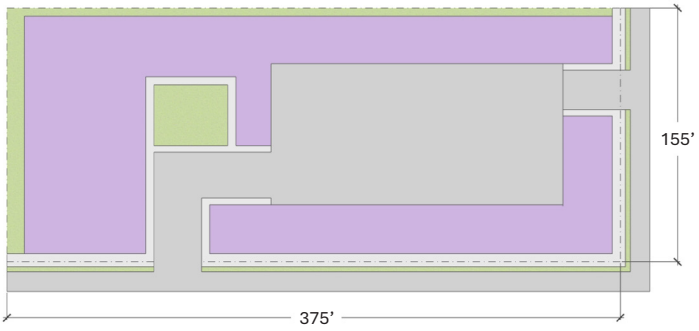
Mixed-Use 2B (MX-2B)

Scale: The maximum height recommended is 65 ft., which generally allows up to six stories.

Allowed uses: Transit-supportive residential and non-residential uses would be permitted. A vertical mix of uses would be required. Ground-floor uses would be required to be pedestrian-oriented, and upper-floor uses could be residential, commercial, office, or hotel.

Potential context: Along larger existing or planned mixed-use corridors or higher-density nodes where high pedestrian activity exists or is planned to be concentrated.





Example Development Stats

Lot size	58,125 sq. ft.
Height	62 ft.
Stories	5

Discussion Topic and Further Analysis: Higher-density mixed-use zones

Explore the need for additional mixed-use base zones that allows height above 65 ft. that could be used in very urban and transit-rich contexts. Ensure any mixed-use base zones that allow more height are applied only in specific transit-oriented contexts and are not broadly available to use citywide in order to preserve the viability of density bonus programs.

Allowed Uses

Mixed-Use zones are intended to allow urban, pedestrian-oriented, and transit-supportive land uses. As part of Phase 1 of the Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) Overlay, City staff and consultant partners determined which uses in the Land Development Code are appropriate near transit and which are not. The ETOD Combining District, adopted by Council in 2024, restricts non-transit-supportive uses along the Project Connect Phase 1 Light Rail Corridor. Staff recommends considering the ETOD Combining District as a starting point for further analysis and discussion for the allowed, prohibited, and conditional uses in the proposed Mixed-Use zones (see Appendix C for a full list of allowed, prohibited, and conditional uses in the ETOD Combining District). Staff will also explore prohibiting drive-thrus in the proposed mixed-use base zones.

Further Analysis: Consider additional use prohibitions for Mixed-Use 1 zones, which could be applied in primarily residential neighborhoods, as well as restrictions related to sound, light, signage, and hours of operation to ensure compatibility with homes on the same property or nearby.

Discussion Topic: Engage community members to understand better the potential impacts of allowing more non-residential uses in primarily residential neighborhoods and identify strategies to avoid or mitigate these impacts.

Development Standards

Density

Further Analysis and Discussion Topic: How to regulate density

Density refers to the size of buildings and the number of homes that can be built on a site. Staff will conduct further analysis to determine whether maximum density requirements, such as maximum dwelling unit per acre requirements, are desirable. Due to SB 840, the City must allow a minimum of 54 dwelling units per acre and cannot regulate floor area ratio (FAR), a common way that cities regulate the bulk and scale of buildings, for multifamily and mixed-use development in SB-840 applicable zoning. Below are additional considerations to discuss further:

Minimum residential density and/or number of stories
Consider setting a minimum residential density and/or a minimum number of stories for residential projects in MX-2 zones to ensure transit-supportive density.

Maximum unit size
Consider applying a maximum unit size in Mixed-Use zones to balance affordability while also allowing for feasible development with family-sized units. This could match or be less than the maximum unit size(s) in Middle Residential zones.

Building Height

Staff recommends a maximum height of 45 ft. in MX-1 zones, which generally accommodates up to four stories, and aligns with the minimum height that the City is required to allow for SB 840-applicable multifamily or mixed-use development. Staff tentatively recommends a maximum height of 65 ft. in MX-2 zones, which generally accommodates up to six floors. However, the proposed height limit for MX-2 zones could change in response to the forthcoming Citywide Tiered Density Bonus amendments.

Further Analysis: *Additional testing is necessary to ensure that the proposed height limits fully enable the anticipated development types. Proposed height limits could also change in response to the forthcoming Citywide Tiered Density Bonus amendments.*

Building Placement and Building Dimensions

Further Analysis and Discussion Topic: Options for regulating building placement

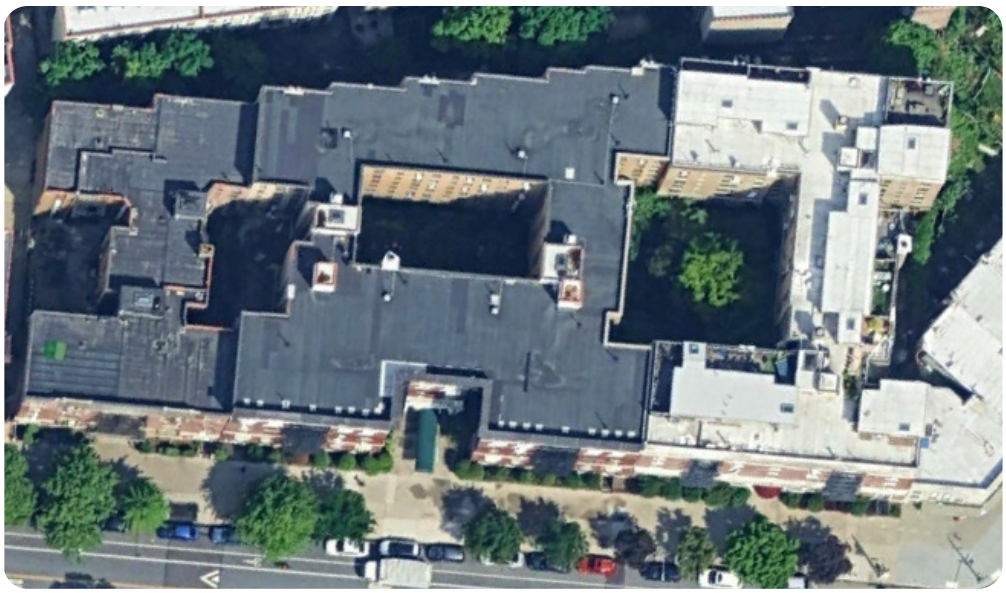
Cities often regulate building placement through setbacks, build-to lines, or minimum frontage requirements. Setbacks determine how close a building can be to a property line. Minimum frontage requirements or build-to lines require buildings to be located a certain distance from property lines and are often used to create an urban streetscape with buildings close to the street and, in very urban contexts, buildings that are connected across lot lines to form an uninterrupted façade of buildings along the street.

For the lower-density MX-1A zone, consider front, side yard, and rear setbacks of 5-10 ft. to align with nearby residential development, which would have similar or larger setbacks. For the MX-1B zone, consider whether to require the same setbacks as MX-1A, or whether to instead regulate building placement through build-to lines or frontage requirements. For properties adjacent to an MX or other higher intensity zone, consider a 0' interior side yard setback to allow a more urban built form.

For the higher density MX-2 zones, consider not requiring setbacks, similar to the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) zoning district in regulating plans, and instead regulate building placement with build-to lines or frontage requirements. Requiring a 0 ft. interior side build-to line for the MX-2B zone may be appropriate to create seamless connections between buildings on different sites, a feature of many streets and boulevards in European and older U.S. cities. Minimum dimensions for courtyards along the interior side lot line could be required to allow sufficient light for interior residences and to create a common open space for all residents of the building.

Additional coordination with Austin Transportation and Public Works is needed to make sure that building placement requirements/allowances in the front and street side yards on corner lots provide adequate sightlines for drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists moving through the adjacent intersection. Coordination with Austin Fire is needed to ensure adequate fire truck access on streets with narrow rights-of-way. Discussions with Austin Energy and Austin Water are also needed to make sure build-to lines/frontage requirements allow for the provision of utilities.

A street level view of mid-rise buildings in Brooklyn, New York with connected façades. Photo via Google Earth.



An aerial view of mid-rise buildings in Brooklyn, New York with connected façades and interior courtyards. Photo via Google Earth.

Further Analysis and Discussion Topic: Consider maximum building dimensions

To create human-scale development, maximum building width and depth requirements, or requirements for façade articulation to break up street facing façades, may be desirable. Some multifamily and mixed-use buildings today have hundreds of feet of uninterrupted street frontage, creating uninviting and uninteresting streetscapes.

Additional Considerations

Active Ground-Floor Uses

Discussion Topic and Further Analysis: Where should an active ground floor be required?

While a mix of office, commercial, and residential uses should be allowed on all properties zoned Mixed-Use, not all projects will choose to develop a mix of uses and will instead concentrate on one particular use. However, a mix of uses and an active ground floor should generally be required on properties located close to frequent transit service and/or in existing or desired pedestrian-oriented retail areas.

An "active ground floor" means that some portion of the first floor of a building contains publicly accessible, pedestrian-oriented uses. These typically include uses like restaurants, shops, corner stores, exercise studios, art galleries, or public-facing offices, such as doctors' offices. Requiring active ground-floor uses in specific locations can make it easier for people to walk, bike, or take public transit to their destinations. It is also a strategy to preserve legacy retail districts that are at risk of losing their commercial character now that SB 840 has allowed multifamily residential use in commercial zoning without requiring an active ground-floor.

Austin currently requires active ground-floor uses in some density bonus programs, including Vertical Mixed-Use (VMU), Density Bonus 90 (DB90), and the Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Density Bonus (DBETOD). In these programs, at least 75 percent of the building frontage along the principal street and on the ground floor of the building must be designed for one or more commercial or civic uses. No base zoning districts, however, require an active ground floor.

The Mixed-Use 1B and 2B zones would require the ground floor to be designed for active uses. Further analysis is needed to determine where to require an active ground floor and how much ground-floor space must be designed for active uses. These discussions would be informed by the recommendations related to active ground floor uses in the upcoming Citywide Tiered Density Bonus amendments.

Peer City Precedent: Seattle

Seattle's Pedestrian Zones require active, pedestrian-oriented ground floor uses and enhanced streetscape design standards in areas designated for especially high pedestrian traffic, such as along existing or planned shopping streets.

A stretch of ground floor retail in the Plaza Saltillo area

4.3

Parking

Developers will likely still provide parking for new mixed-use developments. Therefore, additional rules related to parking should be considered to ensure pleasant and safe streetscapes and to mitigate the visual impact of parking structures. In Mixed-Use zones, parking should be located behind the building façade and accessed via an alley, if available, or a single driveway, with a potential allowance for multiple driveways on larger sites. The number of driveways should be limited to the greatest extent possible to foster a pedestrian-oriented streetscape and to minimize safety concerns for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Further Analysis and Discussion Topic: Parking design

- Consider requiring parking to take access from the lower ASMP level street, if available.
- Recommend ways to screen parking garages from view. Establish a percentage of the amount of the garage that must be shielded and coordinate the percentage with mandated ventilation requirements. Ways to screen parking could include:
    - At a minimum, requiring garages to have headlight screening
    - Requiring garages to be screened with a decorative/ornamental screen, vegetative screen, or false façade
    - Requiring garages to be wrapped with occupiable building space, such as homes or offices

4.3

Frontages and Entrances

In addition to the residential private frontage types described in Section 4.2, mixed-use zones should require building frontages designed for ground-floor, pedestrian-oriented commercial uses. Requiring frontages wherever there is a building entrance ensures an active connection between non-residential uses and the streetscape, creating a pleasant and stimulating pedestrian experience. A minimum number of building entrances should also be considered so there are multiple entrances to large buildings along the street. Coordination with utility providers is necessary to ensure the feasibility of specific frontage types with dimensional requirements. Below are some of the non-residential frontage types that builders could be required to choose from:

Forecourt

A forecourt can be used as an entry court or shared garden space for apartment buildings, or as additional shopping or restaurant seating area within retail and service areas. The building sits at or near the sidewalk with a small percentage of the building set back, creating a small court space.

Shopfront

A shopfront is intended for commercial or live/work use and has substantial glazing at the sidewalk level. It may include an awning that overlaps the sidewalk and may be used with other frontage types. The main facade of the building is at or near the lot line with an at-grade entrance along the public right-of-way.

Gallery

A gallery is intended for buildings with ground-floor non-residential uses and may be one or two stories. The gallery should be used to provide the primary circulation along a frontage and extend far enough from the building to provide adequate protection and circulation for pedestrians. The gallery may overlap with the sidewalk.

B.D. Riley's Irish Pub in Mueller

Active Frontages

Active frontages like patios are a beloved fixture of Austin's restaurants, bars, and coffee shops. A patio or sidewalk café can transform a street into a vibrant place where people enjoy spending time. Mixed-Use zones should allow and encourage patios along street-facing façades where ground-floor pedestrian-oriented uses are provided.

Compatibility

Compatibility is a rule that limits building height, requires a landscape buffer, and restricts uses for some higher-intensity zones in the area within 75 ft. of a property with a single-family home. Staff recommends that both Mixed-Use 1 and 2 zones should be subject to compatibility, though the smaller-scale Mixed-Use 1 zones could be exempt from the landscape buffer requirement like the existing Neighborhood Office (NO), Limited Office (LO), and Neighborhood Commercial (LR) zones are.

Relationship to Existing and Planned Density Bonuses

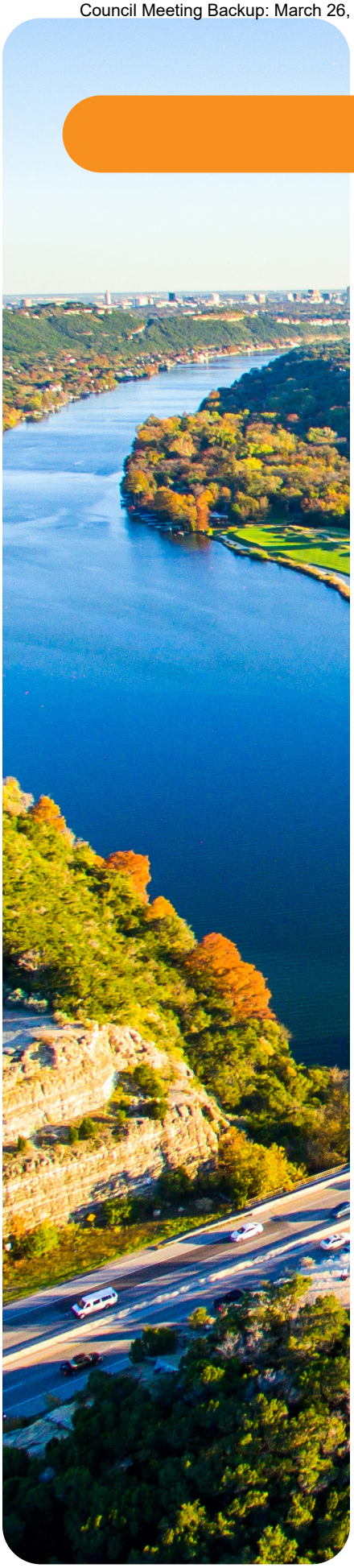
The proposed Mixed-Use zones would be developed in coordination with the planned Citywide Tiered Density Bonus code amendments, allowing the base zoning districts and bonus programs to be paired together. This pairing would give property owners the option to build using either base zoning district regulations or density bonus regulations. Where the density bonus does not define requirements, the base zone requirements would apply. Additional analysis and discussion are needed to determine which requirements should be part of the base zoning district and which requirements would only apply to projects utilizing the density bonuses. Care needs to be taken to avoid reducing the viability of density bonuses when crafting mixed-use base zone regulations.

Alignment with Existing Streetscape and Urban Design Standards

Further Analysis: Streetscape and urban design standards

Staff recommends further analysis of whether the streetscape and building design requirements in the current code align with the intended development types and potential locations for the mixed-use zones. While many of these requirements currently exist in Subchapter E: Urban Design Requirements and Mixed-Use, not all existing requirements may support urban mixed-use development in all contexts, and additional or separate requirements may be needed. Further discussion with Austin Development Services and Austin Transportation and Public Works is necessary to identify approaches to streetscape and urban design standards.

A pedestrian-oriented shopping street in Plaza Saltillo



5 Implementation

In this chapter

5.1 Next Steps

To begin the process to create the new zones, staff recommends that City Council adopt a resolution that initiates the code amendments generally recommended by this study. Should City Council initiate code amendments, the City would conduct community engagement, further analyze and develop proposed regulations, and coordinate with partner departments to develop the final set of proposed amendments. Below are more details on the proposed activities in the next phase of work:

Engage community members

- Gather feedback from community members to inform final recommendations. Leverage consultant support to create clear and accessible engagement materials (surveys, visualizations, etc.).

Further develop initial staff recommendations

- Refine initial recommendations presented in the study with the support of a consultant team.
- Conduct testing sessions with City staff and development professionals to determine whether the proposed development standards fully enable the envisioned development types on a variety of sites.
- Complete a pro forma analysis to determine whether the envisioned development types are financially feasible to build under the proposed regulations. Identify the types of development and unit sizes that are most likely to be built. Change proposed regulations, if necessary, to allow financially feasible regulations that also achieve policy goals, such as incentivizing smaller, more attainable starter homes.
- Consult with partner departments to coordinate necessary updates to non-zoning regulations or administrative processes to further facilitate missing middle and mixed-use development in infill contexts.

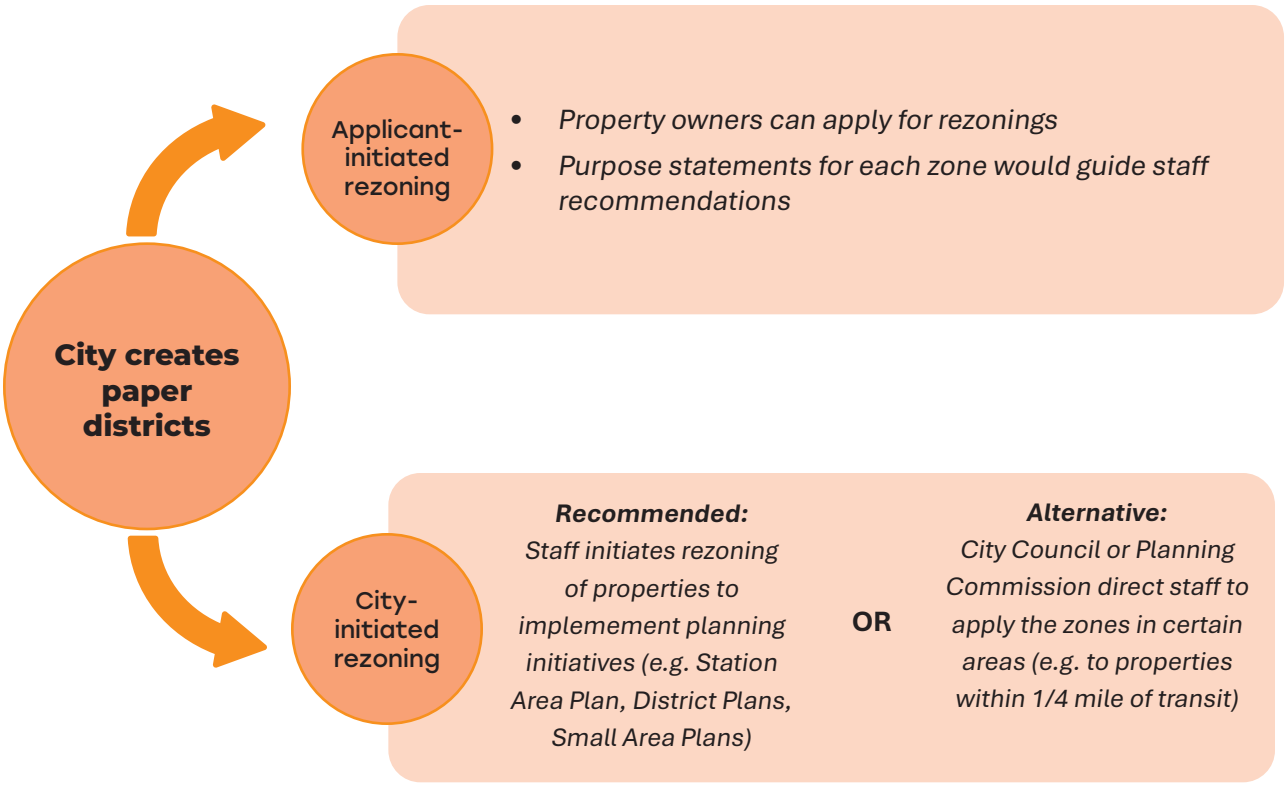
Bring code amendments through the review and adoption process

- Engage the community on the final set of proposed code amendments.
- Present code amendments before Planning Commission and City Council for review and possible adoption.

5.2 Process to Apply Zones

Staff recommends that Council initially adopt the new zones as "paper zoning districts," meaning they would be added to the code first before they apply to properties. The zones could then be applied to properties in the following ways:

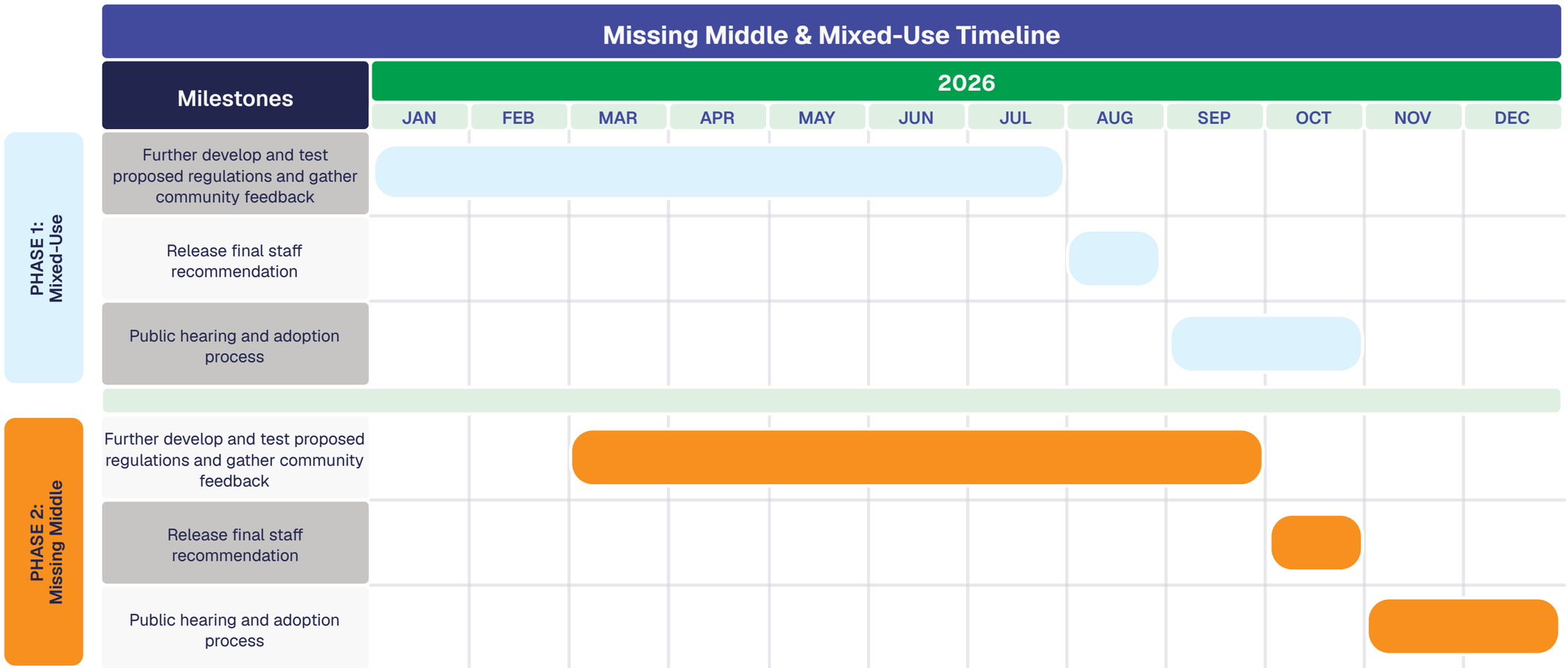
- Property owners could apply to rezone into the new zones. When appropriate, staff would recommend applicants apply for the new zones instead of a comparable office, commercial, or residential base zone. Purpose statements for the zones would help guide staff recommendations.
- The City could apply the zones to achieve policy goals, such as preserving legacy commercial districts, or to implement planning initiatives such as Station Area Plans, Small Area Plans, or District Plans. Additional community engagement would occur as part of these planning processes.
- City Council or Planning Commission could direct staff to recommend where to apply the zones within an area or on a citywide scale. Additional community engagement and analysis would be needed for this option.



5.3

Timeline

Staff proposes a two-phase approach for further analysis, engagement, and review and adoption of the proposed code amendments. After the study is released in early 2026 and code amendments are initiated by City Council, staff recommends a Phase 1 focused on the Mixed-Use zones, with possible adoption of the new zones by October 2026. The Middle Residential zones would be considered in Phase 2, which would begin in March 2026 with possible adoption by the end of 2026.



6

Appendices

In this chapter

A

Development Standards Comparison – Proposed Zones Versus Current Zones

Proposed Middle Residential and Current Single-Family and Multifamily Base Zones

	Minimum lot size	Front Yard Setback	Street Side Yard Setback[21]	Interior Side Yard Setback	Rear Yard Setback	Height	Impervious Cover	Building Coverage	Floor Area Ratio (FAR)
SF-1: Single-Family Home	10,000 sq. ft.	25 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	10 ft.	35 ft.	40%	35%	None or > of 0.4 FAR or 2,300 sq. ft.
SF-2, SF-3: Single-Family Home	5,750 sq. ft.	25 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	10 ft.	35 ft.	45%	40%	None or > of 0.4 FAR or 2,300 sq. ft.
SF-1-SF-3: Duplex	5,750 sq. ft.	15 ft.	5-10 ft.	5 ft.	5-10 ft.	35 ft.	45%	40%	> of 0.55 FAR or 3,200 sq. ft.
SF-1-SF-3: Two-Unit Use	5,750 sq. ft.	15 ft.	5-10 ft.	5 ft.	5-10 ft.	35 ft.	45%	40%	> of 0.55 FAR or 3,200 sq. ft.
SF-1-SF-3: Three-Unit Use	5,750 sq. ft.	15 ft.	5-10 ft.	5 ft.	5-10 ft.	35 ft.	45%	40%	> of 0.65 FAR or 4,350 sq. ft.
SF-1-SF-3: Small-Lot Single Family	1,800 sq. ft.	10 ft.	5-10 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	35 ft.	40 or 45%	35 or 40%	0.55
SF-4A	3,600 sq. ft.	15 ft.	10 ft.	3.5 ft.	5 ft.	35 ft.	65%	55%	None or > of 0.4 FAR or 2,300 sq. ft.
SF-4B	3,600 sq. ft.	25 ft.	15 ft.	10 ft.	15 ft.	35 ft. and 2.5 stories	60%	40%	None or > of 0.4 FAR or 2,300 sq. ft.
SF-5	5,750 sq. ft.	25 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	10 ft.	35 ft.	55%	40%	—
SF-6	5,750 sq. ft.	25 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	10 ft.	35 ft.	55%	40%	—
MR-1 (Proposed)	5,750 sq. ft.	10 ft.	5 ft. or 10 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft. or 0 ft. on an alley	35 ft.	TBD	—	TBD
MR-2 (Proposed)	5,750 sq. ft.	10 ft.	5 ft. or 10 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft. or 0 ft. on an alley	35 ft.	TBD	—	TBD
MF-1	8,000 sq. ft.	25 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	10 ft.	40 ft.	55%	45%	—
MF-2	8,000 sq. ft.	25 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	10 ft.	40 ft. or 3 stories	60%	50%	—
MF-3	8,000 sq. ft.	25 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	10 ft.	40 ft.	65%	55%	.75:1
MF-4	8,000 sq. ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	10 ft	60 ft.	70%	60%	.75:1
MF-5	8,000 sq. ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	10 ft.	60 ft.	70%	60%	1:1
MF-6	8,000 sq. ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	10 ft.	90 ft.	80%	70%	—

Minimum Site Area Requirements				
	Studio	**1 Bed**	**2+ Beds**	**Per Unit**
MR-1 (Proposed)	–	–	–	1,400 sq. ft.
MR-2 (Proposed)	–	–	–	900 sq. ft.
MF-1	2,500 sq. ft.	3,000 sq. ft.	3,500 sq. ft.	–
MF-2	1,600 sq. ft.	2,000 sq. ft.	2,400 sq. ft.	–
MF-3	1,200 sq. ft.	1,500 sq. ft.	1,800 sq. ft.	–
MF-4 and MF-5	800 sq. ft.	1,000 sq. ft.	1,200 sq. ft.	–

21 *For HOME Phase 1 and 2 developments in SF-1 through SF-3 as well as the proposed Middle Residential zones, the street side yard setbacks are as follows: On a Level 1 street, the street side yard setback is the greater of five feet from the property line or 10 feet from curb, or in the absence of curbs, from the edge of the pavement. On a Level 2, Level 3, or Level 4 street, the street side yard setback is 10 feet from the property line.*

A

Proposed Mixed-Use Zones, Current Office and Commercial Base Zones, and Density Bonus Programs[23]

	Allows Residential	Allows Commercial	Allows Office	Allows Mixed-Use	Restricts Non-Transit-Supportive Uses?	Max Height	Front Yard Setback	Street Side Yard Setback	Interior Side Yard Setback	Rear Yard Setback	Max. Impervious Cover	Max. Building Coverage
NO	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	45 ft.	25 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	60%	35%
LO	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	45 ft.	25 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	70%	50%
LR	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	45 ft.	25 ft.	15 ft.	–	–	80%	50%
MX-1A (Proposed)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	45 ft.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	–
MX-1B (Proposed)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	45 ft.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	–
GO	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	60 ft.	15 ft.	15 ft.	5 ft.	5 ft.	80%	60%
GR	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	60 ft.	10 ft.	10 ft.	–	–	90%	75%
CS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	60 ft.	10 ft.	10 ft.	–	–	95%	95%
MX-2A (Proposed)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	65 ft.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	–
MX-2B (Proposed)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	65 ft.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	–
Vertical Mixed-Use (VMU)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	45-60 ft.[24]	–	–	–	0-5ft.[25]	60-95%[25]	–
Density Bonus 90 (DB90)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	70-90 ft.[26]	–	–	–	0-5ft.[25]	70-95%[25]	–
Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Density Bonus (DBETOD)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Subdistrict 1: 70-90 ft.[26] Subdistrict 2: 100-120 ft.[27]	–	–	–	0-5ft.[25]	70-95%[25]	–

Minimum Site Area Requirements[28]			
	Studio	**1 Bed**	**2+ Beds**
NO	3,600 sq. ft.	4,000 sq. ft.	4,400 sq. ft.
LO, LR	1,600 sq. ft.	2,000 sq. ft.	2,400 sq. ft.
MX-1A (Proposed)	–	–	–
MX-1B (Proposed)	–	–	–
GO, GR, CS	800 sq. ft.	1,000 sq. ft.	1,200 sq. ft.
MX-2A (Proposed)	–	–	–
MX-2B (Proposed)	–	–	–

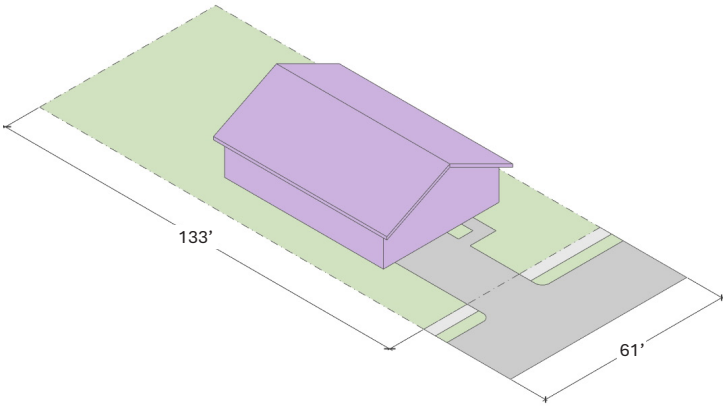
23 *Table reflects SB 840 entitlements for multifamily and mixed-use development*
24 *Base zone height*
25 *Determined by base zone*
26 *Base zone height plus 30 ft.*
27 *Base zone height plus 60 ft.*
28 *The MU combining district sets minimum site area requirements for residential uses that vary by zone and by number of bedrooms in a unit.*

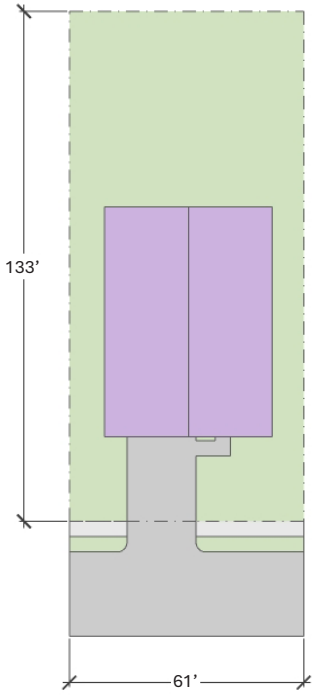
B Development Types Produced by Current Residential Base Zones and the Mixed-Use (MU) Combining District

SF-1 - SF-3: One Home Per Lot

Single-Family Residential Use

Standards: Single-Family Residential Use	SF-1	SF-2 to SF-3
Min. Lot Size	10,000 sq. ft.	5,750 sq. ft.
Max. Height	35 ft.	35 ft.
Max. Impervious Cover	40%	45%
Max. Building Coverage	35%	40%
Max. Dwelling Units per Lot	1	1





Median as Built*		
	Interior Lot	**Corner Lot**
Lot Size	8,096 sq. ft.	9,340 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	61 ft.	191 ft.
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.27	0.25
Units per Acre	5	5
Units Built	62,023	

**Throughout this section, median as built statistics are for existing units built under the current Land Development Code, unless otherwise noted.*

B

SF-1 - SF-3: One Home Per Lot

Small-Lot Single-Family Residential Use (HOME Phase 2)

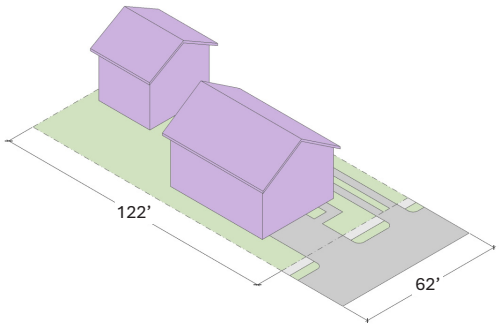
Standards	
Min. Lot Size	1,800 sq. ft. but less than 5,750 sq. ft.
Max. Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.55
Max. Unit Size	2,300 sq. ft.

As of October 2025, the City has received 13 applications for Small-Lot Single-Family Residential Use (HOME Phase 2), which allows one home on lots 1,800 sq. ft. or greater in size. Due to the limited number of applications, data and modeling are not included for this use.

SF-1 - SF-3: Two Homes Per Lot, Detached

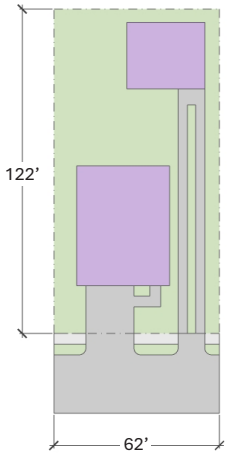
Two-Unit Residential Use (HOME Phase 1)

Standards*	
Min. Lot Size	5,750 sq. ft.
Max. Impervious Cover	45%
Max. Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	> of 0.55 FAR or 3,200 sq. ft.
Max. Unit Size*	> of 0.4 FAR or 2,300 sq. ft.



**Standards were updated in 2023 as part of HOME Phase 1.*

Median (HOME Applications^)	Interior Lot	Corner Lot
Lot Size	7,561 sq. ft.	10,600 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	62 ft.	202 ft.
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.44	0.24
Units per Acre	12	8
Total Permit Applications Submitted	213	
Total New Units Built or Proposed	454	



^Model dimensions based on median data for interior lots. Data only includes permit applications submitted since the HOME Phase 1 ordinance went into effect in February 2024. As of October 2025, the City has received 319 applications for Two-Unit Residential Use projects using updated development standards allowed under HOME Phase 1, and 267 of these have been approved. Pre-HOME data is not available, since it is not possible to distinguish between attached homes (duplexes) and detached two-unit projects with available data.

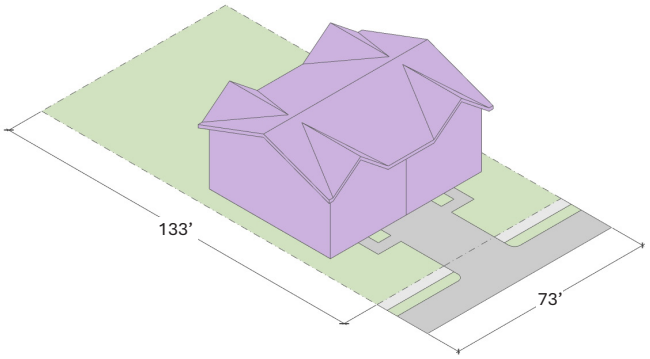
B

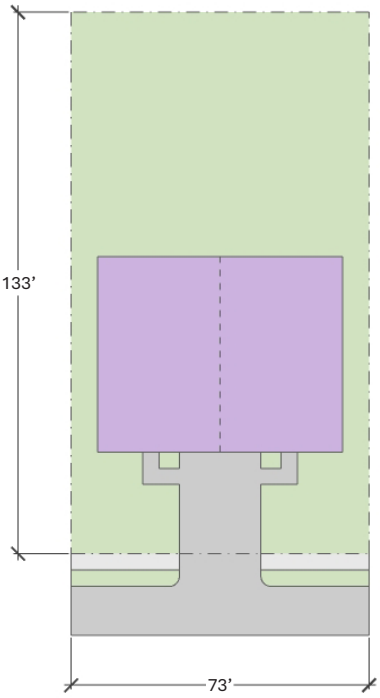
SF-1 - SF-3: Two Homes Per Lot, Attached

Duplex Residential Use (HOME Phase 1)

Standards*	
Min. Lot Size	5,750 sq. ft.
Max. Impervious Cover	45%
Max. Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	> of 0.55 FAR or 3,200 sq. ft.
Max. Unit Size^	> of 0.4 FAR or 2,300 sq. ft.

**Standards were updated in 2023 as part of HOME Phase 1.*
^Except for an existing unit.





Median (HOME Applications)*	Interior Lot	Corner Lot
Lot Size	9,760 sq. ft.	10,023 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	73 ft.	208 ft.
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.34	0.32
Units per Acre	9	9
Total Permit Applications Submitted	42	
Total New Units Built or Proposed	63	

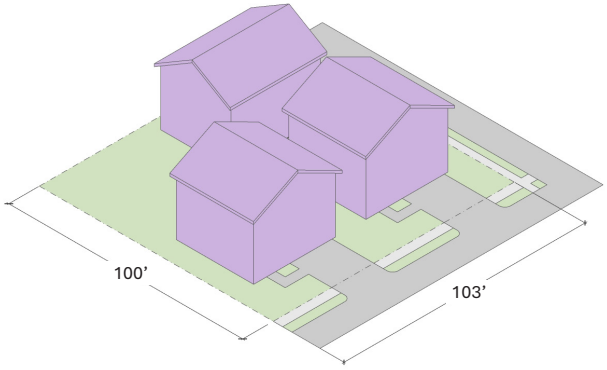
**Data only includes permit applications submitted since the HOME Phase 1 ordinance went into effect in February 2024. As of October 2025, the City has received 42 applications for Duplex Residential Use projects using updated development standards allowed under HOME Phase 1, and 32 of these have been approved. Pre-HOME data is not available, since it is not possible to distinguish between attached homes (duplexes) and detached two-unit projects with available data.*

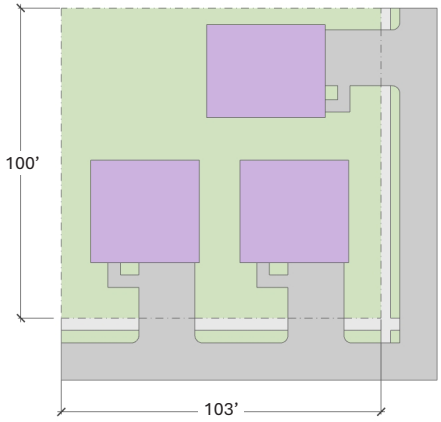
B

SF-1 - SF-3: Three Homes Per Lot, Detached

Three-Unit Residential Use (HOME Phase 1)

Standards	
Min. Lot Size	5,750 sq. ft.
Max. Impervious Cover	45%
Max. Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	> of 0.65 or 4,350 sq. ft.
Except for an existing unit, one unit may not exceed:	> of 0.4 or 2,300 sq. ft.
Except for two existing units, two units may not exceed:	> of 0.55 or 3,200 sq. ft.





Median (HOME Applications)*	Interior Lot	Corner Lot
Lot Size	8,350 sq. ft.	10,289 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	79 ft.	220 ft.
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.61	0.54
Units per Acre	15	12
Total Permit Applications Submitted	194	
Total New Units Built or Proposed	459	

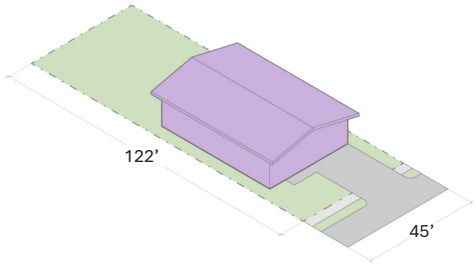
**Data only includes permit applications submitted since the HOME Phase 1 ordinance went into effect in February 2024. As of October 2025, the City has received 194 applications for Three-Unit Residential Use projects using updated development standards allowed under HOME Phase 1, and 156 of these have been approved. There have been an additional seven permit applications for attached three-unit projects, for a total of 19 new units. Model dimensions, including lot size and FAR, are for the median corner lot size, which is 10,289 sq. ft.*

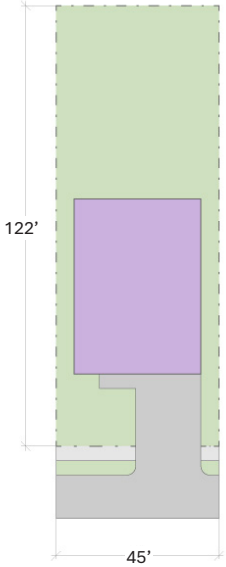
B

SF-4A: One Home Per Lot*

Small-Lot Single-Family Residential Use

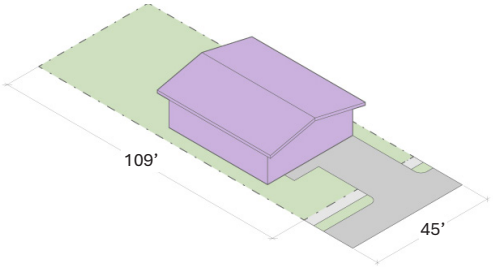
SF-4A Standards	
Min. Lot Size	3,600 sq. ft.
Max. Impervious Cover	65%
Max. Floor-Area-Ratio (FAR)	N/A

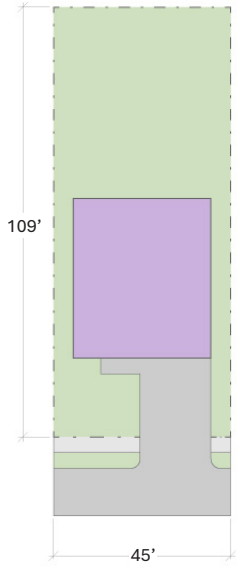




Median As Built: Urban Context

Lot Size	5,500 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	45 ft
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.31
Unit Size	1,680 sq. ft.
Total Projects Built	12,120
Units per Acre	8





Median As Built: Suburban Context

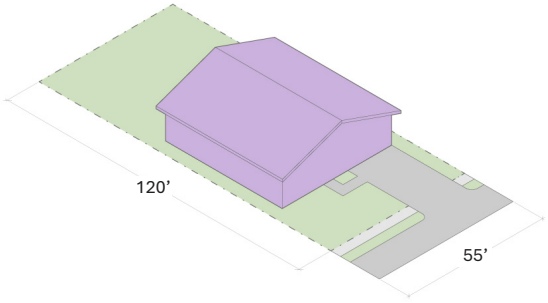
Lot Size	4,900 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	45 ft
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.29
Unit Size	1,417 sq. ft.
Projects Built	1,081
Units per Acre	8

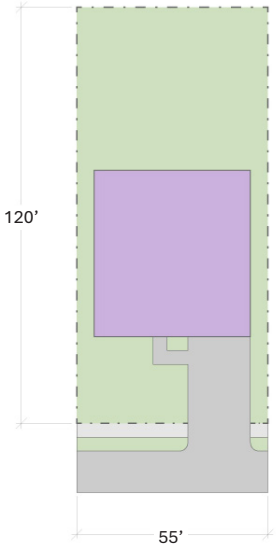
**SF-4B was not included because it only applies to two properties.*

B

SF-5: One Home Per Lot

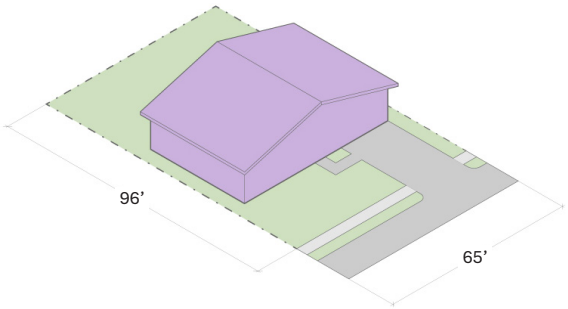
SF-5 Standards	
Min. Lot Size	5,750 sq. ft.
Max. Impervious Cover	55%
Max. Floor-Area-Ratio (FAR)	N/A

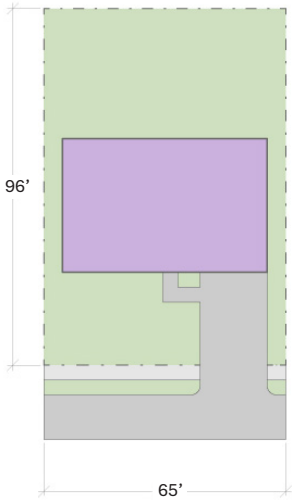




Median As Built: Urban Context

Lot Size	6,606 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	55 ft
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.33
Stories	1
Total Projects Built	32
Units per Acre	4





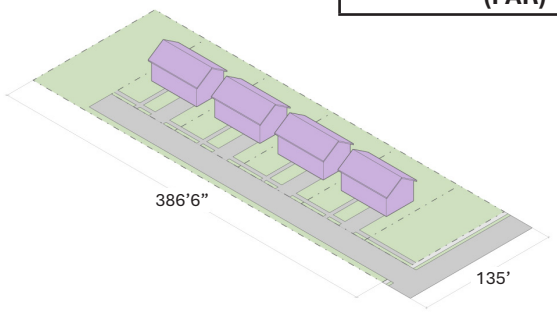
Median As Built: Suburban Context

Lot Size	6,271 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	65 ft
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.32
Stories	1
Projects Built	128
Units per Acre	5

B

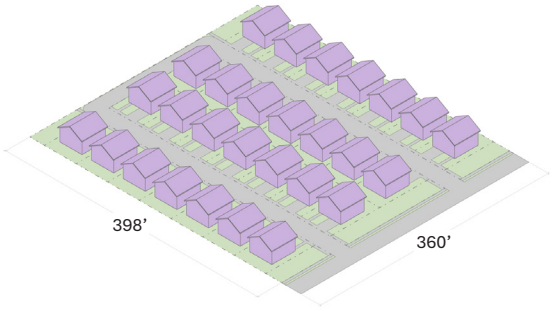
SF-6: One Home Per Lot

SF-6 Standards	
Min. Lot Size	5,750 sq. ft.
Max. Impervious Cover	55%
Max. Floor-Area-Ratio (FAR)	N/A



Median As Built: Subdivided

Lot Size	52,179 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	135 ft.
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.23 FAR
Stories	1
Projects Built	291
Units Built	4,017
Units per Acre	4



Median As Built: Condominium

Lot Size	143,190 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	360 ft
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.51 FAR
Stories	1
Projects Built	49
Units Built	1,070
Units per Acre	10

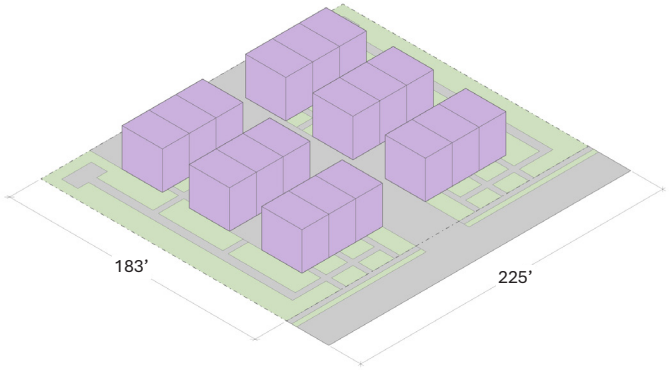
B

MF-1 - MF-3

Building types produced by the MF-1 through MF-3 zones are categorized together due to the similar site development standards in the zones.

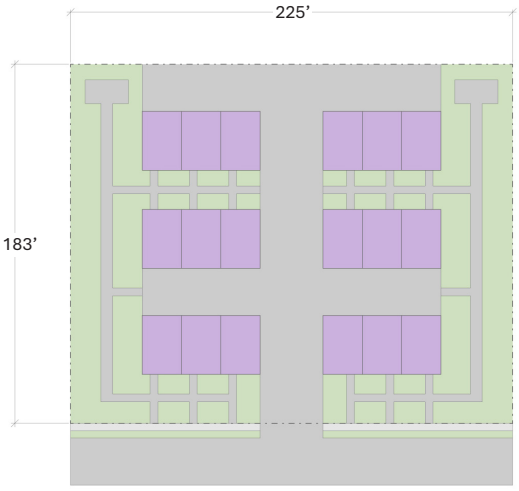
Standards	MF-1	MF-2	MF-3
Min. Lot Size	8,000 sq. ft.	8,000 sq. ft.	8,000 sq. ft.
Max. Height	40 ft.	40 ft. or 3 stories	40 ft.
Max. Impervious Cover	55%	60%	65%
Max. Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	—	—	.75:1

MF-1 - MF-3: Townhomes



Median As Built: Townhomes

Lot Size	41,248 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	225 ft
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.52
Stories	2
Projects Built	77
Units Built	1,226
Units per Acre	11

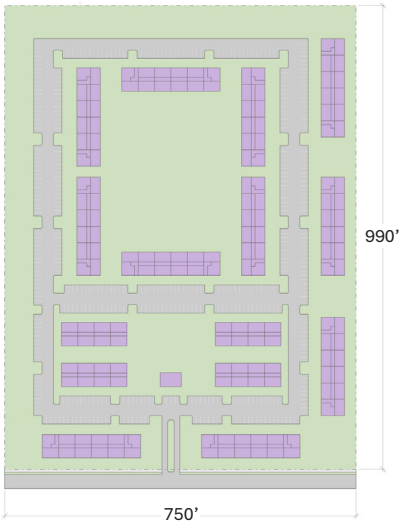


B

MF-1 - MF-3: Garden-Style Apartments

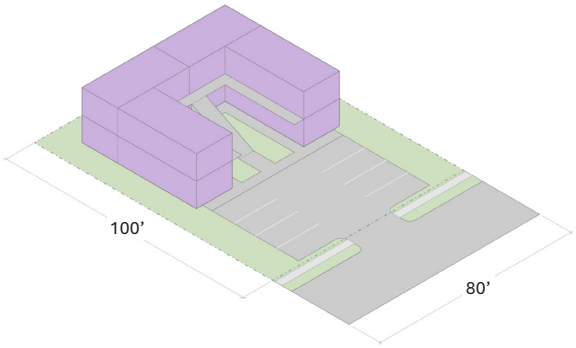
Median As Built: Garden-Style Apartments

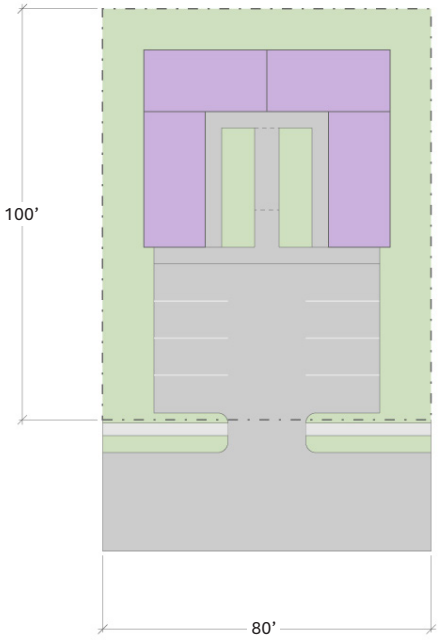
Lot Size	743,000 sq. ft.
Frontage	750 ft
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.38
Stories	3
Projects Built	127
Units Built	39,014
Units per Acre	19



MF-4: Urban Apartments[28]

MF-4 Standards	
Min. Lot Size	8,000 sq. ft.
Max. Height	60 ft.
Max. Impervious Cover	70%
Max. Floor-Area-Ratio (FAR)	.75:1





Median As Built: Urban Apartments

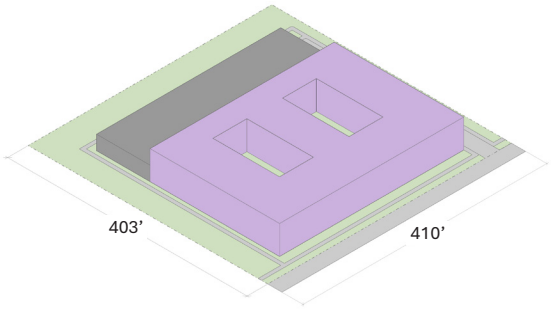
Site Size	8,000 sq. ft.
Street Frontage	80 ft
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.47
Stories	2
Projects Built	28
Units Built	492
Units per Acre	10

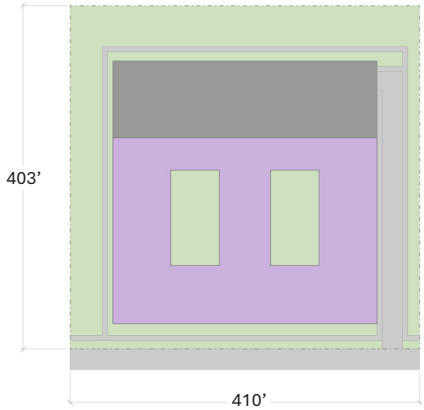
28 *MF-4 base zone regulations have also been used to build large, garden-style apartment complexes, though there were not enough of these examples to be classified as a specific development type. MF-5 was not included because it only applies to a few dozen properties, most of which have non-residential uses and are owned by the University of Texas, the State of Texas, or nonprofit organizations.*

B

MF-6: Urban Wrap

MF-6 Standards	
Min. Lot Size	8,000 sq. ft.
Max. Height	90 ft.
Max. Impervious Cover	80%
Max. Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	—



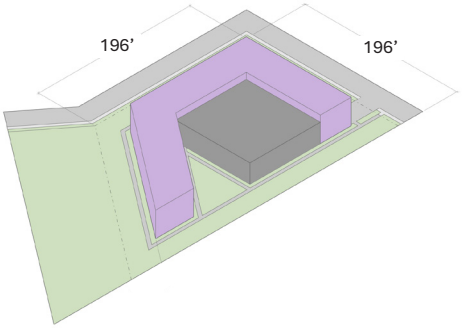


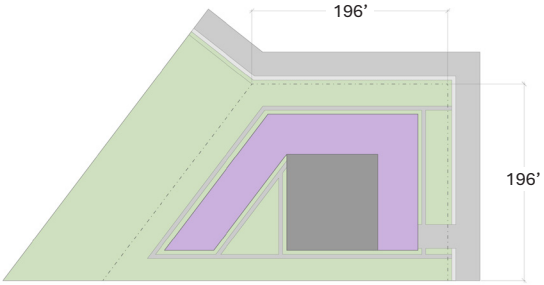
Median As Built: Urban Wrap

Site Size	165,150 sq. ft.
Frontage	410 ft
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	1.33
Stories	4
Projects Built	10
Units Built	2,192
Units per Acre	82

-MU Combining District: Urban Wrap

Site Size	53,100 sq. ft
Frontage	392 ft
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.86
Stories	3
Projects Built	15
Units Built	1,881
Units per Acre	47





C

ETOD Combining District Prohibited and Conditional Uses

ETOD Combining District (ETOD) PROHIBITED USES

COMMERCIAL USES:

Agricultural Sale and Services

Automotive Sales

Automotive Rentals

Automotive Repair Services

Building Maintenance Services

Campground

Carriage Stable

Convenience Storage

Drop-off Recycling Collection Facility

Electronic Prototype Assembly

Electronic Testing

Equipment Repair Services

Equipment Sales

Exterminating Services

Funeral Services

Marina

Recreational Equipment Maintenance & Storage

Recreational Equipment Sales

Research Assembly Services

Research Testing Services

Research Warehousing Services

Scrap and Salvage

Service Station

Stables

Vehicle Storage

INDUSTRIAL USES:

Basic Industry

General Warehousing and Distribution

Recycling Center

Resource Extraction

AGRICULTURAL USES:

Animal Production

Crop Production

Indoor Crop Production

C

ETOD Combining District (ETOD) CONDITIONAL USES

COMMERCIAL USES:

Alternative Financial Services

Automotive Washing

Bail Bond Services

Commercial Blood Plasma Center

Commercial Off-Street Parking

Communications Services

Construction Sales and Services

Electric Vehicle Charging

Kennels

Monument Retail Sales

Off-Site Accessory Parking

Pawn Shop Services

Pedicab Storage and Dispatch

Special Use Historic

INDUSTRIAL USES:

Custom Manufacturing

Light Manufacturing

Limited Warehousing and Distribution

AGRICULTURAL USES:

Horticulture

**Uses in the proposed Mixed-Use (MX) zones are subject to further analysis and discussion using the list of ETOD prohibited and conditional uses as a starting point.*

D Current Housing Stock by Numbers of Units per Site, Pre- and Post- Current Land Development Code

	Overall Housing Stock			Housing Stock Built Pre-1985			Housing Stock Built Post-1985		
Unit Range	**Properties**	**Unit Count**	**Unit Share**	**Properties**	**Unit Count**	**Unit Share**	**Properties**	**Unit Count**	**Unit Share**
1	202,765	202,765	42.21%	97,235	97,235	48.62%	105,530	105,530	37.64%
2	10,620	21,240	4.42%	8,540	17,080	8.54%	2,080	4,160	1.48%
3-4	1,383	5,282	1.10%	1,150	4,435	2.22%	233	847	0.30%
5-16	926	8,205	1.71%	776	6,936	3.47%	150	1,269	0.45%
17-49	410	11,962	2.49%	337	9,795	4.90%	73	2,167	0.77%
50-99	174	12,143	2.53%	115	7,904	3.95%	59	4,239	1.51%
100+	783	218,784	45.54%	250	56,603	28.30%	533	162,181	57.84%
Total	217,061	480,381	100%	108,403	199,988	100%	108,658	280,393	100%

Source: City of Austin 2024 Land Database