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**Subject:** Multiplex Gentle Density Housing, Form-Based Zoning, and Scalable Affordability  
**Date:** Friday, August 15, 2025 3:17:27 PM  
**Attachments:** [image.png](#)

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Chair and Planning Commissioners, Mayor, City Administrator, and Council: (Brett, please share this with Planning)

As we shape Ann Arbor's Comprehensive Land Use Plan, we must confront a simple but critical reality: **our housing crisis isn't just about supply—it's about scale inefficiency.**

Take a typical 6,000 square-foot lot. A new 3,600 square-foot single-family home on that lot, at \$300 per square foot plus land and soft costs, could easily cost **\$1.25 million to build**—and sell for **\$1.7 million or more**. That's clearly out of reach for every middle-income household in our community.

Now imagine that same envelope—no taller, no bulkier—divided into **four 900-square-foot, two-bed / two-bath homes**. Each unit would cost roughly **\$325,000 to build** and could sell for about **\$425,000**—a far more attainable price, while still offering a reasonable return for the developer.

The economics are clear: **gentle density unlocks affordability through efficient form.**

And we see this play out in real time. At 1006 Granger, just west of Packard, a modest home sold for \$373,000 last year, in 2017 it sold for \$190,000. It's now been torn down, and a 5-bedroom, 3.5-bath house sits on that same 3,900-square-foot lot—**listed for \$1.15 million**. This is the current trend in Ann Arbor, without modifying our land use plan for gentle density.



*1006 Granger, Ann Arbor, which sold for \$190,000 in 2017 and \$373,000 in 2024.*



*1006 Granger, Ann Arbor after tear-down and new build, listed for \$1.15 million in 2025*

With zoning reform, this site could have **delivered a duplex**, each unit being more attainable, rather than a luxury rebuild for one household. While this is in a student neighborhood, the economic logic holds. Based on these two scenarios, **a quadplex form-based structure is more affordable than a duplex.**

This is why **duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes** matter. They are the most scalable path to affordability in our low-rise neighborhoods. They allow us to **house more people, more equitably, on the same land**

**footprint**, while reinforcing our climate, mobility, and fiscal goals. Housing not allowed is housing denied.

Fortunately, the draft Comprehensive Plan already adopts **form-based zoning**. That means regulating scale and design, rather than limiting housing type or occupancy. It lets us build homes that *look* like large single-family houses—but quietly house four households instead of one.

To realize this, the Plan should clearly state:

- That **multiplexes of up to four units are permitted by right** on corner lots, larger parcels, near parks or schools, or within a ¼ mile of frequent transit;
- That **floor area ratios (FAR)** should scale with unit count, encouraging modest homes that fit within the existing form;
- That we **remove outdated barriers**—like oversized setbacks, high parking mandates, and excessive lot size minimums;
- And that we **streamline permitting**, so gentle density is not only legal, but financially feasible.

Organizations like the Ann Arbor Community Land Trust and our nonprofit housing partners stand ready to help deliver these homes—below market, within reach, and in alignment with our shared values.

This is how we legalize affordability. Not by mandating it—but by **making it buildable**. Not by sacrificing neighborhood character—but by evolving it.

Ann Arbor has led before. This is our moment to lead again—with vision, with data, and with courage.

Let's make room for more neighbors!

Thank you for your time and your dedication to this critical process.

Brian R. Chambers, Ph.D.  
*3rd Ward, Ann Arbor*