

Subject: Comprehensive plan and discussion of whether simplex units should be legal

From: Alex Lowe

Sent: Sunday, May 4, 2025 6:10 PM

To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>

Cc: City Council <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>

Subject: Comprehensive plan and discussion of whether simplex units should be legal

Hi planning commission and city council,

Given recent discussion about whether it's appropriate to allow duplexes, triplexes, etc. in all Ann Arbor neighbourhoods, I decided to raise a similar question on local social media where the opposition to allowing duplexes has been particularly fierce. Specifically, I asked: "Should simplex units be legal in residential neighbourhoods? We've been hearing a lot of agitation recently about what kinds of housing should be legal, or banned, in residential neighbourhoods. I hope we can have a respectful, civil discussion about whether simplex units should be allowed."

The discussion can be seen [on Nextdoor](#), but I'd like to share with you what I think is a particularly interesting outcome. I was expecting little to no appetite for the banning of simplex housing - after all, a common refrain from those of us who support the comprehensive plan has been "nobody wants to ban your detached house!" As of right now though, a majority of voters on my poll do, in fact, want to ban simplex units.

In reality, I don't think most people who voted "no" in my poll would actually be in favour of banning simplex houses within city limits if it were clearly and accurately described to them. But I chose the terminology intentionally to illustrate something about our choice of language here and how it affects unconscious bias. The term "simplex unit" has a clear, straightforward understanding, but evokes the same types of unconscious bias as the terms "duplex" or "multiplex" do. Likewise, the term "single-family house" evokes its own imagery and comes with a connotation that townhomes, apartments, etc. cannot house "families." This, of course, is clearly false. (Anecdotally, the last time I lived in an apartment my direct nextdoor neighbours were a lovely family of 5.) I also think the selection of examples primed people to vote "no." They were chosen specifically as larger houses, but I believe they're still more representative of what a simplex house looks like than the "grey blob of maximum allowable size" that has been shared, including in official communications, to illustrate what any form of multi-family housing would do in a neighbourhood.

I ask you to remember this when you hear calls to limit the forms of housing in our city, especially as it relates to the comprehensive plan. When couched in the same language with which we describe things like the home in which I live, a majority of people thought it should not be legal to build the only form of housing which is currently allowed in literally every residential zone in Ann Arbor, and the only form of housing that we are not considering banning anywhere.

All the best,

