



MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Brett Lenart, Planning Manager

DATE: April 1, 2025

SUBJECT: **Low Rise Residential Land Use Area – Comprehensive Plan**

Over the past several weeks, I have heard feedback from numerous commissioners that often centered around the proposed low-rise residential zoning area as conceived in the upcoming plan. I have heard questions about past discussions, conclusions, and evolving ideas in the context of ongoing community feedback and conversations.

In response, I have consulted with Councilmember/Commissioner Disch recently to draft language that summarizes some background facets and a possible motion for Planning Commission consideration.

Background

Zoning that prohibits multifamily housing (all R1 and R2 areas) is currently applied to 54% of developable land in Ann Arbor. While many of these districts thrive, this framework also artificially constrains housing supply, drives up prices, and creates an economic reality that excludes middle-income people from purchasing or renting homes here. When housing demand is high, only those with greater affluence can access a limited housing supply. We believe that we can have both: successful, lively neighborhoods with close access to employment and entertainment centers, and increased housing supply that positively impacts affordability.

As part of City Council's directive for the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP), planning staff and consultant teams have engaged with the community extensively. The City appointed a steering committee (drawn from members in our community), hosted events and conversations throughout the City, conducted an online survey (over 3,000 respondents), targeted outreach to underrepresented neighborhood groups and people, conducted public workshops at various locations throughout the City, and provided a self-guided "meeting in a box" tool for neighborhood or other groups to conduct independent conversations (over 1,000 in-person participants). Our engagement process continues.

The CLUP community consensus that has emerged from this public engagement so far supports an incremental increase in potential density to support 3-story multi-family housing in a proposed Low Rise Residential Area.

City Planning Commission, which recommended a further increase for that proposed area, has heard community concerns and, in response, reverses its direction and now asks the consultant to draft a Low-Rise Residential Area consistent with CLUP community feedback to date. We affirm that:

- Pursuant to resolution R-23-131, that increasing the potential density in all districts is important to provide new housing supply and typology to the City, and note that this increase is consistent with community feedback.
- Increasing housing supply in a variety of types and locations is the best method for the City to use land planning and regulations to increase affordability.
- By Michigan law, the City cannot mandate or dictate the cost of rent charged by any property owner, nor limit nor dictate the price at which a home must be sold.
- We believe that new housing should be appropriate in scale and size to harmoniously grow neighborhoods, integrating more households into traditionally low-density areas. Three story housing is an appropriate scale for these areas.
- A single land use category in the Comprehensive Plan, such as Low-Rise Residential, is likely to be implemented with multiple zoning districts or with context-specific form restrictions that respond to neighborhood fabric.

Proposed Motion

We direct a Low Rise Residential Area consistent with CLUP community feedback to date, defining low-rise residential as up to three stories. Additionally, the Planning Commission calls for implementation recommendations to explore additional form-based regulations that consider requirements such as:

- *Overall limit on development intensity to ensure appropriate scale for available infrastructure*
- *Incentives or standards that encourage the development of smaller, more flexible homes that help increase the supply of homes*
- *Limiting maximum development scale by floor area or floor area ratio*
- *Limiting maximum number of homes per building*
- *Limiting number of beds per unit*
- *Modifying lot size/setback requirements*

In view of community feedback expressing a desire that new housing opportunities advance affordable housing and/or A2ZERO carbon neutrality priorities, and in light of the fact that, by Michigan law, the City cannot mandate affordable nor carbon neutral construction, City Planning Commission affirms further public discussion regarding whether the City should, in context-appropriate areas, permit modestly greater density for projects that accomplish rigorous carbon neutrality or affordability goals.

The language and proposed motion above is provided in respect to balancing community engagement, prior Planning Commission discussion, and recent community dialogue. If there is any additional information I can provide, please contact me at blenart@a2gov.org.