

Subject: Implementation Matrix -- 4+ Bedroom Item

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Hi there. The memo below gives a suggestion concerning one of the Implementation Matrix items.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NipgHdOddfJfPl8sGHdI2leJSjUQo3qmeHI24KwY3FI/edit?usp=sharing>

Summary

The implementation matrix contains a lot of great action items, but I suggest removing the following item:

"Define some private multifamily development (student dorm-type, 4 BRs or more) as a separate use class."

What is the purpose of the 4+ bedroom action item?

The purpose of creating a separate use class is to enable banning that use class in one or more zoning districts, so this action item is intended to ban some kind of multi-family housing in some unspecified parts of the city.

What might be banned? The phrase "Student dorm-type" is too vague to be used as a criteria, so what will the criteria be? It sounds like attached housing units with four or more bedrooms.

No justification is given for this rule, but I would guess that the purpose is to prevent the construction of apartments designed exclusively or mostly for students. I expect the reasoning is something like this:

1. Only students want to live in attached units with four or more bedrooms.
2. The city should discourage developers from building housing designed for students in some or all parts of the city.
3. Therefore the city should forbid attached units with four or more bedrooms in certain areas.

Is this purpose consistent with the goals of equity, sustainability, and affordability?

Equity

It is not equitable to single out a group of people—students—and try and prevent the construction of housing that best meets their needs. The commission has done a great job so far of not targeting specific groups of people for exclusion and it should continue to honor that principle.

A counterargument would be that the rule doesn't target students – it merely makes housing more “flexible” for more types of people. But the commission has not proposed a ban on housing designed specifically for small families, or seniors, or couples, so the “flexibility” requirement is being selectively applied, with the implicit assumption that the needs of students are less important than the needs of other groups.

Sustainability

Units with more residents are probably particularly energy efficient, because the heat and electricity used in shared spaces are shared between more tenants.

Affordability

Units with more bedrooms are often more affordable for each tenant, because the costs of shared spaces like kitchens and bathrooms are divided between more payers.

How would the 4+ bedroom action item be implemented?

Option 1 – A permitted use category

The planning commission might define “living together in attached homes with four or more unrelated people” as a “use” in the permitted use table of the Unified Development Code. This option would be awkward, because it would combine a rule about building form (attached homes) with a rule about use (how many people can live in each unit).

This rule would restrict peoples' housing options in both new and old homes. For example, if three people are currently living in a four bedroom apartment, the new use restriction would prevent another person from moving into the open bedroom.

The “use” prohibition could also prevent single-family homes from being expanded into duplexes with four or more bedrooms in one of the units.

Option 2 – Restrictions on new buildings

It is unclear how the city would enforce a ban on new attached homes with four or more bedrooms. Would there be a limit on the number of rooms per home or just the number of bedrooms? How would the city define a bedroom as opposed to a home office or spare room?

Enforcing a bedroom limit would not only be difficult – it would also be unjust and unnecessary. Attached dwellings with four or more bedrooms are fairly common, and banning them would make it harder for both students and non-students to find housing that fits their needs. Lots of families might be interested in living in a duplex or townhome with four or more bedrooms.

Examples

Here are some examples of attached 4+ bedroom units in Ann Arbor:

[Bristol Ridge](#)

<https://www.apartments.com/2739-bristol-rdg-dr-ann-arbor-mi/zkgxj9x/>



[1410 Traver Street](#)

<https://www.apartments.com/1410-traver-st-ann-arbor-mi/dcepqtk/>



[Hideaway Apartments](https://www.apartments.com/hideaway-apartments-ann-arbor-mi/3rjhtdf/)

<https://www.apartments.com/hideaway-apartments-ann-arbor-mi/3rjhtdf/>



State St Village

<https://www.apartments.com/state-street-village-ann-arbor-mi/1b7n3y5/>

University Trails

<https://www.apartments.com/university-trails-ann-arbor-mi/re38vw0/>