

Subject: Comp Plan || The Low Rise Residential Zone Needs a Thesis

From: Sam Homan
Sent: Wednesday, April 2, 2025 11:54 PM
To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>
Subject: Comp Plan || The Low Rise Residential Zone Needs a Thesis

Dear Planning Commission

It seems to me that the commission has become muddled in its thinking about what the purpose of the low rise residential zone is.

The current consensus of the commissioners seems to be something like:

- It's for legacy single family houses
- But since the current R1 zone takes up a lot of land and we need more housing, so how many rental units can we get away with in this new zone?

And I can kind of see the thinking here. Yes, the rent in Ann Arbor is too damn high. But most people don't want to rent their whole lives--and this seems to be the thing the commission is not addressing seriously--the cost to *buy* in Ann Arbor is also too damn high. The primary purpose of the low rise residential zone should be to create places for people to get on *and* climb the property ladder.

In my opinion, the thesis of the low rise residential zone should be: freehold homesteads.

What do I mean by that? The housing in the low rise residential zone should:

- **Primarily be *owned* by individuals, and**
- **Primarily be on *individual parcels***

With these two clear goals in mind, we can change many requirements in the current R1 zones, but still--in my opinion--maintain neighborhood character and increase the supply of housing.

Here's one proposed solution that I *do* think should be part of this low rise residential zone but I haven't heard discussed:

Town Houses/Row Houses (that aren't condos):

That is, we should allow townhomes in the low rise residential zone, so long as they are on individual lots.



- These would require assembling parcels and creating new, special subdivisions. But once assembled, they could be subdivided by right.
- The row houses would sit on lots that are on parcels about 35 to 40 feet wide,
- They could have first floor garages and still have fenced in backyards just like current single family housing.
- Rows could go up to 250 feet along a street--the length of a typical downtown block--and we could have 6 or 7 of these in a small area without overwhelming a neighborhood.
- Since only the front facade is visible, we could even mandate aesthetically pleasing brick or stone facades without adding exhoranant cost. (I cannot stress how important avoiding monotonous facades would be for acceptance. If the facades were all long, unbroken stretches of vinyl siding like 912 Mary Street, they simply will not be accepted by the community.)



- In character, this type of development should aim to be similar to a development like the Turnbury development off of Packard by US23. But a bit denser.



- If front garages were included, there would still be a car's length front setback.
- The key here is that they would be that they would be individual units on individual parcels. People would own them outright.
 - The only shared element would be a cinder block or concrete wall on the property line. Roofs would not be common.

Like I said, this would be a great way to increase density, hopefully increase supply and lower pressure on prices with owner occupied housing.

I'll close by noting that I own and live in an R1 house next to a non-conforming 1950s duplex. My neighbors in the duplex are an MD/PhD student and a woman who's lived in Ann Arbor forever and likes to tell stories about the Borders (of Borders Books) family. I have no problem with duplexes and such being part of this mix of single family neighborhoods. I like living by Woodbury Gardens. I find it very odd that in the 70s, the city seems to have mandated that my street abruptly end at a 30 foot conflicting land

use barrier rather than connect to the R3 section of Woodbury. I meet all sorts of interesting people there. *And* I really like owning a home. I think other people would like the opportunity to own a home outright. This is not an argument for fewer renters. It's an argument for more homeowners.

Best,
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