

Gentle Density Housing Bylaw Guide

A Pathway for Local Governments

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It is the responsibility of all persons undertaking the design, construction, and management of gentle density housing to review and comply with all current building code requirements, zoning bylaws, and all other applicable regulations.



This project received funding from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the views expressed are those of the author and CMHC accepts no responsibility for them.

Small Housing is a non-profit that promotes diverse, smaller-format housing in neighbourhoods and communities throughout Canada. This gentle density housing provide housing choices that better serve our growing and changing populations.

For over a decade, we have provided offerings to local governments, industry partners, and our community to achieve these housing goals, including:

- Cross-sector solutions development.
- Bylaw boot-camp workshops and other local government support.
- Communications support.
- Industrial training and upskilling.
- Advocacy and government engagement.
- Connections for professionals through our Gentle Density Network.

Our Gentle Density Toolbox at toolbox.smallhousing.ca includes sample gentle density illustrations throughout this document are available along with floor plans, site plans and an example pro forma financial analysis.



Overview

This Guide has been developed to capture the “story so far” about **gentle density housing** and provide local governments with assistance for implementation of gentle density in their own communities. This is intended to provide direction and advice to planners and other municipal staff coordinating gentle density housing initiatives, as well as elected officials and other interested groups involved with housing.

Gentle density forms of housing are often seen as the “missing middle” between single-unit detached dwellings and large multi-unit housing, comparable in scale and form to detached homes but with more units. Within this category, there can be a wide range of different housing

forms: secondary suites, laneway coach housing, cottages, houseplexes, and others. Heights are typically limited to three to four storeys.

Context is important to understand this focus on middle housing. For communities of all sizes, residential zoning has historically favoured larger single-detached homes. This has meant that many neighborhoods have been locked into a limited range of housing, with housing types that can exclude many households with increasing housing costs. This impacts nearly all residents when it comes to finding a place to call home, especially priority populations that have experienced historical and ongoing barriers in the housing market.

Different groups can be impacted in different ways:



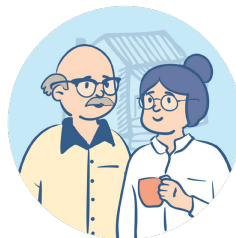
Homeowners interested in tapping into their home equity may be limited in their options for investing in their own property. Building and renting a secondary suite can give them passive income or let them take care of an ageing parent but may not be allowed in the community.



Workers in the community including teachers and service workers may not be able to afford to live close to their jobs and may be forced to commute longer distances to the community that they serve.



Parents may wonder if their adult children can find affordable housing options in the community and if they may need to stay at home even after they graduate, since starting wages may not be high enough to meet housing costs.



Older residents that are planning out their long-term living arrangements may need to leave their community to downsize or to find housing close to friends, relatives, and support services instead of “ageing in place”.



Younger families interested in buying or renting homes in a community may not be able to find affordable, suitable, and safe housing options. This can be very difficult if they have friends and family in the community, or if it is close to where they work.



Multigenerational households and people interested in **co-living** may want larger homes or housing closer to each other, but these options may not be possible due to current zoning practices which limit housing availability and increase cost.

One solution to build needed housing is to allow existing neighborhoods to accommodate growth and provide a wider range of options through gentle density. This type of infill can help increase overall supply and reduce costs over the long term as supply continues to grow.

Gentle density housing can benefit **owners and renters of these homes** through:

- **More attainable, compact** housing options that reflect changing family sizes.
- **Access to established neighborhoods** with available infrastructure such as parks, transit, retail, services, and jobs.
- Opportunities for **co-living** and **multigenerational living** with separated areas for autonomy and privacy.
- **Saving time and money** with shorter commutes.
- **Lower energy consumption** and lower associated operating costs.
- Less time spent on **cleaning and maintenance**.
- Ability to access and build **household wealth**.



Gentle density homes also provide benefits to the **broader community**:

- More gradual development through gentle density housing allows **infrastructure and service capacity** in communities to be provided and expanded more efficiently and at lower cost, reducing overall costs of growth and boosting fiscal sustainability.
- Attainable housing from new gentle density development **supports local businesses** by increasing their local customer base and helping them retain staff that can access housing in the community.
- Gentle density housing can be managed at a scale to fit with existing development and complement a neighborhood's **established identity**.
- Bringing people closer to where they work can **reduce traffic volumes**, and in turn reduce associated congestion, commuting costs, car dependency, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Reducing the needs for personal vehicles, minimizing sprawl, and encouraging residential energy efficiency can improve **environmental sustainability** and **help address climate change**.
- Encouraging more development like gentle density housing can **increase local employment and spending** on construction and the trades.
- More compact housing options can help **maintain social connections** and **keep communities vibrant** by allowing people to stay in a neighbourhood for more phases of their lives (e.g., younger renters, first-time homebuyers, seniors ageing-in-place, etc.).
- Greater housing production through gentle density initiatives can help to **lower housing costs** and **reduce homelessness**.
- More improvements and investment in housing can **increase the local property tax base** and **local fiscal sustainability**.

This Guide has been prepared to provide a step-by-step discussion about how local governments can advance new initiatives to thoughtfully introduce (and even reintroduce) gentle density and smaller housing options into existing residential neighbourhoods. This material includes the following:

- A **definition of “gentle density housing”**, including examples of housing types and definitions used in different communities.
- Strategies for **discussing gentle density housing** with the community, including ways to begin the conversation and answer typical questions.

- A **gentle density workplan** that communities can use when they are exploring how to allow for gentle density housing, including supporting analyses to highlight housing needs and considerations for gentle density.
- **Recommended bylaw revisions**, including model bylaw sections and best practices from different cities.
- **Additional sources of information** to supplement efforts to implement gentle density housing.

Appendices to this document provide examples of implementation in municipalities of different sizes and sample bylaw language for use.

What about other types of housing?

This Guide is specific to different types of lower-density, “missing middle” housing formats. However, a community may have other kinds of homes that may also need to be examined. This can include:

- **Transit-oriented development**, which focuses on higher-density development supported by high-frequency transit service.
- **Mixed-use development**, which incorporates retail, office, or even light industrial uses with homes.
- **Below-market housing** (or “affordable housing”), which includes subsidized homes for lower-income households that cannot afford costs for housing on the residential real estate market.
- **Supportive and social housing**, which includes different housing formats managed for very low-income households, seniors, people with disabilities, and others.
- **Rural housing**, including specific housing types like farmsteads, farmworker housing, and homesteads.
- **Manufactured homes** (previously called “mobile homes”), which include prefabricated dwellings on a wheeled chassis located on leasehold sites in parks.
- **Seasonal housing**, primarily vacation homes, workforce housing, or other accommodations that are usually occupied only part-time.
- **Short-term rental housing**, which typically involves housing used as vacation rentals rented for less than one month.

While this Guide is specifically focused on gentle density housing types, there are several considerations in this work that are relevant for other housing as well:

- **Coordinating broader initiatives.** The framework discussed in this Guide is specific for gentle density housing, but it can be part of a broader process too. More comprehensive housing initiatives could also promote denser multi-unit housing, transitional and emergency housing, and other formats alongside gentle density.
- **Developing a common foundation.** Many of the steps discussed in this Guide can help with future housing initiatives too. Assessing future housing needs and setting future housing targets, for example, may be referenced by other community efforts to promote housing in the future.
- **Addressing targeted needs.** Many places have relied on incentives to promote gentle density housing for specific needs and demographics. This can include lower-income housing but may also be a focus for such initiatives as “ageing-in-place” strategies to keep long-term residents.

The principles and approaches used in this Guide should be used and adapted as necessary to address the complex housing situations as they exist in your community. This is true whether this Guide is seen as a complete guide specifically for gentle density, or a “kit of parts” for initiatives that cover multiple forms of housing.

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I. Introduction

This Gentle Density Housing Bylaw Guide is written to assist local governments in developing bylaws, regulations, and programs for **gentle density housing**. Gentle density housing typically refers to the types of infill housing that can be built in existing low-density neighborhoods, typically those that mostly include single-unit detached homes. This kind of housing development is an essential piece of meeting our current and future housing needs, as it can help increase the availability and variety of homes while maintaining the general form of existing neighborhoods and spreading infrastructure costs across a wider pool of residents.

This Guide shares a range of approaches from across Canada and the US that have been taken to implement gentle density, including technical and procedural insight on how to carry out many of these changes. This includes the initial planning stages, zoning bylaw amendments needed, as well as the suite of regulatory changes necessary to make it feasible to produce gentle density housing.

This document is structured into the following sections to address major considerations with implementing gentle density housing:

- **What is gentle density housing?** This provides a definition for what “gentle density housing” involves, not only with a definition for the term, but also the specific types of housing included in the category.
- **Learnings from early experiences.** There are some lessons learned through communities that have already been through this process that can help guide new efforts. This includes addressing many of the questions that have come up in other communities, tips useful to those starting this process, and examples about how gentle density policies can be implemented in practice.
- **Coordinating zoning bylaw updates.** A successful effort to implement gentle density requires careful coordination. There are steps that communities interested in gentle density can take to identify how best to implement these changes within their bylaws, development regulations, community plans, and approval processes.
- **Suggestions for bylaw revisions.** Based on this work, explanatory materials highlight specific regulatory changes needed to implement gentle density in practice. This can be a starting point for jurisdictions interested in amending their own bylaws.
- **Additional resources.** Finally, there are additional resources that may be of use to communities looking to implement gentle density provided in a bibliography.

Case studies and examples of bylaw provisions from different communities are provided in the Appendix.

How Do I Start?

This is an extensive guide, and it can include a lot of details that can seem daunting even for large communities. When starting with this process, there are three essential steps to help you navigate effectively.

First, make sure to **establish your goals early**. Gentle density housing is intended to help you accomplish your goals, not to be a goal itself. It's important to focus on these goals and clearly outline how they will be achieved under proposed strategies.

Second, **engage with as many perspectives as possible**. Drawing on local experiences on housing can help address many of the potential roadblocks to implementing gentle density housing and build long-term support for the resulting strategies.

Finally, **be selective about what you pursue** from this guide. Some steps may not be as relevant for every context and can be covered in less detail. When coordinating this process for your community, review and scale the different elements as appropriate for your local government to focus on the biggest barriers to reaching your housing goals.

2. What is Gentle Density Housing?

Gentle density housing is an opportunity to reimagine neighborhoods of mostly single-unit detached housing through small-scale infill development. This kind of infill development, often called “middle housing”, represents densities and types of housing between low-density, single-unit detached homes and high-density multi-unit dwellings. Adding a broader range of housing types, ownership models, sizes, formats, and intended users to these neighbourhoods can provide additional homes and support more inclusive and diverse communities.

Gentle density redevelopment can often be accommodated with existing lot layouts, neighborhood amenities, and infrastructure. By contrast, denser multi-storey housing often requires more planning and coordination for site assembly. This also means that gentle density projects can consider the existing built form of the neighborhood and be constructed to align better with its character and identity, making it more palatable for neighbours and policymakers.

This flexibility and scale also provide individual homeowners more choices in deciding what to do with their properties. Unlike denser, large-scale development, local builders, small developers, and landowners can participate in redevelopment and equity investment given the smaller size of these projects.

With respect to the intensity of development, gentle density projects are often **four to six units**. Some communities, such as Vancouver, Edmonton, and Halifax, are enabling **up to eight units** on an existing lot under their provisions, and other formats like row homes and pocket neighbourhoods may include more individual homes. These homes are typically ground oriented, each with their own exterior-facing doors, but may include larger plexes and stacked row housing that may incorporate elevators.

Gentle density housing can incorporate various typologies and arrangements, and many of the common designations can be found below. This is not an exhaustive list, but it does highlight many of the major forms of gentle density housing that may be available in a community.





Accessory dwellings units (ADUs) are additional homes located on a property with a primary dwelling. These units can be either “attached” and within the main structure, or “detached” and found in a separate structure on the same lot, with attached units often referred to as “secondary suites”.



Laneway coach houses are detached accessory dwelling units located on lots with alley access, and they face directly onto the alley for entry. They are typically found in urban areas with established alleys or laneways.



Pocket neighborhoods are clusters of homes and potentially even apartments which are arranged around shared amenities and semi-public open spaces. These homes are typically smaller and are often smaller cottage-style units. The format and design are intended to foster a sense of community and shared stewardship.



Houseplexes, or “multiplexes,” are multiple homes (usually from two to six) within a single structure, designed to blend in with the surrounding neighborhood through similar design and scale. They can be newly built or converted larger homes and typically feature individual exterior doors for each unit.



Small-lot homes are single-unit homes on smaller parcels, designed and constructed efficiently in a compact footprint. They can be developed as infill in existing neighborhoods, and typically incorporate design considerations for smaller site dimensions such as more efficient uses of outdoor space and consistency in neighbourhood design at smaller scales.



Row homes are attached single-unit homes with shared walls between adjacent units. Townhomes are similar, though ownership models may vary by jurisdiction, and “stacked row” homes may include units taking separate floors in a multi-storey building.



3. Discussing Gentle Density Housing

While changes by communities to allow gentle density housing are mostly new initiatives, there are some places that have pursued and implemented these changes already. The lessons learned from these efforts, including both the successes and setbacks, can help to guide local governments interested in making these changes for themselves.

For some places, gentle density can also reflect a return to the types of development that have been historically existed in communities for many decades. Gentle density can reflect many of the well-loved housing styles that were built in many centres and neighbourhoods before zoning changes favoured single-unit detached homes.

Although this Guide presents practical approaches to implement changes to zoning bylaws and other development regulations, the first and most important component of any process like this involves how best to discuss gentle density housing with the people in the community.

Reimagining neighbourhood designs that largely include single-unit detached housing is a sensitive topic for many residents and policy makers alike. There are concerns the community will have about these changes that need to be

addressed during the development of policies, processes, and bylaws. Some may need to be reflected in changes to recommendations, while others may just be related to a lack of information about what gentle density entails or what a local government can or cannot control.

Acknowledging and addressing concerns early, whether related to parking, infrastructure capacity, neighbourhood aesthetics, or other issues, can help build trust and encourage constructive dialogue. This kind of collaboration can help throughout the development and implementation of new gentle density housing initiatives.

This part of the Guide is divided into two components:

- **Starting the conversation** about gentle density housing initiatives to different groups within the community.
- **Addressing questions** that often arise during policy discussions and public engagement, which can be essential to understand to make sure communications with different groups are clear and focused.



3.1. Starting the Conversation

When discussions about gentle density housing come up, conversations can often escalate between advocates and opponents. However, it is essential to keep in mind that gentle density housing strategies are policy tools to achieve certain goals, not goals unto themselves. Dialogue to build support for the goals is essential for success, and guiding constructive community discussions about the role of gentle density housing is an important step.

The following list includes some tips that can help to keep these conversations about gentle density housing constructive. While many of these are universal to planning processes, they are especially important for discussions that can become contentious. Keep in mind that this is in no particular order, and that many of these considerations can come up several times during an engagement process:

- **Start with goals, not solutions.** Gentle density housing should be framed as a strategy to achieve broader community goals, not as the goal itself. Begin any process like this by discussing shared values and goals like affordability, options for families, seniors, and first-time buyers, and regional housing contributions, before introducing gentle density as one potential solution.
- **Foster collaboration and focus on shared values.** Engage the community early, ensuring their ideas and concerns shape the process. Focusing on shared values and ensuring that people feel that their input can shape the process can result in more trust and transparency. Avoid technical jargon and “planner speak” in favour of clear discussions about fairness, inclusion, and community needs.
- **Review the benefits of gentle density.** Examine the benefits of gentle density in partnership with the community to reinforce why it can be effective at addressing identified issues and goals. This can include showcasing its potential to address specific community goals, like enhancing neighbourhood character and increasing housing affordability.
- **Use real world examples.** Present actual examples of gentle density projects to express ideas more effectively. Using visuals and case studies of well-designed examples can effectively illustrate how these housing types integrate into and enhance existing neighbourhoods. (See the Appendix for some examples of gentle density approaches.)
- **Address concerns directly.** Be upfront about potential issues like parking, infrastructure, and neighbourhood character. Provide examples of how other communities have successfully managed these challenges with solutions like design guidelines and parking strategies to present a balanced perspective.
- **Distinguish incremental change from large-scale development.** Emphasize that gentle density housing evolves gradually, unlike larger housing projects. This measured approach can help neighbourhoods to adjust while maintaining their character and allowing supporting infrastructure to be improved over time.
- **Connect with broader community initiatives.** Situate the discussion about gentle density within the context of other local priorities, such as transportation, infrastructure planning, and other housing-related initiatives like transit-oriented development or neighbourhood revitalization. This can ensure alignment with wider goals, and reinforce that gentle density is in turn being considered in these initiatives.

3.2. Trees, Taxes, and Parking: Common Questions

An essential part of discussing gentle density housing is offering clear, accurate information to address questions from the community. While these initiatives have been adopted across Canada and in other countries, similar concerns often arise in discussions. These are often valid questions and rooted in worries about undesirable changes, but many can be addressed effectively with accurate information and open dialogue.

This section provides responses to common concerns raised during public meetings. It is essential to understand and address genuine concerns in the community, and these answers will need to be complemented with an understanding of the local context. They can be a start to providing clear answers to the community that can help to steer discussions toward practical solutions for overcoming challenges and mitigating risks.

“I bought my property because no one could put in more housing next door!”

As communities grow, land uses need to adapt to meet changing demands. Neighbourhoods will inevitably change over time too. Local governments must plan for many different needs for both today and the future, and housing shortages are an important issue that needs to be addressed. That may include changes to zoning bylaws, which can be changed to meet community needs.

Gentle density housing provides a balanced solution by adding compatible homes to existing neighbourhoods with minimal disruption. This type of housing complements neighbourhood character while providing diverse housing options to meet shifting needs. Growth is often gradual, as homeowners may choose to develop their properties over time instead of all at once, and these changes are distributed across much larger areas.

“This means that no one can build single-family homes anymore, and we will be forced to knock down our homes and build apartments!”

Single-unit detached homes are not going anywhere, but they have become financially inaccessible for many residents. Enabling gentle density means that zoning will allow more homes per lot, but this change does not eliminate detached homes as a housing option. Changes that allow gentle density simply add flexibility for homeowners to explore building additional homes on their property if they choose.

These updates also do not force homeowners to make any changes to their current homes or build anything new. Instead, these changes specifically offer more options for those who wish to develop. Local housing needs and market demand for real estate will ultimately guide what gets built.

“Parking will be awful with all of this new housing!”

Parking is a key consideration in any gentle density strategy, and fair solutions must balance the needs of the entire community. Effective parking management, combined with access to pedestrian, cycling, and transit infrastructure, can help ensure the efficient use of land as infill projects are introduced. Managing parking can also help to reduce the costs to build new housing. Plans and strategies should be shared with the community in advance to reinforce that these issues are being considered.



Note that new developments often include parking to meet loan underwriting requirements as well as regulations. However, gentle density policies should account for local parking conditions, transit, and active transportation systems to minimize impacts on current residents. On-street parking will need to be shared and managed fairly to meet everyone's needs as a public resource maintained and paid for by local government.

“We don't have the infrastructure to support new housing in these neighbourhoods and taxpayers will be stuck paying for growth!”

Having infrastructure capacity for new housing is necessary regardless of location, and this can include a range of services from water, sewer, and stormwater, to schools, libraries, parks, and public safety. It can cost less for the community in the long run to build in existing neighbourhoods with available capacity, rather than building new infrastructure in undeveloped areas. Even if repairs or upgrades are needed, updates can cost less than new systems and also increase investment in neighbourhoods that need infrastructure repairs.

With respect to the fiscal benefits, infill projects can help provide service fees and charges to support necessary infrastructure, and greater housing densities can boost municipal tax revenues. New residents may also provide the scale necessary for new services, such as additional transit. Unlike larger projects, gentle density housing grows more gradually, allowing needed expansions to be planned and accommodated incrementally over time.

“Building these homes will change the character of my neighbourhood for the worse, and long-time residents will leave!”

Neighbourhood character will always change as households change, but even under existing zoning regulations the development that is allowed can affect neighbourhood character. Well-designed gentle density housing can complement and even enhance neighbourhood aesthetics, aided by tools such as development design guidelines and pre-approved housing design plans. Gentle density can also help neighbourhoods to adapt to new demands while retaining their identity and desirability as a place to love. Heritage protections can even consider gentle density as a way to incentivize the preservation of important homes while preserving important historical amenities.

“We will lose trees in our community!”

Trees are desirable amenities for homes, and there are significant incentives for new builders to keep trees for aesthetics, shade, windbreaks, and other benefits in gentle density housing projects. Gentle density housing is also intended to fit in with the types of development already allowed within a community, and existing tree protections will still be in place.

For many communities, builders of gentle density housing will be subject to the same rules as someone building a single-unit detached home. In some cases, additional flexibility may be useful to allow developers to replace trees that may limit development, but this can be offset by replacement requirements that can help increase the overall tree canopy in the community.

One of the more important benefits to preserving tree cover, however, is that if demand for housing is met instead with more development in communities further away, this new construction may result in even further impacts to tree cover and habitat in areas where impacts to the natural environment may be even more significant.



“My property values will go down with gentle density housing next door because of all the nuisances (shade, light, noise, etc.)!”

Gentle density housing is intended to be built at generally the same scale as other homes in a neighbourhood. While there may be some changes to development regulations to promote gentle density, new single-unit detached homes could be built on the same properties at a similar scale and have the same nuisances on neighbouring properties. Changes to development regulations can even promote better designs for gentle density development that can perform even better.

On the other hand, having the ability to build more on your property means that the price of land would go up, not down, on the real estate market. This means that when you might look to sell your property in the future, you could potentially receive more for it.

“My property taxes will go up if gentle density housing is allowed because the value of my property will increase!”

Although property values can increase when gentle density is allowed in a community, property taxes consider other factors too. For many communities across Canada, property tax obligations are distributed across properties during annual budgeting. If broad changes allow gentle density and change the property values of many similar residential properties, the distribution of tax obligations will not change in the same way as if only one property increased in value. Your taxes will not go up substantially just because of overall changes in zoning.

Other conditions also affect the property taxes homeowners might need to pay in the future: tax policies in the community, additional property value created from new construction, needs for revenue to support local infrastructure and services, and so on. Each community is different, but supporting additional investment in housing can help to make a community more fiscally sustainable by building up the property tax base.

“This won’t do anything to prices, since these new homes are going to be expensive and won’t be affordable!”

New housing may be costly at first, but increasing the number of homes in the community helps stabilize prices, as seen in many communities across North America. While gentle density housing often starts at higher price points, they are usually smaller and more accessible than many other new homes and tend to become more affordable over time. They also absorb demand that might otherwise push up prices for existing affordable housing, keeping those units available for others. ADUs and similar units may also put more affordable units on the market for rentals, especially in neighbourhoods where rental units may not be commonly found.

“Developers are just looking to make a profit!”

Most housing is built by the private sector, even those that people live in now. To build, developers need competitive financial returns regardless of the project. The smaller scale of gentle density housing keeps more economic benefits local over larger projects. High-density apartment projects require major investments from large developers and institutional investors. In contrast, gentle density enables homeowners to add housing for passive income and profit, allowing people in the community to invest. Smaller, community-based builders can also take on these projects and keep the jobs and economic benefits local.



4. Planning for Zoning Bylaw Updates

Gentle density housing can address many local housing issues, especially in communities and neighbourhoods where siting more intensive development would be challenging. Implementing these changes effectively needs a good strategy to address different questions:

- **Location:** Where is gentle density most effective, and how can it be planned for areas close to services and amenities while avoiding sensitive habitats and hazards?
- **Capacity:** What types of housing can realistically be built in an area under new zoning, and how will these changes impact the capacity to develop the specific housing types needed?
- **Infrastructure:** What infrastructure, services, and amenities will be needed to support infill growth, and what are the associated capital and maintenance costs? How up-to-date are plans for infrastructure, especially in neighbourhoods where growth would be expected.
- **Environment:** What environmental impacts, such as changes to tree canopy or stormwater flow, might result from gentle density housing? How can they be mitigated? What are the benefits over other ways to accommodate growth?
- **City standards:** Do engineering standards for streets, sidewalks, and other systems need to be updated to support gentle density? How should this be done without compromising functions like emergency access and solid waste management?
- **Regulatory requirements:** How can development regulations and building codes be adapted to achieve desired densities?
- **Financial feasibility:** How are these considerations balanced by the need for feasible projects that can be pursued by the private sector? What incentives might be required to promote development?
- **Other bylaw changes:** What additional local bylaw updates, such as for parking, stratification, or subdivisions, are needed to align with zoning changes? How can these be incorporated into the update process?
- **Community perspectives:** What concerns do residents have about infill housing, and how can they be addressed? How should the community be kept informed about the process and how it might impact them?
- **Evaluating outcomes:** How will success in meeting housing goals be measured, and what steps will be taken if goals are not met?

Developing a step-by-step framework to address these questions can be essential. Local governments will need to ensure relevant information is clearly communicated through a transparent process with community members that may be affected by these decisions. There are often concerns that can be addressed with accurate information and a clear and careful exchange of perspectives.

There are also policy questions that take time to answer. Elements such as infrastructure capacity and necessary changes to the subdivision process may need detailed research and

analysis, and potentially even outside assistance. Mapping out the time and effort needed to get these answers to guide final action can be essential in managing an effective process.

This section of the Guide provides clear, detailed recommendations for how to approach these revisions. We recommend that you start with a high-level workplan for this effort, and then address specific details in a clear and methodical way, depending on your capacity.

While this framework can provide a structured approach to allow communities to adapt gentle density housing reforms to their own needs, many of these initiatives will often fall into one of three different categories of approaches, which are described in more detail on the following page:

- **A single gentle density zone** (or a small number of zones) to add to the bylaw.
- **Modifications to existing zones** to maintain the existing structure of the bylaw but add gentle density provisions.
- **Major zoning revisions** that include gentle density as part of a comprehensive revision.

While each of these options may adjust the focus and level of effort involved, note that this framework can apply to them all when building out an approach to manage the process.

To help with planning a strategy for gentle density housing updates, the remaining parts of this section covers three major topics:

- The structure for a **playbook for gentle density housing** that can be used to guide changes to zoning bylaws, development regulations, and other local frameworks to allow for gentle density housing.
- An overview of the **supporting assessments** that can be important for guiding strategies with gentle density housing.
- **Changes to other bylaws** that may be necessary as gentle density housing is implemented.



Gentle Density Housing Workplan – Options for General Approaches

	Option 1 Gentle Density Zone	Option 2 Modifications to Existing Zones	Option 3 Major Zoning Revisions
Description	This would involve adopting a new single zone (or a small set of zones) to implement gentle density regulations. This would be included in existing zoning as a replacement for existing single-detached / duplex zones.	Existing residential zones in a community would be reviewed and updated to include gentle density housing regulations. This could be done by making individual changes to each zone, creating a zoning overlay, or updating general regulations that apply to several zones.	A full assessment of current residential zones would be coordinated to create entirely new zoning classifications that include gentle density housing types.
Context	Most easily implemented in a community with a limited number of parcels identified as appropriate for gentle density housing, or where gentle density housing is expected to take on a similar form throughout the community.	Most suitable for communities with a small but diverse number of residential zones that are suitable for gentle density housing. This is often appropriate for communities that already permit accessory dwelling units and/or infill in different zones.	Most suitable for larger communities with many complex residential zones where gentle density housing would be appropriate and significant revisions and updates to residential zoning would otherwise be needed.
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Quickest option to apply gentle density in a community. » Generally limited in scope and effort. » Desirable for smaller communities and where changes may be limited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Builds on existing regulations and bylaws without the need for comprehensive rewrites. » Tailors gentle density housing to the existing neighbourhood context and current regulations. » Limited mapping updates necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Allows for full integration of gentle density into new zoning specifically developed to consider this type of housing. » Greatest opportunities for tailoring regulations to address needs for implementation. » Potential to be integrated into other residential zoning updates, such as transit-oriented development.
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Effort will likely require mapping analysis and updates to identify where the new zone or zones would apply. » New regulations may not reflect unique conditions in each neighbourhood, potentially requiring rezoning later. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Requires in-depth review of existing regulations to ensure no conflicts with other parts of the zoning bylaw. » More challenging to maintain consistency and communicate changes to the public. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Requires the most time and effort for review and updates. » Challenging for communities with limited staff time and resources. » Community engagement would require the most effort between the three options due to the extent of changes.
Level of Effort	Low	Low to Moderate	High

4.1. Playbook for Gentle Density Housing Changes

When coordinating gentle density housing initiatives, there are several steps to consider. This section outlines a high-level approach that can be used by a community but may be adjusted or supplemented to meet local needs, context, capacity, and expectations.

There are three key points to reinforce with this playbook:

- **This process needs to reflect the availability of local resources.** A smaller community may not have the time or budget to coordinate a detailed set of studies, and even larger cities may need to streamline some components of a workplan. While more detailed assessments may be described in some places, many of these steps are presented to make sure that local governments are giving all due consideration to the factors that may be most relevant in their communities. Components of this should be reduced or removed if they are not important to understanding how best to include gentle density into existing neighbourhoods.
- **This is intended to be a path to reach your housing goals, and not a goal itself.** A gentle density housing initiative should be part of broader housing planning. For some communities, this may include other things outside the scope of this guide: transit-oriented development and higher-density housing options, addressing emergency and supportive housing options, planning for senior and special needs housing, and so on. Parts of this playbook can overlap with those initiatives, and efforts towards gentle density should be coordinated to fit in with those timelines and needs. However, this is intended to complement and not replace broader discussions about local housing needs.

A general process would include five steps:

- **Understand housing needs and goals** for gentle density housing policy changes in consultation with the community.
- **Determine current conditions** for both housing supply and demand in the market and identify how these conditions overlap with expressed needs and goals.
- **Create gentle density housing options** that consider the expressed needs and goals of the community as well as local market conditions.
- **Consult on options for action** to achieve identified housing goals and revise materials based on community feedback.
- **Develop plans for implementation and monitoring** to carry out the identified courses of action.

More details on this process are provided in this section, which includes a more detailed breakdown of necessary tasks and considerations when pursuing changes to enable gentle density.

While this approach is typical of a regular planning process, many of the individual steps outlined will specifically address needs for information for a successful gentle density housing initiative. Note that this work can be coordinated with other housing initiatives as well.

Gentle Density Housing Workplan – Playbook Checklist

Phases

Tasks

1. Understand housing needs and goals

Review local housing issues and engage with the community to develop housing targets and goals that could be addressed with gentle density policies.

- Identify leads for this effort.
- Evaluate your local housing needs.
- Develop engagement strategy / identify participants.
- Organize initial internal engagement with staff.
- Begin external engagement with the community.
- Create a working group from the community.
- Set housing targets and overall goals for gentle density.



2. Determine current conditions

Identify current housing policies and development potential in the community and review the obstacles to reaching housing targets and goals.

- Review zoning bylaws and development regulations.
- Identify constraints and tradeoffs.
- Evaluate infrastructure limitations with providers.
- Determine development potential.
- Calculate shortfalls in needed housing potential.
- Coordinate conversations about gaps and obstacles.



3. Propose gentle density housing options

Develop options for introducing gentle density housing types into the community that will help to address local housing needs.

- Develop gentle density housing concepts.
- Identify how bylaws will need to change.
- Explore incentives and supportive programs for housing.
- Determine likely housing amounts and remaining gaps.
- Assess effects on city finances.
- Provide renderings and examples to show concepts.



4. Consult on options for action

Discuss gentle density options with the community and finalize an approach that addresses local needs and targets for housing.

- Reach out to other departments for review.
- Engage with the community on alternatives.
- Engage with commissions, boards, committees, Council.
- Make necessary revisions to concepts.
- Confirm final concepts will achieve goals.



5. Develop plans for implementation

Support the implementation of gentle density policies through bylaw amendments and coordinate public information needs and ongoing monitoring.

- Draft bylaws for implementation.
- Support the Council process for enactment.
- Develop informational materials about gentle density.
- Provide regular reporting on progress towards targets.
- Coordinate a regular review of outcomes.



4.1.1. Understand housing needs and goals

This step of the workplan deals with the “why” of the process to understand the information needed for decision-making, both quantitative (e.g., housing statistics, demographics) and qualitative (e.g., local perspectives and feedback). This is an essential step to get “buy-in” for the process, especially for controversial proposals or solutions that may have significant impacts.

Changing housing policy must start with the end in mind: what problems are we trying to solve? No two communities are the same, and there may be specific local needs that require different solutions. A community or neighbourhood struggling with providing affordable housing for young people may need a different approach than one with older homes that is facing significant turnover, or areas where seasonal demand and short-term rentals are an issue.

Actions under this phase would include the following:

- **Identify leads.** When initiating a gentle density housing initiative, designate clear responsibility for the process. This includes a lead organization or department, as well as a facilitator or manager with planning and development experience heading the work and serving as a contact.
- **Evaluate local housing needs.** Gathering data about current and future community housing needs in a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) or a similar report can help define the scope of local housing challenges. See the following part of this section for more details on what is included in an HNA.
- **Develop an engagement strategy and identify participants.** Comprehensive engagement can promote dialogue and gather feedback from members of the community across the entire process. A clear and transparent engagement strategy can outline these activities, determine who you should engage with, and identify how this information will guide changes.
- **Organize initial internal engagement.** Engaging departments and groups within local government such as interdepartmental staff, Council, and civic boards and committees, can clarify housing policy objectives and needs. This should involve workshops and meetings to gather input on the initial direction of this work.
- **Begin external engagement.** Early engagement with all those with interests in housing can clarify community priorities and perspectives on gentle density. This can be through workshops, open houses, focus groups, interviews, and other activities at the start of the process, and can include housing advocates, community groups, builders, and the wider public.
- **Create a working group.** Convening a working group of representatives from groups in the community can also support policy development and promote sustained participation, broader representation, and effective communication of outcomes to the wider community.
- **Set housing targets and overall goals.** From the work outlined above, a community should define specific housing goals and targets based on the identified current and future needs. This should be confirmed by Council to give direction to the process and may include not only the total amount of housing to be developed, but also specific types and populations to be served.



4.1.2. Determine current conditions

The next step is to determine how the community can achieve housing goals over time, and what challenges and obstacles will need to be overcome. This builds upon the HNA and provides a foundation for options for action.

Note that the following part of this section provides more details about assessments of current conditions like an HNA or an evaluation of land development potential can be conducted. What is important to keep in mind is that this evaluation of current conditions can be coordinated with different resources and levels of effort. The most important objective of this is to provide supporting information that can ensure that proposed changes to development regulations can help address the problems identified with local housing.

Primary tasks include the following:

- **Review zoning bylaws and development regulations.** The first step of this process should be to evaluate and inventory existing zoning bylaws and development regulations for characteristics that may limit infill housing development. (Note the next section of the Guidebook details many of these restrictions, and how they may be adjusted accordingly to accommodate infill.)
- **Identify constraints and tradeoffs.** Other constraints that impact housing development should also be reviewed, such as environmental limitations, property ownership patterns, or project feasibility. This can include tradeoffs to consider in the concepts; for example, tree protection may need to be considered with increased building height to achieve identified densities.
- **Evaluate infrastructure limitations with providers.** Working with utility and infrastructure providers to assess services such as water, sewage, stormwater, transportation, parking, and electricity is critical to understand capacity constraints and necessary upgrades that could hinder new development.
- **Determine development potential.** Assessments of regulations, site constraints, and infrastructure limitations can be used to estimate the available land for development in a community and the potential for this land to accommodate different types and amounts of new residential development.
- **Calculate current and expected shortfalls in development potential.** When comparing assessments of development potential to evaluations of housing needs, shortfalls can be estimated and highlighted. Some or all of these gaps will be the focus of proposed gentle density housing solutions in this process.
- **Coordinate internal and external conversations about gaps and obstacles.** Throughout all of these steps, it is essential to engage both internal and external groups to discuss the identified gaps and barriers to share information in a transparent and collaborative way and confirm findings.



4.1.3. Propose gentle density housing options

As policy goals become clearer from the assessment of conditions, specific policy and planning solutions can be proposed to achieve them through gentle density housing. As noted above in the summary of potential processes, this can range from simply identifying how to accommodate one or two more homes by right on a lot, to providing detailed policies to encourage a range of new housing types.

This would generally include the following steps:

- **Develop gentle density housing concepts.** At this stage, concepts should be presented for including gentle density housing into a community. This would include considering both the types of housing that should be included to meet local needs (e.g., plexes, ADUs, row housing, etc.) and general approaches that can be used to integrate these housing types into neighbourhoods. This may consider identified development restrictions, as well as information about the abilities for existing lots to accommodate additional growth.
- **Identify changes to policies and zoning bylaws.** Based on these concepts, existing zoning bylaws should be reviewed to identify specific changes to allow gentle density housing, such as dimensional requirements and changes to parking. Note that the following section of this Guide includes a more detailed overview of these potential changes.
- **Explore incentives and supportive programs for new housing.** It can be important to evaluate potential incentives such as density bonuses, reduced permit fees, or streamlined approval processes to help developers and property owners to overcome financial barriers to development and ensure these new housing options are feasible to develop. Where practical, this can also use financial models to evaluate whether new housing projects are feasible to develop, and whether different programs can improve the likelihood of development.
- **Determine remaining gaps.** Based on these changes, the development potential under new regulations can be evaluated. This can be used to determine if these changes are sufficient to address identified housing gaps. Remaining gaps may be addressed by additional changes or through other policies (e.g., higher-density development, government-subsidized projects, etc.)
- **Assess fiscal effects.** Providing estimates of the total fiscal effects from changes can be important for decision-making. This should not only include estimates of the costs for expanding available infrastructure, but also the increased revenue from taxes and fees resulting from new development and new residents. Models such as BC's [Community Lifecycle Infrastructure Costing \(CLIC\) Tool](#) can help to evaluate these effects, especially against other strategies for development.
- **Provide renderings and examples to show form and massing.** Visual renderings and examples can be useful to illustrate the scale, form, and integration of gentle density housing and help all those involved to understand how this new housing will fit within the community.



4.1.4. Consult on options for action

After an approach for gentle density housing implementation has been developed, returning to participants with clear, detailed options for feedback is essential. This second round of engagement allows for additional feedback, ensuring that community voices continue to shape the process.

- **Reach out to other departments for review.** Before reaching out to the wider public and external groups, internal input from relevant departments in local governments, such as planning, engineering, and finance, should be coordinated to confirm alignment with broader community goals and needs and identify potential logistical or operational challenges.
- **Engage with the community on alternatives.** Different activities such as workshops, open houses, and focus groups should be coordinated to gather input from the broader community and specific groups like neighbourhood associations and developers. These opportunities for constructive dialogue can help review potential alternatives and refine proposals to address community perspectives and concerns.
- **Engage with commissions, committees, boards, and Council on recommended changes.** It is also important to provide these options to Council and other relevant community boards, committees, and organizations to gather high-level feedback and address any concerns. This ensures that proposed changes have preliminary support from decision-makers before moving toward adoption.
- **Make necessary revisions to concepts.** Based on the feedback received across all groups, it is important to develop a final recommendation that refines the working concept through input received from different interests in the community. This could require both edits to the concepts in general as well as specific revisions to bylaw amendments.
- **Confirm that revised concepts will achieve goals.** Coordinate a final evaluation of the revised concept based on the work conducted in earlier steps of the process to ensure that the final recommendations will meet the housing goals identified.



4.1.5. Develop plans for implementation and monitoring

Once a final recommended action and/or a set of policies are established, a clear plan is needed for the legislative process and other implementation steps. This is mainly administrative but can require further refining or reviewing of planning and policies. It is also important at this stage to establish a monitoring framework to assess the impacts of these policies over time and ensure housing goals are achieved.

There are several steps involved, many related to addressing the obstacles identified in the assessments:

- **Draft bylaws for implementing the recommended option.** Comprehensive but clear bylaw language is needed for approved recommendations which is clear and can support a straightforward adoption and enforcement process.
- **Support the Council process for enactment.** Facilitating the bylaw approval process with Council through any necessary presentations, reports, or adjustments is also an important role. Providing background context and responding to Council questions in a timely and accurate way can require significant investment in time. It can also be important to coordinate with members of the community to give testimonies during Council meetings about their perspectives on these changes.
- **Develop informational materials about gentle density housing.** Once implemented, communities need to have accessible resources such as guides, FAQs, and informational brochures available to explain the new bylaws to residents, developers, and other interested members of the community. Concise, well-designed communications can foster public understanding and ensure compliance with the new regulations.
- **Provide regular reporting on progress towards targets.** A reporting framework can track the progress of the implemented policies and share data on key metrics with the community at regular intervals. This provides transparent feedback on progress, demonstrates accountability, and supports public confidence in the process. Note that this can be especially important, as gentle density housing development tends to be incremental over time and may need to be highlighted more as compared to larger projects.
- **Coordinate a regular review of outcomes.** Periodic evaluations to review the effectiveness of the policy changes should also be provided to confirm the initial objectives are being achieved and determine necessary adjustments.

4.2. Supporting Assessments

Making changes to the zoning bylaw and other local development regulations are a major part of this process as discussed, and more details on possible edits are provided in the following section. These amendments may need additional assessments as part of the process, which are noted in the process description above.

Note that not every process will require detailed studies. Local governments with fewer resources may not have the capacity, time, or need to develop comprehensive reports. Similarly, some of these topics may not be significant concerns for communities and can be assessed at a high level as part of a more comprehensive process. The level of these studies will be context and community dependent.

4.2.1. Housing needs assessment

As noted in the process, a Housing Needs Assessment is a structured community analysis into current and projected housing needs. It incorporates statistical data such as population forecasts and economic data with policy analysis and community feedback. This is important background material for governments to make informed decisions on housing and infrastructure investments so these efforts can help meet community growth and affordability targets.

Major elements of an HNA include:

- A **community profile**, including trends related to population demographics and growth.
- **Household profiles and economic characteristics** such as income, employment, and commuting patterns.
- Housing issues with **priority groups** such as Indigenous Peoples, seniors, single-parent families, and others that may face challenges in the local housing market.
- A **housing profile** detailing characteristics of homes in the community, including housing prices, ages, and sizes.

See the callout on the following page for more information about how to develop a Housing Needs Assessment for your own community.



Writing a Housing Needs Assessment

As a qualitative and quantitative assessment, a Housing Needs Assessment needs to incorporate datasets from a wide range of sources, from statistical information such as population forecasts and economic data, to policy analysis and community stakeholder feedback. This is important background material to make informed decisions on housing and infrastructure investments, but this can also be a daunting project to tackle!

Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities Canada has established [a standardized HNA template](#) that is often required by agencies to qualify for certain federal infrastructure funds, such as permanent transit funding and the Canada Community-Building Fund (CCBF). This template uses a consistent methodology and relies on available data that is accessible to most communities.

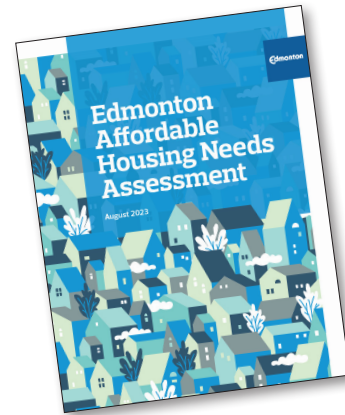
Major elements of this template include:

- **Community Profile and Trends**, including overview of local demographics, population growth, change over time, and likely effects on housing demand.
- **Household Profiles and Economic Characteristics**, such as household income distributions, tenure (owner versus renter), and housing needs. This also includes available data on employment and commuting patterns.
- **Priority Groups**, focusing on specific housing challenges faced by priority populations such as Indigenous Peoples, seniors, single-parent families, and others that may be struggling with affordability in the housing market. This section also discusses homelessness and available emergency and temporary housing resources.
- **Housing Profile**, includes an overview of the local housing stock, with information such as structural types, vacancy rates, housing affordability, non-market housing, and recent changes in average rent and vacancy rates.

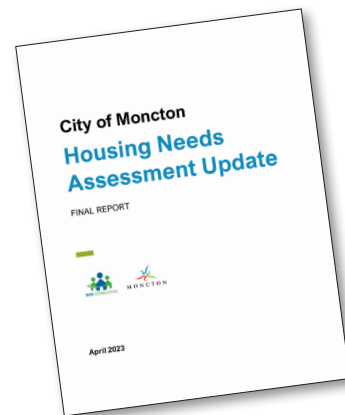
The template provides a step-by-step approach to collect the key housing information needed to support gentle density housing policies for the community. A pre-populated template is even available upon request for communities with populations over 30,000.

For communities developing their own HNAs, these studies rely on Census data collected over the past four collection periods, which is very challenging to access and process. The UBC Housing Assessment Resource Tools (HART) program also provides this information formatted for easier use through their [Housing Needs Assessment Tool](#) and other resources.

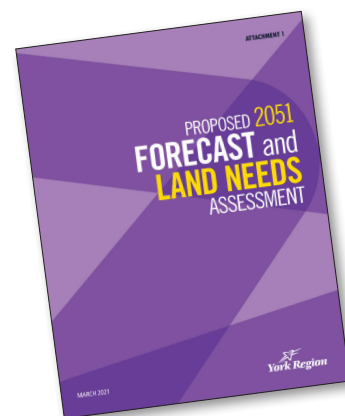
Remember to check with your province to determine if there are additional requirements that are necessary for compliance with community plans and other mandates!



[Edmonton Affordable Housing Needs Assessment \(2023\)](#)



[City of Moncton Housing Needs Assessment Update \(2023\)](#)



[York Region Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment](#)



Areas with hazardous conditions such as steep slopes, landslide risks, or vulnerability to flooding may not be suitable for most housing types, including gentle density.

4.2.2. Hazardous site conditions

Hazardous conditions include site characteristics that pose a significant risk to safety, including geotechnical hazards, steep slopes, poor soil bearing capacity, areas prone to flood or erosion, and fire interface areas. Evaluating where hazardous conditions are located can be important as these areas may need to be excluded from increased density allowances if risks are significant. In other cases where they present development restrictions, they may limit the available development potential on infill sites.

Communities may also consider differentiated approaches to hazard management with gentle density housing where management efforts in already developed areas, such as older single-detached neighbourhoods, may allow infill projects to be accommodated. This may exclude gentle density in other, newer areas unless developers demonstrate that risks are being mitigated.

4.2.3. Development potential

An evaluation of development potential can be used to assess how much net development an area of interest can accommodate. Generally, this evaluation is based on zoning, land use regulations, and available land, as well as limitations such as hazardous conditions (see above), environmental constraints, and infrastructure capacity. An assessment may include not only current conditions but may also evaluate how this potential would change with recommended zoning bylaw amendments.

Such an analysis can be done at different scales and levels of detail, with large jurisdictions coordinating detailed evaluations in GIS, while smaller communities may base their evaluation on available maps for an area (including free aerial and satellite mapping available online). The most important results from this kind of work that can be received are a general estimate about how many homes could be built under different scenarios, to better understand how recommendations can help address identified housing issues.

In studies like these, development potential is not the full build-out of all available space in an area. An assessment needs to consider that available areas may not develop due to a range of factors: unobserved site limitations that prevent development, a lack of interest by the owner, difficulties with coordinating development, and so on. Providing an adjustment with a “market supply factor” can reflect the likelihood that a given area would redevelop or receive infill. These factors typically range from 10–50%, with higher values reflecting areas with active developer interest for infill and lower values for locations with limited development appeal.



Assessing development potential for gentle density housing in the community can show how much development could be accommodated and whether housing targets could be reached.

4.2.4. Sewer and water infrastructure

A Professional Engineer should conduct an analysis to identify areas where new gentle density development could potentially overwhelm existing infrastructure capacity. This needs to consider the incremental nature of gentle density development, potentially establishing thresholds for certain areas where further development would require infrastructure upgrades.



Increases in building footprints and parking on a site from gentle density will result in changes to stormwater runoff, which will need to be considered in development regulations.

As with other studies like these, assessing the sufficiency of available infrastructure can be done at different scales and levels of detail. For smaller communities and neighbourhoods, a high-level assessment may be done internally by a public works department based on their knowledge of available capacity. Broader changes may require more comprehensive assessments of available capacity, including modeling and forecasting of impacts and integrated planning for infrastructure improvements.

Another important consideration with infrastructure planning is that unlike larger forms of redevelopment and infill in communities, gentle density presents more gradual changes in demand over time. In some communities, long-term declines in local demand due to demographic changes, smaller household sizes, and improved efficiency can result in the capacity needed to accommodate gentle density, especially in the shorter term.

4.2.5. Stormwater system capacity and runoff management

As with sewer and water systems, a Professional Engineer should complete an analysis to identify areas with stormwater constraints both within the municipal storm system and where natural soil conditions may limit on-site stormwater management. While many of the steps will be comparable to the sewer and water infrastructure assessment, new infill development may impact stormwater quality and quantity specifically because of increases in impervious surfaces on a lot. Local flooding may also occur if surface flow is interrupted. The mitigation of these effects must be incorporated into development design for gentle density as a result.

Because of this, stormwater mitigation strategies should be considered as part of gentle density updates. This can include several policy options, including:

- Incorporating **low impact development (LID)** guidelines or requirements for storm water mitigation, including permeable paving, tree and soil retention, and landscaping to mitigate runoff;
- Requiring **stormwater retention on site** through flexible best management practices, such as detention ponds or infiltration trenches;
- Considering **more stringent standards for development** such as lower maximum site coverage in areas with poor soil conditions and infiltration capacity that would not allow for on-site mitigation or otherwise pose greater risks; and
- Planning for **additional off-site stormwater management infrastructure** through municipal stormwater management planning.

These strategies will differ from community to community, and will depend on characteristics of the local context.



Ongoing consultation with utility companies, including hydro, is essential to ensure that local planning for growth matches their long-term asset planning.

4.2.6. Electricity and utilities

Public and private utilities, especially electricity providers, may have different relationships with local governments. Regardless of the management of these providers, it is essential to engage with these authorities and their distribution asset planning departments to review projected capacity needs to meet future gentle density housing growth and reduce delays to service new buildings. This is best done by incorporating these utilities into the engagement process to ensure that their perspectives are included in the process.

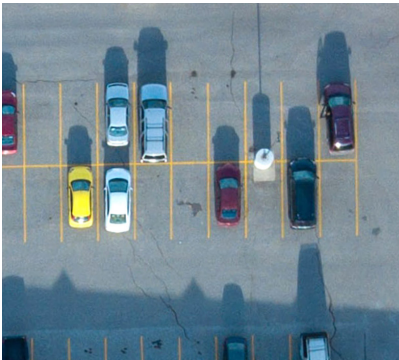
In addition to discussing future utility needs, communities can also work to address any potential problems with expanding infrastructure. This can include such actions as allowing electric utility facilities like pad-mounted transformers to be sited on public land, and coordinating with utilities to develop cost-sharing models for upgrades and extensions.

4.2.7. Transportation and parking

Transportation is also a system that can be impacted by new infill development. In many ways, transportation infrastructure can be evaluated similar to other infrastructure, with some evaluation of expected changes in demand and the ability for existing facilities to meet that demand.

An assessment of transportation infrastructure also needs to consider other elements:

- **Parking.** Perhaps the most common local concern with gentle density housing is parking availability, especially if on-street parking is limited. Evaluating current parking use can help assess whether communities should explore flexible standards and management strategies to meet local parking needs for new and current residents. This will depend strongly on the local context; some communities that will be lower density and car dependent in the long term may require more parking, for example,
- **Transit.** Another consideration for gentle density is transit availability, especially since lower car dependency can reduce the needs for parking and increase the ability to support higher densities in serviced areas. Areas close to transit stops may be a priority for more intensive levels of gentle density housing.
- **Active transportation.** Areas accessible by active modes of transportation, primarily walking and cycling, are also often prime locations for gentle density housing. There may also be a priority for investment in active transportation infrastructure in areas where gentle density housing has been planned.



While parking can be the most contentious change to support gentle density housing, it can significantly reduce costs for residential development and increase available living space.

4.2.8. Development feasibility

Understanding the financial feasibility of building new gentle density housing in the private sector is important. In addition to ensuring that a general understanding of development finance can guide policy, a community can also explore how fees or charges to developers may impact the production of new homes, and if financial



Understanding the feasibility of new gentle density development can be important, but note that this housing can be also used for non-market reasons, including supporting seniors and other family members.



Standardized pre-approved plans can assist smaller developers by providing assurances about compliance with local regulations and streamlining of permitting timelines.

incentive programs may help to promote market-rate or affordable housing construction.

In some cases, consultation with the local real estate and development communities can be enough to know whether these projects would be feasible, and what obstacles should be addressed. In other cases, financial pro forma models can help to calculate whether proposed gentle density housing would make for a good investment. See the Small Housing [Gentle Density Toolkit](#) for examples of these pro forma tools.

Through detailed approaches, an assessment can evaluate the costs of construction, conditions of financing, the financial impacts of regulation, available incentives, and market conditions to determine whether the current context and any potential changes could result in reduced development activity for certain gentle density housing types under consideration. This can be useful in tailoring policies to local market conditions.

4.2.9. Design guidelines and standardized plans

One concern is often that new infill housing may not reflect the desired character and aesthetics of a neighbourhood. While this can be subjective, promoting gentle density housing that fits in with local designs can maintain neighbourhood appeal while encouraging future support of gentle density projects. Inflexible design requirements can increase the costs of construction and can be a disincentive to new housing. However, design guidelines can be developed to support neighbourhood compatibility and help align new housing with local architectural styles and character.

Another approach to this is to provide standardized, pre-approved designs. These plans are created by an architect or designer in advance and pre-approved for compliance with local regulations. They can simplify and accelerate the permitting and regulatory approvals process, which can both reduce costs to a community and help small-scale developers and homeowners build these types of projects. They can also have designs that intentionally reflect and reinforce elements of local character from the neighbourhood.

4.2.10. Assessments of larger vacant properties and redevelopable areas

Larger developments can also incorporate gentle density housing, either as new development or redevelopment. This could include such projects as new subdivisions on vacant land that were originally envisioned as single-unit detached housing, larger redevelopment projects incorporating a mix of housing types, or even large infill projects on underutilized parcels.

Developers should be encouraged to include gentle density within these types of projects as well. This can be done by expanding site planning and zoning of these areas to provide middle housing options, including ADUs for rent as part of new construction. Note that developers should also be discouraged from prohibiting future development of infill through homeowners' association agreements or similar constraints on title.

4.3. Additional Changes for Implementation

Changes for gentle density housing are typically focused on zoning bylaw amendments. There are often other bylaw changes necessary for implementation as well to manage consistencies with local regulations and address components of local regulation not managed in the zoning bylaw.

These changes are not detailed in as much depth as outlined for the zoning bylaw above, but they should be examined and incorporated as part of the process and included in any recommended package provided for review. In total, they are essential for faster and more effective implementation. While some of these will be important to review for consistency (e.g., separate parking bylaws), others may be essential to examine to address the obstacles to gentle density housing.

Additional materials to review include the following:

- **Municipal- and neighbourhood-level plans.** Ensuring consistency with comprehensive planning documents are also important for this process. Community-wide plans, which may be called Official Plans, Official Community Plans, Municipal Development Plans, or other names depending on the jurisdiction, govern the actions that communities can take. These plans should be amended to include policies that allow for gentle density housing. Additionally, neighbourhood-level plans that include more specific development guidance will also need to be evaluated and aligned to allow for gentle density housing.
- **Building codes.** A more in-depth examination of the local building codes may be necessary to understand whether there are any constraints involved that would complicate the development of gentle density housing.
- **Off-street parking.** Changes to parking requirements to support gentle density housing may need to be addressed in separate parking bylaws. This could include parking permits and time-limited parking to manage street parking if it will be expected to be in more demand.
- **Tree protection.** Processes for tree preservation on existing lots may need to be aligned with revisions to the bylaws, especially if there need to be considerations for replacement or incentives for preserving existing trees or impacts to the amount of lot area that can be used.
- **Heritage and historical protection.** Gentle density housing can include provisions for the reuse of heritage buildings. Additionally, steps may need to be taken to ensure that heritage designations are not used solely to block gentle density provisions.
- **Addressing.** Devising a consistent approach for addressing infill housing units can be important, and this may need to be coordinated with Canada Post to ensure mail delivery is not affected.
- **Subdivision, condos, and strata.** Existing bylaws regarding homeownership can provide options for homeowners to sell infill units. This can involve reviewing provisions for lot subdivision and condo/strata regulations as they apply to gentle density.
- **Development charges.** Communities may wish to promote infill housing and ADUs through a discount or waiver of development charges. This may be based on their expected impacts or even as an explicit incentive to encourage development.



- **Servicing requirements.** Changes to servicing requirements for infill housing should be reviewed and discussed with city departments and utilities as needed, especially if these homes may be owned separately from the primary housing unit on the site.
- **Review processes.** When considering implementation, promoting gentle density may require a significant increase in the volume of permit applications. Communities should explore ways to streamline their permit review processes to prevent excessive delays and make the most efficient use of staff resources available.
- **Public information.** Homeowners, builders, developers, and others will need to have clear information about how they can pursue gentle density housing development under these changes to regulations. Communities should work to provide clear, user-friendly resources and engage with interested parties to address questions about the process.

Understanding these necessary changes earlier in the process can confirm that there are no discrepancies with zoning bylaw amendments. This can be important to reduce confusion, prevent legal challenges, and reduce the need for ad-hoc interpretations by staff that could conflict with the intention of these changes.

5. Suggestions for Gentle Density Revisions

The implementation of gentle density housing needs to consider other factors beyond simply allowing these units in neighborhoods:

- Infill projects must be able to fit on existing sites or take advantage of redevelopment opportunities.
- Site design requirements must accommodate necessary access and parking.
- Housing types should help to address community needs.
- Projects should be financially feasible for landowners and developers to pursue.

This section outlines many of the changes that have been pursued by different communities, and provides insights into certain amendments to existing bylaws that can help promote gentle density housing types. This includes:

- Permitted uses and housing types.
- Density and maximum units per lot.
- Building heights.
- Setbacks and dimensional requirements.
- Lot coverage and building footprints.
- Parking.
- Subdivision.

Additionally, this section also reviews other changes to definitions and general regulations that may also be necessary for program implementation.

Different requirements included in zoning bylaws are provided to show these elements in practice. As an overview, a sample of potential site standards and updates are included below from the recommended site standards provided by the BC government. More examples are presented in the Appendix.



Sample Home Design: Richmond
from toolbox.smallhousing.ca



Sample Home Design: Mount Pleasant
from toolbox.smallhousing.ca



Sample Home Design: Tweedsmuir from toolbox.smallhousing.ca

Sample Site Standards

Community Context	Urban Infill	Suburban and Rural with Services	Communities under 5,000 and parcels without sewer or water
Context	Serviced suburban residential areas where current densities are around 8 units per net hectare or more and infill will be allowed.	Serviced suburban residential areas where current densities are around 2.5–8 units per net hectare and infill will be allowed.	Rural residential lands outside of cities and containment boundaries where accessory units will be allowed with a single-unit detached residential home.
Definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Definition of “ground-oriented housing” (three storeys or less; includes no more than a certain number of units in a building or on a lot; does not incorporate shared accesses, elevators, lobbies; or is separated only by vertical party-walls.) » Definition of “accessory dwelling unit” (ADU), including the number of ADUs which can be associated with each housing unit. » Definition of “principal housing unit” (the single-detached, plex, townhome, or other housing units located on the same lot as an ADU.) 		
Density	» Any combination of ground-oriented housing units (or dwellings) and ADUs up to a maximum of 4. No more than 1 ADU can be contained within each principal housing unit.	» 1 dwelling and up to 2 ADUs. No more than 1 ADU can be contained within the principal housing unit.	
Principal Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Ground-Oriented Housing (including duplex, triplex, fourplex, townhouse, rowhouse) » Dwellings (including single-detached housing) 	» Dwellings (including single-detached housing)	
Secondary Uses	» Accessory Dwelling Unit (including secondary suites and carriage/laneway houses)		
Minimum Front Setback	2 m	4-6 m	5-6 m
Minimum Rear Setback	Principal	1.5 m	6 m
	Accessory	1.5 m	1.5 m
Minimum Side Yard Setback	Interior	1.2 m	Combined minimum setback of 3 m
	Exterior	1.2 m	Combined minimum setback of 3 m
Maximum Height*	Principal	11 m 3 storeys	11 m 3 storeys
	Accessory	11 m 3 storeys	8 m 2 storeys
Maximum Lot Coverage	50%	40%	25–40%
On-site Parking	<p>Maximum 0.5 space/unit if lot is within 800 m of transit stop with a bus at a minimum frequency of every 15 minutes (measured between 7am and 7pm). If not, maximum 1 space per unit. (Note that some communities have removed on-site parking minimums in favour of developers determining occupant needs.)</p>		1 per unit

* Height measured as mid-point of a pitched roof or highest point of a flat roof on principal buildings.

Source: [BC Provincial Policy Manual & Site Standards - Small-Scale, Multi-Unit Housing](#) (2024 version)

5.1. Permitted Uses and Housing Types

The most important changes for implementing gentle density are with respect to the uses permitted on a site. Major changes often include:

- Allowing for **different attached and detached primary units** for infill, such as multiplexes, rowhouses, townhouses, and cottage clusters; and
- Permitting **one or more ADUs** on a site with existing housing.

Allowing a broader range of housing types gives flexibility to developers to build different types of homes in the community as a response to varying conditions. Note that some housing types may also be necessary as part of government mandates for flexibility in accommodating infill.

Some considerations when selecting permitted housing types:

- **Combinations of primary and secondary types.** Allowing more housing on a site may include permitting both primary homes and secondary units, such as side-by-side duplexes with an ADU for each unit. Requiring some units to be ADUs instead of primary homes can limit flexibility with ownership and design, but may be necessary if larger housing types are not practical.
- **Fewer units per building at higher densities.** Allowing fewer units within individual structures (or structures with common walls between) means that a development needs to include a larger number of small buildings. This can pose problems with siting and arranging these units, especially if there are separation requirements.
- **Impacts of larger- versus smaller-scale development.** When considering the scale of changes, larger developments (e.g., sixplexes, garden apartments, etc.) can be harder for an individual homeowner to finance and build themselves without additional support. These larger projects may also need land assembly as well, and may be better suited for a smaller developer that can invest more equity in a project. Knowing who will be doing the development can be important to understand what support would be necessary.
- **Lot coverage and building footprints.** Housing on smaller lots requiring ground access may need to be taller with smaller footprints. This can complicate the design of these homes due to the need for stairs with a small floorplate, and strict height limits may make these projects less feasible.
- **Accommodating corner lots.** Corner lots can support larger housing types and more density than internal lots and may require different treatment.

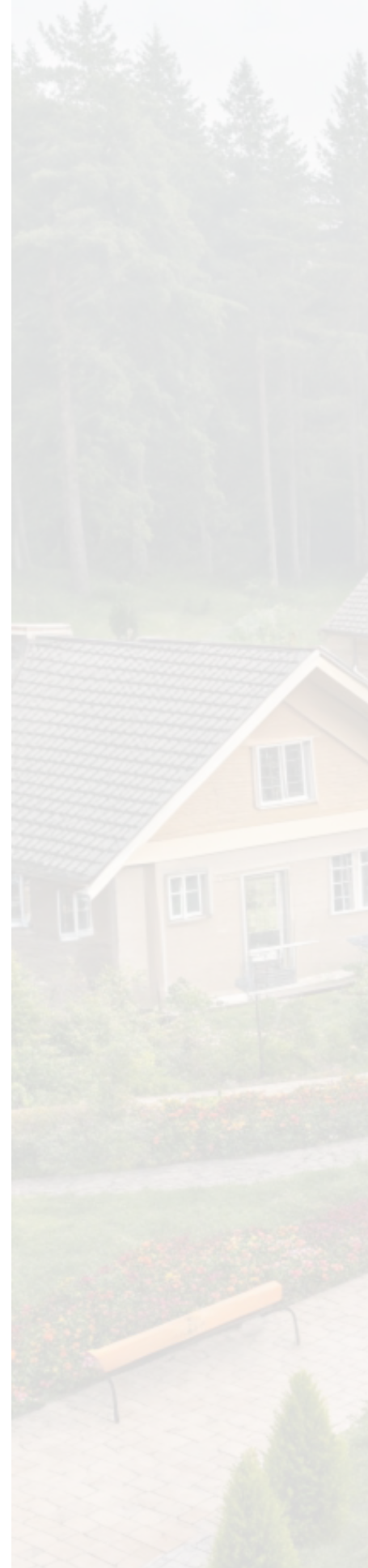
Note that other community uses such as home-based businesses and childcare may also need to be discussed as permitted uses in these areas, especially given their parking needs and access requirements.



5.2. Density and Units per Lot

Examining allowable housing densities involves many of the same factors as permitted building types, but there are often additional requirements to consider that can extend over different types of housing:

- **Density versus units per lot.** Gentle density housing focuses on allowing more units to encourage infill. If lots are generally uniform, expressing this as units per lot can be simple and effective. If current lot sizes and zoning vary significantly, requirements in units per hectare may provide more consistent densities and simplify planning calculations. In most cases, however, units per lot may be simpler in developed neighbourhoods.
- **Minimum housing densities.** Some communities have minimum densities included in zoning bylaws to ensure land is used efficiently. Although gentle density housing amendments do not need these provisions, minimum densities can encourage denser development and the efficient provision of services and infrastructure.
- **Floor Area Ratios.** Regulations about housing intensities expressed as “Floor Area Ratios” (FAR, the floor area of the structure divided by the size of the lot) can cause issues if not adjusted during gentle density amendments. If density is increased and FAR remains the same, units will be smaller and larger, family-sized units will be discouraged. To address this, FAR can be eliminated in favour of dimensional requirements (noted below) or graduated FAR requirements can be included based on the number of units.
- **Building and unit size.** Communities may consider a maximum size for single-detached homes to discourage them in favour of smaller, more attainable, and family-sized ground-oriented housing. Balancing density and FAR, coupled with supportive policies, can also encourage family-sized units in new buildings.
- **Size of ADUs.** Accessory/secondary units may be subject to limitations on their size by a community, either based on area or a proportion of the floor area of the primary home. This ensures they remain subordinate to a primary unit and limits parking and servicing demands, but it may unnecessarily limit flexibility for new units.
- **Garages and FAR calculations.** Garages may use significant internal space that could otherwise be used for living area. In locations where off-site parking is limited, some communities exempt garages from floor area calculations to retain on-site parking while also encouraging housing.



5.3. Building Height

Development may also be regulated in terms of its scale and height. Height is often mentioned as a primary aesthetic concern by neighbours, but providing more flexibility for height can improve the viability and diversity of housing forms and have positive impacts on the functionality and accessibility of small-scale multi-unit housing.

Some considerations regarding height in gentle density include:

- **Optimal heights.** An 11-m / 3-storey maximum height for small-scale infill housing has been suggested by different sources, including the [BC Provincial Policy Manual](#) for middle housing types. This allows for effective access without the need for elevators and provides enough potential building area to accommodate more dense development. Note that height requirements can exempt rooftop stairway accesses, shade structures, and storage areas.
- **Comparisons to single-detached housing.** When discussing height limits, the impact of existing height under current zoning is important to consider. Existing regulations for single-detached housing may result in a similar scale and height as proposed infill housing. Therefore, the impacts of height are often from new housing development generally and not specific to gentle density housing, which should be made clear in conversations with residents.
- **Privacy considerations.** The privacy of neighbours can be an important concern about new development, and requirements such as landscaping, screening, and design may be helpful to address these issues, especially for rooftop patios and similar constructions. These approaches are better at addressing these issues than simply reducing height limits alone.
- **Parking requirements.** On-site parking may need to be accommodated within a building or below grade, especially with denser housing types where site area is limited. Higher building heights can provide more floor area for living if a garage will take up space.
- **Use of basements.** Communities can explore opportunities for semi-submerged basements, which can provide functional floor area for infill housing but can reduce height overall. This can have a negative impact on accessibility if basement units do not have ramps or other mobility aids, and there may be flooding risks to consider in certain areas.
- **Stepback requirements.** “Stepbacks” regarding the floor area and dimensions of the third storey can help mitigate perceptions of overlook, shadowing, and lost privacy. Note that this can make structural designs more complicated and costly.
- **Roof types.** Regulations for building roofs can help duplicate existing neighbourhood characteristics where neighbourhood design is a concern. Permitting flat roofs only for one- or two-storey structures and pitched roofs for higher buildings can integrate new homes with existing design. Half-storey requirements can also be used, with the highest storey being tucked into roof gables.



A flat/angled roofline creates more livable space for this carriage home, but if the footprint was larger, the building could be imposing on surrounding properties.



This carriage home exceeds the height of principal dwelling, but high-quality exterior materials that match the principal dwelling helps to maintain the form and character.

- **Design guidelines.** Design guidelines for quality design and building material variation can improve perceptions of building height and impacts. Guidance for design treatments such as building articulation should consider reduced energy efficiency and increased operating costs, and other guidelines should be examined to ensure they would not result in significant costs. However, guidelines are not enforceable and communities may have no recourse if new buildings do not follow them. If design reviews are put into place to provide more authority, note that these should be focused on clear and quantifiable measures that can be coordinated through an administrative process.

5.4. Setbacks and Dimensional Requirements

Setbacks are defined in land use regulation as the minimum distance a building or structure must be located from a given feature, usually streets or property boundaries. These and other dimensional requirements can also impact development:

- Setbacks can change the **interface between the street and buildings** on the site, and whether building frontage is seen as part of the streetscape or separate from it.
- Setbacks can coordinate the **spacing of buildings** and the feeling of density and urban or rural character within a neighbourhood.
- Dimensional requirements affect the **efficiency of land use changes**, especially if they severely constrain the ability to accommodate new construction.
- Large setbacks can **push a building towards the centre of a lot** and can inadvertently create blocky buildings with large but unused front yards.
- Setback requirements can **increase housing, land, and infrastructure costs** if they impose more difficult and onerous requirements for development.
- Setbacks influence **fire safety** by affecting the potential use of materials, window placement, fire flow demand, and firefighter access.
- New development must have **setbacks from aboveground electrical infrastructure**, such as clearance between utility poles and buildings.

Privacy impacts from reduced setbacks can also be an issue, but these can be subjective. Note that focusing on flexible design considerations can often be more effective than simply increasing setbacks.

Considerations of setbacks related to property boundaries differ based on their position on the lot, whether the front, sides, or back.

Front Setbacks

Front setbacks can change the interface and function of a residential street. Smaller front setbacks (less than 6 m) provide more opportunities for interaction, while



Example of a semi-submerged basement.



These infill homes have an approximately 7m setback that accommodates parking between the building and the lane and provides ample turning radii for vehicles entering and existing the garage.

larger setbacks are often associated with a more suburban typology with parking and trees in front of the building and less outdoor space at the rear.

The following questions should be considered with front setbacks:

- Where are the **sidewalks** (and are they present)? Note a public sidewalk between a boulevard and infill housing can accommodate smaller setbacks.
- Where are the locations of **utility services**? These may be accommodated on parcels or at frequent intervals along the street.
- Could reduced front setbacks better accommodate **outdoor amenity space** from sidewalks and other spaces in public rights of way?
- Is there **lane access**, and are lanes maintained and used regularly (including snow removal)? A reduced front setback could be appropriate if this access is available.
- Are front setback areas used for **parking**? A smaller front setback may deter parking in the front yard versus in locations further from view.
- If front yard parking or garages are allowed, will **vehicle overhang** into the sidewalk be an issue? This may need to be considered for setbacks of less than 6 m.
- Would a **maximum setback** (where a building cannot be placed further back than a set distance) promote a more efficient use of land?
- Should there be decreased setbacks for the portions of buildings that **do not contain a garage**?

Side Setbacks

Side setbacks are also important when determining the position of development on a lot. In addition to many of the points discussed earlier, they can also impact building fire flow demands and rear-yard access for firefighting, and they can affect functionality and design related to building code limitations on doorway placement and window openings. Access considerations may also be relevant for secondary suites and other accessory units.

In developing minimum side yard setbacks, communities should consider the following:

- Combined side-yard setbacks (the side yard setbacks of the property and the adjacent property) which are less than 3 m wide will affect possible locations of **doorways** on the side of a home.
- Providing a combined setback of more than 3 metres will **reduce fire flow requirements** for a structure. This may need to be considered in neighbourhoods with lower fire flow availability.
- The **width of buildable area** will be important for the design of homes, especially if multiple units will have frontage onto the street.
- Side yard setbacks of less than 1.5 metres (to the property line) **limit allowable building materials and soffit assemblies** to limit fire spread. This can also limit the number of windows on the side of a new building.



- Clearance with side yards can also provide access for **garbage/recycling**, opportunities for **stormwater drainage**, and space for **landscaping**.
- Narrow side yard setbacks may limit the **adaptability of units** and available access for **maintenance, improvement, and fire protection**.
- Increasing a side yard setback to **accommodate a driveway** could be incentivized by reducing the side yard setbacks on the other side. This can be coupled with requirements for driveway and parking locations to avoid garages facing a street.

Local governments can also consider zero-lot line setbacks that support row housing formats. This increases land-use efficiency but note that any development building to a zero-lot line will be required to construct a windowless firewall.

Rear Setbacks

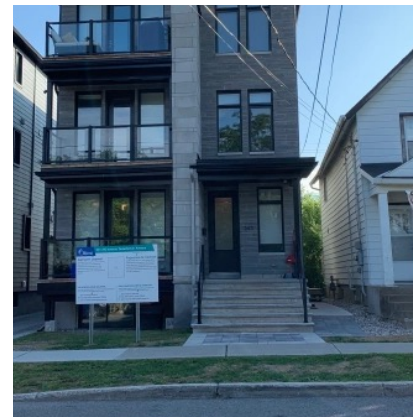
Rear setbacks combine considerations of both front and side setbacks in tradeoffs between amenity space and access for services. For single-unit detached housing, large rear setbacks can provide for backyards, outdoor amenity space, and separation between buildings. Gentle density housing may require additional space on the lot, depending on the housing forms permitted, existing lot sizes, and housing placement and scale. Access may also be important to consider, both if laneway housing is an option and if access for services (primarily garbage collection and parking) is required.

When determining what rear setback is appropriate, consider the following:

- Rear lanes **mitigate impacts of increased building heights** and **reduced rear setbacks**, and setback and height requirements may be adjusted accordingly in areas where lanes are available.
- Pairing shallow rear-yard setbacks and reduced height requirements near property lines can **minimize visual impacts, overlooking, and shadowing**, ideally coordinated with other design provisions. (Note that this may not be allowed in all jurisdictions.)
- Shallow rear-yard setbacks and turning radii adjustments may be needed for garages on **sloping laneways** as lower-clearance vehicles can be damaged by steep driveway ramps.
- For the **collection of solid waste** (garbage/recycling/green waste) rear laneways may be used if front setbacks are not suitable. Waste bin placement should be planned accordingly.
- Increasing minimum separation between multiple buildings on a site can provide **amenity spaces between buildings**, but also create a need to reduce front or rear setbacks in shallow-lot configurations. This may depend on the availability of existing or planned public parks and amenities nearby.



This infill house has a generous front setback which provides space for landscaping and a walkway.



This infill house has a smaller front setback and is oriented in line with adjacent houses to be sympathetic to existing neighbourhood context.

5.5. Lot Coverage and Building Footprints

Maximum lot coverage, including the footprint of buildings and impervious surfaces, should be considered together with other requirements about site design, such as parking, height, setbacks, FAR, and minimum lot sizes. This is necessary for a few reasons:

- **Retaining sufficient area for development on site.** Lot coverage requirements will limit the size of buildings, so this needs to be considered in conjunction with available lot sizes, setbacks, and other dimensional requirements. Small lots with small lot coverage limits may significantly limit the size of new homes.
- **Stormwater management.** Gentle density housing sites need to have adequate permeable surfaces to manage stormwater, and increasing impervious surfaces could overwhelm off-site systems. Local stormwater guidelines should be reviewed, especially in areas lacking infrastructure or with drainage issues. Low impact development techniques may also be employed to address stormwater issues and provide privacy and green space on site.
- **Tree canopy protection.** Increasing allowable lot coverage will reduce the space for trees and natural vegetation. Off-site considerations for green space and street trees, including banking and offsets through replacement may address losses, but addressing both tree protection and development potential that will require some flexibility in development regulations.

A starting point is often 40–50% site coverage for infill lots up to 1,200 sq m (13,000 sq ft). This balances building space requirements with stormwater management, circulation, and green space. This should be adjusted based on size, as smaller lots might need higher allowable coverage.

Modeling different options on typical lot sizes can be beneficial, especially with diverse lot sizes in the community. An inventory of existing lot sizes and geometries can be helpful to have where gentle density housing is anticipated to show the effects of lot coverage maximums.

Questions for communities to consider include:

- Will these sites rely completely on **on-site stormwater management**, or is it possible to connect to municipal stormwater systems?
- Will **on-site management techniques** such as detention tanks be required to avoid overloading off-site stormwater systems?
- What **amendments to stormwater management bylaws** will be required to ensure developments with three to four units can include stormwater management facilities?
- What are likely **types and amounts of on-site parking**? How is this included in lot coverage calculations?
- Are **other impermeable surface area requirements** present? Can requirements or offsets be included for permeable paving and other best management practices?



This carriage home has a small rear yard setback, but the garage access from the side yard provides adequate space for parking a vehicle in front of the garage.

Making Room for Homes on Site

As development requirements are adjusted to account for gentle density housing needs, make sure to take a look at how actual development could be placed on a lot.

For example, a 600 sq m lot that can include four units with a maximum site coverage of 40% and a maximum height of two storeys would only be able to have homes smaller than 120 sq m on average (about 1,300 sq ft) if all four units were built. This would also need to factor in stairways and parking, if needed.

While this could work in some communities, this would not be marketable in many markets for three-bedroom family-sized homes!

Balancing space for people, trees, and cars

These diagrams highlight the tensions with having limited space to accomplish competing objectives of providing space for people, trees (and usable outdoor space) and cars.

The lot components include many of the things that often need to be accommodated on a lot with gentle density housing:

- Mature trees retained on-site;
- Surface parking stalls;
- Accessory dwelling units / laneway homes;
- Smaller primary units (e.g. 48–60 sq m footprints); and
- Larger primary units (e.g. 66–72 sq m footprints).

The lot templates provided below include two types of lots:

- A larger suburban 800 sq m (8,600 sq ft) lot, typical of lower-density neighbourhoods; and
- A smaller urban 275 sq m (3,000 sq ft) lot, usually found in more urban centres.

Both lots include setbacks:

- 2 m front setbacks;
- 1.2 m side setbacks; and
- 1.5 m rear setbacks.

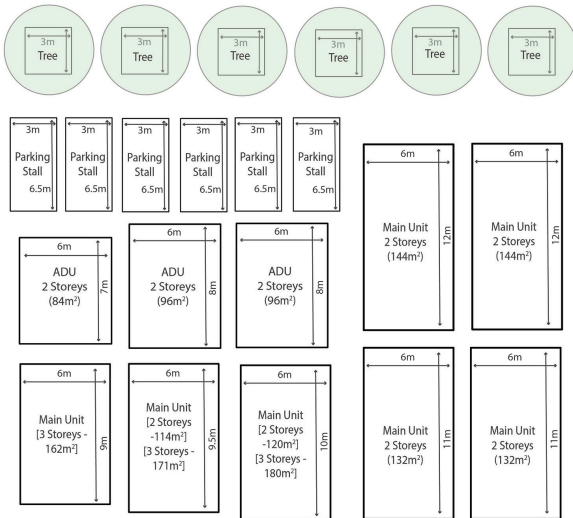
Using these physical cutouts can help to provide insights into how lots could accommodate gentle density housing. As part of outreach, it can be important to change where certain elements can be placed to answer different questions:

- How do larger or smaller setbacks affect where housing can be placed?
- How does surface parking affect what can be included on a site?
- How can tree preservation be integrated with gentle density housing?
- How many units could go onto existing lots? Could this be infill housing or ADUs?
- What could go onto these sites if they were completely redeveloped?

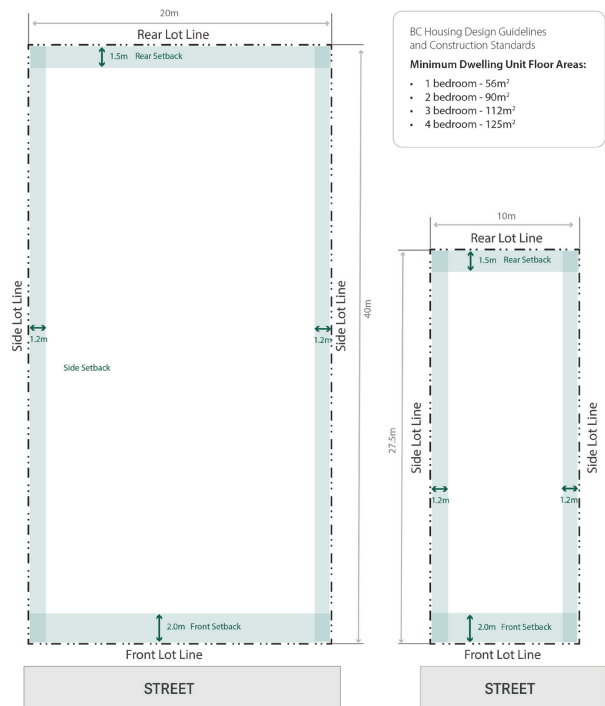
When developing these for your own community, make sure that the lot templates are sized appropriately for the lots that are typically found in your community, and scale the components as needed. Note that lots could be changed to include cul-de-sac lots or corner lots and adjusted to incorporate different setbacks, while components could include different housing types or other required features on a site (e.g., bike parking, LID stormwater drainage).

These can be great as open house activities, especially as they can be presented as a fun activity for all ages!

Lot Components



Lot Templates



5.6. Parking

Parking discussions are among the hardest when proposing new regulations for gentle density housing in existing neighbourhoods. Reduced parking requirements provide the following advantages:

- **More space in homes**, since buildings can be bigger and do not require internal area for parking.
- **Increased flexibility in site layout**, especially if parking access would not be needed.
- The **retention of green space and trees** in space otherwise taken up by pavement.
- **Improvements to the financial feasibility of development**, as more valuable uses can replace parking.

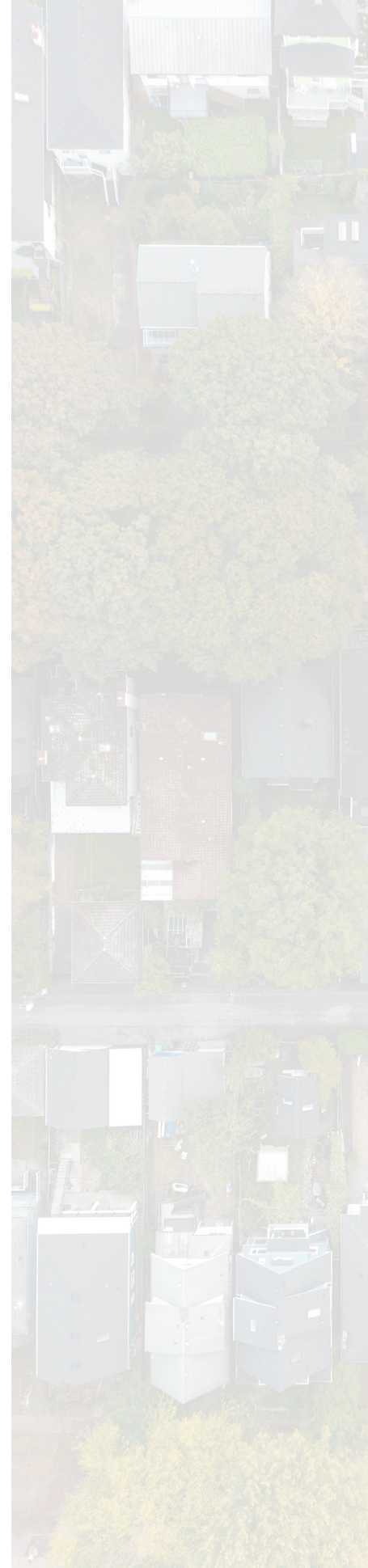
There may be reasons to maintain parking standards, however:

- If off-site parking **may not be available or dependable** (for example, if snow removal is an issue or rights of way are too narrow for street parking), on-site parking may be needed.
- Areas that currently **do not have good walkability or transit access** to employment and amenities may depend on cars and need parking in the neighbourhood.
- If limitations on street parking mean that **parking demand management is needed** (including parking permits or pricing), some on-site parking requirements might be necessary to accommodate expected demand. This may change over time if new active transportation and transit are planned.

Many communities are beginning to shift away from requiring multiple parking spaces per home, and towards requirements that are more right-sized based on access and need. This can include mandates for one space per home (regardless of size), with lower parking requirements for homes located close to transit, or meeting the needs of lower-income or senior households.

Parking requirements can be adjusted in different ways for gentle density:

- **Removing requirements.** Eliminating parking requirements can help maximize infill potential where there are good transportation alternatives and confidence that the market can help to determine the right amount of parking for new development.
- **Maximum parking requirements.** Providing maximum parking standards can prevent excessive on-site parking if this is a concern for new development.
- **Parking design and access.** Concentrating parking in front yards can pose safety risks from vehicles crossing sidewalks, reduce available on-street parking, and limit space for garbage collection. Access via laneways or requiring parking behind buildings can improve the streetscape.
- **Impervious surfaces.** Paved surfaces for parking impact on stormwater runoff and may need to be managed appropriately. Regulating parking and paving permeability can improve groundwater infiltration and reduce the risks of flooding.



- **Storage spaces.** When reducing parking that may be used by residents for storage in practice, communities might consider incentives or even zoning requirements for storage space to keep garages available for vehicles. This could include excluding storage space from floor area ratio calculations, for instance.
- **Cash-in-lieu.** Communities can explore cash-in-lieu contributions from developers to reduce parking requirements in exchange for funding for alternative active transportation options, parking management, or even off-site parking facilities.

Some questions to consider when exploring parking regulation changes include:

- Do parking needs **differ across neighbourhoods**? Are some areas more or less car-dependent due to amenities or transit service?
- Would your community accept **cash-in-lieu of parking** to support an active transportation reserve fund or other programs?
- Is it possible to include **more efficient parking configurations** that prevent parking from dominating frontage?
- Can the **permeability of parking surfaces** be managed through regulation to reduce runoff?
- Do rear lanes exist in the community that can be used for **off-street parking access**?
- Is there **frequent snow** or a need for **snow storage areas**? Will snow removal affect on-street parking and lane access?
- What is the maximum width of a **let-down for driveway access**? If regulations provide for narrower widths, this can improve on-street parking availability but may require shared access to on-site parking.

5.7. Subdivision Regulations

Changes to subdivision regulations, including strata/condo developments, can affect the nature of gentle density housing development. Note that while this Guide provides a high-level description of these changes, more detailed planning and legal advice will be necessary to make appropriate revisions.

Subdivision regulations can be important to review for different reasons:

- **Ownership options** for infill housing can also be shaped by these bylaws, with respect to regulations for fee-simple and condominium/strata ownership. Flexible systems can allow the ownership of new units to be separated for sale.
- **Dimensional regulations** for lots may also be included in subdivision bylaws. This can affect not only the feasibility of infill housing built in current neighbourhoods, but also new development and redevelopment projects constructed on larger lots.
- **Servicing** may be a consideration for gentle density units built as infill. Subdivision bylaws can include considerations of rights-of-way and easements necessary for infrastructure.



- **Covenants** may be placed on the lots in a subdivision that would restrict future gentle density from being included.

When developing amendments to subdivision regulations, consider the following:

- **Ability to subdivide existing lots.** Larger lots may offer opportunities for further subdivision, increasing the potential for higher density developments. Minimum lot sizes, setbacks, and other dimensional requirements in subdivision bylaws may generally affect the ability to use available infill sites for different gentle density housing types, such as row housing.
- **Frontage requirements.** Requirements for lot frontage can be important for the viability of gentle density housing. Parcels need to have frontage for essential infrastructure and access, while balancing the need to use a lot for living space. For example, narrow lots (10 m, or smaller for attached homes) can accommodate front-to-back housing configurations with pedestrian access to the side of the building but pose trade-offs with on-site parking and parking access.
- **Common areas and servicing.** If subdivision or other splits of ownership for individual units are allowed, it is important for subdivision regulations to require clear responsibilities for common areas and servicing, including access by residents and utility companies.
- **Restrictions on covenants.** Limiting subdivision developers from placing covenants to restrict future use of a lot for middle housing can be important to ensure that future landowners will have the ability to accommodate new middle housing units on their properties.

Clear standards for subdivisions can balance the need for increased density with the practical requirements of building safe and appealing residential environments.

5.8. Other Zoning Sections

A comprehensive rewrite of the zoning bylaw to incorporate gentle density housing may also require other changes not otherwise covered above.

5.8.1. Definitions

The definitions in zoning bylaws should be reviewed to ensure they do not conflict with new regulations. Some recommendations for review include:

- Define and distinguish **residential typologies of interest** for gentle density and consolidate these definitions where possible: multiplex/houseplex versus duplex/triplex, row housing versus townhome, etc.
- Separate middle housing types from **multi-unit residential development**, such as attached housing from units such as apartments with common access lobbies that are typically greater than three storeys. Defining **“ground-oriented housing”** can be one way to distinguish between these types.



- Simplify definitions for **secondary suites/ADUs** and ensure that they are managed in a consistent way on a site.
- Define **“bed and breakfasts”**, **“rooming houses”**, **“congregate housing”**, and similar building types to ensure that any limitations on short-term rentals do not extend to these types.
- Ensure **alignment between definitions** for lot coverage, floor area ratio, maximum units per lot, density in units per hectare, etc. Where possible, condense these definitions if they are not necessary to manage site design, and provide clear examples for their calculations.
- **Remove regulatory requirements** from definitions to aid in readability and accessibility.

5.8.2. Additional Regulations

Other development regulations found in a zoning bylaw may also be relevant for specific use types. A review and update can help ensure that there are no conflicts in requirements or uncertainty for developers, occupants, and neighbours. This may include restrictions found elsewhere regarding:

- The number of single-detached dwellings permitted on individual lots.
- The number of suites currently allowed per principal dwelling.
- The maximum number of buildings or dwelling units allowed on a parcel.
- In-home childcare.
- Separate secondary suites.
- Minimum lot sizes for accessory dwelling units.
- Home-based businesses.
- Landscaping requirements, especially for screening of infill and higher-density residential uses.
- Minimum amenity spaces, minimum balcony size and minimum usable outdoor space.
- Off-street parking size standards and dimensions.
- Development fees and charges paid for city services, infrastructure, and amenities.



6. Additional Resources



CMHC Housing Accelerator Fund

The CMHC Housing Accelerator Fund is a \$4.4 billion initiative that is helping to cut red tape and fast track at least 100,000 permitted new homes over the next three years. Its website not only provides information about applying for program funding, but also supporting information of use when developing local housing initiatives.

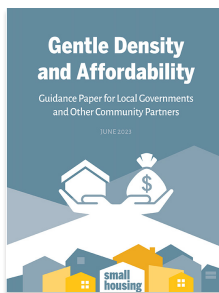
<https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/project-funding-and-mortgage-financing/funding-programs/all-funding-programs/housing-accelerator-fund/>



UBC Housing Assessment Resource Tools

The Housing Assessment Resource Tools (HART) project is an award-winning research group based at UBC that is dedicated to developing standardized, replicable, and equity-focused tools to enhance housing supply decision-making across all levels of government in Canada. Among other offerings, their [Housing Needs Assessment Tool](#) (HNAT) provides organized housing data from the Census for communities across the country.

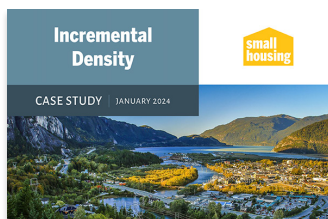
<https://hart.ubc.ca/>



Expert Roundtables & Guidance Papers

Small Housing addresses common and systemic challenges to increasing gentle density housing by convening experts from multiple sectors to advance solutions together, and communicate the findings to a broad audience that can test, champion and implement solutions.

<https://toolbox.smallhousing.ca/?s=guidance+paper>



Case Studies

A series of brief case studies that highlight promising practices of various jurisdictions who are leading the way in implementing gentle density housing around B.C., Canada, and the world, and various tactics or approaches that can advance this work.

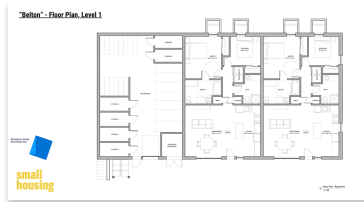
https://toolbox.smallhousing.ca/resources/?_resource_type=case-studies-stories-of-practice



First Nations Stories of Practice

Stories of Practice honour, document, and celebrate community-led gentle density housing projects in Indigenous communities, and provide other communities and organizations with an opportunity to learn about wise practices, teachings, and lessons.

https://toolbox.smallhousing.ca/resources/?_resource_type=case-studies-stories-of-practice



Sample Home Designs

A collection of sample renderings and site plans of built gentle density projects, ranging from 3 to 8 units, showcasing the potential of standardized designs to deliver innovative, inspiring gentle density solutions.

<https://toolbox.smallhousing.ca/resources/find-resources-by-type/sample-designs>

Financial Models/Proformas

Item	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Total
Revenue	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	10,000,000
Operating Expenses	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	5,000,000
Operating Income	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000	5,000,000
Capital Expenditures	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	10,000,000
Net Income	(500,000)	(500,000)	(500,000)	(500,000)	(500,000)	(500,000)	(500,000)	(500,000)	(500,000)	(500,000)	(5,000,000)

Financial Models/ Proformas

Downloadable financial models featured alongside sample gentle density designs allow local governments, building industry professionals, and citizen developers to understand the financial viability of gentle density projects in different communities and economic contexts.

<https://toolbox.smallhousing.ca/resources/find-resources-by-type/sample-designs>



Municipal Partnerships

Through both custom and cohort-based programs, Small Housing supports local governments to assess the need for policy and regulatory updates, to review approvals and other processes, to better understand their local development ecosystem and project financials, and to set up programs and approaches that support the growth of gentle density supply.

https://smallhousing.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/SHBC_Kelowna_SHAP_Report_DRAFT.pdf



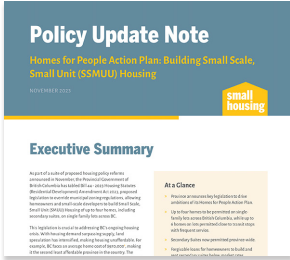
Public Information Sessions

Partnering with local governments and citizens' interest groups, Small Housing plans and delivers information sessions to raise awareness and familiarity of gentle density among the general public, and to parties potentially interested in (re)developing their own gentle density projects.



Neighbourhood Walking Tours

Small Housing coordinates and leads walking tours, with expert hosts (urban planners, designers, local developers, civic historians) to provide participants with first-hand insights into neighbourhoods that feature gentle density infill.



Policy Recommendations & Outreach with Elected Officials and Staff

Small Housing supports all levels of elected officials and government staff in their efforts to understand and implement gentle density in their jurisdictions through mechanisms such as policy update notes, conference engagements, and response to formal inquiries (for example, providing technical input, or reflections on comparative research).

<https://smallhousing.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Small-Housing-Policy-Update-Note-March-2024.pdf>



Annual Gentle Density Leaders Summit

The Gentle Density Leaders Summit is Small Housing's flagship educational and networking event that convenes thought-leaders and key innovators from housing, planning and related local government professions, building design, construction, real estate, and finance to explore emerging practices in policy and regulation, showcase exemplary design and innovation, and discuss proven and emerging approaches that encourage new gentle density development.

<https://smallhousing.ca/gentle-density-leaders-summit-2024>



Industry Research, Engagement, and Upskilling

Small Housing engages industry actors and member associations to support information-sharing and alignment; generate solutions to scaling gentle density supply; and, enable market activation at the local level. Small Housing partners with building industry associations to present skill-building workshops aimed for industry actors, to broaden levels of familiarity, and generating expanded and higher quality gentle density housing.

Appendix: Bylaw Examples

Overview

This section builds upon the example bylaw provisions provided in the Guide to outline what a potential gentle density housing bylaw amendment would look like in practice. Note that this sample is drawn from several different examples, and as such the terms and language used may differ from those in place in your province and region.

This section is divided into three components:

- **Updates to definitions** are provided for terms that are commonly used as part of gentle density housing.
- A **sample residential zone** is presented to highlight how new provisions in a bylaw could be developed to allow for gentle density.
- **Examples from jurisdictions** across North America have been provided to highlight specific real-world examples that can also be the basis for efforts to make amendments that allow gentle density.

The content of this section is intended for examples only. Please consult with a municipal attorney before instituting zoning bylaw changes.

Updates to Definitions

As part of this work, communities should ensure that definitions are updated and reflect the intent of gentle density housing. Consider carefully how to define dwellings to provide flexibility in how dwellings can be combined on a single parcel. Note that these definitions may vary by province and jurisdiction and may be adjusted as needed to address local differences.

Examples of potential definitions include the following:

“Accessory dwelling unit (ADU)” means a self-contained, secondary residential unit that is located on the same lot as a primary dwelling. ADUs can be found within, attached to, or detached from the primary dwelling and have their own separate entrance, kitchen, bathroom, and sleeping area. These units are subordinate in size, location, and appearance to the primary dwelling.

“Apartment” means a dwelling unit in an apartment building.

“Apartment building” means a building or group of buildings having four or more dwelling units for permanent residential occupancy which are accessible through a common building entrance.

“Carriage house” means a type of accessory dwelling unit which is incorporated into the same structure as another accessory use, such as a ground-level garage or storage space.

“ Dwelling unit ” means a self-contained housing unit with facilities such as living spaces, kitchen, and bathrooms that is intended for occupancy.

“ Duplex ” means a type of residential building that consists of two separate but attached housing units.

“ Fourplex ” means a type of residential building that consists of four separate but attached housing units.

“ Garden suite ” means an accessory dwelling unit located on the rear or side yard of a primary dwelling which includes access to these spaces for use.

“ Infill housing ” means primary dwellings or apartments constructed on a site containing one or more existing buildings, some or all of which are retained.

“ Laneway housing ” means an accessory dwelling unit that is not attached to the primary dwelling but is adjacent to a laneway adjacent to a primary dwelling.

“ Houseplex ” or **“ Multiplex housing ”** means a type of residential building that consists of more than one separate but attached housing units, with each unit having its own entrance and facilities such as living spaces, kitchen, and bathrooms. The units are typically connected by a common wall or shared floor/ceiling but are designed to function independently from one another.

“ Primary dwelling ” means a distinct housing unit which is not considered to be an accessory dwelling unit or apartment.

“ Row housing ” or **“ townhouse ”** means a type of residential dwelling which are built in a series, share common walls with their immediate neighbors. Each unit is designed as a separate dwelling with its own entrance, but they may share structural elements like foundations and party walls. *(Note: some definitions will distinguish between row housing and townhomes based on fee simple versus condo/strata ownership.)*

“ Secondary suite ” means an accessory dwelling unit which is contained within or attached to the primary dwelling.

“ Semi-detached housing ” means a type of residential building that includes two or more primary dwellings sharing a common wall. Each primary dwelling includes its own separate entrance, yard, and amenities such as kitchens and bathrooms.

“ Single-unit detached housing ” means a type of residential building that consists of only one primary dwelling. This type of housing may include attached secondary units as ADUs.

“ Stacked housing ” means a residential building of four or fewer storeys in height containing primary dwelling units where the units are divided horizontally and vertically.

“ Triplex ” means a type of residential building that consists of three separate but attached housing units.

Sample Residential Zone: RMH

X.1 Purpose

The intent of the RMH (Residential Middle Housing) district is to support a mix of housing types to address different housing needs while complementing the scale and character of existing neighbourhood development. This is done by accommodating diverse small-scale housing options that consider and support the form and scale of the existing neighborhood. Housing allowed in this zone includes various types of residential units such as multiplexes, row housing, townhouses, and standalone detached houses. Properties may also incorporate additional living spaces as accessory dwelling units, including secondary suites, garden suites, and laneway houses. The preservation of character homes will be encouraged by allowing infill developments and conversions that retain existing dwellings.

X.2 Uses

X.2.1 The following uses are permitted subject to specified conditions of use:

- (a) Accessory dwelling units (attached and detached)
- (b) Accessory structures to residential uses
- (c) Home-based business
- (d) Home-based childcare
- (e) Multiplex housing containing up to four units
- (f) Park
- (g) Row housing
- (h) Single-unit detached housing
- (i) Stacked housing
- (j) Townhouses
- (k) Utilities

X.2.2 The following uses are permitted subject to specified conditions of use and the approval of Council:

- (a) Bed and breakfasts
- (b) Boarding houses
- (c) Day cares and preschools, standalone
- (d) Health services
- (e) Park
- (f) Place of worship
- (g) Recreational facility
- (h) Residential care homes
- (i) Short-term rental properties

X.3 Site and Building Regulations

X.3.1 Development must comply with the conditions in Table X.3.1:

Table X.3.1 Site and Building Dimensional Regulations

Subsection	Regulation	Value
<i>Site Development Criteria</i>		
X.3.1.1	Site density (maximum)	4 dwellings
X.3.1.2	Site area (minimum)	278 sq m
X.3.1.3	Site frontage (minimum)	15 m
X.3.1.4	Floor area ratio (maximum)	0.8 1.0 (3 dwelling units) 1.2 (4 dwelling units)
X.3.1.5	Building coverage (maximum)	45% 55% (3–4 dwelling units) 60% (3–4 dwelling units, laned parcel)
X.3.1.6	Impervious surface coverage (maximum)	65% 70% (3–4 dwelling units)
X.3.1.7	Common amenity space (minimum)	7.5 sq m/unit (3–4 dwelling units)
<i>Building Development Criteria (Principal / Accessory)</i>		
X.3.1.8	Building height (maximum)	11 m or 3 storeys 8 m or 2 storeys (accessory dwelling unit)
	Setbacks	
X.3.1.9	Front setback (minimum)	4.5 m 3 m (lane access)
X.3.1.10	Rear setback (minimum)	6 m 3 m (3–4 dwelling units) 1.5 m (accessory dwelling unit) 0.6 m (accessory dwelling unit, abutting lane)
X.3.1.11	Side yard setback (minimum)	1.2 m 0 m (attached dwellings separated by fire wall)
X.3.1.12	Flanking side yard setback (minimum)	3 m (corner parcel, side shared with street)

X.3.2 At the discretion of the Director of Planning, maximum FAR may be increased by up to 0.2 FAR as follows:

- (a) An additional 0.2 maximum FAR if at least one dwelling unit is designated for below-market homeownership on title and a partnering agreement with a nonprofit or government authority is established.
- (b) An additional 0.2 maximum FAR for infill associated with the retention of a character house.
- (c) An additional 0.1 maximum FAR for the preservation of a character house through conversion.

X.4 Parking Requirements

X.4.1 Off-street parking requirements within 800 m of a transit stop with service at least once every 30 minutes during peak commuting times are as follows:

- (a) Maximum 1.0 vehicle parking stall per principal dwelling.
- (b) Minimum 1.0 secured bicycle parking space per principal dwelling.

X.4.2 Off-street parking requirements for parcels with on-street parking available are as follows:

- (a) Minimum 0.75 vehicle parking stalls per principal dwelling.
- (b) Maximum 1.5 vehicle parking stalls per principal dwelling.

X.4.3 Off-street parking requirements for parcels with no on-street parking available are as follows:

- (a) Minimum 1.25 vehicle parking stalls per principal dwelling.
- (b) Minimum 0.75 vehicle parking stalls per accessory dwelling unit.
- (c) Maximum 2.0 vehicle parking stalls per dwelling.

What else should be included?

The Guide provides other examples of potential content for a revised zoning bylaw that describes districts that allow gentle density housing. However, bylaws for your community may be written differently, and may need additional content to address the typical format used for defining districts.

In addition to the content above, other potential additions or changes may include:

- **Additional requirements for non-residential uses**, such as commercial and institutional uses that may have other impacts on residential uses.
- **Design guidelines** that can provide clarity on desirable configurations and layouts for dwellings on a parcel.
- **Property access requirements**, including requirements for private driveway access and access by emergency services.
- **Outdoor amenity spaces**, which is often required by municipalities for larger plex and multiunit developments.

- **Additional affordability provisions**, including further incentives for providing affordable purpose-built rental and owner-occupied housing.
- **Heritage conservation**, including additional requirements and incentives for maintaining heritage properties and character homes in the identified district.
- **Other storage requirements**, especially in cases where minimal parking may be provided on site.

When developing a gentle density housing bylaw amendment, it can be very useful to review the content from existing zoning districts, as well as other bylaws that may have different requirements by zone or housing type. These requirements should be reviewed to ensure that they do not place significant demands on space or increases in costs when applied on sites with a greater number of units.