

A Resolution Urging Gentle Density Throughout the District of Columbia

WHEREAS, DC has an acute housing shortage, with a 2022 study pegging the shortfall at 116,000 homes, equivalent to 35% of the District’s entire housing stock.¹

WHEREAS, the DC housing shortage is displacing long-time residents, hampering economic growth, and making the District an increasingly unaffordable place to live and raise a family.

WHEREAS, 23% of DC’s land area is zoned exclusively for single-family detached homes.²

WHEREAS, exclusionary zoning restricts the type and amount of housing that property owners can legally build on existing lots, thus reducing the supply of housing and driving up home prices, rents, and land values for District residents.

WHEREAS, exclusionary zoning perpetuates racial and economic segregation in the District by walling off wealthy neighborhoods from new residents and pushing growth and the risk of displacement into less affluent areas.

WHEREAS, the District’s Comprehensive Plan “guides the use, density, and design of buildings within the District, directly shaping the city’s physical form as it changes and develops in the future.”³

WHEREAS, the Office of Planning (OP) helps prepare the Comprehensive Plan and “is tasked with planning for the long-term growth of the District of Columbia, to help ensure it reflects our values of an inclusive and vibrant city.

WHEREAS, the first rewrite of the District’s Comprehensive Plan in nearly 20 years provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to relax exclusionary zoning and increase the supply of family-sized homes across the District.

WHEREAS, a recent poll found that District residents want an end to exclusionary zoning: 63% of District residents favor allowing fourplexes in areas currently zoned for single family homes, including a majority of white, black, and person-of-color residents, and residents of all eight wards.⁴

¹ <https://docs.iza.org/dp15447.pdf>

² <https://ggwash.org/view/75053/we-have-a-history-of-housing-policies-that-hurt-and-segregated-black-people-how-do-we-fix-it-now>

³ <https://planning.dc.gov/comprehensiveplan>

⁴ <https://ggwash.org/view/98531/poll-finds-district-residents-prefer-housing-affordability-to-neighborhood-character>

WHEREAS, density can be introduced in a gradual manner that reflects DC’s historical development as a “rowhouse city” and benefits residents, reduces displacement, and preserves and enhances neighborhood character, vitality, and amenities.

WHEREAS, research shows that the price of four-unit infill conversions in the District would be approximately 33% less than existing structures, creating a substantial affordability benefit for District residents aspiring to own or rent a home.⁵

WHEREAS, there is extensive evidence that new housing lowers rents and makes housing more affordable by reducing housing scarcity and freeing up older, more affordable units.⁶⁷⁸

WHEREAS, research shows that legalizing by-right infill conversions of existing structures to up to 6 units per lot could produce approximately 1,000 family-sized starter homes per year in the District, more than 5 times the rate of single-family detached housing built in DC over the last decade (2014-2024).⁹¹⁰

WHEREAS, single-family homes are essential for young families that need more bedrooms to raise children than are currently being offered by new apartment buildings, which primarily offer studios, 1-bedrooms, and 2-bedrooms.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 1B, that the Commission requests that the Comprehensive Plan support by-right gentle density throughout the District of Columbia to increase housing production by including the following principles:

- Infill conversions of single family detached structures to rowhomes, townhomes, and small homes are an essential source of new family-sized housing and should be allowed by-right in residential zoned areas throughout the District.
- Rowhouses should be allowed by-right throughout the District, reflecting DC’s legacy as a rowhouse city.
- Infill conversions of single family detached structures to multiplexes up to 6 units should be allowed by-right in residential zones in planning areas that, unlike Mid-City where

⁵ https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/ltd_chart

⁶ <https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2025/07/31/new-housing-slows-rent-growth-most-for-older-more-affordable-units>

⁷ <https://ideas.repec.org/a/eee/juecon/v133y2023ics0094119021000656.html>

⁸ <https://www.redfin.com/news/rental-tracker-january-2025/>

⁹ https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/ltd_chart

¹⁰ https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/ltd_est

ANC 1B is located, have not met their new affordable housing units target. Housing targets should be regularly updated in the coming years.¹¹

- Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) up to 1,200 square feet should be simple and easy to build. Owner-occupation requirements, five-year use restrictions, and other policies that unnecessarily limit housing opportunities should be removed to spark a boom in ADU construction.
- Floor-area ratios, setbacks, and height regulations should be aligned with the realistic needs of infill conversions, ensuring that zoning standards do not unintentionally prevent viable projects that add new housing while respecting the scale of surrounding blocks.
- Small-scale subdivisions should be a by-right permitted use in residential zones to make infill conversions viable.
- Historic preservation review will continue to apply to all proposed construction in historic districts.
- DOB, DCOZ, DDOT, DOEE, and related reviewing entities should have a time limit, such as 45 days, to approve, conditionally approve, or deny all single-family detached infill conversions and ADUs, after which any complete application should be deemed approved by operation of law.
- Relevant agencies should hire additional staff to accommodate an increase in permits for infill construction and ADUs.
- Equality of opportunity for people of all economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds is inextricably tied to increasing housing production throughout the District.

¹¹ <https://open.dc.gov/36000by2025/>