

Missing Middle Housing

Small Apartment/Townhomes

Identify characteristics of Austin's existing Missing Middle products built in the last 50 years which are now undevelopable.

- i.e. Enfield (Mopac to Exposition)

Existing limitations by Zoning

- SF3 minimum lot size of 5750 SF stifling subdivision of lots for small neighborhood scaled infill
- Recent Duplex limitations such as common wall, FAR, garage placement effectively removing new Duplex developments from many Austin central neighborhoods due to 50' lot widths
- Lack of Rowhouse/Townhomes due to large zoning gap between SF6 and MF2 with respect to entitlements necessitates developers seeking higher density than necessary for product increasing land costs for lower densities
- Compatibility impact on low density attached housing product. 30' height or 2 stories allowed at 25' and 40' or 3 stories allowed at 50'. Condominium product (SF-6 or greater) is subject to Compatibility. Height and separation limits in combination with parking provisions push product out of neighborhoods and smaller commercial parcels on corridors.

Multi Family and MU Upzoning

MF-2, MF-3, MF-4 in redevelopment areas

Aging apartment s in areas that are in transition or outside neighborhood cores are often build out to the maximum with respect to FAR, current impervious cover limits, or units/ acre but not all constraints. In order to redevelop, one or two increased entitlements in higher MF-4 to MF-6 categories are necessary to trigger viable redevelopment scenarios. Increased zoning requests meets neighborhood opposition.

Can MF-2 become MF-4 densities by right if it meets a new required set of standards bypassing costly and uncertain redevelopment efforts?

Do we continue to passively allow and encourage aging low density apartment communities to slide into substandard conditions without a truly viable and proactive means to redevelop in a responsible way in line with stated Imagine Austin values and preserving on-site affordability?

Case Study

Oak Village Apartments, 2324 Wilson Street

Received upzoning (MF-3 to MF-6) in Bouldin Creek Neighborhood necessary to provide increased density (486 units) and maintain on site affordability (173 affordable housing units).

Bring Housing to the Jobs

Identify low density office parks and large corporate campuses for mixed use infill

With largely homogenous Single Family neighborhoods throughout Austin and consistently narrow commercial corridors (lot depths) and desire to reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), an infill growth option should be to encourage and incentivize the infill of housing types on existing corporate office campuses.

Case Study

Provide reduced parking incentives due to mix use, shared parking strategies

Provide reduced setbacks

Relaxation of impervious cover

Concerns

Large low density office parks may have surrounding transportation networks needing significant upgrades and connectivity.

Heritage Trees in surface parking lots 30-40+ year old office developments may create policy conflict.

Intent of Zoning

Define the individual characteristics of our Zoning regulations. Identify pros and cons of constraints on such elements as...

DENSITY

FAR (Floor Area Ratio)

IMPERVIOUS COVER

MINIMUM LOT SIZES

REQUIRED OFF STREET PARKING

SETBACKS

Intent of Zoning

DENSITY:

Intent:

1. Using a combination of metrics such as Units/Acre, Height, FAR, to regulate the number of people living within a identified area.
2. Prevent overdevelopment of planning areas
3. Regulate scale of urban form (combined building sizes within one site or multiple sites)

Concerns:

1. Regulation can increase or inflate property values or rental rates beyond what a community can be expected to afford by restricting supply.
2. Can perpetuate substandard units or properties and minimize ongoing improvements/redevelopment opportunity, i.e. West Campus before UNO. It is not economically "affordable" to replace an 8-unit development with another 8-unit development. Economic redevelopment principles dictate that, without unique influences, the cost of the land and the structure would need 2-3x the density of units/floor area at a minimum to trigger a feasible redevelopment of the property.
3. SF-3 lots in Austin is described as moderate density, rather than low density. This description sets the stage for a perception than other lower density housing (on a relative urban scale) such as Rowhouses or Townhomes are a high density.

Intent of Zoning

FAR (Floor Area Ratio)

Intent:

1. Regulatory means to control the construction intensity of a site being developed

Concerns:

1. Rarely understood in combination or in cumulative effect with other development intensity regulations such as Building Coverage, Height, Units/Acre.
2. Often a redundant regulatory mechanism on top height, parking, setbacks, building coverage which can drive a potential change in zoning with minimal physical difference in the building type and form.
3. Zoning Categories with high FAR often drive higher land value though other zoning restrictions may still be pushing down the intensity of what can be built.
4. FAR alone is not a quality regulatory tool to help define urban form and does not conserve and enhance neighborhood character to the same degree as height, right of way infrastructure and setbacks regulations.
5. Overly punitive on small lots particularly when setback restrictions are not in tune with walkable urban character, thus compelling development towards large lot assembly. This can be a deterrent to creating or maintaining a wide range of smaller neighborhood focused and scaled businesses.

Intent of Zoning

IMPERVIOUS COVER

Intent:

1. Limit unnecessary impervious surfaces because cumulatively their unrestricted construction in abundance can create environmental concerns that impact urban air and water resources.
2. Provide areas on site where combined building and site improvements can be located that impact stormwater runoff, soil disruption, intensity, and heat island effect.
3. Provide areas for allocation of green space and protection of urban forest.

Concerns:

1. Local regulations do not properly or holistically account for rainwater collection, rain gardens, alternative pervious paving surfaces, regional stormwater detention in the designation of impervious cover limits within current zoning categories.
2. Impervious cover or any horizontal improvements are prohibited in the first 25'-0" of "compatibility" restrictions often severely restricting opportunities for more dense housing types at transitions between commercial and residential zones, i.e. commercial corridors. Commercial corridors in Austin have significant parcels characterized by shallow lots.

Intent of Zoning

IMPERVIOUS COVER

Concerns:

3. Developed urban sites may have existing impervious cover that exceeds current restrictions as per zoning on urban watershed restrictions. Redevelopment or improvements to aging structures may be prohibited due to impervious cover thus limiting opportunities for infill growth, housing, amenities. A balance between environmental policies and strategic infill should be further studied.

Intent of Zoning

MINIMUM LOT SIZES

Intent:

1. Provide consistency in lot sizes within neighborhoods with respect to character
2. Provide consistency in platting of neighborhoods
3. Provide minimum access requirements to lots for city services

Concerns:

1. May exclude smaller units as infill opportunities into existing neighborhoods
2. May prohibit attached housing types within certain zoning districts
3. Small lot housing in Austin, SF-4A or 3600 SF minimum lots size, is essentially non-existent. Most properties in the City are zoned SF-3 or 5750 SF. Very few properties are zoned Small Lot residential, though it is described in the City's zoning guide as appropriate to maintaining community character.
4. Recent changes in restrictions regarding duplex configuration and placement have rendered this critical building type largely zoned out of SF-3 unless lot sizes were originally larger than the zoning minimum. Duplexes are necessary to reduce the cost of units on infill sites.

Intent of Zoning

REQUIRED OFF STREET PARKING

Intent:

1. Provide parking on site to reduce dependency for parking on street which may have inhibited access to properties, city services, or parking close to residences.
2. Remove vehicles from the street to provide increased flow of traffic on neighborhood streets.

Concerns:

1. Many post WWII neighborhoods in Austin have street ROW's significantly wider than earlier neighborhoods, thus the need for increased traffic flow is less of a concern. Wide streets in single family neighborhoods in combination with off street parking have led to negative effects on the character of residential neighborhoods, particularly with respect to walkability and safety.
2. Requires additional allocation of land area to vehicle access and parking while we attempt to increase a modal shift to walking and other alternative forms of transportation. This land area designated for automobiles could have shifted modestly in favor of additional housing or other amenities desired by the communities without placing unrealistic burdens towards on-street parking.

Intent of Zoning

REQUIRED OFF STREET PARKING

Concerns:

3. In combination with impervious restrictions, setbacks and other zoning restrictions, this requirement often contributes to neighborhoods characterized by garages being placed closest to the street. Garage placement with cars in the driveway thus becomes the defining character of the neighborhood. This less desirable residential character contributes to market demand for neighborhoods with improved residential form, such as Hyde Park and Clarksville, escalating marketing demand. At the same time character altering options are limited for neighborhoods that were built predominantly focused on the automobile and the efficiency of land use within the parameters of existing zoning.

Intent of Zoning

SETBACKS

Intent:

1. Provide separation between homes, structures.
2. Access for utilities
3. Regulation of separation of nuisances

Concerns:

1. Limits types of housing that can be provided
2. Increases amount of land necessary to develop
3. Separates people from interaction opportunities
4. In combination with large ROW can increase speed of traffic to unsafe levels
5. Limits creative use of property and modest infill of SF zoned properties

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