



ALIGNED FOR AFFORDABILITY

A Roadmap for Local Government Policy
and Practice in Northwest Arkansas

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ABOUT THE PROJECT AND PARTNERS

About Aligned for Affordability

Aligned for Affordability is a one-year program funded by the Walton Family Foundation and convened by ULI Northwest Arkansas (ULI NWA), in partnership with Smart Growth America (SGA).

Together, ULI NWA and SGA convened the NWA Planner Community of Practice, composed of planners from across the Northwest Arkansas region. Members of the NWA Planner Community of Practice represented every municipality that has a planning staff, including planning consultants and regional planners that work across municipalities without dedicated staff, as well as the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission. ULI NWA and SGA co-hosted a series of seminars, featuring national thought leaders and local experts and practitioners who engaged with the planners on topics relating to housing affordability in Northwest Arkansas.

The goals of the Aligned for Affordability program are to promote the private sector production of diverse, market-rate affordable housing through the following actions:

- Support broad, regional collaboration and action.
- Build expertise in local government policy and best practices to increase housing production.
- Eliminate barriers and develop incentives to deliver diverse neighborhoods that are easily traveled by people walking, riding their bikes, choosing to ride the bus, or other methods of travel.
- Gently increase densities and provide convenient access to jobs, services, and amenities.
- Tap into current research, as well as share private sector guidance from national policy and practice experts.
- Develop a regional policy roadmap and practitioner toolkit.



About ULI Northwest Arkansas

www.arkansas.uli.org

The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. ULI Northwest Arkansas is a district council of the Urban Land Institute, a global organization which, for more than 80 years, has been dedicated to improving the quality of urban areas.

ULI NWA is the sum of its members, who deliver the ULI mission through programs and events and positively shape the future of real estate and land use disciplines throughout Northwest Arkansas. Our goal, simply put, is a built environment that better serves more people. Our members include real estate developers, builders, finance and equity professionals, architects, engineers, urban planners, elected officials, engaged citizens, and other advocates for a high quality built environment.



About Smart Growth America

www.smartgrowthamerica.org

Smart Growth America envisions a country where, no matter where you live or who you are, you can enjoy living in a place that is healthy, prosperous, and resilient. We empower communities through technical assistance, advocacy, and thought leadership to realize our vision of livable places, healthy people, and shared prosperity.



About the NWA Planner Community of Practice

The NWA Planner Community of Practice is a group of 14 city, county, and regional planners and planning consultants working in Washington and Benton Counties. Their goal is to develop a repository of knowledge and best practices and encourage deeper collaboration among urban planners from across the Northwest Arkansas region. Through the Urban Land Institute, each city planner has access to a vast network of experts and resources.

In 2021-2022, the NWA Planner Community of Practice met monthly to discuss topics related to housing affordability. Sessions covered topics ranging from regional demographic and economic trends, to zoning reform, to diversifying housing design, to balancing land use and transportation.

Each session included national experts, local policy makers, and practitioners from the private sector, who advised the planners on actions they could take to expedite the production of moderate-priced and diverse housing close to employment, services, and amenities. The NWA Planner Community of Practice will continue to collaborate, grow, thrive, and serve the region as an active professional network.

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ULI NWA and SGA also extend our thanks to the national and regional thought leaders who dedicated their time and knowledge to the project. The full list of all who participated is available in Appendix B.

We are grateful to the local experts and practitioners who dedicated their time and expertise over the past year to the Aligned for Affordability initiative, and will continue to serve as essential resources to the NWA Planner Community of Practice.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the last two decades, land values and construction costs in Northwest Arkansas have risen steadily, particularly in the four largest cities of Bentonville, Fayetteville, Rogers, and Springdale. Currently, Northwest Arkansas' population is growing by about 30 people daily. The Northwest Arkansas metropolitan area population is projected to reach 1 million—or nearly double—by from 2022 to 2045.

In search of lower costs and less resistance from property owners, rapid growth is pushing housing production to the suburban edges of cities or into unincorporated areas. In effect, residents trade lower housing prices for greater transportation expenses and longer commute times—ultimately eroding any potential cost savings.

Yet, neighborhoods and downtowns work better when they are readily accessible to pedestrians, as well as other modes of transportation, such as bikes, scooters, and public transit. The region needs an array of tools and policies that can support more diverse housing choices in well-located neighborhoods with a variety of transportation options.

Aligned for Affordability: A Roadmap for Local Government Policy and Practice in Northwest Arkansas is designed to help city planners in the region take the lead in achieving more attainable housing and livable communities.

A Roadmap for Housing Affordability in Northwest Arkansas: Three Essential Goals

Members of the Northwest Arkansas Planner Community of Practice have examined the dynamics of the NWA housing market, how local policies and entitlement practices impact affordability, and what solutions might work in their specific jurisdictions. Along the way, they have acquired expertise in industry best practices, and built their capacity as regional leaders and agents of change. The recommendations in this Roadmap reflect the planners' insights. Several "Checklists for Change" as well as lists of resources help to outline next steps for policy advances.

The three goals that are the center of this Roadmap:

- 1 Increase the Supply of Affordably Priced, Market-Rate Housing
- 2 Ensure That Affordably Priced Housing Is Close to Jobs, Services, and Amenities
- 3 Make It Easy to Do the Right Thing

Achieving these goals will advance the production of attainable, market-rate housing, as well as improve transportation choices, enhance public health, and address environmental protection.

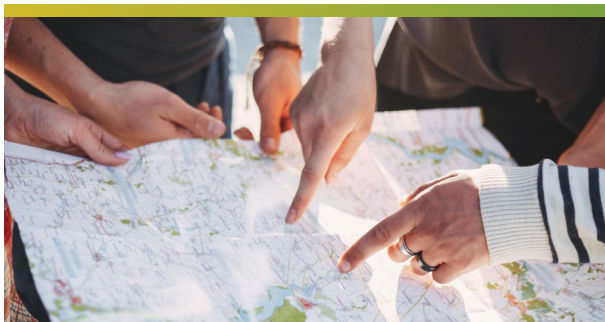
GOAL 1: Increase the Supply of Affordably Priced, Market-Rate Housing

In many markets across the U.S., including Northwest Arkansas, demand for housing has been steadily outpacing supply. Supply shortages are not only about the quantity of units, but also about whether there is a useful mix of types, prices, and locations.

These are an assortment of barriers to increasing housing supply that vary by market. Typical challenges may include restrictive zoning, time-intensive permitting processes, inadequate infrastructure, limited developable land, environmental and other regulations, costly building materials, labor shortages, community opposition to higher-density development, or access to credit and financing.

Strategies for communities in Northwest Arkansas to increase their supply of affordably priced, market-rate homes:

- **Offer diverse housing in walkable neighborhoods.** Make “missing middle” housing easy to build. Allow ADUs and small-scale multi-family development by right, reduce minimum lot dimensions, and adopt regulations to limit the use of ADUs for short-term rentals. Emphasize building forms that are compatible with local character rather than focusing closely on the number of units.
- **Reform parking standards.** Eliminate minimum parking requirements, establish context-sensitive parking standards, and maximize the management of on street parking.
- **Adjust impact fee requirements.** Reduce or waive impact fees to incentivize certain types of development such as missing middle housing, mixed-use neighborhoods, or infill projects.



GOAL 2: Ensure That Housing Is Close to Jobs, Services, and Amenities

The most affordable housing for low- and moderate-income households usually requires a car to access daily needs. This car dependency increases the time and expense of getting to work, school, shopping, or services. Even where transit is an option, excessively long wait times are typical.

Walkable neighborhoods that are close to jobs, shopping, services, and amenities are in high demand, with a limited supply often demanding expensive housing prices. Strategies for communities in Northwest Arkansas to ensure that more housing is close to desired destinations:

- **Encourage a mix of uses.** Expand opportunities for mixed-use development in zoning, subdivision, and other regulatory codes. Maximize by-right uses to make it easier to build mixed-use neighborhoods.
- **Balance housing and transportation.** Well-connected, compact street networks are vital to encourage more walking and biking and to reduce car-dependency. Require new development to comply with a designated connectivity index. Adopt a Complete Streets Policy that describes how a community will plan, design, and maintain streets so they are safe for users of all ages and abilities.



GOAL 3: Make It Easy to Do the Right Thing

Achieving a vision for a more livable, sustainable community is a challenge if development takes too much time, costs a lot, or is a big hassle. To meet housing demand and reach quality of life goals, local governments need to examine how to make it easy to do the right thing in the development process.

Communication and collaboration are key components to streamline the development process. Scaling accomplishments from the local level to pursue regional cooperation will support long-term success.

Strategies for communities in Northwest Arkansas to make it easy to do the right thing:

- **Advance advocacy with statistics and stories.** Key metrics, such as a smart growth fiscal impact analysis, can make a compelling case for why what has worked in the past will not serve the Northwest Arkansas of the future. A smart growth fiscal impact analysis quantifies the costs associated with different development patterns to guide sound policy direction. Equally important is sharing stories of individuals and households to humanize housing challenges in a relatable way.
- **Engage decision makers.** Reach out to elected and appointed leaders to develop a shared understanding of local housing needs. Establishing regular communication with staff in other departments to reduce potential conflict on planning and development projects.
- **Elevate administrative reform.** Encourage projects that truly reflect the community goals in the comprehensive plan, rather than focusing on avoiding undesirable outcomes. Make zoning consistent with the comprehensive plan. Train and coach staff to conduct efficient project review, and designate certain projects for approval by staff. Build a culture of trust and transparency with an approval process that feels predictable and fair to applicants.
- **Adopt a regional approach to growth and development.** A natural partner to support cooperation and decision making in the region is the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission. A regional vision shaped by local planners in Northwest Arkansas, in partnership with NWARPC, could help to address housing needs and help ensure the region realizes its full potential. Regional collaboration can also create consistency among zoning development codes throughout Northwest Arkansas.

Conclusion

The quality of place in Northwest Arkansas is enviable—and attracts thousands of people to the region every year to live, work, and play. The strategies outlined in *Aligned for Affordability: A Roadmap for Local Government Policy and Practice in Northwest Arkansas*, represent an important opportunity—and the NWA Planners Community of Practice can help lead the way.

The people of Northwest Arkansas are at a critical moment to take stock of the quality of place that makes the region special—and consider what the region should look like in the next 30 years. Accomplishing meaningful policy reforms represent an important measure to support continued healthy economic growth, while also supporting more livable neighborhoods.



INTRODUCTION

Land values in Northwest Arkansas have risen steadily over the last two decades, particularly in the four largest cities of Bentonville, Fayetteville, Rogers, and Springdale. The cost of construction has also climbed—propelled by the rising costs of materials and labor, worsened by COVID-19 supply chain issues, and intensified by often long entitlement processes.

In search of lower costs and less resistance from property owners, rapid growth is pushing housing production to the suburban edges of cities or into unincorporated areas. Public infrastructure, services, and amenities in these areas are often limited or non-existent. In effect, residents trade lower housing prices for greater transportation expenses and longer commute times—ultimately eroding any potential cost savings.

The region needs an array of tools and policies that can support more diverse choices of affordably priced, market-rate housing, particularly in neighborhoods with convenient access to jobs, services, and amenities that promote a variety of transportation options.

Previous publications that have examined the region’s housing needs include:

- *[Our Housing Future: A Call to Action for Northwest Arkansas. \(2019\)](#)*
- *[Northwest Arkansas Housing Policy Landscape Assessment Report, Phases One and Two. \(2020\)](#)*

This publication, *Aligned for Affordability: A Roadmap for Local Government Policy and Practice in Northwest Arkansas*, is designed to help city planners in the region take the lead in achieving more attainable housing and livable communities.

Current Conditions and Market Demand¹

The nation is currently experiencing a housing crisis. Many communities do not have enough available or affordable housing stock to meet demand. For many people, neither for-sale nor rental housing is affordable. Housing affordability and infrastructure investment are important factors to support continued economic growth.

Northwest Arkansas had 228,545 housing units in 2021.² In a housing boom not seen locally since 2006, a record 6,000 homes sold in Northwest Arkansas in the second half of 2021. Of these, about 3,700 homes sold in Benton County and 2,300 in Washington County.



Six-Month Home Sales in Benton and Washington Counties

Year	Homes Sold ³
2013	3,051
2014	3,691
2015	4,257
2016	4,373
2017	4,385
2018	4,438
2019	4,910
2020	5,726
2021	6,030
2022	4,848

To keep up with new demand from 2020 to 2040, Bentonville, Fayetteville, Rogers, and Springfield need to add nearly 58,000 new homes, or 2,900 units annually.⁵ The pace of new home construction in Northwest Arkansas is starting to align more closely with demand: homes under construction in the region increased to 1,933 units in the second half of 2021—a 40.7 percent increase—compared to 1,374 units in the second half of 2020. However, recent forecasts indicate that the area continues to need a steady clip of new home construction to keep pace with population growth.⁶

Steady Rise in Home Prices, with a Premium on Downtown Living

Home prices, on average, have risen significantly in the region. In 2021 alone, prices in Benton County increased by 18 percent to an average price of \$346,000 and in Washington County by 16 percent to an average price of \$311,000. The region's housing shortage that pushes up market rates also makes formerly naturally occurring affordable housing more expensive.

In the region's two biggest cities, average home prices skew even higher. In Bentonville, the average home price in 2021 was \$429,000. Reflecting a 52 percent premium for denser, more walkable living in a mixed-use neighborhood, the average home price in downtown Bentonville in 2021 was \$653,000.

In Fayetteville, the average home price in 2021 was \$317,000. A premium for walkable living is also apparent in Fayetteville, where the average price of a home in the downtown area was \$365,000, or 15 percent more.

Notably, Fayetteville's higher rate of pre-pandemic homebuilding—which meant that more new homes were coming on the market in denser subdivisions—helped flatten the high cost of all homes being sold in the city. Thus, the city has a lower five-year average local home price than some of other cities in Northwest Arkansas.

Northwest Arkansas Average Home Prices (June 2022)⁷



Region	\$322,482
Benton County	\$403,829
Washington County	\$362,924
Bentonville	\$399,448
Fayetteville	\$413,174
Rogers	\$382,636
Springdale	\$332,487
Five-year average home price	55 percent increase in NWA (2016-2021)⁸

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the source of regional data in the "Current Conditions and Market Demand" section is Mervin Jebaraj, "Northwest Arkansas Regional Residential Trends and Forecasts," <https://youtu.be/ZYBJD0OzjVc>. <https://youtu.be/ZYBJD0OzjVc>.

² Census Reporter, "Census Profile: Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers, AR Metro Area," 2021. <http://censusreporter.org/profiles/31000US22220-fayetteville-springdale-rogers-ar-metro-area/>.

³ Figures of homes sold are for the 1st or 2nd half of the year.

⁵ Enterprise Community Partners, "Our Housing Future: A Call to Action for Northwest Arkansas," 10.

⁶ Jessica Reese, "Skyline Report Reveals Record Home Sales Despite Rising Prices," Arvest Share, April 7, 2022, <https://share.arvest.com/newsroom/skyline-report-reveals-record-home-sales-despite-rising-prices/>.

⁷ Center for Business and Economic Research, Sam M. Walton College of Business, "Skyline Report for Benton and Washington Counties : Residential Real Estate Market Analysis" (University of Arkansas, June 2022), https://talkbusiness.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/1h2022residentialhighlights_.pdf.

⁸ Jebaraj, "Northwest Arkansas Regional Residential Trends and Forecasts."

By June 2022, the region saw the average selling price of homes increase by 26.8 percent compared to the previous year. From 2012 to 2022, the average home sales price in the region rose 128.4 percent, compared to a national rate of inflation in that decade of 29.04 percent.⁹

In residential rental units, there was 2.3 percent overall vacancy rate in June 2022, with waiting lists for many apartment complexes in Northwest Arkansas. The shortage of rental apartments is also driving up rents, which rose 12.0 percent from the first half of 2021 and 61.3 percent since the first half of 2012.¹⁰

A Widening Gap Between Incomes and Home Values

The median household income in Northwest Arkansas was \$71,767 in 2021. While this median income reflects a growth of 16.4 percent to from 2019 to 2021, local housing values have nonetheless accelerated at an even faster pace.¹¹

One broad measure of housing affordability is the housing median multiple: to gauge the ratio between local wages and housing costs, divide the median home price by the median household income. Local housing prices are generally considered affordable if that number is 2.5 or 3. The housing median multiple statewide for Arkansas was 2.7 in 2021.¹² Yet, the housing median multiple is significantly higher throughout Northwest Arkansas. For example, in the City of Fayetteville, this figure is 5.3, meaning it takes 5.3 times the median household income to afford the median house in the Fayetteville.

Housing Median Multiple (2021)

Location

Washington County.....	5.2
Benton County.....	4.2
Fayetteville.....	5.3
Springdale.....	5.3
Rogers.....	4.9
Bentonville.....	4.8

To accommodate Northwest Arkansas' projected growth from 2020 to 2040, approximately half of new homes in region must be affordable to moderate-income households (a family of four earning \$33,000 to \$78,000) and low-income households (a family of four earning less than \$33,000).¹³



What's Being Built

Northwest Arkansas' population is growing by about 30 people daily. The Northwest Arkansas metropolitan area population is projected to reach 1 million—or nearly double—by 2045. The four largest cities by population in Northwest Arkansas—Bentonville, Fayetteville, Rogers, and Springdale—comprise 58 percent of the region's population of 560,709 (2021). Yet, as of 2022, 53 percent of new housing construction is outside these four cities, mostly in greenfield subdivisions, in smaller cities, and in unincorporated areas.¹⁴

Comparable to markets across the country with a tight supply of homes, Northwest Arkansas is experiencing increasing attention and investment from outside the region. Nationwide, institutional investors accounted for 6.7 percent — 1 in every 15 single-family home purchases in the third quarter of 2022, according to the real estate data company ATTOM. While still below the national average, Northwest Arkansas is attracting the attention of institutional investors. This increased investor attention further exacerbates the regional housing crisis by taking units off the market that could be sold to residents and instead, placing them in an institutional portfolio.

9 Bailey Hughes, "Skyline Report Reveals Jump in Average Price of Homes Sold in NWA," Arvest Share, September 9, 2022, <https://share.arvest.com/newsroom/skyline-report-reveals-jump-in-average-price-of-homes-sold-in-nwa/>.

10 Hughes, "Skyline Report Reveals Jump in Average Price of Homes Sold in NWA."

11 Mervin Jebaraj, "Northwest Arkansas State of the Region 2022," State of the Northwest Arkansas Region Report. 2022. <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/nwregion/13>

12 "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Arkansas," Census Bureau QuickFacts, July 2021. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/AR/PST045221>.

13 Enterprise Community Partners, "Our Housing Future: A Call to Action for Northwest Arkansas," 5.

14 Center for Business and Economic Research, Sam M. Walton College of Business. "Skyline Report for Benton and Washington Counties: Residential Real Estate Market Analysis." University of Arkansas, June 2022. https://talkbusiness.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/1h2022residentialhighlights_.pdf.

What Needs to Change?

Northwest Arkansas needs to not only increase housing production, but to achieve a better match between household incomes and composition and housing type. Nearly 60 percent of the region's residents live in a 1- or 2-person household.¹⁵ Residents who prefer to live in smaller units in more walkable neighborhoods should have that option and they currently do not.

Adding residential infill close to city centers, employment centers, services, and amenities can maximize use of existing infrastructure, improve quality of life for residents able to walk or bike to basic services, and reduce car dependence. The latent demand for smaller-scale multifamily housing and greater variety in housing options, in general, can be addressed with an increase in the production of “missing middle”¹⁶ housing types.

Local governments can incentivize more diverse housing options and lower development costs with the following measures:

- Undertake comprehensive code revision, rather than piecemeal efforts. In particular, a zoning code update should allow for more by-right development and less discretionary review. Whenever possible, reviews should be administrative, rather than legislative, in order to expedite the approval process.
- Expedite project review and the entitlement process, making it faster and less expensive to build housing that is attainable to moderate-income and diverse households. Reducing regulatory barriers is an important step to lower the cost of housing production.
- Eliminate downtown parking minimums that require a certain number of parking spaces per dwelling unit. Encourage shared parking where appropriate. Foster denser developments and public transit to accommodate alternate modes of transportation. Removing parking minimums decreases the cost of the development and reduces the amount of land required to make a project viable. Reducing parking requirements is especially important in locations where land costs are high and cars are not as essential for many daily routes.

If these measures are implemented, current and future residents of Northwest Arkansas will have homes that they can afford, in places that are near everyday services and amenities, served by a range of affordable transportation options.

¹⁵ “Northwest Arkansas Demographics, Northwest Arkansas Data, Regional Labor Force.” 2022. <http://www.nwaprospector.com/data/demographics.html>.

¹⁶ “Missing middle housing,” a term coined by Dan Parolek, founding principal at Opticos Designs, refers to house-scale buildings with multiple units—compatible in scale and form with detached single-family homes—located in a walkable neighborhood.



We've invested as a region in all these nice amenities—museums, restaurants, bars, and bicycle trails. But, they are not outside the cities—they're in the cities. I think we have talked endlessly in this region about building this missing middle housing. It is just time to build the missing middle housing and stop talking about it.”

Mervin Jebaraj

Director of the Center for Business
and Economic Research
University of Arkansas

A ROADMAP FOR HOUSING AFFORDABILITY IN NORTHWEST ARKANSAS: THREE ESSENTIAL GOALS

The planners in the NWA Planner Community of Practice have invested many hours examining dynamics of the NWA housing market, how local policies and entitlement practices impact affordability, and what solutions might work in their specific jurisdictions. Along the way, they have acquired expertise in industry best practices, and built their capacity as regional leaders and agents of change.

The recommendations in this Roadmap reflect the planners' insights, based on a two-day NWA Planner Community of Practice capstone workshop, convened in October 2022. The three goals outlined in this Roadmap are:

- 1 Increase the Supply of Affordably Priced, Market-Rate Housing**
- 2 Ensure That Affordably Priced Housing Is Close to Jobs, Services, and Amenities**
- 3 Make It Easy to Do the Right Thing**

Achieving these goals will advance the production of attainable priced, market-rate housing, as well as improve transportation choices, enhance public health, and address environmental protection.



OBJECTIVE 1.1 **Offer Diverse Housing in Walkable Neighborhoods**

GOAL 1: Increase the Supply of Affordably Priced, Market-Rate Housing

In many markets across the U.S., including Northwest Arkansas, demand for housing has been steadily outpacing supply. A scarcity of housing means that prospective homebuyers and renters are competing for a limited number of units, pushing prices up. Escalating home sales prices and rents frequently squeeze out lower-income households that previously could afford homes in the community.

Supply shortages are not only about the quantity of units, but also about whether there is a useful mix of types, prices, and locations. Major demographic shifts are changing how and where people in the U.S. want to live. The number of households with two parents and two children has been shrinking, while demand for multigenerational living and aging in place is rising.

These are an assortment of barriers to increasing housing supply that vary by market. Typical challenges may include restrictive zoning, time-intensive permitting processes, inadequate infrastructure, limited developable land, environmental and other regulations, costly building materials, labor shortages, community opposition to higher-density development, or access to credit and financing.

Communities in Northwest Arkansas can increase their supply of affordably priced, market-rate homes by making it easier to build a mix of housing types.

A mix of housing types in walkable neighborhoods—near neighborhood grocery stores, schools, recreation, shopping, and services—is essential for housing affordability. Small-scale residential development, such as duplexes, fourplexes, or modest-sized single family homes around a shared cottage court, are affordable to households with a wider range of incomes. This mix of housing types is designed to blend seamlessly adjacent to and within existing residential neighborhoods, providing additional financial levers for homeowners to unlock the full value of their properties.

Building smaller homes, especially on infill lots within existing neighborhoods, also offers an important way to reduce car-dependence and suburban sprawl while revitalizing urban communities. Small-scale development presents a compelling opportunity for local developers to invest in their community—and to develop housing options that may not be of interest to larger companies.

Banks may be hesitant to approve loans for projects that may be inconsistent with local zoning. Updating zoning codes to encourage building types that are compatible with small scale development can make it easier to obtain bank financing, especially for smaller developers. Making the local market more accessible to small scale developers can also add a greater emphasis on equity, by expanding housing diversity and living options for a range of households.

These compact, low-rise options are often called “missing middle housing” because they offer a happy medium between more expensive single-family detached homes and high-rise apartment buildings. Yet the predominance of restrictive zoning since the mid-20th century, limiting neighborhoods to single-family detached homes—both nationally and in the NWA region—has reduced the supply of missing middle housing types. The strategies described below can foster a greater diversity of housing types in pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1 A **Allow ADUs and Small-Scale** **Multi-Family Development By Right**

Adopting or amending zoning to encourage the private sector to build smaller, more affordable units is an important step that municipalities can take to make it easier for developers to build missing middle housing. Approaches to consider:

- **Use goals set out in the local comprehensive plan** to guide zoning updates.
- **Provide pictures** in zoning codes of allowed missing middle housing types including accessory dwelling units (ADUs), duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, and cottage courts. Pictures speak louder than words!
- **Emphasize building forms that complement the context of an area**, and de-emphasize decisions based solely on a building's number of units (a.k.a. density).
- **Share examples of code and case studies from across the country.** It is often helpful to see models from others places.
- **Allow small-scale multi-family residential development by-right** as widely as possible. This includes duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes, cottage courts, townhouses, and small-scale apartments. Reduce the size of zones in the city where development is restricted to single-family detached housing.
- **Amend the base zoning districts**, rather than using overlays. Overlays can offer a useful first step as an interim policy or a pilot program but widespread use can complicate the approval process. Adopt zoning that reflects goals set out in the comprehensive plan for areas designated for new development.



Just because there are more units in a building doesn't mean the building is getting bigger. You are just getting more units in a house-scale building.

Dan Parolek

RECOMMENDATION 1.1 B **Reduce Lot Dimensions**

Conventional zoning with minimum lot size requirements often makes small scale, multi-unit residential development physically or economically impractical. Consider adopting standards that focus on building form, rather than lot size. Prioritizing building form and scale requirements can be a game-changer to encourage housing diversity.

A good measure is to calibrate maximum block length requirements to be compatible with historic blocks. If reducing or eliminating lot dimensions throughout the zoning code is not feasible, communities may wish to start selectively changing these standards in areas closest to jobs, retail, services, and amenities.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1C **Use PRDs and PUDs to Foster Small-Scale Residential Development**

Planned Unit Development provisions are another way that communities can encourage the development of small-scale multifamily housing.

Planned Unit Developments (PUD) and Planned Residential Developments (PRD) are overlay zones that provide developers with additional flexibility in configuring lots and buildings, sometimes with a density bonus and/or reduced infrastructure cost. Developers can use this flexibility to produce greater diversity in housing types and land uses.

Examples of localities that have updated their PUD overlay ordinance to encourage a more diverse housing stock – including duplex, clustered housing, townhouse, and garden apartment housing include:

- [Auburn, Maine](#)
- [North Brunswick, New Jersey](#)
- [Oklahoma City, Oklahoma](#)

Localities should ensure that the administrative requirements for PUDs and PRDs are not so burdensome, that meeting established housing production goals becomes too expensive and time consuming for developers. Making PUD and PRD requirements more conceptual and less specific is an important way to lower barriers to entry.



CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE: Allow Accessory Dwelling Units

Known by many names—granny flats, in-law units, backyard cottages—accessory dwelling units (ADUs) offer an important option to gently increase housing choices and provide more affordable housing. ADUs can be an innovative and effective strategy to gently increase density in neighborhoods dominated by single-family detached housing by adding smaller units on existing parcels. Cities can use this checklist to expedite the process for homeowners and developers who want to build ADUs.

Legislative: Update the city’s zoning code to allow ADUs by-right

Administrative:

- Make standards and regulations for building ADUs clear, specific, and accessible to homeowners
- Expedite the permitting process for ADUs
- Offer pre-approved architectural designs for ADUs, to streamline the path to construction
- Adopt regulations to limit or discourage the use of ADUs for short-term rentals

Stakeholders: Homeowners, moderate-income renters, Chief Building Official, Chief Fire Marshal

Cost: Investigate and publicize options to support homeowner financing to build an ADU

Timeframe: Accomplish in 6-9 months. (NOTE: May require more time to develop and pre-approve architectural designs.)

ADU Ideas From Around the Nation

Examples of local governments from around the country that have created excellent online resources to support the production of ADUs.

California

Napa Sonoma ADU Center

<https://napasonomaadu.org/>

A one-stop shop featuring numerous tools and resources to help homeowners get kickstarted on ADU projects.

Stockton

<https://www.stocktonca.gov/government/departments/permitCenter/buildAdu.html>

Site includes Pre-Approved Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Plans and a guide through the permitting process.

Michigan

Ann Arbor

<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/planning/Pages/Accessory-Dwelling-Units.aspx>

Site includes links to an ADU Fact Sheet, ADU Guidebook (PDF), and an interactive map to illustrate ADUs are permitted throughout the city.

Colorado

Eagle County

<https://www.housingeaglecounty.com/bold-housing-moves>

Eagle County’s “Aid for ADUs” is a loan program to support the creation of new accessory dwelling units. The program supports existing property owners with a low-cost loan for the construction or conversion of existing space to an Accessory Dwelling Unit on the owner’s property.

Boulder

<https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/accessory-dwelling-units>

Information about Accessory Dwelling Units in Boulder, including types of ADUs and how to apply for a permit.

Vermont

Burlington

<https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/cedo/ADU>

Features FAQs about zoning for ADUs, ADU Resources, and information about the city’s permitting process.

Washington

Seattle

<https://aduniverse-seattlecitygis.hub.arcgis.com/>

ADUniverse is a central resource to learn about and plan the construction of an accessory dwelling unit in Seattle.

Resources

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SPOTLIGHT

What Is Missing Middle Housing?

What is missing middle housing, and why is it important for communities? National speaker, architect, urban designer, and author Daniel Parolek joined members of the NWA Planner Community of Practice in May 2022 at an Aligned for Affordability Policy and Practice Seminar to talk about how communities can support the development of more diverse and affordable housing while mitigating sprawl.

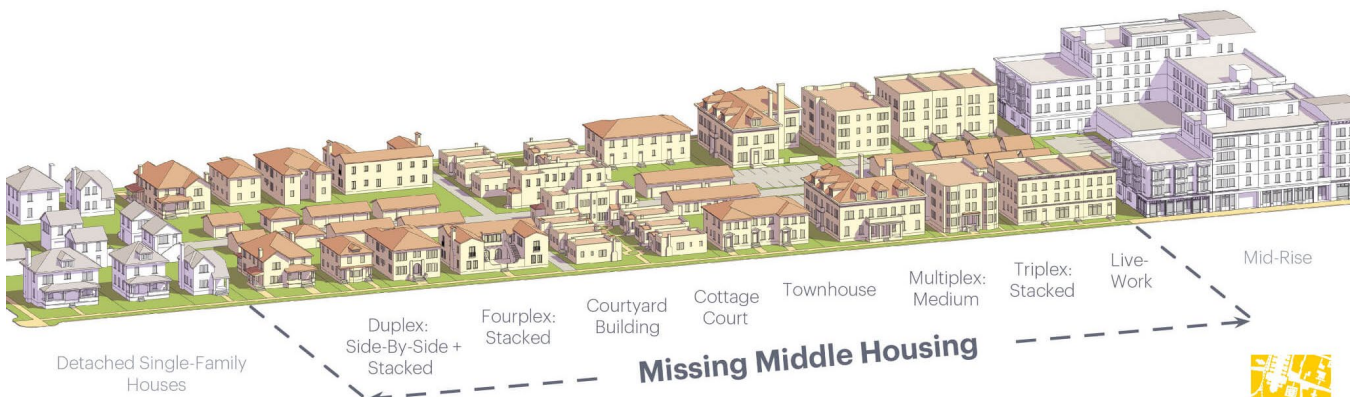
Local planning and zoning policies can create barriers to the delivery of missing middle housing types, but policy makers also can act to make way for more housing options. Parolek noted that the widely shared missing middle housing diagram produced by his firm, Opticos Design, has given planners, developers, and architects a way to talk about housing choices.

"Increasing neighborhood density" is a common way for planners to frame the discussion around adding more housing options in neighborhoods. Parolek asked, "How many neighborhood groups do you feel are going

to be really excited about increasing density in their neighborhood? He added, "'Density' is a term we need to stop using. When you are communicating to your decision makers, it doesn't mean anything...It's really an inaccurate way to measure housing."

Rather than density, Parolek urged the planners to focus on the definition of missing middle housing: house-scale structures with multiple units in walkable neighborhoods. "Just because there are more units in a building, doesn't mean the building is bigger. It can mean, instead, that you are getting more units in a house-scale building."

He discussed some of the barriers to missing middle housing, emphasizing that form-based zoning is a key tool because form-based codes target form, scale, building types, and how they fit on lots, rather than the number of units. "(Conventional) zoning is an out-of-date operating system," he explained.



Missing Middle Housing term created by Daniel Parolek/Image © Opticos Design, Inc.
For more info visit www.missingmiddlehousing.com

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Opticos Design, Inc. 

SPOTLIGHT

Willow Bend: Innovative Infill with a Shared Equity Model

Partners for Better Housing (Partners) is a 501c(3) nonprofit corporation in Northwest Arkansas dedicated to building quality affordable and attainable housing and facilitating upward mobility for moderate-income families. Partners spent several years assembling land to develop Willow Bend, an infill site in Fayetteville with connections to trails and proximity to the downtown square, the University of Arkansas, many major employers, and Walker Park. The development will include a total of 80 single-family homes ranging in size from 900 to 1,800 square feet.

The neighbors wanted the project to have homes that “looked like theirs” -- that looked like they belonged in Arkansas. The neighbors also wanted to promote homeownership, instead of rental units, and connectivity; they wanted the new homes to be a part of the entire community.

Pay it Forward: Attainability with Shared Equity Homeownership

Willow Bend is planned as a mixed-income, single-family residential neighborhood. About two-thirds of the homes will be sold to buyers who earn at or below the Area Median Income under the Pay it Forward program, a shared equity homeownership model based on national best practices.

When purchasing a Pay it Forward home at Willow Bend, homebuyers enter into what could be described as a partnership with Partners for Better Housing. The market value for the Willow Bend Pay it Forward homes are higher than the homebuyer’s purchase price. Partners is, in effect, making up the difference between the sales price and the market value of the home, comparable to an interest-free loan.

For example, if a buyer pays \$215,000 for a Pay it Forward home whose appraised value is really \$250,000, Partners will provide a housing subsidy at the time of purchase for \$35,000.

For all Pay it Forward homes, Partners for Better Housing will hold a Purchase Option and Right of First Refusal for the discounted amount for a period of thirty (30) years. When that home is later sold, Partners for Better Housing will have a “Purchase Option” to repurchase the home at below-market sales price. If, as often happens, the home has increased in value, the owner and Partners for Better Housing both share in the resulting gain.

This purchase option allows Pay it Forward buyers to build equity and realize the value of their investment in real estate, while also allowing Partners for Better Housing to reinvest its funds in the Pay it Forward Program.

Collaboration with the City of Fayetteville

Partners piloted several innovative strategies with the City of Fayetteville, including new techniques for stormwater management, the dedication of green space and park areas, and the creation of several cottage courts, where 10-12 homes all face inward to a central green with parking in the rear. Wide sidewalks on each side of the road and generous front porches were incorporated into the design to encourage neighborhood social interaction.

In 2013, the City of Fayetteville committed \$1,000,000 to share in the cost of infrastructure with the nonprofit. Partners acquired the land for the project, planning to put in the roads, water, and sewer. In exchange for the city’s investment, Partners committed to use profits from market-rate home sales to create “soft second” mortgages for other homes, establishing a shared-equity model for low- and moderate-income households to have an opportunity for homeownership.



Photograph of Willow Bend neighborhood
www.willowbendar.com/neighborhood/
Accessed April 7, 2023. © Willow Bend



OBJECTIVE 1.2 **Parking Standards**

Cities adopt land use regulations and provide financial incentives to achieve desired growth patterns. Yet, these policies also should be living documents. Strategic updates over time will help to ensure that policies and implementation are aligned with current needs and goals, especially when there is a housing shortage.

Parking reform can help address housing shortages by prioritizing land for housing people over housing for cars. Many classic, walkable, urban neighborhoods—think downtown Bentonville, Fayetteville, or Rogers—were built before parking requirements were adopted—but could not be built today. Communities can advance priorities such as housing affordability, economic growth, and climate resilience by adopting land use policies that emphasize people over parking.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2A **Eliminate Minimum Parking Requirements**

Historically, local zoning codes have included minimum requirements for off-street parking in residential and commercial neighborhoods. These minimums tend to have no clear justification or market basis. Excessive minimum parking requirements make it more difficult to walk or bike, and encourage more driving and traffic. Off street parking takes up valuable land that could be used more productively for housing, businesses, or recreation. Extensive surface parking lots also generate a heat island effect in communities, making them less climate resilient.

In addition, parking is expensive to build. In most residential development, these costs are baked into the cost of an apartment, regardless of whether the occupant owns a car or not. Surface parking spaces are estimated to cost about \$5,000 per surface space and construction costs of spaces in structured or underground parking can be as high as \$50,000 per space.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2B **Establish Context-Sensitive Parking Standards**

Neighborhoods and downtowns work better when they are readily accessible to pedestrians, as well as other modes of transportation, such as bike, scooter, and public transit. Encourage locating car parking spaces at the rear of buildings, accessible from side streets or alleys to foster a safe, inviting, and walkable streetscape. Wherever possible, parking standards should require parking to be located behind or to the side of buildings, with building facades closer to the street. Landscaping and design standards for surface lots as well as entrances to structured parking should aim to minimize intrusion into pedestrian access, as well as mitigate the heat island effect. In addition, parking is expensive to build. In most residential development, these costs are baked into the cost of an apartment, regardless of whether the occupant owns a car or not. Surface parking spaces are estimated to cost about \$5,000 per surface space and construction costs of spaces in structured or underground parking can be as high as \$50,000 per space.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2C **Maximize the Management of On Street Parking**

On-street parking management can address increased demand for on-street car parking that may be generated by reducing minimum off-street parking requirements. Typical methods include administering residential street parking permits, expanded metered parking, and incentivizing shared parking among properties.

Donald Shoup, author and distinguished research professor in the Department of Urban Planning at UCLA, is well-known for his book, *The High Cost of Free Parking*. Shoup has long recommended that cities embrace three policies to improve city life, protect the environment, and promote social justice:

1. Charge fair market prices for curbside parking;
2. Dedicate meter revenue to improve public services in the metered areas; and
3. Eliminate off-street parking requirements.

Communities can also reduce overall demand for on street parking by making other modes of transportation safer, widely available, and more inviting. Options include investing in more sidewalk and trail connections, increasing the frequency of public transit services, offering car-sharing and micro mobility options, expanding bicycle infrastructure, and providing shuttle services.



RECOMMENDATION 1.3A **Reduce or Waive Impact Fees for Qualifying Projects**

Reducing or waiving impact fees is a valuable tool for local governments seeking to incentivize certain types of development such as missing middle housing, mixed-use neighborhoods, or infill projects. Important factors to consider when developing a policy:

- **The scale of the impact fee reduction.** Fee reduction could be partial, whole, or a sliding scale based on merits of the individual project.
- **Impacts to the city budget.** Conduct a cost-benefit analysis to evaluate how each project impacts the city's budget, and how much revenue impact fees generate. This evaluation may also include a cost analysis of local land uses. Many times, municipalities discover that the impact fees are not actually a significant source of revenue. However, if needed, local governments should investigate what other revenue sources could be allocated to make up for waived or reduced impact fees.
- **Strategic application of impact fees.** Set impact fees based on the desirability of the development. For example, infill projects could incur lower fees, while low-density, greenfield projects would be subject to higher fees. Set the higher fees to offset lower fees, so the impact is net zero on the city budget.

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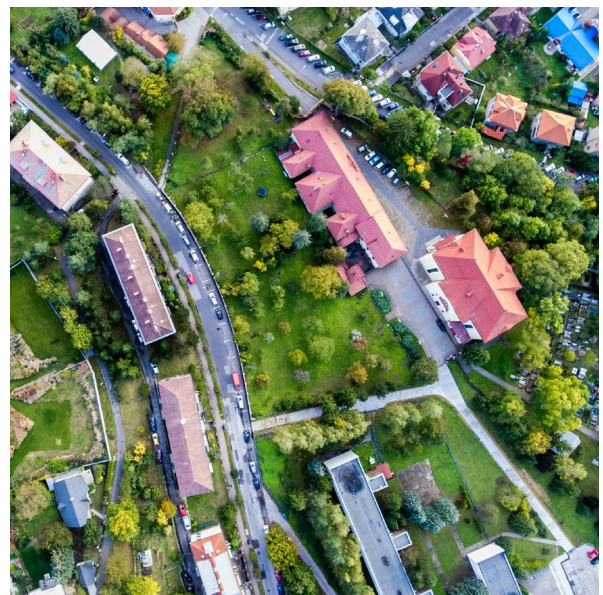
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✓ CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE: Reconsider Parking Requirements

Evaluating parking requirements offers an important opportunity to “right-size” resources. Communities around the U.S. are often finding that there is too much parking, and increasingly amending zoning to remove or reduce parking minimums, particularly for infill development projects.

Some communities, such as Conway, AR, are even adopting parking maximums—an upper limit on the number of spaces that a developer can include in a project. These maximums prevent developers from building excessively large lots and can help to keep traffic consistent with roadway capacity or community priorities.

The checklist below suggests ways that communities can reevaluate and recalibrate the role of parking in local land use.

Administrative:

- Conduct a parking audit to evaluate current parking policies, actual usage, and code provisions.
- Identify specific areas in the community where less parking may be needed, such as neighborhoods that have ready access to a trail network, alternate modes of transportation, and/or a mix of uses on pedestrian-friendly streets.

Legislative:

- Amend zoning to remove or reduce minimum parking requirements.
- Consider adopting case-by case approval for reducing minimum parking requirements, with clear criteria for approval.

Who needs to be engaged:

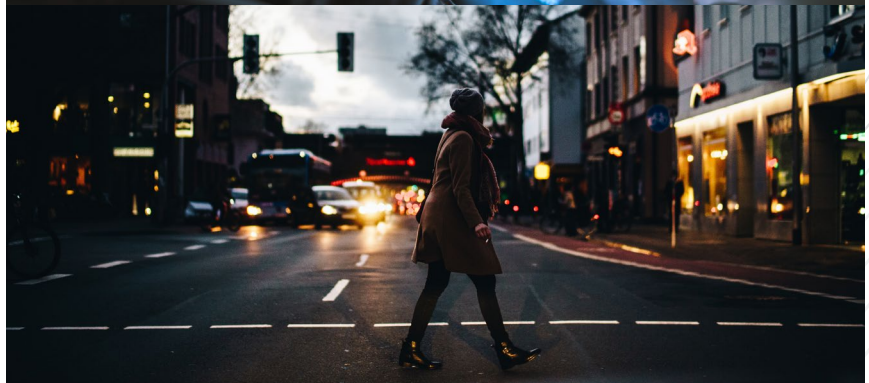
- Residents, property owners, local officials, developers, business owners



Transportation should be an ecology with many different modes. Too many times, we are arguing for one mode over the other.

Steve Luoni

Director, Community Design Center
University of Arkansas



SPOTLIGHT

Kicking The Tires on The Zoning Code: Local Code Review Findings

“Are changes needed in the local codes in NWA to enact affordable housing opportunities?” asked Joseph A. Kohl, founding principal with Dover, Kohl & Partners—one of the country’s leading experts on designing sustainable streets, towns, and regions and a charter member of the Form-Based Codes Institute and the Congress for New Urbanism. This was a central question for Dover, Kohl & Partners’ analysis of codes in Northwest Arkansas’ four largest cities: Bentonville, Fayetteville, Rogers, and Springdale.

The analysis, conducted as a part of the FBCI-SGA study, *Northwest Arkansas Housing Policy Landscape Assessment Report, Phase One*, looked at code provisions that regulated density, mixing of uses, variety in housing types, and options to lower the cost of approvals, among others. Dover, Kohl & Partners made several recommendations to improve walkability, increase housing options, and streamline the project approval process. The goal of this broad analysis was to foster more residential options in the region.

Northwest Arkansas Local Code Review Findings: Bentonville, Fayetteville, Rogers, and Springdale¹⁷

Code Provision	Current Code	Recommendation for Code Reform
Parking minimums	In all four cities, parking requirements are typical and mostly on the high side for the zones they serve.	Remove or reduce minimum parking requirements.
Fee waivers	Only Fayetteville will remove certain fees, tied to specific affordability requirements.	Reduce municipal fees for affordable housing projects. Remove or reduce fees associated with off-site improvements.
Mix of uses	Most of cities allow for some mix of uses in several zones.	Encourage more mixed uses and remove pedestrian barriers.
Density	Local zoning allows for more density than what is actually getting built. For instance, Bentonville regulates building heights with no reference to number of units.	Simplify zoning ordinances by reducing the number of districts and streamlining the code to make it easier for applicants to understand. Encourage local developers to consider infill development using “missing middle housing” building types.
Accessory dwelling units	Bentonville, Fayetteville, and Rogers allow accessory dwelling units with some limitations. There are no provisions for ADUs in Springdale.	Allow or broaden the rules for accessory dwelling units everywhere.
Variety of housing types	All four cities allow multiple housing types in multiple zones.	Eliminate or reduce minimum lot width requirements, where appropriate. Explore incentives that would be attractive to local developers, and leverage inclusionary affordable housing requirements using these incentives.
Approval process	Only Fayetteville has waived hearings before boards and allows for administrative approval when applications meet the requirements of the code.	Expedite the review process to encourage options for housing affordability.

¹⁷ For more detail, see Northwest Arkansas Housing Policy Landscape Assessment Phase One Report (October 2020).



GOAL 2: Ensure That Housing Is Close to Jobs, Services, and Amenities

Conventional (Euclidean) zoning codes are designed to segregate land uses. When housing is far from destinations such as employment, shops, and schools, households are more dependent on cars to reach everyday destinations. Homes on large lots also mean fewer households in an area, limiting the market for nearby retail and services.

In Northwest Arkansas, like many metropolitan areas, there is an inverse relationship between the cost of a home and household transportation costs—in both time and money. The closer a home is to jobs, shopping, services, and amenities, the more expensive it is and the less time it takes to reach everyday destinations.

As a result, the most affordable housing for low- and moderate-income households usually requires a car to access daily needs. This car dependency increases the time and expense of getting to work, school, shopping, or services. Even where transit is an option, excessively long wait times are typical.

OBJECTIVE 2.1 ***“More Things in More Places”: Encourage a Mix of Uses***

Mixed-use development offers more sustainable, walkable, and convenient options by combining two or more land uses in the same building, or nearby, in the same neighborhood. Mixing land uses on a block or in a neighborhood reduces transportation costs and improves the quality of the neighborhood by reducing demand for cars and parking.

Other benefits of mixed-use development include neighborhoods with more economic and cultural opportunities, less pollution, more efficient use of infrastructure investments, and healthier lifestyles on more walkable and bike-friendly streets.

The expression “retail follows rooftops” refers to the fact that a minimum number of households within a set radius is necessary to support nearby businesses. For example, 1,000 households in a walkable neighborhood are needed to support a corner grocer or other small goods and services businesses. Larger retailers and supermarkets require an even larger population within the neighborhood, or need to be located on a transportation node like a busy intersection.

Mixed-use developments may require variances. Local governments must strategically foster mixed-use development and gentle increases in residential densities, as part of their zoning reforms, to ensure that mixed use development is economically viable.

RECOMMENDATION 2.1A

Create Opportunities for Mixed-Use Development

Some ways that local governments can encourage mixed-use development:

- Amend provisions within zoning, subdivision, and other regulatory codes to allow mixed-use development. Zoning ordinances should be living, changing documents.
- Make sure that lots with high market potential for mixed use, like corner lots, are zoned and designed for a mix of uses. Allow small commercial enterprises of less than 1,000 square feet by right in most residential neighborhoods.
- Prepare a market analysis to examine the viability of mixed-use development in key parts of the city.
- Identify opportunities for mixed-use infill, which can take advantage of existing infrastructure. Commercial corridors are good prospects for adding mixed-use with higher density residential development.
- Consider encouraging infill, walkable employment nodes near residential neighborhoods, rather than building large, auto-dependent business campuses.



Does your zoning code deliver the desired outcomes in your neighborhoods?

Joseph A. Kohl

Founding Principal

Dover, Kohl & Partners; charter member of the Congress for New Urbanism

RECOMMENDATION 2.1 B

Maximize By-Right Uses

Allowing more by-right uses (projects that comply with zoning codes and do not require discretionary review process) can facilitate mixed-use development. Removing discretionary review lowers barriers to entry, provides more certainty for a developer, and reduces the time to project delivery, which also reduces costs.

Some decision makers and community members may fear the prospect of more by-right uses, feeling that discretionary review is their only tool to prevent inappropriate and out-of-scale development. Form-based codes that focus on the scale, placement, and design of buildings, rather than the uses, can offer more predictability in how projects look and fit in with the surrounding neighborhood.

Form-based codes are rooted in community preferences and incorporate standards, based on existing neighborhood character and context. Using place types, rather than land use zones, to reinvent by-right approvals can expedite mixed-use options such as those below:

- Residential over commercial space
- Residential in almost every district (unless there is a good reason not to).
- Neighborhood retail in residential areas
- Home-based services like child care and seamstresses
- Home offices

Resources

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✓ CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE: Expand By-Right Approvals with Form-Based Codes

By-right approvals help create more certainty for developers. Doing so in coordination with form-based codes creates more certainty for the community, too.

Administrative: Work with community members to identify specific design priorities.

Legislative: Develop prescriptive regulations emphasizing building form, rather than land use. Focus on the public realm and draft regulations tailored for the context of the streetscape or neighborhood.

Administrative: Establish a process for by-right approvals based, when project proposals meet the specific design requirements as established in the regulations.

Who needs to be engaged: Residents, developers, business owners, and entrepreneurs.

“

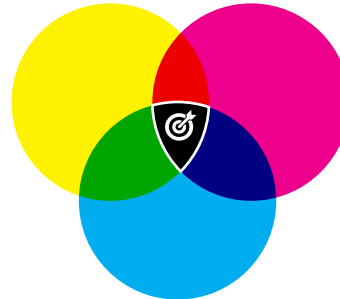
Quality infill needs to be as easy to build as a single-family house.

Matthew Petty
Founder and Principal
Infill Group and Fayetteville
Council member

Real Estate: What Gets Built? Marketable, Allowed, & Convenient

Marketable

Where consumers live, work, shop, etc.



Allowed

What cities allow to be built

Convenient

What is fast and easy to build

“The truth is, the only projects that are built in Northwest Arkansas (or in fact, in the country) are the projects that hit that bullseye: marketable, allowed, and convenient.

A big missed opportunity on the municipal side is not considering that third “convenience” circle...We have a world class downtown master plan in the city of Fayetteville that we passed 15 years ago. It allows all the wide range of the wonderful missing middle housing types that anybody could ever want. But, because of an obscure section in the drainage code, basically all we have gotten in the ensuing 15 years is million-dollar duplex houses.

But it is way more convenient to do that than it is to do the small-scale apartment building. We do ourselves a great disservice by not figuring out how to move that bullseye over the zone that we are trying to target. Which, if it is missing middle, then we should just do that.”

– **Matt Hoffman**, AIA, Director of Urban Design, MBL Planning + Architecture

OBJECTIVE 2.2 **Balance Housing and Transportation**

Housing affordability is about more than the cost of a mortgage payment or rent. Location, which also affects transportation costs, is an integral part of housing affordability. Yet, more often than not, lower-cost housing is located in car-dependent neighborhoods, requiring these households to spend as much as as 25 percent of their income on transportation; while households in more compact, walkable neighborhoods served by public transit spend, on average, about nine percent.¹⁸ Building a multimodal transportation network—capable of supporting safe and accessible routes for pedestrians and bicycle riders, plus public transit, as well as cars—is a crucial step to connect homes with jobs, schools, and shopping.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2A **Foster Street Connectivity**

Establishing well-connected, compact street networks is vital to encourage more walking and biking and to reduce car-dependency. Many traditional neighborhoods are built with interconnected street grids, which are now highly prized by residents. The most appealing street typologies are designed to work for people walking, riding bikes or transit, as well as driving cars. Creating a successful typology involves defining different types of streets—corridors, feeders, neighborhood streets—as well as the characteristics of each including sidewalks, bike lanes, parking, land uses, block lengths, landscaping and setbacks.

Local governments should consider adopting ordinances mandating a minimum level of street connectivity in new developments or a maximum length to city blocks. Three exemplary approaches to connectivity standards include:

- **Block-length standards:** mandate the maximum length of a street between intersections or the perimeter of a block;
- **A connectivity index:** requires new development to meet a minimum score on a designated connectivity index; and
- Requirements for **pedestrian connectivity through culs-de-sac:** requiring pedestrian and bicycle paths between culs-de-sac to provide safe and direct access between blocks.

Additional opportunities include the following:

- Offer density bonuses in exchange for enhanced connections
- Capture connectivity easements in development projects during permitting
- Codify access management and curb cut standards
- Match maximum block length requirements to historic block lengths.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2B **Adopt a Complete Streets Policy**

A Complete Streets policy describes how a community will plan, design, and maintain streets so they are safe for users of all ages and abilities. When adopting a Complete Streets policy, local governments should ensure that zoning and subdivision ordinances are compatible.

Coordinating with regional resources such as the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Council's Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan is also important.



CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE: Adopt a Complete Streets Policy

Legislative or executive:

Consider whether a complete streets ordinance or executive order is appropriate for your community.

Who needs to be engaged

Transportation government agencies, elected leaders, local transportation advocates, neighborhood groups, disability advocates, healthcare partners, community development organizations, other stakeholders.

Draft a policy

Draft a complete streets policy with the involvement of a coalition of partners, exploring priorities and how to make it binding. Work with local government agencies and elected officials to lead the effort.

Resource

Smart Growth America's 10 Elements of a Complete Streets Policy

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SPOTLIGHT

Connecting People and Places

Ryan Hale is founder and CEO of LaneShift, a consulting firm based in Bentonville that specializes in bicycle and pedestrian planning & design. He described to the NWA Planner Community of Practice several strategies that planners can use to advance active transportation and mobility—and connect to housing in the process.

- 1 Choose to walk and bike more.** Every mode begins and ends as a pedestrian. Planners need to put themselves in a position of a vulnerable user, and develop facilities that are for all ages and all abilities.
- 2 Shift the focus to moving people instead of moving cars.** Reduce friction for vulnerable users, and make it easy and safe for pedestrians and bicycles to travel comfortably.
- 3 Cultivate a culture to match the infrastructure.** Seek to develop a welcoming, inclusive, and encouraging culture for bicycles and pedestrians to accompany investments in infrastructure improvements.
- 4 Recognize that most downtowns don’t have a parking problem.** Hale noted, “What you have is a walking problem. On a busy Saturday at Home Depot, if you have to park in the furthest parking spots to walk to the front door, have you ever thought once about calling the manager and complaining about the walk? But of all the cities that we work with, the two most common complaints that they get are road maintenance and parking.”
- 5 Account for the full cost of edge development.** Greenfield land on the outskirts of cities may be cheaper for developers to acquire, but local governments must factor in the additional costs of extending roadways, utilities, and emergency services.
- 6 Scrutinize volume and traffic estimates.** Ask engineers questions about the numbers. Hale commented, “There are studies that show that by and large, the traffic volume estimates that we are using to build new roads never hit the targets that we established. But, we still build those roads.”
- 7 Lean on relationships.** Invest the time and energy to get to know people in other departments and agencies. “Plant those seeds ahead of time that you can harvest later on in the form of a relationship,” Hale suggested.





GOAL 3: Make It Easy to Do the Right Thing

Local governments may embrace a vision of a more livable, sustainable community—but building the components to realize that vision will not happen if development takes too much time, costs too much, or is too much of a hassle. To achieve goals such as increasing the supply of affordably priced, market-rate housing and locating homes close to jobs, services, and amenities, local governments need to prioritize making it easy to do the right thing.

Communication and collaboration are key components, as is streamlining the development process. Yet, aligning for affordability cannot be limited by jurisdiction. Scaling accomplishments from the local level to pursue regional cooperation will support long-term success.

OBJECTIVE 3.1..... *Advance Advocacy with Statistics and Stories*

Both statistics and stories are important to be persuasive for decision makers and the public. Key metrics can make a compelling case for why what has worked in the past will not serve the Northwest Arkansas of the future—such as publicizing data on economic and demographic trends, documenting the gap between housing supply and demand, and mapping directions for future growth. Decision makers should understand why it is so difficult to produce market-rate affordable housing in the current environment. Projects must pencil out for developers to build. Yet, across Northwest Arkansas, most development projects at rents or sale prices less than 150 percent of median household income do not realize an acceptable return for a developer.¹⁹

Equally important is sharing stories of individuals and households to humanize housing challenges in a relatable way. These may be powerful anecdotes about teachers, firefighters, retail clerks, or healthcare workers who are unable to find housing in the region that they can afford. Or tales of empty-nesters who would prefer to downsize after their children have flown the coop—but remain in their 4-bedroom, 3-bath home because they love their neighborhood, and there are no other viable housing options in the community.

¹⁹ Northwest Arkansas Housing Policy Landscape Assessment Phase Two Report, p. 45

RECOMMENDATION 3.1A

Leverage Smart Growth Fiscal Impact Analysis

Smart growth fiscal impact analysis is a tool used by Smart Growth America and others to identify and compare the fiscal impact on local governments of different patterns of development.

In its assessment of local land use policies on housing affordability in Northwest Arkansas, prepared for the Walton Family Foundation, SGA found that the region is not optimizing development patterns to achieve the most cost effective, highest economic potential of land.

Among SGA's findings is the following:

- The region's sprawling, auto-centric development patterns require significantly more public investment per dollar "earned" in economic return.
- These lower value areas, in which most new development is occurring, are difficult to retrofit with infill development, limiting opportunities to increase their economic return to the city.

A smart growth fiscal impact analysis by local governments is a valuable way to identify the costs associated with different development patterns, and guide sound policy direction.

RECOMMENDATION 3.1B

Share Stories About Housing in Northwest Arkansas

Effective advocacy appeals to the heart, as well as the head. Sharing individual stories cultivates empathy and motivates change.

To distill high level data into more engaging individual stories, one must invite the listener to see the beginning and the end—and connect the dots in between to complete the learning experience. Consider these questions to help shape a narrative.

- Who benefits from housing diversity?
- What are the benefits of a diverse neighborhood?
- Who are the people who cannot afford to live in the communities they work in?
- Where was the first place you lived as an adult?
- Where will your adult children live?

Resources

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CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE: **Be a Persuasive Communicator**

Storytelling matters. Powerful stories move hearts.

Choose the right storytellers. Find an individual who will be affected by the decision to change a policy or practice. They need to be genuine, not, necessarily eloquent.

Know your audience. Who are they and what motivates them?

Select words that work for your audience.

- "Road diet"= jargon.
- "Managing congestion and improving safety" = relatable

Find shared beliefs. Can your children walk or bike to school safely? Where in the community can your children and grandchildren afford to live?



We need to remind residents why housing is a foundation for everything they hope for in Northwest Arkansas.

Duke McLarty, Executive Director
Northwest Arkansas Workforce Housing Center



OBJECTIVE 3.2 Engage Decision Makers

It is essential to engage elected and appointed leaders to develop a shared understanding of local housing needs. Investing time for strategic discussions and education will help to develop trust and yield valuable results. When possible, joint sessions with the planning commission and city council can be an efficient use of time.



An affordable house is the one your child who just graduates and gets married can afford to live in. You do not want them to have to move to Oklahoma somewhere to find that house.

John Robert Smith, *Policy Advisor*
Smart Growth America; Chair, T4America; and
former four-term mayor of Meridian, Mississippi

RECOMMENDATION 3.2A Involve City Council Members

Under a mayor-council form of government, the city council is the legislative and policy-making body of city government. A city council sets city policy by passing ordinances and resolutions. The council also determines the city budget and appoints and removes certain board, committee, and commission members.

- Some opportunities to engage the city council members:
- Build trust and issue awareness by providing informational briefings
- Offer an orientation for newly elected members
- Meet in person for discussions about upcoming issues
- Provide visual presentations and host site visits to see good examples
- Remind them that decisions are also for people who are not in the room
- Explore the potential for ULI-sponsored dialogues with elected officials
- Promote wins in council districts with the member that represents that district
- Provide options and allow for course corrections

RECOMMENDATION 3.2B Connect with the Planning Commission

The planning commission is an advisory body with members appointed by the mayor and approved by city council. This body is responsible for providing direction to the city planning department to manage short- and long-range growth. The planning commission also reviews development projects to determine their consistency with the comprehensive plan, associated specific plans, rules and regulations.

Some opportunities to engage the planning commission members include:

- Host long-range planning meetings
- Encourage a focus on growth management, rather than stopping growth
- Educate members on best practices and land use
- Bring in outside experts to serve as thought leaders
- Invite visits to the planning office and onsite projects
- Hold an annual administrative and goal setting meeting

RECOMMENDATION 3.2C

Collaborate with Other City Staff

Planning-related matters frequently extend beyond the influence of the planning department. Public works, engineering, community development, neighborhood services, and building regulations departments or offices commonly intersect with planning on matters such as utilities, easements, subdivision regulations, and rights-of-way.

Yet, without dedicated efforts to connect and collaborate, employees in different departments can be siloed, creating friction among staff and frustration among developers. Establishing regular communication and cultivating relationships with staff in other departments is a valuable step to help align shared interests and reduce potential conflict on planning and development projects.

✓ CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE: Effective Communication about Housing Issues²¹

Communicating effectively about housing issues is a vital, if complex, task. Sharing meaningful talking points about housing is an essential part of working with local officials.

Talking points can help these leaders to:

- Explain the connection between current housing challenges in Northwest Arkansas and housing policies/systems.
- Advocate for decision-makers' role in bringing systems-level solutions to the table.
- Describe the benefits of plentiful and diverse housing.
- Note that growth is inevitable and that they can act now to ensure everyone has a place to thrive in the growing region.
- Remind people of the things they love about Northwest Arkansas and why those things are worth coming together for.
- Counter the toxic narrative about "outsiders" ruining the community for "locals."
- Build optimism for solutions by sharing concrete examples of how other regions have tackled housing issues and are making progress.
- Connect the fate of those who are most negatively impacted by the rising costs of housing to the collective prosperity of everyone in the region.
- Tell the "story of us" often to help people see how more affordable housing options would benefit them and their role to play.
- Share stories of times when NWA residents have come together as a community to solve problems, and how they can do it again.

²¹ Based on findings from a housing communication playbook by [The Case Made](#) for the Northwest Arkansas Workforce Housing Center.



It's sort of foolish to say that we can stop growth. What we need to do is manage the growth. That's what I see in our role as elected officials.

Evelyn Rios Stafford

*Justice of the Peace
District 1,
Washington County, Arkansas*





SPOTLIGHT

Neighborhood Planning Units for Atlanta, a City of Neighborhoods

Atlanta, Georgia

The City of Atlanta is comprised of over 240 unique neighborhoods, which are grouped into 25 [Neighborhood Planning Units](#), or NPUs. The NPUs are the official avenue for residents to express concerns and provide input in developing plans to address the needs of each neighborhood, as well as to receive updates from the city government.

NPUs are citizen advisory councils that make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on zoning, land use, and other planning-related matters. The NPU system was established in 1974 by the late Mayor Maynard Jackson and his planning director, Leon Eplan, to provide an opportunity for all residents to actively participate in the Comprehensive Development Plan, which is the official citywide vision for growth over the next five, ten, and fifteen years.

NPU University

Established in 2020, NPU University is a community engagement initiative that advances the Department of City Planning's mission to facilitate thriving neighborhoods and public engagement in all our work.

NPU-U aims to increase and strengthen the voices and skills of Atlantans by educating, empowering and equipping them to serve as effective community representatives and leaders. NPU-U will provide the training residents need in order to make valuable contributions to civic decision-making and produce more equitable strategies for neighborhoods.

OBJECTIVE 3.3 **Elevate Administrative Reform**

Development administration has a significant impact on what gets built—and thus, what communities look like. Yet, too often local development review processes focus on avoiding undesirable outcomes, rather than encouraging projects that truly reflect community goals as outlined in the comprehensive plan.

Traditional zoning is designed to make it harder to build projects that do not directly align with the criteria outlined in the land development regulation. Thus, projects that do not meet the by-right criteria as outlined in the zoning ordinance have to undergo discretionary review. As a result, excellent project proposals must endure months (or years) of review and uncertainty, setting the stage for failure.

Alternatively, if a project that clearly meets the design criteria outlined in the comprehensive plan is eligible for expedited review, that makes it faster and easier to build—and helps to keep costs down. A streamlined review process is particularly important for projects that will increase the supply of diverse, moderately-priced housing types, which would help to address significant gaps in the housing supply.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3A **Make Zoning Consistent with Comprehensive Plans**

Zoning regulations are intended to implement long range or comprehensive plans. Yet, they are often out of date and not well-aligned with the vision or plan they are supposed to implement. Planners and decision makers should review comprehensive plans and zoning periodically for consistency and adopt amendments as needed to ensure they support each other.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3B ***Train and Coach Staff***

An innovative and entrepreneurial staff is better equipped to conduct a more efficient and productive project review. Cross-training is valuable, so staff are familiar with how to do each other's work, as is training staff to understand the complete development process. City leaders can reclaim staff time by simplifying development processes, including administrative procedures. They can create a culture of continuous improvement by evaluating procedures periodically and revising as needed.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3C ***Designate Certain Projects for Approval by Staff***

Legislative project approval by the planning commission or city council requires significantly more time and cost to the developer, in addition to the uncertainty of discretionary review. Designate certain projects as eligible for staff administrative approval. Requests for variances to reduce parking, small infill projects that meet code requirements, or conditional use permits are all good candidates for staff administrative review.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3D ***Build a Culture of Trust and Transparency***

The approval process should not feel arbitrary or unpredictable to applicants. Use data to back up administrative decisions and provide clarity. Educate planning commission and city council members on best practices to support consistency in project review. As staff take on more project approvals, they should report regularly to the planning commission and city council to build support and trust.

CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE: Implement Administrative Reform

“Make it easy to do the right thing” is the essential goal when it comes to implementing administrative reform. The steps below can help local planning departments accomplish that goal.

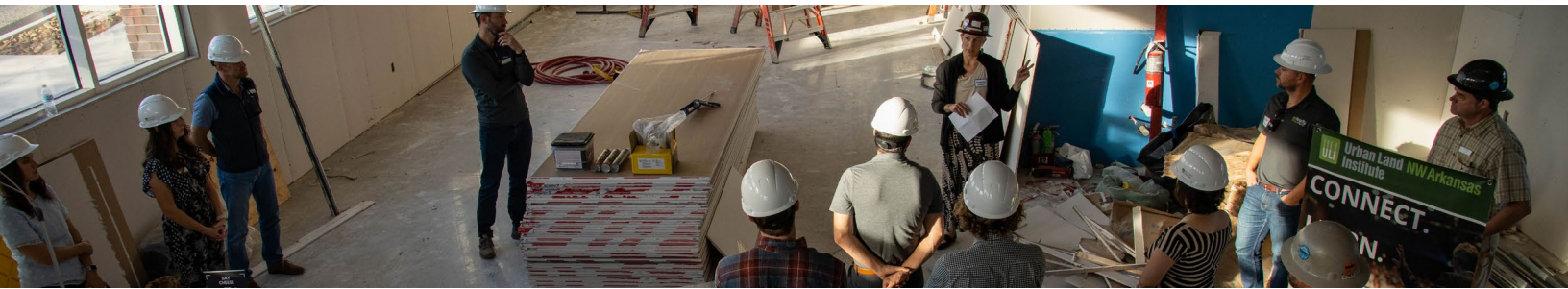
- **Simplify zoning regulations.** Ensure that regulations and diagrams are clear. Allow greater flexibility in lot sizes, eliminate single-family uses in urban districts, and focus more on using scale rather than density to describe the parameters of a project. Eliminate unused regulations and regulations that do not meet the intent of the code.
- **Improve user access to relevant information.** Simplify staff reports. Link regulatory documents and other relevant files directly to the zoning map. Create postcard public notices with QR codes to look up further information.
- **Implement technology to assist customers.** Create an online portal to access development service. Offer online how-to videos to help navigate the administrative process.
- **Require free pre-development conferences.** Meet with developers early in the development process to advise what it will take for a project to meet local code requirements.
- **Create a developer bootcamp,** especially for infill development and the production of low- and moderate priced housing. Infill development is more difficult and time consuming than greenfield development. This kind of intense bootcamp can encourage more challenging building projects and support new developers.
- **Make it quick and low-cost to obtain permits for desirable projects.** Projects that realize community priorities will be most attractive if they incur little to no administrative fees and enjoy expedited permitting. Projects that are less desirable should be subject to a costly and time-consuming permitting process.
- **Convene interdepartmental coordination meetings** to foster regular communication with other departments that are involved with development, such as public works.





Make it easy to do the right thing...Often, our ordinances and processes are developed to preclude bad actors. Consider, instead, rewarding the good actors.

Randy Hutcheson, *Manager of Urban Design and Historic Preservation*
City of Fort Worth, Texas



OBJECTIVE 3.4 Adopt a Regional Approach to Growth and Development

Development throughout the region impacts everyone in the region. Where residents live and work, commute times, transit and active transportation options, housing affordability, or adequate open space all extend beyond individual municipalities. A regionally coordinated approach to growth and development is especially important for fast-growing areas to support well managed and sustainable development, particularly in a region like Northwest Arkansas where there is not one core jurisdiction, but 31 individually governed municipalities in a two-county area.

A regional approach is common throughout the United States for transportation planning, typically under metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) that allocate federal transportation funds for the region. Increasingly, many regions are recognizing the value of broader efforts to coordinate both land use and transportation policies at a regional level. There is opportunity for Northwest Arkansas to adopt a regional vision that is scenario-based, aspirational, and long-range in focus to be incorporated into the local MPO's 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Planning (MTP) process in order to more comprehensively project and plan for the future needs of the growing region.

The regional vision should be informed by locally adopted municipal land use plans, zoning, master street plans, multi-modal plans, housing, parks and open space plans, and reflect existing and projected population and employment. Each locality within the region has a unique role to play – working together, municipalities can build a regional framework that connects and respects local plans to manage growth, leverage investments in infrastructure, share professional resources, and generate ideas for local implementation.

While each municipality will stake out its own competitive advantage, a practical and effective regional vision will make Northwest Arkansas more competitive with other regions. Additional benefits of a regional vision and/or scenario planning effort include decreased infrastructure costs, increased climate sustainability, and the opportunity to leverage federal dollars.

RECOMMENDATION 3.4A

Find a Natural Partner with NWARPC

The Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (NWARPC) is the region's MPO, supporting joint cooperation and decision making in the region's transportation system improvements. NWARPC's membership includes 35 units of government in Benton, Madison, and Washington Counties, Arkansas; McDonald County and Pineville, Missouri; the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT); the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT); transit agencies; Northwest Arkansas National Airport (XNA); and Beaver Water District.

While NWARPC is primarily a transportation planning organization, they also work on regional strategies relating to housing, employment, green space, and green infrastructure.

The Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission has created many plans and programs for regional cooperation, including:

- [NWA 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan](#)
- [Transportation Improvement Program \(TIP\)](#)
- [Congestion Management Process](#)
- [NWA Transportation Alternatives Analysis](#)
- [NWA Transit Development Plan \(TDP\)](#)
- [NWA Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan](#)
- [NWA Open Space Plan](#)

RECOMMENDATION 3.4B

Create a Regional Vision for Growth and Development

A regional vision shaped by local planners in Northwest Arkansas, in partnership with NWARPC, could help to address housing needs and help ensure the region realizes its full potential. A regional approach is also an important opportunity to bring in unincorporated areas to take part in these solutions.

RECOMMENDATION 3.4C

Make Zoning Policies Consistent Across the Region

Regional collaboration can also create consistency among zoning development codes throughout Northwest Arkansas. Creating model ordinances and templates would encourage common terminology and create valuable predictability to make it easier for developers to work in multiple jurisdictions. Local governments who agree to participate in these regional initiatives would be eligible for technical assistance to help them update an existing code, or draft and adopt a new one.

SPOTLIGHT

Reality Check: A Guide for ULI District Councils

Reality Check is a program created by District Councils of the Urban Land Institute to help “grass-top” leaders in a region think about how best to manage growth. The program is built around a one-day, participatory, regional visioning exercise that serves as a focal point and springboard for creating a plan to optimize growth. Approximately 15 District Councils in regions from Seattle, to North Florida to Washington, DC to Boston have hosted the program.

ULI Reality Check Richmond, Virginia

<https://www.williamsmullen.com/news/making-uli-reality-check-richmond-reality>

ULI Reality Check, First Coast North Florida

<http://www.realitycheckfirstcoast.com/>

ULI Reality Check Midlands Columbia, South Carolina

<http://www.realitycheckfirstcoast.com/>

ULI Reality Check Hampton Roads, Virginia

<https://ulidigitalmarketing.blob.core.windows.net/ulidcnc/2015/08/InceptionOfYourVision.pdf>

ULI Northwest Seattle, Washington

https://ulidigitalmarketing.blob.core.windows.net/ulidcnc/2012/03/ULI-Reality-Check_EDAW.pdf

Resources

Central Arkansas

Unified Development Ordinance: A Model Code for Central Arkansas' Small Cities

Little Rock, Arkansas

Designed for governments in Central Arkansas, Metroplan's UDO was developed by local planning staff and professionals in Central Arkansas, with input from Metroplan's Small Cities Council. Metroplan's [September 2022 Best Practices Newsletter](#) offers an overview of the UDO. See below for a profile of the Metroplan UDO.

National

CONNECT Our Future

Greater Charlotte Region, North Carolina and South Carolina

Launched in 2005-2008, [CONNECT Our Future](#) started with public, private, and nonprofit organizations in the greater Charlotte region coming together across a 14-county bi-state area (North Carolina and South Carolina) to develop a vision for the region's future. The ULI Reality Check program with ULI Charlotte [was also a step in the three-year CONNECT Our Future process.](#)

A main goal of CONNECT Our Future is to create a framework for guiding and investing in the region's growth. The preferred regional growth maps support major (re)investment in walkable downtowns, mixed-use activity centers, walkable neighborhoods, and major transit corridors region-wide. Land outside designated growth areas is preserved as rural or working farms. Both the Centralina (North Carolina) and Catawba (South Carolina) Regional Councils of Governments assist individual communities in their respective areas with access to available tools and data to support the implementation of CONNECT Our Future.

Denver Regional Council of Governments: Metro Vision Plan

Denver, Colorado

[The Denver Metro Vision Plan](#) is a regional long-range plan is designed to protect and enhance the region's quality of life. Centered on five overarching themes that describe the region's desired future, the Metro Vision Plan offers ideas for local implementation, respects local plans, encourages communities to work together, and is dynamic and flexible for members of the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG). DRCOG serves as a planning organization, technical assistance provider, and forum for more than 50 local governments to discuss emerging issues of importance to the region.

The 2017 Metro Vision plan is the result of a collaborative process involving many public and private partners that spanned nearly five years. The first Metro Vision plan was adopted in 1997 and has been revised regularly to adapt to changes in the region and extend its future horizon. The Metro Vision plan does not replace the vision of any individual community; rather, it is a tool to promote regional cooperation on issues that extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries. The plan anticipates that individual communities will contribute to Metro Vision outcomes and objectives through different pathways and at different speeds for collective impact.



If not enough housing gets built in Fayetteville, or a housing project gets blocked in Fayetteville, it doesn't just cease to exist. The people who needed those houses don't just cease to exist.

Randy Hutcheson,
*Manager of Urban Design
and Historic Preservation
City of Fort Worth, Texas*

SPOTLIGHT

Metroplan's Unified Development Ordinance

Little Rock, Arkansas

Metroplan is the metropolitan planning organization for the Little Rock metro region, which covers a five-county area in Central Arkansas. In September 2022, Metroplan released Unified Development Ordinance: A Model Code for Central Arkansas' Small Cities, designed to guide land use and development for governments in Central Arkansas. Metroplan's UDO was developed by local planning staff and professionals in Central Arkansas, with input from Metroplan's Small Cities Council.

The UDO is a resource document for the details of zoning, subdivision, utility regulation, and urban design. While it conforms with conventional zoning laws, the UDO is designed with an emphasis on form, rather than use, like a form-based code. The UDO is aimed particularly at the smaller communities in Central Arkansas, many of which are growing rapidly but lack sufficient planning personnel and may have gaps in their ordinances.

The UDO is voluntary; the decision to adopt it lies with each jurisdiction. Users can also adopt portions of it and make modifications at their own discretion, although it is designed as a workable system for all planning needs. Metroplan staff is available to provide technical assistance to cities among its member communities that opt to use it.

The UDO includes a Use Table which summarizes land uses allowed by right, as well as conditional uses. It provides flexibility, with a variety of possible land use categories which can be customized to each city's needs and aspirations. The UDO provides standard commercial and single-family zones, but also gives communities options for developing walkable town center, neighborhood, and flexible residential zones to fit different areas of their city. Other elements include:

- Subdivision standards with guidelines for pedestrian and street connections
- Utility and drainage standards
- Application enforcement and procedures



SPOTLIGHT

A Values-Based Vision for Des Moines

Des Moines, Iowa

In 2013, the [Des Moines Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) adopted [The Tomorrow Plan](#) for the region, supported by a \$2.2 million Sustainable Communities grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Sustainable Communities. The Tomorrow Plan envisions a vibrant future for greater Des Moines. The Tomorrow Plan seeks to convene the many agencies and organizations in the region, as well as area residents, to collaborate and coordinate efforts toward a shared future.

Des Moines' Tomorrow Plan emphasizes the importance of creating regional transportation, housing, water, and air quality plans that are tied to local comprehensive land use and capital investment plans, as well as increased use of compact development. Speaking to the NWA Planner Community of Practice, Mike Ludwig, Deputy Director, Development Services, City of Des Moines, Iowa explained that cumulatively, these planning efforts have incentivized adding more diversity of housing types in single family neighborhoods with accessory housing units and "missing middle" housing, along with more commercial development.

Yet, Ludwig noted that change is incremental, and communication is paramount. An important step, he emphasized, is to identify local champions. He explained that planners' daily challenge is recognizing that not every policy will be in place to direct future development. "Most of it is just negotiation, and trying to make things incrementally better every time you get a chance."

Ludwig noted the influences and experiences that have had an impact on his career, particularly [Ian L. McHarg's *Design with Nature*](#). As a planner, he noted, "You are not just looking at a site for development. It's what's around you, and how your development fits in with that, and how your development treats nature and protects nature going forward...Carrying forward from a sustainability perspective in our city, and in our region: Are we leaving things better than we found them?"

One of the ways Ludwig and his city of Des Moines, Iowa's capital city, have sought to leave things better is through their comprehensive plan, "[PlanDSM: Creating Our Tomorrow](#)." The award-winning 2016 plan was recognized by the [American Planning Association \(APA\)](#) for its values-based vision for the City of Des Moines and for integrating sustainability throughout the plan.

The plan helped to usher in many changes—such as removing downtown parking minimums, directing growth toward existing infrastructure, redeveloping nodes and transit corridors, and encouraging mixed-use development with a focus on form and design. Ludwig explained that the long-term relationships with stakeholders such as business leaders and community organizations were central to the planning process. "We built those relationships over five, six, eight years with these groups to build support for what we were doing as a community."



CONCLUSION

The quality of place in Northwest Arkansas is enviable—and attracts thousands of people to the region every year to live, work, and play. The strategies outlined in *Aligned for Affordability: A Roadmap for Local Government Policy and Practice in Northwest Arkansas*, represent an important opportunity, and the NWA Planners Community of Practice can help lead the way. Some short-term next steps to consider:

- **Create ongoing opportunities for the NWA Planners Community of Practice to convene and collaborate**, especially with other public and private partners. An excellent example is the November 2022 Place Summit hosted by the ULI Northwest Arkansas District Council, aimed at exploring place-based strategies and creating the quality places that are vital to staying competitive in the 21st century.
- **Explore how to revise local zoning codes to remove barriers and better host a mix of housing types in walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods**. Consult with other NWA planners that have already begun this process. Check out the model code produced by Metroplan for Central Arkansas, and consider whether it would be useful to develop a version for Northwest Arkansas.
- **Launch a conversation about a regional growth plan**. Gather additional data about local and regional housing and infrastructure needs. Coordinate with mayors and other local leaders to begin that effort.

The people of Northwest Arkansas are at a critical moment to take stock of the quality of place that makes the region special—and consider what the region should look like in the next 30 years. Accomplishing meaningful policy reforms represent an important measure to support continued healthy economic growth, while also supporting more livable neighborhoods.



APPENDIX A: RESOURCES

Accessory Dwelling Units

Solomon, Adina, “What’s Blocking an ADU Boom?,” Planning Magazine, September 9, 2021, <https://planning.org/planning/2021/summer/whats-blocking-an-adu-boom>

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Walton Family Foundation. “Northwest Arkansas Housing Policy Landscape Assessment, Phase 2 Report” December 2020. <https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/learning/northwest-arkansas-housing-policy-landscape-assessment>.

Case Studies

Strategy: Community Engagement	Code for America and the City of Boulder
Strategy: Leveraging Data and Metrics	Data Driven Detroit
Strategy: Zoning Reform	Expanding Housing Choices in Durham, NC
Strategy: Innovative Financing Tools	JBG Smith and Federal City Council: The Washington [DC] Housing Initiative (WHI) Sawmill Community Land Trust - Albuquerque, NM
Strategy: Promotion of Accessory Dwelling Units	The Santa Cruz County Accessory Dwelling Unit Package - California
Strategy: Regional Collaboration	Central Florida’s Regional Affordable Housing Initiative King County Regional Housing Task Force – Washington State The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission’s Regional Housing Strategy

Impact Fees

Local Housing Solutions. “Reductions in Impact Fees and Exactions,” November 29, 2022. <https://localhousingsolutions.org/housing-policy-library/reductions-in-impact-fees-and-exactions/>.

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APPENDIX B: ALIGNED FOR AFFORDABILITY 2022 SPEAKERS, PRESENTATIONS, AND EVENTS

ULI NWA Developer Fishbowl - March 2022

Facilitator: Amy Reeves Robinson, Founder, NEXXT

Panelists

- Jesse Fulcher, AICP, Director of Land Planning, Rausch Coleman Homes
- Matthew Hoffman, AIA, Director of Urban Design, MBL Planning + Architecture
- Ryan King, AIA, Owner/Principal, Unit Architecture
- Sarah Marsh, Residential and Commercial Realtor, Keller Williams
- Yume Rudzinski, Blue Crane, LLC
- Robert Sharp, Architect and Developer

Market Moves - A National and Regional Analysis of the Residential Market - March 2022

Moderator: Wes Craiglow, Executive Director, ULI Northwest Arkansas

Speakers

- Gregg Logan, Managing Director at RCLCO
- Mervin Jebaraj, Director of the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Arkansas

Policy and Practice Seminar #1 - April 2022

Local Codes Review: The Role of Zoning in Shaping a Community

Speaker: Joseph A. Kohl, founding Principal, Dover, Kohl & Partners; charter member of the Congress for New Urbanism.

Facilitator: Marta Goldsmith, Executive Director, Form-Based Codes Institute, Smart Growth America.

Local Commentators

- Ward Davis, Principal, High Street Real Estate & Development
- Mary Madden, Principal, Madden Planning; Member, Fayetteville Planning Commission

Policy and Practice Seminar #2 - May 2022

Defining Missing Middle Housing

Speaker: Daniel Parolek, Architect, Opticos Design

Facilitator: Marta Goldsmith, Executive Director, Form-Based Codes Institute, Smart Growth America.

Local Commentators

- Matthew Hoffman, Director of Urban Design for MBL Planning + Architecture
- Jake Newell, Owner, Newell Development
- Matthew Petty, Founder and Principal, Infill Group and Fayetteville Council member for Ward 2

Policy and Practice Seminar #3 - June 2022

Simplifying Development Administration

Speaker: Randy Hutcheson, Manager of Urban Design and Historic Preservation for the City of Fort Worth, Texas

Facilitator: Marta Goldsmith, Executive Director, Form-Based Codes Institute, Smart Growth America

Local Commentators

- William P. (Bill) Burckart, Owner and President, Burckart Construction, Inc.; Alderman, Ward 3, seat 2, City of Bentonville, Arkansas
- Garner Stoll, Past Planning Director, City of Fayetteville, Arkansas

Policy and Practice Seminar #4 - July 2022

Land Use, Transportation, and Housing Affordability

Speaker: Mike Ludwig, Deputy Director, Development Services, City of Des Moines, Iowa

Facilitator: Wes Craiglow, Executive Director, ULI Northwest Arkansas District Council

Local Commentators

- Steve Luoni, Director, Community Design Center, University of Arkansas
- Ryan Hale, Founder and CEO, LaneShift
- Elizabeth Bowen, Project Manager, Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission

Policy and Practice Seminar #5 - August 2022

Strategies for Communication and Advocacy

Speakers

- Duke McLarty, Executive Director, Northwest Arkansas Workforce Housing Center
- John Robert Smith, Policy Advisor, Smart Growth America; Chair, T4America; and former four-term mayor of Meridian, Mississippi

Facilitator: Marta Goldsmith, Consultant and former Executive Director of the Form-Based Code Institute, Smart Growth America

Policy and Practice Seminar #6 - September 2022

Housing Affordability in NWA: Advocates, Resources, Partners

Speakers

- Sterling Hamilton, Assistant Vice President, Cushman & Wakefield | Sage Partners
- Tiffany Hudson, Director of Real Estate, Partners for Better Housing, Fayetteville
- Casey Kleinhenz, Executive Director and development lead at Community Development Corporation of Bentonville/Bella Vista
- Duke McLarty, Executive Director, Northwest Arkansas Workforce Housing Center
- Evelyn Rios Stafford, Justice of the Peace, District 1, Washington County, Arkansas

Facilitator: Marta Goldsmith, Consultant and former Executive Director of the Form-Based Code Institute, Smart Growth America

Aligned for Affordability Policy Roadmap Workshop - October 2022

NWA Planner Community of Practice

- Jonathan Curth, Development Services Director, City of Fayetteville
- Nicole Gibbs, Regional Planner, Northwest Arkansas Area Regional Planning Commission
- David Keck, Community Development Director, City of Gravette
- Amber Long, Planner II, City of Rogers
- Tyler Overstreet, Planning Services Manager, City of Bentonville
- Taylor Robertson, Planner, City of Bella Vista
- Sharon Tromburg, Planner II, City of Springdale
- Donna Wonsower, Planner II, City of Centerton

Guests

- Ward Davis, Principal, High Street Real Estate & Development
- Matthew Petty, Founder and Principal, Infill Group and Fayetteville Council member for Ward 2
- Matthew Hoffman, AIA, Director of Urban Design, MBL Planning + Architecture
- Tiffany Hudson, Director of Real Estate, Partners for Better Housing, Fayetteville
- Mary Madden, Principal with Madden Planning; Member, Fayetteville Planning Commission
- Duke McLarty, Executive Director, Northwest Arkansas Workforce Housing Center
- Jeremy Pate, Deputy Director, Home Region Program, Walton Family Foundation
- Evelyn Rios Stafford, Justice of the Peace, District 1, Washington County, Arkansas

Facilitators

- Megan Brown, Director of Signature Programs, ULI Northwest Arkansas District Council
- Wes Craiglow, Executive Director, ULI Northwest Arkansas District Council
- Marta Goldsmith, Consultant and former Executive Director of the Form-Based Code Institute, Smart Growth America

Place Summit - November 2022

Housing Affordability Through Policy Reform

Panelists

- Jonathan Curth, Development Services Director, City of Fayetteville
- Tyler Overstreet, Director of Planning and Community Development, City of Bentonville
- Donna Wonsower, Planner II, City of Centerton



Aligned for Affordability: A Roadmap for Local Government Policy and Practice in Northwest Arkansas

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