

Home in Tacoma Project

Action is necessary as Tacoma faces a housing crisis with people finding it harder to find housing that is affordable, particularly if they have fixed or lower incomes. Housing provides basic human needs and connects us with family, friends, community, transportation, employment and more, which matters to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our community members.

As part of Tacoma’s Affordable Housing Action Strategy, the **Home In Tacoma Project** recommends changes to Tacoma’s housing growth strategy, policies and programs to increase housing supply, affordability and choice for current and future residents.

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

May 19, 2021

WHAT’S IN THE HOME IN TACOMA PROJECT PACKAGE

As directed by the City Council, Tacoma’s Planning Commission developed policy recommendations to help meet Tacoma’s housing needs. Over the past year, Tacoma’s Planning Commission engaged with the community in a discussion about housing needs, development trends, and neighborhood change. The planning process included two public hearings, an online survey, housing café discussion series, an interactive housing growth scenarios map, about 50 stakeholder meetings, and citywide notice. The Commission received about 900 comments on their preliminary recommendations, and made multiple changes to reflect community ideas, questions and concerns. On May 19, 2021, the Commission forwarded the its recommendations to the City Council.

Proposals would change policies in Tacoma’s Comprehensive Plan – the City’s blueprint for community growth. The recommendations are to adopt **a new housing growth vision**, to **update housing policies**, to **enable Missing Middle Housing** in Tacoma’s neighborhoods, to strengthen tools to **ensure Tacoma gets housing growth right**, and to take actions to **make housing more affordable**. If adopted, these policies would initiate a second phase of policy work and public engagement to develop zoning, standards, programs and other implementation steps.

Recommendations are summarized below—visit www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma for more information.

A NEW HOUSING GROWTH VISION

Utilize housing growth to create neighborhoods that are inclusive, welcoming to our diverse community, resilient, thriving, distinctive and walkable, with robust community amenities and a range of housing choices and costs.

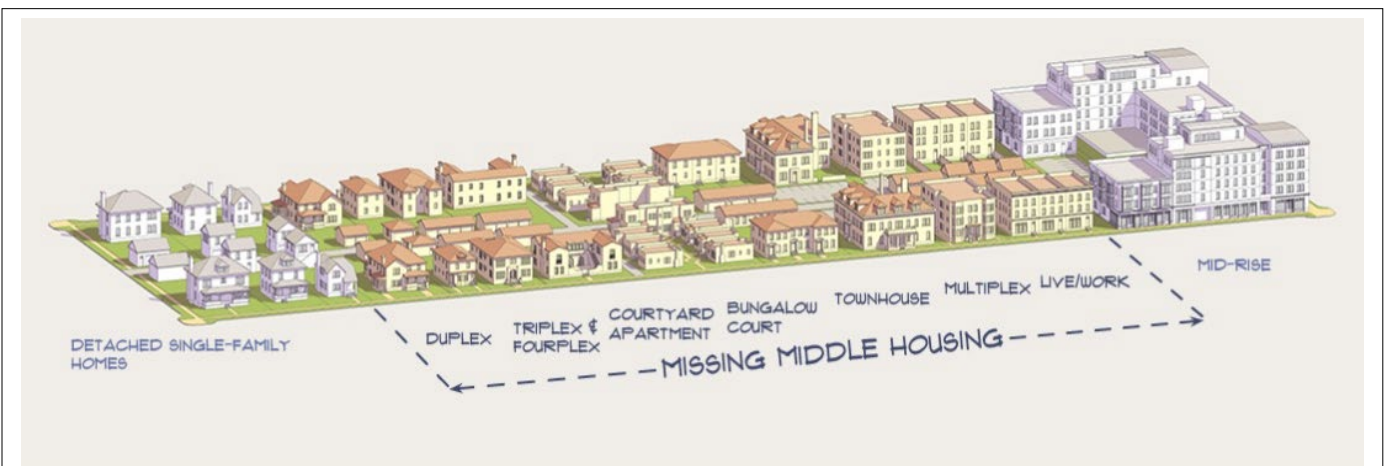
The recommendations propose the above **new vision for housing growth** based on increased housing choice within vibrant, walkable neighborhoods. To adapt to changing housing needs, the Commission recommends allowing diverse housing types with strong design standards throughout our predominately single-family neighborhoods and mid-scale multifamily housing near shopping and transit. The vision also calls for actions to ensure that housing growth meets multiple community goals, to target unmet need for affordable housing, and to prioritize anti-displacement measures to ensure that all groups can benefit from housing growth.

To support the new housing growth vision, the proposals include updates to City policies, including:

- Increase housing options throughout the City
 - Renew Tacoma’s longstanding vision for housing growth Downtown and in Centers
 - Expand Missing Middle housing options in Tacoma’s neighborhoods
 - Plan for the impacts of growth on urban infrastructure such as sidewalks, traffic and utilities
- Ensure that new housing is well designed and complements Tacoma’s distinctive neighborhoods
 - Use design standards to ensure that infill complements neighborhood scale and patterns
 - Provide for smooth transitions from low-scale to higher scale areas
 - Protect the character of historic districts and promote reuse of existing structures
- Evolve our housing vision to be more inclusive of all members of our community
 - Address inequitable access to opportunity in Tacoma’s neighborhoods
 - Shift regulatory language away from “family” to allow households to define themselves
 - Address lingering impacts of systemic racism and facilitate homeownership and wealth-building opportunities for people of color
 - Promote accessibility for people of different physical abilities
- Recognize that housing is a fundamental building block of community that affects multiple goals
 - Promote housing in Tacoma as an alternative to urban sprawl
 - Build sustainable and resilient housing to address the climate emergency, urban forestry goals, and protect the health of the Puget Sound
 - Promote infill in walkable areas with transportation choices to reduce car dependency

ENABLING MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

The recommendations call for enabling diverse housing types, often called Missing Middle Housing, throughout Tacoma’s neighborhoods. The term “Missing Middle Housing” describes a long-term trend in many American cities of reserving the majority of neighborhoods exclusively for single-family houses, while limiting areas where smaller, attached or clustered housing types are allowed. This limits housing supply and choice, and drives up housing costs. It wasn’t always this way—many pre-zoning neighborhoods, in Tacoma and elsewhere, offer a range of housing sizes, types and choices.



“Missing Middle is a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types compatible in scale with single-family homes that help meet the growing demand for walkable urban living.” www.missingmiddlehousing.com

Today, Tacoma sets aside about 75 percent of our residential land supply for single-family houses. The proposals would increase housing flexibility and choice by creating two new residential land use designations. The new designations would replace the current Single-family and Multi-family Low-Density Land Use designations on Tacoma Future Land Use Map—the City’s blueprint for guiding growth.

Recommended changes would shift Tacoma’s housing rules from an emphasis on housing types (such as single-family) to building form, design and scale. The objective is to provide more housing options, support affordability, diversity, walkability and thriving neighborhood businesses while ensuring that new housing complements the overall scale and residential patterns of existing neighborhoods.

What are the proposed Low-scale and Mid-scale Residential designations?

Low-scale Residential areas support housing types including detached houses, duplexes, triplexes, cottage housing, and in some cases fourplexes and small multifamily buildings. New housing is built at the general scale (size, width and height) of detached houses with front, side and rear yards similar to existing neighborhoods. Low-scale areas are generally quieter settings that are a short to moderate walking distance from parks, schools, shopping, transit and other amenities.

Mid-scale Residential areas support the same housing types as Low-scale Residential areas, along with moderate sized multifamily housing. Housing is generally up to 3 stories tall, with 4 stories allowed in limited circumstances such as across the street from tall buildings. Mid-scale areas are generally close to shopping, transit and other urban activities, and provide a transition between dense centers and nearby Low-scale areas.

In both new designations, standards would require compatible design features, building height and scale, and attention to scale transitions. Pedestrian orientation to the street, street trees and landscaping, and a strong emphasis on reuse of existing structures would be strongly emphasized as essential features.

Examples of Low-scale and Mid-scale Housing Types

Low-scale Housing



House & ADU(s)



Duplex, triplex

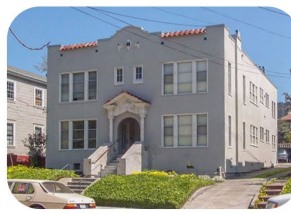


Small lot house



Cottage housing

**Low-scale Housing
(in some circumstances)**



Fourplex



Small multifamily

Mid-scale Housing



Townhouses



Medium multifamily



Illustration of a transition from Low-scale to Mid-scale housing, with taller structures only near dense centers



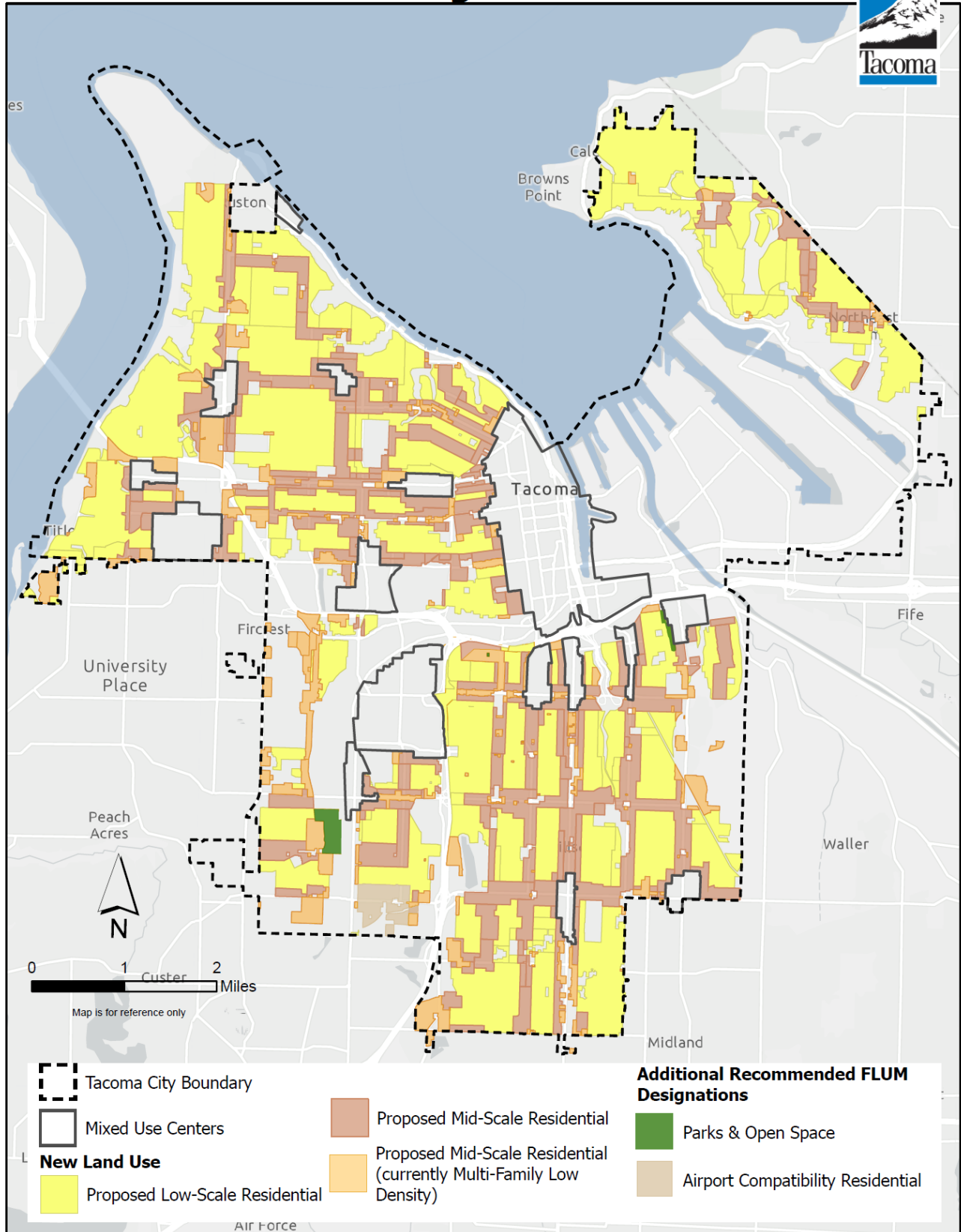
Recent infill housing providing a transition from existing houses to nearby larger buildings (Bozeman, MT)

Recommended Housing Growth Scenario

The recommendations would update Tacoma’s Future Land Use Map, which provides high-level direction for the types, size and scale of development citywide as follows (see map):

- Replace *Single-family* and *Multifamily Low-Density* Land Use designations with the proposed *Low-scale Residential* and *Mid-scale Residential* designations, allowing more housing choices citywide
- Designate areas near Centers, Corridors, and bus routes for Mid-scale Residential
- No changes are recommended Downtown or in Centers, or in areas where housing is not the primary goal (such as parks, commercial and industrial areas), with map cleanups to recognize existing parks and open spaces, and the Airport Compatibility Area

Recommended Housing Growth Scenario



GETTING HOUSING GROWTH RIGHT

The recommendations call for careful evaluation of how Tacoma can balance housing goals with design, livability, historic preservation, urban forestry, public infrastructure and services, and other important community goals. Recommended infill design principles call for new housing to complement neighborhood scale and patterns, avoid abrupt differences in building height, and provide transitions from higher-scale to lower-scale areas. Recommendations also strongly commit to actions to reduce demolitions of viable structures, to ensure that housing growth is supported by infrastructure and services, and to building green, resilient housing. City Council action would initiate the next phase of public engagement and policy analysis, including:

- Zoning changes
- Design standards updates
- Actions to ensure that urban infrastructure and services are adequate to support growth
- Potential phasing of implementation, if directed by the City Council
- Actions to address the potential demolition of viable structures
- Actions to create green, sustainable and resilient housing
- Actions to promote physical accessibility
- Review of City permitting and processes
- Education and technical support for developers and the public

MAKING HOUSING MORE AFFORDABLE

The Commission finds that allowing diverse housing types is ***an essential step toward meeting housing affordability goals***. However, by itself the for-profit housing market is not likely to produce housing affordable to moderate and lower income Tacoma residents. To address this need, the recommendations call for ***expansion of regulatory affordable housing incentives and requirements*** and ***anti-displacement actions***. These tools, in combination with increased public investment and other actions called for by the Affordable Housing Action Strategy, allow the City to partner with developers in affordable housing creation. Recommendations include:

- Strengthen policy guidance for affordability tools and set affordable housing production targets
- Recognizing current market strength, expand regulatory affordable housing tools
- Establish an anti-displacement strategy to help lower-income residents stay in growing neighborhoods
- Promote access to housing and wealth-building, particularly for people of color

NEXT STEPS

City staff are preparing public information sessions prior to a City Council public hearing. Visit www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma for more information. The complete package includes:

One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan: Housing, Urban Form, and Design and Development Element changes

Housing Growth Scenario Map: Learn about the recommended housing growth scenario

Housing Action Plan: Analysis and list of housing growth strategy actions to be implemented over time

Near-term Code Changes: Changes to address known code issues, and for consistency with state law

Planning Commission letters: A letter recommending, and a minority report opposing, these changes

Findings and Recommendations Report: Policy basis and an overview of the process

SEPA Determination: City review of potential environmental impacts and mitigation actions