



# SINGLE-FAMILY ZONING IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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APRIL 2020

## INTRODUCTION

This report is a component of Mayor Bowser's Comprehensive Plan Proposal and the Housing Framework for Equity and Growth (HFEG), both of which recommend an assessment of barriers to housing production in different areas of the District, including an analysis of single-family zoning. As part of the Comprehensive Plan update, DC Council added an amendment to the Framework Element that said:

"Upon submission of amendments to the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan, the Office of Planning shall provide to the Council additional guidance on the following:

1. Options for increasing the variety of housing types in areas zoned for single-family detached and semi-detached housing; and
2. The implications on equity and affordability of allowing small multifamily buildings in all residential zones."<sup>1</sup>

Single-family homes serve an important role in the District's housing stock, as the majority of family-sized units, or units with three or more bedrooms.<sup>2</sup> More than two-thirds of the District's households with four or more people live in single-family homes, and single-family homes have more people living in them on average than other housing types.<sup>3</sup> Single-family neighborhoods have characteristics that should be respected when considering future growth, such as open space, lower-traffic streets, and neighborhood scale. However, any positive elements of single-family neighborhoods must be balanced with the need to "help accommodate population growth and advance affordability and opportunity" (LU-2.1: A District of Neighborhoods).

The District's current housing stock is insufficient to meet our current and future housing needs, and affordable housing is inequitably distributed across the city. To address this, Mayor Bowser set a bold goal to create 36,000 new housing units and 12,000 affordable units between 2019 and 2025. If the District is to meet this goal, all neighborhoods must play a part. Single-family zones make up 59 percent of the residential land in the District, and yet since 2000, fewer than 10 percent of new building permits issued for housing units were for single-family homes.<sup>4</sup> A large share of the residential land area in our already land-constrained city is not accommodating growth in housing units, and this contributes to the District's housing shortage and increases housing costs for all residents.

The District's single-family areas have diverse characteristics and disparate outcomes. Unlike other cities whose single-family zones are principally white and wealthy areas, it is important to note that this analysis finds that planning areas with a large amount of single-family zoning are among the most segregated by race, and many of the District's single-family neighborhoods are predominantly Black. This report recommends a geographically-tailored approach to assessing and addressing the future of single-family zoning that recognizes the need for more housing opportunities in high-cost, high-opportunity neighborhoods, while also working to create high-opportunity areas in those single-family neighborhoods that have been historically underserved.

Incentivizing missing middle housing types in high-opportunity, high-cost single-family zones and single-family zones near transit could create more affordable housing options, address segregation and inequity, and moderate housing costs overall. This can be done through "gentle density" approaches that seek to ensure appropriate housing density for the existing community. However, any action to increase housing types in single-family neighborhoods must consider how to retain existing family-sized units and incentivize new family-sized units in both single-family and multifamily buildings, so that the supply of family-sized housing is not put under further pressure.

### Summary of Recommendations to Increase the Variety of Housing Types in Single-Family Zones

1. Promote gentle density in single-family zones that are high-cost, high-opportunity, or near transit
2. Encourage accessory apartments by addressing barriers and exploring incentives
3. Incentivize and preserve family-size units in both single-family and multifamily buildings

This report will begin to examine single-family zoning in the District and should be thought of as one piece of a broader conversation about how all neighborhoods in our city can accommodate an equitable share of affordable housing. The report will:

- Examine the distribution of single-family zoning and housing in the District
- Establish the goals of providing additional missing middle housing options in single-family zones
- Provide recommendations for how to increase missing middle housing options in single-family zones
- Explore actions that other jurisdictions have taken to amend single-family zoning
- Evaluate the affordability, equity, and environmental implications of allowing a variety of housing options in single-family zones

### Single-Family Zoning in the Comprehensive Plan

While the Mayor's Comprehensive Plan Proposal does not directly make changes to the Zoning Regulations, the adopted Comprehensive Plan will inform future changes to zoning through its Citywide and Area Elements and Future Land Use Map. The Comp Plan Proposal includes several updates that address how past comprehensive plans have set aside single-family neighborhoods as in need of "protection" and "conservation." This language was informed in part by the desire to preserve family-sized units. In fact, the 2006 Comp Plan suggested that the District could only retain young families if it "provide[d] a healthy environment for new families in its established single family and rowhouse neighborhoods."<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the Mayor's Comp Plan Proposal includes many policies to ensure that families can thrive in all neighborhoods and across all housing types—not just in single-family homes.

As a part of HFEG, the Office of Planning (OP) in coordination with other housing agency partners has embarked on a series of community engagements about housing equity informed by research and analysis. In this research, historians have established that language that implies that certain neighborhoods need "protection" from others stems from a history of racism and segregation.<sup>6,7,8</sup> In recognition of this history, OP proposes in this update language that shifts from a focus on "protection" of single-family neighborhoods to the need to respect and support all neighborhoods, regardless of density (LU-2.1.5: Neighborhood Support).

OP updated the Comp Plan Proposal to address the need for single-family neighborhoods to balance the preservation and enhancement of positive elements of neighborhood identity with the need "to help accommodate population growth and advance affordability and equity" (LU-2.1.1: Variety of Neighborhood Types). However, the scope of edits to the Comp Plan was limited by the fact that this is an amendment to an existing plan. Zoning cannot operate in a manner inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan and making broad changes to what is permitted under single-family zoning is not consistent with the 2006 Comp Plan or the Comp Plan Proposal. For example, the amended Framework Element, which was adopted by Council in October 2019, defines the role of the Comp Plan's Future Land Use Map (FLUM) and Generalized Policy Map (GPM). The FLUM guides future zoning decisions and includes a "residential low density" category for single-family detached and semi-detached housing. Most of the FLUM's residential low density areas are categorized as "Neighborhood Conservation Areas" in the GPM, which are described as maintaining "existing land uses and community character...over the next 20 years."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the Comp Plan Proposal's FLUM increases density in several areas adjacent to single-family neighborhoods, but it is limited from broadly increasing density in residential low density neighborhoods by the fact that the Comp Plan recommends "maintenance of existing land uses" in these areas. Recommendations in this report should be understood in the context that broad changes to zoning or FLUM designations in single-family neighborhoods will have to be informed by community planning and engagement processes or be included in a future Comp Plan rewrite (LU-2.1.8: Zoning of Low- and Moderate-Density Neighborhoods).

### Comprehensive Plan Proposal Citations

Throughout this report, relevant policies and actions in the Mayor's Comprehensive Plan Proposal will be cited in text with the abbreviation of the element and the corresponding action or policy, for example:

#### LU-2.1.8 = Land Use Element Policy 2.1.8

Elements discussed in this report include:

**LU - Land Use**

**H - Housing**

**UD - Urban Design**

**E - Environmental Protection**

# SINGLE-FAMILY ZONING IN THE DISTRICT

## What is “single-family zoning” in DC?

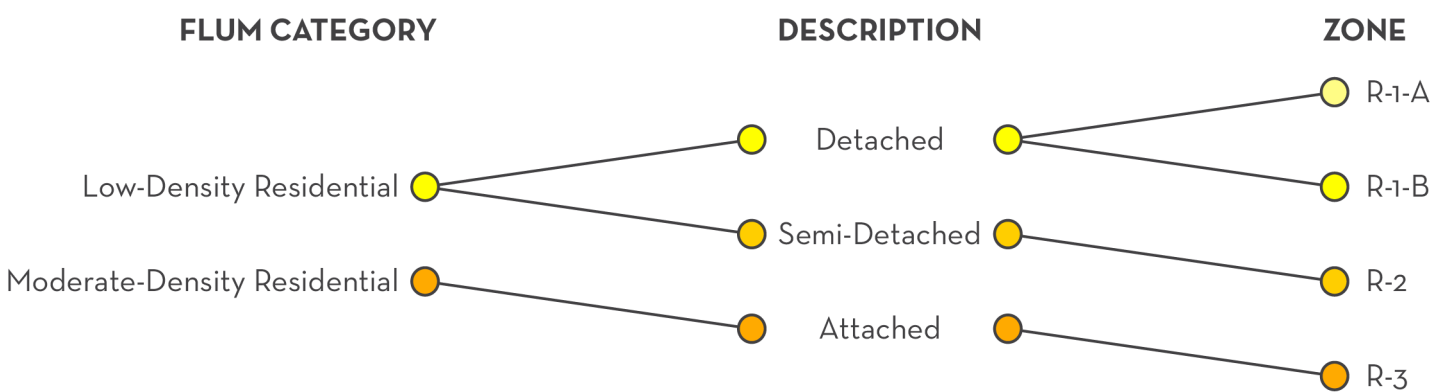
Before discussing “single-family zoning,” it is important to define what that means in the District’s zoning regulations. While the term “single-family” is not explicitly used in the regulations, the concept applies to all Residential House (R) zones. The intent of these zones is to “provide for stable, low- to moderate-density residential areas suitable for family life and supporting uses” and to “discourage multiple dwelling unit development.”<sup>10</sup> There are 19 R zones, which fall into four broader zone categories, with slight variations for neighborhood characteristics and tree and slope protection. Together these zones encompass single-family detached (R-1-A and R-1-B), semi-detached (R-2), and attached (R-3) dwellings:

- **R-1-A:** “intended to provide for areas predominantly developed with **detached** houses on large lots” (includes R-6, R-8, R-11, R-14, and R-21)
- **R-1-B:** “intended to provide for areas predominantly developed with **detached** houses on moderately sized lots” (includes R-7, R-9, R-12, R-15, R-16, and R-19)
- **R-2:** “intended to provide for areas predominantly developed with **semi-detached** houses on moderately sized lots that also contain some detached dwellings” (includes R-10)
- **R-3:** “intended to permit **attached** rowhouses on small lots” (includes R-13, R-17, and R-20)<sup>11,12</sup>

Each of these single-family zones has a corresponding land use designation on the FLUM. Single-family detached (R-1-A and R-1-B) and semi-detached (R-2) zones are aligned with the low density residential designation on the FLUM. Attached single-family zones (R-3) are considered moderate density residential, along with Residential Flat (RF) zones, and some Residential Apartment (RA) zones. Medium and high density residential are aligned with the remaining RA zones. The Framework Element of the Comprehensive Plan defines land use designations relevant to single-family zoning as follows:

- **Low density residential (aligned with R-1-A, R-1-B, and R-2):** “neighborhoods generally, but not exclusively, suited for **single family detached and semi-detached** housing units with front, back, and side yards.”<sup>13</sup>
- **Moderate density residential (aligned with R-3, all RF zones, and RA-2):** “neighborhoods generally, but not exclusively, suited for **row houses as well as low-rise garden apartment complexes**. This designation also applies to areas characterized by a **mix of single-family homes, 2-4 unit buildings, row houses, and low-rise apartment buildings**. In some neighborhoods with this designation, there may also be existing multi-story apartment buildings, many built decades ago when the areas were zoned for more dense uses (or were not zoned at all).<sup>14</sup>

Figure 1. Alignment of Single-Family Across the FLUM, Descriptions, and Zoning





While all R zones can be considered “single-family,” there are differences between single-family detached, semi-detached, and attached zones. DC Council’s request for an analysis of single-family zoning specifically cited single-family detached and semi-detached zoning. However, attached dwellings, or rowhouses, are included in single-family zoning, and represent a significant portion of the District’s single-family housing stock. Furthermore, rowhouses in R-3 zones differ from rowhouses in Residential Flat (RF) zones, which specifically allow for conversion into multiple principal dwelling units. For these reasons, this report broadly considers single-family zones to include detached, semi-detached, and attached zones. However, where there are significant differences between these zones they will be considered separately. The Zoning Regulations do distinguish between the purpose and intent of the four zones. The purpose of R-1-A and R-1-B zones is to “protect quiet residential areas...and stabilize the residential areas and promote a suitable environment for family life” and R-2 zones serve to “protect these areas from invasion by denser types of residential development.”<sup>15</sup> The R-3 zone is not described as an area that must be “protected” from denser types of development, instead allowing for “attached rowhouses on small lots.”<sup>16</sup>

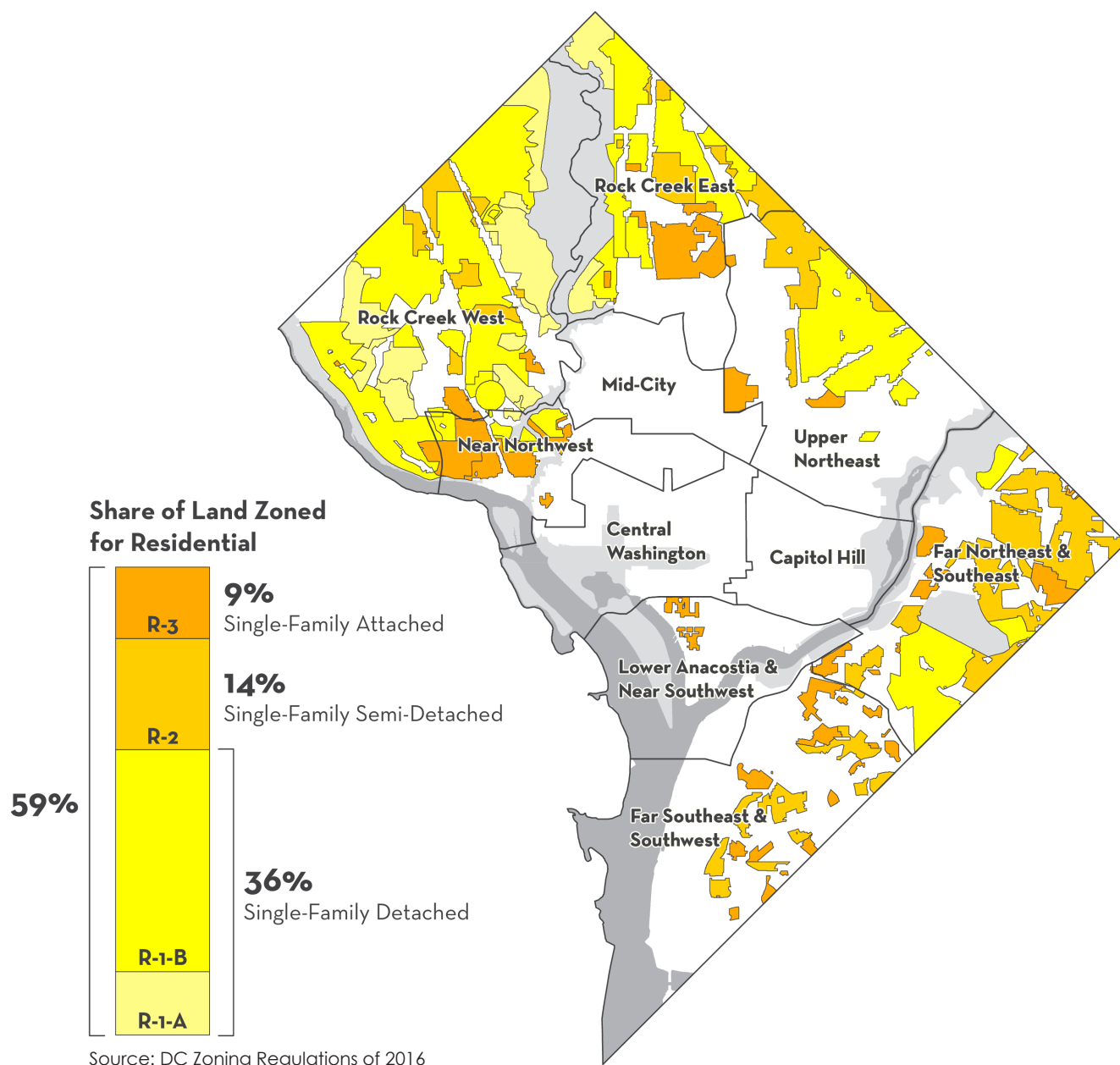
One way that the zoning regulations differentiate between detached, semi-detached, and attached single-family zones is through minimum lot size, which dictates the amount of land required for certain buildings to be permitted. Minimum lot size influences the types of buildings that can be built on a parcel, as well as how dense a neighborhood feels. It is one of several dimensional standards included in zoning, such as height and setbacks. Single-family zones tend to require larger minimum lot sizes, making single-family homes both more land intensive and more expensive than other types of housing. The minimum lot size for R zones in the District varies based on the zone, unit type, and whether inclusionary zoning is being used. Each R zone allows the type of dwelling listed in the zone’s intent, as well as the dwelling types allowed in less dense zones. For example, R-1-A and R-1-B allow single-family detached, R-2 allows semi-detached and detached, and R-3 allows all types of single-family homes. Minimum lot sizes are smaller for each housing type in each subsequent zone. Therefore, the minimum lot size for single-family homes ranges considerably—the 7,500 square foot minimum in R-1-A means that lot could hold up to 4 rowhouses zoned if it were zoned R-3 and used inclusionary zoning.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 2. Minimum Lot Sizes in R Zones**



Source: DC Zoning Regulations of 2016, Subtitle D, Residential House (R) Zones

**Figure 3. Map of Single-Family Zoning in DC**



### How much single-family zoning does DC have?

Of the District's 68 square miles, approximately 48 square miles are zoned—the remaining area is primarily water and federal lands. Of the District's land that is zoned for residential purposes, 41 percent is multifamily and 59 percent is single-family, composed of 36 percent detached, 14 percent semi-detached, and 9 percent attached.<sup>18</sup> This share of single-family land is consistent with peer East Coast cities. Just over 50 percent of Baltimore and Boston's residential land is zoned for single-family, with over 30 percent zoned for single-family detached.<sup>19</sup> In comparison, 79 percent

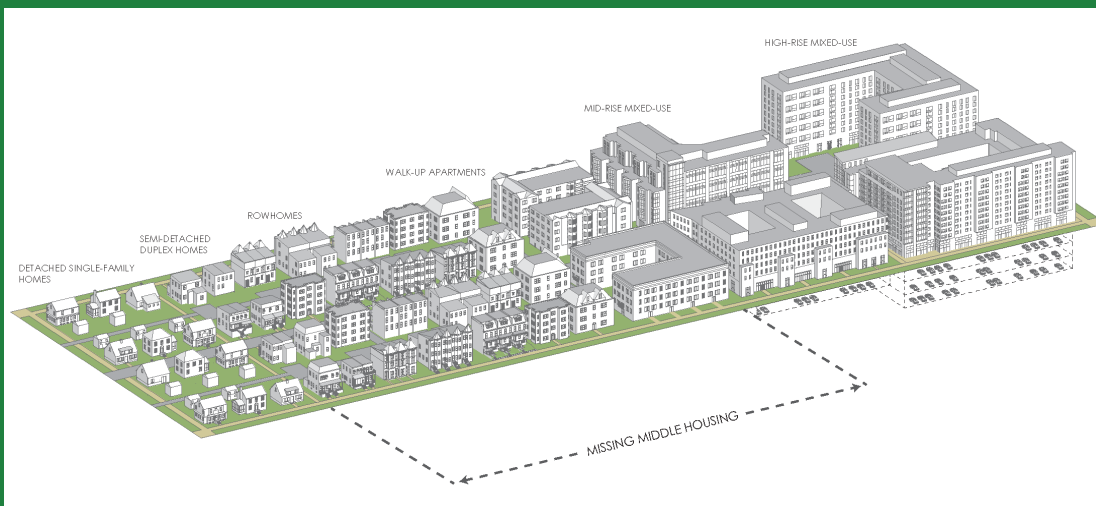
of Philadelphia's residential land is zoned for single-family, but 57 percent is for single-family attached and 21 percent is for single-family detached.<sup>20</sup> The share of land zoned for single-family detached housing in the District and other East Coast cities is much lower than in many cities in other regions, such as the Sun Belt, Midwest, and Pacific Northwest. A recent analysis of several cities in the New York Times found shares of residential land zoned for single-family detached that ranged from 70 percent in Minneapolis up to 94 percent in San Jose.<sup>21</sup>

“Single-family zoning” encompasses land where a property owner is currently permitted to build a single-family home. “Single-family homes,” on the other hand, describes the type of housing unit, regardless of whether that housing unit is located within a single-family zone. While single-family zoned land makes up the majority of the District’s residential land area, single-family homes make up a much smaller share of households. Of the District’s households, 37 percent live in single-family units and only 12 percent live in single-family detached units.<sup>22</sup> The discrepancy between the share of land zoned for single-family and the share of single-family households is greater when taking into account the fact that many single-family homes in the District are located outside of single-family zones. For example, a rowhome that is located within a Residential Flat (RF) zone and is currently occupied by one household is a “single-family home.” Therefore, an even greater share of residential land accounts for a comparatively small share of the District’s housing. The DC Policy Center corroborated this point in a 2018 report when they found that “93,470 single-family units make up only 30 percent of the District’s housing stock, but 80 percent of the residential buildings...For a land-constrained city, the District has set aside a significant amount of land for low-rise, low occupancy housing units.”<sup>23</sup>

Although single-family homes make up just over a third of the District’s housing units, they serve an important role as the largest supply of large or “family-sized” units (units with three or more bedrooms). Approximately 75 percent of family-sized units in the District are in single-family homes, while the remaining 25 percent are in multifamily buildings.<sup>24</sup> Consistent with their larger size, single-family homes provide housing for larger households than average, between 2.3 and 2.5 persons per unit compared to all other forms of housing, which range between 1.4 and 1.9 persons per unit.<sup>25</sup> Of the District’s households with 4 or more people, which include both family and non-family households, 67 percent live in single-family homes.<sup>26</sup> Single-family units provide housing for just over half of the District’s families, 20 percent in detached units and 35 percent in semi-detached or attached units.<sup>27</sup> The importance of single-family homes as the majority of family-sized units will be a central consideration as the District explores zoning changes in single-family neighborhoods going forward.

## What is “Missing Middle Housing”?

“Missing middle” housing refers to “a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types—compatible in scale with detached single-family homes” that fall somewhere between a single-family home and a larger apartment building in their density. These types of units are often more affordable to low- and moderate-income families than single-family homes. (Source: Opticos Design, [missingmiddlehousing.com](http://missingmiddlehousing.com).)



This transect illustrates the variety of housing types in the District, including many of the missing middle options in between a single-family home and a large apartment building.

Image Source:  
DC Office of Planning

## How does single-family zoning vary across DC?

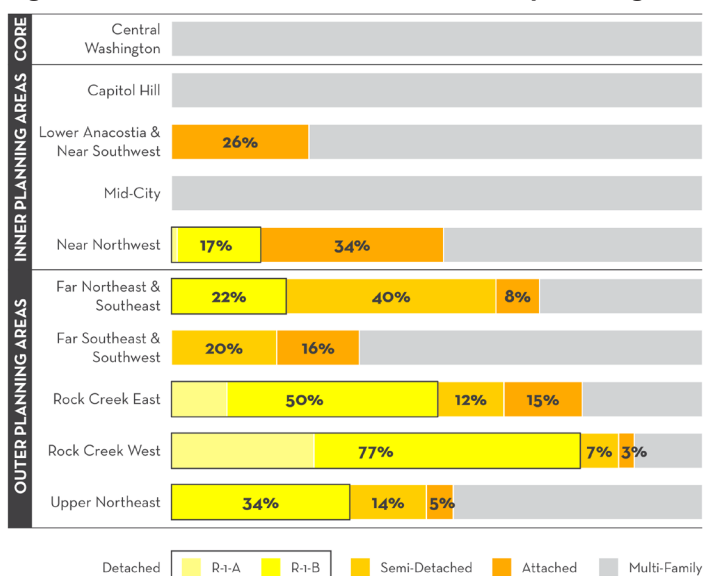
The distribution of single-family zoned land varies considerably across the District's ten planning areas. Only five of the ten planning areas have any single-family detached zoning, Rock Creek West, Rock Creek East, Upper Northeast, Far Northeast & Southeast, Near Northwest. Rock Creek West has by far the highest share of land zoned for detached single-family housing, at 77 percent of residential land area and contains over half of the District's total single-family detached land. When differentiating between the two types of single-family detached zones, Rock Creek West and Rock Creek East are the only two planning areas that have a substantial amount of R-1-A land, which is zoned for single-family detached homes on "large lots" rather than "moderately sized lots."<sup>28</sup> Far Northeast & Southeast, Far Southeast & Southwest, and Near Northwest have the greatest share of land area zoned for single-family semi-detached (R-2) and attached (R-3). There are three planning areas that have no single-family zoning, Mid-City, Central Washington, and Capitol Hill.

The four planning areas with the highest share of residential land zoned for single-family detached also have the highest share of single-family detached housing units, Rock Creek West, Rock Creek East, Upper Northeast, and Far Northeast & Southeast. At the same time, the share of households living in single-family detached units in these planning areas is substantially less than the share of residential land, in part because

detached housing is so land intensive. In contrast with single-family detached, the share of single-family attached households can differ considerably from the land zoned for that purpose. For example, Capitol Hill and Mid-City have no single-family zoning and yet have significant shares of their households living in single-family attached units. This fact points to the need to distinguish single-family detached and attached zones in analyses going forward—it is much more common for attached single-family homes to exist outside of single-family zones than is the case for detached single-family homes.<sup>29</sup>

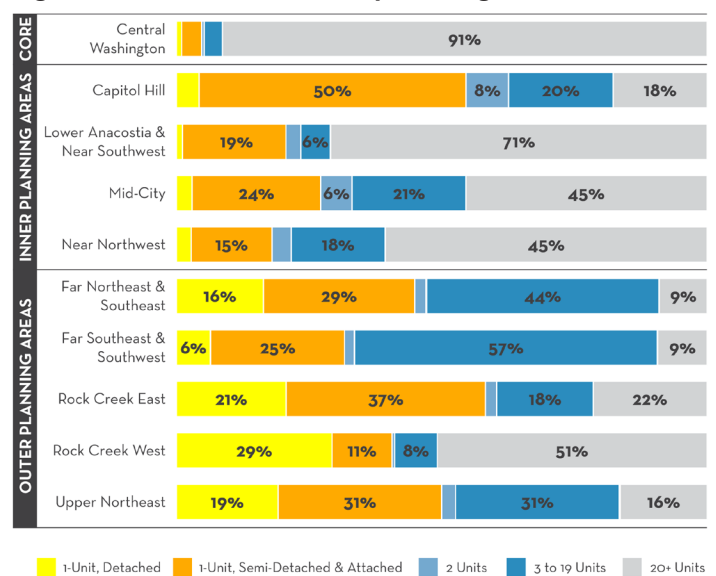
To better understand the role of single-family zoning in each planning area, it is important to consider the balance of housing across building types. For example, Rock Creek West has the largest amount of single-family zoned land; however, there are four planning areas that have a higher share of single-family households than Rock Creek West—Rock Creek East, Capitol Hill, Upper Northeast, and Far Northeast & Southeast. This is because a higher share of Rock Creek West's households live in multifamily buildings with 20 or more units than these planning areas. At the same time, only 8 percent of Rock Creek West's households live in buildings between three and 19 units. This is by far the smallest share of households living in "missing middle" housing in any planning area with a large amount of single-family zoning.

**Figure 4. Share of Land Zoned for Residential by Planning Area**



Source: DC Zoning Regulations of 2016

**Figure 5. Share of Households by Planning Area**



Source: American Community Survey, 2013-2017 5-Year Estimates

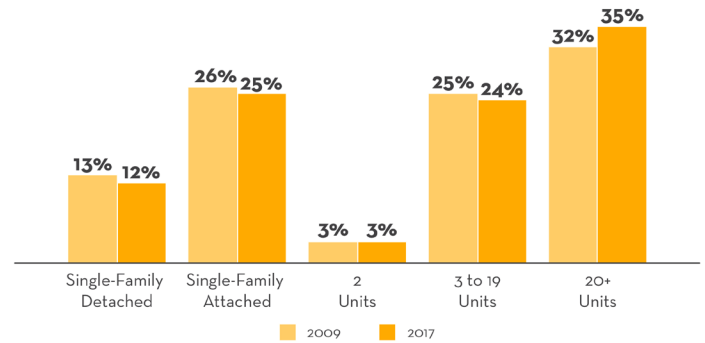


## How does single-family zoning impact housing production in DC?

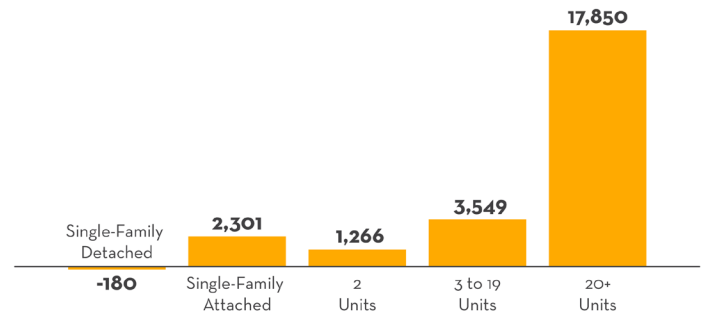
Many of the District's single-family neighborhoods have been built out for decades and have not undergone significant zoning changes in recent years. Therefore, much of the District's rapid population growth over the past two decades has been accommodated in large multifamily buildings, not in single-family housing units. Since 2009, the District has gained 24,571 households, 73 percent of which were in buildings with 20 or more units.<sup>30</sup> Both detached and attached single-family housing represent a smaller share of the District's housing stock than in 2009. This shift is evident when evaluating building permits over time. Since 1980, an average of 190 permits per year have been issued for single-family structures, compared to an average of 1,494 per year for units in buildings with 5 or more units.<sup>31</sup> Since the beginning of the District's population growth in 2006, over 90 percent of new permits issued have been for units in multi-family buildings over 5 units.

**Figure 6. Households by Units in Structure**

Share of Housing Units by Units in Structure, 2009 & 2017

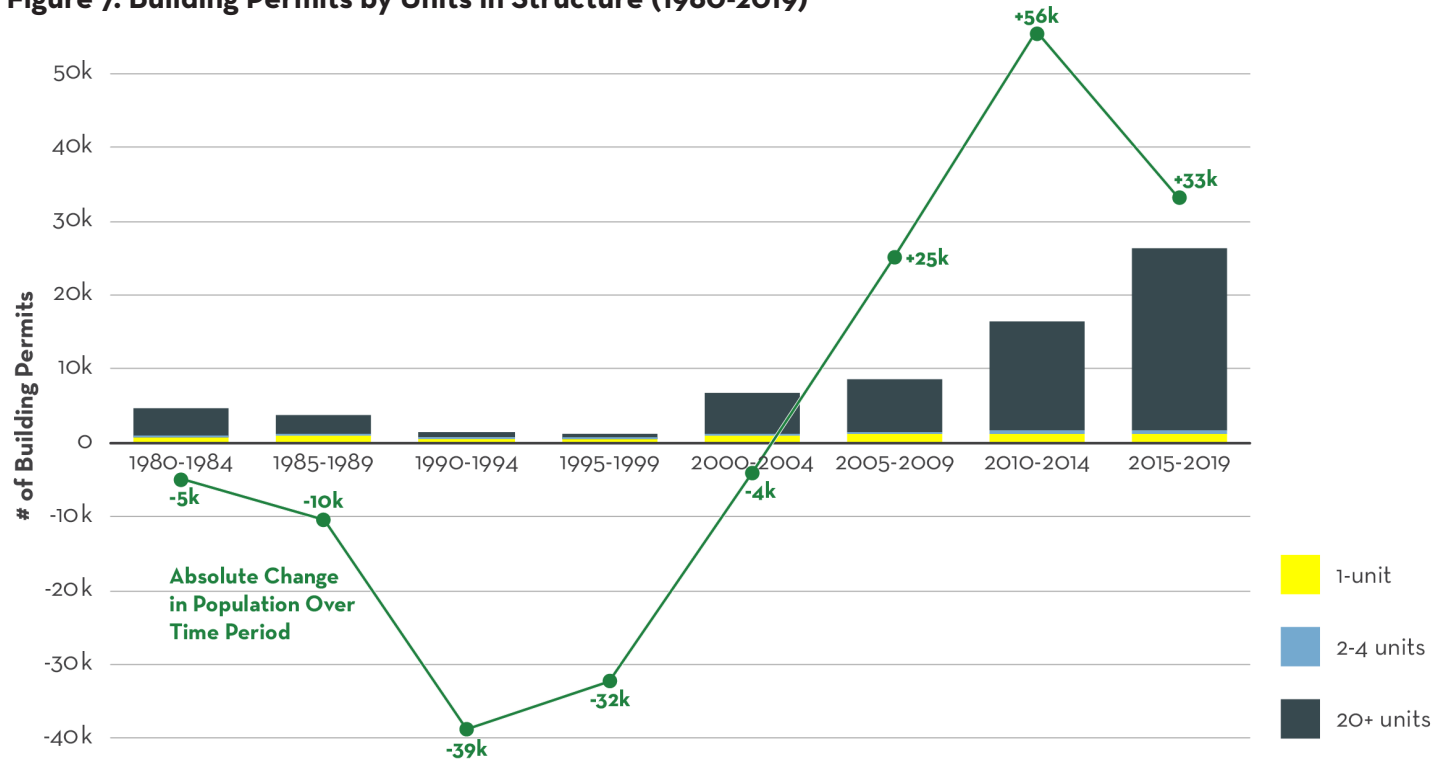


**Change in Housing Units by Units in Structure, 2009-2017**



Source: American Community Survey, 2013-2017 & 2005-2009 5-Year Estimates

**Figure 7. Building Permits by Units in Structure (1980-2019)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Building Permit Survey, U.S. Census Population Estimates.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING THE VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES IN SINGLE-FAMILY ZONES

### **Promote Gentle Density in Single-Family Zones that are High-Cost, High-Opportunity, or Near Transit**

The District can accommodate additional housing options in its single-family zones using a targeted “gentle density” approach that recognizes the need for more housing in high-cost, high-opportunity neighborhoods, as well as near high-capacity transit. Gentle density refers to allowing additional housing density through context-sensitive development. The Mayor’s Comp Plan Proposal incorporates gentle density throughout its policies by encouraging development that respects neighborhood character, while considering neighborhood priorities, such as affordable housing and public facilities (LU-2.1.3: Conserving, Enhancing, and Revitalizing Neighborhoods). In a recent article, researchers at the Brookings Institution found that “the median lot size for single-family detached homes in the District is 5,460 square feet, compared to 1,600 square feet for rowhouses and 4,100 square feet for four- to six-unit multifamily buildings,” which means that many single-family lots in the District are large enough to accommodate additional housing units.<sup>32</sup> The types of housing that could fit within a single-family neighborhood will vary but could include many different types of missing middle housing that are compatible in scale and design with single-family homes. For example, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, residential flats, or accessory apartments can be nearly indistinguishable in a detached single-family neighborhood and a small multi-unit building may not be out of context in an attached single-family neighborhood. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution that can be applied across the District’s single-family neighborhoods.

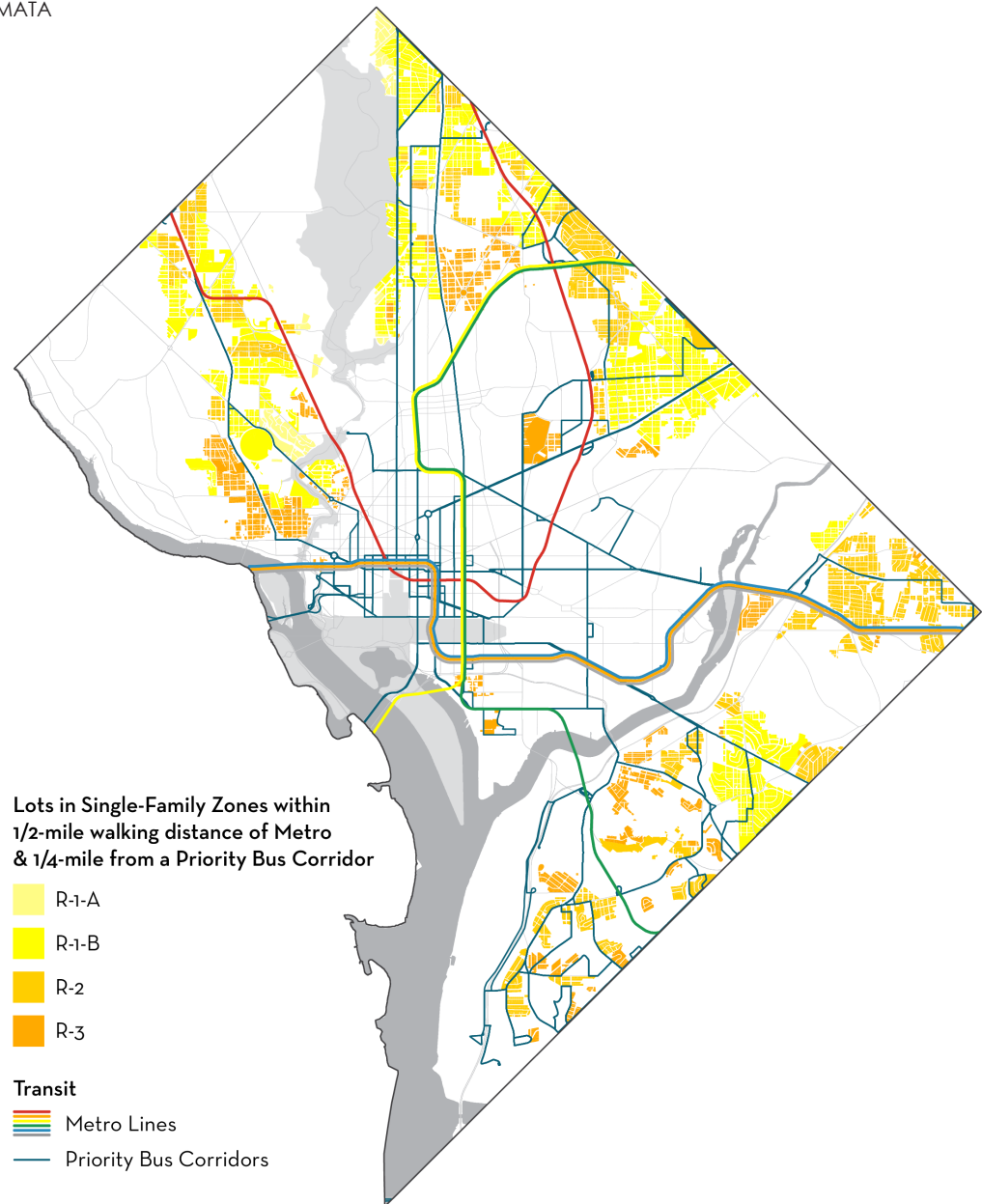
## GOALS OF INCREASING THE VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES IN SINGLE-FAMILY ZONES

Allowing additional housing options in single-family zones has the potential to help the District accomplish several goals:

- Accommodate the District’s projected population growth without displacing residents.
- Create more opportunities for affordable living in high-opportunity neighborhoods.
- Foster a diversity of housing options—across affordability levels, building types, and/or household types—in all parts of the city.
- Address discrimination and practices that have led to segregation by race and economic status.
- Provide income streams and wealth-building opportunities for homeowners willing and able to subdivide their homes or lots to provide additional housing.
- Reduce the environmental burden of the built environment by locating more housing near transit.
- Create more walkable neighborhoods.
- Respect the character and scale of neighborhoods within a changing urban context.
- Promote good design and visual appeal of DC’s neighborhoods.

## Figure 8. Transit-Accessible Lots within Single-Family Zones

Source: DC Office of Planning, WMATA



The Mayor's Comp Plan Proposal and its Future Land Use Map focus on increasing density along high-capacity transit corridors. Gentle density within single-family neighborhoods would be complemented by larger buildings on main streets and corridors. Gentle density in single-family zones can be prioritized in areas that are within access to a high-capacity transit corridor, which is defined as a half-mile from a Metro station and a quarter-mile from a stop on a priority bus corridor. Many single-family neighborhoods in the District about high-capacity transit corridors, in fact, approximately 72 percent of lots within single-family zones are within walking distance from a Metro station or a bus stop on a priority corridor. The Comp Plan

Proposal recognizes the need to promote housing that serves a mix of incomes near transit stations, and states that "developments around transit stations and transit stops should optimize the potential for pedestrian-oriented urban villages...and be designed to help integrate the transit facility with neighborhood character" (LU-1.3: Transit-Oriented and Corridor Development). Implementing gentle density near transit stations along neighborhood main streets and corridors, as well as in single-family neighborhoods, could both provide more transit-accessible housing for all income levels and generate foot traffic to support businesses along major corridors.<sup>33</sup>



Good design can ensure that gentle density fits into the context of single-family neighborhoods. The Comp Plan Proposal repeatedly states that new development should not be “architecturally distinguished and out of character” with its neighborhood and should “avoid overpowering contrasts of scale and height” (LU-2.1: A District of Neighborhoods & UD-2.2: Designing for Vibrant Neighborhoods). The Housing Design and Experience phase of HFEG, which is currently underway at OP, will help the District better understand how residents experience and interact with the built environment in their neighborhoods—taking into account multiple scales and building design.<sup>34</sup> The Comp Plan Proposal also contains policies and actions to ensure that affordable housing is well-designed and integrated into existing neighborhoods. This includes a review of “affordable housing policies, building, and zoning regulations to identify impediments that inhibit affordable housing from achieving high quality design,” as well recommended changes and form-based guidelines (UD-2.2.D: High-Quality Affordable Housing Review & H-1.1.5: Housing Quality). This review should consider whether affordable housing typologies are discouraged in single-family neighborhoods. These analyses and community engagement processes will inform recommendations on how missing middle housing options can be integrated into single-family neighborhoods using gentle density.

### Encourage Accessory Apartments

One way that the District already encourages gentle density in all single-family zones is by allowing accessory apartments, or secondary dwelling units in single-family homes. As a part of the 2016 Zoning Rewrite, accessory apartments were legalized as a matter of right in all R zones. Accessory apartments can be attached to the existing unit, like in a basement or upper-level, or in a separate, detached building. For a single-family home in an R zone to add an accessory apartment, it must meet certain conditions. The regulations require that a home be 2,000 square feet in R-1-A and R-1-B zones and 1,200 square feet in R-2 and R-3 zones to add an accessory unit, and that the accessory unit is no more than 35 percent of the gross floor area of the home. Additionally, the regulations set a maximum occupancy of three people in the accessory unit and require that the owner of the dwelling live in either the principal or accessory unit.<sup>35</sup> If homes within single-family zones meet these and other provisions stipulated within the zoning regulations, then they are permitted to add an accessory apartment, effectively doubling the density of the lot.



Attached Accessory Apartment in Basement of a Rowhouse in a Single-Family Neighborhood



Detached Accessory Apartment in a Single-Family Neighborhood

Source: DC UrbanTurf



Stacked Townhouse (2-floor over 2-floor units)

Source: apartments.com



Even though accessory apartments have been permitted in all R Zones since 2016, fewer than 50 accessory apartments have been approved each year since the regulations were adopted.<sup>36</sup> Incentivizing and encouraging accessory apartments has significant potential to address the District's goal of adding 36,000 new housing units by 2025. In a recent report, the Urban Land Institute explained that if 14 percent of Rock Creek West's 17,700 single-family homes added an accessory apartment, they would meet their target of 2,500 new affordable units.<sup>37</sup> Barriers cited to accessory apartments are not necessarily zoning regulations, but rather construction costs, financing, and permitting processes. DCRA will soon issue new guidance that will make the accessory apartment process easier to navigate. The Mayor's Comp Plan Proposal recommends an assessment of barriers to accessory apartments, as well as "a pilot program to increase the number of affordable housing units through accessory dwelling units" (H-1.5.F: Support of Accessory Dwelling Units). The District should continue to explore ways to alleviate barriers to accessory apartments and work to identify potential financial incentives.

### **Incentivize and Preserve Family-Sized Units**

If gentle density is to be implemented in single-family zones, the District must be careful that it achieves its desired effect. Any action to increase housing options in single-family neighborhoods must be consistent with the Comp Plan Proposal, which includes a policy to "increase the supply of larger family-sized housing units for both ownership and rental by encouraging new and retaining existing single family homes, duplexes, row houses, and three- and four-bedroom market rate and affordable apartments" (H-1.3.1: Housing for Larger Households). Since 2000, the supply of family-sized units has grown 14 percent and the number of households with four or more people fell 2 percent.<sup>38</sup> However, families face economic competition from other types of households for family-sized units, for example singles, couples, or groups of adults that may have higher incomes. This is especially the case in neighborhoods with "public and private amenities such as good schools, safe public spaces, and proximity to transit and quality retail."<sup>39</sup> Allowing additional housing types in single-family areas must be done carefully, to ensure that the limited supply of family-sized units is not put under further pressure.



**8-unit Apartment Building Designed to Look Like Large Single-Family Home/Duplex**

Source: W+W Architecture



**Duplex to Quadplex, Often Designed to Blend in with Single-Family Housing**



**4-8 Unit Small Apartment Building, Compatible with Smaller Scale Single-Family and Larger Scale Apartment Buildings**

However, additional housing can be added to single-family homes while also preserving family-sized units. For example, a single-family home that adds an additional unit(s) and retains a family-sized unit would constitute the preservation of a family-sized unit. If done well, providing for more housing options in single-family areas may also decrease competition for family-sized units by creating smaller units that are attractive to smaller households.

The Comp Plan Proposal recommends two actions specifically focusing on family-sized units. First, research regarding land use tools and techniques that can be used to encourage the production and retention of multi-family, family-sized units (H-1.3.B: Create Tools for the Production and Retention of Larger Family-Sized Units in Multi-Family Housing). Second, as the majority of the capacity of new family-sized units in the District is in multifamily buildings, the Comp Plan Proposal recommends design guidelines for family-sized units in higher-density housing (UD-2.4.A: Design Guidelines for Higher-Density, Family-Sized Housing). Both actions complement recommendations from the recent "Assessment of the Need for Large Units" prepared for the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning & Economic Development (DMPED), including conducting a cost analysis to determine the appropriate portfolio of incentives to enable the production of family-sized units.<sup>40</sup>

## WHAT OTHER JURISDICTIONS HAVE DONE TO INCREASE THE VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES IN SINGLE-FAMILY ZONES

### Changes to Single-Family Zoning

In the past two years, several cities and states have taken steps to increase the variety of housing in single-family neighborhoods. In all cases, this involved making zoning changes to allow for missing middle housing in single-family zones, either broadly or in targeted areas. Most notably, Minneapolis and Oregon have both passed laws that require all single-family zones to accommodate more housing. Minneapolis has received national attention for allowing duplexes and triplexes in all single-family zones,<sup>41</sup> which previously comprised 70 percent of the city's residential land.<sup>42</sup> Incorporated into a Comp Plan rewrite, the reason that Minneapolis cited for this change stemmed from the connection between single-family zoning, segregation, and a lack of affordable housing.<sup>43</sup> In

July 2019, Oregon passed a law requires that cities with 10,000 or more residents to allow duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and cottage clusters in single-family zones. The action was in part intended to alleviate development pressures on the state's urban growth boundaries.<sup>44</sup> In late 2019 and early 2020, Virginia and Nebraska both proposed similar bills, which would allow up to duplexes and up to quadplexes in all single-family zones, respectively.<sup>45</sup> Both states cited housing affordability concerns, and Nebraska's bill emphasizes the ability of additional density to create the conditions for transit and walkability.<sup>46</sup>

The Office of Planning does not recommend a citywide change of what is permitted under single-family zoning at this time, as this action would have to be considered in the context of a Comprehensive Plan rewrite. However, several other jurisdictions are taking a more targeted approach to increasing housing in single-family zones that prioritizes high-cost, high-opportunity neighborhoods, and areas near high-capacity transit. In March 2019, Seattle changed zoning in 6 percent of its single-family neighborhoods to allow for more housing in these high-cost areas and help to address development pressures and displacement in more vulnerable communities.<sup>47</sup> Previously, 75 percent of residential land in Seattle was zoned for single-family.<sup>48</sup> Seattle's motivation for this change was the affordable housing crisis and inequitable economic outcomes across different populations in the city. Two proposed bills, in California and Maryland, focus on making changes to single-family zones based on their proximity to transit and opportunity. California's SB 50 proposed allowing up to four-unit buildings in transit- and job-rich areas, but the bill failed to pass out of the senate in January 2020.<sup>49</sup> A bill in Maryland proposes that areas "with relatively high incomes, concentration of jobs, or access to public transit" permit at least one middle-housing option and allow duplexes by right in single-family zones.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, the bill would require "local governments to ensure that new development does not lead to any net loss of naturally occurring affordable housing."<sup>51</sup>

The Office of Planning recommends taking a similar approach to increasing housing options in single-family zones that focuses on high-opportunity, high-cost neighborhoods and neighborhoods near high-capacity transit, while working to create high-opportunity areas in those single-family neighborhoods



that have been historically underserved. OP recommends that the consideration of gentle density in single-family neighborhoods occur through the community planning and engagement process. This will allow the District to consider how missing middle housing options can fit within the design of a neighborhood to enhance resident experience. Additionally, citywide changes to the allowable density in single-family zones would likely create development pressures in areas with relatively inexpensive land and more available land. This would likely encourage density and increase land values in planning areas that have already met or are close to their affordable housing targets. Taking a targeted approach would enable the District consider displacement risks and help residents to benefit from potential economic opportunities. Furthermore, a targeted approach would enable the continued coordination between planning for new housing and planning for new facilities and infrastructure.

### **Easing Requirements for Accessory Apartments**

There are several examples of jurisdictions that have improved their accessory apartment regulations to considerable success. In the fall of 2019, California passed AB 68, which permits two accessory dwelling units, and enables all single-family lots in the state to accommodate three dwelling units. California has also eliminated owner-occupancy requirements for accessory apartments, prohibited parking requirements for accessory apartments within a half mile of transit, limited utility connection fees, and reduced permitting time.<sup>52</sup> After these changes, the permits for accessory units in Los Angeles increased by a factor of 30.<sup>53</sup> In 2019, Seattle adopted a new law to allow two accessory apartments per lot and eliminate parking and owner-occupancy requirements. Additionally, the city limited the size of new homes to 2,500 square feet so that there is a greater incentive to add accessory apartments rather than demolish older homes.<sup>54</sup> As the District evaluates the accessory apartment process, issues guidance on permitting, and establishes its accessory apartment pilot program, it should consider what other jurisdictions have done to incentivize greater construction of accessory apartments.

## **THE IMPLICATIONS ON AFFORDABILITY, EQUITY, & THE ENVIRONMENT OF ALLOWING A VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES IN SINGLE-FAMILY ZONES**

Increasing missing middle housing within single-family zones will have significant equity, affordability, and environmental impacts. Equity and housing affordability are inextricably linked, because where a person can afford to live impacts their access to opportunity. The District's legacy of discriminatory and exclusionary land use decisions has contributed to persistent racial and economic segregation. As a result, access to opportunity varies considerably across different areas of the District, including across different single-family zones. Therefore, single-family neighborhoods need to be examined not as a singular neighborhood type, but in the context of their area. Allowing for additional housing types in high-opportunity, high-cost single-family neighborhoods and single-family neighborhoods near high-capacity transit will begin to address inequity, provide additional affordable housing options, and connect more residents with opportunity. Furthermore, if homeowners in single-family zones choose to add additional housing to their lot, it could provide them with an income stream that may enable them to remain in their homes and build wealth. From an environmental perspective, allowing more housing in single-family zones can help to reduce the environmental burden of the built environment, by promoting transit usage and encouraging housing types with a smaller energy footprint.

### **Defining "Equity"**

The Framework Element of the Comprehensive Plan sets forth a vision for an equitable city, stating that:

*"Equity exists where all people share equal rights, access, choice, opportunities, and outcomes, regardless of characteristics such as race, class, or gender."*

It also suggests that equity is realized through targeted actions and investments to improve outcomes for those who face the worst health, social, and economic challenges.

The Framework also provides a vision for racial equity in particular, stating that:

*"The District achieves racial equity when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live or their socioeconomic status; and when race divides no longer exist between people of color and their white counterparts."*

## Affordability & Single-Family Zoning in DC

### Affordability & Housing Supply

The Mayor's Comp Plan Proposal establishes affordable housing production and preservation as a major civic priority and sets a target of 15 percent of affordable units in each planning area by 2050 (H-1.1: Expanding Housing Supply & H-1.2: Ensuring Housing Affordability). Over one-third of District residents are burdened or severely burdened by housing costs, and residents must set aside a growing share of their income for housing and utilities (H-500.11). Since 2010, single-family home prices have risen at about 7.3 percent per year while the median family income grew by 1.8 percent per year—although declining interest rates during that time period have contributed to rising home prices and increased purchasing power (H-500.6 & H-500.9). While single-family homes tend to be less expensive on a per-square-foot basis, they require more land and living area than multifamily units, which means they tend to be more expensive overall. Single-family zoning restricts the supply of housing in a land-constrained city like the District. Once a single-family home is built on a lot, there are limited options to continue to add housing on that lot. At the same time, as the District's population increases, the demand for housing is increasing, thereby increasing the cost of the limited supply of single-family homes even further.

### Affordability of Family-Sized Units

Most of the District's family-sized units are in single-family homes, and approximately two-thirds of the District's single-family homes are inhabited by family households.<sup>55</sup> A recent study conducted by the Urban Institute and the Coalition for Nonprofit Housing & Economic Development for DMPED found that family-sized units are becoming increasingly unaffordable for households making less than 50 percent of the median family income (MFI). The supply of affordable family-sized units is not only constrained, but the "affordability of large units varies widely based on location."<sup>56</sup> The report found that of the single-family homes and condominiums with three or more bedrooms that sold in 2017 in the District, 13 percent were affordable to a first-time homebuyer at 80 percent MFI (\$88,240 in 2017) and only 1 percent were affordable to a first-time homebuyer at 50 percent MFI (\$55,150 in 2017). Of the family-sized units sold that were affordable at 80 percent MFI, 89 percent were in Wards 7 and 8; none were in Wards 1, 2, or 3; and there were one each in

Wards 5 and 6. At the same time, about 64 percent of family-sized units for rent that are affordable to households making below 30 percent MFI are in Wards 7 and 8, while 1 percent are in Wards 2 and 3. Therefore, most of the for-sale or rental family-sized units available to low-income households are in the Far Northeast & Southeast and Far Southeast & Southwest planning areas.

### How Allowing Additional Housing Types in Single-Family Zones Would Impact Affordability

Permitting missing middle housing options in single-family zones that are high-opportunity, high-cost, or near high-capacity transit using a gentle density approach will reduce housing price pressure and will help the District to meet its goal of 36,000 new housing units. In a recent study on the concept of "supply skepticism," or the disbelief that adding to housing supply decreases housing costs, researchers noted that "the preponderance of evidence suggests that easing barriers to new construction will moderate price increases and therefore make housing more affordable to low and moderate income families."<sup>57</sup> Missing middle housing options tend to be more affordable for low and moderate income households for several reasons. First, as researchers at the Brookings Institution have noted, allowing gentle density in single-family neighborhoods will contribute to affordability simply because "the cost of the most expensive factor—land—is spread across more homes."<sup>58</sup> Second, missing middle housing tends to be relatively low-rise and "stick-built," meaning that it uses wood-frame construction, rather than more expensive materials such as concrete and steel that are needed in the construction of larger apartment buildings.<sup>59</sup> Allowing additional housing supply in single-family neighborhoods through gentle density will not address the issue of housing affordability alone. However, considering these zones as separate from the rest of the District and not required to accommodate an equitable share of population growth will exacerbate housing affordability and equity issues.

Implementing gentle density in single-family zones must be done in a way that preserves existing family-sized units and encourages the construction of new family-sized units. Single-family lots can accommodate



new housing units while preserving an existing family-sized unit. For example, a single-family home can add an accessory apartment, or a larger single-family home can be subdivided into two duplexes with three bedrooms. In fact, if a homeowner chooses to add housing units to their single-family home, that would provide them with an income stream and potentially enable them to remain in their home and build wealth. Furthermore, targeting efforts to increase affordable housing in single-family neighborhoods along high-capacity transit corridors will decrease the transportation cost burden on low- and moderate-income households, allowing them to access employment, education, and other opportunities across the District.

While adding to housing supply in single-family neighborhoods would moderate increases in housing costs, it is important that the District understand the circumstances in which it would be economically feasible to add housing to a single-family lot. As researchers at the Brookings Institution have noted, “the homes most attractive for redevelopment are older structures that are in poor physical condition and located on relatively large lots in expensive neighborhoods.”<sup>60</sup> The District should understand where gentle density is possible and analyze the overall potential for additional housing units. This analysis should consider the variety of single-family neighborhoods in all areas of the city and include community engagement opportunities.

## **Equity & Single-Family Zoning in DC**

### **Segregation in Single-Family Neighborhoods**

The District, like many American cities, has a history of using zoning and legal and financing tools as implements of racial exclusion and segregation. Mapping Segregation, a local research project, explains that “racialized lending policies worked in concert with restrictive deed covenants and exclusionary zoning both to concentrate white wealth and to shrink black access to land and capital.”<sup>61</sup> Federal policy, through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), greatly contributed to the “[institutionalization] of racial exclusivity as a criterion for mortgage lending.”<sup>62</sup> In fact, the 1937 FHA map that grades sections of the District bears a strong resemblance to the current single-family zoning map. Nearly all the District’s detached single-family zones were graded A, B, or C on this map. These three grades are described as being “protected” and “restricted”

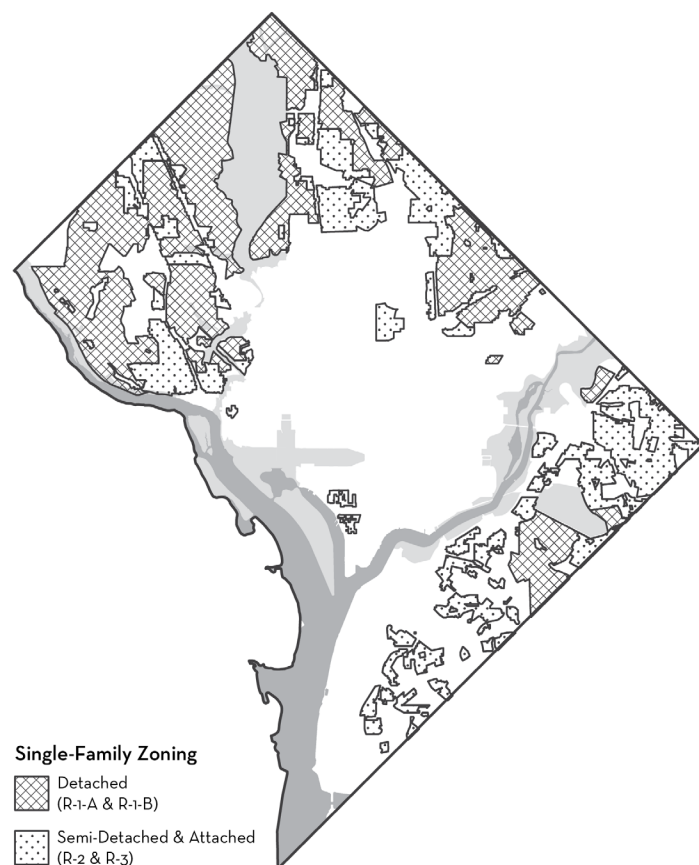
from “adverse influences,” while other areas are described as being for the occupancy of Black residents.<sup>63</sup> While discriminatory lending and restrictive covenants are now illegal, zoning has continued to ensure that certain areas are unavailable to anyone who cannot afford a single-family home. Like many single-family neighborhoods in Northwest DC, Rock Creek West historically used deed restrictions against Black and Jewish residents and even though these are no longer in effect, the neighborhood “remains the city’s wealthiest and most exclusive area with the highest home prices and barriers to entry.”<sup>64</sup>

Although segregation in the District has declined in recent years, it persists in many parts of the city. Planning areas with a large share of single-family zoned land tend to be more segregated. Far Northeast & Southeast and Far Southeast & Southwest both have over 90 percent Black residents and a significant amount of single-family zoning. Rock Creek West is the planning area with the highest share of White residents in the city and it has the highest share of single-family zoned land.<sup>65</sup>

### **Opportunity in Single-Family Neighborhoods**

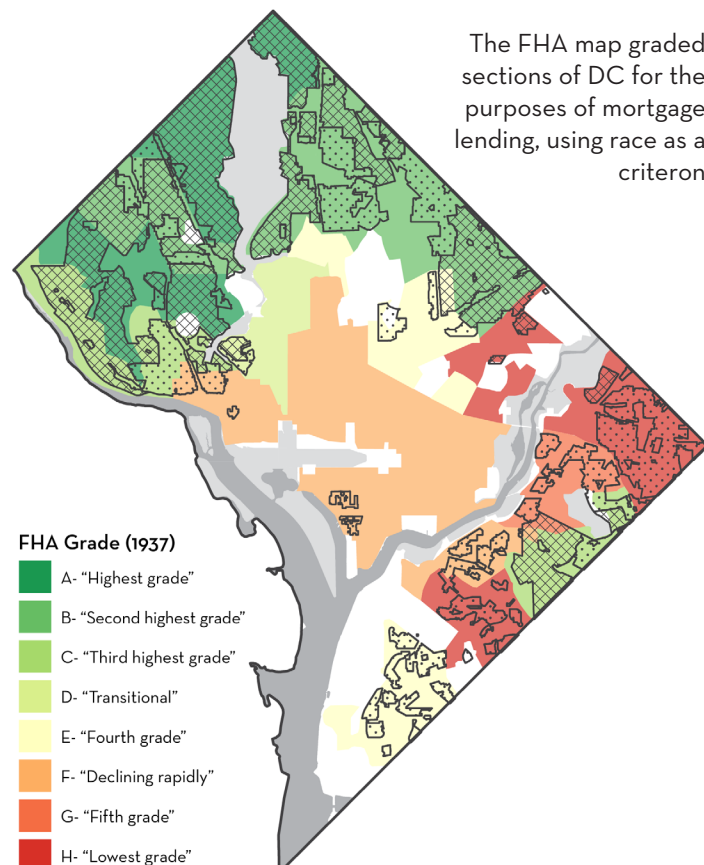
Exclusionary and discriminatory land use, zoning, and housing policies have contributed to significant disparities in the District. Where you live—and can afford to live—matters because “neighborhoods differ by the diversity and quality of the amenities they provide...[and] when neighborhoods have higher economic opportunities, less economic and racial segregation, and improved built environments, they foster improved physical and mental health for both adults and children.”<sup>66</sup> The Housing Equity Report explains that high-cost, high-opportunity areas of the District need additional affordable housing, because when these areas lack affordable housing “low-income residents are excluded from important social and economic opportunities.”<sup>67</sup> In the 2018 Health Equity Report, DC Health evaluated the key drivers of community health, including education, employment, income, housing, transportation, food environment, medical care, outdoor environment, and community safety—these factors are interrelated and often have a compounding effect.<sup>68</sup> Across indicators from life expectancy to unemployment rate, many outcomes follow patterns of racial and economic segregation, regardless of an area’s amount of single-family zoning.

**Figure 9.**  
**Single Family Zoning in the District**



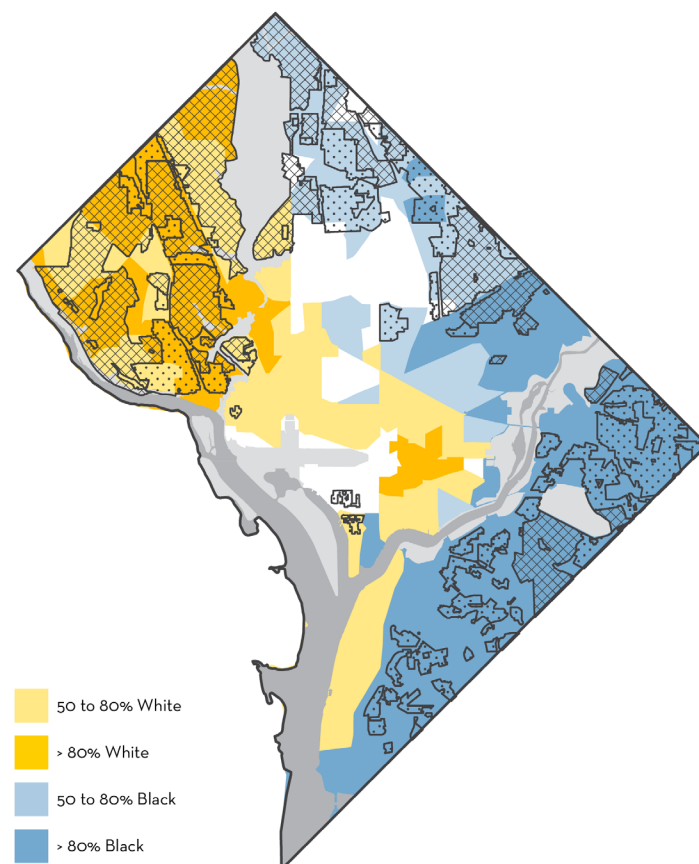
Source: DC Zoning Regulations

**1937 Federal Housing Administration Map**



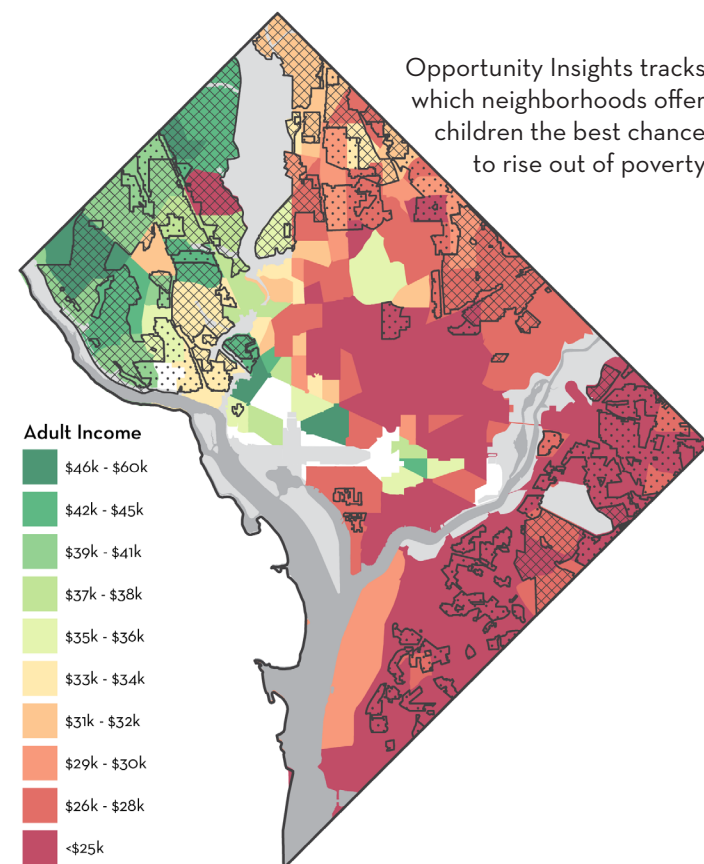
Source: DC Policy Center, FHA, Prologue DC, National Archives

**Majority White & Majority Black Census Tracts**



Source: American Community Survey 2013-2017 5-Year Estimates

**Adult Income for Children in Low-Income Households**



Source: [opportunityatlas.org](http://opportunityatlas.org)

Another lens on equity is examining the geography of economic opportunity as it relates to zoning. Opportunity Insights is an organization that tracks children and how where they live impacts their access to opportunity and their ability to rise out of poverty. In the District, the adult earning potential for children whose parents make about \$27,000 per year or less is significantly higher for children living in Rock Creek West and parts of Near Northwest that are zoned for single-family than other areas of the city.<sup>69</sup> In Far Northeast & Southeast, adult earning potential ranges from \$21,000 to \$28,000, regardless of whether children are residing in one of the planning area's single-family zones. In Rock Creek West, children in the same income bracket have an adult earning potential ranging from \$42,000 to \$52,000, or about twice as much as the children in Far Northeast & Southeast.

The relationship between race, wealth, and homeownership in the District demonstrates how single-family zoning can limit access to economic opportunity. The overall share of owner-occupied housing units in the District is 42 percent, but in single-family units that share jumps to 70 percent and further to 78 percent in single-family detached units.<sup>70</sup> The planning areas with the most single-family detached zoning also have some of the highest rates of homeownership, Rock Creek West (56.4 percent), Rock Creek East (56.2 percent), and Upper Northeast (34 percent).<sup>71</sup> At the same time, the rate of homeownership in the District is higher for White residents than Black residents, at 47 percent and 36 percent, respectively.<sup>72</sup> This is one of the narrower gaps between the share of White and Black homeownership in the nation; however, a recent Urban Institute study found that the typical home value in the District is significantly lower for Black households compared to White and Latino households.<sup>73</sup> The same study found that White households in the District have a net worth 81 times greater than that of Black households. This wealth gap is attributable to centuries of deliberate policy choices, including limiting housing options through redlining and restricted covenants. Additionally, federal policies and funding priorities such as urban renewal and highway construction in Southwest DC displaced tens of thousands of the District's Black residents with little compensation.<sup>74</sup> The compounded effect of segregated neighborhoods, restricted opportunities for homeownership, and lower home valuations has been a restricted capacity for the District's Black households to build wealth over time. Single-family neighborhoods

that remain segregated are one factor responsible for the significant wealth gap that exists between the District's White and Black households.

#### **How Allowing Additional Housing Types in Single-Family Zones Would Impact Equity**

Segregation and inequities in the District are not exclusively the product of zoning so allowing for additional housing in single-family zones will not solve the legacy of centuries of racial discrimination and exclusion. However, ensuring that certain neighborhoods are not completely closed-off to different types of housing is an important step in that process. Diversifying the cost of housing available in high-opportunity, high-cost single-family neighborhoods and single-family neighborhoods near transit will provide more options for the District's homeowners and renters, and allow them to access amenities, such as employment opportunities, high performing schools, grocery stores, parks, and accessible public transit, in those neighborhoods.

The Comp Plan Proposal includes several policies that encourage the development of market rate and affordable housing in all planning areas, with an emphasis on high-cost and high-opportunity neighborhoods. The intent of these policies is to make high-cost areas "more inclusive" and "to distribute mixed-income housing more equitably across the entire District" (H-1.1.8: Production of Housing in High-Cost Areas & H-1.2: Ensuring Housing Affordability). The equity impact of gentle density in single-family zones would be different across planning areas, because the demographic and economic conditions of planning areas that have single-family zoning vary significantly. In planning areas that currently have a high concentration of affordable housing and limited amenities, the District is committed to making "investments to increase opportunity...to allow both current and future residents to thrive."<sup>75</sup> An action in the Comp Plan Proposal suggests a "periodic publication of social and economic neighborhood indicators for the purpose of targeting neighborhood investments, particularly for the purposes of achieving neighborhood diversity and fair housing" (LU-2.1.E: Study of Neighborhood Indicators). As the District continues its efforts to add market rate and affordable housing units in all planning areas, it should use this reporting process to track how housing opportunities impact outcomes.



## The Environmental Impact of Single-Family Zoning

The Mayor's Comp Plan Proposal recognizes "reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and adapting to climate change" as critical issues facing the District (E-600.2). In light of this goal, it is worth considering the environmental impact of different housing types. Research has demonstrated that detached single-family homes are the most resource intensive type of housing due to energy usage and transportation choices. Approximately 75 percent of the District's greenhouse gas emissions come from buildings.<sup>76</sup> Nationally, people living in detached single-family homes consume "significantly more energy per household—and per person—than people living in any other type of structure."<sup>77</sup> Over half of energy use in homes is for heating and cooling, which requires more energy in detached single-family homes both because they are larger and because apartments tend to benefit from the insulating effects of shared walls. Largely due to heating and cooling, "the average household living in a single-family detached home consumed nearly three times more energy than a household living in an apartment building that has five or more apartments."<sup>78</sup> This is a concern not only for environmental reasons, but it also means that the energy costs of single-family homes are higher.

Transportation is the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the District, at 21 percent.<sup>79</sup> National research shows that single-family households tend to take more trips by car than multifamily households, thereby generating more transportation emissions per household.<sup>80</sup> The reason for this is that single-family homes are more land intensive and tend to be more spread out, and therefore people must travel further to reach destinations. Lower population density in single-family neighborhoods means that they typically do not have enough residents to support public transit. In fact, households living in single-family detached homes in the District have the highest rates of car ownership by far, with 93 percent owning at least one car.<sup>81</sup> However, nearly three quarters of lots within single-family zones are within walking distance of a Metro station or a priority bus corridor.

## How Allowing Additional Housing Types in Single-Family Zones Would Impact the Environment

Allowing single-family zones to accommodate additional housing can decrease energy usage per household if new units are attached and/or have a smaller square footage than the previous single-family home. The Sustainable DC 2.0 plan recommends an energy audit of all buildings to determine how much energy they use and what savings can be made. This audit will help the District to better understand energy usage for different housing typologies at the local level, including single-family homes and multifamily buildings. Furthermore, Sustainable DC 2.0 and the Comp Plan Proposal recognize that energy costs contribute to housing costs and therefore, "the District policies and programs will prioritize energy and water efficiency and solar energy" to cut energy costs for low- and moderate-income households (E-3.2.1: Carbon Neutrality, E-3.2.5: Reducing Home Heating and Cooling Costs, & Sustainable DC 2.0 BE1.1).

The Mayor's Comp Plan Proposal and Sustainable DC 2.0 both recommend increasing density around high-capacity transit corridors. Locating more housing near transit in single-family zones has the potential to encourage transit ridership and decrease transit emissions. The District's regional partners have also emphasized transit accessibility in planning for housing opportunities. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) has set a regional housing target of 320,000 new housing units by 2030, of which the District's 36,000 goal is a part. Both MWCOG's housing targets and the Transportation Planning Board (TPB)'s Visualize 2045 plan setting a target that at least 75 percent of new housing should be in Activity Centers or near high-capacity transit.<sup>82</sup> Permitting gentle density in single-family neighborhoods along high-capacity transit can help to meet this regional-level target.



## CONCLUSION

This report recommends that the District pursue gentle density in single-family zones in a targeted manner that prioritizes neighborhoods that are high-opportunity, high-cost, or near high-capacity transit. An important element of this recommendation is ensuring that the District maintains and grows a supply of family-sized units as land uses change from single-family to multifamily.

There are many potential affordability, equity, and environmental benefits of allowing additional housing options in single-family zones. If the District is to accommodate 36,000 new housing units and 12,000 affordable units between 2019 and 2025, all neighborhoods of the city will have to play a part. Permitting and incentivizing a diversity of housing in single-family zones would provide options for households with different needs and at different affordability levels. These units could provide more affordable options for families, or smaller options for young singles and

couples or retirees who are looking to downsize within their neighborhood. In addition to the housing itself, increasing access to high-opportunity neighborhoods will increase access to what those neighborhoods have to offer, such as transit and employment and educational opportunities. Allowing additional housing in single-family zones would serve to moderate increases in housing costs and begin to address discriminatory land use policies that have resulted in segregation by race and economic status. Furthermore, gentle density could have a beneficial environmental impact, by encouraging household types that use less energy and increasing households within access to transit. There are many factors beyond single-family zoning that have contributed to the state of the District's housing market. However, fostering a variety of housing types and affordability levels in neighborhoods across the city is an important first step in addressing affordability, equity, and environmental concerns.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### TO INCREASE THE VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES IN SINGLE-FAMILY ZONES:

- 1. Use gentle density, or context-sensitive design that respects neighborhood character, to produce new housing types and more housing in single-family neighborhoods. (LU-2.1, H-1.1, & H-1.2)**
  - a. As a part of the Housing Design and Experience analysis, develop recommendations to inform how missing middle housing options can be integrated into single-family neighborhoods. (UD-2.2)
  - b. As a part of the review of regulatory barriers to affordable housing in the construction and zoning regulations, specifically consider barriers to affordable housing in single-family zones. (UD-2.2.D & H-1.1.5).
  - c. Take a tailored approach to incorporating gentle density into single-family neighborhoods, by prioritizing high-opportunity, high-cost areas and areas near high-capacity transit corridors. (LU-1.3)
  - d. Determine the feasibility and appropriateness of gentle density within community planning and engagement processes.
- 2. Continue to evaluate barriers and potential incentives to accessory apartments in all single-family zones. Take into consideration how other jurisdictions have encouraged accessory apartments. (H-1.5F).**
- 3. Ensure that any action taken to encourage additional housing in single-family zones considers the preservation and production of large or family-sized housing units. This will require the preservation of existing single-family, large units and the construction of additional multifamily, large units. (H-1.3.1)**
  - a. Research tools to encourage production and retention of family-sized units. (H-1.3.B)
  - b. Create design guidelines for higher-density family-sized housing. (UD-2.4.A)
- 4. In the Comprehensive Plan rewrite, evaluate the role of the Future Land Use Map and Generalized Policy Map, including their granularity to distinguish them from parcel-level zoning maps.**

### TO ASSESS THE IMPLICATIONS ON AFFORDABILITY, EQUITY, & THE ENVIRONMENT:

- 5. Track the impact of housing opportunities on social and economic outcomes across the District. (LU-2.1.E)**
- 6. Incorporate single-family and multifamily homes into the Sustainable DC 2.0 energy audit. Assess the energy usage of different housing types to determine possible energy and cost savings. (E-3.2.1 & 3.2.5, Sustainable DC 2.0 - BE3.5)**

## ENDNOTES

- 1 District of Columbia Comprehensive Plan Act, Framework Element, October 2019.
- 2 "An Assessment of the Need for Large Units in the District of Columbia," prepared by Peter A. Tatian and Leah Hendey, Urban Institute and Scott Bruton, Coalition for Nonprofit Housing & Economic Development, prepared for District of Columbia, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning & Economic Development.  
[dmped.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dmped/publication/attachments/Formatted%20FSU%20Study\\_FINAL%206-24\\_1.pdf](https://dmped.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dmped/publication/attachments/Formatted%20FSU%20Study_FINAL%206-24_1.pdf)
- 3 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Public Use Microdata Sample, 2013-2017.
- 4 DC Zoning Regulations & U.S. Census Building Permit Survey.
- 5 2006 Comprehensive Plan, Framework Element, 2-18.
- 6 Urban housing. A summary of real property inventories conducted as work projects, 1934- 1936; Housing Market Analysis, Washington, D.C., July 1937, Federal Housing Administration, Division of Economics and Statistics, August 5, 1937, pp. 19-26. (Research and Statistics Division, Records Relating to Housing Market Analyses, 1935-42, Box 17, RG 31, National Archives) via Sarah Shoenfeld, "Mapping Segregation in D.C.," D.C. Policy Center, April 23, 2019, [dcpolicycenter.org/publications/mapping-segregation-fha](https://dcpolicycenter.org/publications/mapping-segregation-fha).
- 7 Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2017).
- 8 Undesign the Redline Interactive Exhibit, designing the WE, at Continuing Conversations on Housing: How Land Use Policies Impact Housing Opportunity Across the District, February 8, 2020, [projects.designingthewe.com](https://projects.designingthewe.com).
- 9 Comprehensive Plan, Framework Element, 225.4.
- 10 Title 11 – Zoning, Subtitle D – Residential House (R) Zones, Chapter 1, General Provisions, 100.1 to 100.2.
- 11 Title 11 – Zoning, Subtitle D – Residential House (R) Zones, Chapter 3, Purpose and Intent, 300.1 to 300.7.
- 12 Zoning Commission for the District of Columbia, Case No. 18-16, Text and Map Amendments to Change Certain Zone Names, [app.dcoz.dc.gov/Content/Search/ViewCaseReport.aspx?case\\_id=18-16](https://app.dcoz.dc.gov/Content/Search/ViewCaseReport.aspx?case_id=18-16). Corresponding zones are taken from this amendment which proposes renaming R zones so that they are consistent with the R-1-A, R-1-B, R-2, and R-3 categories.
- 13 Comprehensive Plan, Framework Element, 227.4.
- 14 Comprehensive Plan, Framework Element, 227.6.
- 15 Title 11 – Zoning, Subtitle D Residential House (R) Zones, Chapter 3, Purpose and Intent, 300.1 and 300.4.
- 16 Title 11 – Zoning, Subtitle D Residential House (R) Zones, Chapter 3, Purpose and Intent, 300.7.
- 17 Title 11 – Zoning, Subtitle D Residential House (R) Zones, Chapter 3, Purpose and Intent, 302.1.
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