Purpose

Fast-paced population growth, limited availability of developable tracts, and a renewed preference for in-town living has led to a housing availability and affordability challenge for Durham. Over time, zoning rules have restricted development in many neighborhoods almost exclusively to single-family dwellings, eliminating many of the small-scale and often more affordable options that once existed.

Expanding Housing Choices is a project that explores ways to eliminate barriers and expand the choices people have when it comes to housing options.

One approach is to review and amend the zoning ordinance (local rules that regulate different aspects of land use and development), officially named the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). Amending the UDO is a legislative process called a Text Amendment.

Following the direction of the City Council and Board of County Commissioners, the Planning Department has created a Discussion Draft, or a menu of proposals for input and feedback. The proposals are aimed at allowing a wider range of housing options for new neighborhoods or that can be integrated contextually into existing neighborhoods.

Project Objectives

Expand the menu of housing types to meet a diverse set of needs.

Over the long-term, potentially help stabilize housing prices by expanding the supply of housing to keep pace with the rate of population and job growth.

Create opportunity for creative infill, particularly where demand for housing is high.

Focus on small scale housing.

Balance densification with context-sensitive development.

Streamline processes by making choices allowable without special approvals.

Proposals

Infill Standards
Modify residential infill standards to promote more context-sensitive development while not prohibiting other proposals.

Accessory Dwelling Units
Modify UDO regulations to increase viability for more properties.

Duplexes
Allow duplexes as a housing type in more locations, especially within the Urban Tier.

Lot Dimensions and Density
Adjust lot dimensional standards to allow more opportunities for small-scale infill.

Small House/Small Lot
Create a new housing type/lot dimensional standard to accommodate small houses, including versions for a Small House Pocket Neighborhood (clusters of small homes built around a common green space) and Small Flag Lots.

Trade-offs with These Proposals

The draft proposals presented for discussion do not come without potential impacts and trade-offs regarding other equally important issues. As you’ll see in the posters and handouts, staff has attempted to mitigate some of these impacts.

- Impact to the tree canopy
- More impervious surface
- Parking congestion
- Teardowns
- Change to neighborhood character or “feel”

Part of a Toolbox of Approaches

Zoning regulations can play a part in the affordability and attainability of housing, but other strategies need to be employed, and are being explored by the City and County including, but not limited to:

- Utilization of City and County properties
- Programs addressing evictions
- Homeowner education focusing on rights and understanding property value
- Preservation of currently affordable housing
- Accessory dwelling unit how-to manual
- Re-consideration of certain City fees

Issues Outside of Governmental Control

The City and County can control certain aspects of development, but other aspects are beyond control (or at best very limited).

- Location desirability
- Cost of land
- Cost of labor
- Cost of materials
- Regulation of aesthetic design of single family and two-family structures (limited exceptions that include historic districts)