

ATTAINABLE HOUSING STRATEGIES: BRIEFING



Attainable Housing Strategies

Description

This briefing will provide an overview of work to date on the Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative, including recommendations made by the prior Planning Board in 2021.

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SUMMARY

- On March 4, 2021, the Montgomery County Council directed Montgomery Planning to review and analyze housing options in the county.
- To explore these housing options and to provide a comprehensive overview of housing options in the county, Montgomery Planning launched the [Attainable Housing Strategies](#) (AHS), an initiative aimed at evaluating and refining various proposals to spur the development of more diverse types of housing, including Missing Middle Housing, in Montgomery County.

INFORMATION

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BACKGROUND

In March 2021, the Montgomery County Council requested that the Montgomery County Planning Department undertake an effort to consider zoning reforms to allow opportunities for more diverse housing types in the county, to provide opportunities for public input, and to send recommended zoning modifications to the Council. Subsequently, through the Attainable Housing Strategies initiative (AHS), the Montgomery County Planning Department studied, reviewed, and refined various housing policy options. The draft report (Attachment A) represents the culmination of this effort by Montgomery Planning and a previous Planning Board in 2021. It provides the findings of the analyses and presents the recommendations of the Planning Board, which has also been informed by an extensive stakeholder feedback effort.

As requested by the Council, the draft report identifies zoning reforms that will allow and encourage the creation of a more diverse range of housing typologies across the county. The recommendations are intended to provide a menu of options for the Council to consider, which can be implemented by introducing and adopting relevant portions of the corresponding zoning modifications.

The initiative was put on hold in 2022 to allow the Planning Department and Planning Board to focus on completing *Thrive Montgomery 2050*. Today’s briefing will focus on reenergizing the initiative. Planning Staff will share work to date completed on the initiative, the recommendations made by the prior Planning Board, as well as discuss next steps with the Planning Board.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The prior Planning Board held six work sessions in 2021 that focused on the following elements and recommendations regarding Attainable Housing Strategies:

[AHS Goals and Scales](#)

- AHS Initiative Goals:** While the overarching purpose of the AHS initiative is to increase the diversity of housing options across Montgomery County, the Planning Board endorsed the following specific goals for the initiative:
 - Increase opportunities to meet the county’s diverse housing supply needs and obligations, as well as the county’s economic development objectives.
 - Unravel the exclusionary aspects of the county’s single-family residential zones to diversify the county’s communities by diversifying the county’s housing stock.
 - Create more opportunities for homeownership for more households in more parts of the county.
- Attainable Housing Definition:** The Planning Board supported a definition of attainable housing that includes a focus on providing more diverse housing options that allow more neighborhoods to be attainable to more households.
 - Attainability is the ability of households of various incomes and sizes to obtain housing that is suitable for their needs and affordable to them.
 - Attainable housing includes diverse housing types beyond single-family detached units. These housing types tend to be smaller and more affordable than the typical new detached home in that neighborhood.
- Attainable Housing Scales:** The Planning Board recognized three scales of attainable housing – small, medium, and large. With the three scales come three distinct sets of housing typologies, achieved through different recommendations and implementation tools, each with its own geographic focus.



Figure 1 Three scales of Attainable Housing Strategies Recommendations

Small Scale Attainable Housing Recommendations

- Applicable Residential Zones for Small-Scale Attainable Housing:** Small-scale attainable housing includes house-scaled duplexes and multiplexes (triplexes and quadplexes). The Planning Board recommended allowing, by-right with pattern book conformance, small-scale attainable housing as follows:

- duplexes in the R-60, R-90, and R-200 zones¹;
- triplexes in the R-40, R-60, and R-90 zones; and
- quadplexes in the R-40, R-60, and R-90 zones within the Priority Housing District.
- **Pattern Book:** The Planning Board recommended creating a Planning Board-approved pattern book, to which conformance will be mandatory for the creation of new small-scale attainable housing, whether through new construction or renovations to existing structures. The pattern book will be developed separately from the zoning recommendations through a process that will provide additional opportunities for community and stakeholder input. Work on the pattern book will proceed after and based on direction from the Montgomery County Council. The Planning Board advised Planning staff to work with the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services to outline a process for the implementation of the pattern book.
- **Priority Housing District:** The Planning Board recommended establishing the Priority Housing District, in which quadplexes would be allowed and parking requirements would be reduced. The Board recommended defining the Priority Housing District using a straight-line buffer of one mile from Metrorail’s Red Line, the Purple Line light rail, and MARC rail stations,² plus 500 feet from a BRT Corridor, plus River Road (inside the Capital Beltway), and Connecticut Avenue.
- **Development Standards:** The Planning Board recommended a series of development standards for small-scale attainable housing that generally follows the development standards for detached houses. The Board further recommended that:
 - Substandard-sized lots that currently allow single-family detached homes should not have restrictions placed on them prohibiting duplexes, triplexes, or quadplexes.
 - The development standards will act to put limits on building size, but, more importantly, the pattern book should be utilized to establish design standards that ensure compatibility and feasibility.

Medium Scale Attainable Housing Recommendations

- **Attainable Housing Optional Method (AHOM) for Medium-Scale Attainable Housing:** The Planning Board was supportive of the idea of the AHOM and middle density attainable housing. The intent of the AHOM is to allow greater density and development flexibility in exchange for attainability.
 - **AHOM Geographic Applicability:** Properties zoned R-90 or R-60 that abuts a corridor planned for BRT in the *2013 Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan*, and Connecticut Avenue and River Road inside the Capital Beltway, properties recommended for AHOM in a master plan, or properties recommended for a Residential Floating Zone through a master plan are eligible for the AHOM.

¹ A map of the Zoning Ordinance can be found here: <https://mcatlas.org/zoning>

² This station buffer is consistent with the reduced parking requirements currently allowed for Accessory Dwelling Units.

- **Maximum Average Unit Size:** The most practical means of ensuring attainability is to establish a maximum average unit size across all unit types within a development project. The Planning Board recommended 1,500 SF as the maximum average unit size.
- **Density in the AHOM:** The Planning Board agreed to a net density of 10 units/acre for the R-90 zone, and 13 units/acre for the R-60 zone. Additional bonus density would be allowed for AHOM projects with an average unit size below 1,500 SF.

Large Scale Attainable Housing Recommendation

- **Corridor-Focused Master Plans:** The Planning Board recommended using the master plan process to potentially rezone properties along the county’s primary growth corridors for higher intensity, large-scale attainable housing development.

Additional Recommendations

- **Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDU) and Cluster Optional Methods of Development:** The Planning Board recommended updating the existing MPDU and Cluster Optional Methods of Development to allow triplex and quadplex buildings. Correspondingly, the Board recommended a series of applicable development standards that largely mimic the optional method standards for detached houses.
- **Standard Method of Development in Other Zones:** The Planning Board recommended allowing triplexes and quadplexes under the standard method of development in the Residential Townhome, Residential Multi-Unit, Commercial/Residential, and Employment zones, where duplex and townhouse building types are currently allowed by-right.
- **Parking:** The Planning Board recommended reducing minimum off-street vehicle parking requirements for Attainable Housing units but also included other parking options in the AHS report.
- **Catalyst Policies and Programs:** The Planning Board recommended that the county explore several additional policies and programs to encourage the production of attainable housing. These policies include ones that would assist existing homeowners who wish to convert their homes to a duplex, triplex, or quadplex, and other community-level incentive programs. The Board recommended that these ideas be studied through multi-agency efforts after implementing any zoning reform.

WORK TO DATE: ENGAGEMENT AND SCHEDULE

During previous work on the initiative, AHS planned its major milestones and activities around gathering feedback from the community and other stakeholders with the goal of reaching as many members of the community as possible. This process included six work sessions with the Planning Board, four community meetings, three sets of virtual office hours, an external advisory team (Housing Equity Advisory Team) that provided initial feedback and guidance on the preliminary recommendations, and a social media day focused on housing.

Major Engagement Events and Project Milestones (2021-2022)	
March 24, 2021	HEAT Meeting #1
March 29, 2021	Community Meeting #1
April 9, 2021	Virtual Office Hours
April 14, 2021	HEAT Meeting #2
April 21, 2021	Community Meeting #2
April 27, 2021	Virtual Office Hours
April 28, 2021	HEAT Meeting #3
May 1, 2021	#MyMoCoHome Kickoff
May 13, 2021	Planning Board Update Briefing
May 19, 2021	HEAT Meeting #4
June 2, 2021	Community Meeting #3
June 3, 2021	Virtual Office Hours
June 14, 2021	Social Media Day
June 24, 2021	Planning Board Briefing and Public Comments
July 8, 2021	Planning Board Work Session #1
July 22, 2021	Planning Board Work Session #2
September 9, 2021	Planning Board Work Session #3
October 7, 2021	Planning Board Work Session #4
November 4, 2021	Planning Board Work Session #5
December 9, 2021	Planning Board Work Session #6
December 13, 2021	Community Meeting #4
February 24, 2022	Planning Board Panel Discussion

NEXT STEPS

On March 21 2024, the Planning Board will hold a public comment session with the community. This will allow the Planning Board to receive input on the initiative and allow the community an opportunity to share feedback.

Planning Staff anticipates that the current Planning Board will want to make revisions to the recommendations on the initiative made by the prior Planning Board. Planning Staff has tentatively scheduled five work sessions to work through the details of the initiative, which will result in a report sent to the County Council on the initiative and revised recommendations made by this Planning Board by early summer 2024.

Potential Attainable Housing Strategies Schedule (2024)	
February 22, 2024	Planning Board Briefing on Attainable Housing Strategies initiative
March 21, 2024	Planning Board Public Comment Session on AHS
April 11, 2024	Planning Board Work Session #1
April 25, 2024	Planning Board Work Session #2
May 9, 2024	Planning Board Work Session #3
May 23, 2024	Planning Board Work Session #4
June 6, 2024	Planning Board Work Session #5
Early Summer 2024	Planning, Housing, and Parks Briefing

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – DRAFT Attainable Housing Strategies Report with markup from the previous Planning Board