

**ATTAINABLE HOUSING STRATEGIES: WORK SESSION #7
BACKGROUND AND MEDIUM SCALE ATTAINABLE HOUSING**



Attainable Housing Strategies

Description

Work session to discuss and refine the draft Attainable Housing Initiatives definitions, and medium scale recommendations.

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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.
- The Planning Board hosted a public listening session on March 21, 2024, to allow the public to provide comments on the draft AHS report.
- Attainable housing recommendations are broken into three scales: small, medium, and large. This report focuses on the draft recommendations around medium scale attainable housing.
- Key recommendations include the creation of a new Attainable Housing Optional Method (AHOM), focusing medium scale housing along growth corridors, and providing increased density in exchange for a small average unit size.

INFORMATION

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Work session 7 – Medium scale attainable housing

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APPROACH TO WORKSESSIONS

Planning Staff is hosting a series of work sessions with the Planning Board through the spring of 2024 to go over the recommendations in the Draft AHS report. The purpose of these sessions is to educate the Planning Board on the contents of the draft report, and the process and reasoning that went into the draft recommendations. There may be instances where Planning Staff proactively recommends changes to the draft report and invites the Board to also consider refinements.

The staff reports that are published in advance of each work session will outline the major recommendations of the draft AHS report that pertain to that work sessions subjects. Planning Staff will walk through these recommendations as a series of decision points at each work session. Should the Board have specific questions on an element of AHS not explicitly covered by the staff report, Planning Staff will be prepared and happy to discuss these with the Board.

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, including analysis and 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.

After placing AHS on hold to focus on completing *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, the Planning Board was provided with a high-level briefing on the status of the AHS and the contents of the draft report on February 22, 2024. Subsequently, the Board hosted a public listening session on March 21, 2024, to allow the public to provide comments on the draft AHS report before the scheduled work sessions in the spring. Since restarting the initiative, Planning Staff and the Planning Board have received comments from over 60 organizations and individuals, both written, and live at the listening session. The majority of the comments were in support of AHS, with some asking the study to make more expansive recommendations, and others asking for less expansive recommendations. Most comments are focused on issues directly related to small-scale housing, though a few raised concerns about using the growth corridors as justification for medium and large scale recommendations.

PROJECT 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

PROJECT NEXT STEPS

The Planning Board will hold up to five additional work sessions to go through the draft AHS report

Tentative Attainable Housing Strategies Schedule (2024)	
April 11, 2024	Planning Board Work Session #7 – medium scale
April 25, 2024	Planning Board Work Session #8 – small scale
May 9, 2024	Planning Board Work Session #9 – large scale and other policies
May 23, 2024	Planning Board Work Session #10 – wrap-up
June 6, 2024	Planning Board Work Session #11 – wrap-up
Early Summer 2024	Planning, Housing, and Parks Briefing

before finalizing the report and transmitting it to the County Council. This report is for work session 7, with a focus on the medium scale recommendations for attainable housing. In summer 2024, the County Council’s Planning, Housing and Parks (PHP) Committee plans to review the report.

GENERAL INFORMATION

GENERAL VS SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The original intent of the AHS Initiative was to deliver both a report and a ZTA to the County Council. However, in working through this process, Planning Staff have come to realize there are many moving parts and many possible ways to implement the recommendations in the draft AHS report, including amending the zoning code, amending other chapters of County code, or creation of other policies, that achieve similar goals. Therefore, staff have pivoted instead toward delivering a report of broad recommendations which generally refrains from providing draft language to implement the recommendations in the draft AHS report, except where necessary to explain the recommendations.

Creating a ZTA would be the logical next step in this process once the Council provides direction on how it would like to proceed with the recommendations in the draft AHS report. These ZTA(s) should be a collaborative effort between Planning Staff and Council Staff and would be brought before the Planning Board as part of the normal review process, providing the Board, and the public, the opportunity to review the proposed changes against the draft AHS report. While there may be elements of the report where Planning Staff will provide sample changes, generally, Planning Staff recommend modifying portions of the draft AHS report that may be unnecessarily specific to avoid any confusion.

Question – *Does the Board support focusing the draft AHS report on general recommendations that may result in changes to the zoning code, other sections of the code, and policy reforms, without providing explicit draft code changes?*

ATTAINABLE HOUSING DEFINITIONS - BUILDING TYPES

A major element of the draft AHS report is to propose and define new building types. These new building types apply to both the small and the medium scales of attainable housing. Currently, there are four building types allowed in residential zones, shown below with a summary definition:

- **Detached House or a Building for a Cultural Institution, Religious Assembly, Public Use, or Conditional Use allowed in the zone.**
 - Building with one primary dwelling unit, or with a non-residential use allowed by the zone.
- **Duplex**
 - Two principal dwelling units.
- **Townhouse**
 - 3 or more dwellings separated vertically by a party wall.
- **Apartment Building**
 - 3 or more units arranged vertically and horizontally.

To assist in creating triplex and quadplex units that are flexible in design and house-scale in size, the draft AHS report recommends creating a new residential building type, called Multiplex. The full definition of multiplex can be seen on page 18 of the draft final report but in summary is:

- **Multiplex:**
 - 3-4 principal dwelling units separated vertically, horizontally, or both.

Question – *Does the Board support creating a new building type called Multiplex, and support the definition of a multiplex being a 3–4-unit building?*

If the Planning Board supports the creation of a Multiplex building type, the definition of Townhouse and Apartment Building should be modified to avoid overlap. The draft AHS report recommends amending the two building type definitions as follows:

Townhouse

The current recommendation in the draft AHS report is to modify the definition of Townhouse building, increasing the number of units to four or more, and specifying the linear arrangement, shown below.

- **3 4** or more dwellings separated vertically by a party wall and the dwellings are arranged linearly.

Planning Staff originally recommended against permitting three- and four-unit dwellings arranged linearly, similar to townhouses, because there was concern that these unit types would not resemble the surrounding single-family homes. However, Planning Staff acknowledge that some developers

already provide some three-unit townhouse buildings at the scale of surrounding detached houses, and so the definition of Townhouse was modified as shown above in the draft AHS report.

Planning Staff however, is concerned these earlier recommendations may inadvertently create nonconforming buildings where townhouses have applied to vertically separated attached dwellings that are not in a linear arrangement. For consistency with the modifications recommended below for the Apartment Building type, and to avoid nonconformity, Planning Staff now recommends removing the linear arrangement requirement, and defining townhomes as five or more units separated vertically. This would clearly distinguish Multiplexes from Townhouses.

- **35** or more dwellings separated vertically by a party wall.

Question – Does the Board support modifying the draft AHS report recommendations for Townhouse Building type to be 5 or more units, and removing the requirement that they have a linear arrangement?

Apartment Building

In the draft report, there is also a recommendation to modify the definition of Apartment Building, increasing the number of units to five or more, and specifying that a small apartment building has 19 or fewer dwellings.

- **35** or more units arranged vertically and horizontally. An apartment building with 19 or fewer dwellings is also known as a small apartment building.

The modifications are intended to distinguish Apartment Buildings from Multiplexes. The provision establishing a ‘small apartment building’ at 19 or fewer units is to accommodate medium scale recommendations for small apartments.

Question – Does the Board support modifying the Apartment Building type to be 5 or more units, and create a sub-definition for small apartment set at 19 or fewer units?

MEDIUM SCALE ATTAINABLE HOUSING

ATTAINABLE HOUSING OPTIONAL METHOD

The medium scale recommendations from the draft AHS report are focused on the creation of a new Attainable Housing Optional Method (AHOM) of Development which would be located under Section 4.4.2. Optional Method Development. Optional method of development is not a new idea as the existing zoning code has two existing optional methods of development, Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit and Cluster.

Optional methods of development offer more flexible development standards such as reduced setbacks and additional building types, in exchange for the addition of site plan review and providing a pre-determined public benefit. In the case of AHOM, the draft AHS report recommends providing the following flexibility:

- utilizing the new attainable housing building types (duplexes, multiplexes, townhouses and small apartments), and;
- additional density

This new flexibility would be in exchange for:

- site plan review, and;
- a maximum average dwelling unit size, forcing the dwellings to be kept smaller to encourage them to be more price attainable.

Questions: Does the Board support:

- Creating a new Attainable Housing Optional Method (AHOM)?
- Requiring site plan review?
- Requiring adherence to an average dwelling unit size?

Definition

Page 28 of the draft AHS report recommends the following definition for the AHOM:

The Attainable Housing method of development provides an optional method of development that supports the creation of a variety of dwelling unit types. The focus is to limit the size of new dwelling units to promote sizes and prices that are lower than what existing new developments generally provide. Optional Method Attainable Housing Development allows flexibility in lot layout and variety in residential building types. Density is increased above the underlying zoning in a sliding scale that incentivizes the creation of price attainable housing options. The Attainable Housing Optional Method of Development also provides a transition from more intensive land uses or density to less dense areas near existing and proposed transit infrastructure. An applicant's use of this method of development, and site plan approval for portions of such development, are subject to approval by the Planning Board.

Planning Staff believes this definition is appropriate given the intent of the AHOM but recommends clarifying that Planning Board approval would occur through [site plan](#).

Question – Does the Board support clarifying that approval by the Planning board is through site plan?

Applicability

Page 28 – 29 of the draft AHS report recommends allowing the AHOM in the R-60 and R-90 zones on properties:

- Abutting certain major transportation corridors, or
- Recommended for AHOM development in a master plan, or
- Recommended for a residential floating zone in a master plan.

The draft AHS report deliberately limits where AHOM can take place since it does represent a substantial increase in density and building form.

- The R-60 and R-90 zones are generally the residential zones found along the identified corridors and tend to be more suitable for lot assembly and resubdivision.
- Corridors are likely to benefit from the greatest investment in infrastructure.
- Redevelopment along the corridors will help the transition from auto-oriented highways to people-oriented boulevards.
- Master Plans often recommend properties as suitable for floating zones rather than rezoning them outright.

At the time the draft AHS report was written, *Thrive Montgomery 2050* had not been adopted, but the intent was to utilize the identified Growth Corridors from Thrive as the eligible corridors for AHOM. As the corridors recommended to be included in the AHOM in the draft AHS report are the same as the Growth Corridors in *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, Planning Staff recommend the following change:

Properties abutting **Thrive Montgomery 2050 Growth Corridors** ~~certain major transportation corridors~~

Questions – Does the Board support limiting AHOM eligibility to:

- *R-60 and R-90 zones?*
- *The Thrive Montgomery 2050 Growth Corridors?*
- *Properties recommended for AHOM or a residential floating zone in a Master Plan?*

Procedures of Development for the AHOM

Both the MPDU optional method and the Cluster optional method have basic procedures for their use found under Section 4.4.2. of the zoning code, including requiring site plan review, allowing development to span across different zones so long as both zones allow for the optional method, calculating density off of a tracts usable area, and creating provisions for projects that voluntarily provide MPDUs below 20 units. The draft AHS report recommends extending the same procedures to AHOM development.

Question – Does the Board support extending the existing optional method of development procedures to the AHOM?

Standards Table Generally for the AHOM

The AHS draft report recommends modeling the AHOM off the standards for the MPDU optional method of development. While the purpose of these two optional methods is different, the provision of flexible development standards that support smaller unit development remains the same. With a few exceptions explained below, Planning Staff recommends keeping the AHOM standards table largely based on the MPDU optional method standards. This includes:

- Site standards such as minimum area, density, open space and site coverage
- Lot standards such as minimum lot dimensions
- Placement standards including building and accessory building setbacks
- Height

Question – Does the Board support using the MPDU Optional Method standards table as the reference point for the AHOM, with specific modifications (as discussed later)?

Specific AHOM Development Standards

As discussed above, there are a few standards where the draft AHS report recommends adjustments from the MPDU optional method development standards.

Building Types

The draft AHS report recommends including in the AHOM all the building types currently allowed by MPDU optional method, plus adding building types for Multiplex, and Small Apartment, as defined earlier in this report.

- Detached House
- Duplex
- **Multiplex**
- Townhouse
- **Small Apartment**

Question – Does the Board support the list of allowed building types above, adding Multiplex and Small Apartment?

Site Dimension – Usable Area

The AHOM wants to encourage larger scale projects along the Thrive Growth Corridors by assembling multiple smaller properties. Therefore, the draft recommendation is for a usable area set at 2 times the minimum lot size for a detached house in the underlying zone.

Question – Does the Board support setting the minimum usable area at two times the minimum lot size for a detached house in the underlying zone?

Maximum Density

Density is one of the major incentives that the AHOM offers to a potential developer, therefore setting the right density is critical. The density needs to be enough of an incentive to spark interest, without being so much that it can't still be implemented in a way that is sensitive to existing development patterns. The recommendations of the AHS draft report are:

- A base density of 10 units/acre in the R-90 zone and of 13 units/acre in the R-60 zone. This is approximately two times the base density allowed in these two zones.
- Density bonuses for projects that further reduce their average dwelling unit size (discussed later in this report), with a two percent increase in density recommended for each one percent reduction in average unit size.

Many factors were considered when determining the appropriate base densities including existing zones, real life examples of projects similar to the desired outcome, and various external resources on the approximate density of different building types.

The Townhouse zones include:

- Townhouse Low Density (TLD) 9 units/acre
- Townhouse Medium Density (TMD) 12 units/acre
- Townhouse High Density (THD) 15 units/acre

Planning Staff reviewed recently approved townhouse developments to see how many units/acre were achieved after factoring in roadways, stormwater, utility easements, and open space.

- Rock Spring Park in the *Rock Spring Sector Plan* area was approved under the old I-3 zone and developed 168 units on 10.6 acres for a density of 15.8 units/acre.
- Randolph Farms east of North Bethesda developed under the RT-15 floating zone with 104 units over 8.4 acres for a density of 12.3 units/acre.

Both sites have units that average over 2,000 square feet per unit and were required to provide parking at the standard of 2 spaces per unit.

Planning Staff also looked at anticipated densities based on different unit types from the website missingmiddle.com, and from the prepared as part of the [Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan](#). One specific site along the Veirs Mill corridor in the Robindale District was evaluated for a hypothetical missing middle project and a sketch plan was approved that achieved close to 30 units/acre. This site including parking and stormwater management, but it may not have been adequate for approval. This plan also had an average unit size closer to 1,000 square feet per

dwelling. The table below shows various densities of different housing types from missingmiddle.com and the [Missing Middle Housing Study](#).

Housing Type	Missingmiddle.com	Missing Middle Housing Study
Cottage Courts	5-10 DU/Acre	10-15 DU/Acre
Duplex (side by side)	8-17 DU/Acre	14 DU/Acre
Townhouse	11-25 DU/Acre	24 DU/Acre
Multiplex	5-12 DU/Acre	
Stacked Flat		30-34 DU/Acre
Stacked Triplex	15-38 DU/Acre	33 DU/Acre
Small Apartments	21-35 DU/Acre	20-40 DU/Acre

Questions – Does the Board support AHOM density that:

- At its base it is two times the density of the underlying zone?
- Support a bonus density increasing density two percent for every one percent reduction in average unit size?

Open Space

The draft AHS report recommended open space provisions call for 10% common open space for projects with 10 or more dwelling units, and no open space for projects under 10 dwelling units. The provision of common open space is consistent with other medium intensity, residential only development zones and methods in the county. The requirement for 10% is a bit lower than typical for MPDU optional method projects at 20%, however, the size of the AHOM projects is also anticipated to be on the smaller side. The recommendations prioritize the provision of housing over open space, without completely ignoring its importance in communities.

Questions – Does the Board support recommending common open space at 10% of the site area?

Dwelling Unit Standards

One of the key elements of the AHOM is creating more attainable units by placing limits on how large new dwellings can be. The draft AHS report recommends creating a new section in the standards table for Dwelling Unit Standards. This section would establish a maximum average dwelling unit size and set a maximum detached dwelling unit size.

- Maximum average dwelling unit size of 1,500 square feet.
- Maximum detached dwelling unit size of 1,500 square feet.

Planning Staff and the previous Board wanted to set a number that reasonably limits the size of dwelling units without discouraging the ability to create family-sized units. The thought was

an AHOM development may create a few larger units in the townhouse or duplex form that could then be offset by smaller units in a multiplex or small apartment form. At 1,500 square feet, developers should be able to comfortably create a three-bedroom dwelling over one or multiple floors. The second recommendation limiting the size of detached dwelling units is a compromise struck between Planning Staff who wanted to remove detached dwellings from the AHOM, and the Board which wanted to keep the detached dwelling option, for use as small cottage housing options.

Questions – *Does the Board support Dwelling Unit Standards that:*

- *Limit the average dwelling unit size to a maximum of 1,500 square feet?*
- *Support establishing a maximum dwelling size for any detached dwelling at 1,500 square feet?*

ATTACHMENTS

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