



Prohibiting Municipal Zoning Regulations to Encourage Housing Development

Reforming restrictive municipal zoning rules is key to creating more flexible land use and addressing the growing need for housing. Traditional zoning laws often impose minimum lot sizes, large setbacks, and open space requirements, which drive up development costs, limit land use efficiency, and reduce affordable housing availability. Updating these rules allows for more diverse housing options in both cities and suburbs.

Rigid lot size and setback requirements are outdated and limiting:

Many zoning codes require large lot sizes and wide setbacks, which don't always match modern community needs or preferences. The [National Association of Home Builders](#) highlights that such requirements restrict land use efficiency, preventing higher-density housing development that could address growing demand. In densely populated areas with high housing demand, zoning regulations requiring large setbacks and expansive open spaces consume valuable land that could support additional housing units or community facilities. By relaxing these requirements, municipalities can construct more homes on the same land, boosting housing supply to meet demand and support community growth.

Restrictive zoning policies drive up housing costs:

Rules like minimum lot sizes and open space requirements make housing more expensive by limiting how many units can be built on a given property. Research from the [Mercatus Center](#) and [Housing Affordability Institute](#) shows how urban minimum lot sizes and setbacks contribute to higher housing prices and urban sprawl. This drives up land costs and reduces the supply of affordable homes for buyers and renters. Relaxing these restrictions allows for more housing to be built, helping to stabilize prices and expand affordability.

Unserviced areas remain unaffected:

This proposed zoning reform applies only to lots connected to municipal water and sewer systems, primarily in urban and suburban areas. Rural or unserviced lots would remain under traditional zoning standards, where larger lot sizes and extensive setbacks are typically more appropriate for low-density development. This ensures that zoning changes are context-sensitive and do not disrupt land-use practices in rural settings.

Zoning reform supports community growth and housing equity:

Municipalities can foster a more inclusive and affordable housing market by eliminating excessively restrictive zoning mandates. This approach supports a broader range of housing types suitable for various income levels and household sizes, helping to address housing inequality. Inclusive zoning allows for growth and diversity in housing options, contributing to community resilience and reducing barriers to affordable housing.

Examples of successful zoning reform:

Several jurisdictions have reformed zoning regulations to encourage more flexible land use, increase housing supply, and promote affordability. California's [SB 9](#) allows homeowners to split single-family lots and build up to four units, increasing housing density in residential neighborhoods. Similarly, [SB 478](#) prevents excessive floor area ratio (FAR) and minimum lot size requirements, ensuring small-scale multifamily developments can proceed without restrictive zoning barriers. Examples of city-level reform include Spokane, Washington, setting a minimum lot size of 1,200 square feet, and Austin, Texas, lowering its lot size requirement from 5,750 square feet to 1,800 square feet ([Mercatus Institute](#)).