

# Home in Tacoma Project

Action is necessary as Tacoma faces a housing crisis with people finding it harder to find housing that is affordable, particularly if they have fixed or lower incomes. Housing provides basic human needs and connects us with family, friends, community, transportation, employment and more, which matters to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our community members.

As part of Tacoma’s Affordable Housing Action Strategy, the **Home In Tacoma Project** recommends changes to Tacoma’s housing growth strategy, policies and programs to increase housing supply, affordability and choice for current and future residents.

## CITY COUNCIL IPS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

October 27, 2021

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*On **November 16, 2021** the City Council will hold its first reading of an ordinance adopting the Home In Tacoma Project policy actions, with changes made by the City Council Infrastructure Planning and Sustainability Committee. Learn how you can participate at [www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma).*

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## WHAT’S IN THE HOME IN TACOMA PROJECT PACKAGE

As directed by the City Council, Tacoma’s Planning Commission developed policy recommendations to help meet Tacoma’s housing needs. Over the past two years, the City engaged with the community in a discussion about housing needs, development trends, and neighborhood change and forwarded recommendations to Council on May 19, 2021. The Council held a public hearing on July 13, 2021 and received over 500 public comments. Most recently, the IPS Committee has completed two months of review and recommended significant changes.

Proposals would change policies in Tacoma’s Comprehensive Plan – the City’s blueprint for community growth. The recommendations are to adopt **a new housing growth vision**, to **update housing policies**, to **enable Missing Middle Housing** in Tacoma’s neighborhoods, to strengthen tools to **ensure Tacoma gets housing growth right**, and to take actions to **make housing more affordable**. If adopted, these policies would initiate a second phase of policy work and public engagement to develop zoning, standards, programs and other implementation steps.

The proposals also include several significant code changes that would go into immediate effect upon adoption. These **Near-term Code Changes** would streamline permitting for Accessory Dwelling Units, create optional incentives for development to include affordable housing, expand flexibility for non-conforming uses, and expand the multifamily tax exemption program.

*Recommendations are summarized below—visit [www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma) for more information.*

## A NEW HOUSING GROWTH VISION

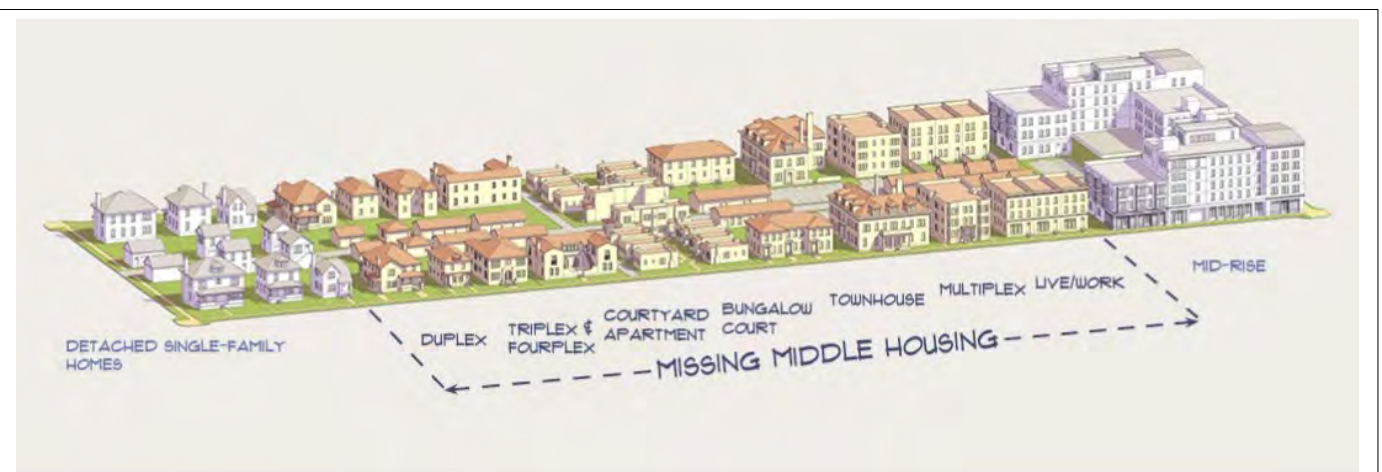
Utilize housing growth to create neighborhoods that are inclusive, welcoming to our diverse community, resilient, thriving, distinctive and walkable, with robust community amenities and a range of housing choices and costs.

The **new vision** promotes increased housing choice in vibrant, walkable neighborhoods. To support this vision, the proposals include updates to City policies, including:

- Increase housing options throughout the City
  - Renew Tacoma’s longstanding vision for housing growth Downtown and in Centers
  - Expand Missing Middle housing options in Tacoma’s neighborhoods
  - Plan for the impacts of growth on urban infrastructure such as sidewalks, traffic and utilities
- Ensure that new housing is well designed and complements Tacoma’s distinctive neighborhoods
  - Use design standards to ensure that infill complements neighborhood scale and patterns
  - Provide for smooth transitions from low-scale to higher scale areas
  - Protect the character of historic districts and promote reuse of existing structures
- Evolve our housing vision to be more inclusive of all members of our community
  - Address inequitable access to opportunity in Tacoma’s neighborhoods
  - Shift regulatory language away from “family” to allow households to define themselves
  - Address lingering impacts of systemic racism and facilitate homeownership and wealth-building opportunities for people of color
  - Promote accessibility for people of different physical abilities
- Recognize that housing is a fundamental building block of community that affects multiple goals
  - Promote housing in Tacoma as an alternative to urban sprawl
  - Build sustainable and resilient housing to address the climate emergency, urban forestry goals, and protect the health of the Puget Sound
  - Promote infill in walkable areas with transportation choices to reduce car dependency

## ENABLING MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

The term “Missing Middle Housing” describes a long-term practice in many communities of reserving most of the land for single-family houses, while restricting smaller, attached or clustered housing. It wasn’t always this way—many older neighborhoods, in Tacoma and elsewhere, offer a range of housing sizes, types and choices.



“Missing Middle is a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types compatible in scale with single-family homes that help meet the growing demand for walkable urban living.” [www.missingmiddlehousing.com](http://www.missingmiddlehousing.com)

Today, Tacoma sets aside about 75 percent of our residential land supply for single-family houses. The proposals would increase housing flexibility and choice by creating two new residential land use designations. The new designations would replace the current Single-family and Multi-family Low-Density Land Use designations on Tacoma Future Land Use Map—the City’s blueprint for guiding growth.

Recommended changes would shift Tacoma’s housing rules from an emphasis on housing types (such as single-family) to building form, design and scale. The objective is to provide more housing options, support affordability, diversity, walkability and thriving neighborhood businesses while ensuring that new housing complements the overall scale and residential patterns of existing neighborhoods.

**What are the proposed Low-scale and Mid-scale Residential designations?**

**Low-scale Residential** areas support housing types including detached houses, duplexes, triplexes, cottage housing, and in some cases fourplexes and small multifamily buildings. New housing is built at the general scale (size, width and height) of detached houses with yards similar to existing neighborhoods.

**Mid-scale Residential** areas support the same housing types as Low-scale Residential areas, along with moderate sized multifamily housing. Housing is generally up to 3 stories tall, with 4 stories allowed along corridors. Mid-scale areas are generally close to shopping, transit and other urban activities, and provide a transition between dense centers and nearby Low-scale areas.

**In both** new designations, standards would require compatible design features, building height and scale, and attention to scale transitions. Pedestrian orientation to the street, street trees and landscaping, and a strong emphasis on reuse of existing structures would be strongly emphasized as essential features.

**Examples of Low-scale and Mid-scale Housing Types**

Low-scale Housing		Low-scale Housing (in some circumstances)	Mid-scale Housing
A modern house with a large glass front door and a small attached unit.	A two-story house with a central entrance and a side entrance.	A row of four two-story units with individual entrances.	A row of three-story townhouses with gabled roofs.
House & ADU(s)	Duplex, triplex	Fourplex	Townhouses
A colorful two-story house on a small lot.	A row of small, colorful houses with front porches.	A row of three-story blue houses with multiple units.	A three-story apartment building with a modern design.
Small lot house	Cottage housing	Small multifamily	Medium multifamily



*Illustration of a transition from Low-scale to Mid-scale housing, with taller structures only near dense centers*



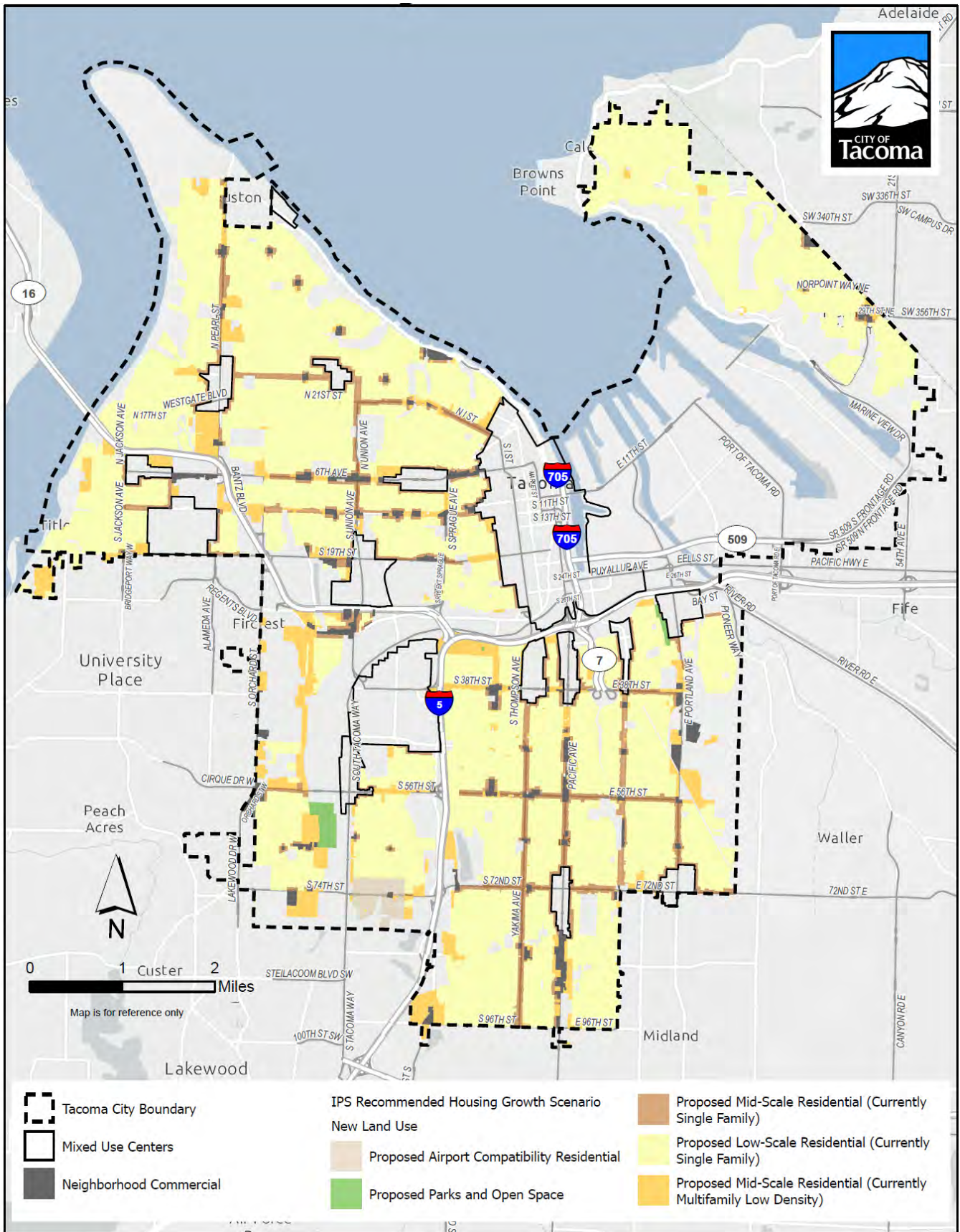
*Recent infill housing providing a transition from existing houses to nearby larger buildings (Bozeman, MT)*

### **Recommended Housing Growth Scenario**

The recommendations would update Tacoma’s Future Land Use Map, which provides high-level direction for the types, size and scale of development citywide as follows (see map):

- Replace *Single-family* and *Multifamily Low-Density* Land Use designations with the proposed *Low-scale Residential* and *Mid-scale Residential* designations, allowing more housing choices citywide
- Designate areas near Centers, Corridors, and bus routes for Mid-scale Residential
- No changes are recommended Downtown or in Centers, or in areas where housing is not the primary goal (such as parks, commercial and industrial areas), with map cleanups to recognize existing parks and open spaces, and the Airport Compatibility Area

Visit [www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma) to view the map online.



## GETTING HOUSING GROWTH RIGHT

The recommendations call for careful evaluation of how Tacoma can balance housing goals with design, livability, historic preservation, urban forestry, public infrastructure and services, and other important community goals. Recommendations strongly commit to robust infill design standards, actions to reduce demolitions of viable structures, steps to ensure that housing growth is supported by infrastructure and services, and to building green, resilient housing. City Council action would initiate the next phase of public engagement and policy analysis, including:

- Zoning changes
- Design standards updates
- Actions to ensure that urban infrastructure and services are adequate to support growth
- Potential phasing of implementation, if directed by the City Council
- Actions to address the potential demolition of viable structures
- Actions to create green, sustainable and resilient housing
- Actions to promote physical accessibility
- Review of City permitting and processes
- Education and technical support for developers and the public

## MAKING HOUSING MORE AFFORDABLE

Allowing diverse housing types is ***an essential step toward meeting housing affordability goals***. However, by itself the housing market is not likely to produce housing affordable to lower income residents. To address this need, the recommendations call for ***expansion of affordable housing incentives and requirements*** and ***anti-displacement actions***. These tools, in combination with increased public investment in housing, allow the City to partner with developers in affordable housing creation. Recommendations include:

- Strengthen policy guidance for affordability tools
- Expand regulatory affordable housing tools
- Establish an anti-displacement strategy to help lower-income residents stay in growing neighborhoods
- Promote access to housing and wealth-building, particularly for people of color
- Expand Tacoma's Multifamily Tax Exemption program
- Expand affordability incentives and provide flexibility to nonconforming sites

## NEXT STEPS

The complete package includes:

**One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan:** Housing, Urban Form, and Design and Development Element changes

**Housing Growth Scenario Map:** Learn about the recommended housing growth scenario

**Housing Action Plan:** Analysis and list of housing growth strategy actions to be implemented over time

**Near-term Code Changes:** Changes to streamline permitting and create housing incentives

**SEPA Determination:** City review of potential environmental impacts and mitigation actions

Adoption of these policies will initiate a major community conversation as the City updates zoning and standards. Visit [www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/homeintacoma) for more information.