SOUTH SHORE

LITTLE TO MIDDLE HOUSING OPTIONS


59
61
59
61
517

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks for the support and leadership of the many people who made this report possible.

Funding for this project was provided by the **Metropolitan Area Planning Council** (MAPC), the regional planning agency serving the 101 cities and towns of Metropolitan Boston, through Direct Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) and the Planning for MetroFuture Technical Assistance fund (PMTA). Professional support was provided by MAPC housing and land use staff, including: Emma Battaglia, Senior Housing + Land Use Planner; **Alex Koppelman**, Regional Housing + Land Use Planner; **Courtney Lewis**, Regional Land Use Planner; **John McCartin**,* Regional Housing + Land Use Planner; **Betsy Cowan Neptune**,* Chief of Economic Development and South Shore Coalition Subregional Coordinator; **Karina Oliver-Milchman**, Chief of Housing and Neighborhood Development; Lydia Slocum, Regional Housing + Land Use Planner II; **Alexis Smith**, Principal Regional Housing + Land Use Planner; **Kit Un**,* Visual Designer.

**Former MAPC Staff*

METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL OFFICERS

President **Erin Wortman**, Town of Stoneham
Vice President **Adam Chapdelaine**, Town of Arlington
Secretary **Sandra Hackman**, Town of Bedford
Treasurer **Sam Seidel**, Gubernatorial

SOUTH SHORE LITTLE TO MIDDLE HOUSING PROJECT PARTNERS

Lauren Lind, Town of Cohasset
Valerie Massard, Town of Duxbury
Emily Wentworth, Town of Hingham
Ellen Allen, Kenneth Kirkland, and Kim Roy, Town of Norwell
Kyle Boyd and **Brad Washburn**, Town of Scituate
Courtney Bjorgaard, South Shore Chamber of Commerce

Finally, this report builds on the work of the original Living Little project, conducted in 2018 in partnership with the Towns of Foxborough, Medfield, Medway, Sherborn, and Stoughton.

MAPC
METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL

SSC
South Shore Coalition

Cover image credits: Hearthstone Cohousing | PlaceMatters via Flickr
Ross Chapin Architects | Karen Delucas via Flickr
Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GLOSSARY

ADU	Accessory Dwelling Unit
CHD	Cottage Housing Development
CO	Cohousing
DADU	Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit
DU	Dwelling Unit
IRC	International Residential Code
NOAH	Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing
PB	Planning Board
PDU	Primary Dwelling Unit
PRD	Planned Residential Development
SSC	South Shore Coalition
SF	Square Feet
SPGA	Special Permit Granting Authority
ZBA	Zoning Board of Appeals

INTRODUCTION

The Greater Boston region is experiencing a housing crisis stemming from a lack of affordable housing and appropriate housing options for today's range of household types and incomes. **This shortage is not just about a lack of housing overall, but also a lack of different types of housing, especially smaller and therefore usually lower-cost options.**

To address the crisis and meet demand, a range of unit sizes at a variety of building scales is needed throughout the region. MAPC's Living Little project highlights alternative small housing types that could begin to address this need, with a focus on small-scale buildings that are appropriate for Greater Boston's suburban communities.

WHAT IS LIVING LITTLE?

Living Little explores different types of small housing that would be well-suited for suburban communities throughout Greater Boston, where larger homes are more common. Smaller housing can provide options for a variety of smaller households—from millennials just starting out to baby boomers looking to downsize—helping towns meet need, retain household diversity, and take a "little" step towards addressing the region's housing crisis.

The project began in 2018 as a study that MAPC conducted with five towns (Foxborough, Medfield, Medway, Sherborn, and Stoughton) that were interested in exploring housing options for younger households and seniors. The first Living Little report studied smaller housing types that, due to their size, can be more naturally affordable than the luxury single-family homes frequently built in these communities. These types included detached accessory dwelling units, cottage housing development, and tiny houses. A second phase of this work took a deeper look at cottage housing, including a study of best practices and a draft cottage zoning bylaw.

Recognizing a similar need for a variety of housing options in their communities, five South Shore municipalities—Cohasset, Duxbury, Hingham, Norwell, and Scituate—partnered with MAPC to study housing types that would work well in the South Shore. This document revisits two housing types considered in the original report (accessory dwelling units and cottage housing development) as well as additional housing types (small-scale mixed-use development, townhouses, and single-family home conversion, and cohousing), each selected by participating towns as being particularly suitable for their communities. These housing types are explored through case studies, history, example layouts, and analysis of regulatory and infrastructure barriers. It is informed by interviews with town planners, developers, and designers.

Content from the first Little Living report is denoted with this symbol: PHASE 1

Acton, MA

WHY LIVING LITTLE?

Communities throughout the region need a variety of housing types and sizes to retain and attract a diverse mix of households. **Small housing types promote:**

Aging in place. Senior households tend to consist of one or two people, who are not often served by the traditional large, single-family houses found in most suburban communities. Many seniors who wish to downsize have difficulty finding options within their communities, let alone options they can afford, and instead choose to remain in houses that do not meet their accessibility needs or are difficult or costly to maintain.

Choices for smaller households. With the trend of forming families later in life and having fewer children, household size has been shrinking. For many households, a suburban single-family house is too large and the associated mortgage, maintenance, and tax costs are too high. Increasing choices for smaller households helps stabilize the housing market and reduces competition for bigger homes suited for larger households.

Long-term rental income for homeowners. Some small housing types, such as accessory dwelling units, can benefit primary homeowners through supplemental rental income, helping them to stay in their homes and communities.

Low-cost housing for younger adults. Millennials are more likely than their predecessors to live with their parents or delay starting their own families, and are more likely to carry large students debt (Pew Research Center). Providing these younger adults with lower-cost housing options helps them remain in and contribute to their local communities.

Naturally occurring (unsubsidized) affordable housing. Smaller homes tend to come with a smaller price tag than larger single-family houses, especially when they add to a community's housing supply instead of replacing existing stock through teardowns.

Fostering diversity. Single-family zoning can exclude households that cannot afford the large down payment and mortgage required to purchase a home in many suburban communities. This disproportionately impacts people of color, who for decades were prevented from living in these communities due to redlining and other discriminatory policies.

Local economic development. A mix of housing options in a community brings households with diverse skills and incomes that can fill local employment opportunities and contribute to the local economy.

Smart growth community development. Smaller housing types are well suited to infill development in existing neighborhoods, making use of existing infrastructure and avoiding greenfield development.

Camelot Housing, Berlin, MA | Jay Ross via Flickr

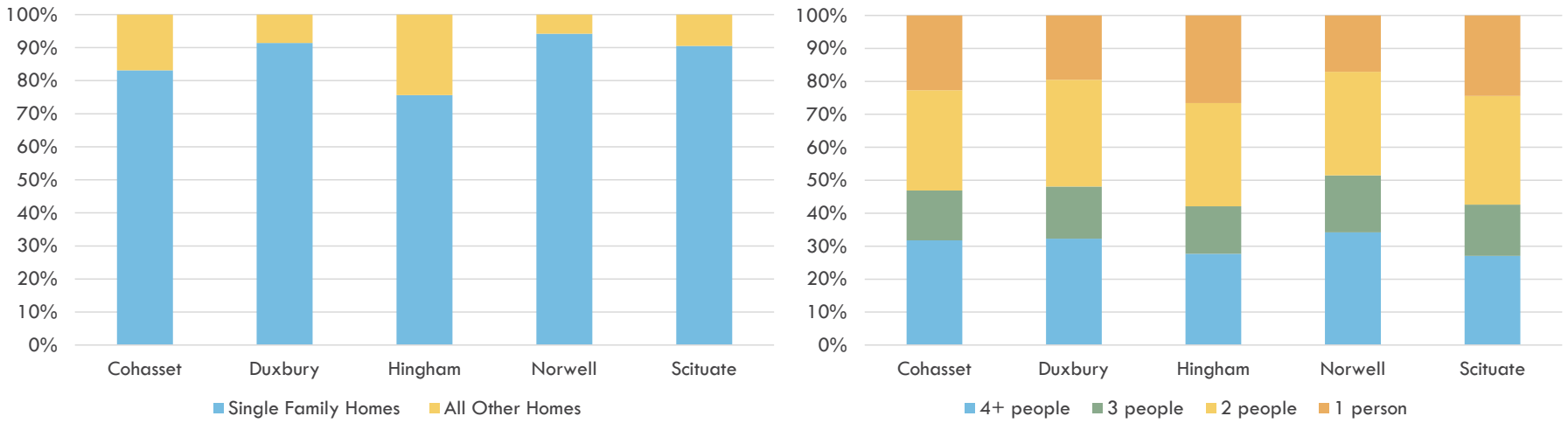
WHY LITTLE TO MIDDLE HOUSING FOR THE SOUTH SHORE?

Like communities across the Greater Boston region, the five towns participating in this study—Cohasset, Duxbury, Hingham, Norwell, and Scituate—are experiencing increased pressure on their housing market alongside changing demographics. Decreasing household size and increasing housing costs are prompting more residents, from seniors looking to downsize to young adults looking for starter homes, to seek smaller, more naturally affordable housing options.

A little over half of the households in the five participating South Shore towns are either single-person households or two-person households (U.S. Census, 2010). However, the predominant housing type in the South Shore is the single-family home: between 75%-95% of each participating towns' housing consists of single-family homes. Furthermore, despite smaller household sizes, home sizes have been growing. The average size of a new single-family home built in the northeast U.S. in 1973 was 1,600 SF, while the average size in 2019 had grown to 2,700 SF (U.S. Census Bureau Annual Survey of Construction).

Housing that is affordable without subsidy, often due to being older or smaller, is sometimes referred to as naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH).

Total Housing Units by Units in a Structure (2014-2018) + Household Size (2010)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2014-2018)

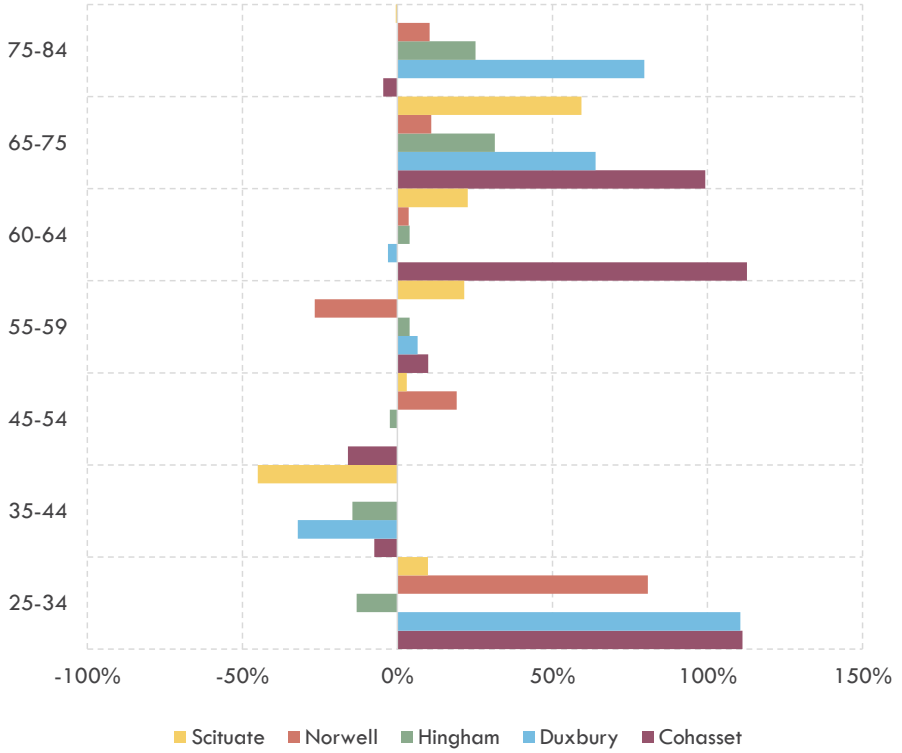
Given the mismatch between household size and housing type, it is unsurprising that smaller households can have difficulty finding homes that suit their needs. Finding the right home is made even more challenging by the tremendously high housing costs in the region. At the end of 2019, the lowest median single-family home price of all the participating South Shore communities ($590,000) was more than double the national median home price of $244,218 and the highest single-family home price of $949,000 was nearly four times as much (The Warren Group, 2019; Zillow Home Value Index, 2019).

These high housing costs have real impacts on the South Shore's residents. The share of households paying more than 30% of their income for housing costs, meeting the federal government's definition of "housing cost burdened," ranges from 29%-36% in participating South Shore communities (American Community Survey, 2014-2018). For households that are low-income—between 23% and 30% of the households in the participating communities—close to 75% or more of these households are cost burdened (CHAS, 2011-15).

Finding the right housing can be particularly difficult for seniors. Many seniors are "over-housed," meaning their houses are bigger than they need, requiring significant upkeep, high tax and utility payments, and costly modifications to enable aging in place. However, many lack options to downsize within their community. Consistent with national trends, in recent years the South Shore has experienced strong growth in its senior population. There are 29,000 senior-headed households in the SSC, 28% of the total number of South Shore households. Of these, nearly two-thirds (19,750 households) are low- or moderate-income, meaning that they earn less than the area median income. As more older adults transition to fixed incomes and become limited by physical changes brought on by aging, their single-family homes can become too difficult to afford and maintain.

Several South Shore towns have also seen an increase in the number of young adults aged 25-34. These young households often seek affordable starter homes or housing close to their workplace or other amenities. Indeed, increased housing options that will meet the needs of a younger workforce is one of four focus areas of the South Shore Chamber of Commerce's South Shore 2030 Vision.[1]

Percent Population Change by Age (2005-2009) - (2014-2018)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2005-2009) - (2014-2018)

1 South Shore Chamber of Commerce Housing Initiative, https://www.southshore2030.com/overview.html

"Our Housing Initiative focuses on encouraging more housing options that attract the next generation of workers and keep our population of retirees here in our region. By collaborating, advocating, and supporting housing initiatives on state and municipal levels, we see housing production as an economic development strategy that increases our region's housing choices and improves our region's economic competitiveness. We need to start building housing products that help shift our demographic trends and introduce home products that meet the needs of young people (and families) and downsizing baby boomers who want to stay on the South Shore."

– South Shore Chamber of Commerce Housing Initiative

Creating these opportunities for seniors can also free up the stock of single-family homes for the families that need them. Findings from MAPC's 2020 study of family-sized housing units in Greater Boston showed families with children have difficulty finding available large housing units (housing units with three or more bedrooms) and this issue is connected to a lack of downsizing options for aging households. Nearly15% of large units in Greater Boston—114,000 homes—are occupied by a householder over the age of 70. Increasing the supply of small to mid-sized housing options will not only facilitate downsizing and first-time homeownership but will also free up larger housing units for families who can't currently find anything on the market.

Having a greater variety of housing options overall will help communities in the South Shore meet the changing needs of households at various income levels and life stages. And a range of housing options will give those that serve their communities better opportunities to live where they work. At the same time, South Shore towns are looking for housing solutions that fit within their smaller-scale suburban context. Although there is great variety in the character of South Shore towns, the types of housing considered here would be appropriate in many South Shore neighborhoods.

Providence, RI | Union Studio Architecture and Nat Rea Photography

This "missing middle" housing refers small-scale multifamily buildings that, in terms of size, fall between detached single-family houses and larger mid-rise multifamily buildings. It is so named because, though these housing types were historically common across the country, they have been infrequently built in recent decades due to restrictive zoning.

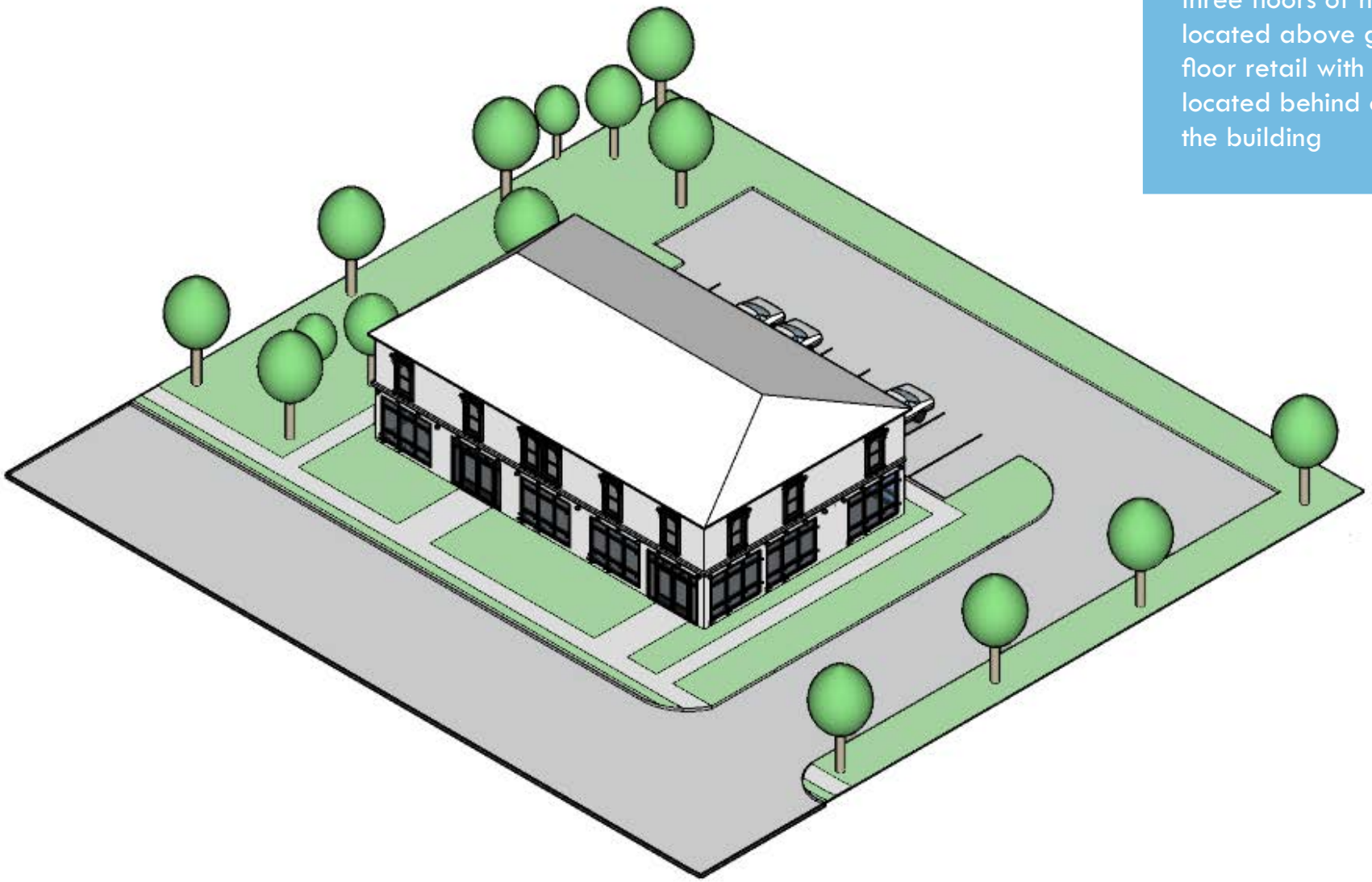
LITTLE TO MIDDLE HOUSING TYPES

SMALL-SCALE MIXED-USE AND STRIP MALL REDEVELOPMENT

Maynard, MA

SMALL-SCALE MIXED USE

Definition: One to three floors of housing located above ground floor retail with parking located behind or below the building

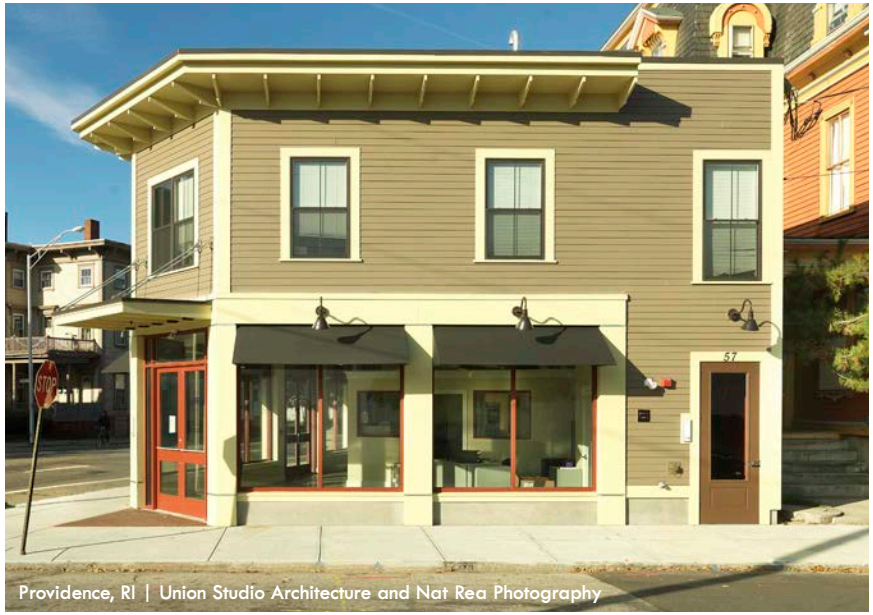


OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

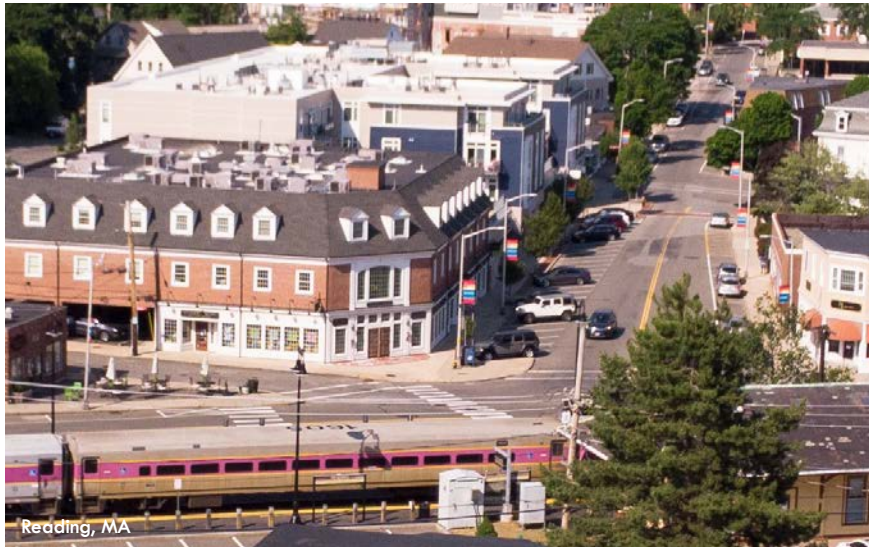
Mixed-use neighborhoods have been common in urban areas for centuries. In its earliest forms, mixed-use most typically consisted of a workshop or merchant space with living space for the shop owner above or behind. In the nineteenth century, one or more stories of residential apartments above a retail space became the prevalent typology for main streets in towns and small cities across the country. However, with the advent of zoning in the 1920s, land use policies began to require separation of commercial, housing, and industrial uses to protect public health. This trend became more pronounced in the mid-twentieth century as new suburban neighborhoods on previously undeveloped land were able to more fully separate different land uses. These suburban zoning regulations heavily favored single-family homes and auto-centric communities, making it difficult to realize the town commons and centers typical of the traditional New England community.

Generally these same land use principles still form the foundation for most suburban communities' zoning bylaws today. However, as these communities continue to evolve, the separation of uses and the dominance of single-family zoning does not always align with town goals or residents' needs or desires. In particular, many households today are interested in living in a place where retail, entertainment, and other amenities are located close to where they live. Housing located near essential services such as markets or pharmacies is of particular importance to seniors who may no longer be comfortable driving.

While the desire for integrated land uses has increased, many older strip malls and single-use commercial buildings are experiencing reduced demand. To respond to both trends, many towns in Massachusetts are utilizing mixed-use development to help revive these aging commercial areas. Local businesses often benefit from a reliable customer base and increased spending power offered by new households. Additionally, retrofitting these aging commercial areas can create an opportunity to make the area more attractive and pedestrian friendly.



Providence, RI | Union Studio Architecture and Nat Rea Photography


Reading, MA

Bolton, MA

LAYOUT

GENERAL LAYOUT

Lot Size	1/4 acre or larger
Height	2-4 stories
Setbacks	Front face of building 0-15' from sidewalk
Density	10-20 units per acre; varies depending on dimensional and parking requirements
Unit Size	600-1,200 sq.ft. per unit 1-3 bedrooms

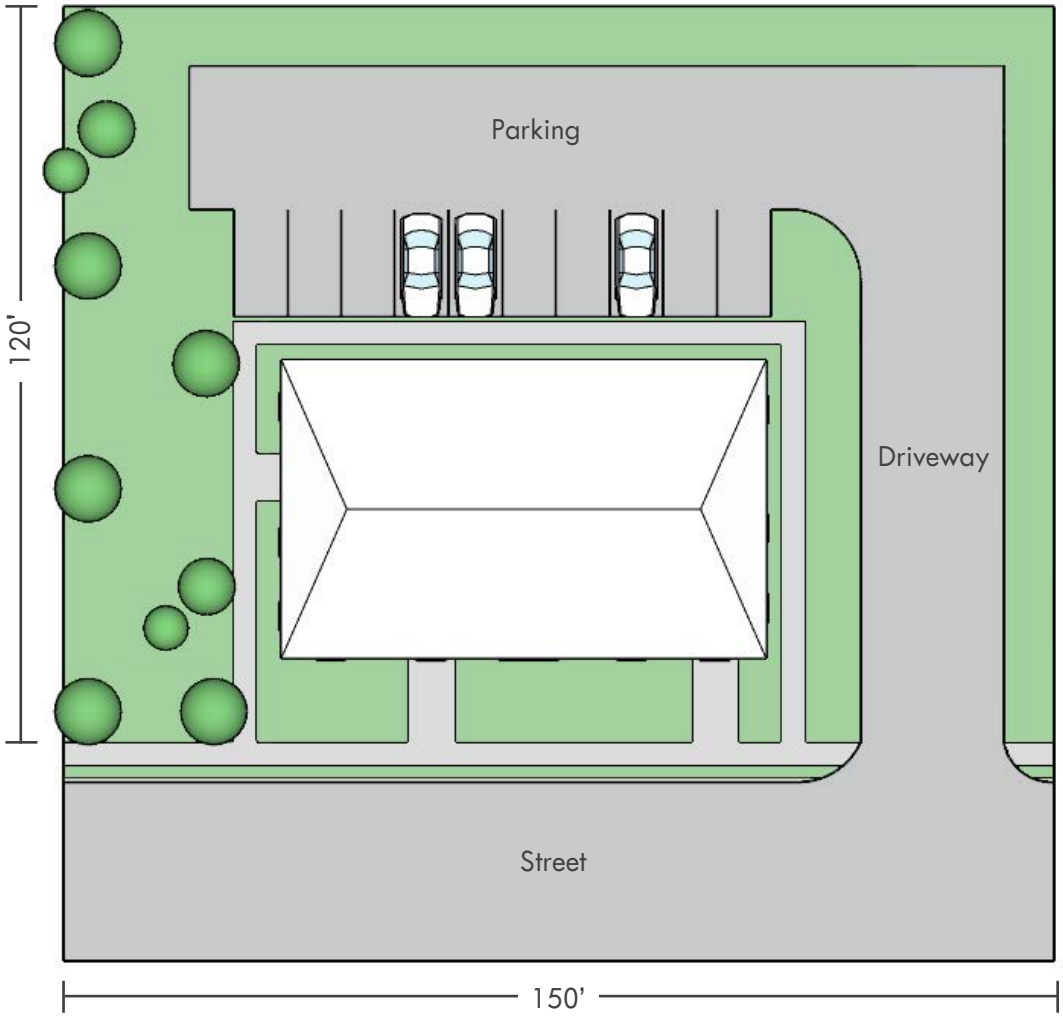
POLICY EXAMPLES:

Ashland
Beverly
Maynard
Millis

BUILT EXAMPLES:

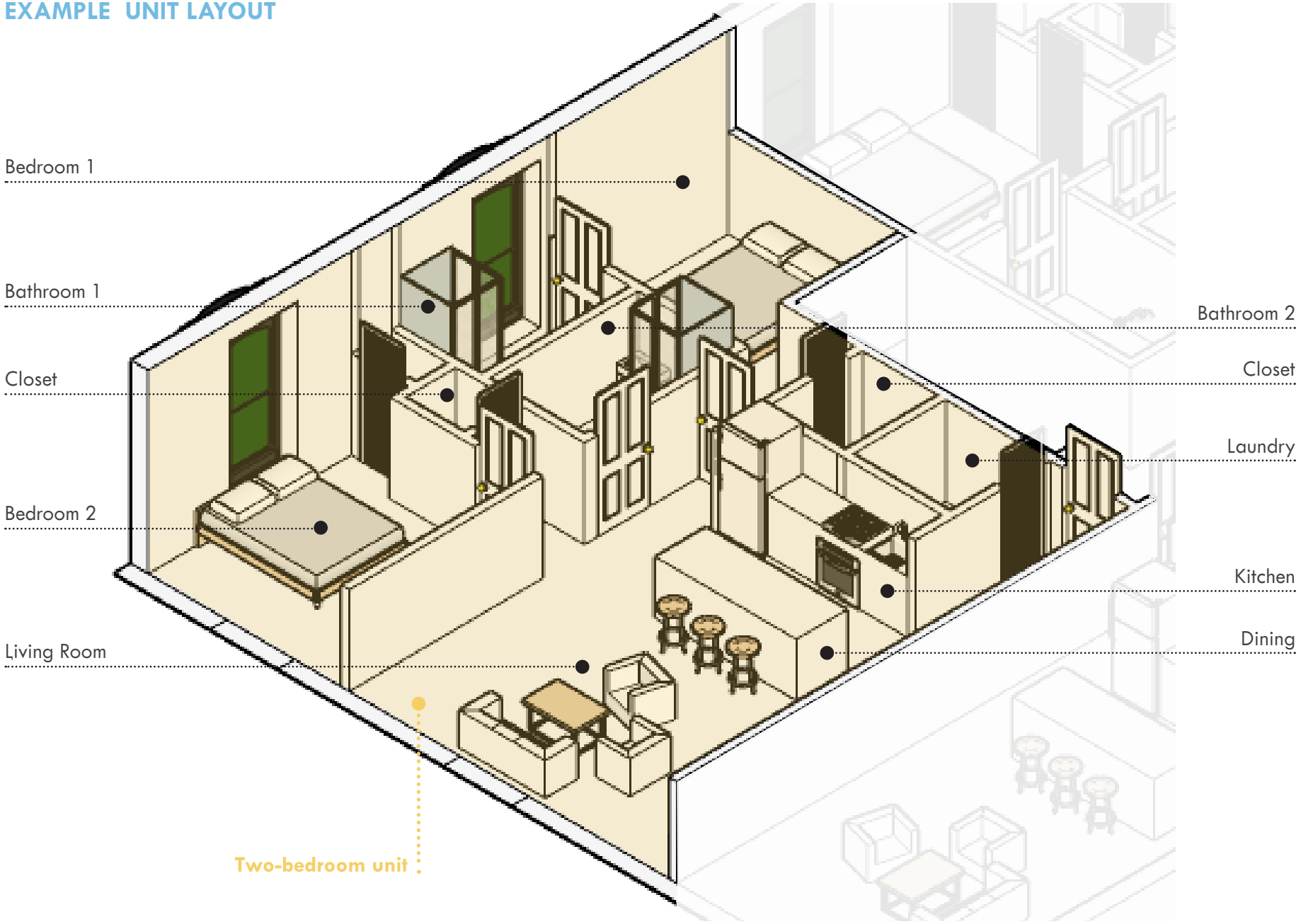
Beverly
Mashpee
Wayland

SITE PLAN LAYOUT



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

EXAMPLE UNIT LAYOUT



Acton, MA

BARRIERS

BARRIERS

Some of the challenges surrounding mixed-use development are due to, as the name suggests, its dual nature. Mixed-use developments must meet the often-high parking requirements for commercial uses while also managing the water and sewer requirements of residential uses. The differing timelines for residential development and commercial leasing can make financing difficult. When retrofitting existing strip malls, challenges also include dealing with outdated structures and pedestrian-unfriendly site plans. However, when these challenges are met, many residents look forward to the addition of small-scale, local-serving retail or revitalization of aging commercial centers.

Beverly, MA

BARRIERS BY STAKEHOLDER

TOWN OFFICIALS

Zoning bylaws
Parking
Traffic and pedestrian safety
Water and sewer

DEVELOPERS

Zoning bylaws
Parking
Permitting process
Market dynamics
Financing

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Traffic
Parking
Existing local businesses

BARRIERS FOR TOWN OFFICIALS

Zoning

In many suburban towns, zoning presents a substantial barrier to mixed-use development. Many zoning bylaws require a special permit for mixed-use development or prohibit it altogether, even in districts where commercial or multifamily uses are permitted as a single-use. Dimensional requirements further limit where and how mixed-use can be built. Allowing mixed uses in certain areas can represent a significant departure from decades of land use practice and may require strong advocates to communicate its potential. Some towns permit certain accessory uses or home-based businesses as a more incremental path to enabling mixed-use development.

A 2019 review of zoning in Greater Boston found that, while many local bylaws around the region allow mixed-use and multi-family, most have outdated and in some cases arbitrary requirements that stifle this type of development.[2]

Traffic and Pedestrian Safety

Commercial zoning districts and older strip malls are often located in auto-centric areas along arterial roadways that are uncomfortable or even dangerous for pedestrians. A successful mixed-use development needs the support of a planning process that considers these needs and transforms auto-centric areas to be more walkable and inviting for households and patrons. Even if public transit isn't available or regulations for major state-owned roads limit potential traffic calming measures, sites themselves can be designed to promote walkability. For instance, shared parking areas located behind buildings can allow visitors to park in one place and visit multiple businesses and amenities by foot. Ample sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, and amenities such as seating and plantings can encourage walking and a more vibrant street life.

Parking

Perhaps the greatest barrier to mixed-use development imposed by zoning is parking requirements. Often a mixed-use development must meet parking requirements for both retail and housing, which can be as high as one parking space per 500 square feet of retail space and two parking spaces per residential unit. When combined, these requirements can be difficult to meet. Even if the required parking can be accommodated, large parking areas can create an unfriendly environment for pedestrians, exacerbate heat islands on warm days, increase stormwater runoff, and be visually unattractive. Building parking spaces is also very expensive, costs which are usually passed on to future building residents. The latest phase of MAPC's Perfect Fit Parking Initiative estimated costs to be between $5,000-$10,000 per surface parking space and up to $23,500 per garage parking space (MAPC Perfect Fit Parking Initiative Phase II, 2019).[3] Of the suburban communities included in the report, the average cost of a parking space for residents ranged from $8 - $60 per month. The report also found that parking is oversupplied even in suburban communities where demand is perceived to be high. To encourage smaller mixed-use development, towns should allow residential and commercial uses—which often require parking at different, complementary times of day—to share parking spaces and reduce the development's overall requirement.

Water and Sewer

While mixed-use development can serve as a vehicle for pedestrian-oriented public improvements, it may be constrained if a site does not have access to water and sewer lines. In the case of existing commercial uses, some infrastructure may already exist on-site. However, residential use is often more water-intensive than commercial use, and existing infrastructure may need to be upgraded. Larger redevelopment projects may be able to support the cost of on-site wastewater treatment, and smaller projects may be able to utilize a shared septic system. Communities planning for growth in particular areas can seek MassWorks funding to expand or upgrade its sewer and water infrastructure to support new development.

2 Dain, Amy. "The State of Zoning for Multi-Family Housing In Greater Boston." The Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance, June 2019. Accessed June 19, 2021. https://ma-smartgrowth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/03/FINAL_Multi-Family_Housing_Report.pdf.

3 The MAPC Perfect Fit Parking Initiative is a multiple phase study to estimate the utilization and cost of parking with the goal of helping communities better understand their parking demand and how to set parking regulations to match demand and avoid contributing to unnecessary development costs. So far the two phases have included parking surveys in over 20 cities and towns, located mostly in the Inner Core Subregion. Future study will expand further into Greater Boston. For more information visit www.perfectfitparking.mapc.org.

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING

The participating South Shore communities each have at least one zoning district that can facilitate mixed-use at a variety of scales and intensities. However, minimum lot size and other dimensional requirements limit how mixed-use can be built, potentially encouraging development is not consistent with best practices for urban design and walkability, and in some cases may effectively deter it entirely. Generally, regulations that focus more on the form and intensity of a development are more flexible and more effective in encouraging mixed-use than regulations that focus on permitted uses with stringent dimensional, height, and parking requirements. Additionally, South Shore bylaws could do more to encourage mixed-use such as allowing this type of development by-right within parameters or design guidelines to ensure the development meets community standards and goals. Strategic relief from requirements could also be offered such as reducing parking requirements when the development is near transit or contributing to a shared parking arrangement.

Providence, RI | Union Studio Architecture and Nat Rea Photography

Specifically:

- **All five towns have at least one zoning district where mixed use is permitted**; of these, three towns have at least one district where mixed use is permitted by right and two towns require a special permit for mixed use in any district. Even in towns that permit some mixed-use by right, opportunities may be limited; for example, Norwell allows mixed use by right in its Business A district, which covers a small area at the center of town, but mixed use is not permitted at all in other business areas where it may be appropriate. Scituate stands out for its multiple districts which allow mixed use by right.
- **Scituate and Hingham's multiple districts with low or no minimum lot area most readily facilitate small-scale, more incremental development.** In other towns, minimum lot size may be more prohibitive. For example, Cohasset's downtown business district requires a minimum parcel size of close to or above one acre depending on the number of units, which may make it more difficult to develop the sort of small-scale mixed use that would be well-suited to its compact, walkable downtown.
- **Parking requirements may be the greatest impediment to mixed-use development, or at least the greatest driver of mixed-use that takes the form of isolated buildings surrounded by expansive parking lots.** Between the participating towns, one and a half to two parking spaces are required per housing unit, though Scituate and Norwell's bylaws permit only one space for one-bedroom units. These are in addition to spaces required for commercial uses.
- **Three of the towns' bylaws permit sufficient mixed use buildings up to 3 stories.** Norwell permits mixed-use buildings two and a half stories tall; Duxbury's 30' height limit would likely only accommodate a 2-story building because retail floors are typically taller than residential floors. While 2- or 2.5-story mixed-use buildings are certainly possible, they may be less attractive for developers and, in areas where land costs are high, are less likely to be financially feasible.

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING

	COHASSET					DUXBURY		HINGHAM			
Zoning District	**Harbor Village Business Overlay**	**Downtown Business**		**Highway Business**		**Neighborhood Business Light**	**Neighborhood Business Light 1 and 2**	**Downtown Hingham Overlay**	**Business A**	**Business B**	**Industrial**
Special Permit	Y	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Min. Lot Area (sf)	**Single-unit**	**Single-unit**	**Multi-unit**	**Single-unit**	**Multi-unit**	30,000	15,000	SP	NA	NA	100 acres FAR 1 to 1
	5,000	5,000	40,000 + 4,000 per family more than two	10,000	88,000						
Min. Lot Frontage (ft)	50	50	20	50	200	200	100	SP	20	100	SP
Min. Lot Width (ft)	50	50	20	100	200	100 (Depth)	100 (Depth)	SP	NA	NA	SP
Min. Front Yard (ft)	15*	15	15	50	100	25	10	SP	10	40	SP
Min. Side Yard (ft) (j)	10**	10	10	20	50	25 to Residential 0 to NB-1 or NB-2	0	SP	NA	25	SP
Min. Rear Yard (ft) (j)	15	15	15	20	50	15 to Residential 0 to NB-1 or NB-2	0	SP	NA	25	SP
Max Coverage	80%	80%	20%	60% (25% structures)	60%	50%	50%	SP	NA	25% (buildings)	SP
Min. Open Area	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	80% (buildings)	80% (buildings)	80% (buildings)	15%
Max. Height ft, (Stories)	35		35 (NA)	35 (NA)	35 (NA)	30	30	SP	35 (3)	35 (3)	40
Bedroom Limitation						2	2	2	3 – 15%	3 – 15%	3 – 15%
Bedroom Size Requirement									One-bed: 575 sq. ft. min Two-bed: 750 sq. ft. min		
Parking	1.5 per DU	2 per DU						2 per DU			
IZ Threshold/Requirement	5/fee-in-lieu					6/10%		6 or less DU per acre/10%, More than 6 DU per acre/15%			

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING CONTINUED

	NORWELL	SCITUATE						
Zoning District	**Business A**	**General Business**	**Harbor Business**	**Commercial**	**Greenbush Village Center Sub-district**	**Gateway Business Subdistrict**	**New Driftway Transit Village Center Subdistrict**	**Vertical Mixed-use Design Standards**
Special Permit				Y	Y	Y		
Min. Lot Area (sf)	1 acre (all districts)	10,000	10,000	10,000	NA	NA	NA	NA
Min. Lot Frontage (ft)	80 (all districts)	100	100	100	NA	NA	NA	50
Min. Lot Width (ft)	125 at setback	SP		NA		NA		SP
Min. Front Yard (ft)	50				5 min/30 max	5 min/ 40 max	5 min/40 max	0 min/20 max
Min. Side Yard (ft) (j)	10	8	8	8	10 min; 0 feet if common wall	10 min; 0 feet if common wall	10 min; 0 feet if common wall	10 min; 0 feet if common wall
Min. Rear Yard (ft) (j)	20	20 (res)		NA		25		SP
Max Coverage	NA				80%	60%	80%	NA
Min. Open Area	NA				15%	15%	15%	15%
Max. Height ft, (Stories)	34 (2.5)	40 (3)	40 (3)	40 (3)	14 min/35 max	14 min/ 35 max	18 min/45 max	30 (2.5)
Bedroom Limitations	2	2		3 – 15%		3 – 15%		3 – 15%
Bedroom Size Requirements				One-bed: 575 sq. ft. min Two-bed: 750 sq. ft. min				
Parking	1 per one-bed, 2 per two-bed+	Planning Board can reduce to 1 per one-bed, 1.5 per two-bed, and 2 per three-bed						
IZ Threshold/Requirement	No requirement	8-40+/10-15% (sliding scale)						

PROGRESSIVE BYLAWS

Progressive bylaws for small-scale mixed-use tend to focus more on the form and design of the building rather than the use or density. The greater the flexibility of the setback, height, and density requirements, the better opportunity these bylaws have to facilitate mixed-use development in various contexts. Mixed-use bylaws should have a small front yard setback requirement or a build to line and should require parking to be located in the rear to foster a more pedestrian-friendly and engaging environment. Shared parking arrangements are also key to satisfying parking demand for a range of different uses. Finally, allowing mixed-use by-right (subject to design and other criteria) can also incentivize this type of development.

Examples of progressive small-scale mixed-use bylaws are shown on the following page. Key elements include:

- Each of the examples make it easy to permit smaller mixed-use by providing a by-right option rather than a special permitting process. The Maynard Downtown Mixed-use Overlay District encourages smaller mixed-use developments by allowing developments of six or fewer housing units by-right, but also gives the planning board oversight of developments with more than six housing units through a special permitting process. Beverly's Central Business District uses a similar approach to provide flexibility for building height, allowing up to 55 feet by-right and up to 75 feet by special permit.
- Several zoning districts have small and flexible lot size, frontage, and setback requirements, which all contribute to a more walkable and cohesive downtown or village center district.
- Several of the examples direct parking to the rear to create a pedestrian friendly environment. These zoning examples also offer opportunities to reduce parking requirements based on site conditions.
- The Ashland Downtown District breaks down mixed-use into various scales and intensities by utilizing form-based code. This district has three sub-areas that facilitate larger, medium, and small-scale mixed-use by differentiating minimum lot area, frontage, height, and floor area ratio. As seen in the chart on the right, the bylaws also provide visual examples of façade types and other architectural details that are encouraged (but not required). Visually articulating desired design features ensures that by-right development is consistent with town goals without forcing developers to use specific building materials.

Ashland, MA

Ashland, MA

PROGRESSIVE ZONING EXAMPLES

Key elements are highlighted.

	ASHLAND, MA	BEVERLY, MA	MAYNARD, MA	MILLIS, MA
Zoning District	**Ashland Downtown District (Form-based Code)**	**Central Business District**	**Downtown Mixed-Use Overlay District**	**Economic Overlay District**
By-right	By-right and special permit vary by sub-district, density, and housing type.	Y	Mixed-use with 6 or fewer dwelling units (by-right) Mixed-use with more than 6 dwelling units (special permit)	All uses in underlying zoning district, apartment houses, and residential uses restricted to second floor and above (where facing Main Street/Route 109)
Vertical mixed residential and commercial	Y	Y		Y
Min. Lot Area (sf)	Sub-area A: 35,000 Sub-area B: 20,000 Sub-area C: 8,000	None for commercial and mixed-use development	30,000	30,000
Min. Lot Frontage (ft)	Sub-area A: 100 Sub-area B: 75 Sub-area C: 50	None (Unless abutting a residential zone -15 ft)	20	120
Min. Lot Width (ft)				
Min. Front Yard (ft)	0-15	None (If abutting a residential zone, setbacks are the same as that zone)	10	5-15
Min. Side Yard (ft) (j)	0	None (If abutting a residential zone, setbacks are the same as that zone)	0 (15 if abutting a residential lot)	0
Min. Rear Yard (ft) (j)	12	None (If abutting a residential zone, setbacks are the same as that zone)	0 (15 if abutting a residential lot)	25
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	Sub-area A: 2 Sub-area B: 1.5 Sub-area C: 1.5			
Max. Height ft, (Stories)	Sub-area A: 4 Sub-area B: 4 Sub-area C: 3	55 (by-right) – 75 (special permit)	45	35 ft, 2.5 stories (whichever is lower)
Parking	75% of general parking requirements for each use. Parking lots within the Downtown District must be connected unless there are physical constraints and that prevent their connection	Within the deport parking overlay district – one space per dwelling unit	2 spaces per dwelling unit The planning board may allow shared parking and reduce parking requirements during the special permit process	1 space per dwelling unit and 2 spaces per two-bedroom unit or greater The planning board may allow shared parking and reduce parking requirements by special permit
Additional attributes	Form-based approach provides visual examples of preferred design features.	Special permit can be pursued if dimensional and design standards aren't met. 100% of the ground floor must be commercial or office as defined by a special use table of by-right and special permit uses	More than 50% of ground floor space must be used for retail, restaurant, office and/or medical office use Density bonus of 800 sq. ft. per dwelling unit can be granted by PB under a development agreement if number of affordable units is equal to or greater than 15% of total units in the development or equivalent donation to Maynard Affordable Housing Trust	The planning board may permit a density bonus of 1 dwelling unit per 2,000 square feet of open land, provided the open land is equal to at least 15 percent of the total area

BARRIERS FOR DEVELOPERS

In towns where mixed-use is not permitted by right, the special permit process can lengthen the development timeline and can increase risk due to the uncertainty of the permitting process. It can also result in conditions placed on the development during the review process; while these conditions are in service of public benefit and may result in a better project, they can also increase development costs. By-right zoning for development that a town would like to encourage, accompanied by clear design guidelines and expectations for public benefits, can reduce the unpredictability of the approvals process.

Beyond regulatory constraints, mixed-use redevelopment is challenging because it requires expertise in multiple markets. Residential developers are often unfamiliar with commercial development and may be wary of taking on the risk of building commercial space that they may have trouble leasing. On the other hand, commercial developers may be put off by the longer development timeline associated with residential development. Banks may be reluctant to finance a project without a confirmed retail tenant, but many retailers are not interested in signing a lease for a space that cannot be occupied for months or years. Delays in the approvals process can exacerbate these challenges.

Retrofitting aging single-use commercial buildings can pose additional challenges. Strip malls are often under local ownership; these small-scale property owners may have less development capacity and access to capital than larger-scale regional developers. Strip malls can span multiple parcels controlled by several different property owners, making it challenging to collaborate on a redevelopment proposal. Finally, strip malls can still be profitable even if they appear to be in decline; in these cases, property owners may have little incentive to embark on a complicated redevelopment process. Strong partnerships and dedicated proponents are critical to a successful strip mall redevelopment.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Residents are often concerned that new housing will increase traffic, particularly if it is located on an already-busy arterial street. Although every development is different, typically a residential unit, whose occupants may take a few trips each day, has minimal traffic impact when compared to commercial uses, which may see dozens of visitors each hour. If a project satisfies parking requirements through an alternative method such as shared parking, community members may worry that parking will be insufficient, particularly in auto-centric areas where most trips occur via car. A traffic impact study and a parking analysis, conducted by the developer for projects above a certain size, can identify potential impacts; towns can then use this information to require mitigation.

In the case of aging strip malls, many have been around for so long that it can be difficult for long-time residents to imagine something different, particularly if that involves an increase in height or density. Additionally, strip malls often have local tenants whose businesses depend on the less expensive rents found in older buildings. Redevelopment of a strip mall must engage these stakeholders to ensure that local businesses are not displaced.


Maynard, MA

Wayland, MA

CASE STUDIES

CABOT STREET APARTMENTS, BEVERLY MA

Year built
2015

Lot size
1/3 acre

Housing units
13

Affordability
2 deed-restricted units

Unit mix
One- and two-bedroom apartments

Building height
3 stories; first floor commercial, second and third floors residential

Tenure
Rental

Zoning
Central Business District (CC)

Beverly has been working to encourage small-scale mixed-use development along Cabot Street and Rantoul Street with the goal to bring walkers and shoppers to the areas near its downtown. Following the completion of a housing production plan, the City established the Central Business District (CC). This new district allows mixed-use by-right for projects up to 55 feet with no setback requirements unless the project abuts a residential zone. A special permitting process is also offered for development proposals that would like to consider aspects outside of the zone's dimensional and design standards, including a height of up to 75 feet.

Beverly's CC District and the Cabot Street apartments show how flexible zoning focused on form and design can result in mixed-use housing development that helps activate local commercial streets and add vibrancy to neighborhoods. Utilizing the new zoning, the Cabot Street Apartments were built in 2015 resulting in 13 total rental housing units, including two Affordable Housing units to satisfy the town's inclusionary zoning requirements. The 3-story project was within the 55-ft. height permitted by right for mixed use in the CC District. Following the CC Zone's direction, the Cabot Street apartments locate parking in the rear of the building and keep the building close to the sidewalk which fosters an inviting and walkable sidewalk environment.

MASHPEE COMMONS

Year(s) built
Phased; most recent phase began construction in 2014

Housing units
77 units as of 2021

Unit mix
One- and two-bedrooms

Tenure
Mix of ownership and rental

Zoning
M.G.L. Chapter 40B

Mashpee Commons is one of the country's most well-known examples of a transformational suburban retrofit. Although larger than the small-scale mixed use described in this section, the project offers lessons for mixed-use redevelopment at any scale. What started out in 1968 as a sprawling strip mall of 75,000 square feet has since been transformed into a popular mixed-use neighborhood and shopping center that conveys a traditional New England town center feel. After a decline in activity during the 1980s, the single property owner partnered with local planners to re-envision the site during a series of charrettes. They eventually won public support for creating a mixed-use walkable district with a gridded network of internal streets rather than arterial roadways as originally expected.

Mashpee Commons was developed through the Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permitting Process, a state statue that enables local Zoning Boards of Appeals to approve affordable housing developments under flexible rules if at least 20-25% of the units have long-term affordability restrictions. The flexibility of Chapter 40B enabled the project to avoid many of the dimensional restrictions in the Town's zoning bylaw and was key to the success of the project. Additional flexibility was gained by defining the streets as driveways and alleyways to avoid regulations that would have required large setbacks.

The project was constructed in multiple phases beginnign in 1986; earlier phases consisted primarily of commercial buildings with later phases adding residential units. It includes 350,000 sf of commercial space occupied by a mix of local, regional, and national retailers. Residential units are located above and behind the commercial spaces, and because of Chapter 40B's mixed-income requirement, 25% of these housing units are deed-restricted Affordable Housing.

WAYLAND COMMONS

Total Housing Units
54

Housing Types
Mixed-use and townhouses

Tenure
Mix of ownership and rental

Commercial Area
159,000 square feet

Zoning
Mixed-use Overlay District

Wayland Commons, a redevelopment of a Raytheon facility near downtown Wayland that was formerly used for weapons research and design, demonstrates that mixed-use suburban retrofits need not be limited to strip malls. In preparation for redevelopment, the Town worked with Raytheon to create a public involvement plan for remediating the site and held annual public meetings to update residents on the progress. After the site was remediated, the Town adopted its Mixed-Use Overlay District to facilitate development on the site.

The standards of the overlay district were helpful in guiding the design of the development and providing a basis for the Planning Board, which served as the special permit granting authority, to review the development. However, the Planning Board also had the ability to discuss the project with the developer throughout the special permitting process, providing the flexibility to accommodate unique aspects of the development. Ultimately the site was transformed into a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood with 159,000 square feet of commercial space, 12 rental housing units located above store fronts, and 42 condominium townhouses. The development also includes open spaces and recreational opportunities with direct access to the Massachusetts Rail Trail.

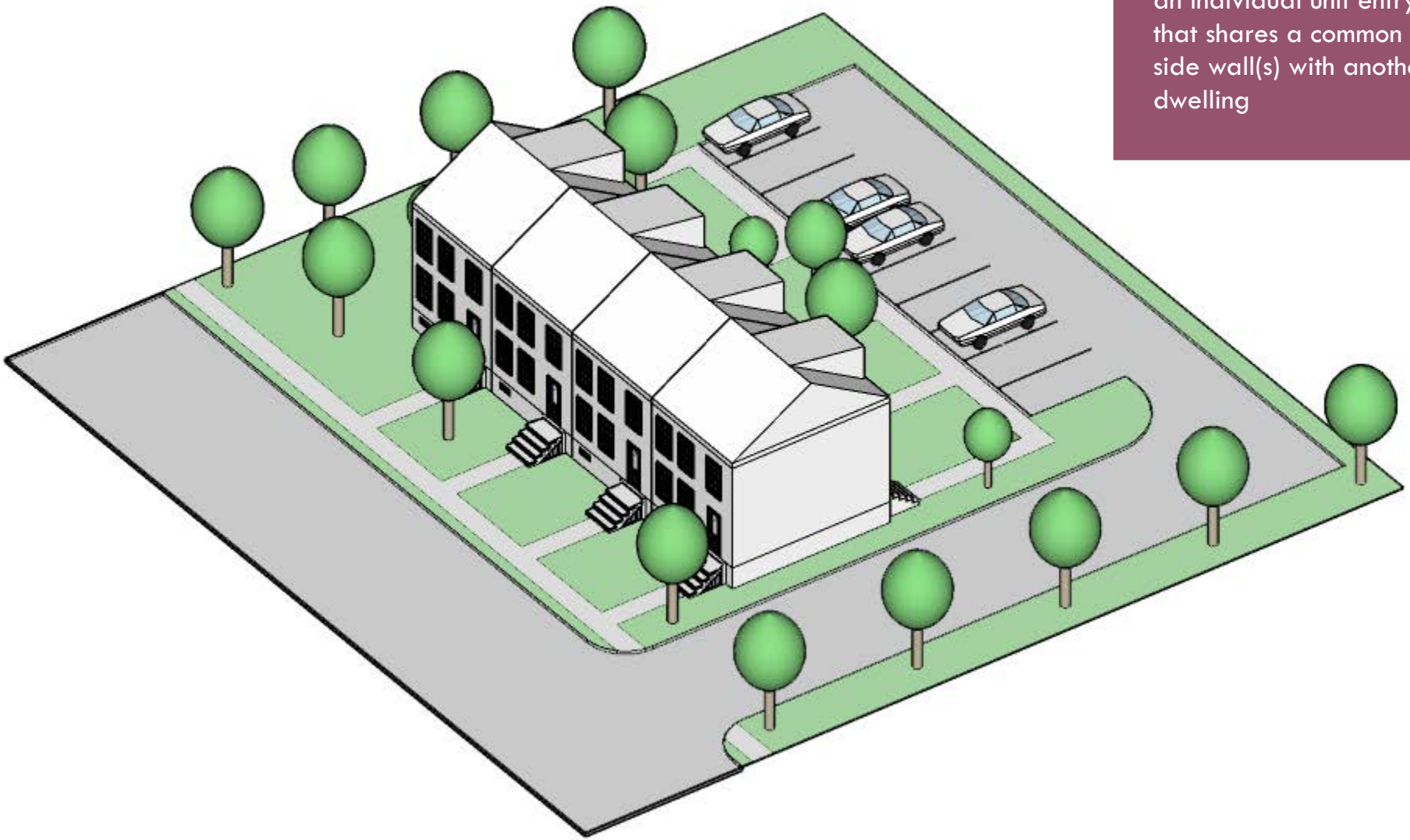
LITTLE TO MIDDLE HOUSING TYPES

TOWNHOUSES

Opticos Design | Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

TOWNHOUSES

Definition: A narrow, multi-level home with an individual unit entry that shares a common side wall(s) with another dwelling



OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

From the brownstones of Back Bay to historic homes in and around town centers across Massachusetts, townhouses have a special place in Greater Boston's history. Originating in London and Paris, townhouses became popular in New England in part thanks to Bostonian architect Charles Bullfinch, who designed some of Boston's first townhouses after spending time in Europe. Compact yet private, townhouses emerged as a popular housing type for the urban middle class. The townhouse concept was also widely employed to meet increasing demand for workforce housing during the industrial revolution.[4]

While suburban zoning bylaws in the mid- to-late twentieth century largely discouraged or prohibited townhouses through minimum frontage and setback requirements, in recent years this housing type has been gaining more attention. Townhouses now come in many different shapes and sizes and, harkening back to their middle-income origins, they represent a single-family housing option that tends to be more affordable than large-lot detached homes.

North Kingstown, RI | Union Studio Architecture + Nat Rea Photography

4 Schoenauer, Norbert. *6,000 Years of Housing*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003.

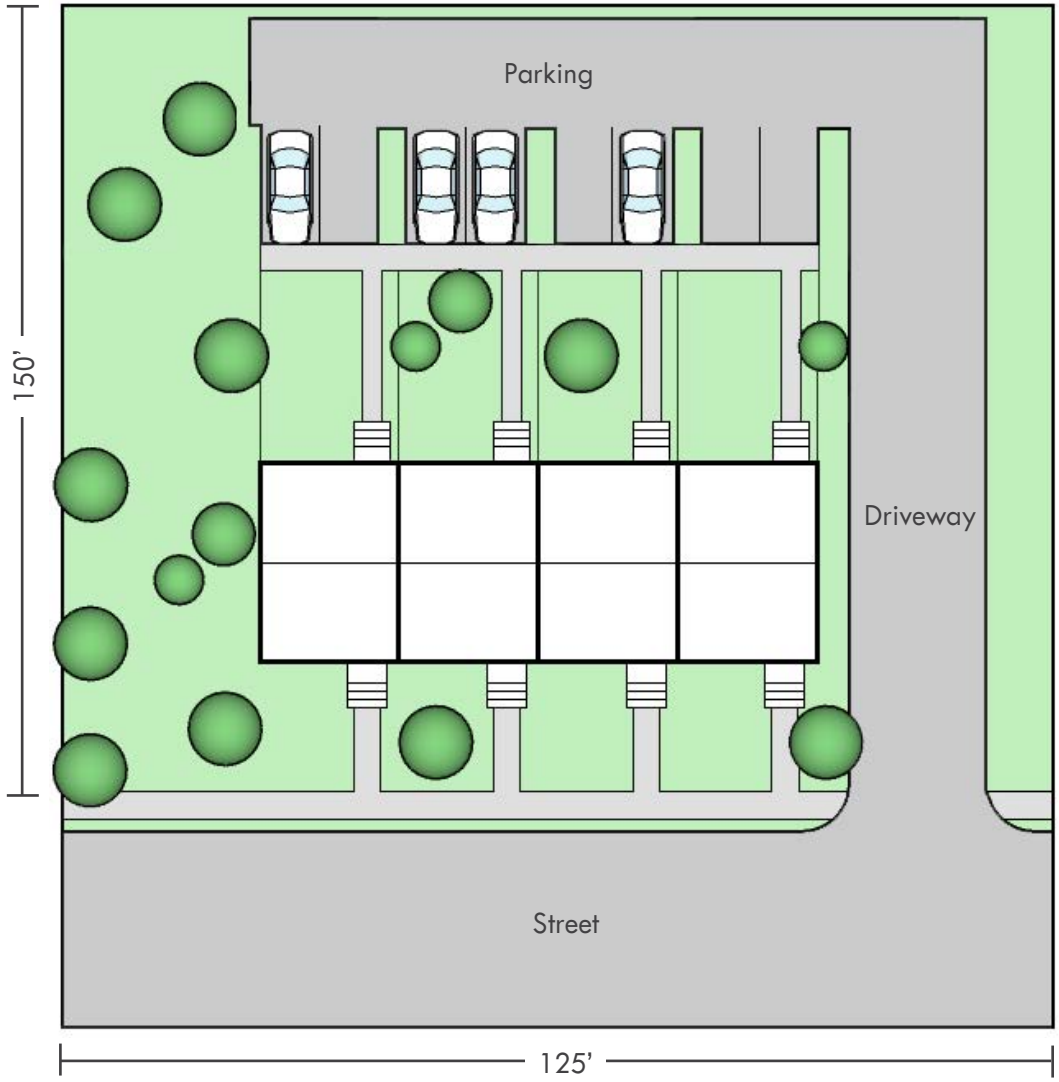
Curtis Adams via Pexels

LAYOUT

GENERAL LAYOUT:

Lot Size	1,800-3,000 sq.ft. per townhouse
Height	2 - 2½ stories
Setbacks	0' between adjacent buildings, 10' between clusters; front face of building 0-15' from sidewalk
Density	5-15 units per acre
Width	Each townhouse 15-25'
Unit Size	1,200-2,400 sq.ft. per townhouse 1-4 bedrooms

SITE PLAN LAYOUT:



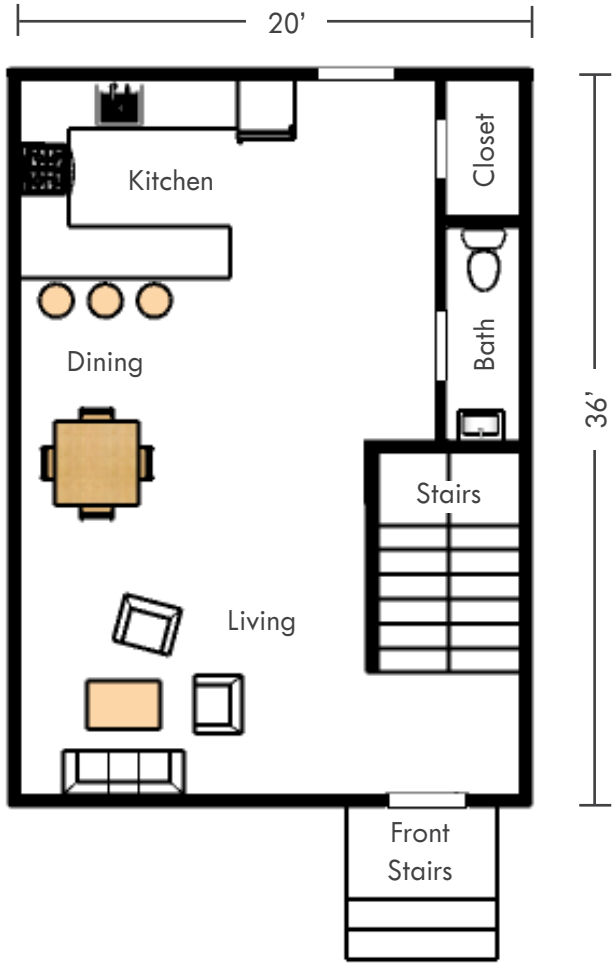
POLICY EXAMPLES:

Danvers
Northampton
Portsmouth, NH
Reading

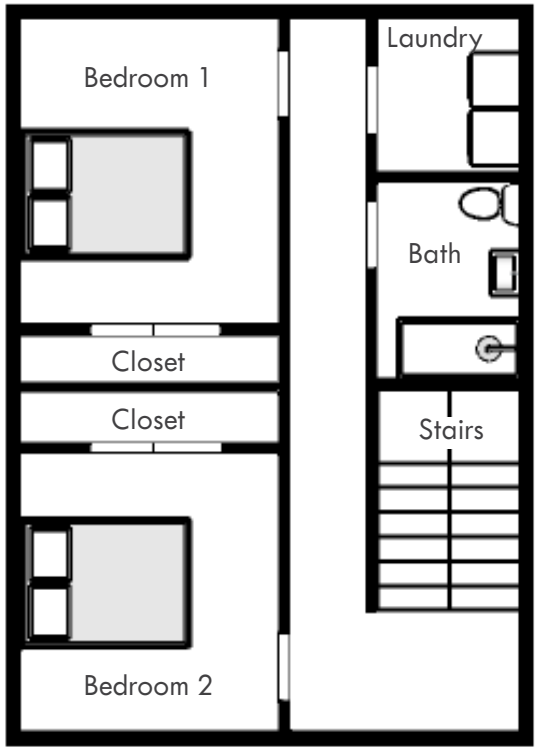
BUILT EXAMPLES:

Gloucester
Lincoln
Manchester-by-the-Sea

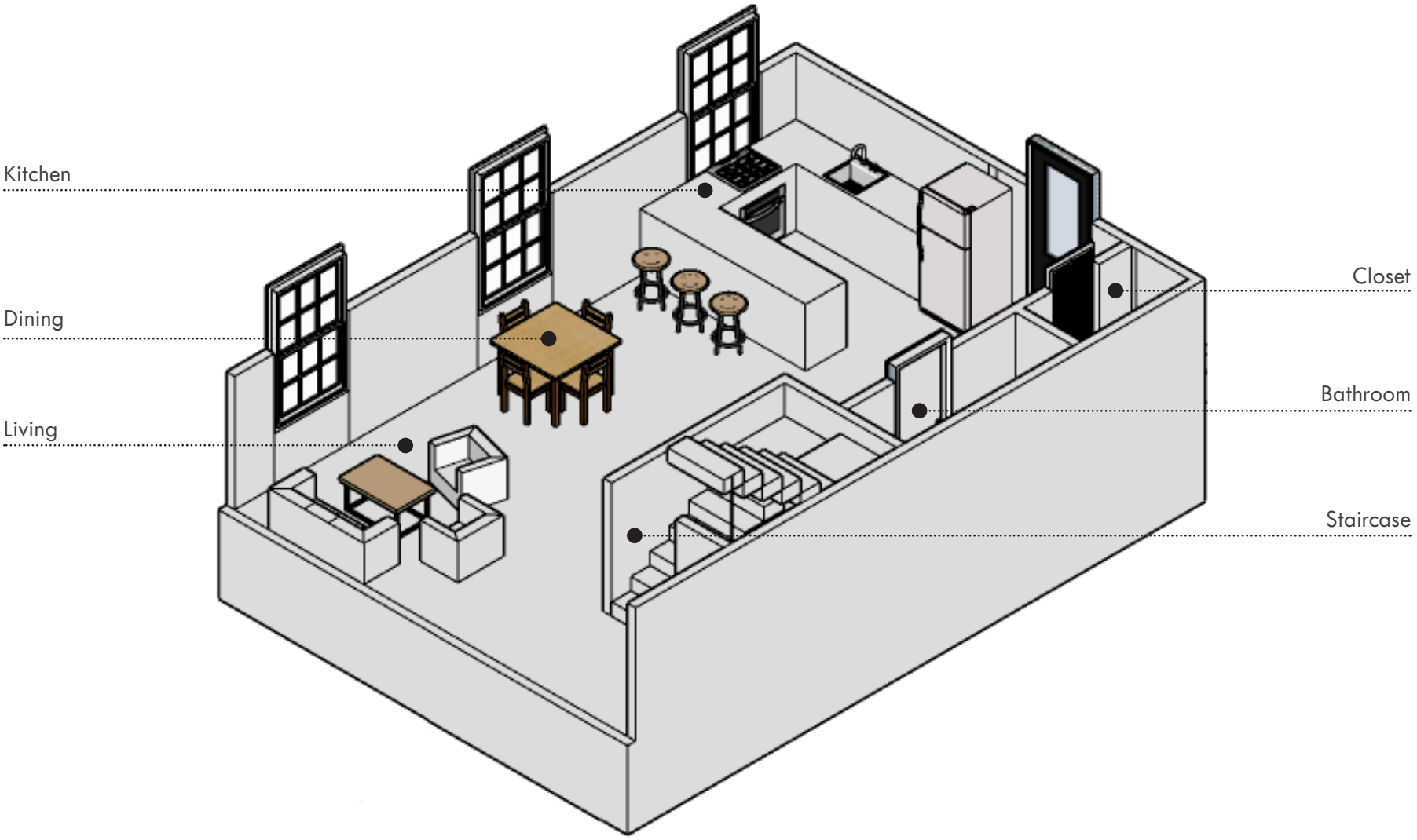
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR LAYOUT



Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

BARRIERS

BARRIERS

Due to their lot line-to-lot line layout, townhouses can face unique zoning challenges, particularly if they are not defined in a town's zoning bylaw and must comply with more general multifamily dimensional requirements. Additionally, their relatively high density can pose challenges both in terms of infrastructure and public perception. However, many common concerns can be addressed through thoughtful site planning, and many towns would be well-served by the mix of privacy and density afforded by this housing type.

Curtis Adams via Pexels

BARRIERS BY STAKEHOLDER

TOWN OFFICIALS

- Zoning bylaws
- Parking and trash access
- Building and fire codes
- Water and Sewer

DEVELOPERS

- Zoning bylaws
- Ownership structure
- Permitting process

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- Traffic
- School enrollment
- Neighborhood character

BARRIERS FOR TOWN OFFICIALS

Zoning

Because townhouses are essentially attached single-family homes, they can be either be built side-by-side on a single lot or on adjacent narrow lots with no side setback. Because of this, it can be difficult to craft appropriate dimensional regulations if townhouses are not defined as their own typology. If townhouses are classified as single-family housing, typical suburban zoning regulations that require a minimum lot size, frontage, and side yard setback would preclude the narrow parcels and lot-line common walls that make townhouses possible. However, classifying townhouses as multifamily housing can also be problematic. Even multifamily zoning districts, when designed for apartment use rather than townhouses, often include setback and lot coverage restrictions can impede townhouse development. Open space requirements can also be challenging if they can only be met through the provision of a large contiguous shared open space rather than the smaller, individual open spaces afforded by townhouses. If local regulations are too rigid, some Massachusetts developers opt to utilize state-enabled zoning tools such as Chapter 40B or Chapter 40R.

Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

Parking and Trash Access

A well-designed townhouse site plan should locate parking and trash behind the house, not visible from the street, to promote an attractive and pedestrian-oriented façade. However, because townhouses are built side-by-side, direct access from the street is not possible for each townhome. This is easily addressed through shared driveways, but could pose a challenge if lot and subdivision regulations do not have the flexibility to accommodate shared drives.

Building and Fire Codes

Residential building codes and fire safety codes provide clear guidance on construction requirements for dwelling units with shared walls and to ensure adequate access for emergency vehicles on shared driveways. However, local officials that deal primarily with detached single-family homes may not be accustomed to reviewing this type of construction and may need to familiarize themselves with the ways in which life safety standards are met in attached housing.

Water and Sewer

While their relative density makes townhouses an example of smart growth design, they may be constrained if a location is not served by public water and sewer lines. This is especially true in smaller towns and suburban communities, many of which rely on septic systems and limited public infrastructure. The Battle Road Farm development in Lincoln, MA, used an onsite sewer treatment plant, but this option is only financially feasible for developments above a certain size. Smaller projects may be able to utilize a shared septic system. It is also worth remembering that, in comparison to single-family homes, townhouses generally are more compact and have fewer bedrooms and therefore accommodate fewer people, requiring less water and sewer capacity per unit.

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING

While technically each of the five partner towns has at least one zoning district where townhouse development is permitted, some of these districts' dimensional standards do not easily lend themselves to townhouse design, and others require an approvals process so involved that it would likely discourage development altogether. Hingham and Scituate each have at least one district whose dimensional requirements work well for townhouse development, though even these require a special permit.

- Two of the five participating South Shore towns include a specific definition for townhouses or rowhouses.[5] In the other towns, a townhouse development would likely be defined as multifamily housing and would need to comply with the bylaw's multifamily dimensional requirements.

North Kingstown, RI | Union Studio Architecture + Nat Rea Photography

- With attached side walls and widths of only 15-25', townhouses are best facilitated by correspondingly narrow and small lots. Scituate's bylaw is the only one with at least one district that permits lots narrow and small enough for this type in at least one of its zoning districts. In a similar vein, townhouses are most commonly situated close to the sidewalk with a relatively small front yard; again, Scituate's bylaw is the only one of the five where this is possible.
- If it is not possible to build townhouses on adjacent individual lots, a developer may choose to build them on a single lot as condominium units. A townhouse developer in Hingham could pursue this route with relative ease in at least one zoning district, which permits up to four connected townhouses with suitable minimum required lot size and frontage.
- In the three remaining towns, the only vehicle for building townhouses is through a floating overlay district or planned unit development, with minimum lot sizes of one acre or more. Lots of this size would lend themselves to a larger planned development of cluster of townhomes built around a courtyard or mews, but preclude small-scale, incremental pockets of three or four townhouses. A courtyard townhouse arrangement could be further limited in Norwell, which allows only one structure on each lot, thus excluding two rows of facing townhouses.
- Most towns' bylaws require that at least one third of the site be reserved as open space. While this is easily accomplished on larger sites, it can be prohibitive for smaller townhouse developments of just a few units, which rely on smaller private yards for open space rather than large, contiguous shared yards.
- Two out of five limit the number of bedrooms that can be included in townhouses, which conflicts with federal and state fair housing laws that protect familial status.
- All towns allow a height of at least two and a half stories, which is appropriate for a townhouse and would not be particularly limiting.

To encourage townhouse development, bylaws should provide a definition for this development, allow multiple buildings on one lot, and offer flexible design guidelines that can accommodate various site dynamics.

5 Most bylaws refer to this housing type as either a "townhouse" or a "rowhouse;" the two terms are used interchangeably here.

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING

	COHASSET	DUXBURY				HINGHAM		NORWELL	SCITUATE
Zoning District	**Residential Cluster District (RCD)**	**Planned Development District**				**Residence D and E Districts by special permit**			**R-3 by Special Permit**
Defined in Zoning Bylaw	No	Classified as semi-detached				Attached party walls on one or both sides, has a separate ground level entrance and front and rear yards. Exempt from lot shape requirements.		No	Attached single family residential buildings. Each unit is separated by a common wall and groups of buildings may be separated by a common driveway or community space.
More than one Structure Permitted on a Lot	Single-family separate, Multifamily together	One structure by right. Multiple by special permit.				By special permit		No	Yes
Unit limitation	30% Multifamily buildings max, must be attached	5% min detached SF. Must have a mix of detached SF, attached SF, semi-attached townhouse, and multifamily or garden apartments. Max 70% of one type.				At least four connected dwellings, no more than 10 units on one lot			Max 8 units can be attached by a common wall before accessway of 20 ft. is provided for pedestrians, vehicles, or outdoor amenity space
Bedroom Limitation	2	2 (multifamily)							
Unit Size						Affordable town houses must be a min of 1,200 sq. ft. GFA			
Minimum lot size (sq. ft.)	10 acres in Residence B or C District	1.5 acres unless specified in underlying zoning district				**Residence D**	**Multi-unit Standards**	1 acre	1,200 sq. ft. (if on separate lot)
						5,000	5 acres, Max 8 units per acre		
Lot Width (ft.)	Underlying districts, min 30 ft between group of lots and group of clustered buildings							150	Min/max depth - 50
Frontage (ft.)		**Single-family**	**Semi-detached**	**Three- and four- family**	**Multi-family**	30 per unit			18/24
Buffers (ft.)		75	125				At least 35 ft between structures and 50 ft landscape buffer adjacent to each property line.		
Front yard (ft.)		At least one yard must be 35 ft.	Min 10 ft between exterior walls, if no windows	Underlying district	Preferred to be only one dwelling unit deep so that each dwelling unit extends through the building	50		15-50	5/15
Side yard (ft.)				20 ft.		20		20	0
Rear yard (ft.)						20		20	15
Height (ft.), (stories)	35	35 (2.5), setbacks must be equal or less than required height				35 (2.5)		34 (2.5)	30 (2.5)

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING CONTINUED

	COHASSET	DUXBURY		HINGHAM		NORWELL	SCITUATE
Open Space Requirement	45%	60% (general standard)		**Residence D**	**Multi-unit Standards**	1/3 of the lot	Specific design standards, Section 752
					At least 2,000 sq. ft. of undeveloped and unpaved land and 1,000 sq. ft. of open space per dwelling unit		
Parking	2 spaces per DU	**Multifamily**	**Single-family**	2 spaces per dwelling unit	Guest parking required when no off-street parking is available determined by site plan review, not to exceed 10% of total required spaces	1 space – one-bed or less 2 spaces – two-bed or more	SF – 2 spaces Two-family – 4 spaces Other – 1 per bedroom
		1.5 per one-bed, 2 per two-bed	2 for two- and three-bedrooms, 3 for four-bedrooms or more				

PROGRESSIVE BYLAWS

Bylaws that best facilitate townhouse development typically define townhouses as their own building type, independent of detached single family and multifamily housing. Each of the example bylaws on the following pages include specific definitions for townhouses and allow them by right in at least one district. Other notable features include:

- Visual examples can communicate the town's vision to developers and provide guidance to local boards while maintaining sufficient flexibility for individualized designs. In the examples below, Danvers and Portsmouth utilize form-based code with corresponding graphics to clearly communicate desired design elements.
- Progressive bylaws permit the small and narrow lots that are unique to townhouses. Danvers' bylaw incorporates minimum lots sizes and lot frontages that are well-suited for townhouses, while Portsmouth and Reading's bylaws offer even more flexibility by not requiring a minimum lot size or frontage at all. Likewise, bylaws should stipulate no minimum density or a density that is high enough to accommodate the small townhouse lots.
- It is also essential that towns allow for attached dwellings. The dimensional requirements in some bylaws regulate distance between structures (i.e. multiple attached townhouses in a cluster), while others include setback requirements between individual townhouse units. If the latter, the side yard setback must be zero. Bylaws should be clear about this distinction.
- Bylaws should enable townhouses to be located close to the street by setting minimal or no required front setback.

Even with these elements, many townhouses are developed through 40B or 40R or other flexible districts. Northhampton utilized a M.G.L Ch. 40-R Smart Growth Overlay District to facilitate townhouse development and other communities could use this state tool if they do not have bylaws that are well-suited for this development.

Opticos Design | Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

PROGRESSIVE ZONING EXAMPLES

Key elements are highlighted.

	DANVERS, MA	NORTHHAMPTON, MA	PORTSMOUTH, NH	READING, MA	VIRGINIA BEACH, VA
Zoning Districts	**Character-based Zoning Districts**	**Village Hill Smart Growth Overlay District**	**Character District 4 (below) and Character District 5**	**Business C (requirements of this district are described below) and Planning Subdistrict A**	**Residential Townhouse District, Apartment Districts, and Mixed-use Districts**
By-right	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Definition	A small footprint and attached residential building with one dwelling unit where each unit is separated horizontally by a common wall. Rowhouses are not allowed for non-residential uses.	A row, attached side-to-side (not on top of each other), of at least two and not more than eight dwelling units. Each unit in the row may be owned by a separate owner.	A dwelling unit in a group of three or more attached units, foundation to roof, open space on at least two sides, separated by a fire-rated wall	A dwelling unit that is arranged, intended or designed to be occupied by a single family and that is attached to one or more other dwelling units by one or more common walls, with each dwelling unit having its own exterior entrance.	A building containing three (3) or more dwelling units attached at the side or sides in a series, separated by a boundary wall and each unit having a separate lot with at least minimum dimensions required by district regulations for such sections.
More than one Structure Permitted on a Lot	Y	Y	Y, Townhouses are exempt	Y, In Business A and Business C	Y
Minimum lot size (sq. ft)	1,200	2,000	None	None	1,400
Density		Sub district A – 8 units per acre Sub district B and C – 21 units per acre			
Minimum Lot Width (ft)			None		30
Frontage (ft)	18 min/ 24 max			None	
Front yard (ft)	5 - 15	Consistent with other buildings on the block (can be adjusted by the planning board based on natural constraints)	10 max	10	30
Side yard (ft)	None	For units extending behind front units, where entries orient to the side lot, 20-foot side setback (can be adjusted by the planning board)	None	10	10
Rear yard (ft)	15		Greater of 5 ft from rear lot line or 10 ft from center line of alley	10	20
Height (ft), (stories)	35 ft /2.5 stories	Minimum two stories/ underlying		55 max	36
Open Space Requirement	20%	Mandatory park/common area accessible to the public of at least 300 sq ft or 30 sq ft per dwelling unit of buildable land area	10%	30%	

PROGRESSIVE ZONING EXAMPLES CONTINUED

	DANVERS, MA	NORTHHAMPTON, MA	PORTSMOUTH, NH	READING, MA	VIRGINIA BEACH, VA
Parking	Two spaces per dwelling unit plus one space for each bedroom over two to a maximum of 3 spaces per dwelling unit Must be located behind building	No minimum parking required Parking must be located in the rear Parking of five or more cars must be distributed on the site to minimize impact to the neighborhood character	Less than 500 SF - .5 space per unit Between 500-750 SF - 1 space per unit Greater than 750 SF - 1.3 spaces over Planning board may grant a conditional use permit to provide less than minimum.	2 spaces per du	1 per DU
Additional Attributes	Design standards for roof type, façade, and other design elements. Standards are demonstrated by graphics and example photos.	All projects shall provide equal access to all building amenities, park and civic space and public entrances to buildings to residents of both affordable and non-affordable units. 20% of housing units must be Affordable Housing	Design guidelines that permit and prohibit different building forms such as a forecourt or balcony		No side yard setbacks required for up to six dwelling units

BARRIERS FOR DEVELOPERS

As with many alternative housing types, zoning can be a major barrier for developers; this is particularly true in the case of townhouses. Minimum lot sizes and frontages can influence whether a townhouse development is sold as condominium units on a single parcel or as individually-owned attached structures on separate lots. If it is cumbersome to design townhouses within the framework of dimensional regulations intended for larger multifamily structures, a developer may simply opt to build a more conventional multifamily building. If lot size, frontage, or setback regulations are overly restrictive, the developer may opt to simply build larger single-family homes instead.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

For many residents accustomed to single family housing on large lots, the biggest concern is the attached construction, which some may perceive to be urban and out-of-character with their town. Unlike many other Living Little housing types, which are typically not more than two bedrooms, townhouses could include three or more bedrooms, potentially raising concerns about school impacts (addressed in the last section of the report).

2. ROWHOUSE AND TOWNHOUSE

1.1. DEFINITION AND PERMITTED USES

A small footprint and attached residential building with one dwelling unit where each unit is separated horizontally by a common wall. Rowhouses are not allowed for non-residential uses.

1.2. LOT STANDARDS

A.	Min. Lots Size (S.F.)	1,200 SF
B.	Frontage (Min./Max.)	18 Min./24 Max.
C.	Build-To-Zone (Min./Max.)	5 Ft./15 Ft.
D.	B-T-Z/Façade Build Out (Min.)	80%
E.	Side Yard Setback (Min.)	0 Ft
F.	Rear Yard Setback (Min.)	15 Ft
G.	% Outdoor Amenity (Min.)	20%
H.	Parking Setback (Min.)	Behind Building

1.3. DESIGN STANDARDS

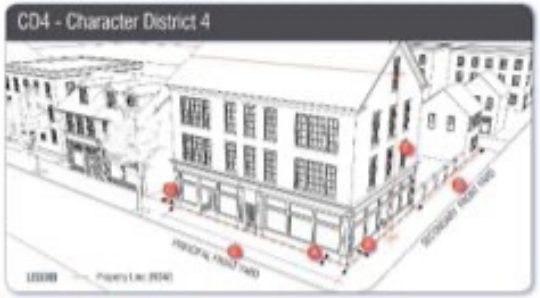
A.	Building Height (Max.)	2.5 Stories/35 Ft
B.	Roof Types	All
C.	Street Facing Wall Width (Max.)	24 Ft.
D.	Street Facing Wall Off-Set (Min.)	N/A
E.	Street Facing Transparency - Ground Floor/Upper Floor (Min.)	20% / N/A
F.	Street Facing Entrance	Required

1.4. ADDITIONAL STANDARDS

A. On-site parking is not allowed between the buildings; rear vehicle access is required.

B. A maximum of 8 units can be attached by a common wall before access is provided for pedestrians, vehicles, or outdoor amenity space.

FIGURE 10.5A41.10C DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS
CHARACTER DISTRICT 4 (CD4)



BUILDING PLACEMENT – PRINCIPAL BUILDING*

Maximum **principal front yard**	10 ft
Maximum **secondary front yard**	15 ft
Side yard	NR
Minimum **rear yard**	Greater of 5 ft **from rear lot line** or 10 ft from center line of alley
Front lot line buildout	
On Cates Street	50% max. (See Map 10.5A21C)
Everywhere else	50% min.

* Except for items listed under Section 10.5A42.12

BUILDING AND LOT OCCUPATION

Maximum **building block length**	200 ft
Maximum **façade** modulation length	80 ft (see Section 10.5A43.20)
Maximum **entrance spacing**	50 ft
Maximum **building coverage**	90%
Maximum **building footprint**	15,000 sf (or as allowed by Section 10.5A43.40)
Minimum **lot area**	NR
Minimum **lot area** per **dwelling unit**	NR
Minimum **open space**	10%
Maximum **ground floor GFA** per **use**	15,000 sf

BUILDING FORM – PRINCIPAL BUILDING

Building height	See Map 10.5A21.B & Section 10.5A43.30
Maximum finished floor surface of **ground floor** above **sidewalk** grade	36"
Minimum **ground story height**	12 ft
Minimum second **story height**	10 ft
Façade glazing	
Shopfront façade	70% min.
Other **façade** types	20% min. to 50% max.
Roof type	flat, gable, hip, gambrel, **mansard**
Roof pitch, if any	
Gable	6:12 min. to 12:12 max
Hip	3:12 min.
Mansard gambrel	6:12 min. to 30:12 max.

Portsmouth, NH

Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

CASE STUDIES

SUMMER STREET DEVELOPMENT, MANCHESTER-BY-THE-SEA, MA

Total Housing Units
42 (21 new units, 21 renovated units)

Affordability
5 for-sale units designated for first-time homebuyers, 21 Affordable rental units

Tenure
Mix of ownership and rental

Housing Types:
Townhouses, mixed-use, and multifamily

Zoning
M.G.L. Chapter 40B

The Summer Street development involved multiple partners and a variety of project components. It included 18 new condominium townhouses, five of which are reserved for first-time homebuyers; a mixed-use building with three condominium units above ground floor retail; and the renovation of an existing apartment building with 21 Affordable units. Residents of the development benefit from its proximity to the Manchester commuter rail station, downtown Manchester businesses, and the harbor and its associated open space. The project was led by a mission-driven partnership that included the Manchester Affordable Housing Corporation, the Manchester Housing Authority, and the Town.

Similar to several of the case studies in this report, the flexibility offered by the Chapter 40B comprehensive permitting process was key to the project's success. M.G.L. Chapter 40B is a state statue that enables local Zoning Boards of Appeals to approve affordable housing developments under flexible rules if at least 20-25% of the units have long-term affordability restrictions. In addition to offering more leeway with regards to dimensional requirements, participation in the state's Local Initiative Program, part of M.G.L. Chapter 40B, enabled the Town to receive technical and financial assistance from the state for the development.

POND VIEW VILLAGE, GLOUCESTER, MA

Total Housing Units
118

Affordability
77 Affordable rental units, 15 for-sale units designated for first-time homebuyers

Housing Types
Townhouses and multifamily

Tenure
Mix of ownership and rental

Zoning
M.G.L. Chapter 40B

Pond View Village is a mixed-income townhouse development on the site of the former Lepage Glue Factory. The project was spearheaded by an area nonprofit and, thanks to the involvement of a mission-driven developer, includes 77 apartment housing units for households earning 60% of the area median income and 41 mixed-income townhouse condominiums, of which 15 are reserved for first-time homebuyers. The area surrounded by open space is adjacent to a publicly accessible pond.

A strong project team and the City's commitment to creating Affordable Housing was essential to the success of the project and overcoming public opposition. The development was facilitated through the Chapter 40B comprehensive permitting process, which enables developments with an Affordable Housing component to seek approvals under more flexible requirements than local zoning regulations. Partway through the project, the developers needed to request an amendment to the permit to allow for additional height for the townhouses making up the second phase of the development. Abutters appealed the City's decision to grant the amendment, and although the appeal was denied, it substantially lengthened the development timeline. Due to this extended timeline and a declining housing market in 2006, the initial developer had difficulty obtaining financing and ultimately backed out of the project. However, the project had strong support from the Mayor and the City's housing task force, and eventually another area non-profit stepped up to lead the final phase of development and complete the project, illustrating the importance of political support when pursuing out-of-the-box housing solutions.

BATTLE ROAD FARM, LINCOLN, MA

Total Housing Units
120

Lot Size
24 acres for housing, 47 acres total

Affordability
48 Affordable units

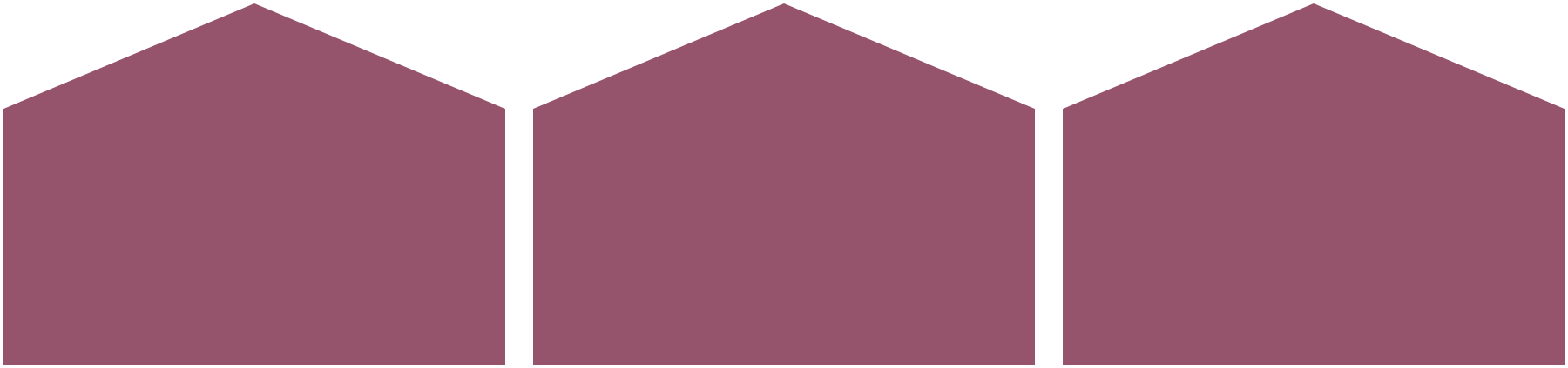
Tenure
Ownership

Zoning
M.G.L. Chapter 40B

Battle Road Farm is a townhouse development initiated by the Town of Lincoln, which purchased land adjacent to the Minute Man National Park to use for a new mixed-income housing development. The portion of the site used for housing comprises 24 acres, roughly half the total site area, situated next to a large conserved open space that provides a buffer between the housing and the park. The 120-unit development consists of 30 two-story structures each made up of 4 townhouse units.

This project demonstrates the power of using publicly-owned land and the RFP process to facilitate development consistent with a municipality's housing and affordability goals: forty percent of all housing units are Affordable, a direct result of leveraging publicly owned land to reduce development costs and reach deeper levels of affordability. More recently, Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds have been used by Lincoln to preserve the Affordable Housing on site.

The project also shows how a balance can be struck between housing development and preserving open space. Although the site was located in an environmentally sensitive area, the project team designed an on-site septic treatment facility that utilized an innovative tertiary treatment system. This system provided the on-site sewer infrastructure needed for the site without negatively impacting the surrounding park and wetlands.



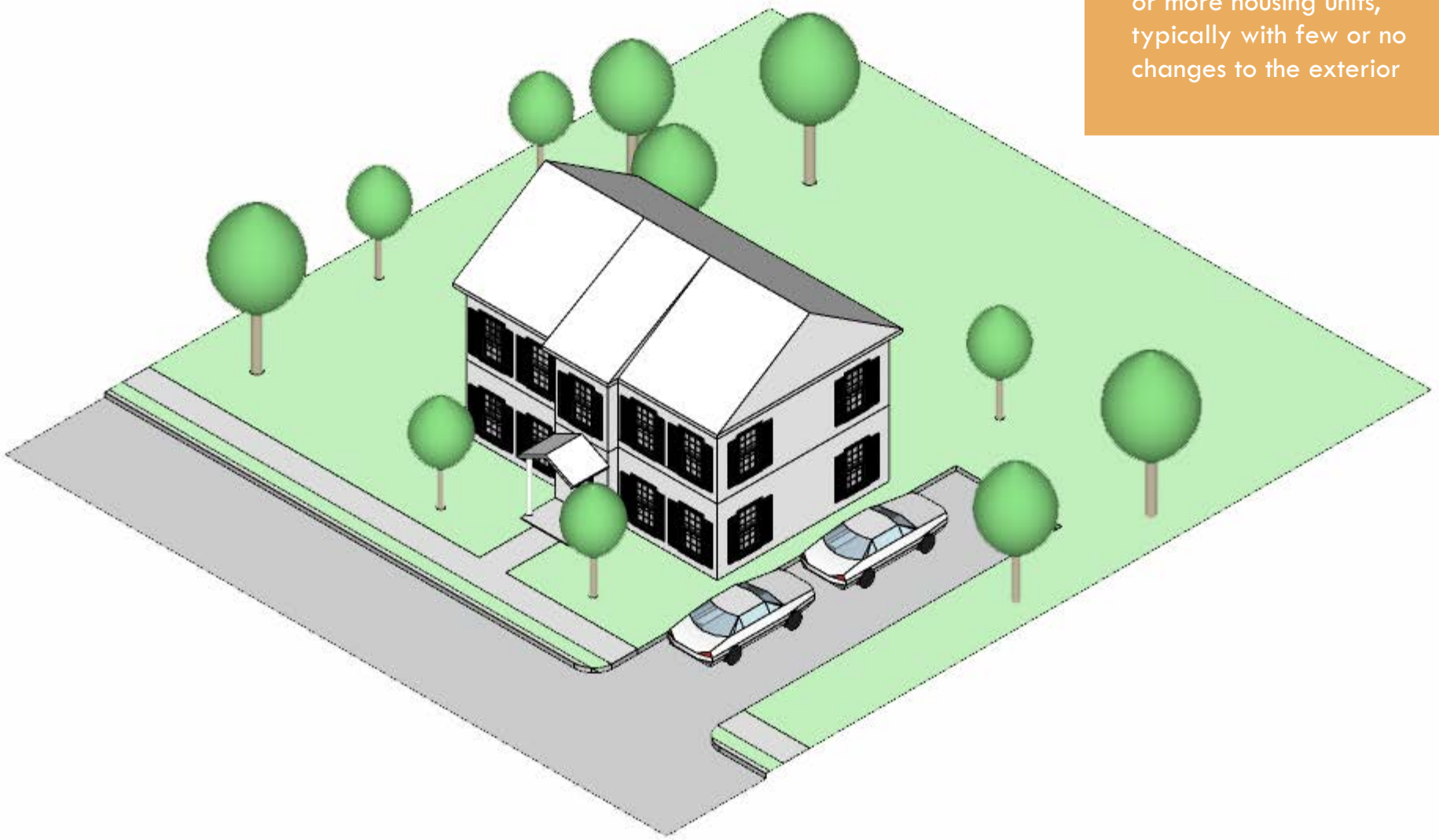
LITTLE TO MIDDLE HOUSING TYPES

SINGLE-FAMILY HOME CONVERSION

Newton, MA

SINGLE-FAMILY CONVERSION

Definition: A single-family home that has been converted into two or more housing units, typically with few or no changes to the exterior



OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

Converting single-family homes to duplexes and multi-unit homes has been a planning strategy to increase housing options for some time. In fact, the American Planning Association (APA) wrote a report on this concept in 1949, even as single-family homes were proliferating across America.[6] Home conversions were conceived as mechanism to preserve large historic properties, many of which were originally designed for households that included extended family members and servants, that could no longer be maintained by a single owner.

Single-family home conversions typically accommodate two to four housing units, though this number can be greater depending on the size of the original building. While a house's interior will likely undergo significant reconfiguration to accommodate additional units, many conversions can be (or are required to be) completed without impacting the building's exterior, resulting in no visible changes in appearance.

While single-family conversions remain a great way to preserve historic homes, they need not be limited to buildings of a particular time period. Today some municipalities are revisiting their home conversion regulations to encompass a greater range of existing buildings, recognizing that houses of any style can afford the opportunity to adapt a community's existing housing stock to suit the needs of today's smaller households.

Roger W via Flickr

Providence, RI | Union Studio Architecture and Nat Rea Photography

6 American Society of Planning Officials. "Conversions of Large Single-Family Dwellings to Multiple-Family Dwellings. Information Report No. 5, August 1949. Accessed June 19, 2021 at https://www.planning.org/pas/reports/report5.htm

Franklin, MA

LAYOUT

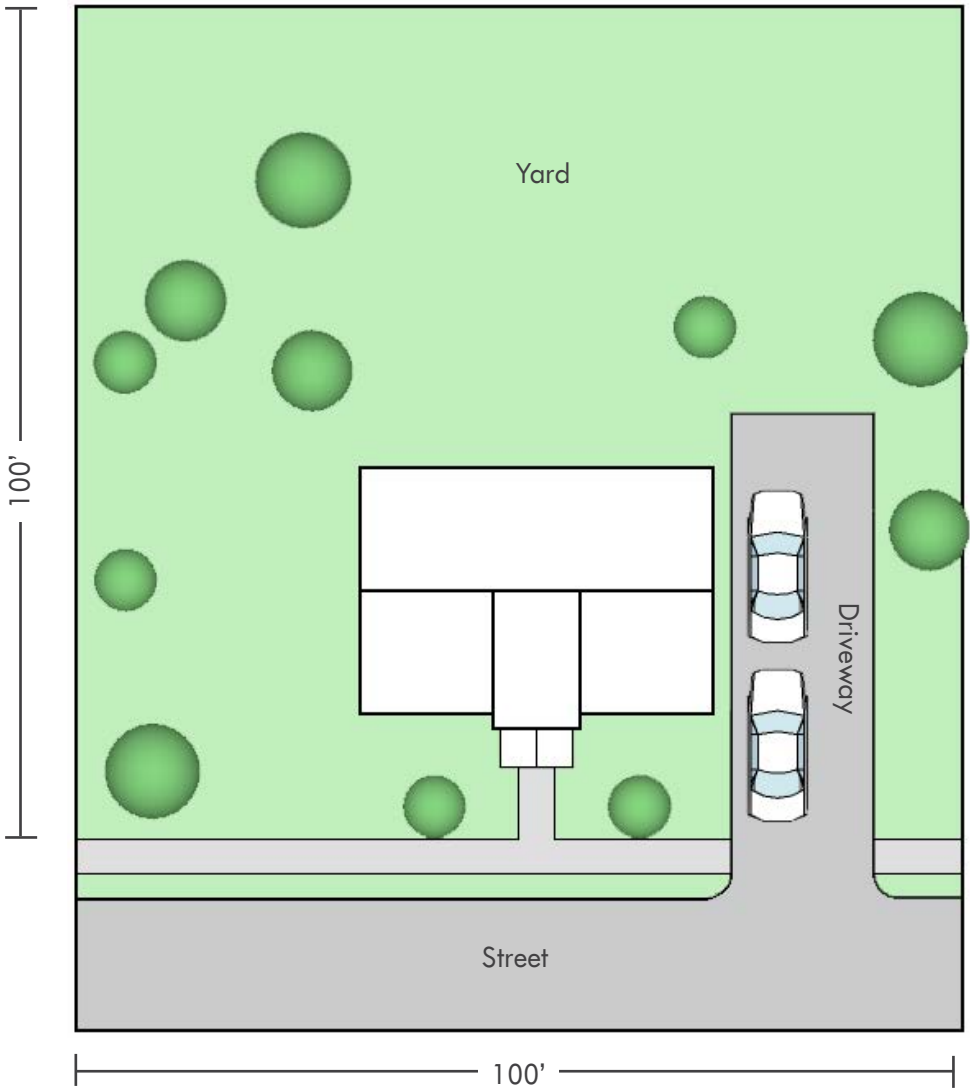
GENERAL LAYOUT:

Lot Size	1/4 acre or larger
Height	2 - 3 stories
Setbacks	Varies depending on configuration of original structure
Total units	Typically 2-5 units; varies depending on size of original structure
Unit Size	500-1,000 sq.ft. per townhouse 1-2 bedrooms

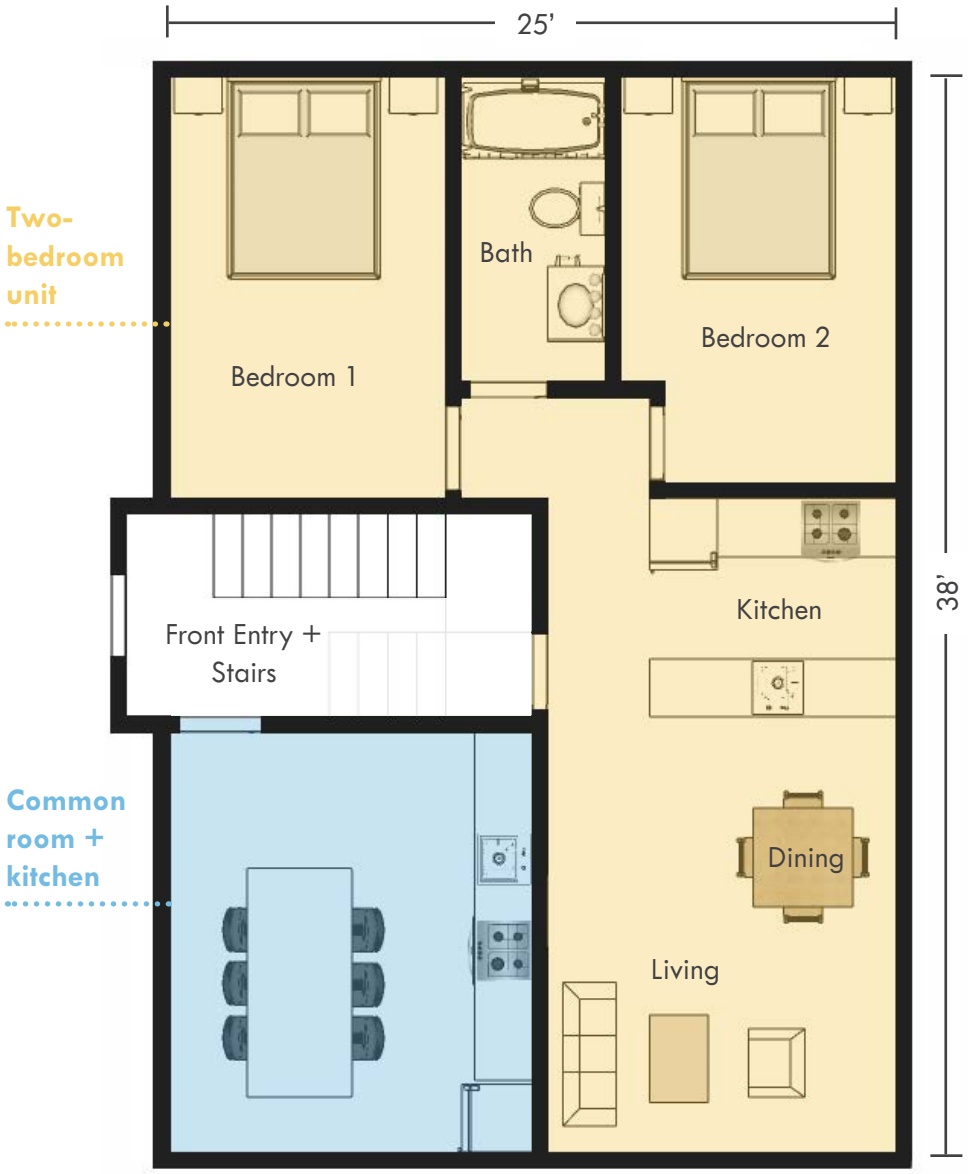
POLICY EXAMPLES:

Abington
Gloucester
Holden
Newton
Portsmouth, NH

SITE PLAN LAYOUT:

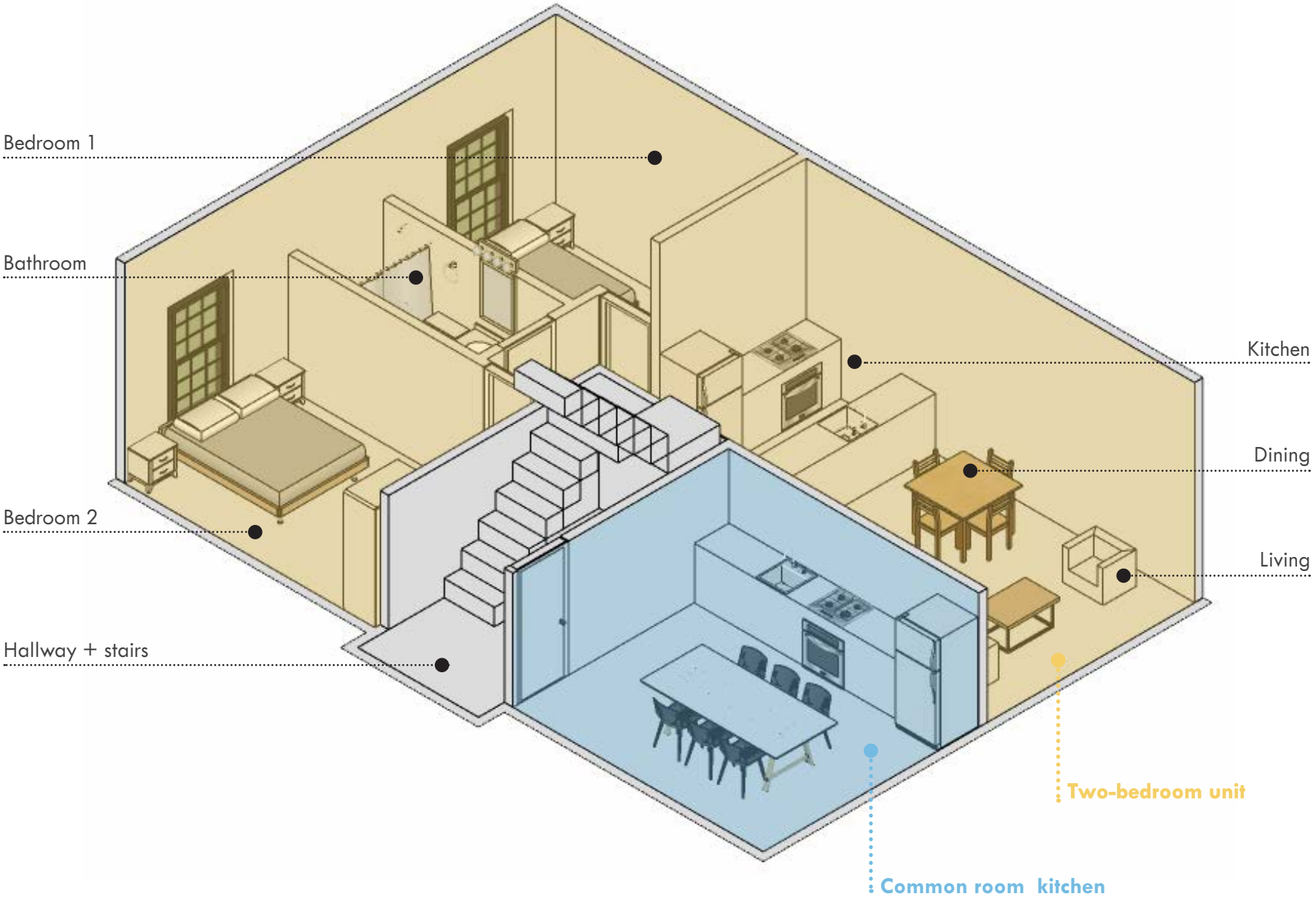


FIRST FLOOR PLAN

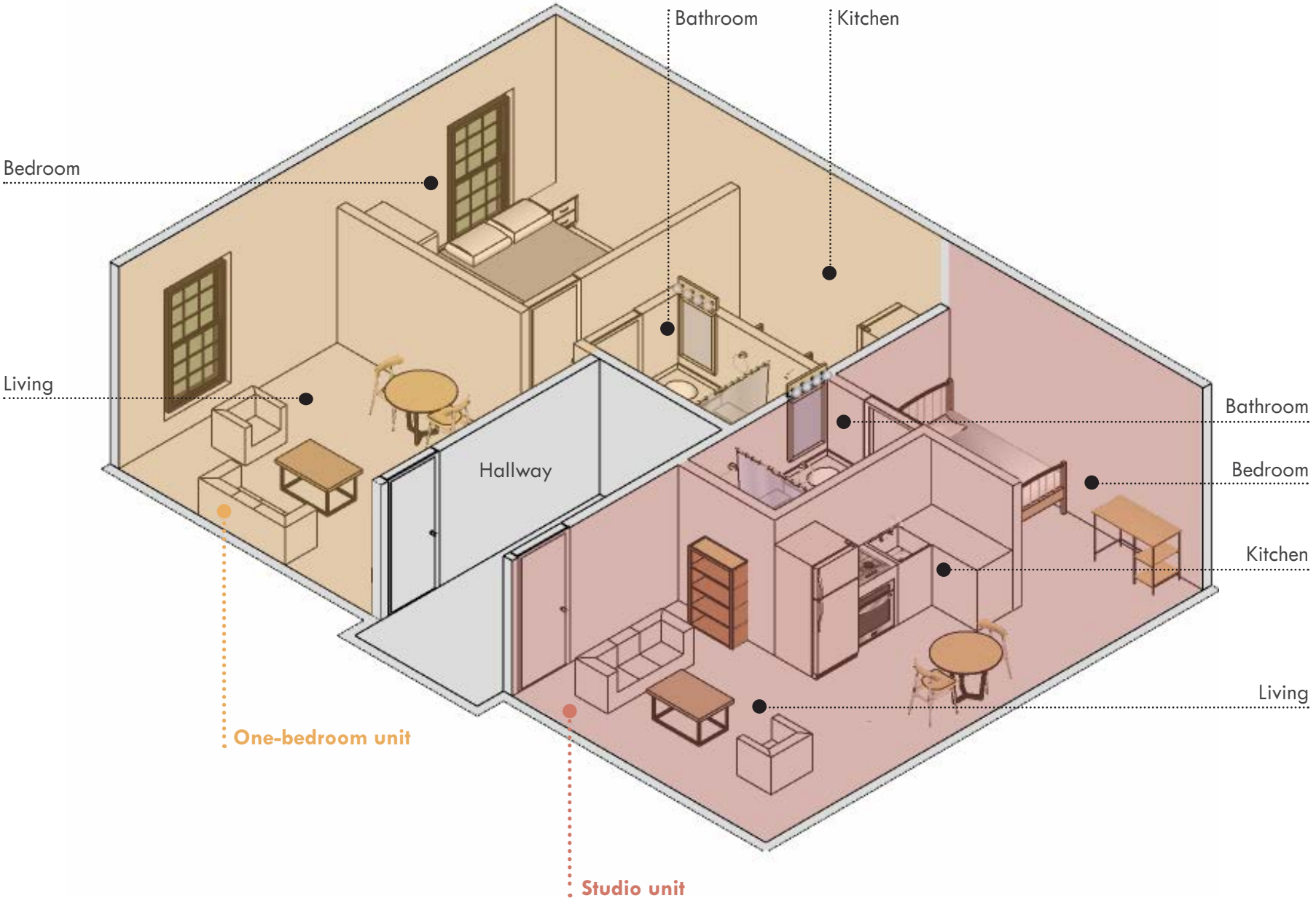


SECOND FLOOR PLAN

FIRST FLOOR LAYOUT



SECOND FLOOR LAYOUT



BARRIERS

BARRIERS

Single-family home conversions involve many technical challenges beyond those typically faced by new housing construction. In addition to satisfying local zoning codes, a conversion must comply with current building, life safety, and accessibility codes that, depending on the age of the building, may not have existed when the house was built. Skilled developers, architects, and contractors that possess specialized renovation expertise and a willingness to work creatively with local officials can successfully overcome many of the technical challenges inherent in this type of housing.

Newton, MA

BARRIERS BY STAKEHOLDER

TOWN OFFICIALS

Zoning bylaws
Building codes
Water and sewer
Parking

DEVELOPERS

Zoning bylaws
Building codes
Constraints of existing building
Specialized expertise required

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Parking and traffic
Neighborhood character

BARRIERS FOR TOWN OFFICIALS

Zoning

While many communities have zoning regulations that allow for conversion, most were developed in the 1950s with the intention to preserve large estates and may not be applicable to smaller properties where home conversion may still be appropriate. Furthermore, they may not allow for the creation of more than two housing units, since the purpose of the original bylaws was preservation rather than creating additional housing options. Town officials might also have concerns about home conversion bylaws being exploited by developers that would like to build multi-unit housing in in zoning districts where it is otherwise prohibited. However, this concern can be addressed by limiting home conversions of relatively new buildings.

Building Codes

Building codes can pose a substantial barrier for single-family to multi-family home conversions. These structures were not originally designed to accommodate multiple households, and may have been built before building codes existed at all. In addition to updating the building to meet modern standards, increasing the number of units may move the structure to a different occupancy category that requires additional life safety measures, such as sprinklers. Particularly, it can be difficult to design two forms of egress from each unit depending on specific building conditions. Finally, ensuring home conversions meet modern accessibility requirements can be challenging since providing access to units on upper floors could require significant modifications such as ramps, stair lifts or elevators. Since home conversions would otherwise be great housing options for seniors, addressing this barrier is critical.

Water + Sewer

If the house uses a septic system, which is common in many smaller Massachusetts communities that do not have town-wide public water and sewer infrastructure, a home conversions may be limited because of septic constraints. If a home conversion results in an increase in load (typically based on the number of bedrooms) that exceeds the existing septic system's capacity, the system will need to be upgraded, which can be cost prohibitive. Additionally, many Massachusetts municipalities have local septic regulations that are more stringent than Massachusetts state regulations, which may place additional restrictions on septic system expansion.

Parking

Many zoning bylaws require as many as two parking spaces per unit, which may or be a barrier depending on lot size and whether there is sufficient space to for additional parking. Single-family homes on large lots typically have ample space to meet this requirement, though it may result in enlarged driveways and paved areas with more formal delineation of spaces. Smaller lots may necessitate more flexibility. In practice, off-street parking demand for home conversions does not look remarkably different than what one would encounter in a single-family home occupied by a household with one or more driving-age children, each of which may have their own vehicles.


Franklin, MA

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING

Home conversions are allowed by special permit in all of the participating communities. Interestingly, most of the partner towns bylaws contain a mix of progressive and prohibitive elements, so the ease with which a homeowner can pursue conversion will likely depend on individual site and building circumstances.

- Two towns, Duxbury and Scituate, treat home conversions as internal accessory dwelling units. While this may offer some advantages in terms of process, in means that the same regulations that discourage ADU construction—such as expiration of permit upon sale of the home and family occupancy requirements—also apply to home conversions.
- On the other hand, Duxbury and Scituate's requirements for the age of the building are quite flexible. In the other three towns, buildings must date to the 1950s or earlier to be eligible for conversion.
- Restrictions on the number of units vary by town and, in certain towns, but district. In this regard Norwell's bylaw, which allows up to four units per conversion in any district, is the most permissive.

	COHASSET	DUXBURY	HINGHAM	NORWELL	SCITUATE
Zoning Districts	**R-A, R-B, R-C by right and DB, VB, and HB by special permit**	**Single-family home conversions treated as ADUs - see ADU section**	**All residential and business districts by special permit**	**Residential and business districts**	**Single-family home conversions treated as ADUs - see ADU section**
By Right or Special Permit	Special Permit (PB and ZBA)	Special Permit (ZBA)	Special Permit (ZBA)	Special permit	Special Permit (PB)
Restrictions on Age of Structure	Principal built before 1955	Principal at least 10 years old	Principal built before 1941, min six rooms excluding bathrooms	Residential districts -principal predates 1952, business districts – principal predates 1963	
Unit Limitation	Not limit but dependent on minimum lot size, more units require a larger lot size	Max 1 additional unit	Subject to occupancy restriction	4-unit max	One additional unit in Residential Districts and three Business Districts
Minimum Lot Size Requirements	District by district. Minimum lot size requirement increases as units are added.	20,000 sf		1 acre	Underlying Zone

PROGRESSIVE BYLAWS

Progressive home conversion bylaws make the permitting process as easy as possible, do not include building age requirements, have flexible minimum lot size and density requirements, and include a mechanism to make exterior changes if required for building code compliance. Examples of progressive small-scale mixed-use bylaws can be found on the table on the following page. Key elements include:

- Since small developers or lay people may choose to convert their home, its important that the permitting process be as straightforward as possible. The example bylaws shown here offer a by-right option in at least some areas of town. Portsmouth allows the creation of up to four units through conversion by right, with the possibility of additional units through a special permit.
- Each of the example bylaws relies on the underlying zoning for dimensional requirements such as minimum lot area and setbacks, so these requirements will not become more stringent when a house undergoes conversion. This flexibility is key, because a building that is already constructed cannot change these attributes. However, bylaws should include a pathway for nonconforming buildings and lots, since many older buildings predate and do not conform with their town's zoning bylaw.
- When required for building code compliance, the bylaws allow for changes to the exterior of the building with a special permit.
- While some of the example bylaws limit conversions based on the age of the building, the required building ages are younger than those seen in several South Shore bylaws. Rather than setting a static built-before date to determine eligibility, a more effective approach is to set a building age, as Duxbury's bylaw does (e.g. building must be at least ten years old). This prevents developers from immediately converting a new single-family house to multifamily while gradually allowing additional homes to become eligible as they age.
- Gloucester's bylaws are the most flexible in terms of parking requirements, but all four examples either require less than 1.5 spaces per unit, allow for parking reductions through a special permit, or both.

Providence, RI | Union Studio Architects and Nat Rea Photography

Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

PROGRESSIVE ZONING EXAMPLES

Key elements are highlighted.

	ABINGTON, MA	GLOUCESTER, MA	HOLDEN, MA	PORTSMOUTH, NH
Zoning Districts	**High density residential district and business districts**	**Rural Residential, High Density Residential, and Civic Center District**	**Residential Suburban 3, Village, and Residential Multi-family**	**Several districts (described below)**
By Right	By-right and special permit	By-right	By-right in Residential Multi-family, Special permit in other districts	Conversions up to **4 DU allowed by-right** in several districts, **5 to 8 by special exception (ZBA)** in several districts
Unit Cap	3-family	2-family	4-family	Up to 8 units by special exception
Min. Lot Area (sf)	Underlying	Underlying	Underlying	1,000 to 3,000 minimum lot area per dwelling unit (varies by district)
Lot Width (ft)	Underlying	Underlying	Underlying	Underlying
Building Width (ft)	Underlying	Underlying	Underlying	Underlying
Density	Underlying	Underlying	Underlying	Underlying
Minimum Floor Area	600 sq ft for primary, 400 sq ft for each additional unit	Underlying	Underlying	Underlying
Setbacks (ft)	Underlying	Underlying	Underlying	Underlying
Parking	1.3 spaces per one-bedroom unit 2 spaces per two-bedroom unit 2.6 spaces per three-bedroom unit Reduction allowed by special permit	1 space per du, reduction by special permit	1.5 per unit	1.3 spaces per 750 sq ft of dwelling unit floor area
Design		Special permit required for changes to the exterior	Special permit required for changes to the exterior. Additional entrances allowed for elderly housing.	No change to the exterior of the building **unless required for building code compliance**
Restrictions on Age of Structure				Must have existed prior to January 1, 1980

BARRIERS FOR HOMEOWNERS/ DEVELOPERS

Meeting building code requirements will likely be the greatest barrier to converting a home. Retrofitting a house to accommodate multiple units is a technically challenging task, particularly in older homes that predate modern codes or construction techniques. Changing a building's occupancy classification from single-family to multifamily may trigger additional life safety and accessibility requirements. Renovated layouts must accommodate multiple kitchens, bathrooms, and heating systems as well as their associated piping and vents. Designing new unit layouts that meet current code requirements as well as modern expectations for comfort and amenity requires creativity and technical skill. Often home conversion regulations prohibit any changes to the exterior of the building. Even if exterior changes are permitted by the zoning bylaw, the house may still be subject to other historic preservation requirements. All these factors, plus the unexpected conditions inevitably encountered in historic renovation, can quickly escalate project costs. An individual homeowner seeking to convert their house should to hire an architect and contractor with specialized expertise in historic residential renovations.


Newton, MA

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Community concerns about home conversions revolve around impacts to neighborhood character. By definition, this housing type converts a single-family home, potentially located in a neighborhood consisting primarily of other single-family homes, to multifamily housing. Neighbors may object to the possibility of overcrowding, though this is unlikely to play out in reality; for example, if a four-bedroom house that could accommodate a five-person family is converted to three one-bedroom units each occupied by a single person or a couple, the overall number of occupants may not even increase. Neighbors may also fear that the potential occupants of a home conversion may be too transient, too noisy, or just not "fit in." These concerns are usually rooted in fear of the unknown and should be addressed through open community dialogue and positive messaging about addressing housing need.

Members of the public may also be concerned that home conversions will result in greater demand for on-street parking or generate more traffic than they're accustomed to. Typically, larger single-family homes that would be suitable for a multi-unit home conversion have driveways that can accommodate several off-street parking spaces. Indeed, a single-family house occupied by two adults and multiple driving-age teens may have as many or more cars than a converted home. Even if this is not the case, single family conversions occur incrementally over a long period of time as individual owners decide to make changes; such a small increase in the overall number of units in a particular neighborhood will not typically overwhelm on-street parking capacity or neighborhood traffic patterns.

CASE STUDIES

NEWTON HOME CONVERSION ORDINANCE UPDATE

Existing

Building must have existing 10 years prior to date of application

Limits conversions to specific home types and civic buildings

Conversions of up to six housing units by special permit

Home conversions are allowed at a density of 1,250 SF per dwelling unit

Requires both on-street and off-street parking

Prohibits changes to the exterior of the building

Proposed

Removes building age requirement

All conversion for all residential types in all residential zones

Allows conversion of up to six housing units by-right and additional housing units and associated building additions by special permit

Home conversions are allowed at a density of 1,200 SF and 900 SF for deed-restricted Affordable Housing

Only requires off-street parking and minimum requirements can be reduced upon special permit

In 2020, Newton proposed changes to its zoning ordinance to better facilitate home conversions as a part of a broader rezoning effort. The City's existing and proposed home conversion regulations are listed here below. Interestingly, the proposed regulations would allow any residential building to be converted to a multi-unit building, regardless of age, and incentivizes the creation of deed-restricted Affordable Housing units by offering a density bonus.

These proposed changes to single family home conversion regulations are part of Newton's broad "Zoning Redesign" process. Zoning Redesign grew out of the passage of a new Comprehensive Plan in 2007, which called out the lack of clarity and accessibility of the city's zoning ordinance. The city has been working since that time to make Newton's zoning ordinance more accessible, understandable, and reflective of its latest goals for land use, housing, transportation, economic development and climate action. The city's estimate timeline for zoning redesign dedicates all of 2021 for "continued revision and outreach," with a focus on the proposed updates for village district zoning. There is not yet a target adoption date.

Even prior to the planned update, Newton's home conversion ordinance included several progressive elements, including eligibility for buildings older than 10 years, up to six units permitted within a building by special permit, and a relatively high unit density. With the proposed changes, the ordinance will likely be one of the most flexible in the state, if not the country. Newton is more urban in character than the five partner towns, and some aspects of its conversion ordinance may not make sense for smaller South Shore communities. However, the concepts could be easily adapted to reflect the South Shore's more suburban character, and the process demonstrates the importance of evaluating the ways in which zoning regulations do or do not advance a municipality's planning goals and proactively seeking improvements.

EXAMPLE HOME CONVERSION – PORTLAND, OR

This example in Portland, OR illustrates some classic barriers that homeowners may encounter when pursuing home conversion and demonstrates why modified standards or may exemptions need to be provided to more easily facilitate this housing type.

This example shows a historic home on a 7,780 SF lot that was converted into six condominium housing units. The home dates back to 1911 and was converted in 1999. It features separate housing unit entrances and shared internal common spaces. The City exempted this development from parking requirements to help make the conversion possible. The largest obstacle to overcome was complying with fire and building codes, which were triggered after the building was divided into several units. The approval process was lengthy and required the developers to provide multiple egress points for each unit, enclose a stairwell, upgrade lighting and ventilation, construct fire-rated walls to separate units, and put in a new fire sprinkling system. Fire and safety requirements also conflicted with the US Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings and the City of Portland's Historic Design Review.

In cases such as the one above, home conversion is While life safety regulations should not be compromised, the extensive work necessary to meet these requirements illustrates how difficult home conversions can be and why guidance and support from municipal staff is critical.

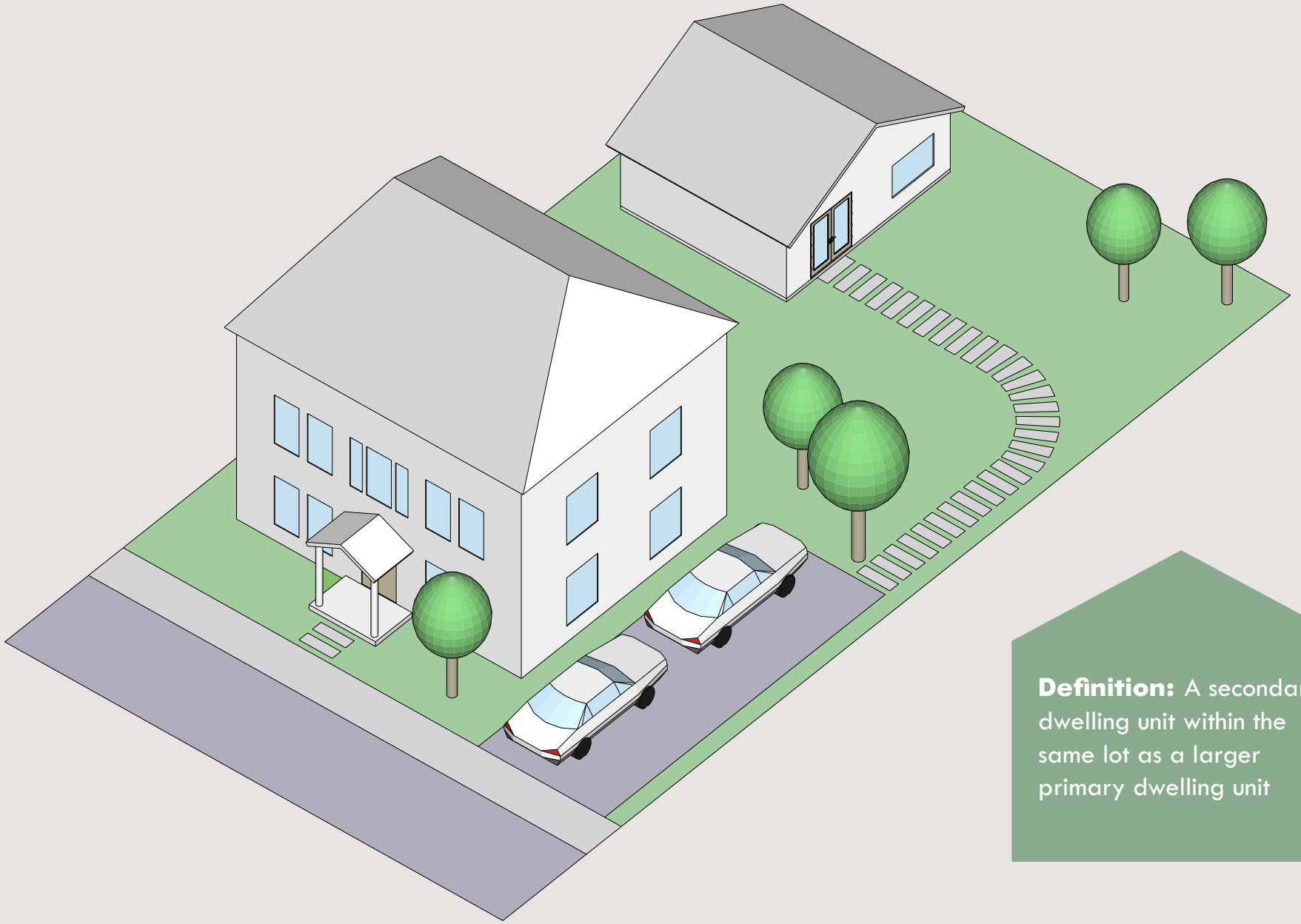
LITTLE TO MIDDLE HOUSING TYPES

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

Mark McClure via Flickr

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

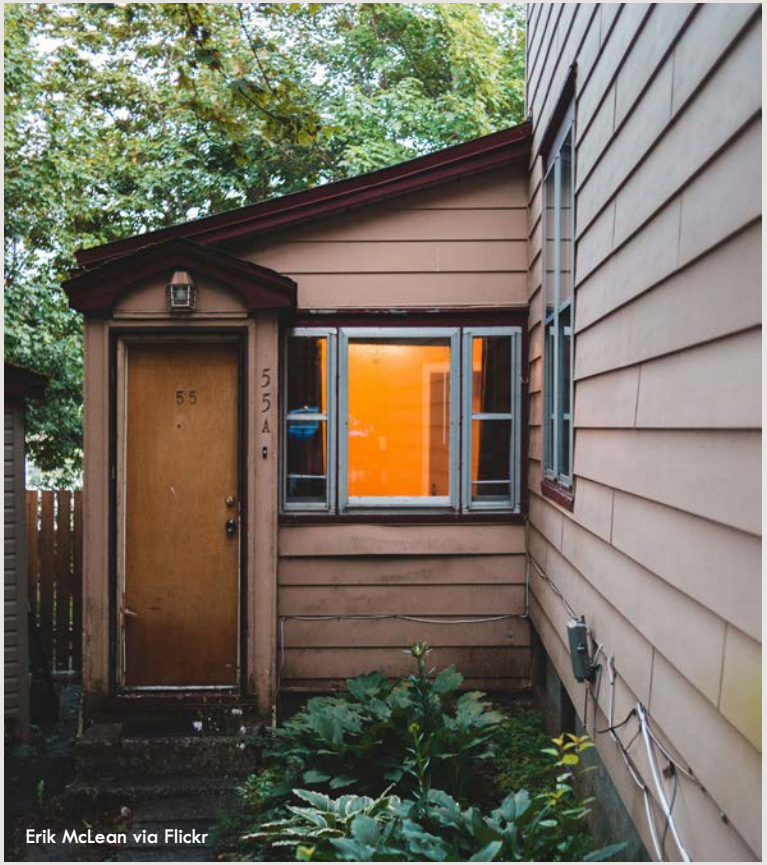
PHASE 1



Definition: A secondary dwelling unit within the same lot as a larger primary dwelling unit

The South Shore communities participating in this report were interested in understanding the extent to which their zoning bylaws enable or impede detached accessory dwelling units, one of the housing types studied in the first Living Little report. An assessment of participating towns' zoning bylaws with regards to accessory dwelling units is included alongside relevant content from the first report, replicated here for ease of access and shown as:

PHASE 1



Erik McLean via Flickr

OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), commonly known as "granny flats," "carriage houses," or "in-law apartments," were prevalent before World War II throughout American towns and cities, serving as an attached or detached secondary dwelling for in-laws, smaller households, and house workers.

Following the end of WWII and the move towards single-family, low-density suburbanization and increased zoning restrictions, ADUs lost popularity or were zoned out of existence. Beginning in the 1970s, a handful of municipalities began to write ADUs back into zoning. Currently, ADUs are built and lived-in legally and illegally, especially in urban areas with high housing demand. Certain cities and towns have begun to see ADUs are solution to high housing costs that prevent younger households from purchasing a house and empty nesters from downsizing their living arrangements.

Per building code regulations, for an ADU to serve as a household's main living area, there must be a bathroom, kitchen, and bedroom that is independent from the primary dwelling unit. ADUs come in four main types: carve-out or conversion of an existing living area within the primary dwelling unit, finishing an existing basement or attic within the primary dwelling unit, adding to an existing structure such as a garage, and building a new free-standing structure on site. This report focuses on the latter. Nationally, Oregon and California are at the forefront of creating flexible zoning and incentives to increase the supply of ADUs.


Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

Christoph Scholz via Flickr

LAYOUT

GENERAL LAYOUT:

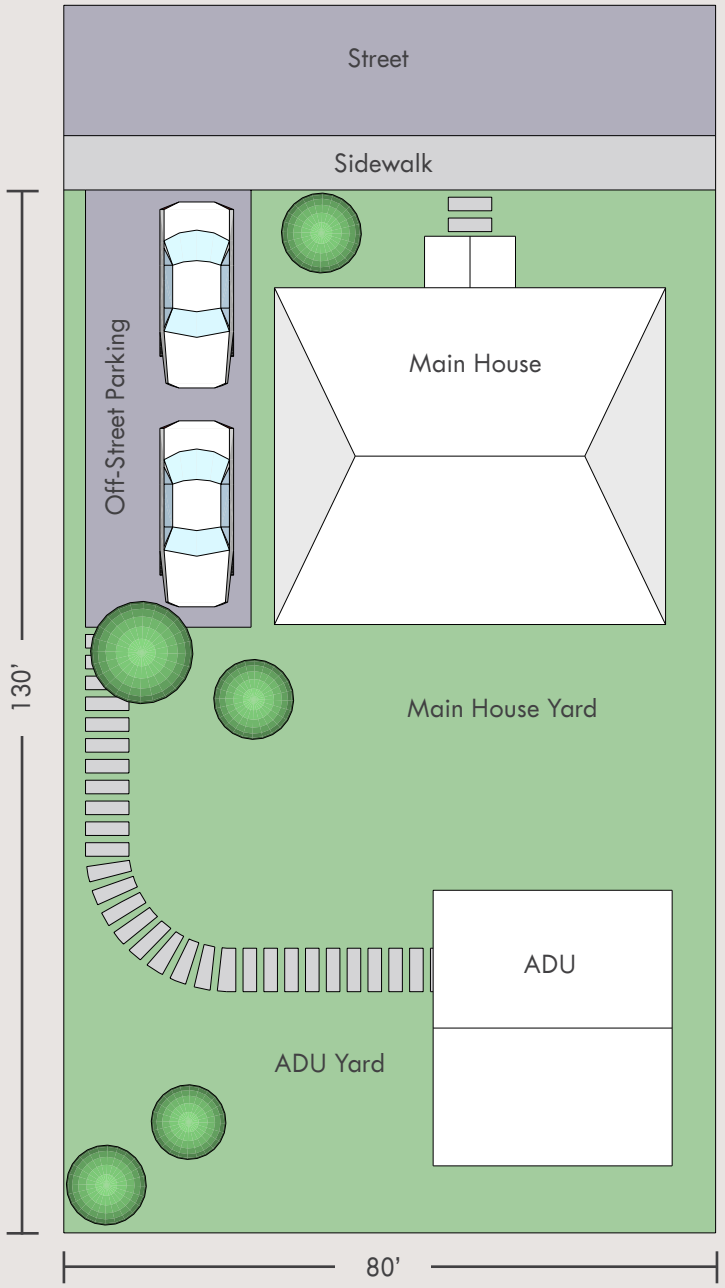
Lot Size	1/4 acre or larger
Setbacks	6' - 10' from primary dwelling Respects other zoning setbacks
Unit Size	250 - 1,200 sf or 30% - 40% of primary dwelling 1-2 bedrooms

EXAMPLES:

Barnstable, MA
Cambridge, MA
Lexington, MA
Newton, MA
Orleans, MA
Wellfleet, MA
Austin, TX
Boulder, CO
Los Angeles, CA
Minneapolis, MN
Portland, OR
Santa Cruz, CA

SITE PLAN LAYOUT:

PHASE 1

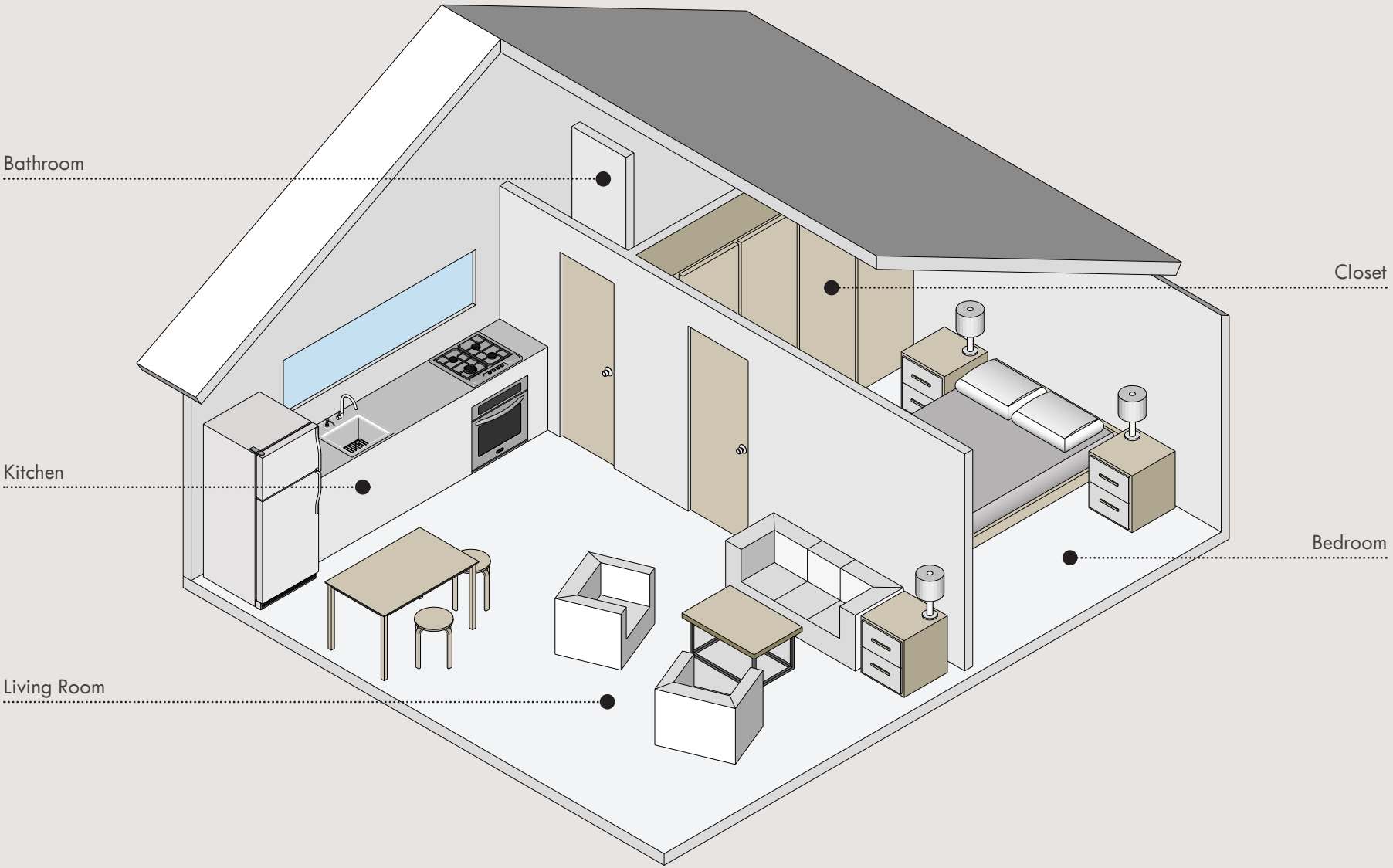


ONE-STORY ADU FLOOR PLAN

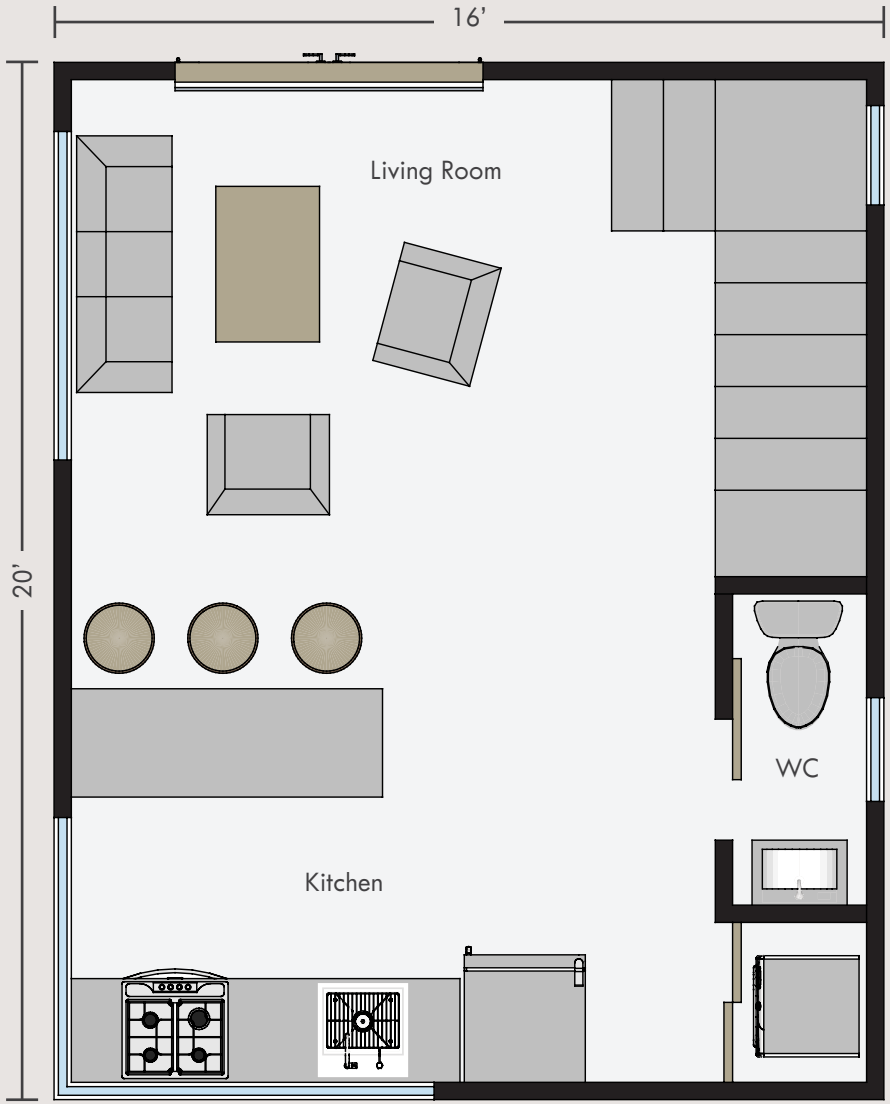
PHASE 1

ONE-STORY LAYOUT

PHASE 1

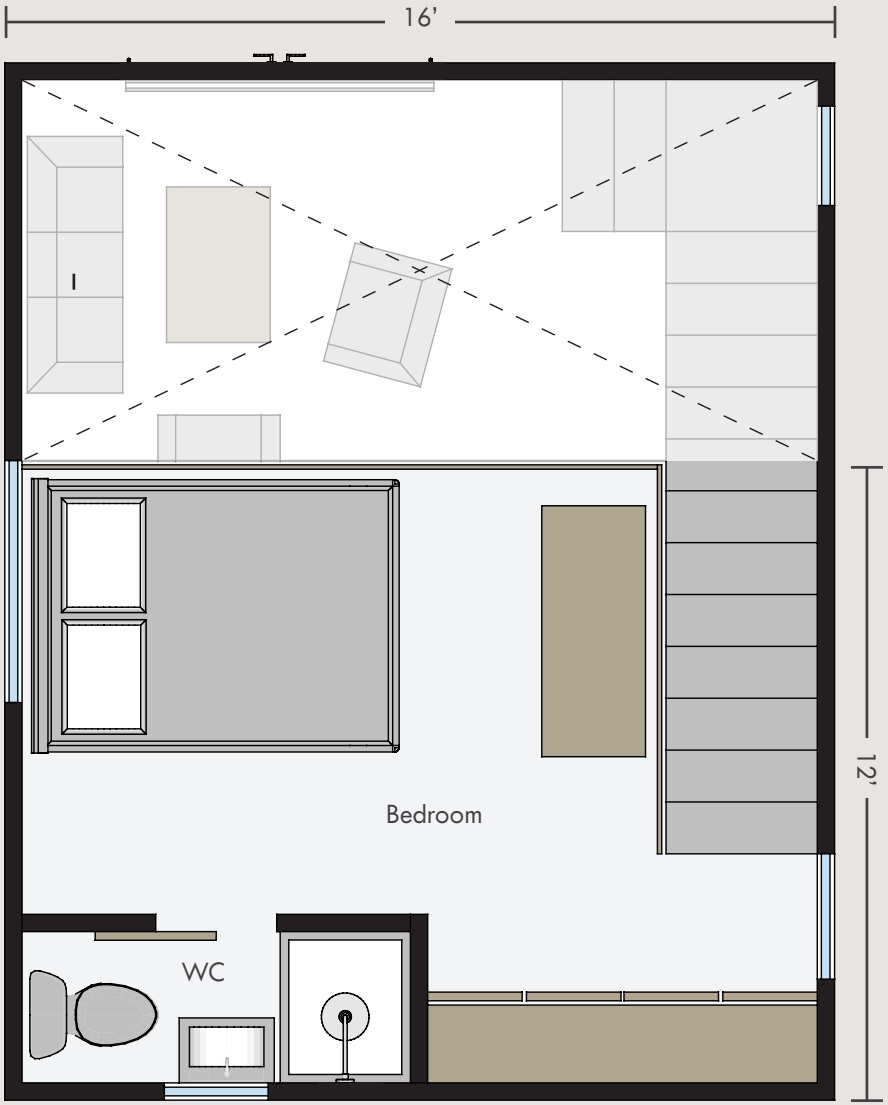


TWO-STORY ADU: FIRST FLOOR PLAN



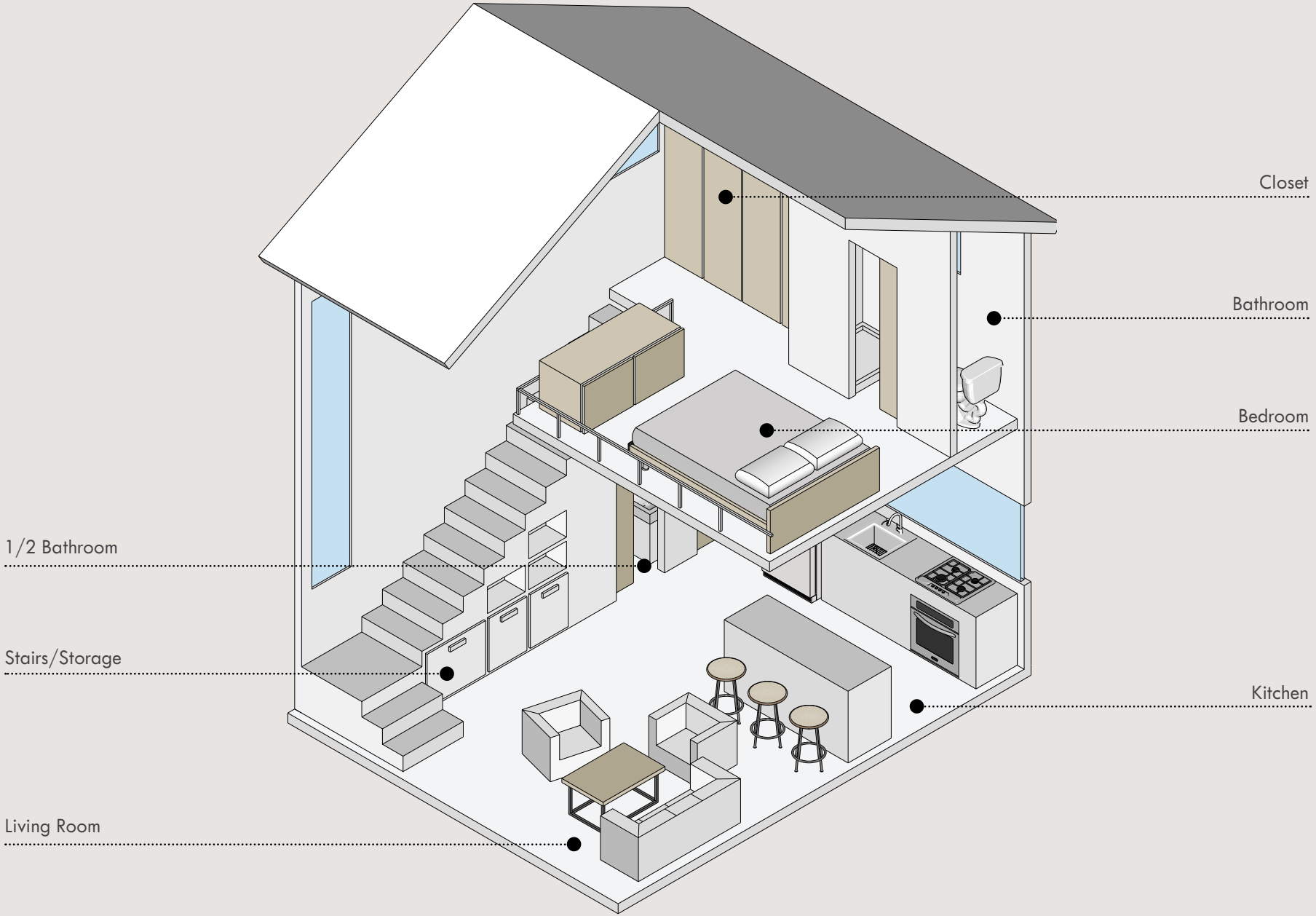
TWO-STORY ADU: SECOND FLOOR PLAN

PHASE 1



TWO-STORY LAYOUT

PHASE 1



Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

BARRIERS

BARRIERS

There are several barriers to building the supply of detached accessory dwelling units, including regulatory, infrastructural, fiscal, financial, and educational. The main regulatory barriers are zoning bylaws that completely ban or are highly restrictive of ADUs, as well as code compliance. Fiscal barriers include permitting fees and the capacity of the town's water and sewer system. Homeowners interested in building an ADU can find it difficult to finance the permitting and construction, limiting the number of households able to take advantage of ADU bylaws. Finally, neighbors and community members may be fearful of ADU impacts on schools, traffic, and neighborhood character. Many communities have overcome these barriers to adopt ADU-friendly policies.

Andrea Davis via Unsplash

BARRIERS BY STAKEHOLDER

TOWN OFFICIALS

- Zoning bylaws
- Permitting fees
- Building and health codes
- Fire safety

HOMEOWNERS

- Zoning bylaws
- Permitting fees
- High construction costs
- Inadequate building experience
- Lack of lending programs
- Tax increases

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- Traffic
- School enrollment
- Neighborhood character

BARRIERS FOR TOWN OFFICIALS

Zoning

The first hurdle communities have to overcome to become ADU-friendly is adding an ADU bylaw to the zoning, or amending existing ADU bylaws that may be too restrictive. In the Commonwealth, this process is more challenging due to Town Meeting form of governance employed in many smaller communities, which requires a 2/3rds majority for approval of any zoning change. Town officials will find that building pro-ADU coalitions and educating concerned community members is essential for approving progressive ADU bylaws.

Water + Sewer

By design, ADUs are not a great burden on a town's existing water and sewer capacity due to their small size and their occupancy limits. In most cases, the primary dwelling unit and the ADU may use a common water supply following a review from the proper inspection authority. Similarly, ADUs can use a common sewer line without additional fees as long as they abide by the maximum allowed connections. In California, detached ADUs require separate utility connections for water, gas, and sewer, as it can be more difficult for them to tap into the existing primary dwelling unit's connections.

Buidling Codes

Like any other dwelling structure, ADUs need to meet all the codes required by law. Building codes include the International Building Code as well as any state and local building requirements. Health and fire codes also need to be met, although specific requirements may be waived depending on the number of ADU occupants. Usually, two means of egress are required, as well as a sprinkler system and smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.

Fees

Building and connection fees for ADUs should befit the small size and low impact of the typology. In many cases, permit fees are attached to the estimated costs of construction or to the ADU's square footage. Utility connection fees are usually charged only if the ADU can be shown to have a significant impact on the existing utility connections. In Portland, OR, water service charges are only necessary when the size of the existing water or sewer line needs to be changed. In Berkeley, CA, ADUs are not considered new residential units for the purposes of calculating water and sewer fees.

Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) are permitted in all five of the partner South Shore towns, and in several towns are permitted town-wide. However, each town's bylaw restricts ADUs through a variety of dimensional and occupancy restrictions that, when taken together, amount to a substantial barrier for homeowners interested in adding an ADU.

Clay Banks via Unsplash

- ADUs are not allowed by-right in any of the five partner towns. Each town requires a special permit for ADUs, all using the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) as the special permit granting authority expect for Scituate, where special permits for ADUs are issued through the Planning Board. The ZBA typically evaluates cases where an applicant may need relief from dimensional requirements of the zoning bylaws based on specific criteria, whereas the Planning Board typically conducts a broader site plan review within the context of local land use policy. Either body can successfully review ADU applications, though Planning Boards sometimes have greater flexibility in their decision-making.
- Occupancy requirements are a common and considerable barrier to ADUs. While many homeowners might consider adding an ADU for an elderly parent or an adult child, they are unlikely to go through the expense if the ADU can no longer be used after the family member moves out. Three of the five partner towns require that ADUs be occupied by family members of the principal homeowner; only Duxbury and Scituate permit non-family occupancy. However, in Scituate these rentals must be deed-restricted Affordable Housing. While deed-restricted housing is a laudable policy goal, it is highly unlikely that a typical homeowner has access to the technical expertise and financial resources required to support a deed-restricted unit, so this realistically amounts to a de facto family occupancy requirement.
- Similarly, if an ADU permit does not run with the land and requires that the ADU be removed before the primary home is sold, homeowners will unlikely to devote their resources towards building one. Of the five partner towns, only Cohasset permits an ADU to remain when a home is sold.
- Scituate is the only participating town that allows ADUs to be detached. In the four other towns, ADUs must be internal or attached to the primary house.
- Three of the five partner towns cap the number of ADUs that can be built in a given year or overall. In many cases these caps are rarely met due to the myriad other restrictions on ADUs, however, it is unusual for a zoning bylaw to restrict the supply of a specific housing type in this way and does not help to promote the development of ADUs.

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING

	COHASSET	DUXBURY	HINGHAM	NORWELL	SCITUATE
Zoning District	All	All single-family districts excluding RCC and PUD	All	All	All residential districts and above ground in all business districts. Affordable ADUs in R-1, R-2, R-3, and business districts.
Year Updated	2018	2011	2018		
By Right or Special Permit	Special Permit (ZBA)	Special Permit (ZBA)	Special Permit (ZBA)	Special Permit (ZBA)	Special Permit (PB)
1 ADU Per Lot	Y	Y	Y		One per lot in Residential Districts and three per lot in Business Districts
Off-street Parking Required	One space per bedroom	One space per housing unit			One space per bedroom
Restricted to Family Members	Y		Y	Y	Affordable ADUs can be rented to non-family
Owner Occupancy Required	Y	Y	Y		Affordable ADUs can be rented to non-family
Matching Exterior to Primary DU	Y			Y	Y
Primary Must be Built or Occupied for at least 10 years	Y	Y			
Must be Internal or Attached	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Separate Entrance Required			Y		
Total ADU Cap	10% of single-family housing units in town		2.5% of single-family housing units in town		15 permits per year for Affordable ADUs
ADU Runs with the Land	Y				
Yard Dimension Requirements	1,200 sf	20,000 sf	5,000 sf		Underlying Zone
ADU Size Restrictions	900 sf or 25% of principal GFA, whichever is less	850 sf max	750 sf or 30% of primary GFA		750 sf or 40% of principal GFA, whichever is less. Unrestricted in business zones.
Max Bedrooms			Two bedrooms		

CASE STUDIES

ACCESSORY APARTMENT NEWTON, MA

Zoning
ADUs allowed for all single- and two-family detached houses by special permit

Size
250 - 1,200 sf for 40% of primary DU

Building Height
22' (pitched roof) or 18'

Floors
1.5

Setbacks
6' from primary DU

Parking
No additional parking required

Design
In keeping w/ primary DU + neighborhood

Occupancy
Homeowner must occupy one unit

Rent
Minimum 30 days

In 2017, the City of Newton passed one of the most progressive accessory dwelling unit (ADU) bylaws in the Commonwealth. It allows attached ADUs by right and detached ADUs by special permit in all single and two-family lots. Newton had first allowed ADUs in 1991, but virtually none were built due to the restrictiveness of the ordinance. The previous ordinance tied ADUs to lot sizes that were larger than what was common in the city, and as a result only homeowners with large lots were allowed to build ADUs. As a result, eligible homeowners tended to be wealthier individuals who were not inclined to build ADUs. City officials were also aware that anywhere from 600 to 1,000 illegal ADUs were scattered around the community, posing serious health and fire risks.

According to interviewed City staff, one of the main factors of success was the interest of City Council members, who were willing to work together in order to pass a new ordinance. The City also engaged with supporters to build a coalition that would reach out to the City Council and the media. The coalition included the Council on Aging, which was interested in the ordinance's connection to aging in place; environmental groups supportive of ADUs as a smart growth strategy; and housing advocates interested in increasing the city's housing supply. Additionally, the City carried out public meetings to identify other supporters that were willing to speak in support during public hearings.

The City also had to compromise with opposing factions in order to get the ordinance approved. Compromises included requiring a special permit for detached accessory dwelling units, allowing the maximum ADU size to be 1,000 square feet instead of 900 square feet to satisfy seniors who wanted a larger unit to move into, and limiting the total number of people in the primary and accessory units to that allowed in the primary dwelling unit (one family and 3 unrelated individuals) to avoid overcrowding.

Despite the improved ADU ordinance, the City of Newton believes the number of ADUs will not dramatically increase for a number of reasons. First, the cost of building an ADU is high, ranging from an estimated $90,000 for an internal unit to $200,000 for an external unit, according to Newton's building commissioner. The high investment, coupled with the lack of available financing, will disincentivize many homeowners from building a unit. Additionally, the ordinance restricts ADUs from being used as a short-term rental unit for less than 30 days, limiting homeowners who may be interested in generating rental income from the ADU. Maneuvering the special permitting process for a detached ADU may also deter households from going through the lengthy, costly process. Finally, many homeowners will find the construction process overwhelming, especially those with little to no background in design and development. This is confirmed by building data: In the year following the passing of the ordinance, only 6 applications for ADUs were filed.

ACCESSORY APARTMENT LEXINGTON, MA

Zoning
ADUs allowed for all single-family houses by special permit

Size
Maximum 1,000 sf

Building Height
25' to 30' depending on district

Bedrooms
2

Setbacks
6' from primary DU

Parking
No additional parking required

Design
SPGA determines if exterior appearance is compatible w/ primary DU and neighboring dwellings

Occupant
Homeowner must occupy one unit, can be absent and rent both units for up to 2 years

The Town of Lexington passed its current accessory apartment bylaw in Spring of 2016 through Town Meeting. Prior to the most recent iteration, Lexington had a 15-year-old accessory apartment bylaw with lot and occupancy requirements that made it unusable by most homeowners. Following a year of community engagement and bylaw design, the Planning Board successfully proposed a new ADU bylaw that was approved at Town Meeting.

A year prior to introducing the bylaw, the Planning Board held an informal, open-ended community forum on residential policy. Community members freely commented on the challenges, opportunities, and successes of the existing residential zoning, as well as on what other towns were doing. The main themes that surfaced from the forum were the homogenous housing supply, lack of options for empty nesters, and absence of housing for younger households. Later that year, the Planning Board held a second forum where they showcased possible changes to the zoning that would address the main concerns of community members. Some of the proposed changes included two-family houses, ADUs, modified height of structures, and neighborhood conservation districts.

The Planning Board presented the proposed residential zoning changes as a package in the 2016 Spring Town Meeting. Although some of the amendments, including two-family housing, were voted down, the accessory apartments bylaw passed.

Although Lexington's accessory apartment bylaw is one of the most permissive in the Commonwealth, the Town has not seen an overwhelming number of applications since its approval. Since 2016, a total of 11 units have been permitted. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these units are being built for family members, especially younger residents moving back to Lexington after completing their post-secondary studies.

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT PORTLAND, OR

Zoning
ADUs allowed in all Residential, Commercial, and Central Employment Zones

Size
75% of living area or 800 sf

Building Height
20'

Setbacks
40'

Parking
No additional parking required

Design
Must match primary dwelling unit

Building Code
Abide by state building code

Utilities
Can connect to existing systems or have a separate connection for an additional fee

The City of Portland is often hailed as a national leader for accessory dwelling units, and has over 20 years of iterative ADU regulations. The primary objective of ADUs in Portland is to make more efficient use of the existing housing stock and provide a greater mix of housing options, while maintaining overall neighborhood character. In Portland, ADUs can take the form of an existing space conversion (garage, accessory structure, space within a house), an attached addition to an existing building, or a new detached building. Partly due to their progressive regulations, the City has permitted over 2,000 ADUs since 2010.

Portland's first ADU reforms for minimum square footage and owner occupancy requirements were enacted in 1997, but it took further reforms for homeowners to take advantage of the regulations. In 2004, the City allowed ADUs to be built citywide, including in converted garages, and eliminated on-site parking requirements. Then, the City waived system development charges (SDC) for ADUs, which are usually charged for any new construction. After removal of the SDC fees, the number of ADU permits doubled from 2010 to 2014. In 2014, ADUs were officially allowed to function as short-term rentals (STRs). The City Commissioner is now pushing to limit the number of STRs by requiring homeowners building an ADU for STR purpose to pay the SDC fee. Lastly, in 2015 the City once again relaxed the design and setback standards to further incentivize homeowners to add ADUs.

Despite Portland's relatively relaxed ADU requirements, the City still has control over a variety of aspects. A detached ADU cannot cover more than 15% of the total lot size and must be set back 40 feet from the front lot line. This ensures that ADUs remain a secondary structure to the main house, both in size and placing. ADUs taller than 15 feet must have exterior finishes, roof, and windows that visually match those of the primary house. Moreover, the total number of residents that can live in both the primary and secondary units is limited to the total allowed for a household.[1]

Despite fears of ADUs being used as STRs, anecdotal evidence and data show that most are used for housing family or long-term renters. According to a 2014 survey, 70% of ADUs in Portland are owner-occupied, and only 4% are used as STRs.[2] In 2016, following increased deregulation of ADUs, there were approximately 1,359 ADUs in the city, of which about 200, or 15%, were used as STRs.[3]

1 Defined as one or more persons related by blood, marriage, domestic partnership, legal adoption or guardianship, plus no more 5 additional persons

2 Office of Policy Development and Research. Accessory Dwelling Units. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/casestudies/study-09082016.html

3 Will short term rentals actually reduce long term housing in granny flats? Accessory Dwellings. https://accessorydwellings.org/2016/04/04/adustr/

LITTLE TO MIDDLE HOUSING TYPES

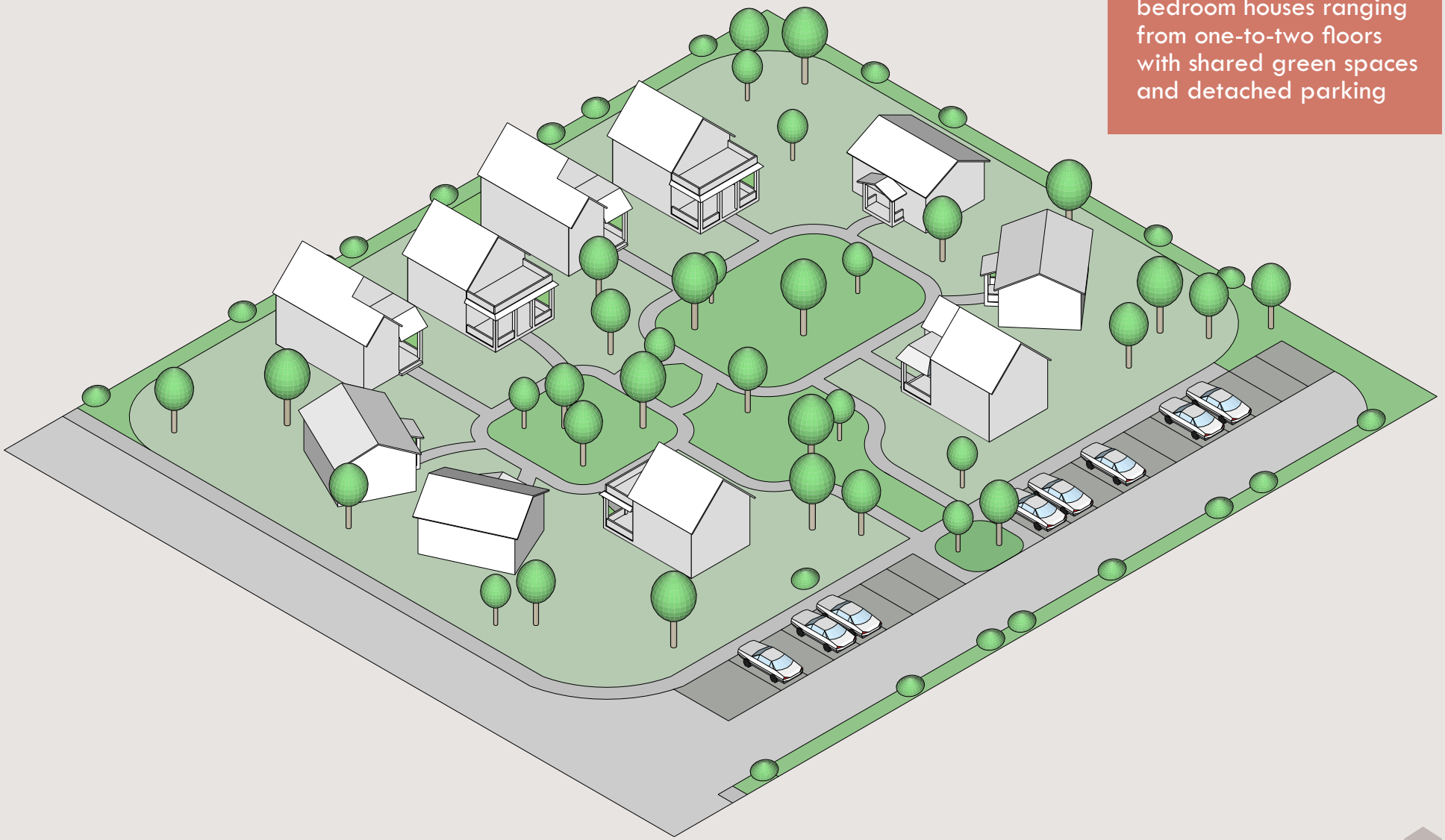
COTTAGE HOUSING

Ross Chapin Architects | Karen Delucas via Flickr

COTTAGE HOUSING

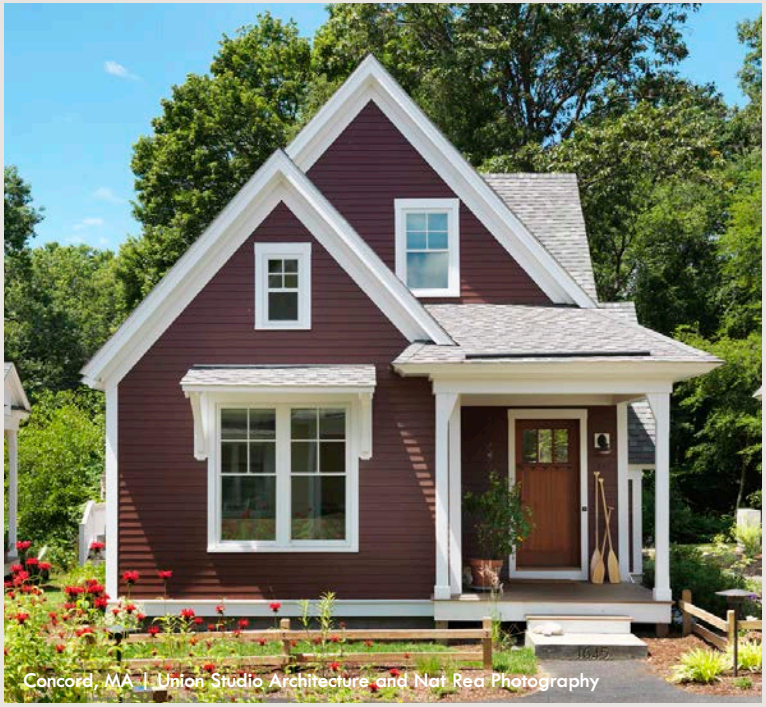
PHASE 1

Definition: A pedestrian-friendly collection of one-to-two-bedroom houses ranging from one-to-two floors with shared green spaces and detached parking



The South Shore communities participating in this report were interested in understanding the extent to which their zoning bylaws enable or impede cottage housing development, one of the housing types studied in the first Living Little report. An assessment of participating towns' zoning bylaws with regards to accessory dwelling units is included alongside relevant content from the first report, replicated here for ease of access and shown as:

PHASE 1



Concord, MA | Union Studio Architecture and Nat Rea Photography

OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

Cottage developments, also called pocket neighborhoods, are commonly identified by their walkable paths, shared green spaces, smaller clustered units, and detached parking spaces. Cottage developments can consist of single- and two-family houses, townhouses, or more urban apartment buildings. Cottages first appeared on the Cape Cod peninsula as a more permanent form of the self-built summer campgrounds used before WW II. In the late 1930s, these campgrounds came to be seen as "blight" by local authorities, and zoning laws were created to stop them. Today, many cottages are illegal under existing zoning laws, but they are tolerated and some, such as the 318 Victorian cottages in Oak Bluffs, were designated as a National Historic Landmarks by the U.S. Department of Interior.

Recently, a number of towns around the Commonwealth have updated their zoning to allow for cottage development. In Dennis, MA, the recent Seasonal Resort Community Zoning bylaw allows for small cottage clusters, while Concord, MA, has permitted new cottage developments through its Planned Residential Development (PRD) Zoning. Nationwide, the City of Langley, WA, was one of the first to adopt modern zoning for cottages in 1995. The City's Cottage Housing Development (CHD) code allows 4-to-12 small, detached cottages under 975 square feet to be built in single-family districts. Like other small housing options, CHD was a response to the nationwide demographic trend of decreasing household size, the need for increased affordable housing, and planning for developments that enhance walkability and sense of community..

PHASE 1

Ross Chapin Architects | Karen Delucas via Flickr

LAYOUT

GENERAL LAYOUT:

Lot Size	1/4 acre or larger
Height	1-2 stories
Setbacks	10' between cottages
Density	Depending on town's cottage zoning, density can be 15+ units/ acre; Generally developed under Planned Residential Development zoning
Unit Size	900-1,500 sq.ft. 1-2 bedrooms

EXAMPLES:

Concord, MA
Dennis, MA
Wayland, MA
Weymouth, MA
Carmel, IN
Fairview, OR
Indianapolis, IN
Kirkland, WA
Langley, WA
Phoenix, AR
Seattle, WA
Wheatridge, CO

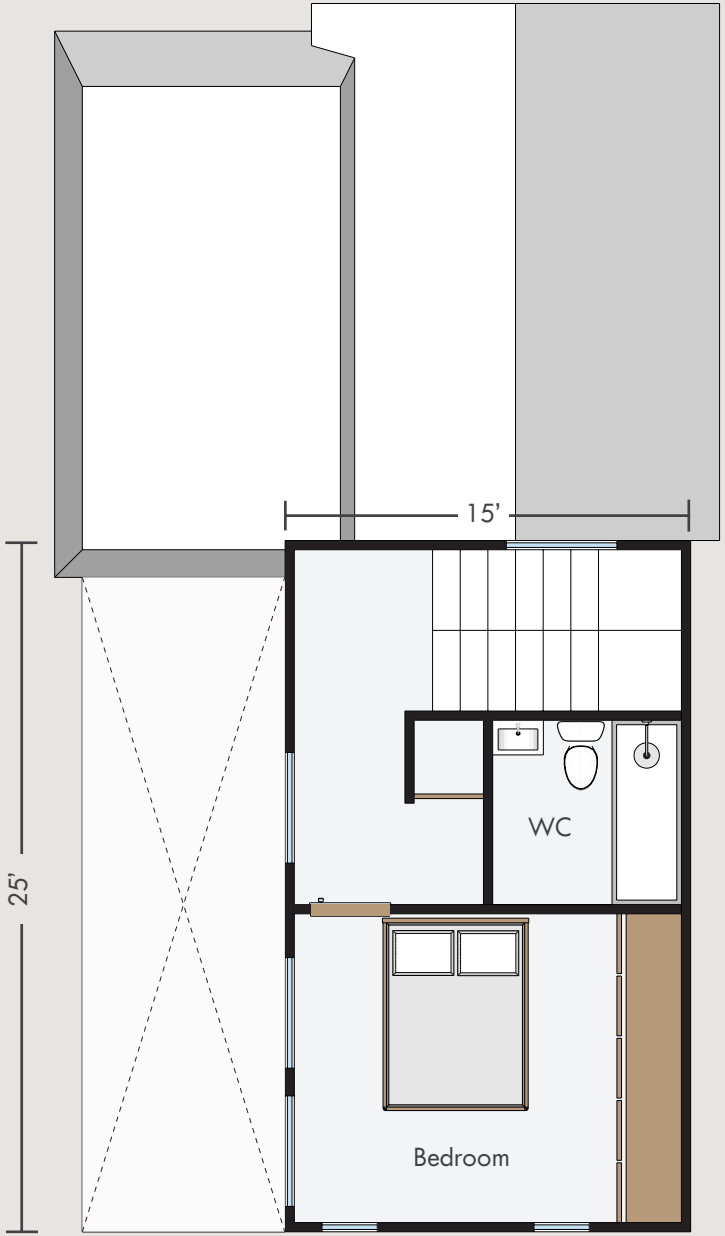
SITE PLAN LAYOUT:

PHASE 1

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

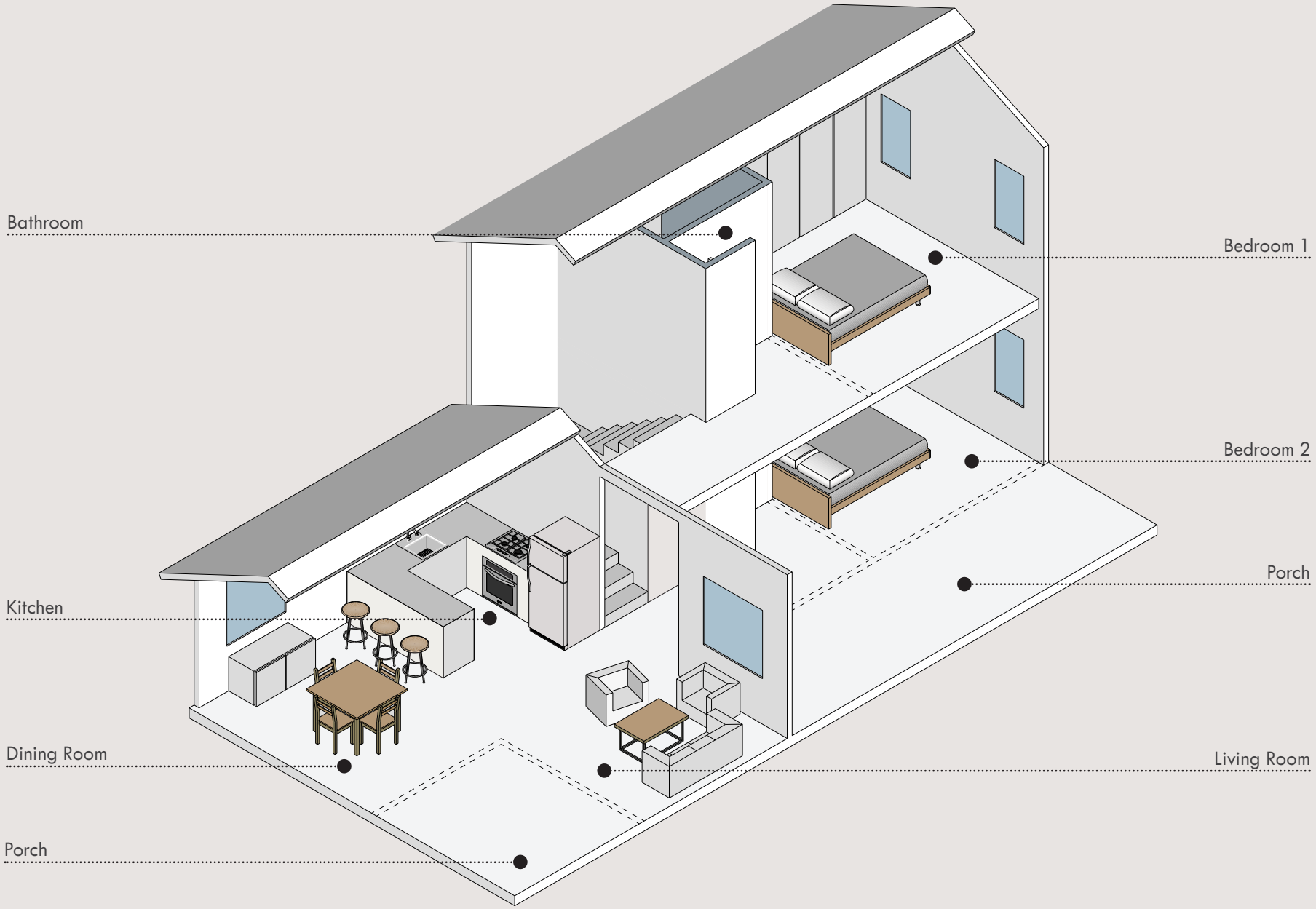
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

PHASE 1



TWO-STORY LAYOUT

PHASE 1



East Greenwich, RI | Union Studio Architecture and Nat Rea Photography

BARRIERS

BARRIERS

Cottage Housing Developments (CHDs) are a smart growth strategy that has proven to be desirable to homebuyers, especially those that have recently formed households and those seeking to downsize, and financially feasible for developers. In spite of their success in the Commonwealth and the nation, CHDs continue to face regulatory, infrastructural, and educational barriers that restrict their development. The main regulatory barriers are zoning bylaws that restrict high-density clustered development. Similar to ADU barriers, neighbors and community members may be fearful of CHD's impacts on schools, traffic, and neighborhood character. Various communities around the Commonwealth and the nation have been able to overcome these barriers to successfully create compact, well-designed cottage housing developments.

Ross Chapin Architects | Karen Delucas via Flickr

BARRIERS BY STAKEHOLDER

TOWN OFFICIALS

- Zoning bylaws
- Parking and trash disposal
- Fire safety
- Water and Sewer

DEVELOPERS

- Zoning bylaws
- Market dynamics
- Financing

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

- Traffic
- School enrollment
- Neighborhood character

BARRIERS FOR TOWN OFFICIALS

Zoning

In many suburban towns, clustered development is prohibited by zoning or requires a special permit. The higher density of cottage developments can be seen as excessive by towns accustomed to single-family dwelling units or larger lots. In Massachusetts, Planned Residential Districts (PRDs) provisions within a zoning bylaw can present an opportunity to create cottage developments. Outside the Commonwealth, some communities have gone further and created cottage development bylaws that are specifically designed to create these types of communities.

Water + Sewer

While the relatively high density of cottage developments makes this type of housing an example of smart growth design, it can also pose a burden on public water and sewer system. This is especially true in smaller towns and suburban communities that may rely on septic systems and limited public infrastructure. However, cottage houses generally have fewer bedrooms and therefore accommodate fewer people than typical single-family houses. In the town of Concord, MA, the developers of the Concord Riverwalk cottage development overcame infrastructure constraints by placing cottages with three bedrooms near the road and connecting them to the public sewer system, while a shared septic system was used for the units with one-to-two bedrooms.

Parking + Safety

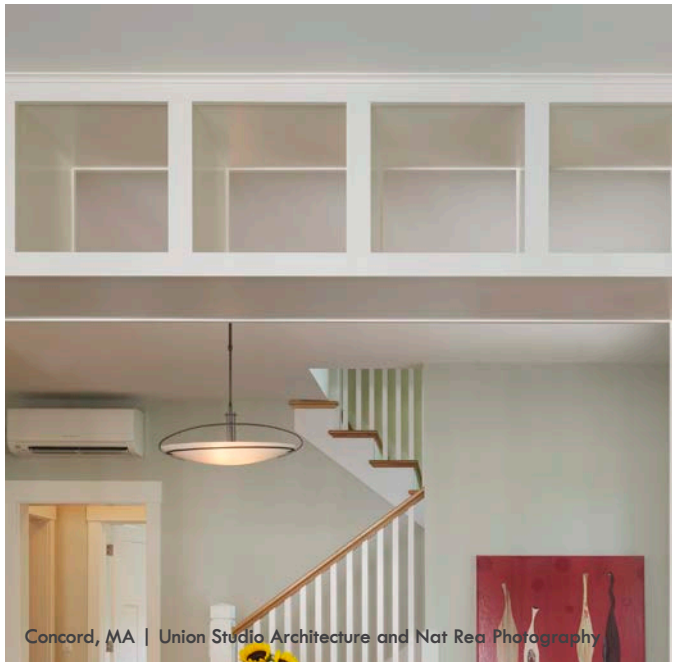
The lower number of parking spaces required per dwelling unit in a CHD and their location away from the units is different from single-family housing units. Walking paths in CHDs may also not be large enough for emergency vehicles and garbage disposal vehicles. In this case, creative site plan design can ensure proper access to and from the units in the event of an emergency and for garbage disposal.

East Greenwich, RI | Union Studio Architecture and Nat Rea Photography

Ross Chapin Architects | Karen Delucas via Flickr

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING

Each of the participating towns has a residential cluster zoning district where cottage housing development could occur. While in many cases dimensional restrictions limit the efficacy of these bylaws to encourage cottage housing, these districts are more flexible than conventional zoning and could serve as a starting point for regulations that more readily facilitate cottage development.



Concord, MA | Union Studio Architecture and Nat Rea Photography

- Large minimum lot sizes, particularly in Cohasset and Scituate, preclude small cottage clusters from being built on smaller lots where they may be appropriate. Cottage development need not be limited to large, neighborhood-size parcels; smaller groupings of only a few cottages on a smaller lot can be equally attractive and may be particularly suitable in areas close to village centers where smaller lots are historically more common.
- Density restrictions further limit how many housing units can be built and can prompt developers to pursue more conventional subdivision development. Cottage developments, which are designed be compact and walkable, can comfortably accommodate densities much higher than those permitted in most of the partner towns' bylaws.
- A parking requirement of two spaces per unit, as required by half of the partner communities, is far easier to accommodate in a traditional subdivision development and could discourage developers from pursuing a more compact cottage site plan. On larger sites, this could be mitigated by flexibility in where the parking spaces are located.
- Some of the zoning districts considered here are Open Space Residential Development districts, which allow denser development on one portion of a site while reserving the remainder of the site as open space. While these districts share some goals with cottage housing, namely a compact development footprint, the intent differs in that an OSRD is more focused on open space preservation and does not necessarily permit more units that would otherwise be allowed in a conventional subdivision. OSRDs were considered in this analysis for purposes of comparison, but they are not necessarily the right mechanism to promote small-scale, incremental cottage development, and interested towns should consider a bylaw that enables cottages independent of OSRDs.
- Finally, four out five towns limit the number of bedrooms in housing units, which conflicts with federal and state fair housing laws that protect families. With a clearly defined zoning vision, flexible dimensional requirements, and/or design guidelines, towns can encourage small-scale housing such as cottages without limiting the number of bedrooms.

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING

	COHASSET	DUXBURY	HINGHAM	NORWELL	SCITUATE
Zoning District	**Residential Cluster District**	**Residential Conservation Cluster (RCC) Development**	**Flexible Residential Development (FRD) – SP in Residential A, B, and C**	**Open Space Residential Design (special permitting process) – by-right in any district, Village Overlay District**	**Residential Cluster District**
Year Updated	1981	2017		2011	1986
Special Permit Granting Authority	PB	PB w/ criteria 540.3	PB in Residential Districts A, B, and C	PB	NA
More Than One Structure Permitted on a Lot	Single-family separate, multifamily together	One structure by right. Multiple by special permit	By special permit	No	Yes
Permitted Housing Types	Multifamily (30% max)	Single-family, two-family, and three-family	Single-family or two-family	Board review	Same as R-3
Bedroom Limitation	2	2 (multi-family)	No more than 15% of units can be 3-bedroom		2
Other Review	Joint or separate review by Board of Health, Design Review Board, Conservation Commission, and other boards deemed appropriate by PB	Subdivision Control Law – Board of Health	Two public hearings – One for the special permit and one for the definitive plan; Town boards and agencies submit written recommendations to PB within 35 days of preliminary application	Other boards review and report to PB	Preliminary plan and definitive plan
Minimum Lot Size (sf)	10 acres	½ the square footage required in underlying district	3 acres	½ acre	Cluster Zoning – minimum 20 acres. Cottages only on lots of 5,000 or part of a Cottage Court.
Other density requirements	Min 30 ft between individual structures	Max du - (Applicable land area x .75) divided by minimum lot area of zoning district. No more du than allowed in conventional subdivision.	Restricted to what's allowed under a conventional subdivision increased by 135% with AH provisions for additional units	Five acres for total project (can be waived if contiguous open space available)	Cluster – one unit per ten thousand square feet of lot area; Cottages max unit size of 1,400 GFA
Frontage (ft)	30-foot minimum width between open land and between each group of clustered buildings. 30 feet between structures. Underlying setbacks apply	50 feet	50	No less than 50	All buildings 60 feet buffer from project boundaries
Font yard (ft)		15	15	25	
Side yard (ft)		½ underlying	15	10	Buildings 35 feet apart
Rear yard (ft)		½ underlying	15	10	
Stories		Underlying	2 ½	2 ½ (underlying)	1.5 (cottage)
Height (ft)	35	Underlying	35	34 (underlying)	20 (cottage)
Parking	General regulations. 2 spaces per du	Determined by Zoning Officer	2 spaces per du in garages and/ or driveways	1 per one-bed, 2 per two+-bed	Underlying, planning board can reduce to 1 per one-bed, 1.5 per two-bed, and 2 per three-bed
Open space requirement	25%	60%	40%	50%	Land not devoted to dwelling units as a condition of special permit

COTTAGE HOUSING

Concord, MA | Union Studio Architecture and Nat Rea Photography

CASE STUDIES

CONCORD RIVERWALK CONCORD, MA

Housing Units
13

Year Built
2011

Unit Mix
5 three-bedroom, 8 two-bedroom units

Unit Size
1,340 - 1,760 sf

Lot Size
3.7 acres

Open Space
50%

Parking
12 garage units, detached and clustered
16 designated surface spaces

Zoning
Planned Residential Development

Ownership
Homeowners Association

Sales Price
$600,000 - $780,000/unit, 2016

The Concord Riverwalk development process is a prime example of cottage housing development (CHD). The project was led by Dan Gainsboro, the founding principal and owner of real estate company NOW Communities. Gainsboro's interest in community development and his service on the Town of Concord's Planning Board were two of the factors that led him to develop this project. Prior to starting any work on the project, Gainsoboro organized an informal advisory board for feedback regarding land planning and approval processes. Gainsboro's board included Ross Chapin, the principal architect of Ross Chapin Architects, a design studio that specializes in pocket neighborhoods based out of Washington state, and a leader in CHD.

Once Gainsboro identified a parcel for development, he and Chapin connected with Concord's town officials to present the idea of CHD and address any design questions. According to the Town, Gainsboro carried out extensive outreach to the community, including meeting with abutters to ensure that the project's design addressed their concerns. Gainsboro brought Chapin to public forum meetings to answer design questions and provide more technical information about the process. After sustained community outreach, residents voiced their support for the project.

One of town officials' greatest concerns with this project was how it would address basic infrastructure provision, parking, and fire safety. Town officials state that the Town's limited sewer capacity was sufficient for all of the housing units to the public system. To overcome this, the units with fewer bedrooms were accommodated in the rear part of the lot and connected to a septic system, while those with a greater number of bedrooms were located near the street and connected to the public sewer system. To ensure fire safety, Gainsboro held early discussions with the local fire department and ultimately designed an access drive large enough for emergency vehicles, which also functions as a public access grass path to the Assabet River behind the project. The limited amount of parking in the project can't always accommodate visitors, but it's unusual for there to be no open spaces.

One of the main difficulties Gainsboro enumerated was getting the support of investors who were not familiar with the concept and saw it as a risk, despite the popularity of these projects with homebuyers. In regards to affordability, the condo ownership structure and the houses' small design has resulted in relatively stable prices when compared to traditional single-family houses.

PHASE 1

HERITAGE SANDS DENNIS, MA

Housing Units
63

Year Built
2015

Unit Mix
One- to three-bedroom cottages

Unit Size
900 - 1,350 sf

Lot Size
8 acres

Parking
1 space per cottage

Zoning
Seasonal Resort Community

Ownership
Homeowners Association

Sales Price
$550,000 - $1,250,000/unit, 2018

The site of Heritage Sands sits was previously as the Grindell's RV Park, a successor of tourist campgrounds existed around town since the 1930s. Camps are allowed to continue operating, despite new trailer parks being prohibited in 1965. However, existing camps were labeled "non-conforming," and could not receive municipal sewer or septic support, leading to failing cesspool infrastructure in addition to overcrowded conditions. From 2009 to 2010, the Dennis Economic Development Committee and municipal officials held community discussions on a new Seasonal Resort Community Zoning District for campgrounds around Dennis. In 2010, the new zoning was approved, allowing the development of Heritage Sands, the first oceanfront cottage community in more than 50 years.

In 2010, following severe sewage challenges in the RV Park and a newly approved zoning bylaw, Grindell's owner and principal of MS Ocean View, LLC, Mark DeWitt, teamed with real estate developer and president of CapeBuilt Development, LLC, Rob Brennan, to redevelop the property. The team collaborated with the Town's Select Board, Town Manager, other municipal boards and committees, the local business community, and year-round and seasonal residents during the project's development.

As with other pocket neighborhoods, Heritage Sands had to overcome difficulties of compact design, parking, fire safety, and sewage. The site plan was designed to visually and physically allow access to the water by creating numerous common spaces, which also served to increase a sense of community within the project. Other community amenities, such as the clubhouse and pool, were placed in the area furthest from the water to make up for the distance to the ocean.

Fire lanes were created by designing a 24-foot two-way entrance and a 16-foot one-way loop around the development. These brought the project in compliance with the fire code while preserving walkability and green spaces. The site had no access to municipal sewer so the green spaces were utilized for high-pressure leeching and a common tank and sewer facility were built behind the pool and community building.

In 2014, the cottages went on the market for approximately $350,000 ($366,252) adjusted for inflation). In 2018, units for sale on Zillow ranged from $550,000 for a 1-bedroom to $1,250,000 for a 3-bedroom.

COTTAGE HOUSING ZONING HAMILTON, MA

Lot Area
1 to 5 acres

Gross Floor Area
800 - 1,500 sf

Density
Max. 4.5 units/acre

Bedrooms
Max. 2

Building Height
25 ft

Setbacks
10 ft

Dwelling Units
4 to 18

Open Space
500 sf per DU, min. of 3,000 sf

Parking
2 spaces per cottage

At 2017 Town Meeting, the residents of Hamilton rejected a proposed Cottage Housing Zoning Bylaw that would have allowed cottage housing development in town under specific conditions. The bylaw was a culmination of five years of discourse, including discussions with residents and town surveys to gauge support. In addition, the town's 2004 Master Plan recommended the development of smaller, more affordable housing types that could balance the primarily large, single-family homes in the community. Despite this and a 2016 community survey that showed 66% of 704 respondents in support of cottage zoning, the measure was downvoted by 284 to 8 at Town Meeting.

According to Town officials, there was ongoing support for the bylaw prior to Town Meeting, including from the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, and real estate developers in town. Residents that supported the bylaw were invited to Town Meeting, but the setting might have scared supporters despite the extensive community discussion and outreach. The community pushback against density was due partly to fear of newcomers and a potential increase in the school-age population. Residents also voiced concerns about excessively dense clusters cropping up in town, as well as changes in the town's character.

This experience made town officials skittish about introducing new residential zoning that encourages density. It also led the Planning Board to seek funding to update the town's master plan to focus on residential growth that the community would accept. Town officials believe that the community's ultimate response to the proposed bylaw resulted in housing developers taking their business to different communities where cottage development is more feasible.

LITTLE TO MIDDLE HOUSING TYPES

COHOUSING

Duwamish Cohousing | Joe Mabel via Wikimedia

OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

Cohousing is an intentional community of private residences surrounded by shared open space and common areas that facilitate social interaction and communal support. It is a collaborative way of living that fosters connectedness, increases social capital, and creates opportunities for more conscious use of social, natural, and human-made resources.[7] The concept of private dwellings around shared public spaces is centuries old, but cohousing in its modern form was pioneered by Danish architect Jan Gudmand-Hoyer in the 1960s. Gudmand-Hoyer organized a group of friends in purchasing land outside of Copenhagen, where they planned to build twelve attached, townhouse-style homes set around a shared yard, pool, and common house. Although the development was never realized due to neighborhood opposition, the concept of intentional living grounded in communal support began to garner attention, and Gudmand-Hoyer was ultimately successful in designing cohousing communities across Denmark, a country where this type of housing is now commonplace.[8] In the 1980s, the concept made its way to the United States, where over 250 exist today, including several in Massachusetts. One of the oldest is Pioneer Valley Cohousing, which is made up of 32 detached houses, duplexes, and triplexes and two large common houses for community activities and shared learning.[9]

Cohousing typically involves private housing units with shared community spaces such as dining halls, kitchens, social rooms, and gardens. Because of the extensive shared space in cohousing developments, the private units are usually smaller than they might be in a typical development. While cohousing can be attractive to households of all ages and are commonly multigenerational, it offers particular benefit to seniors by mitigating physical and social isolation. Cohousing communities are legally structured as either a condominium, in which each resident owns the deed to an individual unit and common areas are maintained through monthly condominium fees, or as a limited equity co-op, in which each resident owns a share in the overall development. Limited equity co-ops often limit the resale value of an ownership share to maintain affordability.

Cohousing is not limited to a specific building type, but rather is based on a shared commitment to living in community. Cohousing communities have been successfully launched across a range of building types, from single-family to cottages to townhomes, and could be employed in many of the Living Little building types.

Beyond classic cohousing communities, home sharing and cohousing coordinated through digital platforms is a new trend occurring across the state and the country. Under this framework, residents interested in a shared living situation are connected through a digital platform or peer-to-peer website. The focus varies by platform; some emphasize intergenerational connections while others cater primarily to young professionals. Most intend to facilitate at medium- to long-term arrangements and are not intended as short-term vacation rentals. Although these are not cohousing communities in the traditional sense and they are not formed in a grassroots manner, they share many of the same values as more traditional cohousing, such as shared meals, mutual assistance, and relationship building.

BUILT EXAMPLES:

Amherst, MA
Berlin, MA
Cambridge, MA
Malden, MA
Northampton, MA

7 The Cohousing Association of America, Cohousing.org, 2021

8 https://www.theguardian.com/money/2009/oct/24/communal-living-grand-designs

9 https://www.cohousing.org/directory. Johnson, B. B. (2019, October 09). The Case For Cohousing: Where Responsibilities Are Shared And Life Is A Little Less Lonely. Retrieved May 30, 2021, from https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2019/10/09/cohousing-community-living-ben-brock-johnson

LAYOUT


Sam Brown via Flickr


Hearthstone Cohousing | Anne via Flickr

GENERAL LAYOUT:

Housing type	Single-family, duplexes, townhouses, cottages, multifamily, or a combination
Unit size	Depends on housing type; often smaller than average
Lot size	2 to 6 acres
Housing	10 to 40 units
Common house	2,500 to 5,000 sf
Potential common house elements	Commercial kitchen, dining room, living room, guest rooms, meeting rooms, library or study area, bike storage and repair, workshop space
Potential common outdoor elements	Community garden, playground

Definition: An intentionally-designed community of private residences and shared public open and common spaces. Cohousing can take many forms, including single family, duplexes, townhouses, cottages, or a combination of several housing types.

Flickr User Punktoad via Flickr

BARRIERS

BARRIERS

There are several barriers to building the supply of detached accessory dwelling units, including regulatory, infrastructural, fiscal, financial, and educational. The main regulatory barriers are zoning bylaws that completely ban or are highly restrictive of ADUs, as well as code compliance. Fiscal barriers include permitting fees and the capacity of the town's water and sewer system. Homeowners interested in building an ADU can find it difficult to finance the permitting and construction, limiting the number of households able to take advantage of ADU bylaws. Finally, neighbors and community members may be fearful of ADU impacts on schools, traffic, and neighborhood character. Many communities have overcome these barriers to adopt ADU-friendly policies.

BARRIERS FOR TOWN OFFICIALS

For the most part, town officials' concerns over cohousing will be related to whatever built form it takes, such as townhouses or cottages, and will be consistent with the barriers described above for those housing types. While town officials may be unsure how to classify occupancy, a well-structured cohousing project will delineate individually-owned residences and, in terms of occupancy and use classification, will not differ substantively from a more typical multifamily development with generous shared spaces.

For digitally-facilitated shared housing arrangements such as those discussed in the case studies below, use and occupancy definitions may pose a greater challenge. Depending on lease terms and local bylaw definitions, home sharing could potentially be classified as any number of uses—from rooming house to single room occupancy—each of which may or may not be permitted in a given district and may require physical changes to the home to meet the code requirements for that use. If a municipality wishes to encourage this type of living option, it may need to consider changing zoning regulations to allow exemptions for well-defined home sharing arrangements (life safety-related building code requirements should always met). Regulations should also differentiate between long-term, community-based home sharing and short-term vacation rentals.

Duwamish Cohousing | Joe Mabel via Flickr

Trudeslund Cohousing | seier+seier via Wikimedia

PARTNER TOWNS ZONING

	COHASSET	DUXBURY	HINGHAM	NORWELL	SCITUATE
Occupancy Restrictions	Two families max	Not more than four unrelated persons or more than five persons can share a home	Family definition, two families max	Dwelling unit "exclusively for use as living quarters for only one family."	Dwelling unit must be for one family

BARRIERS FOR DEVELOPERS

In many instances, cohousing communities are not built by experienced developers but are a grassroots effort spearheaded by similarly minded laypeople who may not have any knowledge of zoning, permitting, building, and occupancy requirements. Establishing the ownership structure for a condominium or limited equity co-op can be technically complex and likely requires formal legal expertise. All this professional expertise requires a significant up-front investment of capital that may not be accessible to laypeople. When it comes to financing the project construction, traditional lenders may be wary of funding a cohousing development or may not have an appropriate loan product.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Concerns over the built form of a cohousing development will echo those described in other housing types above and in the previous Living Little report: neighborhood character, parking and traffic impacts, water and sewer capacity, etc. In addition to concerns surrounding the development's physical form, neighbors may also be wary of cohousing as a concept or suspicious of the sort of person who might seek to live in cohousing. Fortunately, Massachusetts has several longstanding cohousing communities that provide concrete examples of how this type of housing functions and serves as an asset to its residents.

Members of the public may also have the perception that no one will want to move to a living situation with shared public spaces, particularly if there are a range of age groups. While cohousing may not be suitable for everyone, it clear that residents of existing cohousing communities enjoy and benefit from a community of diverse interests and ages living interconnectedly, particularly seniors at risk of isolation.

Arcadia Cohousing | Seth Vidal via Flickr

Manchester-by-the-Sea | Alex Koppelman

Amherst, MA | Ann Forsyth, Design for Health via Flickr

Flickr User Complicated via Flickr

CASE STUDIES

CORNERSTONE COHOUSING
CAMBRIDGE, MA

Total Housing Units
32

Housing Types
Townhouses and multifamily

Cornerstone Village was conceived in the early 1990s by a group of like-minded Cambridge residents who wanted to create a new cohousing community. Technical assistance and support from community partners was critical to the success of Cornerstone Cohousing. The Center for Collaborative Communities, now called the Cohousing Center, provided information and guidance to the founders of Cornerstone and helped them find a site and developer. Throughout the permitting process, the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee advocated for the development and helped Cornerstone overcome regulatory barriers. They also helped Cornerstone win appeals that were made against the decision to permit the development. Even with this local support, the process was a long one and required determination and sustained commitment from the future cohousing residents and their community partners.

Upon its completion in 2001, Cornerstone offered a low-cost housing option, grounded in intentional community and support, to a diverse range of residents. It consists of 32 housing units, including nine townhouses and 23 apartments ranging in size from one- to four-bedrooms, clustered around green space and gardens. There are currently 75 community members that range from retired seniors to families with young children. Cornerstone Village community members share a common house that includes meeting space, a children's playroom, and a large dining hall and kitchen used for shared community meals. As one of Massachusetts's well-established cohousing communities, it often serves as an example to others interested in establishing cohousing communities and continues to be a leader in the Massachusetts cohousing movement.

BAY STATE COMMONS MALDEN, MA

Total Housing Units
30

Housing Type
Multifamily

Cost
Varies by unit size; approximately $690,000 for a two-bedroom in 2021

Bay State Commons is one of the newest cohousing developments in Greater Boston. As with many cohousing projects, taking the project from concept to occupancy was a multi-year effort. Planning for the development began in 2013; construction began in 2020 with expected completion in 2022. The development will include 30 housing units and 5,000 square feet of common spaces. Units will range in size from 384 square foot studios to 1,200 square foot three-bedroom units. Common spaces will include a meeting and workroom, social room, large common kitchen, and shared dining area.

The greatest challenge the Bay State Commons founders faced was finding a site. The group spent several years pursuing opportunities that ultimately did not bear fruit. Eventually they hired a cohousing expert to assist the group with site acquisition, and in 2018 they successfully purchased a property formerly owned by American Legion. To navigate legal hurdles, they organized themselves as a condominium association.

The permitting process, which took over one year to complete, encountered some challenges due to the unconventional qualities of cohousing, particularly with regards to the small private housing units and large amounts of shared common space. In spite of their location within walking distance to subway and commuter rail stations, to meet the City's parking requirements Bay State Commons needed to construct underground parking, which adds significant cost to the project. Finally, the development was contested by abutting property owners. To overcome this opposition, the cohousing group hosted a series of public forums with abutters and other concerned community members to answer questions and provide more information about their plans.

The founders' experiences demonstrate the combination of technical challenges and messaging challenges often experienced in cohousing development, and the need for perseverance. Now that the project is nearing successful completion, it has generated strong interest from prospective members. Municipalities wishing to support this type of development could provide technical expertise for site acquisition or could even make public land available in exchange for affordable units. Towns should also ensure their zoning allows sufficient flexibility to accommodate the unique situations that arise in cohousing, such as a process for reducing parking requirements.

PIONEER VALLEY COHOUSING

Total Housing Units
32

Housing Type
Detached single family, duplexes, triplexes

Cost
$320,000 to $385,00 depending on home size, as of May 2020

Pioneer Valley Cohousing started from a local newspaper advertisement in 1989. Families and individuals interested in the cohousing model responded to the ad and began planning in earnest for one of the first cohousing communities in the Eastern U.S. These families jointly purchased a 23-acre meadow within walking distance of transit and amenities in Amherst, MA.[10] After five years of planning and construction, Pioneer Valley Cohousing open in June, 1994.

Since then, it has been home to 32 households of all ages, living in eight detached homes, nine duplexes, and two triplexes that range from 616 to 1600 square feet. The homes sit on about ¼ of the large 23-acre site that also includes open space, office building, workshop/artist studio, playgrounds, garden space, and a 4,500-square foot common building that acts as the center of community life. These shared and open spaces serve an important role in sustaining the health and connections between residents of all ages. Pioneer Valley is proudly multi-generational, and the mix of seniors, adults, and children in the community is a major draw for many current and prospective residents. On its website, Pioneer Valley Cohousing states that they are "continuously striving to maintain a robust waiting list that includes young families, retiring boomers, and the full spectrum of our diverse culture."[11]

The longevity of this community demonstrates the stability of a cohousing model when members are committed, and clear governance protocols are in place. Unlike urban cohousing communities, which often face challenges finding and obtaining land, the original Pioneer Valley members were able to purchase a large and desirable property that could accommodate housing and a variety of shared spaces while reserving a large portion of the site as open space. In communities closer to Boston, land prices are far higher and would likely necessitate a more compact footprint. Towns interested in this type of housing should be flexible in their expectations for what a cohousing community looks like and understand that opportunities for cohousing need not be limited to parcels above a certain size.

10 https://www.cohousing.org/directory/pioneer-valley/
11 https://web.cohousing.com/

DIGITALLY-ASSISTED HOME SHARING

Recent years have seen the rise of digital platforms aimed at facilitating alternative shared living arrangements. While these are not cohousing in the traditional sense, many operate on similar principles of intentional community living. One such example operating in Greater Boston is Nesterly, a home sharing service that matches over-housed seniors with compatible, often younger, housemates. Though the focus is intergenerational, hosts of any age may participate. Matches are made by Nesterly's staff of case workers, and the service also manages leasing arrangements between the homeowner and tenants. Unlike short-term vacation rentals, leases last a minimum of one month and are often long-term. Usually, a homesharing arrangement consists of only two people, so occupancy requirements don't come into play. Rental registry requirements are also not applicable because the owner of the home lives on site.

The City of Boston conducted an intergenerational homesharing pilot program in 2020, with Nesterly as its vendor. The program goals were to create supplemental rental income for seniors with fixed incomes and at the same time create affordable housing opportunities for graduate students with limited incomes, reducing social isolation for participating seniors in the process. The pilot project was small—eight pairings were made—but was considered a success by several metrics. The average rent during the pilot was $700, well below market rents in Boston, and tenants often had the option to further reduce rent by assisting with errands or household chores. On the other hand, seniors received several thousand dollars in additional annual income, and many participants reported developing a fulfilling relationship with their homesharing partner.

Another variation on cohousing that has been enabled by digital platforms is professional shared housing developers that acquire and redevelop properties specifically for community-oriented living, such as Cohaus in Los Angeles or Open Door in several west coast states. These projects—many of which are single-family home conversions—typically feature private bedrooms and bathrooms with a common kitchen, living room, and outdoor space. The development company performs tenant screening and background checks and assists in finding a suitable shared housing match. Like traditional cohousing, these developments espouse intentional, community-focused living. Unlike traditional cohousing, they tend to be homogeneous in terms of age and household composition: the standard one-bedroom unit size precludes families, and the projects are most often marketed towards young professionals. Perhaps the biggest difference is that these developments are created by a business rather than formed organically by a group of individuals with a shared vision. Of course, there are benefits to this approach; the early involvement of development professionals eliminates many of the predevelopment growing pains experienced by many grassroots cohousing communities. And these developments do indeed fill a gap in housing supply by providing smaller, less expensive housing options for young adults interested in community living.

OVERALL COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND BARRIERS

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Recent studies across the nation have found that concerns about new housing development increasing school enrollment are overstated.[1, 2]

In 2017, MAPC conducted an analysis of housing permits and enrollment trends across 234 public school districts in the region from 2010 to 2016. The study found that there is no meaningful correlation between housing production and increased school enrollments. **In cities and towns with the most rapid housing production, enrollment barely changed; and districts with the largest student increases saw very little housing production. Data shows that broad demographic trends, parental preferences, and current housing stock all play a much larger role in school enrollment growth and decline.**

The Commonwealth's public school enrollment (including charter schools) peaked in 2002 and has been declining ever since. Public school enrollment is now 3% lower than it was in 2002, while private schools have seen a 20% decline in enrollment during the same time period. Across the region, 159 of 234 local school districts saw an average decline of 8% from 2010 to 2016.

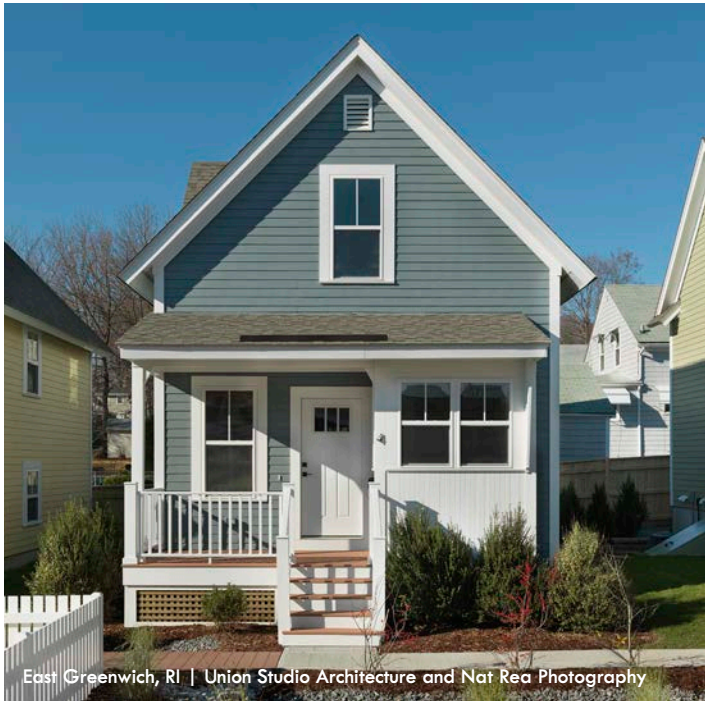
The districts that have experienced an increase in enrollment tend to be located in urban communities, while most suburbs have seen a decline in enrollment. Districts experiencing rapid enrollment fall into two buckets: those with top schools, proximity to employment in Boston, compact neighborhoods, and expensive housing stock (Arlington, Belmont, Brookline, Cambridge, Lexington, Lincoln, and Natick); and those with low-performing school districts in diverse, low-income, urbanized areas that are still affordable for low- and middle-income households with school-age children (Revere, Everett, Chelsea, Lynn, and Waltham).

The majority of suburban communities in the MAPC region are seeing sustained declines in enrollment. In communities where substantial housing construction has occurred, the corresponding growth in households and children has not been enough to offset the natural demographic decline in school-age residents associated with the aging of the children of Baby Boomers.

1 Housing the Commonwealth's School-Age Children: The Implications of Multi-Family Housing Development for Municipal and School Expenditures, 2003, Community Opportunities Group, Inc. & Connery Associates; Citizens Planning and Housing Association. https://www.chapa.org/sites/default/files/f_1239203891HousingSchoolAgeChildren.pdf

2 The Costs And Hidden Benefits Of New Housing Development In Massachusetts. Michael Goodman, Elise Korejwa, and Jason Wright; PPC Working Paper No. 02 March, 2016. http://publicpolicycenter.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/GoodmanKorejwaWright_TheCostsBenefitsOfNewHousingDevelopment.pdf

Community members may be wary of some of the housing types included in this report, such as townhouses and cottages, because they worry that these housing types could impact school enrollment. However, several studies show little correlation between new housing development and increased school enrollment. This is consistent with enrollment patterns in the participating SSC communities. In for of the five participating towns, school enrollment has decreased since 2010 despite permitting hundreds of residential buildings. The exception is Hingham, and even here school enrollment has only increased by 4% in the last nine years despite permitting 1,061 residential buildings. Additionally, prohibiting housing that might bring more families to town is a violation of state and fair housing laws, which protect families with children.



East Greenwich, RI | Union Studio Architecture and Nat Rea Photography

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

There is no evidence that smaller housing typologies contribute to increased traffic and parking issues. One of the main reasons these typologies have limited impact is that they typically only make up a sliver of most suburban communities' housing supply, especially when compared to single-family houses. By design, suburban single-family houses encourage households to own more than one vehicle due to their scale and provision of off-street parking. The majority of households in the 5 project partner towns from Phase 1 live in single-family houses, and the majority of households in all towns except for Stoughton have two or more vehicles.[1] Meanwhile, Living Little typologies generally consist of one-to two-bedrooms and encourage infill development near transit, limiting the number of people and vehicles.

Data on how Living Little typologies affect property prices is still limited, but studies show that smart growth policies may increase housing prices.[2] Communities that have implemented smart growth policies that favor compactness, well-planned density, transit, and walkability have become highly desirable and have seen increases in property values. At the same time, extensive empirical research shows that incorporating smart growth principles can significantly decrease capital outlays for infrastructure by municipalities, counties, and states.

The language of Living Little zoning bylaws can ensure new housing production is respectful of existing architectural design. How zoning is written can decisively influence what new housing looks like. Most Living Little zoning regulates how these typologies should visually interact with their surroundings. Town officials can add language that ensures new Living Little housing complements the neighborhood, and can require Living Little developers to undergo a design review process prior to permit approval through the special permitting process. Town officials can also provide design guidelines or create form-based codes to foster high-quality, predictable development.

Living Little housing can fill a gap in the housing stock, but there is no evidence to indicate it leads to overcrowded communities. Factors such as land availability, zoning, market preferences, and development costs limit the impact that smaller housing typologies can have on a community. The nature of Living Little typologies and their incremental, small-scale development largely prevents them from spurring dramatic neighborhood change.

1 American Community Survey, 2012-2016

2 Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Smart Growth Policies literature review. Sonoran Institute and Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, July 2008. https://sonoraninstitute.org/files/pdf/economic-and-fiscal-impacts-of-smart-growth-policies-07012008.pdf

RETROFITTING THE SUBURBS[12]

Suburban communities have long been designed to separate different land uses, focus housing production on single-family detached houses, and facilitate movement by car. But many of the housing types considered here lend themselves towards the opposite: compact, walkable neighborhoods where compatible uses are located close together. With the exception of large planned developments, no single project will single-handedly transform a neighborhood. However, policies that guide gradual changes in community infrastructure and orientation, combined with the introduction of new types of housing, can incrementally move an area in this direction.

Some infrastructure changes may happen as part a new development, but towns interested in "suburban retrofit" can proactively pave the way through the adoption of forward-thinking policies, seeking funding for infrastructure upgrades, and community discussions. Strip malls that have been redeveloped into mixed-use will be most successful when accompanied by pedestrian-friendly complete streets and alternative modes of transportation. Cottages and townhouses can be enabled by expanding water and sewer access in targeted areas of town. Housing that may occur alongside single family homes, such as ADUs or home conversions, will need for public awareness efforts that dispel misconceptions and articulate the benefits of more housing options in residential neighborhoods. For all little to middle housing types, updated zoning regulations that provide both flexibility and clear direction will encourage walkable integrated communities that incorporate a wide variety of little to middle housing options.

Sightline Institute: Missing Middle Homes via Flickr

Mosaic Commons, Berlin MA | Tim Pierce via Flickr

12 See also http://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/10.22.20_Retrofit-Suburbia_Strip-Malls_Suitability-Analysis_MWRC.pdf