

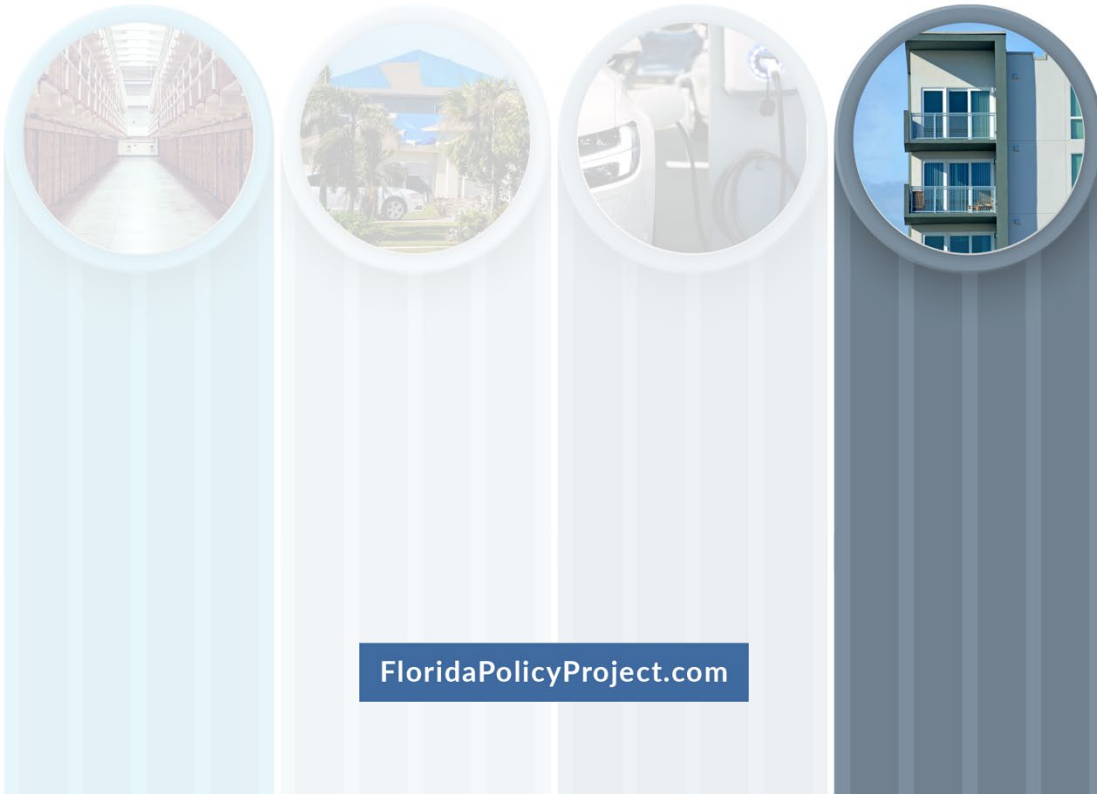
# FLORIDA POLICY PROJECT

BEST PRACTICES, BETTER OUTCOMES

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## HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Best Practice: Encourage Light-Touch Density



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## Best Practice: Encourage Light-Touch Density

### Policy Objective:

To increase the supply of housing by increasing the diversity of housing types.

### Policy Mechanism:

Expand the housing options that are available to residential neighborhoods to include single-family houses, duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes, tiny houses, accessory dwelling units, and small lot homes.

### What is Light-Touch Density?

Light-touch density (LTD) is an upzoning strategy that encourages incremental increases in residential density. Options for expanding housing through LTD<sup>1</sup> might include:

- duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes (see Best Practice 1: Upzoning for housing),
- tiny houses (featured in this Best Practice 2: Light-Touch Density),
- accessory dwelling units (see Best Practice 3: ADUs), and
- small-lot single-family houses (see Best Practices 4: Minimum Lot Sizes).

LTD provides communities with voluntary improvement options that do not fundamentally change the character of a neighborhood.

Local communities often create exceptions to their own rules by granting a variance on a case-by-case basis. However, allowing more varied housing types and densities overall can carry with it dramatic community benefits. For example, allowing for more metropolitan-area housing on smaller lots lessens racial segregation.<sup>2</sup> While many elected officials assume that the community prefers large lots, market demand suggests otherwise. By some estimates, LTD could lead to a gradual 2% conversion of current housing in high demand areas into new housing supply, while still preserving mature neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Pinto, Tobias Peter and Emily Hamilton, "Light Touch Density - American Enterprise Institute - AEI," *American Enterprise Institute*, accessed May 19, 2023, <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Light-Touch-Density-Compiled-FINAL-1.12.2022.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Salim Furber and MaryJo Webster. 2023. "[Single-Family Zoning and Race: Evidence from the Twin Cities](#)," *Housing Policy Debate*, March.

<sup>3</sup> Edward J. Pinto, Tobias Peter, & Hannah Florence, "The Case for Light Touch Density," Santa Cruz (CA) *Sentinel*, September 16, 2022, last accessed online May 11, 2023 <https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2022/09/15/guest-commentary-housing-the-case-for-light-touch-density/>

## Examples

Leon County, Florida: Leon County passed an ordinance to allow tiny homes under 400 square feet within the county, outside of the city limits, in an effort to address a lack of affordable housing.<sup>4</sup> The Dwellings, a tiny house community with a high-tech sustainable design emphasis, aimed to help address affordable housing challenges and by helping to support local unhoused individuals.<sup>5</sup>

Like many tiny house communities across the country, the Dwellings were not eligible for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funding because the housing is considered a temporary or transitional residence rather than a permanent housing solution.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, this rural community is outside the city limits of Tallahassee causing walkability and transportation barriers for the residents. Restrictions about tiny house communities to outside city limits creates inherent affordable housing challenges. Still, such communities are a step in the right direction in terms of housing supply.

State of California: California has been making headlines for the past 50 years for high housing costs compared to U.S. averages.<sup>7</sup> In 2022, California passed S.B. 10, with a bipartisan vote of 27-7, on light-touch density legislation to expand residential options in neighborhoods and near transit. The bill allows cities to voluntarily increase single family residential density by up to 10-unit buildings without the previous extensive approval process. This expansion of housing density standards will facilitate building much-needed housing and, through shortening commutes, may even help contain the sprawl that is associated with higher carbon emissions and wildfire risks.<sup>8,9</sup>

Henderson County, North Carolina: The county permits a tiny home community of over 100 wheeled residences in a recreational vehicle zone. This is intended to be a temporary residence on a large shared

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<sup>4</sup> Leon County, “Sec 5-2 Tiny Homes,” *Municode Library*, accessed May 19, 2023, [https://library.municode.com/fl/leon\\_county/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodId=PTIICOOR\\_CH5BUCO\\_ARTIITEST\\_DIV4TIHO\\_S5-2.10TIHO](https://library.municode.com/fl/leon_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodId=PTIICOOR_CH5BUCO_ARTIITEST_DIV4TIHO_S5-2.10TIHO).

<sup>5</sup> April Jackson et al., “Exploring Tiny Homes as an Affordable Housing Strategy to Ameliorate Homelessness: A Case Study of the Dwellings in Tallahassee, FL,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2020; v.17 no.2, p.661ff.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Legislative Analyst’s Office Report “California’s High Housing Costs: Causes and Consequences” <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2015/finance/housing-costs/housing-costs.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Office of Senator Scott Wiener, (2021, June 2), *Senate passes Senator Wiener’s Light Touch Density Legislation*. Senator Scott Wiener. <https://sd11.senate.ca.gov/news/20210602-senate-passes-senator-wiener%E2%80%99s-light-touch-density-legislation>

<sup>9</sup> California YIMBY, “SB 10,” *California YIMBY*, accessed May 19, 2023, <http://cayimby.org/sb-10/#:~:text=SB%2010%20provides%20tools%20for,resolution%20to%20adopt%20the%20plan.>

property rather than a permanent home for individual property owners. Despite the intended temporary nature of the zoning, some residents are living in their tiny homes full-time.<sup>10</sup>

Bergen County, New Jersey: This borough of New Jersey located near Manhattan illustrates how LTD can successfully add housing by gradually replacing single family homes with duplexes. Palisades Park's population has grown substantially each decade following LTD policies. Today, Palisades Park has newer homes, higher land values, and lower tax rates than surrounding areas. In fact, new homes in Palisades Park are less expensive than neighboring boroughs.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Boyle, "Tiny Home Boomlet in Henderson County, but in Buncombe? Not so Much," *The Asheville Citizen Times*, July 8, 2019, <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2019/07/08/tiny-home-north-carolina-henderson-county-buncombe/1585840001/>.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Pinto, Tobias Peter and Emily Hamilton, "Light Touch Density" American Enterprise Institute, accessed May 19, 2023, <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Light-Touch-Density-Compiled-FINAL-1.12.2022.pdf>