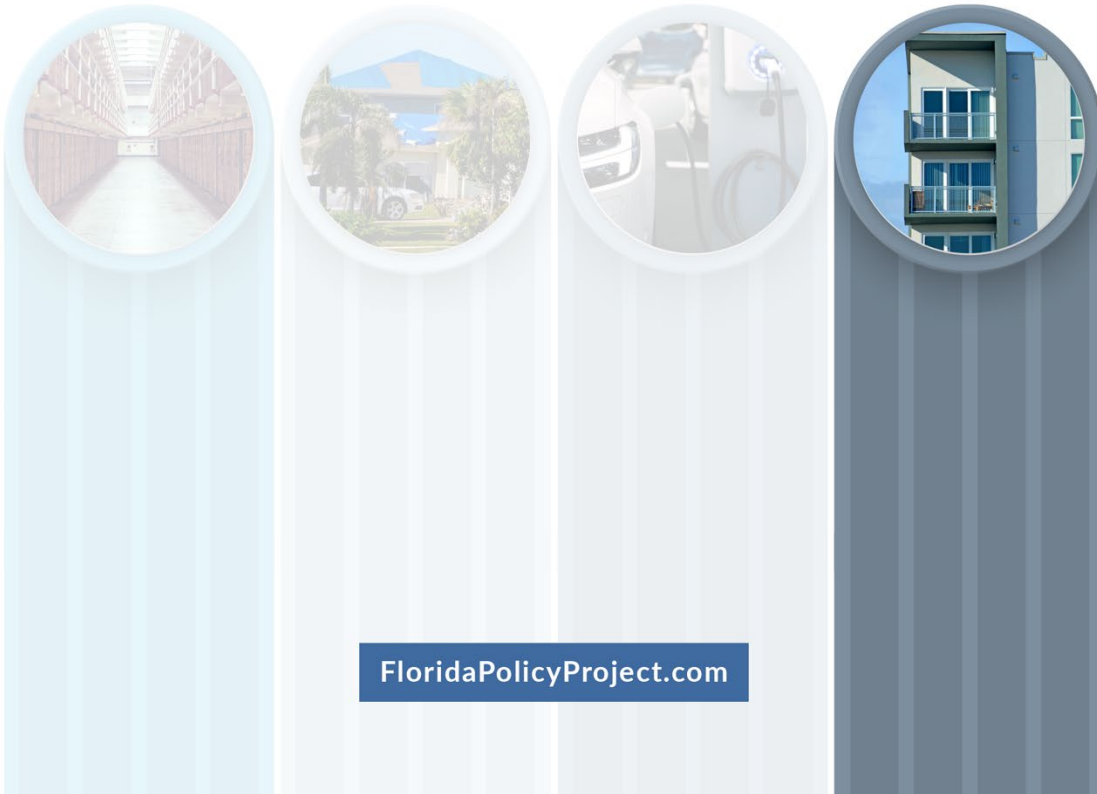


FLORIDA POLICY PROJECT

BEST PRACTICES, BETTER OUTCOMES

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Best Practice: Upzone



FloridaPolicyProject.com

Best Practice: Upzone

Policy Objective

Increase the supply of housing units through organic growth within neighborhoods.

Policy Mechanism

Allow higher housing densities and infill opportunities consistent with neighborhood characteristics by removing housing type restrictions or creating opportunities for dividing up existing parcels.

What is “upzoning”?

Upzoning loosens regulations and restrictions on what can be built on private property and the intensity of the use, allowing higher densities and a wider assortment of housing types than the pre-existing code permitted.^{1,2} Typically applied to rigid single-family zoning, upzoning allows existing footprints to house more people through infill opportunities. Most often, these changes are small and visible at the driveway level, but not significant enough to fundamentally change the character of the street or neighborhood. Upzoning creates value by changing use (rezoning) or permitting extra density or height increases.³ Upzoning is a better approach to increasing housing supply to downzoning (further restricting land use), though success can depend on local market conditions.⁴

Several cities and states have experimented with various approaches to upzoning. Oregon may have been the first state to implement upzoning in 2019 as part of a statewide effort to promote more housing and infill on spaces that permitted only single-family housing. The Oregon legislature passed a law that requires small towns with over a thousand residents to allow duplexes in single-family zoned neighborhoods, and cities with populations over 25,000 may include townhouses, triplexes, and fourplexes.⁵ California also passed legislation in 2021 to allow property owners to build duplexes and fourplexes by splitting their single-family lot into a separate parcel for the new structures.⁶

¹ John Myers and Michael Hendrix, “To Create More Affordable Housing, Make Zoning Hyperlocal,” *Bloomberg.com*, February 19, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-19/hyperlocal-zoning-can-expand-affordable-housing>

² For a summary of recent state legislative changes, see Anthony Flint, “A State-by-State Guide to Zoning Reform,” *Lincoln Institute for Land Policy*, last accessed May 11, 2022, <https://www.lincolinst.edu/publications/articles/2022-12-state-by-state-guide-to-zoning-reform>

³ See Minjee Kim, “Land Value Creation and Land Value Capture: Designing an Inclusionary Housing Ordinance Consistent with State Law,” *Housing Network News* Vol. 37, Num. 1 (June 2021).

⁴ Yonah Freemark, “Zoning Change: Upzonings, Downzonings, and Their Impacts on Residential Construction, Housing Costs, and Neighborhood Demographics,” *Journal of Planning Literature*, available online April 4, 2023, last accessed online May 11, 2023, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/08854122231166961>

⁵ Erika Bolstad, “Affordable Housing Push Challenges Single-Family Zoning,” *Stateline*, August 20, 2019, last accessed May 11, 2023, <https://stateline.org/2019/08/20/affordable-housing-push-challenges-single-family-zoning/>

⁶ Flint, “A State-by-State Guide to Zoning Reform.”

Examples

Minneapolis, Minnesota: In 2018, the City of Minneapolis adopted a new comprehensive plan, called Minneapolis 2040, that featured affordable housing as its centerpiece out of 100 policies. In order to meet housing supply needs, the formerly single-family zones that dominated the city can now contain up to three housing units.⁷ Notably, Minneapolis does not mandate the increase in the number of units. Rather, adding additional housing options to a single lot is voluntary. The local housing market signals for increases in density will in large part lead to the conversion and addition of residential units.

Seattle, Washington: The State of Washington is currently considering expanding single-family zoning in 2023 to include “middle housing,” such as townhomes and duplexes.⁸ If one of out every five single family homes in Seattle was replaced with two townhomes, this would increase available housing stock by over 10% by adding approximately 25,000 new housing units over a decade without requesting a subsidy.⁹

Auburn, Maine: Small towns under 25,000 people are not immune to housing issues. With the support of Yes In My Backyard (YIMBY) advocates, the city took an incremental approach to upzoning by making slight changes in zoning. From 2018 to 2022, Auburn’s code and comprehensive plan were loosened to accommodate higher densities and multifamily housing where demand for these land uses existed. Updates included a secondary dwelling unit ordinance and allowances of duplexes in low density residential areas.¹⁰

Portland, Oregon: Oregon became one of the earliest adopters of “urban growth boundaries”— legal “lines” around cities and metropolitan areas intended to contain development and prevent open space development. This dramatically increased the demand for higher density housing, increased the relative cost of land, and reduced housing affordability.

In response, the city recently approved the Residential Infill Project, which upzones by allowing higher density (including duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes) in already existing traditional single-family neighborhoods to accommodate higher affordable housing demand and expand housing choices. This project aims to provide more than 100,000 households by 2035.¹¹

⁷ See Minneapolis 2040, Policies, Policy 1: “Access to Housing: Increase the Supply of Housing and its Diversity of Location and Types,” <https://minneapolis2040.com/policies/access-to-housing/>

⁸ See Washington State Legislature H.B. 1110 <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billssummary?BillNumber=1110&Year=2023&Initiative=false>

⁹ Edward Pinto, Tobias Peter, and Emily Hamilton, *Light Touch Density*.

¹⁰ Salim Furth and Eric Cousens, “Case Study: Auburn, Maine: Incremental Victories with Zoning Reform,” *Better Cities Project, Las Vegas*, <https://better-cities.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/BCP-Auburn-case-study.pdf>

¹¹ See Portland government, “About the Residential Infill Project,” *Portland.gov*, accessed May 19, 2023, <https://www.portland.gov/bps/planning/rip/about-project>.