

Albany HIP Implementation Development Code Focus Group Input

Focus Group Dates: 8/14/24, 8/28/24, 9/9/24, 9/18/24

Number of Participants: 42 representing residents, realtors, for profit and nonprofit builders, social service agencies, engineers, architect, financial institutions

- Reduce lot sizes for smaller homes:

- a. For houses between 750 – 1,250 SF (excluding garage), allow lot sizes that are about 60% of the standard lot
- b. For houses < 750 SF, allow lot sizes that are about 50% of the standard lot size

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS: No concerns, overall support across all participants

- Are you factoring in the garage size? A: Just house size. Lot coverage maximum would determine garage size.
 - Would this apply to infill development or just new development? A: Both. If infill, lot needs to be large enough to divide into two or more lots and meet lot coverage on both lots.
 - As long as you meet the setbacks and lot coverage ratios, do we even need minimum lot sizes?
 - 800 SF for smaller home pencils for a 28' x 28' footprint
 - 1,400 SF is Hayden Homes' sweet spot – would like to see that size included in the scaling strategy
 - Could you put an ADU on the small lots? A: Yes if meet lot coverage
- Reduce side setbacks for smaller home lots and townhouses: 3 ft one-story and 5 ft for two- or more stories
 - No concerns expressed.
 - Do the reduced setbacks meet fire and building codes? Yes.
 - For zero lot line developments, is there a reason you wouldn't double the setback on the adjacent lot? Anne: We don't have a specific proposal for that. The building code separation would apply.
 - Reduce front setbacks for dwelling (not garage), increase rear setbacks to encourage provide backyards for smaller home lots
 - No concerns expressed.
 - I think it's great. Most families would prefer to have their kids play in the backyard.
 - Reducing front setback reduces utility construction costs, so in favor of this.
 - Why is the HDR rear setback so small? Anne: intended for urban development; MDUs have an additional buffer setback adjacent to lower-intensity development.
 - Has there been discussion about removing planter strips? A: No, need space for street trees, utilities and storm drainage
 - People want backyards.
 - So much development last 5 years – concerned with livability and lack of open space.
 - Increase flexibility for ADUs: Allow up to 900 SF or 25 SF less than primary dwelling, whichever is less.
 - Why not allow the ADU to be larger than the primary dwelling? If larger, could the ADU become the primary dwelling?
 - If we can put up to 4 units on a lot, why limit ADU sizes? Why not allow detached units. A: Detached ADUs and cottage clusters (3 or more houses) are permitted on a lot.

- Why not just allow 900 sf as long as you meet the setbacks and lot coverage?
 - This isn't going to move the needle on ADUs. Other cities have removed SDCs and that's what makes ADUs happen. Will there be discussions about SDCs for ADUs? A: This focus group is about code changes, not policy changes.
 - Is 50% of the primary dwelling pretty standard in other cities? A: Most other cities limit to 75-80% of primary dwelling and have a max size around 900SF
 - Does the City limit short term rentals for ADUs? They're not helping housing supply. A: No.
 - What we need is volume. More units. Need financial incentives to make this happen.
 - Since no parking can be required, won't larger ADUs have more of an impact on neighborhoods? A: ADU can currently be 900 SF if house large enough.
 - How does the market determine parking? A: If there's demand for off-street parking it is provided.
 - Could ADUs also have relaxed setbacks? A: Detached ADUs meet accessory structure setbacks.
 - SDCs aren't regulated in the development code.
- Reserve medium and high-density zones (RM, RMA, HDR) for those housing types:
 - a. Remove minimum area requirements per unit (varies by # of bedrooms): No concerns.
 - b. Remove maximum density limits (let lot coverage and height determine) and c. set minimum density:
 - Are there considerations given to people without cars who rely on public transit and further discussion of parking and housing affordability? A: City no longer requires parking.
 - All but one in support; "makes sense".
 - Concern about increased residential density and ability to supply water, including in a fire. A: City water master plan and water lines are sized to accommodate fire flow.
 - Could you allow phased development to reach minimum density over time? A: Yes.
 - Do we still require open space for multifamily? What is the lot coverage? A: Yes, we MDU requires 15% open space and tot lot. Lot coverage is 60-70%.
 - Encourage tiny home cottage clusters
 - Have there been any successful cottage clusters? Anne:
- Encourage rear/alley-loaded development to save street for parking
 - Concerned about lack of backyard space. Kids need space to be outside.
 - People like having options not to have yards they need to maintain.
 - FG #3 – all in support to encourage more variety of housing, on-street parking, pedestrian friendly
 - What happens in historic districts? A: New development requires historic review.
- Require small tot lots/pocket parks in subdivisions over a certain size (ex: every 20 lots – provide 3,000 SF)
 - Overall support from FG participants.
 - Developer/builder concern that play structure would be a liability for the developer. Insurance costs are significantly different if play structure required.
 - Respect idea and do in other cities, as long as clear and objective standards. Prefer a percentage open space requirement.
 - Smaller lots and denser development need green space. when push to increase density and newer developments having lower livability. Kids need open space. Affordable housing developments have more open space than neighborhoods.
 - Importance of neighborhood gathering spaces. We've centralized schools – fewer and larger. People need places to meet other families/kids. Need mandates for public space. Having porches close to streets also encourages people to interact with neighbors.

- You should get an SDC credit if you're building parks. A: These would be smaller than standard City parks. Possible if build part of trail/multi-use path for tSDC and future pSDC credits.
- Isn't this counterproductive to increasing affordability and getting more units? A: idea is balance development with livability especially with smaller houses and lots, and middle housing where they don't have much green space.
- How would this work with middle housing? A: still figuring this out
- Would HOA have to pay for maintenance? A: yes, but HOAs required for stormwater, and stormwater facilities could be green space amenity after first tot lot/park.
- Rather than making this mandatory, could this be incentivized with a density bonus or something similar?

General Comments

- I'm hearing from my peers the desire for options like duplexes and cottage clusters to be close to family / friends.
- We need to look at our water rights and the ability to sustain growth. Also a transportation system that supports growth.
- We need housing first and foremost. People are living outside. More housing and affordable housing should be our focus.
- Habitat: we're thinking about the land trust/lease shared-equity concept to maintain affordability and cottage cluster development
- Farmworker Housing Devel Corp: also looking at land trust model for first-time homeownership in Albany
- Why do we have all these different terms for housing? ADUs, cottages, duplexes... If you can fit it on a site, why not let builders do what they want? A: Some cities have form-based codes – could consider but a would be a much bigger project
- What about removing window requirements to reduce costs and windows to nowhere? (Code requires front façade have 15% in windows or main door, including windows in garage doors.)