

Principles & Zoning Recommendations

For Equitable, Sustainable, and Thriving Municipalities



Housing Forward-MA Principles

For Massachusetts to adequately address the urgent and growing need for affordable and middle-income housing, Housing Forward-MA supports zoning and land use policies according to these principles:

Equity and Economic Inclusion

We support policies that allow for more equitable and sustainable communities. Because overly restrictive land use regulation disproportionately excludes low-income people and people of color, we encourage policies that allow flexibility for new development to meet the needs of people with diverse backgrounds and incomes. To ameliorate racial and economic segregation — the result of deliberate policies like exclusionary zoning, racially restrictive covenants, and redlining — we promote policies that expand access to areas of opportunity for all.

Addressing the Climate Crisis

We recognize that housing policy can in many ways be climate policy. We support land use regulation that respects existing green space and reduces sprawl. Further, we promote density as an effective tool for combating climate change. We encourage the expansion of opportunities for people to live closer to employment centers in order to decrease commutes and the resulting carbon emissions.

Expansion of Local Options

We support allowing a range of home choices across communities. We believe that cities and towns should be able to build housing that fits current and future needs of their community, without unnecessary restrictions. We support the creation of an abundant supply of homes that are affordable to rent or buy for households of various sizes and incomes, including housing that makes it easier for longtime residents to age in place in their community, along with access to supportive services, where feasible, for households that include seniors and those living with disabilities.

Transit-Oriented Density

We encourage efficient land use policies near transportation hubs, allowing for greater density and reduced reliance on private cars. We support increasing the availability of housing options in walkable neighborhoods with access to transit. Not every household wants to or can afford to own a car; we believe that zoning requirements should recognize and help encourage the utilization of mass transit and other modes of shared mobility.

Municipal Level Recommendations

Action at all levels of government is necessary to achieve these goals. The federal and state governments can lead on these issues by committing to full funding of existing incentive programs and enacting policies to support smart growth. In particular, increased state and federal funding of transit projects and other infrastructure improvements is vital.

At the municipal level, we recommend the following specific adjustments to current zoning codes to create equitable, sustainable, and thriving communities across the Commonwealth:

BOSTON

- Eliminate exclusive single-family zoning
- Zone building envelopes, defining a building’s maximum width, depth, and height, instead of a maximum number of units, allowing for more predictability for developers and for smaller, more affordable housing units
- Reduce lot minimums to no more than 0.5 acres
- Eliminate or reduce parking requirements within 1/2 mile of train, subway, or rapid bus stops; reduce parking requirements within 1/4 mile of local bus stops
- Use CBDs, commercial corridors, and areas within 1/2 mile of train, subway, or rapid bus stops, or 1/4 mile of local bus stops to automatically trigger upzoning, or an increase in the density allowed as-of-right
- Allow the addition of residential units above existing ground-level businesses as-of-right
- Require minimum densities and mixed-use developments in CBDs, commercial corridors, on unused industrial-zoned land, and within 1/2 mile of train, subway, or rapid bus stops
- Allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as-of-right on all properties of six or fewer units
- Institute density bonuses for on-site affordable housing, increasing the allowed density by 2 square feet for every square foot of affordable housing

MUNICIPALITIES WITH POPULATIONS OF 125,000+

Worcester, Springfield

- Reduce exclusive single-family zoning
- Zone building envelopes, defining a building's maximum width, depth, and height, instead of a maximum number of units, allowing for more predictability for developers and for smaller, more affordable housing units
- Reduce lot minimums to no more than 0.5 acres
- Reduce parking requirements within 1/2 mile of train, subway, or rapid bus stops, and within 1/4 mile of local bus stops
- Use CBDs, commercial corridors, and areas within 1/2 mile of train, subway, or rapid bus stops, or 1/4 mile of local bus stops, to automatically trigger upzoning, or an increase in the density allowed as-of-right
- Allow for mixed-use development, with at least 51% of the gross floor area of any such development devoted to residential use, in CBDs, commercial corridors, on unused industrial-zoned land, and within 1/2 mile of train, subway, or rapid bus stops
- Allow the addition of residential units above existing ground-level businesses as-of-right
- Allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as-of-right on all properties of three or fewer units
- Institute density bonuses for on-site affordable housing, increasing the allowed density by 2 square feet for every square foot of affordable housing

MUNICIPALITIES WITH POPULATIONS 75,000 - 125,000

Brockton, Cambridge, Fall River, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, Newton, Quincy, Somerville

- Reduce exclusive single-family zoning
- Use CBDs, commercial corridors, and areas within 1/2 mile of train, subway, or rapid bus stops to automatically trigger upzoning, or an increase in the density allowed as-of-right
- Allow for mixed-use development (including the addition of residential units above existing ground-level businesses) as-of-right, with at least 51% of the gross floor area of any such development devoted to residential use, in city centers, commercial corridors, on unused industrial-zoned land, and within 1/2 mile of train or subway stations

- Allow the addition of residential units above existing ground-level businesses as-of right
- Allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as-of-right on all properties of three or fewer units
- Institute density bonuses for on-site affordable housing, increasing the allowed density by 2 square feet for every square foot of affordable housing

MUNICIPALITIES WITH POPULATIONS 50,000 - 75,000

Brookline, Chicopee, Framingham, Haverhill, Malden, Medford, Methuen, Peabody, Plymouth, Revere, Taunton, Waltham, Weymouth

- Reduce exclusive single-family zoning
- Allow for mixed-use development (including the addition of residential units above existing ground-level businesses) as-of-right, with at least 51% of the gross floor area of any such development devoted to residential use, in city centers, commercial corridors, and within 1/2 mile of train or subway stations
- Allow the addition of residential units above existing ground-level businesses as-of-right
- Allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as-of-right on all owner-occupied properties of three or fewer units
- Institute density bonuses for on-site affordable housing, increasing the allowed density by 2 square feet for every square foot of affordable housing

MUNICIPALITIES WITH POPULATIONS UNDER 50,000

- Reduce exclusive single-family zoning
- Allow for mixed-use development (including the addition of residential units above ground-level businesses) as-of-right, with at least 51% of the gross floor area of any such development devoted to residential use, in city centers, commercial corridors, and within 1/2 mile of train or subway stations
- Allow the addition of residential units above existing ground-level businesses as-of-right
- Allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as-of-right on all owner-occupied properties of three or fewer units

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