

Multi-family Zoning: Achieving Intended Densities



Project Scope

Last fall, the City Council Planning and Community Development Committee directed staff to identify changes to facilitate intended densities and additional opportunities for innovative housing types in Residential Multi (RM) zones. The project may include these four broad categories of changes:

- A simplified **ranged zoning** system for all RM zones. This system may assign the adopted [Comprehensive Plan](#) density ranges of low, medium or high to each RM zone and allow development at any density within the assigned range. It includes changes to 94 RM zones in the Bellingham Municipal Code and the RM sections of up to 20 neighborhood plans to remove inconsistencies with the new ranged zoning system.
- Projects in RM zones that meet location-efficient criteria (e.g. proximity to high frequency transit, parks, schools, grocery stores, etc.) may be eligible for a **density bonus**. Specifically, a property would be able to develop within the density range of the next highest density category (e.g. a “medium” density property would jump to the next “high” density category) if it meets a certain number of criteria.
- All [Infill Housing Toolkit](#) forms (i.e. small and smaller house, cottage, duplex, triplex, shared court, garden court, and townhouse) may be allowed in all RM zones. Small and smaller houses, cottages and duplexes are the only forms currently allowed in RM duplex zones.
- Certain (or all) RM zones may include **minimum densities**.

Project Purpose and Goals

- Implement the Comprehensive Plan’s intent for RM zones
- Address the City’s housing, climate change, environmental and land use goals
- Expand housing choice and variety for Bellingham’s diverse residents
- Provide an opportunity for more people to live in walkable/bikeable/transit-friendly neighborhoods with access to jobs, services and amenities
- Promote the benefits of multi-family housing

OPEN HOUSES: YOU’RE INVITED!

Attend one of the open houses below to learn more about the initial stages of the RM project and provide feedback to City Planning staff. Both open houses will include the same format and information. Choose the one that is the most convenient for you to attend.

Monday, March 16, 6 – 7:30 PM
Downtown Library
210 Central Avenue, Learning Room

Thursday, March 19, 6 – 7:30 PM
Whatcom Community College
333 Calluna Court, Foundation Building (Room 105)

POSTPONED

LEARN MORE
ABOUT THIS
PROJECT!





Frequently Asked Questions

What is RM zoning? Per Policy LU-2 (Comp Plan Land Use Chapter), the RM designation is intended for areas that can support higher concentrations of people, while encouraging a desirable living environment within and adjacent to these districts. This zoning also provides a compatible mixture of residential housing types, typical accessory uses, public and semi-public uses, office uses and limited neighborhood commercial uses in appropriate areas.

Why are the RM zones being evaluated now? City Council asked staff to “leave no stone unturned” in finding solutions to the City’s housing crisis. Staff evaluated several options and proposed the RM project, which could result in a significant number of additional units in neighborhoods throughout the community and help meet the City’s housing, climate change and land use goals. City Council directed staff to continue analysis of this project.

What does the City hope to accomplish with this project? The project will result in more homes, many of which will be located in areas that are accessible by transit to services, jobs, schools, parks and other amenities. Initial analysis indicates that the project could result in approximately 1,000 additional units. Staff is analyzing whether affordability should be required for units in certain circumstances. In general, multi-family units are some of the most affordable homes in the community, as they are smaller and more efficient.

How will neighborhoods be affected? The project will facilitate more homes for more of Bellingham’s residents by allowing a broader range of densities and Infill Housing Toolkit forms in existing RM zones within their current Comprehensive Plan density ranges. The impacts of the changes on existing units and residents will be considered as the project moves forward. Existing RM and Infill Housing Toolkit standards, such as those related to design, parking, open space and height, will continue to apply to projects in these zones.

Are single-family zones part of this project? No. This project evaluates multi-family (RM) zones only.

For More Information

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