

Appendix C: Zoning and Density Assessment

Adams County has been in the process of updating its Development Standards and Regulations (DSR) over the past two years, arriving at the final draft during summer 2026.¹ The updated code retains existing residential zone names and boundaries, with updated standards to address development barriers across diverse land use contexts. Updates to residential zones focus on allowing denser housing in urban portions of the County.

Addressing zoning barriers to housing in a variety of contexts

The County's land use regulations must respond to notably different settings. Neighborhoods surrounding Denver and other cities in the southwestern area include some of the highest-density residential land uses in the County. Transitional spaces in the northwestern area, as well as between existing neighborhoods and agricultural areas, feature large-lot single-unit homes. Agricultural and vacant land in the eastern part of the County occupy the largest geographic areas. In responding to these elements and focusing on supporting higher-density uses in existing residential areas, key proposed changes to the DSR include:

- ◆ Allowing multiple units per lot in residential zone districts
- ◆ Decreasing minimum lot sizes and reducing parking requirements for middle housing and multi-unit buildings
- ◆ Assigning dimensional standards relative to new building types (i.e., two-unit dwelling or multiplex dwelling) across lower-density residential districts that decrease lot width and establish more flexible setbacks
- ◆ Expanding ADU applicability to support ongoing efforts to increase production
- ◆ Creating new building type standards for different situations with added flexibility for cluster, compact, and infill development options
- ◆ Allowing select residential uses in commercial zones
- ◆ Allowing for two single-unit homes on agricultural properties over 35 acres to decrease pressure to reclassify future land use, rezone, or subdivide

¹ Current Development Standards and Regulations:

<https://adamscounty.municipalcodeonline.com/book?type=temp>

Proposed Development Standards and Regulations: <https://publicinput.com/Customer/File/Full/e6e873b3-6224-4ed7-9092-095afb9ea55b>

By highlighting development and building types, the new code would welcome more density in existing and developing neighborhoods

The code update has focused on making it easier to build more on existing lots in lower-density residential areas and lowering barriers to infill middle housing and higher-density buildings. In retaining the residential zone district names and updating the standards for them, the County enabled immediate development changes on existing lots without requiring a rezoning. In addition to reducing lot size and width across zones, as well as reducing parking requirements for middle housing and multi-unit buildings, some of the individual zone changes would include:

- ◆ **R-1-C (Residential Low Density):** allowing one duplex or one single-unit home and an ADU for each unit
 - Current zone only allows one single-unit home and ADU
- ◆ **R-2 (Residential Mixed):** allowing one duplex and an ADU for each unit; single unit home; up to a four-unit multiplex; or townhomes (up to 20 units per acre)
 - Current zone allows single-unit and duplex development, with an ADU for detached single-unit homes
- ◆ **R-3 (Residential Moderate Density):** increasing maximum density for infill development types from 14 units per acre to 23, encouraging more diversity of middle housing types
- ◆ **R-4 (Residential Mixed High Density):** increasing maximum density from 35 units per acre to 50, allowing more mid-rise building types, and clarifying guidelines for amenity space
- ◆ **TOD and MUD (Transit-Oriented Development and Mixed Use):** setting maximum density for mixed-use areas to 75 and 50 units per acre (respectively) to encourage highest-density development on priority corridors and near transit facilities

These updates generally focus on the western part of the County, where existing neighborhoods have the highest relative concentration of housing, as well as corridors identified in the Comprehensive Plan, Advancing Adams, for strategic growth.

The proposed changes identify development opportunities for scales of property owners. Single-unit homeowners would have the ability to more easily add incremental housing to their existing property. Developers could utilize more flexible dimensional standards in building middle housing. Developers could also identify more parcels with zone capacity for high-density projects.

A new feature of the code for residential districts that seeks to support more contextual redevelopment for infill parcels assigns a standard that maximum height cannot exceed 150% of buildings on immediate adjacent properties. This additional height inclusion aims to minimize the potential for substantially different building types within existing neighborhoods.



Updated dimensional standards would make it easier to build to increase density capacity and simplify implementation

The proposed code moves away from applying dimensional standards universally across each zone, using new form-based building and development-type regulations to address different situations. The current code emphasizes broader district regulations for building placement, whereas the proposed code also addresses development contexts and building types. Across the lower-density zone districts (R-1-C and R-2), the County proposed lowering minimum lot sizes and reducing building setbacks for new building-type regulations. Some of the changes proposed to dimensional standards between the existing and update code include:

- ◆ **R-1-C:** lowering the minimum lot size from 7,000 square feet to a contextual range based on building and development types, with the proposed conventional minimum at 4,500 square feet. Additionally, minimum lot width would decrease from 65 feet to 50 feet, and corner setbacks would decrease from 20 feet to 10 feet.
- ◆ **R-2:** reducing the minimum duplex lot size from 3,500 square feet per unit to 2,250 square feet. Required lot widths for duplexes would decrease from 35 feet to 25 feet.
- ◆ **R-3:** reducing the minimum multiplex lot size from 3,200 square feet per unit to 1,500 square feet. These changes would also allow a multiplex on lots with a 50-foot width, whereas the current code requires a 150-foot lot width for buildings with units on the same lot (i.e., multiplex).
- ◆ **R-4:** reducing the minimum multi-unit building lot size from two acres to 10,000 square feet and the minimum lot width from 200 feet to 50 feet.

Regulating dimensional standards by building type within those frameworks, and reducing barriers like prohibitively high lot size minimums, would simplify development requirements for incrementally adding housing throughout the County.

Infill properties near neighborhoods with single-unit homes in western parts of the County have seen duplex and townhouse development, commonly through Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). Developers interviewed as part of this analysis indicated that they chose to pursue PUD zoning in these developments because of the limitations of current dimensional standards. The updates in dimensional standards seek to lessen the amount of perceived need in PUD rezoning to facilitate more development in existing zones.

New development type provisions tailor standards to context

Development types would be a new code provision that modifies underlying zone standards based on the size and context of new residential developments, considered individually below:

- ◆ **Conventional Development** carries forward traditional development standards from the existing code, with generally uniform dimensional standards throughout a development.



- ◆ **Cluster Development** offers more flexible standards and greater density in exchange for preservation of larger and better-preserved open spaces (available in Agricultural zones and Residential Estate [RE], R-1-C, and R-2).
- ◆ **Compact Development** allows more flexible standards and greater density in exchange for including multiple building types and extra amenity space (available in R-1-C and R-2).
- ◆ **Infill Development** facilitates relatively dense development in areas that have previously been developed with more flexible and contextual standards for lot dimensions, building height, and setbacks based on averages on surrounding lots (available in R-2, R-3, and R-4).

Exhibit 1 and Exhibit 2 illustrate examples of the differences between the proposed Cluster and Infill development types.

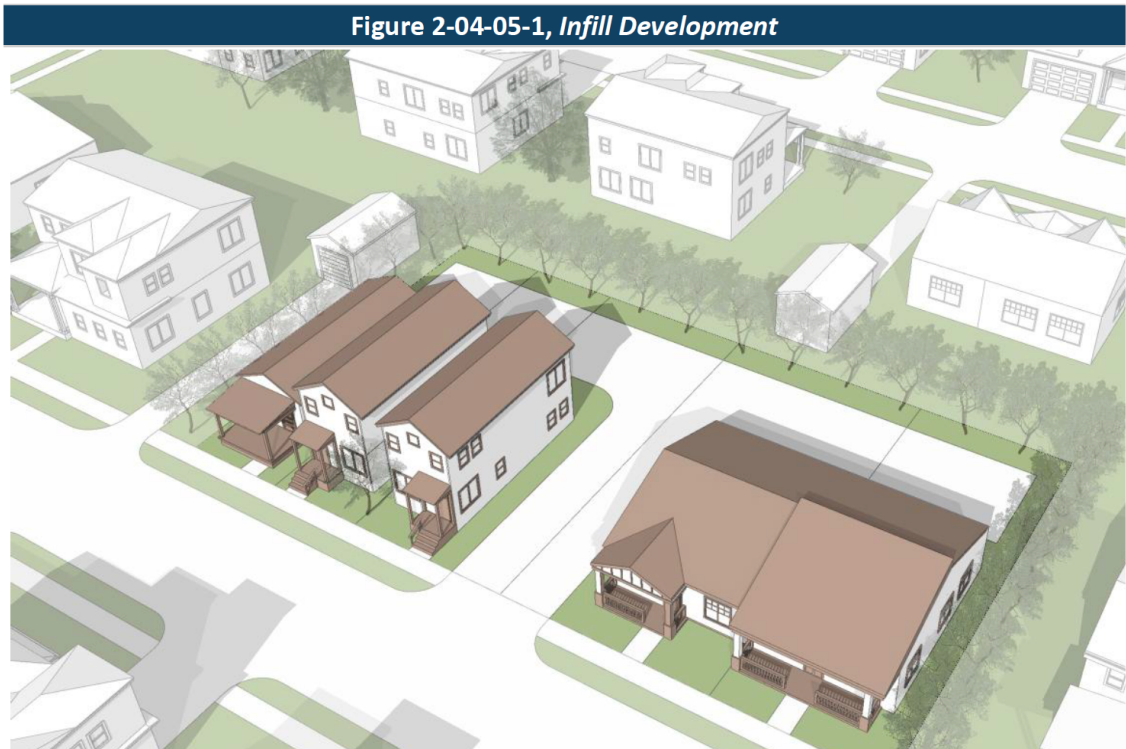
Exhibit 1. Cluster Development Example

Figure 2-04-03-1, *Cluster Development*



Source: Adams County Draft DSR

Exhibit 2. Infill Development Example



Source: Adams County Draft DSR

The addition of development-type provisions in the updated DSR intends to improve the code’s flexibility and appropriateness for the variety of development contexts in the County. It targets modest increases in the built density of greenfield developments while elevating housing capacity for sites in areas already served by infrastructure for infill development.

Of the core residential zones, lower-density zones make up most of the parcel numbers that the DSR would affect

The proposed zoning updates in this section generally focus on the core residential zones. When considering the scope of where these changes would affect parcels in the County, Exhibit 3 includes the number of parcels in each current residential zone district and the share of that zone relative to this group in terms of both parcel count and area.

Exhibit 3. Current Residential Zone Parcel Count and Share of Residential Parcels

Zone District	Parcels Count	Share of Residential Parcels	Share of Residential Area
RE: Residential Estate	882	5%	24%
M-H: Mobile Home	19	<1%	3%
R-1-A: Residential Low Density	181	1%	1%



Zone District	Parcels Count	Share of Residential Parcels	Share of Residential Area
R-1-C: Residential Low Density	14,018	78%	60%
R-2: Residential Mixed	1,653	9%	8%
R-3: Residential Moderate Density	875	5%	2%
R-4: Residential Mixed High Density	451	2%	2%

Source: Adams County GIS and EConorthwest

Note: Does not include residential PUDs

R-1-C properties reflect the majority of both the amount of residential land and the number of parcels that would see underlying changes, representing 78 percent of residentially zoned parcels. The moderate-density zones (R-2 and R-3) make up 14 percent of the number of residential parcels and 10 percent of the land area, with R-4 parcels comprising two percent of each. Collectively, approximately 17,000 parcels in this grouping would see changes to underlying zoning capacity, with more than 14,000 of them shifting from currently allowed single-unit and ADU zoning to a moderately higher density.

The extent of proposed changes to residential zone districts reflects an increase in opportunities to meet Unincorporated Adams County's demonstrated housing need of 8,435 units over the next decade. Zoning changes do not, by themselves, create new units. Property owners can continue to use their properties as is. Other physical or financial constraints may keep the addition of units infeasible. Creating a wide range of new opportunities on an assortment of parcels in various contexts is an important step toward creating the conditions for needed housing production.

Simplifying processes and allowing more housing in other parts of the County

The proposed changes would decrease parking minimums for townhouses and multi-unit buildings. A townhouse would need to provide 1.5 parking spaces per unit (currently two), while multi-unit buildings would see a reduction between 0.25 and 0.5 spaces per unit depending on bedroom size. Such a reduction allows a property owner to dedicate a smaller portion of lot area for parking, leaving more available for the building footprint or required yard space. On infill lots where acquisition of additional land for parking is impractical, this change to parking minimums can make townhome construction feasible.

Proposed changes to the commercial zone districts would consolidate six different commercial zones to three and allow housing in two of those new zones. None of the current commercial districts allow for by-right housing development.

Neighborhood and local-serving commercial areas near lower- and middle-density areas would shift to a Neighborhood Commercial district, permitting single-unit detached, duplex,



and multiplex housing formats. More active commercial areas without light industrial uses would transition to General Commercial and allow multi-unit development, including mixed-use development at both vertical and horizontal scales in places that currently do not permit housing without rezoning.

Additionally, in rural areas of the County on properties generally exceeding 35 acres, a shift to allow two single-unit homes aims to decrease applications to change the future land use and zoning. Agricultural-3 (A-3) zoning currently permits one home on a property, and property owners have pushed to allow those properties to build one or more homes, ultimately proposing small subdivision changes to the future land use. This proposal seeks to preserve those areas from subdivision pressures. Exhibit 4 provides a summary of these proposed shifts.

Exhibit 4. Summary of Proposed Residential Zoning Changes in Other Districts

Zone District	Summary of Differences
Agricultural-3	Allowing two single-unit homes on properties over 35 acres to decrease pressure on applications that seek changes to the future land use map, rezoning, and subdivision on rural properties
Neighborhood Commercial	Would permit low-intensity mixed-use development (up to 11 units per acre) in commercial-focused zones where the current code does not permit any residential development
General Commercial	Would permit more intensive mixed-use development (up to 35 units per acre) in areas that currently do not allow any residential development

Options for Future Efforts

By changing the standards of the underlying residential districts, the proposed code supports more rapid utilization of its updates. However, in changing contexts, it does not move to change the standards for subdivision approval yet. A Minor Subdivision Plat (dividing parcels less than 20 acres and/or four or fewer lots) currently requires a hearing with the Planning Commission and approval by the Board of County Commissioners. A Major Subdivision Final Plat requires approval on the consent agenda by the Board of County Commissioners.

