

Middle Housing for Washington

Growth Management and Housing

Under the Growth Management Act, cities and counties must update their comprehensive plans and development regulations, including to accommodate each jurisdiction's share of needed housing at a full range of income levels for the next 20 years. The Department of Commerce is providing assistance, including a new Middle Housing program, to help with this work.

How much housing does Washington need?

More than one million more homes are needed in Washington by 2044¹. That's an average of 50,000 new units per year, to be located primarily in urban growth areas where sewer, water, transit, and other infrastructure already exist, and in sufficient quantities for households at all income levels. Middle housing can help cities accommodate their share of the overall need, especially for moderate income households.

What is middle housing?

Middle housing is a term for homes that are at a middle scale between detached single-family houses and large multifamily complexes. Examples include: duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, fiveplexes, sixplexes, courtyard apartments, cottage clusters, and townhomes. Usually, each unit is smaller than a standard detached house but when combined on a residential lot, they are still typically "house-scale"; that is, they have about the same form and height as a detached house.



¹ Based on an analysis of housing needs by the Department of Commerce and population forecasts from the state Office of Financial Management.

Commerce Middle Housing Program

What is it?

Commerce's Middle Housing Program offers grants and technical assistance to help cities in the central Puget Sound region provide for middle housing. These jurisdictions have the first state due dates to update their comprehensive plans and development regulations for accommodating housing needs. Commerce expects to provide assistance to other regions in subsequent years.

Grants: About 30 cities in the central Puget Sound region are receiving a Commerce grant under a 2022 state budget proviso. The proviso requires grantee cities to draft and consider adoption of policies and regulations allowing at least 30% of their single-family zones to have middle housing. The current grant program ends June 30, 2023.

Technical assistance: Commerce staff includes a three-person team of former planning directors to support cities in providing for middle housing in single-family zones. Assistance features include:

- Informational materials and presentations
- Results of a public opinion survey about housing
- Photo library of middle housing
- Dedicated webpage: Planning for Middle Housing - Washington State Department of Commerce
- Information and guidance on racial equity analysis and anti-displacement policies
- Data-gathering assistance
- Coordination on other growth management topics
- Pro forma analysis tool to compare costs of different middle housing types—**coming this spring**
- Toolkit of objective design and development standards (being prepared by Opticos Design for Commerce)—**coming this spring**
- The toolkit of middle housing standards may be considered for adoption in whole or part, with any revisions, by interested local governments.
- Videos about middle housing and why it's a beneficial housing type for many Washington communities—**coming this spring**

Resources

www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/growth-management/growth-management-topics/planning-for-housing/

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