



# WASHOE COUNTY

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## STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: May 12, 2026

**DATE:** April 10, 2026

**TO:** Board of County Commissioners

**FROM:** Kat Oakley, Planning Manager, Community Services Dept., (775)-328-3628, [koakley@washoecounty.gov](mailto:koakley@washoecounty.gov)

**THROUGH:** Kelly Mullin, AICP, Division Director, Planning & Building Division, Community Services Department, (775)-328-3619, [kmullin@washoecounty.gov](mailto:kmullin@washoecounty.gov)

**SUBJECT:** Introduction and first reading of an ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) within Article 336 Housing Incentives to add small unit density standards allowing increased density for dwelling units with a maximum unit size of 1,200 square feet and establishing requirements for utilizing the increased density; and all matters necessarily connected therewith and pertaining thereto. This ordinance is part of a group of amendments the Board has identified as a top priority for implementation of the master plan.

And if supported, set a public hearing for the second reading and possible adoption of the ordinance for June 16, 2026 (All Commission Districts.)  
FOR POSSIBLE ACTION

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### SUMMARY

The Board is asked to introduce and conduct a first reading of an ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) to establish a small unit density incentive for dwelling units under 1,200 square feet. The proposed code amendments are described in detail beginning on page 2 of this staff report. Additional analysis can be found in Attachment C, Planning Commission staff report.

### **Washoe County Strategic Objective supported by this item:**

Vulnerable Populations: Expand appropriate housing options across our community.

### PREVIOUS ACTION

April 7, 2026. The Washoe County Planning Commission (PC) reviewed the proposed amendments to Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) and voted 7-0 to recommend approval of Development Code Amendment WDCA26-0001 to the Board. In doing so, the Planning Commission made all four possible findings (only one is required) set forth in Washoe County Code Section 110.818.15(e), which are set forth below:

AGENDA ITEM # \_\_\_\_\_

1. Consistency with Master Plan. The proposed development code amendment is in substantial compliance with the policies and action programs of the Washoe County Master Plan;
2. Promotes the Purpose of the Development Code. The proposed development code amendment will not adversely impact the public health, safety or welfare, and will promote the original purposes for the Development Code as expressed in Article 918, Adoption of Development Code;
3. Response to Changed Conditions. The proposed development code amendment responds to changed conditions or further studies that have occurred since the Development Code was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, and the requested amendment allows for a more desirable utilization of land within the regulatory zones; and
4. No Adverse Affects. The proposed development code amendment will not adversely affect the implementation of the policies and action programs of the Conservation Element or the Population Element of the Washoe County Master Plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

Housing affordability and attainability are identified in strategic planning and vision documents as one of the most pressing issues in Washoe County. Many trends impact housing affordability, one of which is housing size. Between 1970 and 2022, the median size of a newly constructed home in the medium density suburban (MDS) regulatory zone increased from 1,266 to 2,231 square feet (76% increase). In the same time period, the mean household size in the United States decreased from 3.14 to 2.5 people per household (40% decrease). Residents in Washoe County, therefore, may pay for more space than they want or need because very few smaller units are on the market. Approximately 63% of households in Washoe County are 1 or 2 person households that would be well served by smaller units that are simply not being built.

Population projections indicate that the demand for smaller units will only grow. The Washoe County Consensus Forecast anticipates a 30,000-person increase in seniors by 2044. Average household size decreases with age, and so seniors looking to “downsize” will likely be seeking smaller dwelling units. Currently, seniors and other citizens do not have many housing options available for small units, limiting abilities to “age-in-place” and stay in one’s community. WDCA26-0001 proposes a density incentive to encourage the creation of smaller dwelling units.

## **PROPOSED AMENDMENTS**

Proposed changes occur in Division Three—Regulation of Uses. The changes are summarized below. A draft ordinance showing all code amendments is attached as Attachment A.

### **Article 336 Housing Incentives**

All proposed amendments as part of WDCA26-0001 are in Article 336 Housing Incentives. A new section is proposed to:

- Establish a 25% density increase for units with a maximum size of 1,200 square feet in the suburban, urban, and commercial regulatory zones (the rural zones are excluded).
- Preclude previously approved tentative maps and specific plans from utilizing the allowed density incentive without obtaining a new review and approval.
- Establish other standards for the use of the density incentive.

Any development utilizing the small unit density incentive will still be required to get approval through other applicable planning processes, including any required subdivision review or discretionary permits.

**IMPACT ANALYSIS**

A density increase of 25% was selected to incentivize small units with minimal impacts on traffic and building bulk. To determine an appropriate incentive, staff compared estimated traffic impacts between three different “model neighborhoods” based on two different traffic generation estimate techniques (for the full analysis, *see Attachment C*). The results are included in Table 1 below. In all cases, a small unit neighborhood receiving a 25% density incentive is estimated to generate **less** traffic than a traditional neighborhood, generating anywhere from 78% to 96% of typical traffic.

	Average Household Size	Overall Number of Residents	ITE Average Daily Trips	RTC Average Daily Trips
<b>100-unit Standard Neighborhood</b>	2.49 people	249 people	657 trips	770 trips
<b>125-unit Small Unit Neighborhood (WC Household Size)</b>	1.55 people	194 people	514 trips	710 trips
			<b>78%</b> of standard neighborhood	<b>92%</b> of standard neighborhood
<b>125-unit Small Unit Neighborhood (Mountain West sf-per-person)</b>	1.63 people	204 people	538 trips	737 trips
			<b>82%</b> of standard neighborhood	<b>96%</b> of standard neighborhood

*Table 1 Traffic Generation Estimates*

Averaging all the trip generation estimates for each neighborhood type suggests that small unit neighborhoods could potentially receive up to a 54% density increase without reaching the traffic impacts of a standard neighborhood. However, staff has proposed a more conservative rate of 25% to account for uncertainty in household size in a small unit neighborhood.

Staff conducted a similar analysis to understand impacts on overall building bulk from the proposed small unit density incentive. The analysis compared 125-unit “small unit” neighborhoods to 100-unit neighborhoods with average home sizes for older and newer medium density suburban (MDS) neighborhoods. The analysis reveals that a small unit neighborhood would have **significantly less** building bulk, ranging from 66% to 80% of typical building bulk. In this regard, a small unit neighborhood would therefore be less impactful than a typical neighborhood.

Both the traffic and building bulk analyses show that the proposed small unit density incentive is a viable method to encourage small affordable-by-design homes in the County without creating negative impacts. Furthermore, these neighborhoods may have many positive impacts outside of affordability, including reduced traffic and increased air and space in the built environment.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

No fiscal impact.

### **PUBLIC WORKSHOP**

Public workshops to discuss the amendments took place on March 4 and 5 of 2026. Approximately eight citizens attended both workshops. Planning representatives described the overall intent of the amendments and presented the draft changes. There was an opportunity for questions and discussion.

Questions and comments were related to deed restrictions, the need for smaller dwelling units, parking requirements, and more. Overall, attendees were supportive of the proposed amendments. Summaries of the meetings are attached as Exhibit B of Attachment C.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Board of County Commissioners introduce and conduct a first reading of the attached ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) in Article 336 as set forth in WDCA26-0001. If supported, the Board is asked to set the public hearing for second reading and possible adoption of the ordinance for June 16, 2026.

### **POSSIBLE MOTION**

Any member of the Board may introduce and conduct the first reading of the proposed ordinance. However, a possible motion would be:

“Move to introduce and conduct a first reading of Bill Number [insert Bill number provided by the County Clerk], which is an ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) within Article 336 Housing Incentives to add small unit density standards allowing increased density for dwelling units with a maximum unit size of 1,200 square feet and establishing requirements for utilizing the increased density; and all matters necessarily connected therewith and pertaining thereto.

Further move to schedule a public hearing for the second reading and possible adoption of the ordinance for June 16, 2026.”

Attachments:

- A. Working Copy of Proposed Ordinance
- B. Planning Commission Action Order and Resolution No. 26-07
- C. Planning Commission Staff Report for WDCA26-0001
- D. Planning Commission Staff Presentation
- E. Recording April 7, 2026 Planning Commission Public Hearing