

Board of County Commissioners



COMMUNITY
SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Small Unit Density Incentive

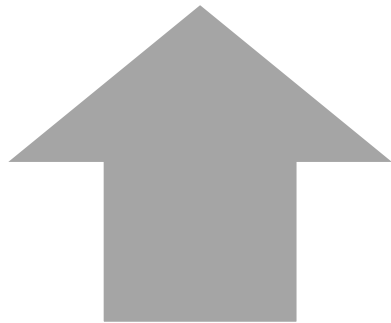
May 12th, 2026

Background

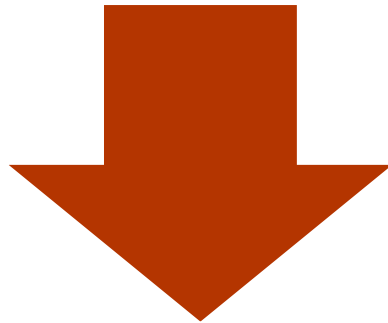


- Housing supply trends not following household trends
 - Need for larger variety of housing types, particularly smaller units

Trends 1970-2022



**Medium Density
Suburban median
new home size:
1,266 sf to 2,231 sf**



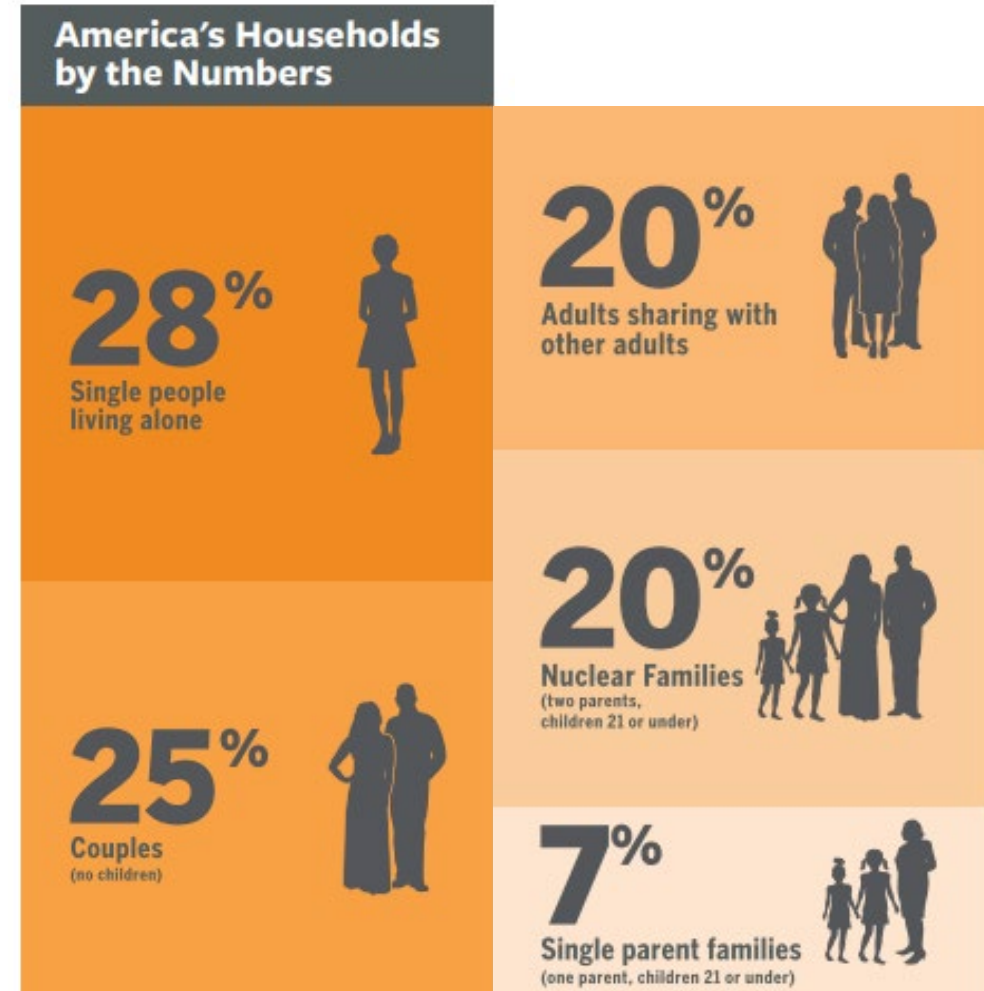
**US mean
household size:
3.14 to 2.50 people**

**63% of
households in
Washoe County
are 1 or 2 person
households**

Future Trends



- **Future trend:** aging population
- Washoe County consensus forecast for seniors:
 - Currently 19.1% of population (96,472 people)
 - In 2044, 21.1% of population (126,396 people)
- Expected increase in senior population of approximately **30,000 people** (31% increase), and decrease in average household size
- Incentives proposed for affordable-by-design small units



Source: AARP Making Room-Housing for a changing nation

Article 336 Housing Incentives



- **25% density incentive** for units under **1,200 square feet** in **suburban, urban, and commercial zones** outside of the Tahoe Basin
- Units receiving density incentive must be 1,200 square feet or smaller at the time of the **initial Certificate of Occupancy**
- Approved **tentative maps** or **specific plans** that want to use this density incentive must receive new approvals
- **No variance** to the density incentive section may be granted

Traffic Generation Estimates



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

Behind the Numbers - Traffic



- Estimated traffic generation for model neighborhoods varies by method, but in all cases a small unit neighborhood would generate **less** traffic than a standard neighborhood (**78-96%** less traffic)
- Proposed density incentive: **25%**
 - More conservative than the most conservative traffic estimations due to uncertainty about the household composition of a small unit neighborhood
- Proposed developments will conduct traffic impact analyses based on Washoe County standard practices

Behind the Numbers: Building Bulk



Standard MDS Neighborhood (1970-2024)

- Average home size: 1,865 square feet
- 100-unit neighborhood
- Total building bulk: **186,500 sf**

Standard MDS Neighborhood (2019-2024)

- Average home size: 2,261 square feet
- 100-unit neighborhood
- Total building bulk: **226,000 sf**

Small Unit Neighborhood

- Average home size: 1,200 square feet
- 125-unit neighborhood
- Total building bulk: **150,000 sf**

Small unit neighborhood would have 80.4% of the building bulk of an older MDS neighborhood and 66% of the building bulk of a newer MDS neighborhood.

Findings



- Planning Commission on April 7, 2026 voted 7-0 to recommend approval.
- Must make one (1) of the following findings (PC made **all four findings**):
 1. Consistency with Master Plan.
 2. Promotes the Purpose of the Development Code.
 3. Response to Changed Conditions.
 4. No Adverse Affects.

Motion - Approval



“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.”

Thank you

Kat Oakley, Planning Manager
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Model Neighborhoods



- Staff compared estimated traffic impacts between three different “model neighborhoods.”

Neighborhood A

“Standard” Neighborhood

Reflects average statistics of Washoe County for people per household (2.49 people per household)

100 units
249 residents

Neighborhood B

“Small Unit” Neighborhood

Reflects a neighborhood composed of only 1 and 2 person households in proportions reflecting Washoe County household size statistics (45% 1 person and 55% 2 person)

125 units
155 residents

Neighborhood C

“Small Unit” Neighborhood

Reflects a neighborhood composed of only 1 and 2 person households in proportions reflecting average home square footage per household member (37% 1 person and 63% 2 person)

125 units
203 residents

Traffic Generation Methods

- Estimated traffic impact for the three model neighborhoods based on two traffic generation estimate methods.

ITE Estimates

Uses resident-based Institute of Traffic Engineers (ITE) traffic generation estimates.

- Substantiated by traffic studies across the country
- Estimates traffic impact by number of residents rather than number of dwelling units

RTC Estimates

Uses household size-based traffic generation data from the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) 2024 Washoe County Household Travel Survey.

- Recent and local data
- Weighted to represent Washoe County demographics