

Planning Commission



COMMUNITY
SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Small Unit Density Incentive

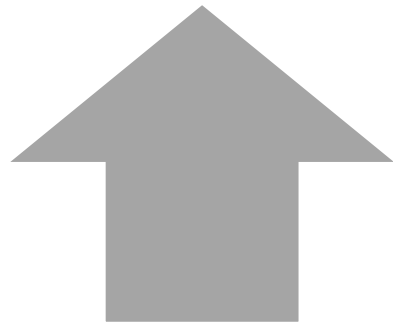
April 7th, 2026

Background

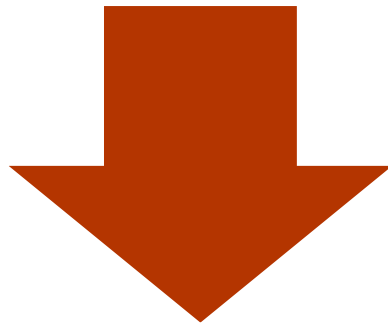


- Housing supply trends not following household trends
 - Need for larger variety of housing types, particularly smaller units

Trends 1970-2022



**MDS median new
home size: 1,266 sf
to 2,231 sf**



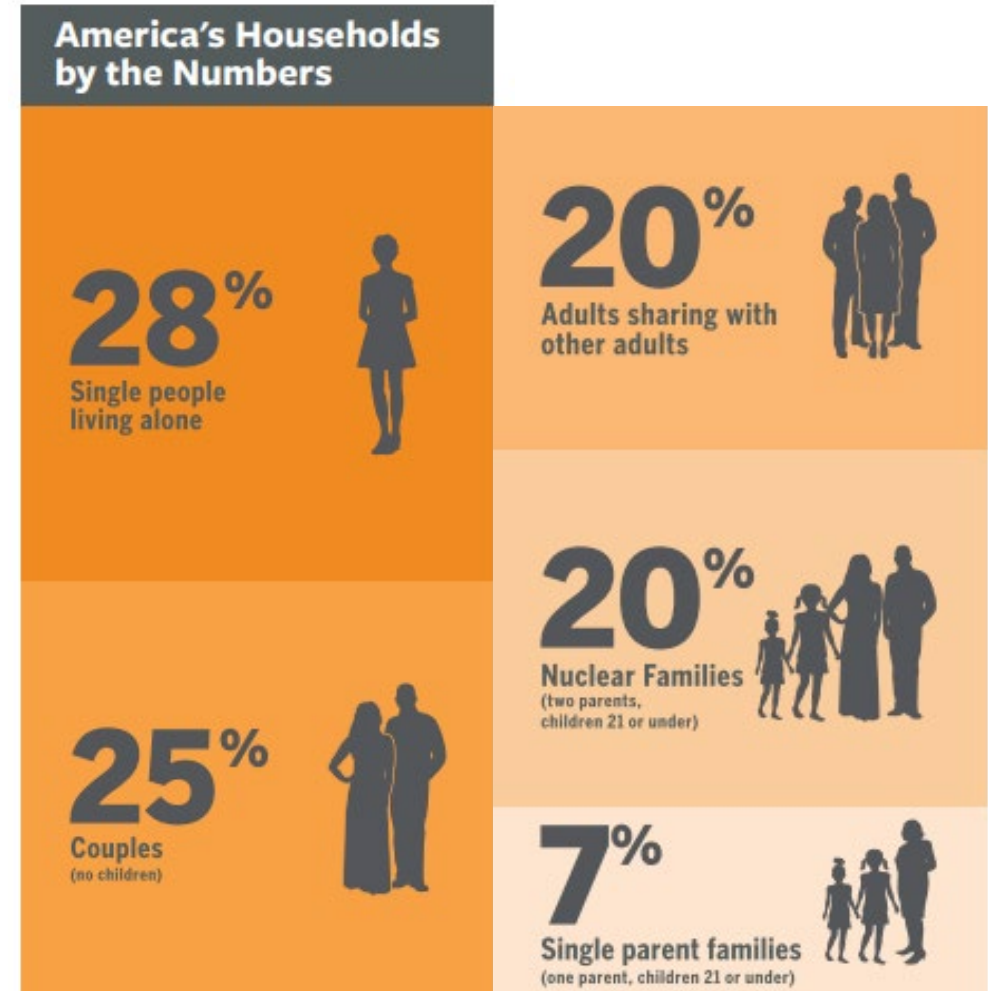
**US mean
household size:
3.14 to 2.50 people**

**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)
- Increase in senior population of approximately **30,000 people** (31% increase), and decrease in average household size



Source: AARP Making Room-Housing for a changing nation

Article 336 Housing Incentives



Section 110.336.30 Small Unit Density. To support the development of small dwelling units, the following density incentive can be used for single family, middle housing, and multifamily development in **suburban, urban, and commercial zones outside of the Tahoe Basin**, subject to the restrictions stated in this section.

- (a) A **25% density increase** above the base density is allowed for units that are **1,200 square feet or smaller**. Base density is calculated based on the underlying housing type and regulatory zoning per Table 110.406.05.1.
- (b) The density incentive in this section may be utilized for a portion of a development with units under the required maximum square footage.
- (c) Additional units permitted by density incentive in this section will be subject to the maximum unit size of **1,200 square feet or less**.
- (d) Units limited to **1,200 square feet** pursuant to the provisions of this section must be **1,200 square feet or smaller** at the time of issuance of the **initial certificate of occupancy**.
- (e) Approved tentative maps seeking to utilize the incentives in this section will be required to receive a **new tentative map approval** pursuant to Article 608.
- (f) Approved specific plans seeking to utilize the incentives in this section will be required to receive a **new specific plan approval** pursuant to Article 821.
- (g) **No variance** may be requested or granted for any portion of this section.

Behind the Numbers - Traffic



- Goal: provide a density incentive that is likely to have minimal traffic impacts.
- Two forms of traffic impact assessment completed, one based on ITE traffic generation estimates and one based on RTC trip generation data.

Standard Neighborhood



Small Unit Neighborhood



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

Traffic Generation Estimates



	Average Household Size	Overall Number of Residents	ITE Average Daily Trips	RTC Average Daily Trips
100-unit Standard Neighborhood (Neighborhood A)	2.48 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

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.

Must make one (1) of the following findings:

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 allow 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.

Motion - Approval



I move that, after giving reasoned consideration to the information contained in the staff report and information received during the public hearing, the Washoe County Planning Commission **initiate and recommend approval** of WDCA26-0001, to amend Washoe County 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. I further move to authorize the Chair to sign the resolution contained in Attachment A on behalf of the Washoe County Planning Commission and to direct staff to present a report of this Commission's recommendation to the Washoe County Board of County Commissioners within 60 days of today's date. This recommendation for approval is based on all of the following four findings in accordance with Washoe County Code Section 110.818.15(e):

Thank you

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