



WASHOE COUNTY

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STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: May 26, 2026

DATE: April 17, 2026

TO: Board of County Commissioners

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THROUGH: Kelly Mullin, AICP, Division Director, Planning & Building Division,
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SUBJECT: Introduction and first reading of an ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) within Article 336 housing incentives, to establish a density bonus for attainable housing that scales to the underlying regulatory zone, providing for higher attainable densities in more intense regulatory zones; to establish a density bonus for attainable senior housing above the bonus for non-age restricted attainable; to prohibit the stacking of multiple density bonuses; to set the minimum period of affordability at 30 years for rental projects and 9 years for sale products; and all matters necessarily connected therewith and relating thereto;
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

SUMMARY

The Board is asked to introduce and conduct a first reading of an ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) in Article 336 housing incentives, to establish a density bonus for attainable housing that scales to the underlying regulatory zone, providing for higher attainable densities in more intense regulatory zones; to establish a density bonus for attainable senior housing above the bonus for non-age restricted attainable; to prohibit the stacking of multiple density bonuses; to set the minimum period of affordability at 30 years for rental projects and 9 years for sale products; and all matters necessarily connected therewith and relating thereto. The proposed code amendments are further summarized in the Proposed Amendments section of this staff report, and the full text of the proposed code can be found in Attachment A, Working Copy of Proposed Ordinance. 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.

AGENDA ITEM # _____

PREVIOUS ACTION

April 7, 2026. The Washoe County Planning Commission reviewed the proposed amendments to Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) and voted 6-0 to recommend approval of Development Code Amendment WDCA25-0006 to the Board. 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:

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 County strategic planning and vision documents as one of the most pressing issues in Washoe County. Throughout 2024 and 2025, the planning program brought forth multiple development code amendments in support of the county commission's housing related priorities. These initiatives have come forward in a series of "housing packages."

Thus far, the county commission has reviewed and adopted housing packages that:

- support multi-family and accessory dwelling units;
- create new use-types for "missing middle" housing;
- support senior housing development;
- create infill development opportunities in existing neighborhoods.
- allow multi-family development in commercial areas; and
- create an expedited process for attainable housing projects.

Progress on the entire series of housing related amendments can be found on the planning program's Master Plan Implementation webpage.

This development code amendment, proposing to establish density bonuses for attainable housing, is anticipated to be one of the final amendments in the housing series. The following is a brief review of density bonuses as a tool for local governments.

The use of density bonuses as a tool to achieve desired forms of development is a longstanding approach commonly utilized by jurisdictions to incentivize affordable housing, sustainable or “green” development, senior housing, and other development types deemed desirable by the community, but that remain difficult to achieve. In building their density bonus programs, jurisdictions have developed and implemented density bonuses in diverse ways and for diverse purposes.

In Nevada, per NRS 278.250, density bonuses were enabled as an allowable tool in 1999. Density bonuses have since been incorporated into statute in multiple places in a broad attempt to both mandate and encourage their adoption. The following definition was also adopted to clarify the tool’s full intention.

“Density bonus” means an incentive granted by a governing body to a developer of real property that authorizes the developer to build at a greater density than would otherwise be allowed under the master plan, in exchange for an agreement by the developer to perform certain functions that the governing body determines to be socially desirable, including, without limitation, developing an area to include a certain proportion of affordable housing.

In 2025, the legislature adopted additional housing statutes that will serve to expand the use of density bonuses for attainable housing. The state adopted an additional tier of affordability to the traditional range of affordable housing. Affordable housing as defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) targets a range of affordability that includes households earning between 0% and 120% of Area Median Income (AMI.) Nevada expanded that range by creating an affordable housing tier that includes the 120% to 150% AMI range. This new tier broadly represents what affordable housing advocates have long referred to as workforce housing. The state also created new funding opportunities associated with the new tier structure. The ability of local jurisdictions to provide density bonuses to projects in this tier is a valuable additional incentive for workforce housing and may have particular benefits in Washoe County’s suburban and rural character land use-pattern.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

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

The approach is designed to be rational and transparent, and thus more useful. The density bonus simply provides the density of the next highest regulatory zone to any qualifying project. This approach provides numerous advantages over the tiered and menu-based approaches found in more urban settings. Some of these advantages include:

- Consistent across all AMI targets, without a tiered system of incentives. Provides equal opportunities for higher AMI target families, including the newly established tier 5 (120-150% AMI)
- Consistent across all housing types, not just traditional multi-family approaches to affordable housing. Provides equal opportunities for non-multifamily products, such as single family, cottage court and other middle housing.

- Consistent with lower density projects that can blend with existing unincorporated development patterns.
- Transparency. Avoids the need to “calculate” density based on various formulas regarding how AMI and bonus % come together to establish a density.
- Focused on the value of additional density *and* reducing the need for lengthy entitlement processes.
- Functional without additional incentives. Previous housing packages have addressed multi-family development standards.

Summary of proposed amendments:

The amendment has two components: purpose and applicability sections, followed by a density bonus section. The proposed amendments are provided in Attachment A, included with this staff report.

The purpose and applicability sections include:

- A prohibition against stacking the bonuses and other incentives available in Article 336, Housing Incentives, with the exception of senior attainable housing projects.
- A requirement that the unit-type must be one of the residential permitted uses in the underlying regulatory zone. This prevents multi-family housing in areas where it is not permitted.
- Provisions establishing the affordability term for both sale and rental units. Units developed for retail sale may be sold without income restriction after 9 years. Rental units are subject to affordability standards for 30-years.
- A density bonus may not increase a project’s density above any limits established by the Truckee Meadows Regional Plan.

The density bonus section includes:

- Density bonuses for the suburban (MDS/HDS), urban (LDU/MDU/HDU), and commercial (NC/GC/TC) zoning districts. The bonuses provide the density of the next most dense zone, as described in the table below.
- An additional bonus of 20% is available for Senior Attainable projects.

Examples of the densities resulting from these bonuses are displayed in the following table.

REGULATORY ZONE	BONUS		% 	10 ACRE EXAMPLE	MINIMUM 80% ATTAINABLE
MEDIUM DENSITY SUBURBAN (MDS)	SFD	Existing: 3 du/ac Bonus: 7 du/ac	133%	30 units to 70 units.	56
	SFA and MH	Existing: 5 du/ac Bonus: 9 du/ac	80%	50 units to 90 units.	72
HIGH DENSITY SUBURBAN (HDS)	SFD	Existing: 7 du/ac Bonus: 10 du/ac	43%	70 units to 100 units.	80
	SFA and MH	Existing: 9 du/ac Bonus: 14 du/ac	55%	90 units to 140 units.	112
LOW DENSITY URBAN (LDU)	SFD	Existing: 10 du/ac Bonus: 21 du/ac	110%	100 units to 210 units	168
	SFA, MH, MF	Existing: 14 du/ac Bonus: 21 du/ac	50%	140 units to 210 units	168
MEDIUM DENSITY URBAN (MDU)	SFD, MH, MF	Existing: 21 du/ac Bonus: 42 du/ac	100%	210 units to 420 units.	336
HIGH DENSITY URBAN (HDU)	SFD, SFA, MH, MF	Existing: 42 du/ac Bonus: 50 du/ac	19%	420 units to 500 units.	400

SFD, Single Family Detached. SFA, Single Family Attached. MH, Middle Housing. MF, Multifamily.

FISCAL IMPACT

No fiscal impact.

PUBLIC WORKSHOP

Two public workshops were conducted to discuss the proposed amendment, one available in virtual format, and the other available in-person. The virtual-only meeting took place on January 28, 2026. Twelve (12) citizens attended. The in-person only meeting took place on January 29, 2026. Eight (8) citizens attended. 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 the reasoning behind the bonuses for commercially zoned properties, as well as the 30-year affordability period for rental projects and the 9-year affordability period for for-sale products.

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) Division Three, Allowed Uses as set forth in WDCA25-0006. 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 establish a density bonus for attainable housing that scales to the underlying regulatory zone, providing for higher attainable densities in more intense regulatory zones; to establish a density bonus for attainable senior housing above the bonus for non-age restricted attainable housing; to otherwise prohibit the stacking of multiple density bonuses; to set the minimum period of affordability at 30 years for rental projects and 9 years for sale products; and all matters necessarily connected therewith and relating 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 Resolution No. 26-03
- C. Planning Commission Staff Report for WDCA25-0006
- D. Planning Commission Staff Presentation
- E. Minutes of April 7, 2026 Planning Commission Public Hearing