

Planning Commission



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COMMUNITY  
SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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**WDCA25-0006**

**(Attainable Housing Density Bonus)**

April 7, 2026

## WASHOE COUNTY STRATEGIC EFFORT TO INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY OF DIVERSE HOUSING TYPES.

- Housing affordability and attainability are identified priorities in Washoe County
  - Envision Washoe 2040.
  - BCC Strategic Priorities.
- A series of housing related code amendments have been undertaken.
- Progress on the entire series can be found at the [Master Plan Implementation](#) page on the planning program's webpage.
- [www.washoecounty.gov/csd.planning\\_and\\_development](http://www.washoecounty.gov/csd.planning_and_development)

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.

Currently under consideration (BCC April 14, 2026):

- allow residential development in commercial areas. 1<sup>st</sup> reading.
- create expedited processes for attainable housing projects. 2<sup>nd</sup> reading.

Two additional housing related code amendments on the agenda today.

1. Density Bonus for Attainable Housing.
2. Density Bonus for Small Unit Development.

Primary differences include:

- ✓ The attainable housing bonus requires significant administrative commitment due to the multi-layered requirements associated with deed-restricted housing.
- ✓ The small unit bonus has more market and design flexibility.

These density bonus amendments support the County Commission's housing related strategic priorities and is consistent with the Master Plan Population and Housing Element:

- **PH Principle 3. Use a balanced set of tools to increase and maintain the diversity of housing types across all income levels and to facilitate more affordable and workforce housing.**
  - **Goal 3.5.** *Require and/or incentivize a mixture of housing types (i.e. product types, unit sizes, and price points) in large development applications and subdivisions.*
  - **Goal 3.6.** *Disperse affordable and attainable housing throughout developments and neighborhoods.*
- **Action Item:**
  - *Create standard incentive packages for different levels of affordability in new developments*

## What is a Density Bonus?

### NRS:

#### **NRS 278.250 Zoning districts and regulations. Since 1999.**

4. In exercising the powers granted in this section, the governing body may use any controls relating to land use or principles of zoning that the governing body determines to be appropriate, including, without limitation, density bonuses, inclusionary zoning and minimum density zoning.

5. As used in this section:

(a) “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.

## Washoe County Development Code Definition.

**Density Bonus.** "Density bonus" means an increase in residential density over and above the density specified in the Development Code. A "density bonus unit" is one of the additional housing units built as a result of granting a density bonus.

## Common Density Bonus Strategies associated with Affordable (Attainable) Housing

- Use of a tiered system that provides larger bonuses to lower Area Median Income (AMI) targets, seeking to provide a greater incentive to lower income households.
  - 30-60% AMI receives a 100% bonus
  - 60-80% AMI receives a 50% bonus.
  - 80-120% AMI receives a 25% bonus.
- Use of menu options for other incentives such as:
  - Increased building heights.
  - Decreased setbacks.
  - Decreased parking standards.

## Washoe County's proposed approach:

1. Consistent approach across all AMI targets, without a tiered system of incentives.
  - ✓ The master plan supports the diversification of all housing types, not just traditional mutli-family approaches to affordable housing.
  - ✓ Provides equal opportunities for higher AMI target families. **Including the newly established tier 5 (120-150% AMI)**

- ✓ Provides equal opportunities for non-multifamily products, such as single family, cottage court and other middle housing.
- ✓ Provides equal opportunity to lower density projects that can blend with existing unincorporated development patterns.
- ✓ Avoids the need to “calculate” density based on various formulas regarding how AMI and bonus % come together to establish a density. The county’s proposal provides ease of calculation and transparency.

## Washoe County's proposed approach:

### 2. No menu options for additional incentives.

- Previous housing packages have addressed multi-family development standards.
- “Stacking” with other incentives will be limited.

Incorporating the State of Nevada's new approach to affordable housing.

## *Attainable Housing:*

Attainable Housing is defined in five separate tiers related to affordability and Area Median Income. In order to be considered affordable, the total housing costs cannot exceed 30% of the family's gross income.

1. Tier One Affordable Housing means housing that is affordable for households earning no more than 30% of AMI.
2. Tier Two Affordable Housing means housing that is affordable for households earning more than 30% of AMI but no more than 60% of AMI.
3. Tier Three Affordable Housing means housing that is affordable for households earning more than 60% of AMI but no more than 80% of AMI.
4. Tier Four Affordable Housing means housing that is affordable for households earning more than 80% of AMI but no more than 120% of AMI.
5. Tier Five Affordable Housing means housing that is affordable for households earning more than 120% of AMI but no more than 150% of AMI.

## Purpose and Applicability section to include:

- ✓ A brief explanation of density bonuses, a prohibition against stacking with other bonuses, and a “rounding down” approach to address fractions when calculating a bonus.
- 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.

## The Density Bonus Section includes:

- Density bonuses for suburban (MDS/HDS), urban (LDU/MDU/HDU), and commercial (NC/GC/TC) zoning districts.
- The bonuses are designed to provide the density of the next most dense zone. This approach was taken in response to developer feedback that suggests the cost of rezoning is a significant contributor to housing cost.

### For instance:

- Applying the bonus in the Low Density Urban (LDU) district would boost the density from 14 du/ac for multi-family to 21 du/ac for multi-family, which is equivalent to the Medium Density Urban zone.
- Applying the bonus in the Medium Density Suburban zone would boost the density from 5 du/ac for middle housing to 9 du/ac for middle housing, which is equivalent to High Density Suburban.
- An additional bonus of 20% is available for Senior Attainable projects.
- NC bonus is equal to the LDU zone (10/14 du/ac), GC and TC are equal to the MDU zone (21 du/ac.)

# Proposal



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

# Discussion



100% AMI = \$110,000

30% housing cost = 33,000. \$2,700 per month.

80% AMI = \$88,000

30% housing cost = 24,400. \$2,033 per month.

50% AMI = \$55,000

30% housing cost = 16,500. \$1,375 per month.

**150% AMI = \$165,000** 30% housing cost = 49,500. \$4,125 per month.

**120% AMI = \$132,000** 30% housing cost = 39,600. \$3,300 per month

# Discussion



- Median Home Sale Price: \$600,000
- Zillow Says...

Annual income <sup>?</sup>

\$ 165,500

Calculate by [payment](#)

Monthly debts

\$ 1,500

Down payment

\$ 20,000

**Advanced**

[Calculator disclaimer](#)

Home price

Payment

[Full report](#)

**You can afford a house up to  
\$480,652**

Based on your income, a house at this price  
may **stretch your budget** too thin.



# Potential Motion.



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 WDCA25-0006, to amend Washoe County Chapter 110 (Development Code) within Article 336, Housing Incentives. 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 the Planning Commission's ability to make all four findings identified in the staff report and in accordance with Washoe County Code Section 110.818.15(e).