



Frequently Asked Questions

Comprehensive Land Use Plan

3.27.2025

Revised 3.31.2025 – to add an update to question 7.

Glossary of Terms

- *MPEA* - Michigan Planning Enabling Act
- *Comp Plan* - Comprehensive Land Use Plan
- *Zoning Ordinance* – this is the general term but in Ann Arbor it is also called the Unified Development Code (UDC)

1. How are the Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the Zoning Ordinance related?

The Zoning Ordinance is law with penalties and consequence for not following it. A Comprehensive Plan is a land use policy document that expresses intent for how to coordinate development across the City. It is not an enforceable document and is not law.¹

By Michigan law, a Zoning Ordinance must be based upon a plan. Therefore, planners do all the necessary research to write a Comp Plan that provides recommendations for how to update the Zoning Ordinance so that the two documents align. One way a Comp Plan makes recommendations is through its Future Land Use Map, which provides a visual guide for the preferred development pattern. This map is often confused with a Zoning Map. It is not the same. A Future Land Use Map does not rezone your property. It becomes the map that the Zoning Ordinance uses as a basis for the recommended changes.

2. How will the Comprehensive Land Use Plan address tree protection?

The Comp Plan proposes maintaining the City's current regulations for tree protection. Currently, trees are not protected for small-scale development activities, and no change is currently being considered. For larger developments, the City's UDC has protection measures for landmark trees. Other protections include the tree's critical root zone and best practices for how to replace trees should they be removed during development. There are separate protections for

¹ https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/difference_between_a_zoning_ordinance_and_a_master_plan



woodlands. If you'd like to learn more about the [Ordinance](#), go to section 5.23.6 (page 126).

3. Who are the ultimate approvers of the Comp Plan?

The Planning Commission are considered the official "authors" of the Comp Plan through the [Michigan Planning Enabling Act](#). Both the Planning Commission and the City Council will approve or deny the Comp Plan.

4. What is form-based code?

[The Form-Based Codes Institute](#) provides a definition:

"A form-based code is a land development regulation that fosters predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code. A form-based code is a regulation, not a mere guideline, adopted into City... law. A form-based code offers a powerful alternative to conventional zoning regulation."

The definition explains the emphasis on form over use. In many cases, cities will use a hybrid approach that regulates land use and form.

5. Is the Comp Plan considering removing historic districts or changing its regulations and procedures?

No. Community engagement results were supportive of historic district preservation. The City is currently updating its Historic District Design Guidelines as a separate process with the Historic District Commission.

6. Will there be more community engagement for the Comp Plan?

Yes, the draft plan will go public this spring. We are in the process of planning 3 to 4 engagement sessions during the spring and summer to share the draft and to listen to the community's feedback. To ensure you are notified, please sign up for the City's email subscription service here:

https://service.govdelivery.com/accounts/MIANNA/subscriber/new?topic_id=MIANNA_205

7. What does the City mean by affordability? If new housing being built is so expensive, how does greater density contribute to our goal of affordable housing?

Housing costs are determined by a variety of factors and market conditions, and the City of Ann Arbor has no legal ability to dictate the price of rent or the sale of



a home within the City. Nonetheless, the City Council, Planning Commission, and City staff share a desire to explore ways in which the City can utilize legislative and other methods to positively impact housing affordability.² One way to impact the cost of housing is to consider housing supply. By considering the City's land use permissions and plans, the City can seek to increase the development of housing inventory.³

Some affordable developments receive government subsidies to drop the price for residents that earn less than the area median income. There are income eligibility requirements to access affordable housing. Most of these properties are managed by the City's Housing Commission. Since 2021, about 1,000 income-eligible units have been through some phase of the development process. In addition, the City has a payment in lieu option that developers can pay into instead of constructing affordable units. Since 2022, this fund has received \$20 million of developer contribution. Currently in the pipeline, there are 399 affordable units that are approved and under construction and 72 more units that have been approved but have not yet started construction.

In the Comp Plan, we are using the broader version of the word affordable. Many households who earn over the area median income still struggle to find housing that is affordable for their income bracket. Subsidy is not available to them, but neither are housing options that fit their needs. In the Comp Plan, we are trying to address how to slow down the rising cost of market rate housing so that residents of all income brackets can find a place to live here. Therefore, housing is treated like any other product that is subject to supply and demand pressure. The City wants to increase supply to help alleviate demand pressure and slow the rate of rental rates and housing values. Yes, new housing that is built is expensive. The cost to build has risen tremendously since COVID, but the option not to continue to build will exacerbate this issue even further.

8. How will group housing be addressed?

Group housing has the potential to provide additional housing types for a variety of residents. The City generally heard community feedback to explore this type of housing, including expanding the use as an opportunity for more affordably priced housing options. City staff will explore language in the draft plan to provide

² <https://a2gov.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4686013&GUID=C523B634-C75E-4939-9D00-5136F534EE83&Options=ID|Text|&Search=R-20-439>

³ <https://www.freddiemac.com/research/insight/20210507-housing-supply>



policy direction on this.

9. Does the City have the infrastructure to support increased residential density?

This answer is based on the type of infrastructure in question, and at times, the geographic location of the proposed growth. One of the ways that infrastructure capacity is increased is when developers upsize pipes as a part of their construction. The City is currently examining its stormwater, water supply, and sanitary sewer capacity. This will have a big impact on what can be built across the City, and the rate at which growth can occur.

10. Why is the City applying a “one-size-fits-all” approach to residential density?

The City Council directed this work to result in fewer, more flexible land use areas, and City staff has been diligent in following this direction.

The current Future Land Use Map features a low-rise residential category that applies to many of the current R-1 and R-2 zones. It also calls for increasing residential density along many of the City’s corridors. The current direction from City Council’s resolution (and supported by the Planning Commission) is to densify single-family neighborhoods. The purpose is to permit a greater variety of housing options for residents at a variety of income levels. This has been applied across the City for an equitable distribution of housing types, so as not to focus it in one neighborhood over another. Nonetheless, geographic distribution across neighborhoods can lead to additional market-based influence.

While the Future Land Use Map offers “one residential” category, it is likely in the process of rewriting the UDC, that more than one residential zone will be written. For now, this provides the planning team of the primary policy direction which is to reduce the number of zones, offer greater flexibility and adaptability in land use, and increase the supply of housing.

11. Will the City be able to require higher electrification and green standards for new buildings?

The short answer is no, we cannot *require* certain green building practices because they are not expressly enabled by state law. However, the City can use incentives to try to meet our sustainability goals. For example, the City could



provide greater density or building potential to developers who have 100% electric buildings or achieve other carbon neutrality goals.