

Local Strategies for Increasing Housing Accessibility and Diversity

INTRODUCTION

The last few decades have seen an evolution in the demographic makeup of U.S. households, and these households now require new housing options to meet their basic needs and changing lifestyles. The increase of aging baby boomers, empty nesters, childless couples, and grandfamilies¹ requires communities to reassess the type, location and design of housing available to these households. There is need for smaller homes that require less maintenance, are located in closer proximity to services and community interaction opportunities, and are designed to address the physical limitations of aging and disabled persons. In addition, the nation's minority populations have increased significantly in recent years, a trend that is expected to continue. The combined increase in these households, and the fact that many of them fall into lower income tiers, makes it difficult to create equitable communities. Prevalent development patterns cluster housing by type and price points and typically do not provide a diversity of units within developments. The physical separation of households by income levels results in an imbalance in opportunities and ultimately affects the long-term success of low-income families and children, and in turn, the quality of life for all.

Diversity in local housing opportunities has become necessary to maintain a sustainable quality of life. The "American Dream" of home ownership has not changed, but the typical one-size-fits-all, suburban single-family home, found in a homogenous neighborhood, is no longer the only housing solution. Some developers are interested in providing homes for this new demand segment, but are prohibited by outdated zoning and design standards. Development regulations need to keep pace with the changing needs of communities to foster the development of a broad array of housing options. Many communities have started to address these needs by providing new opportunities, incentives, or mandatory regulations. Some communities urge developers to offer a mix of housing unit types, sizes and price points. Some encourage units designed to provide access to a range of ages and physical abilities. Others ensure that developments provide for more sustainable commuting patterns and community engagement opportunities by locating housing proximate to public transportation, employment centers and necessary services.

IMPLICATIONS OF NOT ADDRESSING THE ISSUE

Communities that do not address changing housing demands will find their citizenry forced to live in inadequate housing or to relocate to an area that can provide needed amenities and proximity to services. Elderly residents may find it necessary to spend fixed income wages to retrofit their home to provide better handicap accessibility. Young families may find limited housing opportunities suitable for raising children in urban areas and may relocate to find adequate housing elsewhere. Communities may become increasingly segregated by socio-economic status, creating new community challenges.

In general, when housing needs are not met, it affects the overall quality of living in a community. Providing housing options to a diversity of households improves their quality of life, and development regulations need to provide the framework to affect this change.



GOALS FOR HOUSING DIVERSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

The goals for this chapter are to:

- Raise awareness about the changing housing needs of our nation's communities
- Offer methods to create more diverse housing opportunities by removing regulatory barriers from local development regulations
- Identify incentives for developers to encourage development of a full range of housing options to meet local demands
- Suggest mandatory requirements to create more diverse and inclusive housing communities



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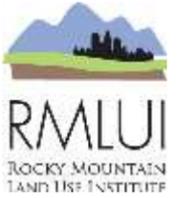
¹ Grandfamilies are households wherein grandparents raise their grandchildren. This type of household is on the rise. According to the 2005 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, there are over 6 million children living in "grandfamily" or "kinship care" households in the United States.

Sustainable Community Development Code Framework

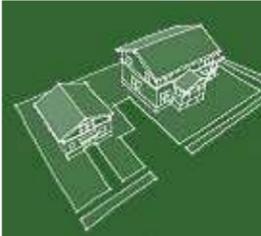
HOUSING DIVERSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

KEY STATISTICS:

- America's population is growing older. In 2000, twelve percent of Americans were over age 65. This age group is expected to rise as high as twenty to twenty-five percent of the total population by 2030
- The average household size is shrinking. There are now more households of married couples without children and single person households than any other types, including married couples with children
- According to the 2005 American Community Survey, there are over 6 million children living in "grandfamily" or "kinship care" households in the U.S., half of whom are cared for solely by their grandparents
- In 2007, the nation's minority population reached 100 million – approximately one third of the total U.S. population
- Many families can not find adequate housing in urban areas where the primary form of housing is small units with two or fewer bedrooms



INCREASING DIVERSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF HOUSING THROUGH LOCAL REGULATORY TOOLS

	Achievement Levels (Note: Higher levels generally incorporate actions of lower levels)			References/Commentary	Code Examples/Citations
	Bronze (Good)	Silver (Better)	Gold (Best)		
<p>Remove Obstacles</p>      <p>Adequate Doorways</p> <p>Usable Bathroom</p> <p>No-Step on Slab</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise zoning definition of "family" if it is an obstacle to allowing non-traditional families in affordable housing (e.g., family is four or fewer unrelated individuals) Allow accessory dwelling units and elder cottages in residential districts by-right or through conditional use permit Reduce parking requirements for senior housing and transit-oriented-development housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow for development of group homes and co-housing by-right or with conditions Remove large minimum lot size regulations to allow for small lot residential development (See Affordable Housing Framework Section) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permit duplex and multi-family development in all residential districts Permit duplex and multi-family development by-right in more districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Santa Cruz, CA, <i>Smart Growth in Action: Accessory Dwelling Unit Development Program</i> <i>Creating Senior-Healthy Communities: Removing Regulatory Barriers</i>, Denver Regional Council of Governments (2007) Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. U.S. Department of Justice, the <i>Federal Fair Housing Act</i> prohibits discrimination based on familial status, Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Santa Cruz, CA, Accessory dwelling unit program, Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. City of Fort Kent, ME, Elder cottage housing, Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. City of San Francisco, CA, Downtown parking requirements reduced/eliminated to increase TOD units, Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. City of Fort Myers, FL, Reduced downtown minimum parking requirements, Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. City of Nashville, TN, Parking requirement reduction when proximate to transit, Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. City of Salt Lake City, UT, Multi-family developments allowed by-right in non-residential districts, Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011.

Sustainable Community Development Code Framework

HOUSING DIVERSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

		Bronze (Good)	Silver (Better)	Gold (Best)	References/Commentary	Code Examples
	Create Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expedite review and waiver of fees for development of a diversity of units, or units with visitability or universal design features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce selected development standards (e.g., parking, setbacks) when providing a diversity of units types or use of visitability² or universal design features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide density bonuses when incorporating a variety of housing units in a development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Visitability: A New Direction for Changing Demographics,” <i>Practicing Planner</i>. (2004) Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Fort Collins, CO, “Practical Housing for All” standards that encourage use of universal design concepts, Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011
	Enact Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require residential units in urban areas to include family-friendly amenities, such as parks and play grounds on site Require variations in lot sizes and densities in larger developments (See Affordable Housing Framework Section) Require minimum densities in larger developments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require a percentage of units within urban developments to include three or more bedroom units As a planned unit development compensating community benefit, require mix of housing types Require variation in multifamily building size or footprint to encourage different unit sizes and configurations Create mixed-use zone districts that allow a variety of housing types (e.g., apartments, townhouses, duplexes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a mandatory development points system for incorporating community objectives such as a range of housing types, development of affordable units, and using visitability design standards Require a certain number of units to be “adaptable” or include visitability or universal design standards Require a mix of housing types within residential developments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Living First in Downtown Vancouver”, <i>Zoning News</i>, Beasley. (2000) Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. <i>A Blueprint for Action: Developing a Livable Community for All Ages</i>, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging and Partners for Livable Communities. Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Parramatta, Australia, Mandatory mix of units by number of bedrooms and “adaptable” features (e.g., easy conversion of home design to meet elderly/disabled needs), Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. City of Vancouver, British Columbia, Design guidelines for high-density housing aimed at families and children, Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. City of Fort Collins, CO, Minimum residential density requirements, Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. City of Chapel Hill, NC, Affordable Housing Units as Components of New Developments, Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011. St. Lucie County, FL, Towns, Villages and Countryside Overlay (requires mix of units types), Available online. Retrieved January 2, 2011.

POTENTIAL SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES

- Calculating the number of accessory dwelling units, elder cottages, and other senior housing units available and comparing with demand
- Calculating the number of multi-family housing units and number of bedrooms per unit in urban areas
- Calculating the number of new homes implementing visitability and universal design standards
- Calculating the number of intergenerational housing development units available
- Calculating the housing diversity in a community using the LEED-ND Housing Diversity Measurement or similar index

² Visitability is a design approach driven by the principle that all new homes of all types should be designed and built with basic levels of access. The intent is for the disabled to be able to “visit” and access the homes of their non-disabled peers and for disabled persons to be given the capacity to continue residing in their own homes. Basic features of Visitability include one-level, no step entrances; accessible doorways; and a bathroom on the entry level floor. It does not entail comprehensive accessibility within the residence.