



Middle Housing Code Study

2024 King County Comprehensive Plan

December 2023

A. Introduction

In February 2023, the King County Council approved Motion 16287,¹ which directs the King County Executive to complete a code study related to expanded multifamily housing types in low- and medium-density urban residential zones, also known as "middle housing." A draft of the code study was directed to be issued in June 2023 as part of the Public Review Draft of the 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan update (2024 Update). A final report and associated recommended King County Code² (K.C.C.) changes are directed to be transmitted by the Executive to the Council in December 2023 as part of the transmittal of the 2024 Update.

Middle housing includes moderately scaled multi-unit or clustered housing types that typically occur in low- and medium-density urban residential zones. Middle housing developments have higher housing density than single detached dwelling units, but less than apartments or townhouses over three stories. These housing types typically include, but are not limited to, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, multiplexes, townhouses, courtyard buildings, cottage houses, and live-work buildings three stories or less. Because of their size and scale, these housing types can be more affordable than single-detached homes. Given this, middle housing can increase housing supply and help meet the need for more housing choices at a range of incomes. Middle housing can also support denser, walkable urban communities while fitting into a low-density community's character.^{3,4}

As required by the motion, this code study reviews: applicable Comprehensive Plan⁵ policies; different types of middle housing; current regulations in K.C.C. Title 21A that apply to middle housing in the R-1 (urban residential, 1 dwelling unit per acre) through R-12 (urban residential, 12 dwelling units per acre) zones; regulatory barriers to developing middle housing; and recommendations for adjusting zoning and the development review process to encourage more middle housing.

¹ Motion 16287 [\[LINK\]](#)

² King County Code [\[LINK\]](#)

³ Parolek, D., & Nelson, A.C. (2020). *Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Building Small to Respond to Today's Housing Crisis*. Island Press.

⁴ Motion 16287

⁵ King County Comprehensive Plan [\[LINK\]](#)

B. Middle Housing Regulatory Analysis and Recommendations

This section includes the following subsections:

1. Current Policy Framework
2. Middle Housing Types
3. Current Zoning Regulations and Barriers
4. Recommendations

1. Current Policy Framework

This subsection outlines the laws and plans that establish the policy framework for this study.

House Bill 1220 (2022) – Changes to Comprehensive Planning Requirements

The Growth Management Act⁶ (GMA) requires cities and counties to develop comprehensive plans to plan for their population growth. This includes setting overarching state-level policy that determines where counties and cities should focus housing growth. Recently, the GMA was amended through House Bill 1220,⁷ which addresses housing affordability, reporting, and racial equity. A summary of the changes required by House Bill 1220 follows.

- The Growth Management Act housing goal was changed:
 - Previous goal: “Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments...”
 - New goal: “Plan for and accommodate housing affordable to all economic segments ...”
- New requirements for King County:
 - Expand the housing needs analysis to consider lower-income households in unincorporated King County
 - Identify local policies and regulations that result in racially disparate impacts, displacement, and exclusion in housing
 - Ensure the vitality and character of established residential neighborhoods by including a statement of goals, policies, objectives, and mandatory provisions for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing, including single detached residences
 - Within an urban growth area boundary, allow moderate density housing options including but not limited to, duplexes, triplexes, and townhouses
 - Begin to undo racially disparate impacts, displacement, and exclusion in housing
 - Identify areas at higher risk of displacement and establish anti-displacement policies
 - Identify land capacity for housing for lower-income households, emergency housing, permanent supportive housing, and duplexes, triplexes, and townhouses

⁶ Revised Code of Washington Chapter 36.70A [\[LINK\]](#)

⁷ House Bill 1220 [\[LINK\]](#)

VISION 2050⁸

The Multicounty Planning Policies in the Puget Sound Regional Council's VISION 2050 plan support coordinated long-range outcomes for the 4-county region (King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap counties). Key multicounty policies related to middle housing are as follows.

- *Expand housing options:*

MPP-H-2 Provide a range of housing types and choices to meet the housing needs of all income levels and demographic groups within the region.

MPP-H-3 Achieve and sustain – through preservation, rehabilitation, and new development – a sufficient supply of housing to meet the needs of low-income, moderate-income, middle-income, and special needs individuals and households that is equitably and rationally distributed throughout the region.

MPP-H-9 Expand housing capacity for moderate density housing to bridge the gap between single-family and more intensive multifamily development and provide opportunities for more affordable ownership and rental housing that allows more people to live in neighborhoods across the region.

H-Action-7 Housing Choice: Counties and cities will update regulations and strategies to reduce barriers to the development and preservation of moderate density housing to address the need for housing between single-family and more intensive multifamily development, consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy.

- *Reduce cost barriers to housing affordability:*

MPP-H-10 Encourage jurisdictions to review and streamline development standards and regulations to advance their public benefit, provide flexibility, and minimize additional costs to housing.

H-Action-8 Housing Production: Counties and cities will review and amend, where appropriate and consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy, development standards and regulations to reduce barriers to the development of housing by providing flexibility and minimizing additional costs.

2021 King County Countywide Planning Policies, as amended⁹

The Countywide Planning Policies provide a framework for the County and its 39 cities on how to locally advance shared countywide planning goals. Key countywide policies related to middle housing are as follows.

- *Racial exclusion and discrimination:*

H-6 Document the local history of racially exclusive and discriminatory land use and housing practices, consistent with local and regional fair housing reports and other resources. Explain the extent to which that history is still reflected in current development patterns, housing conditions, tenure, and access to opportunity. Identify local policies and regulations that result in racially disparate impacts, displacement, and

⁸ VISION 2050 [\[LINK\]](#)

⁹ King County Countywide Planning Policies [\[LINK\]](#)

exclusion in housing, including zoning that may have a discriminatory effect, disinvestment, and infrastructure availability. Demonstrate how current strategies are addressing impacts of those racially exclusive and discriminatory policies and practices.

- *Implement policies and strategies to meet housing needs equitably:*
H-10 Adopt intentional, targeted actions that repair harms to Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color households from past and current racially exclusive and discriminatory land use and housing practices (generally identified through Policy H-6). Promote equitable outcomes in partnership with communities most impacted.

- *Identify sufficient land capacity for a variety of housing types:*
H-12 Identify sufficient capacity of land for housing including, but not limited to income-restricted housing; housing for moderate-, low-, very low-, and extremely low-income households; manufactured housing; multifamily housing; group homes; foster care facilities; emergency housing; emergency shelters; permanent supportive housing; and within an urban growth area boundary, duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes.

- *Reduce cost barriers to housing affordability:*
H-13 Implement strategies to overcome cost barriers to housing affordability. Strategies to do this vary but can include updating development standards and regulations, shortening permit timelines, implementing online permitting, optimizing residential densities, reducing parking requirements, and developing programs, policies, partnerships, and incentives to decrease costs to build and preserve affordable housing.

- *Expand housing options:*
H-18 Adopt inclusive planning tools and policies whose purpose is to increase the ability of all residents in jurisdictions throughout the county to live in the neighborhood of their choice, reduce disparities in access to opportunity areas, and meet the needs of the region’s current and future residents.
 - ...
 - b. Expanding capacity for moderate-density housing throughout the jurisdiction, especially in areas currently zoned for lower density single-family detached housing in the Urban Growth Area, and capacity for high-density housing, where appropriate, consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy;
 - ...
 - d. Providing access to housing types that serve a range of household sizes, types, and incomes, including 2+ bedroom homes for families with children and/or adult roommates and accessory dwelling units, efficiency studios, and/or congregate residences for single adults.

2016 King County Comprehensive Plan, as amended

The Comprehensive Plan guides how growth and development in unincorporated King County will occur over the next 20 years, consistent with the state, regional, and countywide planning framework. The land use and housing elements of the Comprehensive Plan in particular impact housing need, availability, location, and affordability in unincorporated communities. Key policies related to middle housing are as follows.

- *Variety of housing types, cost-ranges, and densities:*
U-118 New residential development in the Urban Growth Area should occur where facilities and services can be provided at the lowest public cost and in a timely fashion. The Urban Growth Area should have a variety of housing types and prices, including mobile home parks, multifamily development, townhouses and small-lot, single-family development.

U-119 King County shall seek to achieve through future planning efforts, over the next 20 years, including collaborative efforts with cities, an average zoning density of at least eight homes per acre in the Urban Growth Area through a mix of densities and housing types. A lower density zone may be used to recognize existing subdivisions with little or no opportunity for infill or redevelopment.
- *Integration of compatible multifamily in residential areas:*
U-121 New multifamily housing should be built to the scale and design of the existing community or neighborhood, while contributing to an area-wide density and development pattern that supports transit and allows for a range of housing choices. Multifamily housing in unincorporated urban areas should be sited as follows:
 - a. In or next to unincorporated activity centers or next to community or neighborhood business centers;
 - b. In mixed-use developments in centers and activity areas; and
 - c. On small, scattered parcels integrated into existing urban residential areas.
 Over time, zoning should encourage a larger proportion of multifamily housing to be located on small scattered sites rather than on larger sites.
- *Allow range of housing types in all residential zones:*
U-134 Single-family detached homes, townhomes, duplexes and apartments shall be allowed in all urban residential zones, provided that:
 - a. Apartments shall not be allowed in the R-1 zone unless 50% or more of the site is environmentally constrained; and
 - b. Apartments in R-1, R-4, R-6 and R-8 shall not be developed at densities in excess of 18 units per acre in the net buildable area.
- *Higher-density, affordable housing in Rural Towns:*
R-506 Rural Towns may contain higher-density housing than permitted in the surrounding Rural Area, and should provide affordable and resource-worker housing if utilities and other services permit. Development density in Rural Towns may approach that achieved in Cities in the Rural Area.
- *Multifamily housing in Rural Towns:*
R-507 Rural Towns serve as activity centers for the Rural Area and Natural Resource Lands and may be served by a range of utilities and services, and may include several or all of the following land uses, if supported by necessary utilities and other services and if scaled and designed to protect rural character:
 - a. Retail, commercial, and industrial uses to serve the surrounding Rural Area and Natural Resource Lands population;
 - b. Residential development, including single-family housing on small lots as well as multifamily housing and mixed-use developments;
 - c. Other retail, commercial, and industrial uses, such as resource industries, tourism, commercial recreation, and light industry; and

- d. Public facilities and services such as community services, churches, schools, and fire stations.

2. Middle Housing Types, Current Zoning Regulations, and Barriers

This subsection provides a review of middle housing typologies and whether they are compatible in King County's R-1 through R-12 zones; a review of development standards that affect the location, siting, and development of middle housing types in the R-1 through R-12 zones; and identification of regulatory barriers to developing those housing types.

Note that housing developments are subject to the base density requirement for the zone. For instance, the R-1 zone sets a base density of 1 dwelling unit per acre (although there is no required minimum density); the R-4 zone sets a base density of 4 dwelling units per acre; the R-6 zone sets a base density of 6 dwelling units per acre; the R-8 zone sets a base density of 8 units per acre; and the R-12 zone sets a base density of 12 dwelling units per acre. A minimum density requirement in the R-4 through R-12 zones must also be met, unless specific criteria are met.¹⁰ This context helps inform the range of housing types appropriate for each zone.

¹⁰ K.C.C. 21A.12.060

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
Duplex	2 dwelling units, either side-by-side (next to each other with a shared wall) or stacked (1 on the ground floor and another on top of it)	Yes	Yes, treated as 2-unit apartment or townhouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apartments are permitted outright in the R-1 zone if there are certain critical area constraints and if the density is 18 dwelling units or less per acre of net buildable area¹² • Apartments are permitted outright in the R-4 to R-8 zones if the density is 18 dwelling units or less per acre of next buildable area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowed densities are low • CUP permitting process is lengthy and expensive • No regulations specifically apply to smaller scale multifamily residential development (i.e., middle housing); applying the same regulations as a midrise apartment building can be a disincentive
Triplex	3 dwelling units, typically stacked on top of each other	Yes	Yes, treated as 3-unit apartment or townhouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conditional Use Permit (CUP) is required in the R-1 to R-8 zones if the apartment or townhouse proposal exceeds base density for the zone in which it is proposed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived cost inefficiencies for middle housing (rather than midrise apartments)
Fourplex	Typically, 2 dwelling units on the ground floor and two units stacked on top of them	Yes	Yes, treated as 4-unit apartment or townhouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A CUP is also required in the R-1 to R-8 zones for townhouses if there is more than one dwelling on individual lots, except: on lots in subdivisions, short subdivisions, or binding site plans approved for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No design or dimensional differentiation between apartment/ townhouse and duplex/ triplex/ fourplex/ multiplex
Multiplex	5 to 12 dwelling units, typically stacked on top of each other (also known as mansion apartments)	Yes	Yes, treated as 5- to 12-unit apartment or townhouse		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only focuses on lot size and building setbacks, rather than building size and scale
Townhouse	2 or more multistory dwelling units, side-by-side with shared walls	Yes	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking space requirements are high

¹¹ Parolek, D., & Nelson, A.C. (2020). *Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Building Small to Respond to Today's Housing Crisis*. Island Press.

¹² See "net buildable area" definition in K.C.C. 21A.06.797

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
Courtyard Building	Multiple attached side-by-side or stacked dwelling units oriented around a courtyard(s)	Yes	Yes, treated as apartment	multiple unit lots, or for accessory dwelling units. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apartments and townhouses are permitted outright in the R-12 zone • Minimum lot width of the R-1 zone is 35 feet; for the R-4 to R-12 zones, minimum lot width is 30 feet • Minimum street setback of the R-1 zone is 20 feet; for the R-4 to R-12 zones, the setback is 10 feet • Minimum interior setback of the R-1 to R-12 zones is 5 feet • Base height of the R-1 to R-8 zones is 35 feet; for the R-12 zone, base height is 60 feet • Building heights can go up to 75 feet when additional setbacks are provided • Maximum impervious surface area of the R-1 zone is 30%; the R-4 zone is 55%; the R-6 zone is 70%; the R-8 zone is 75%; and the R-12 zone is 85% • In the R-1 to R-8 zones, a building that contains a 	

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
				<p>grouping of attached townhouse units must not exceed a 200-foot maximum length without a separation of at least 10 feet from other groupings or rows of townhouses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apartments exceeding 4 units and townhouse development must have parking areas at the rear of buildings with primary vehicular access via the alley; when alley access is provided, no additional driveway access from the public street is allowed except as necessary to access parking under the structure or for fire protection; and when the number of uncovered common parking spaces for attached dwellings and group residences exceed 30 spaces and when there is alley access, no more than 50% of these uncovered parking spaces must be between the street property line and any 	

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
				<p>building, except when authorized by the director due to physical site limitations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apartment and townhouse developments must provide building facade modulation on facades exceeding 60 feet and facing abutting streets or facing properties zoned R-1 to R-4. • Residential developments of more than 4 units in the R-4 to R-12 zones must provide recreation space • Apartments developed on common property at a density of 12 or more units per acre must provide landscaping • Townhouse developments require 2 parking spaces per unit • Studio units require 1.2 parking spaces per unit; 1 bedroom units require 1.5 parking spaces per unit; 2 bedroom units require 1.7 parking spaces per unit; and 3 bedroom units or 	

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
				larger require 2 parking spaces per unit	
Cottage Houses	Cluster of small homes that are typically detached and oriented around a shared common open space (also known as cottage courts)	Yes	Yes, only in the R-4 through R-8 zones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A minimum of 3 units are required • If the site contains an existing home that is not being demolished, the existing house is not required to comply with height, floor area, or footprint limits • Developments should consider including a variety of housing sizes, such as units with a range of bedroom sizes or total floor area • The applicant must hold a community meeting¹³ before filing an application with the department • The total area of the common open space must be at least 250 square feet per unit and at least 50% of the units must be clustered around the common space. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cottage housing regulations were evaluated under a separate code study that was prepared as part of the 2020 Update to 2016 Comprehensive Plan.¹⁴ The code was amended at that time based on the recommendations from the code study. No additional barriers have been identified at this time.

¹³ Subject to K.C.C. 20.20.035

¹⁴ Code Study 2 : Cottage Housing Regulations [\[LINK\]](#)

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total floor area of each unit, except for 250 square feet of any enclosed parking, is limited to 1,200 square feet. The footprint of each unit, including any enclosed parking, is limited to 900 square feet. A front or wraparound porch of up to 100 square feet is allowed and is not included in the floor area or footprint calculation. • Fences within the cottage housing unit development are limited to 3 feet in height. Fences along the perimeter of the cottage housing development are limited to 6 feet. • Individual cottage housing units must be at least 10 feet apart. • Each dwelling unit that abuts common open space must have either a primary entry or a covered porch, or both, oriented to the common open space. 	

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each dwelling unit within 40 feet of a public right-of-way, not including alleys, must have a facade oriented to the public right-of-way that includes a porch, an entrance or a bay window that projects a minimum of 6 inches and is a minimum of 4 feet in width. If a dwelling unit is within 40 feet of more than one public right-of-way, the County must determine which right-of-way towards which the facade elements shall be oriented. Materials used on this facade shall wrap the corners of the unit. • Minimum lot width is 30 feet • Minimum street setback is 10 feet • Minimum interior setback is 5 feet • Base height is 25 feet. Buildings that have pitched roofs with a minimum slope of 6 over 12 may achieve a 	

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
				maximum height of 30 feet at the ridge of the roof <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum impervious surface area of the R-4 zone is 55%; the R-6 zone is 70%; and the R-8 zone is 75% • Cottage housing developments require 1 parking space per unit. 	
Live-work Building	Multiple attached dwelling units that each include a separate flex space for non-residential uses, often for a small business use by the owner/renter, an art studio, or renting to another business for income generation (also known as flexhouses)	Yes, only as home occupation	Yes, only as home occupation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings in which both a commercial use and residential use exist in the same building can be achieved by utilizing “mixed-use” or “home occupation” provisions in the existing code. Live-work building could be allowed as a “Mixed-use” development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mixed use developments are not allowed in the R-1 to R-12 zones ○ They are allowed in NB (Neighborhood Business), CB (Community Business), RB (Reginal Business), and I (Industrial) zones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing code does not define or set standards for a “live-work building” • Existing policies (such as Comprehensive Plan Policy U-129) focus support for mixed-use development in commercial areas or higher density residential areas, such as the R-12 zone or above. There are currently no adopted policies supporting commercial uses in R-1 through R-8 zones • The adopted purpose of the R-1 to R-8 zones in K.C.C. 21A.04.080 does not include mixed-use developments.

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Home occupation” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The total floor area of the dwelling unit devoted to all home occupations must not exceed 20% of the floor area of the dwelling unit ○ Areas within garages and storage buildings must not be considered part of the dwelling unit calculation and may be used for activities associated with the home occupation ○ All the activities of the home occupation or occupations must be conducted indoors, except for those related to growing or storing of plants used by the home occupation or occupations ○ A home occupation or occupations is not limited in the number of employees that remain off-site. No more than one nonresident employee may work on- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building code standards are more extensive for commercial construction than residential; including a commercial component of a building could increase regulatory requirements if size thresholds are exceeded.

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
				<p>site for the home occupation or occupations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sales are limited and certain business that tend to be incompatible with the residential characteristics are not allowed ○ In addition to required parking for the dwelling unit, on-site parking is provided as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1 stall for each nonresident employed by the home occupations; and 2. 1 stall for patrons when services are rendered on-site; ○ On-site services to patrons must be arranged by appointment ○ Distribution of products from the site and/or parking a vehicle used for picking up materials for the home occupation is allowed only if: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No more than 1 such 	

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
				<p>vehicle is allowed; and</p> <p>2. The vehicle is not stored within any required setback areas of the lot or on adjacent streets; and 3. The vehicle does not exceed an equivalent licensed gross vehicle weight of 1 ton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The home occupation or occupations cannot: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use electrical or mechanical equipment that results in a change to the occupancy type of the structure or structures used for the home occupation or occupations; or 2. Cause visual or audible interference in radio or television receivers, or electronic equipment located off-premises or fluctuations in line voltage off-premises ○ There shall be no exterior evidence of a home occupation, other 	

	Description ¹¹	Compatible with King County R-1 to R-12 zones?	Currently Allowed in R-1 to R-12 zones?	Development Standards	Regulatory Barriers
				<p>than growing or storing of plants or a permitted sign, that would cause the premises to differ from its residential character. Exterior evidence includes, but is not limited to: lighting, the generation or emission of noise, fumes or vibrations as determined by using normal senses from any lot line or on average increase vehicular traffic by more than four additional vehicles at any given time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Customer visits and deliveries must be limited to the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on weekdays, and 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekends 	

3. Recommendations

This subsection outlines recommendations to expand middle housing types, including recommended code changes in the 2024 Update.

To help expand the range of housing options available at various income levels as required by state law, the Executive is recommending regulatory changes to support and incentivize the development of middle housing in low- and medium-density urban residential zones. Specifically, it is recommended to allow outright duplex, triplex, and fourplex multifamily developments in all residential zones in unincorporated King County. These housing types are already permitted outright in the R-12 to R-48 zones; this change would also make them permitted outright in the R-1 to R-8 zones. It is also recommended to limit the size and scale of the buildings to support compatible development with existing neighborhoods, to facilitate the inclusion of multiple units on smaller sites, and to improve affordability. To further support increased housing development and supply, it is also recommended to streamline permitting requirements for apartments and townhouses, multiplexes and courtyard buildings. The table below provides a summary of these recommendations, which are reflected in the Executive-recommended draft of the 2024 Update.

It is not recommended to change cottage housing regulations at this time, as these regulations were recently reviewed and updated in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan Update. Additionally, no changes to live-work buildings are recommended at this time, because it is not appropriate at this stage to allow more commercial businesses in the R-1 through R-12 zone.

Recommended Change	Affected existing King County Code	Intent/Rationale
1. Add new definitions of duplex, triplex, and fourplex	K.C.C. Chapter 21A.06 Technical Terms and Land Use Definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifies the “middle” form and scale between single-detached homes and mid- or high-rise multifamily buildings • Differentiates duplex, triplex and fourplex from townhouse or apartment development. These middle housing types are currently allowed, but they are subject to the same standards as large multifamily developments, which can be cost prohibitive and a barrier to construction. Regulating these middle housing types separately will allow for streamlined permitting and other regulatory flexibilities to incentivize their construction. • Creates more naturally affordable ownership and rental housings than newly constructed single-detached homes • Adding additional housing units and types of housing choices to the housing stock should help increase access to more affordable housing options

Recommended Change	Affected existing King County Code	Intent/Rationale
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This type of housing will encourage multigenerational housing in separate living units but on one site. Increasingly, multi-cultural society is leading to more interest in multi-generational living. A need for multigenerational housing was expressed during the community engagement processes for the Skyway-West Hill and North Highline Anti-Displacement Strategies Report¹⁵ • Most unincorporated area properties are zoned to outright allow single detached homes. However, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families have not had an equal opportunity to purchase single-detached homes. This proposed change could increase the supply of and access to additional housing options for underrepresented communities • The County regularly receives requests to add units on a property with a single-detached home. This is often in the context of housing family members. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) have a size limitation and might be too small for large families. These additional housing options could help address that interest. • Delaying implementing middle housing types would present a lost opportunity, as the trend is to demolish smaller homes and redevelop with large expensive single-detached homes • K.C.C. Chapter 21A.34 Code study (Code Study 1: Residential Density Incentive Program¹⁶) states “...as the vast majority of the urban unincorporated areas of King County are zoned R-4 to R-8, strengthening the incentives that are feasible in these zones would expand new affordable housing options into more areas than the relatively small areas zoned for higher density...Smaller developers are less likely to have the capacity to

¹⁵ Skyway-West Hill and North Highline Anti-Displacement Strategies Report [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁶ Residential Density Incentive Code Study [\[LINK\]](#)

Recommended Change	Affected existing King County Code	Intent/Rationale
		navigate a complex policy or understanding the regulatory requirements that are associated with income-restrictive units...”
2. Revise definition of apartment	K.C.C. 21A.06.355 Dwelling unit, apartment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiates duplex, triplex and fourplex from apartment development. This allows middle housing types to have regulatory flexibilities distinct from apartments.
3. Remove CUP requirement and outright allow duplex, triplex and fourplex throughout the R-1 to R-48 zones (including Rural Towns), with restrictions for the R-1 zone to match current regulations	K.C.C. 21A.08.030 Residential land uses and 21A.12.030 Residential zone densities and dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlines permitting process to incentivize middle housing types • Offers alternatives to apartment living and options for housing that are less dense than mid-rise apartments and denser than single-detached homes • Supports Comprehensive Plan policies that call for a wide range of housing types available at various income levels • Maintains existing development conditions for R-1 zoned properties (typically urban separators),¹⁷ consistent with Comprehensive Plan Policy U-134.
4. Allow outright a duplex on a R-4 to R-8 zoned lot that is 4,500 square feet or greater but less than the minimum lot size needed to achieve 2 dwelling units, if using a Transfer of Development Rights	K.C.C. 21A.08.030.B Residential land uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivizes middle housing types • Provides property owners of small lots with R-4 to R-8 zoning that could otherwise only build one single-detached home the option of building either 1) a single-detached home with a detached ADU (current allowance) or 2) a duplex
5. Allow outright townhouses in the R-1 to R-8 zones through subdivision/short subdivision process	K.C.C. 21A.08.030.B Residential land uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removes zoning barrier • The current code requires a CUP in the R-1 to R-8 zones before approving more than one dwelling on individual lots, except on lots in subdivisions, short subdivisions, or binding site plans approved for multiple unit lots. The intent is to eliminate the CUP permitting process and allow townhouse

¹⁷ Per Comprehensive Plan Glossary: "Urban separators are areas planned for permanent low residential density within the Urban Growth Area. Urban separators protect adjacent resource land, environmentally sensitive areas, or Rural Areas and create open space corridors within and between urban areas which provide environmental, visual, recreations and wildlife benefits."

Recommended Change	Affected existing King County Code	Intent/Rationale
		development in the R-1 to R-8 zones only through the platting process. This will create a clear and supportive entitlement process for future townhouse development projects
6. Allow outright apartments in the R-1 to R-8 zones if density allows	K.C.C. 21A.08.030.B Residential land uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removes zoning barrier • The current zoning requires a CUP in the R-1 to R-8 zones if the proposal exceeds base density for the zone in which it is proposed. The intent is to eliminate the CUP process for proposals exceeding base density.
7. Prohibit ADUs for duplex, triplex, or fourplex developments	K.C.C. 21A.08.030.B Residential land uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing code allows one ADU per primary single detached home on a lot that is 3,200 square feet or greater in an urban area or Rural Town. This could result in a duplex containing 4 dwelling units (2 primary, 2 ADUs); a triplex containing 6 dwelling units (3 primary, 3 ADUs); or a fourplex containing 8 dwelling units (4 primary, 4 ADUs) • Differentiates duplex, triplex and fourplex from ADU proposals
8. Add 150% density bonus density bonus for duplex, triplex, fourplex, or townhouse developments with 9 or fewer units and when located within a ½ mile of high-capacity or frequent transit	K.C.C. Chapter 21A.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In response to Equity Work Group input • Further encourages development of middle housing • Aligns with Countywide Planning Policies and Comprehensive Plan polices about focusing development near transit • Limited to 150% bonus and 9 or fewer units so as to not overly compete with proposed expanded Inclusionary Housing program • Creates opportunity for those unable to afford purchasing Transfer of Development Rights under the proposed expanded Inclusionary Housing program
9. Limit building height to 35 feet for duplexes, triplexes, or fourplexes throughout the R-1 to R-12 zones	K.C.C. 21A.12.030 Densities and dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures large houses, out of scale with existing neighborhoods, are not constructed • Allows for duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes in a way that will not result in out-of-scale buildings
10. Adjust other design standards,	K.C.C. Chapter 21A.16 Landscaping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivizes middle housing types

Recommended Change	Affected existing King County Code	Intent/Rationale
such as landscaping requirements and on-site recreation space requirements	K.C.C. 21A.14.180 On-site recreation – space required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates flexibility in design for smaller scale middle housing projects
11. Reduce minimum parking space to 1 per dwelling unit in form of duplexes, triplexes, or fourplexes	K.C.C. Chapter 21A.18 Development Standards – Parking and Circulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivizes middle housing types • Off-street parking requirements have a tremendous impact on the financial and physical feasibility of middle housing¹⁸

¹⁸ The book “Missing Middle Housing” states: “If the parking space requirement is not being reduced, then these housing types probably will not be enabled effectively. Consider that, at a minimum, a wood constructed garage adds approximately \$15,000 to \$20,000 to the cost of a unit, which can easily put the price out of reach for many buyers.” If the County requires more than 1 off-street parking space for each dwelling unit, it is likely that it is not enabling middle housing.