Atlanta City Design Housing

A look into how housing policy shaped Atlanta's design, how that design impacts the city's residents, and ways to design it for everyone.

A Project of the City of Atlanta's Department of City Planning | February 22, 2021

The Journey to One Atlanta
By the Numbers
A Brief History of Land-Use
A Better Future, Together

The design of a city can either foster inclusion or exclusion.

The design of a city can uplift communities and provide opportunity for all of its residents, or it can be built to ensure that some residents reap the economic benefits of a city while others are excluded from that economy. The history of a city, its problems, and its potential future can often be understood by observing the physical ways a city is designed: where its jobs are located, how its **transit** infrastructure has been built, the location of **healthcare centers**, the siting of **highways** and **stadiums**, and the type of **housing options** that exist. These physical markers tell a story about what a city values and about the ways a city has been designed for inclusion or exclusion.

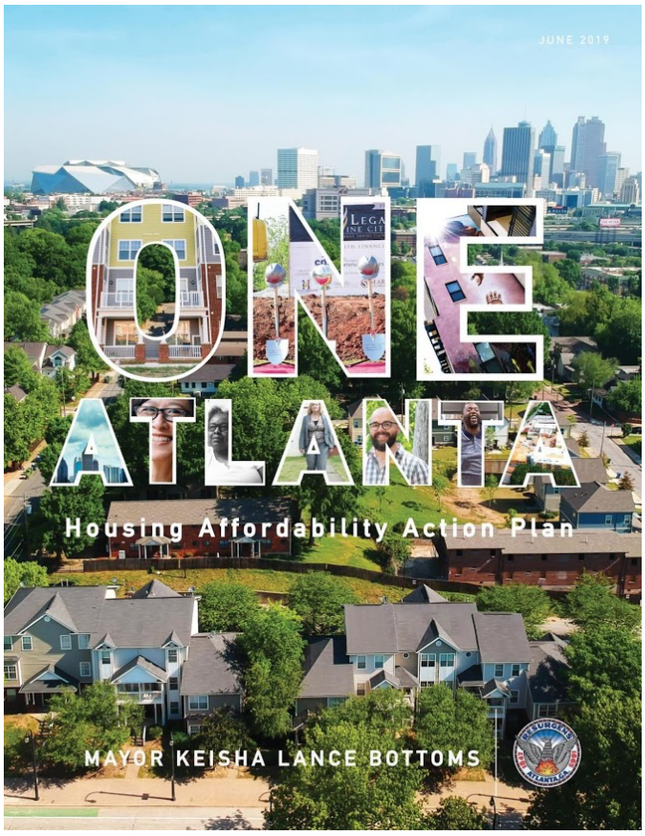
Perhaps no other design element carries more weight for an individual than housing. Housing is a critical element of a person's life. It impacts everything from travel time and commute options for work to a person's ability to quickly and easily access fresh food. Any city that aims at creating a more equitable, inclusive, and resilient place to live must start with examining how its housing and land-use policies mitigate or exacerbate social and economic inequalities. Atlanta City Design Housing is an exploration of how housing in Atlanta might be reimagined to work better for everyone that wants to call Atlanta home.

Small apartment buildings like this one in Midtown were once a dominant housing type in the city before decades of downzoning slowly pushed them to the margins of Atlanta's housing ecosystem.

The journey to One Atlanta

When Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms started her term in office in 2018, she unveiled a bold vision for the future of Atlanta. The Mayor announced the creation of the first ever One Atlanta office to lead the City's efforts in "working towards a more affordable, resilient and equitable city."

The vision of One Atlanta is rooted in the idea that cities are not predisposed to equity, affordability, and resilience, they have to be built by design to foster these ideals. Most fundamental of all elements of city design is how a city houses its residents, particularly its most vulnerable residents. **That's why the Bottoms administration focused on housing as a top priority from day one.**



Click here for the full Housing Affordability Action Plan

Mayor Bottoms' 2019 One Atlanta Housing Affordability Action Plan highlighted the role of effective and impactful decision making and policies city in ensuring long-term housing affordability in Atlanta.

The plan looks critically at the ways Atlanta has been designed, the ways that design has perpetuated race and class segregation in implicit and explicit ways, and proposes bold action to ensure that Atlanta's future is inclusive for everyone. The plan sets a goal to create or preserve 20,000 affordable housing units in the Atlanta by 2026. Achieving such an ambitious goal will require a comprehensive approach to housing, bringing together philanthropy, incentives, housing innovation, and improved land-use and design to allow growth to be an asset to the residents of Atlanta. Progress toward accomplishing the goal of creating and preserving housing for residents across income levels is what the journey to One Atlanta is about.

The plan calls for bold zoning reform to allow more affordable housing types and stronger neighborhoods to address issues of inequality exacerbated by the City's zoning code.

Zoning has long been used as a way to exclude and to segregate communities, and Atlanta is no exception. Zoning reform is needed to allow the city to rectify the exclusionary practices of its past (and present) and allow for different housing types and local economies to thrive throughout the city.------This housing affordability action plan requires us to think critically about how to improve the production and accessibility of housing in Atlanta by addressing an outdated zoning code that was designed for exclusion. The plan calls for the expansion of affordable housing types throughout the city, from adding additional housing units on single-family properties to adding new affordable housing near transit. It directly addresses the ways that affordable housing types have continued to be limited by Atlanta's zoning code.

That brings us to *The Atlanta City Design*.

In 2017, the City of Atlanta adopted ***The Atlanta City Design*** into the City's charter. *The Atlanta City Design* looks critically at the city's history and charts a vision for the city's future, focusing on the ways that planning and design can help us achieve the Beloved Community. The residents of Atlanta are the central figure in *The Atlanta City Design*, something that is often conspicuously missing from most planning documents. The central goal of the work is to create a better Atlanta, together.

The Atlanta City Design is based on two core premises about Atlanta and our future:

> *"The first premise of the Atlanta City Design is that the city is going to change; that not changing is not an option; that our change will involve significant growth; and that if properly designed, growth can be a powerful tool for shaping the Atlanta we want to become"* ***- The Atlanta City Design***

> *"The second premise is that almost always, more people are better than fewer; that a diverse population is better than a homogeneous one; and that the most strategic scenario for growth includes everyone."* ***- The Atlanta City Design***

Check out full The Atlanta City Design and our latest projects here:

The vision of *The Atlanta City Design* is fundamental to the work of **Atlanta City**

Design Housing. Drawing from *City Design, t*his project spends a good deal of time talking about design and the impact of design on a city's residents. We use the term design broadly throughout and refer to many things as products of design. We believe that cities take shape through a broad collection of actors using a variety of design tools. The design tools range from financial to architectural to legislative. They impact the safety of a pedestrian at an intersection and the access to good jobs and education for a young family. This project attempts to view all of the ways that various actors designed Atlanta through their wide-ranging tools and how those design decisions still impact Atlanta today.

In this project, we zoom in on one aspect of city design: housing. Housing is an integral part of life and its often an aspect of cities that has been overtly impacted by government policies and land-use decisions that have long lasting implications. This project takes a deep dive into the history of zoning policy in Atlanta, its impact on housing in Atlanta, and what we might be able to do to make housing work better for all Atlantans moving forward.

By the Numbers

For the last decade Atlanta has been growing... a lot.

The City of Atlanta is at a new peak in the residential population and surpassed **500,000 residents** in 2019. New residents and new money are pouring into Atlanta. In 2019, the city saw an increase of about 9,000 residents and median household incomes have risen by over 35% since 2010. This continues a decade long trend of growth. Since 2010, the city has increased in population every year totaling about 85,000 new residents. However, in past decades Atlanta has had a much smaller population and actually had a declining population from 1970 to 1990.

Thousands of new housing units have been built over the last several years, with over 7,500 permitted in

2019 alone.

Multi-Family developments like this one in Midtown are popping up throughout the city. Photo from Atlanta City Design

This level of growth is only expected to continue.

The Atlanta Regional Commission projects that the metro Atlanta region will grow by **2.9 million**, ballooning to a metro population near 9 million by 2050. Atlanta currently has a population of just over 500,000, but *The Atlanta City Design* estimates suggest that Atlanta could more than double in size in the next few decades to 1,200,000. This will put significant pressure on the city unless we embrace growth by designing for it.

Source: The Atlanta City Design

Continued growth can allow Atlanta to become a more equitable, inclusive, and accessible city to live in.

The recent population growth has brought new jobs to the city, generated funding for improved transportation, and allowed for more businesses and other amenities to open in neighborhoods throughout the city. Higher density neighborhoods can create the economic conditions necessary for small neighborhood businesses to thrive. It can also increase the amount of resources available at the neighborhood level, creating conditions for greater walkability and improved access.

Growth can allow for improved transit and more frequent local bus service.

A new bus shelter in Cascade Heights

And an increase in local resources like neighborhood grocery stores.

Westview Corner Grocery. Source: ThreadATL

But this level of growth without good design can also cause problems, particularly for the city's residents most vulnerable to displacement.

While growth can bring renewed energy to a city, it can also serve as a key contributor to community disruption and displacement. Significant growth often raises the cost of housing rapidly to levels that could cause long-time residents (and other residents of lower economic means) to struggle to stay in their homes.

In 2018, the City of Atlanta conducted an Equitable Housing Needs Assessment to better understand the state of housing affordability in Atlanta.

During the Summer of 2018, the City of Atlanta worked with HR&A to provide critical analysis on Atlanta's affordable housing situation and listen to the residents of Atlanta about the housing challenges they were facing. The report revealed that Atlanta has significant need for more affordable housing stock across income levels and provided insight into the city's growing economic inequalities. The analysis also highlighted the need for a more comprehensive approach to housing policy in Atlanta. You can find the full report here.

From one of the community engagement sessions in 2018.

From 2010-2018, Atlanta added just over 21,000 new households, the majority of which were moderate or high income.

During the 2010s, Atlanta continued to add residents across income levels, but higher income households outpaced those earning less than $45k/year. 3 out of every 4 new households in Atlanta from 2010-2018 earned above $45k.year.

In 2010, households earning below $45k per year accounted for **~45%** of Atlanta households. **In 2018, households earning below $45k per year made up ~42% of all Atlanta households**. In order to avoid being cost-burdened, a household would need to earn approximately $45k/year to afford a rent of $1,000/month. So, while Atlanta is still adding new households earning below $45k per year, these lower income households comprised a smaller share of the city's population in 2018. Households earning under $45k/yr need housing options that cost $1000/month or less to avoid being cost-burdened. In Atlanta, 4 in 10 households earn less than $45k/yr.

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It is important to note that many households that fall below the $45k/year threshold earn far less. For example, in 2018 about 26% of households in Atlanta earned less than $25k/year. Most of these households cannot afford a $1,000/month apartment without becoming cost-burdened. The substantial share of Atlantans with extremely low-incomes makes it difficult to supply naturally affordable or subsidized housing in the quantity and at the price point needed.

During that time, Atlanta produced 4 times as many new housing units priced above $1,000/month than below.

From 2010-2018, 17,513 new housing units were added in the City of Atlanta. Of those, only 3,301 were priced under $1,000/month. Most of the new housing production in the city is not addressing the need for affordable housing options for households earning less than $45k/yr.

Source: US Census

That's only about 57% of the units needed at <$1,000/month to keep up with the population growth.

There were 5,725 new households at or below $45k/yr added in Atlanta from 2010-2018, but only 3,301 new housing units produced at price points those households could afford. **That's a deficit of nearly 2,500 units over the last eight years.** The demand for housing units priced below $1000/month has been significantly outpacing the supply of these types of housing units in Atlanta for most of the last decade.

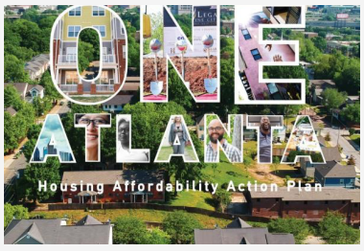
But there has been progress since 2018.

After Mayor Bottoms took office in 2018, she appointed Terri Lee as the City's first ever Chief Housing Officer to help accomplish her goal of 20,000 affordable housing units by 2026. During the year since the plan was released, a broad group of public agencies including Invest Atlanta, the Atlanta BeltLine Inc., the Land Bank Authority, and Atlanta Housing have come together to begin implementing the Housing Affordability Action Plan mentioned above. Progress made in creating new affordable housing options over the last two years is being tracked on this affordable housing Pipeline Tracker:

Housing Affordability Tracker

The Atlanta Housing Affordability Tracker provides a snapshot of progress made in reaching the goals of (1)... creating or preserving 20,000 affordable homes by 2026

https://www.atlantaga.gov



Projects like Adair Court that opened in 2019 have added much needed affordable housing options.

New affordable housing is being added every year in Atlanta through public subsidy programs and regulatory measures. These efforts make the development of new housing opportunities like Adair Court possible. Opening in 2019, Adair Court added nearly 80 new affordable housing units for elderly adults in the Adair Park neighborhood. It is likely that without the combination of regulatory requirements and public subsidy that Atlanta would have produced substantially fewer new affordable housing units over the last decade.

Adair Court affordable senior housing opened in 2019. Photo: Atlanta BeltLine

And this progress is important because the increase in high-cost housing units over the last decade in Atlanta is causing many households to spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

Households spending more than 30% of their monthly income on rent are considered rent-burdened. **Nearly 1 in 2 Atlanta renters spend more than 30% of their income on rent.** And households throughout the city earning up between $35k-$75k per year are increasingly spending more than 30% of their household income on housing costs.

Source: US Census Bureau

And this problem is only getting worse. From 2010-2018, Atlanta saw a **16% increase** in households spending more than 30% of their income on rent. There was an increase in rent-burdened households from **45,892** to **53,417** in just eight years

The loss of affordable rental units disproportionately impacts households of color that are less likely to own their home.

Most federal housing subsidies are targeted to incentivize homeownership, with the largest subsidy through the mortgage interest deduction. In contrast, far fewer resources are targeted towards renters, and subsequently fewer benefits accrue from renting than owning. Atlanta has large racial disparities in homeownership that have only grown in recent years. In 2018, 60% of white householders owned homes, whereas only 32% of Black householders owned homes. **Since 2010, Black homeownership has risen by about 4,000 households while white homeownership increased during this time by about 12,000 homeowner households.**

The rising housing costs in Atlanta are putting more and more financial pressure on residents, particularly renters.

In a city that has nearly 1 in 2 renters and 1 in 4 homeowners now spending more than 30% of their household income on rent, it is likely that residents that are the most rent-burdened will increasingly look for more affordable housing options in other cities or in the suburbs. The current pace of affordable housing development is not matching the population growth of residents in need of those housing options.

> The current supply of affordable housing options in Atlanta is not meeting the demand. This is unlikely to change until the city is re-designed to accommodate growth for everyone.

It is vital that Atlanta slow down rapidly rising housing costs in the city and remedy the shortage of affordable housing units available. So, what key contributors that are causing housing costs to rise so fast in Atlanta?

Atlanta has a housing supply problem.

Population growth coupled with inefficient land use is limiting how Atlanta can grow. Much of Atlanta today is locked into restrictive single-family zoning that limits how the city grows. These limited growth areas become pressure points in the supply/demand equation of the housing market. When too few housing opportunities exist for an increasing number or residents, residents with the greatest economic means begin to drive out those with less economic agency.

Housing supply is not keeping up with population growth, creating an inelastic housing supply market.

To have a balanced housing market, the amount of housing units available (supply) should meet the amount of people looking for housing units (demand). An inelastic market is a market where demand exceeds the supply, driving up costs rapidly. In Atlanta, population growth has outpaced the rate of housing unit production creating a housing supply shortage. Atlanta added 3,500 more households than it did new housing units from 2010-2018.

Atlanta's current land-use and residential zoning policies are putting self-imposed pressure on the market.

Home prices are surging and population is nearing an all-time high for Atlanta, in part because the city's current land use policies are inefficient. This inefficiency means that most of the multi-family housing is limited to a very small part of the city while single-family zoning takes up the majority of the city's land.

Source: Department of City Planning GIS

Here's a map showing all of the exclusively single-family properties in the city.

Source: Department of City Planning GIS

And restrictive zoning can often accelerate housing costs.

The Impact of Zoning on Housing Affordability

Does America face an affordable housing crisis and, if so, why? This paper argues that in much of America the...

https://www.nber.org

Limiting so much of the city to single-family zoning drives up the cost of housing during periods of population growth.

The current population surge Atlanta is experiencing is pushing the housing market to the edges of middle-income affordability, primarily because there isn't enough housing to go around. There is a housing supply problem in Atlanta and nearly 60% of the city is zoned for restrictive single-family zoning that limits our ability to add additional density. Population surge without flexible and adaptive design means more people end up fighting over fewer units and drive up the cost of housing.

> In the last decade, Atlanta's median home sale price has risen over 50% from ~$196k to ~$296k.

Increasingly, Atlanta is a city of single-family homes, large apartment buildings and... well, not much else.

As would be expected given that about 60% of Atlanta is single-family zoned, most housing structures in Atlanta have only one unit. However, the next most common housing type, and a type that has been growing, is structures with over 50 units. In contrast, structures with 2-4 units remained quite low from 2010 to 2019. For example, in 2019, there were about 110,000 structures that had one unit, about 76,000 structures that had over 50 units, but only about 15,000 structures with between 2-4 units. This is consistent with the problem of the “missing middle” or when the housing market is bifurcated into either high-density or low-density structures. Structures in the middle, particularly 2-4 unit structures, can provide gentle density and affordability, but are not allowed in single-family zoned areas in Atlanta.

Source: ACS 1-year estimates, 2010-2019.

The lack of housing option variety means less affordable options predominate the market.

While the cost of single-family homes has risen dramatically over the last decade, the main uptick in unit production over the last decade has come through in the way of new large apartment buildings that are costly to construct and often quite costly to rent or buy. Renting a 2-bedroom unit in one of these buildings can often run well over $2000/month, well above the cost-burden threshold for many of the city's residents. Not only does Atlanta have an overall housing supply problem, it also has a housing variety problem.

> *Not only does Atlanta have an overall housing supply problem, it also has a housing variety problem.*

With average home sale prices near $300k and new housing units located primarily in large apartment buildings, Atlanta is not adding enough of its more traditionally affordable housing options like duplexes, basement apartments, and small apartment buildings.

A healthy (and affordable) housing ecosystem needs a variety of housing options.

Atlanta's current zoning code lends itself to the creation of either single-family homes or large apartment buildings. It currently restricts housing types that tend to offer more affordable options. Take the modest **basement apartment**, for example. A basement apartment is a modest and often barely noticeable housing unit. Basement apartment could easily exist in today's single-family neighborhood areas, incorporate seamlessly into the primary structure, and often do so in a way that is barely even noticeable from the street.

Basement apartments are currently limited to the small number of two-family zoned areas of Atlanta like this one in the Old 4th Ward.

The basement apartment is also typically much more affordable than the primary home that it sits in. The basement apartment could provide a more affordable housing option in a neighborhood where the cost to buy a home would make housing accessibility unlikely for many Atlantans. The basement apartment would also allow the homeowner to earn revenue from their basement all while providing an affordable housing option.

So, why don't we see more basement apartments in Atlanta? Basement apartments are not currently allowed in any of the exclusively single-family zoned areas of Atlanta.

Today, Atlanta has a population density of just over 3,500 residents per square mile.

Atlanta's regional population has boomed over the last few decades. The region is now one of the 10 largest metropolitan areas in the country. Metro Atlanta, like many other Sunbelt cities, has swelled in population during the height of car culture. The design of the city has closely followed the region's suburban development pattern, contingent on automobiles for transportation. This has created a city and metro region designed for low-density.

Source: ACS

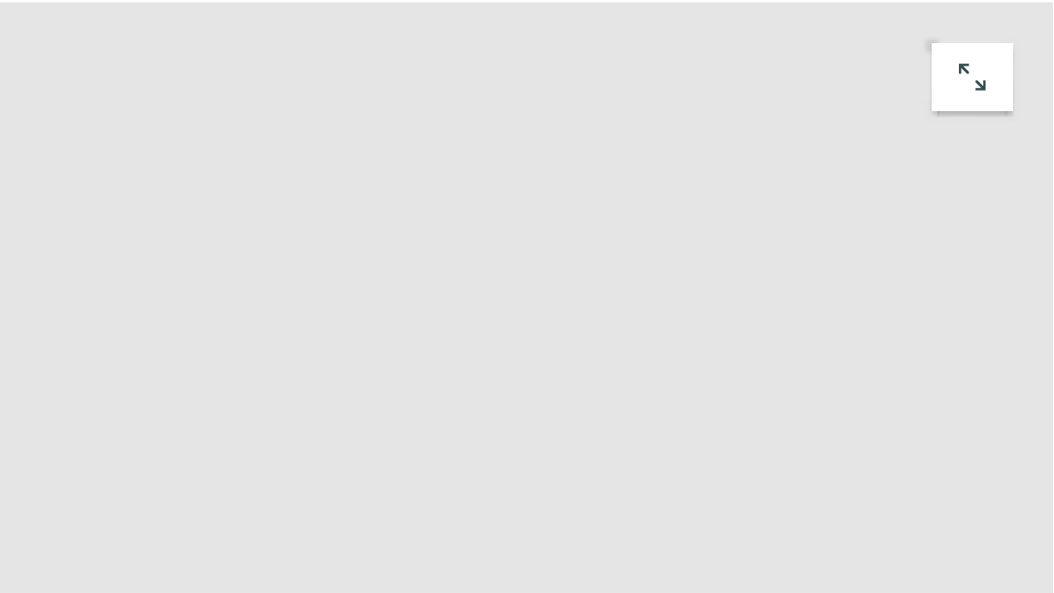
This development pattern has generated much of the dreadful traffic we now see in the region and has forced the housing stock to be continually decentralized and further from key resources like jobs, food, doctors, and schools. Throughout the 20th Century, the City of Atlanta intentionally designed itself as a low density city. This choice drastically reduced the housing options and limited the use of urban land in favor of suburban development patterns. The result: the City of Atlanta is now the 316th densest city in the United States.

That means that all of these American cities are more densely populated than Atlanta...

Source: ACS

Here is a map of all 315 US cities with higher

population densities than Atlanta:



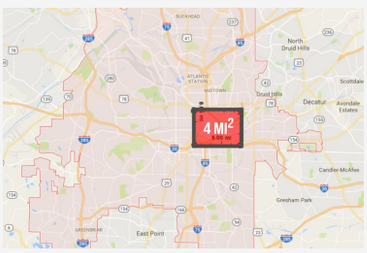
Top 316 US Cities By Population Density (US Census Bureau)

In short, Atlanta isn't a very dense city. Check out this visual comparison of Atlanta to other cities around the world:

Atlanta's population density versus global cit...

Atlanta is known as many things, but dense urban landscape it is not. Want proof? A new series of maps b...

https://atlanta.curbed.com



A brief history of land-use

Atlanta wasn't always like this, so how did we get here?

At one point, the City of Atlanta was a dense, urban place with a comprehensive streetcar system. In 1940, Atlanta was 35.2 square miles and had a total population of 302,288. **Atlanta's 1940 population density was approximately 8,588 people per square mile, nearly 2.5 times as dense as the city was in 2018.**

In 1940, Atlanta was more than twice as dense as it is

today.

Source: US Census Bureau 1940 and 2018 + Department of City Planning (1940 city limits)

Atlanta in 1940 had a density comparable to that of modern-day **Seattle, Baltimore**, and **Los Angeles.** This level of density sustained over 100 miles of trolley lines and gave neighborhood commercial districts the density of residents needed to enable neighborhood economies to thrive.

Atlanta once had the density to support one of the country's largest streetcar networks. This is a photo from the 1920s of two streetcar operators in front of the streetcar that ran along Ponce de Leon Ave.

Prior to 1929, Atlanta did not have restrictive zoning, allowing for urban density and a variety of housing types.

In 1929, Atlanta developed the city's first comprehensive zoning code. It only had four zoning types. Atlanta's first zoning code was built to reflect the city that had developed around the railroad industry in Atlanta. Many of the city's urban

neighborhoods already existed prior to 1929 and informed how the zoning map was designed. It was intended to reflect the city's built environment and inform future development. This was the first time in Atlanta's history where lower-density residential land-use and higher-density residential land-use were separated. **Check out the full 1929 Zoning Ordinance here.**

When the 1929 plan was adopted, although larger apartments and smaller dwellings were separated, there were no exclusively single-family zoned areas in the city.

In 1929, the City of Atlanta had zero parcels zoned exclusively for single-family homes. Much of what are now single-family lots in the older in-town neighborhoods of Atlanta, were more generally zoned in 1929 under the Dwelling House code. The Dwelling House code restricted high-density developments on the properties but allowed for up to two primary dwellings and additional accessory dwellings. This flexibility in the code was needed since many of the buildings that now exist as single-family homes were once 2-3 family dwellings.

Commercial Districts like Carroll St. in Cabbagetown are able to thrive because of the century old density patterns of small lots, duplexes, and small apartment buildings that support the local businesses.

And density is key to developing high access, high resource neighborhoods for residents. The denser a neighborhood is, the easier it is to sustain a local grocery store or transit route. An increase in population density can make all the difference for a community trying to attract a new grocery store or medical center. Many of Atlanta's Main Street districts were developed during this period because the design of the city allowed businesses to thrive at a neighborhood level.

But the 1929 zoning code has a problematic history. Most zoning codes and city plans in the U.S. do.

The 1929 zoning code was the first comprehensive zoning code adopted by the City of Atlanta. Well, it was the first one not overturned by the courts. In 1922, the *Atlanta City Planning Commission* released a zoning plan that was explicitly racist in its zoning, stating in the plan that, "home neighborhoods had to be protected from inappropriate uses, including encroachment of the colored race." The original 1922 code had two residential zoning categories: **"R-1 white district"** and **"R-2 colored district"**. The Georgia Supreme Court rejected this explicitly racist language in the 1922 code based on the 1917 Supreme Court Decision on *Buchanan v. Warley* that banned racial zoning in the U.S. (Rothstein, 2017, p.46).

The 1929 code, in many ways, was quite similar to the 1922 code that was struck down by the courts. The main difference: the racially explicit language was removed.

The 1929 zoning code **changed "R-1 White Districts" to "Dwelling House Districts" and "R-2 Colored Districts" to "Apartment Houses"**. The change meant that zoning could no longer restrict areas of the city based on race, but it did not restrict the ability of cities to design for economic segregation.

City of Atlanta 1929 Zoning Code

Zoning may not have been allowed to use explicitly racial language, but lenders backed by the federal government could.

In the early 1930s, the federal government formed two agencies that economized segregation: the Homeowners Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). These two agencies revolutionized the housing industry by using government-backed mortgages with amortization. This allowed for homebuyers to purchase a loan with 15+ year mortgages and build equity in their home each month allowing a new mechanism of wealth creation for American families.

The FHA and HOLC built intricate systems of qualification and analysis to exclude communities of color from their loan programs. The FHA would only back mortgages in all white communities and often required deed restrictions on properties which mandated the property would not be sold to non-white households in the future (Rothstein, 2017, p.65). The HOLC created maps instructing lenders where to invest and what areas to avoid. Race was considered an acceptable reason to label a neighborhood "Hazardous".

In 1938, the HOLC created a map used to block investment and economically exclude communities of color. This practice is often called redlining.

The areas of the city labelled "Best" by the HOLC use language like 'predominately white area', 'restricted/exclusive zoning ', and 'newly zoned single-family' to describe these areas. The areas labelled "Hazardous" were often described with language like 'overcrowding', 'mixture of racial groups', and 'slum'. This map added to the exclusion enacted through economically restrictive zoning practices.

The University of Richmond has done the painstaking work of reconstructing the 1938 map with original documentation on each neighborhood.

Together, these two practices denied economic access

to Black neighborhoods while creating substantial wealth creation for white communities.

While exclusive single-family zoning began to be increasingly used in the 1930s as a means to excludes residents of lower economic means from neighborhoods, the intentional exclusion of communities of color from federally backed mortgages ensured that Black residents never had the economic means to move into the parts of the city where affluence was concentrated. The disinvestment in the redlined neighborhoods exacerbated neighborhood deterioration, leading to poor housing conditions and overcrowding (Rothstein, 2017, *p.*97).

The deterioration of many of the city's Black neighborhoods due to economic exclusion led to devastating destruction through another federal initiative: Urban Renewal

Urban Renewal was a federally funded initiative used to enact 'slum clearance' in order to build new housing and erect new infrastructure for an increasingly car-dependent white suburbia. The Urban Renewal picked up where the economic exclusion policies of racially restricted mortgages and single-family zoning left off. It took the intentional neighborhood deterioration caused by those policies to condemn the neighborhoods and mark them for 'slum clearance' (Rothstein, 2017, p.127).

Many of Atlanta's Black neighborhoods were erased through Urban Renewal.

1

Fulton County Stadium

Built in 1964, the construction of the stadium destroyed the historically Jewish and later predominantly Black neighborhood of Washington-Rawson, and further separated other Black neighborhoods from the central business district.

For a deeper dive, check out the work that ATLMaps has done on this neighborhood.

2

The Connector: I-75/I-85

The freeway cut through the heart of the city, destroying or significantly maiming the neighborhoods of color: Sweet Auburn Summerhill, Mechanicsville, and Peoplestown.

3

The Atlanta Civic Center

The historically Black Buttermilk Bottom/Foggy Bottoms neighborhood was razed in the 1960s to accommodate construction of the Atlanta Convention Center, which became the Atlanta Civic Center.

The first image is of the former Mayor of Atlanta walking through Foggy Bottoms. The neighborhood was later destroyed for 'Urban Renewal'

The Atlanta Civic Center is now closed and site has been vacated.

4

Freedom Parkway

Hundreds of homes were demolished in the 1960's for construction of extensive east-west freeway projects that never broke ground. The existing John Lewis Freedom Parkway was constructed on that land in the early 1990's.

5

Frankie Allen Park

Prior to the 1940s, this was the neighborhood of Macedonia Park, one of the only Black neighborhoods in Buckhead. In the 1940s, it was publicly condemned by Fulton County and cleared to become Bagley Park (and later renamed Frankie Allen Park).

You can read the full history of the neighborhood here.

6

Georgia Dome

Completed in 1992, the Georgia Dome was erected over the former Black neighborhood of Lightning. Like many other communities of color, this neighborhood was cleared in the name of progress to make way for the stadium.

7

I-20

Opening in the 1960s, I-20 was a 90% federally-funded freeway. The freeway served as a geographic barrier separating majority-black neighborhoods to the south from white, affluent neighborhoods to the north.

A 1960 report on I-20 noted, "The proposed route of the West Expressway [I-20 West] would be the boundary between the white and Negro communities."

This type of destruction happened all over the city.

Take a look in the spyglass below and see how the city was forever changed as a result of 'Urban Renewal'. **The spyglass map compares Atlanta in 2017 with the city that existed in 1949.** Check out how significantly neighborhoods like Sweet Auburn and Summerhill have changed in the last 75 years.

Atlanta 2017 vs 1949

As of 2018, 86% of the HOLC redlined neighborhoods were either no longer in existence or were still predominantly low-income neighborhoods.

Redlining has had a lasting impact on Atlanta. Eighty years later, many of the neighborhoods that received the "Hazardous" tag either no longer exist (many destroyed through Urban Renewal and freeway projects) or remain predominately low income today. This type of erasure and economic suppression hit cities all over the US. A 2018 study noted that, "Most of the neighborhoods (74%) that the HOLC graded as high-risk or “hazardous” eight decades ago are low-to-moderate income today. Additionally, most of the HOLC graded “hazardous” areas (nearly 64%) are minority neighborhoods now." Atlanta's redlined neighborhoods are even worse than the national average, with 86% of Atlanta's redlined areas either destroyed or still low-income areas today.

And by 1982, the majority of the of the city had been zoned exclusively for single-family housing.

The City of Atlanta's 1982 zoning code (that still governs the city to this day) formalized Atlanta's exclusionary policies designed to limit growth and exclude low-income communities. While the HOLC map served as a road map for Urban Renewal in the city's core, the local zoning code was used to perpetuate exclusionary economic policies. This excluded the use development of traditionally affordable housing types throughout the nearly 60% of the city zoned exclusively for single-family housing. Housing types like duplexes, basement apartments, and small apartment buildings were effectively eradicated from most of the city.

> The existing zoning code is a key contributor to Atlanta's rapidly rising housing costs.

Decades of federal and local policies that designed to perpetuate race and class discrimination are still ingrained in Atlanta today

Still Segregated

The racist policies of redlining, exclusionary zoning, and urban renewal have segregated the city so deeply that Atlanta today is still largely divided along racial lines.

Long-Lasting Economic Impact

Decades of economic exclusion has limited the economic opportunity of many of the city's Black neighborhoods, leading to a direct correlation between the city's economic and racial divides. Atlanta consistently leads all U.S. cities in income inequality.

Racial Wealth Gap

Today, home values remain disproportionately lower in the areas of the city with the highest percentage of Black residents, a product of decades of housing policy designed to suppress home values in communities of color.

Educational Divide

Generational disinvestment in Black neighborhoods throughout the 20th century has led to lower levels of educational attainment, which has been shown to have a direct impact on a person's ability to improve their economic standing.

Exclusionary single-family zoning continues to contribute to racial isolation in the city today.

The amount of land reserved for exclusionary single-family housing is negatively correlated with racial diversity today. In the most racially diverse neighborhoods in the City in 2018, the median percent of area dedicated to single-family homes was 15.6%. Conversely, in the City's least racially diverse neighborhoods, the median area that was dedicated to single-family housing was 78.4%. This striking difference, and the statistically significant negative correlation between single-family zoning and racial diversity, demonstrates how this exclusionary zoning policy is related to the lack of racial diversity in many of the City's neighborhoods.

Source: US Census and Department of City Planning

Furthering Fair Housing is crucial to addressing structure of discrimination in housing.

In 2015, the Obama administration and HUD announced the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule which requires communities to identify fair housing issues in order to receive HUD funds. The rule was meant to spur "meaningful actions, in addition to combating discrimination, that overcome patterns of segregation and foster inclusive communities" (Section 808(e)(5) of the Fair Housing Act, 42 U.S.C. § 3604). **In July 2020, the Trump administration issued a new rule focused on deregulation, prompting concerns from**

policymakers and civil rights advocates that racial segregation will deepen. For cities like Atlanta that have persistently high racial and economic segregation, the work of creating inclusive communities will have to continue without the framework that the AFFH rule offered.

Mayor Bottoms recently released an op-ed with other US Mayors calling for cities to address systemic racism in housing.

Opinion | 27 U.S. mayors: Want to address sy...

We have arrived at a critical juncture: Do we offer platitudes and empty gestures to outraged Americans... demanding change, or do we answer the cry for racial

https://www.washingtonpost.com

Atlanta is facing rapidly rising housing costs in large part due to the exclusionary policies of the past that are still impacting the city.

The combination of redlining, exclusionary zoning, and urban renewal have left a lasting impact on Atlanta. The city today is still segregated along race and class lines as a product of decades of policies designed to exclude and suppress the city's residents of color. Making Atlanta a more equitable city will mean unwinding the existing structures that were designed to exclude and working together to build new policies that promote Mayor Bottoms' vision of One Atlanta to foster an inclusive, resilient, and equitable city.

A better future, together

Creating a better Atlanta will mean unwinding the problematic policies of the city's past and designing a city meant for inclusion instead of exclusion.

Designing a better Atlanta will require many tools all working together.

Zoning and Land-use reform is critical to unlocking large areas of the city and creating more equitable growth. But zoning reform alone is not enough. Strategic use of regulatory tools, government subsidies, and even the leveraging of publicly-owned vacant land can go a long way toward ensuring that the city continues to provide quality housing options for residents across all income levels. **Many of these initiatives are already underway as part of the Mayor's Housing**

Affordability Action Plan.

Affordable housing developments like this Inclusionary Zoning project by City of Refuge are made possible by through a combination of regulatory requirements and subsidies.

Equitable design means looking closely at how Atlanta is designed today and what might be done to help Atlanta become the best version of itself.

As the city grows, it could easily continue down the path to greater exclusion through poor land-use. But, if Atlanta is to become better, we must growth strategically by ensuring that our growth leads to a city designed for greater access and more affordable lifestyles. The *Atlanta City Design* considers the ways in which Atlanta's future can be designed in light of the existing city that we have. It asks how we can improve the city we've inherited and how we can help that city become the best version of itself. *Atlanta City Design* defines two main types of areas that are distinct and in need of unique and different strategies.

The Atlanta City Design identifies two distinct design types: Growth Areas and Conservation Areas.

Growth Areas

These areas of the city have a built environment that is most conducive to dense, urban development. Atlanta's Growth Areas already house many of the city's densest areas, but there is significant room for additional residential density in areas like the dowtnown's urban core.

Conservation Areas

Much of Atlanta is comprised of residential areas that are currently dominated by low-density residential areas and greenspace. Adding housing density in these areas looks very different than in the Growth Areas. The key here is to add subtle density that maintains the character and form of the neighborhoods.

Growth Areas and Conservation areas are distinctly different and need different tools.

By designing our future with a focus on Growth Areas and Conservation Areas, Atlanta can strategically implement solutions that are unique each neighborhood's needs while still designing a future that works for residents of all types. Zoning reform should be based on how make Atlanta growth more inclusive in both the Growth and Conservation Areas without changing the basic neighborhood designs of those areas. Growth Areas should increasingly take on a larger share of the city's housing stock, but Conservation Areas can also contribute to the city's growth in tangible ways.

Designing Atlanta's future will mean making Growth Areas work better as Growth Areas and making Conservation Areas work better as Conservation Areas.

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End exclusionary single-family zoning

Exclusionary single-family zoning was created as a means to economically exclude lower income residents from neighborhoods and was used in combination with racist lending practices to exclude communities of color. **This aligns with Initiative #3 of the Housing Affordability Action Plan to revise the zoning code.**

Atlanta should amend the City's zoning code to allow more housing flexibility in the existing exclusionary single-family zoning areas designed for race and class discrimination.

Today, nearly 60% of the city is still zoned exclusively for single-family zoning. Atlanta's future depends on policies of inclusion and exclusive single-family zoning is anything but inclusive. The first step toward making Atlanta a more inclusive place to live should be to end exclusive single-family zoning by allowing an additional dwelling unit in all existing single-family zoned areas in the city.

This could be done by amending the zoning code to allow an additional dwelling unit in all of the existing

single-family areas.

This single zoning amendment would unlock 60% of Atlanta's land to contribute to the city's growth without substantially changing the character and feel of the neighborhood. By allowing a 2nd unit on properties throughout the city, the zoning code would align with the historic two-family development pattern found in much of the city. It could be designed to allow for the development of a variety of additional and subtle housing options, ranging from **basement apartments** to **recessed 2nd units**, most of which tend to be much cheaper to live in than a single-family home.

This could allow for a variety of options.

Over/Under

The additional unit is located on the top floor, while the primary dwelling in on the main level.

Recessed 2nd Unit

The additional unit is recessed from the primary structure but still oriented toward the street. The primary dwelling sits closer to the street with the additional unit set slightly further back.

Basement Apartment

The basement of a single-family home becomes an apartment. These often have entrances on the side or back of the primary dwelling.

Garage Conversion

A repurposed garage as an additional dwelling unit, sometimes on the side, back, or basement of a home.

The ability for property owners to create an additional unit on their property would also enable them to economically benefit from the city's growth.

Allowing for the development of a 2nd unit on current single-family properties would also create opportunities for wealth creation for property owners. By turning their basement into an apartment or converting the back of their home into an additional unit, homeowners could generate new revenue off of their property while creating a new unit for the growth population. This is type of wealth generation opportunity is key to ensuring Atlanta grows in ways that benefit its residents.

And the impact on the housing supply could be significant.

Make Accessory Dwelling Units easier to build and buy

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are detached structures with a housing unit often built in backyards. They are currently allowed in certain areas with limitations. Making them easier and more accessible to build can increase production of this more affordable housing type. **Expanding ADU allowance furthers the Housing Affordability Action Plan's initiative to implement the ADU ordinance.**

ADU allowance was expanded in several zoning categories in 2018, but implementation has been somewhat limited.

An Accessory Dwelling Unit in Atlanta

Since the passage of the ADU ordinance in 2018, there has been a lot of interest in the development of ADUs by homeowners and developers alike. Unfortunately, implementation of these accessory housing units has been challenging for many. Most challenging has been the ability to finance the construction of this new housing type in the Atlanta market.

Financing ADUs has proven to be particularly challenging.

Accessory Dwelling Units in the Atlanta market often find limited financing opportunities in the city's traditional financing market. The housing type is relatively new to the Atlanta market, making traditional lenders wary of the risk and unaware of the potential pros/cons of the housing type. The potential for revenue generation and added property value are unknowns in the market, so access to capital has been limited to more affluent homeowners and developers that can front more of the cost.

Another challenge in financing ADUs has been the inability to collateralize the ADU like a traditional single-family home can be collateralized. This is because the ADU is unable to be sold or have the value separated from the primary home. This limits access to capital for homeowners looking to build ADUs and also limits the function of the ADUs as exclusively a tool for rental housing development.

Allowing ADUs to be sold separately could open up financing options and create affordable ownership opportunities.

Amending the zoning code to allow ADUs to be bought and sold separately from the primary home could allow for ADUs to be easier to finance because it would allow them to be collateralized. This could help low- and moderate-income homeowners get the financing they need to build an ADU on their property. It could also expand options for how a homeowner builds wealth through an ADU. It the homeowner would like to build and rent an ADU, they still can. But this would also allow the homeowner to build an ADU (with greater access to capital) and sell it to generate profit upfront and avoid the extra work of becoming a property manager for their rental ADU.

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Adding this new housing type to the homebuyer market would introduce a more affordable ownership option and make homeownership more accessible to many Atlanta residents.

Allowing ADUs to be sold separately would also generate new, more affordable homeownership opportunities. Adding this new housing type to the homebuyer market would introduce a more affordable ownership option and make homeownership more accessible to many Atlanta residents. This type of added housing choice would help Atlanta to have a healthier and more comprehensive housing ecosystem, where residents across income levels could choose from a variety of rental and for-sale housing options.

The could be done by allowing something called 'flag lots'.

The ability to sell and finance ADUs could be accomplished through a zoning code allowance for fee-simple lot subdivisions. Fee simple subdivisions allow for a 'parent lot' to be subdivided into two separate lots but still retain the lot requirements for the parent lot. In the case of fee-simple subdivisions for ADUs, the lot could be subdivided to allow for the primary structure and the ADU structure to be sold separately, but the lot regulations for the parent lot would still govern the relationship between the primary home and the ADU. This would ensure that the ADU maintains its relationship to the primary structure and other zoning requirements like floor area ratio and lot coverage would not exceed the original allowance of the parent lot.

ADU on a flag lot

Flag lots like this would allow ADUs to be sold separately from the primary home.

Flag lots are often called such because the shape of the lot looks like a flag. It typically has a narrow 'pole' section that give the lot access to the street and a larger 'flag' part toward the back of the lot.

ADU on a corner lot

Corner lots often have backyards that abut a side street. Allowing for these lots to be subdivided and developed for ADUs could help to create an additional homeownership opportunity similar to flag lots.

The added benefit of allowing this type of fee-simple subdivision is that it would also contribute to adjacent blockface, filling in a vacant street frontage with a new ADU.

This is already allowed for duplexes in Atlanta.

Currently, the City of Atlanta allows these types of fee-simple subdivisions in the limited areas of the city that still allow duplexes. The current fee simple subdivisions allow for each side of a duplex to be sold separately. The lot requirements of the original 'parent lot' still exist and govern both lots, but this allows for each side of the lot to be collateralized and sold, creating two ownership opportunities on the lot. Allowing fee-simple subdivisions for ADUs would be a naturally expansion of what the City already does for duplexes.

Loosening some of the current zoning restrictions to could also make ADUs more accessible and cheaper to build.

The current ADU code limits the size, height, and use of unconditioned space (i.e. garage, porch) in ways that can make development somewhat inflexible to the varying needs of property owners. Updating the zoning code to allow for a more form-based code that gives property owners the flexibility to build their ADU to fit the needs of their property could lead to increased production and affordable housing options.

Currently, this garage counts against the 750 sqft max allowed for ADUs.

There are also several areas of the city where ADUs are still not allowed.

ADUs are currently limited to R4, R4A, R5 zoning areas (and a few special districts). This restriction limits homeowner's ability to benefit from the wealth-building opportunities afforded by ADUs and perpetuates economic exclusion through zoning in certain areas of the city. Expand ADU allowance to all of the existing single-family areas of the city would maximize property owners' flexibility and increase housing options while conserving the character and built environment of these neighborhoods.

Source: Department of City Planning GIS

Allow small apartment buildings by-right near transit

Small apartment buildings typically range in size from 3-12 units and were common throughout Atlanta prior to the rise of exclusionary zoning. **This aligns with the Housing Affordability Action Plan action item to implement 'missing middle' housing.**

Small apartment buildings often provide cheaper housing options in cities. Atlanta excludes them in most areas.

This type of housing make sense in Growth Areas, in Conservation Areas bordering Growth Areas, and near high-capacity transit. The smaller buildings tend to fit in nicely in the cities more urban neighborhoods where they were allowed before the city started to relegate them to lower-income neighborhoods. Since the number of 2-4 unit buildings has declined slightly and been persistently low in Atlanta in the last decade, there is ample opportunity to increase their use throughout the City. For example, in 2019 there were about seven single-unit structures for every 2-4 unit structure in the City, demonstrating the large disparity in single-family housing and small apartment buildings.

A small apartment building in Virginia Highland. Photo from Atlanta City Design.

These types of apartment buildings are ideal near transit. Allowing them by-right within 1/2 mile of MARTA stations could add new housing and align density with transit.

With Atlanta expected to more than double in population in the next few decades, it will be more critical than ever for the city to align density with existing transit. Areas within 1/2 mile of the city's existing MARTA stations are the existing areas of the city that have the highest capacity to add density without adding lots of new cars on the road. Expanding the allowance by-right of small apartment buildings like the Virginia Highland one above could create a more traditionally affordable housing option in areas of the city most conducive to life without a car, reducing transportation costs for residents.

These types of apartments, though less subtle than a basement apartment, still represent a type of gentle density that fits in nicely in more residential neighborhoods. Allowing these by-right near transit could stimulate their development in a way that makes Atlanta more resilient and sustainable as the city grows.

Source: Department of City Planning GIS

End minimum parking requirements citywide

Most zoning categories in the Atlanta zoning code have what are called 'Parking Minimums' that mandate how many parking spots a property must have. An element of exclusionary suburban-style zoning is a heavy reliance on cars. Low-density zoning often creates the conditions for car dependency. Developing a city in this way reinforces the economic exclusion historically tied to zoning efforts that perpetuate car dependency and drives up monthly costs required to live in a city. **This initiative aligns with the Housing Affordability Action Plan initiative to reduce parking requirements citywide.**

Parking Minimums can often make new housing development more costly

For large apartment buildings, the cost to add the required number of parking spots can be as costly as the price to build a new unit. This cost is almost always relayed to the renter through the cost of rent or through additional monthly parking fees. Currently, the City of Atlanta requires much of this parking and is a direct contributor to the added costs. Removing parking minimums for apartment buildings could help make projects more feasible and keep costs lower.

Some estimate the parking costs alone can increase new housing production by update 20%

In his 2012 book *Walkable Cities*, Jeff Speck (with the help of Donald Shoup's *The High Cost of Free Parking*) assess the cost of parking on the development of new housing. He estimates that in some cities housing production costs can contribute 18-20% of their total costs to meeting minimum parking requirements and that these requirements often take a substantial hit on total number of units a project can bring online. Most new multifamily developments in Atlanta use structured parking to accommodate the parking requirements. The cost of parking construction for a parking garage can often cost upwards of **$40k per parking space** leading to a **monthly added cost of around $125 a month or $4 a day**. This cost is almost always passed on to the renters or buyers. (Speck, 2012, p.116, p.124).

And parking minimums on residential lots limit flexibility.

Parking minimums also currently exist for the majority of Atlanta's small dwelling zoning categories, including on single-family lots. These, while not always as cost prohibitive as the requirements for apartment buildings, can often limit a homeowner's flexibility by requiring that a portion of their property be dedicated to a car. Many of the city's neighborhoods are connected to MARTA or have good accessibility without a car. **Requiring parking minimums reinforces a land-use practice that discourages alternate modes of transportation and exacerbates Atlanta's traffic problems.**

Parking minimums on residential properties require significant land dedicated to cars.

While we're at it, we should also consider getting rid of parking minimums for all other zoning categories.

Parking minimums are not only costly and inflexible for residential properties, they also drive up costs and limit optimal land-use for businesses like retail, restaurants, and bars. Commercial zones in the city often have high parking minimums that require a significant portion of the property be reserved for parking. Removing parking minimums on commercial properties could reduce the cost for businesses and make better use of the land.

Parking minimums can often be costly and cost prohibitive for many small businesses.

Parking requirements often perpetuate exclusionary practices and drive up cost. Here's a deeper dive on parking:

Why free parking is bad for everyone

America is built around cars. And most of us expect that we'll be able to park our cars for free, pretty much… anywhere we go. But economist Donald Shoup of UCLA

https://www.vox.com

Increase density in the Growth Areas

Focusing density in these areas will allow the city's population to be increasingly aligned with transit and closer to key resources. **This proactive effort would support the Housing Affordability Action Plan's goal to revise the zoning code and drive housing development near transit.**

There are nearly 2000 properties in the Growth Area restricted to low-density housing.

Today, there are 1,954 parcels inside the Growth Areas that cover 909 total acres that are currently zoned for either single-family housing or two-family housing. Many of these low-density properties are concentrated along corridors like Donald Lee Hollowell Pkwy in Grove Park and McDonough Blvd in South Atlanta. These neighborhoods could greatly benefit from strategically located higher density housing option, but the current zoning code limited their ability to produce this type of housing.

Research has shown that density restrictions are related to income segregation in cities and serve to preserve the concentration of affluence. A study of 95 cities found that density restrictions are associated with segregation of middle and high-income households, or that, “density restrictions directly lead to the concentration of affluence, not poverty” (Lens & Monkkonen, 2015). Another main finding was that cities with several separate oversight review steps for development that would increase density (i.e. zoning boards, local control mechanisms) had higher levels of income segregation.

Properties in the Growth Areas with low-density residential zoning.

These low-density parcels could be proactively upzoned in the Growth Areas.

As Atlanta's population continues to grow as a rate not seen in decades, it will be crucial for a large share of that density to come in the city's Growth Areas. These areas have the highest long-term capacity for growth. They are often near to existing and planned high capacity transit, close to job centers, and have significant room for new growth. Upzoning these properties would align the current zoning code with the Growth Areas and ensure that the densest areas of the city are near resources and amenities as the city grows.

Reduce minimum lot size requirements

Single-family zoning has long been intended to extend economic exclusion through higher cost properties. **Reducing lot minimums would advance the Housing Affordability Action Plan's initiative to revise the zoning code.**

Large minimum lot sizes requirements often serve to increase the cost and limit the supply of housing.

In addition to limiting housing development to a single detached dwelling per property, zoning codes have also been used to create rules requiring minimum lot size and establishing regulations about how many feet a house should be set back from the street or an adjacent house. These rules have long served as a companion to exclusionary single-family zoning in making neighborhoods more expensive and housing options less attainable. They also serve to limit a city's ability to appropriately densify and contribute to rising housing costs by reinforcing and inelastic housing supply market.

Allowing smaller lots can increase housing options and provide wealth-building opportunities.

For instance, in some areas of the city, single family lots sit between two roads: one road at the front of the property and one at the back. On larger lots in similar circumstances, subdividing the lot to allow for another house to be built (while enabling the property owner to profit on the underutilized land), could allow for an increase in density through the creation of more single-family lots.

This rendering to the left by the Atlanta City Studio of a road in Cascade Heights shows how lowering the lot size requirements could allow property owners to turn the backs of their lots (often underutilized and overgrown portions of their property) into new housing and wealth-creation opportunities. The buildings in white represent the potential new single-family homes this could allow.

Source: Atlanta City Studio

By reducing the lot minimums for many of the city's single-family lots, we could allow for more natural development of underutilized land for the benefit of both the neighborhood and property owner.

And smaller lots can often lead to cheaper housing options.

In Austin, a loophole in city's zoning code allowed one developer to build smaller houses on smaller lot. The result: less expensive housing.

Should Austin block or welcome developme...

In 2013, a light bulb went off in Austin builder David Whitworth's head as he was reading a rather dry... document: the city's land development code

https://www.statesman.com

Distribute dedicated affordable housing more equitably across the city.

The current economic segregation of the city is often perpetuated by the limited number of affordable housing units developed in the city's high-cost neighborhoods.

Incentives and regulatory requirements can be used to add affordable housing in high-cost areas.

Relaxing the zoning code to allow for increased production of more traditionally affordable housing options like basement apartments and small apartment buildings plays an important role in the city's efforts to produce enough housing to meet the demand of population growth. But, additional tools like government subsidies or regulatory requirements to build affordable housing are often needed to add affordable housing options in high-cost areas. These areas often have little available affordable housing that is naturally produced by the market.

These tools to could be designed to equally and strategically distribute dedicated affordable housing throughout the city.

If Atlanta is to make progress in reducing the city's economic segregation, it will be important to use regulatory and subsidy tools to develop affordable housing all throughout the city. But, not all areas of the city are the same. **Most of the tools that are used to build dedicated affordable housing are focused on large apartment buildings that are most suitable for Growth Areas.**

An affordable housing development in Atlanta.

Focusing on Growth Areas could support affordability tools in areas with access to public and private resources.

By aligning development of dedicated affordable housing in Growth Areas, we can incentivize affordable housing development in areas of the city with the highest access to resources like transit, fresh food, and jobs. In order to track how the development of new affordable housing is distributed across the city, it would be important to break the city down by section.

Using the city's high school clusters as a guide and weighting each cluster based on the amount of Growth Area in the district could help the City set goals and align programs to more equitably distribute affordable housing development.

Source: Department of City Planning GIS

This is how the proportions break down when each high school district is weighted by amount of Growth Area.

Source: City of Atlanta + Atlanta Public Schools

Focusing on affordable housing in Growth Areas will ensure that dedicated affordable housing can be both equitably distributed and strategically located in high-access areas.

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Expand the Urban Enterprise Zone Program

One potential subsidy tool that could be expanded to better incentivize dedicated affordable housing development throughout all 9 high school districts is the Urban Enterprise Zone. **This would implement the Housing Affordability Action Plan initiative to expand usage and access to the Urban Enterprise Zone Program.**

The Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ) is a tax abatement program that was created in the 1980s to spur redevelopment in the city. The program provides a 10-year property tax abatement and allows for a full range of projects from industrial and commercial developments to housing and mixed-use.

The Housing UEZ program requires that at least 20% of the total units created be dedicated for affordable housing for the life of the tax abatement. This program has only seen two applications in the last 8 years and could be significantly expanded to generate more affordable housing.

Here's the current eligibility map for the UEZ program:

Source: Department of City Planning GIS

Right now, the program is primarily limited to the lowest income neighborhoods of the city and thus limits the tool's ability to build dedicated affordable housing equitably throughout Atlanta.

> The current UEZ program cannot be used to incentivize affordable housing in high-cost areas, reinforcing decades of economic segregation.

To address this, the UEZ program could be expanded to include all of the city's Growth Areas for affordable housing.

This would support the goals of the ensuring dedicated affordable housing is developed in Growth Areas throughout the city. It could unlock **a substantial tool to for use in developing dedicated affordable units in high-access, high-cost areas** of the city that are less likely to develop naturally-occurring affordable housing.

Source: Department of City Planning GIS

Create affordability districts near major public investment projects

In 2018, Inclusionary Zoning was passed to require all new multi-family developments near the Atlanta BeltLine to include affordable housing units. The BeltLine area was targeted for affordability requirements because the City recognized that major public investments can often be associated with rising housing costs nearby. The Inclusionary Zoning program was designed to ensure that all new housing development near the BeltLine included some affordable rental units. **This program could serve as a model for future affordability districts in areas near major public investments and aligns with the Housing Affordability Action Plan's call to explore the feasibility of expanding Inclusionary Zoning.**

Inclusionary zoning is a regulatory tool that requires all housing developments of a certain size to set aside a portion of their units for dedicated affordable housing. Atlanta's current Inclusionary Zoning overlay covers the area near the current and future path of the Atlanta BeltLine. The overlay requires that all rental developments with 10+ units set aside between 10-15% of their units at affordable rates for 20 years.

In the first two years of Inclusionary Zoning, 14 projects have been permitted or completed.

The 14 projects underway will add 278 affordable housing units. These units are set aside for tenants at 60-80% of the AMI and must be kept affordable for 20 years. Inclusionary Zoning is designed to make broad impact by requiring small amounts of affordability in every project. This type of affordability district adds subtle affordability throughout rather than concentrated affordability by ensuring that all new housing development participates in the creation of new affordable housing units.

Source: Department of City Planning

Major public investments like the Atlanta BeltLine often inadvertently drive up housing costs nearby.

Affordability districts like the one around the BeltLine can ensure that affordable housing is included on new development. Since major public investments can result in unintended consequences like increase rising housing costs nearby, considering policies like an affordability district near major public projects could help to ensure that residents of multiple income levels can benefit from the positive impacts of major public investments.

The neighborhoods near the new Westside Park might be a good place for a new affordable housing district.

Expected to open soon, the Westside Park will be the city's largest park and the initial phase is expected to cost upwards of $26M to complete. The new park borders the neighborhoods of Grove Park and Rockdale and is near Carey Park, Almond Park, and Center Hill. This level of public investment near these neighborhoods could potentially lead to increased housing costs and new investment. An affordability district in this neighborhood could help to ensure that new development would requirement affordable housing options.

Once completed, the new park will become the largest park in Atlanta.

An affordability district near the new park would ensure future development includes dedicated affordable housing.

The Westside Park sits on the western edge of the BeltLine's existing Inclusionary Zoning district. This new district could be focused on the neighborhoods to the south and west of the park that currently fall outside of the Inclusionary Zoning area. This extent of this district would be tied to the neighborhoods to the west of the park most impacted by the new development and not currently covered by the Inclusionary Zoning affordability district for the BeltLine area to the east of the park.

Potential boundary of the Westside Park Affordability Overlay

The district could also include affordable for-sale requirements, too.

Existing affordability districts in the city only regulate the affordability of rental affordable housing units. This often leaves a gap in affordable for-sale housing options for residents looking to become homeowners. The Westside Park Affordability District could potentially include a for-sale requirement to require developers building more than 10 for-sale units to provide a percentage set-aside for households between 80%-120% of the Area Median Income.

Affordability districts like this could become a model for future major public investment projects.

To proactively address the potential for major public investment projects to drive real estate markets and lead to rising housing costs nearby, the City could explore a policy that would tie affordability districts like the proposed one near the Westside Park to major investments. This type of policy would be aimed at mitigating the negative consequences of rising housing costs and ensure that future development near the amenity would include a percentage of dedicated affordable housing.

Leverage publicly owned vacant land

Public agencies, including entities like the City of Atlanta, Atlanta Housing Authority, and Invest Atlanta, own land throughout the city and quite a bit of it is vacant. **Redeveloping these properties aligns with the Housing Affordability Action Plan's key initiative to use public vacant land for affordable housing**. Publicly owned vacant properties are all over the city and in both Growth and Conservation Areas. Some of them may be a best fit for large apartment buildings while other may work best as 2-family lots or small apartment buildings.

The City of Atlanta also owns vacant land in Growth Areas that could potentially be used for affordable housing.

In the growth areas alone, public agencies own **259 vacant parcels** that are a total of **363 acres of land**. Being in a growth area, this land is a valuable asset. It's an asset that, properly used, could be leveraged for dense housing developments with long-term affordability. Below is a map of the where those parcels exist.

Source: Department of City Planning GIS

City land could potentially be used as a type of subsidy to gain affordable housing in high-cost areas.

High land cost is often a key metric that limits affordable housing development in high-cost areas of the city. By identifying potential City-owned land that could be developed, the City could leverage these often-underutilized assets to subsidize new affordable housing. Properties in the city's Growth Areas are likely good candidates for large apartment buildings or mixed-use projects. In addition to housing units, the development of these sites should also consider other resources that may be lacking in the area like fresh food access or healthcare, and leverage the site to address as many of the neighborhood's needs as possible.

One City-owned property in Growth Area that could be ideal for redevelopment is in South Downtown at 104 Trinity Ave.

The vacant lot is situated directly across the street from Atlanta City Hall and is near two MARTA stations (Georgia State and Garnett) and in close proximity to the future Summerhill BRT route. The site could be a great opportunity for long-term, dedicated affordable housing near essential resources like jobs and transportation access. The site could also be a candidate for mixed-use development, bringing new office space, and ground floor retail options to an area of the city that has limited active ground floor retail.

104 Trinity Ave. SW

Developing vacant publicly owned land in Conservation Areas can also help add housing and invest in neighborhoods throughout the city.

Publicly owned land in the Conservation Areas can vary quite a bit. Some parcels are vacant lots on residential blocks while others were acquired for a purpose decades ago and still sit unused. Each property is a bit different, but some of them carry the potential to be better used. Leveraging these properties for long-term affordable housing can help Atlanta to create new affordable housing options throughout the city. There are currently **819 properties** and **1338 acres** of publicly owned vacant land in the city's Conservation Areas.

Source: Department of City Planning GIS

Sites like 879 White St. could be developed for affordable home ownership opportunities.

Developing new housing on publicly owned land creates a unique opportunity to introduce new housing types and affordability options to the Atlanta market. When new options like flag lots for ADUs or small apartments near transit are allowed through policy, there is often a lag in production of the new type. In situations like 879 White St. where the City is the landholder, there is an opportunity to be early on the innovation curb and stimulate the development of a new housing type.

879 White Street. Property owned by the City of Atlanta.

This site could potentially serve as an example of how a flag lot could work to create two affordable homeownership opportunities on a site that would previously have only allowed for one.

Get innovative with odd lots

A lot of the publicly owned vacant land in Atlanta fall into the category of the odd lot. These lots are often leftover pieces of other projects, odd triangle-shaped lots near a MARTA line, or thin slivers near an intersection. These lots often become dead space, not positively contributing to the public realm and not traditional enough to be developed. Many of these lots can't be developed under the current zoning code but are physically large enough to be built on and quite a few are in areas that would be ideal for new housing. Creating zoning flexibility on odd lots could take leftover space and allow it to contribute new housing (and other important uses). This could begin on existing publicly owned vacant land and even be expanded over time to odd lots all over the city.

City-owned lots like this one in Oakland City could potentially be infilled with innovative small houses.

Source: Department of City Planning GIS

This lot in Oakland City is only about 40 feet deep more than half a mile long. It doesn't fit the existing zoning category and would likely not be able to honor most lot minimum requirements, which makes it very difficult to develop. Creating opportunities build new housing on this lot could restore the blockface, add new housing options to the area, and make for a more vibrant and complete street. Lots like these exist all over the city and sit unable to be developed. Many have immense untapped potential. Creating an option to have the flexibility to be innovative on these lots could open these lots up to become a valuable part of the city's housing ecosystem.

The development of publicly owned land could become a critical tool for stimulating housing innovation while creating affordable housing.

In many ways, the existing public vacant land is both a tool for affordable housing subsidy and housing innovation. The land itself is a form of subsidy that can be leveraged to ensure that the housing developed on it is affordable for a long time. The City's ownership of the land also allows the City to use this land to further efforts toward creating a healthier housing ecosystem by using these sites to create new housing types and stimulate housing innovation in the city.

Expand the Housing Innovation Lab

Housing innovation plays a key role in developing affordable housing types and ensuring that new regulations allow for new, affordable housing opportunities. **Expanding the Housing Innovation Lab would implement a core initiative of**

the Housing Affordability Action Plan.

Supporting housing innovation will further Atlanta's effort to become more affordable as we grow.

The Atlanta City Studio has been working with community organizations in neighborhoods across the city to design new ways to use the single-family lots that could add subtle density and increased housing options in places that have long been limited to single-family homes or large apartment buildings. This type of innovation helps to bring new housing types to an Atlanta market that has a limited housing ecosystem.

Each of these renderings is designed for current single-family lots. This type of development could begin around areas like the Atlanta BeltLine and near MARTA stations to add density in the most walkable areas of the city.

Two quadraplexes, a studio apartment and shared parking on two adjacent lots. This was designed for two formerly single-family lots.

This design has twelve units on two formerly single-family lots with parking located at the back of the property. This design also provided preservation for most of the existing trees on the site.

This design focused on saving the existing tree canopy by locating three detached studio apartments strategically throughout the lot to avoid tree removal.

Similar to the detached studios design, this design strategically adds 11 new housing units while keeping the existing single-family home. This would enable these two adjacent lots to create a total of 12 housing units, while preserving much of the existing tree canopy.

The Housing Innovation Lab would help Atlanta develop a healthy, comprehensive, and affordable housing ecosystem.

An expanded Housing Innovation Lab could make the way we envision our land more equitable, help Atlanta to better activate its vacant land, and improve long-term affordability in the city. The Innovation Lab would partner with developers, builders, and homeowners, to imagine new housing approaches and creative infill opportunities that would add critical housing supply in a nuanced way that honors the unique built environment of Atlanta.

Many of the ideas and proposals in Atlanta City Design: Housing are relatively new to the Atlanta market and some would require the policy changes proposed here. The Lab would help to stimulate innovative housing solutions by designing new housing types the fit naturally in the city's Conservation and Growth Areas while also adding new varieties of housing choices to generate housing supply across income levels. The Lab would connect policy innovation to practical implementation.

The journey to One Atlanta will not always be easy, but together we can accomplish a lot.

The challenges of housing affordability and growing racial and economic disparities that Atlanta is facing today are, in many ways, the result of decades of housing and land-use policies that were designed for exclusion. Implementing these initial policy proposals directed at addressing and rectifying those exclusionary practices could go a long way toward making Atlanta a more equitable city in the future. Atlanta has the opportunity to change the course of its history and set the city on a path toward inclusion instead of exclusion. We have a chance to build a better future, but we can only build it better if we build it together.

This project would not have been possible without these people

Tim Keane
Commissioner
Department of City Planning
City of Atlanta

Tim's vision for what this project could be, for the story that needed to be told, and for the ways the city needs to address our inequalities in housing helped us to see what this project could be. At every turn, Tim encouraged us to push a little further and dig a little deeper. This project's predecessor, Atlanta City Design was our guiding light.

Janide Sidifall
Deputy Commissioner
Department of City Planning
City of Atlanta

Janide is the one who pulled our initial team together for this project. Few of us had worked closely together when we started this project, so I guess she's to blame for all of the hours we've spent together working on this. :) Throughout this entire project, Janide was a sounding board, a course corrector, and a storyteller, helping us figure out what to include and what to throw out. This story would likely be much longer, and much less interesting if it weren't for Janide.

Terri Lee
Chief Housing Officer
City of Atlanta

Since the beginning of this project, Terri has been one of our biggest supporters. Early on, Terri saw this project as a way to advance the cause of affordable housing by helping us to better understand how we got here and how we can start the work to become a more equitable city. Terri helped us to make this project better and took the time to go line by line through with us through all of our iterations. The project would not be as ambitious or as thorough if it weren't for Terri's investment in this work.

Bithia Ratnasamy
Project Manager for
Chief Housing Officer
City of Atlanta

Bithia has been a consistent sounding board for this project. She pushed us to be better, to ask ourselves hard questions about what we were trying to accomplish, about who these solutions are designed for, and how to design these initiatives to actually make Atlanta a more inclusive and equitable place to live. Bithia never stops thinking the actual impact our decision will make on the lives of current and future residents. Whenever we drifted off into policy wonk or planning abstractions, she would patiently remind us to focus on the people that live here and on how these proposals would impact them.

Mad Dworschak
Graphic Designer
Department of City Planning
City of Atlanta

That this story map was visually pleasing enough for you to get all of the way to the and read this is because of Mad. She is an incredible designer and visual storyteller. She helped us to frame our story, establish flow and rhythm, and made this project really pop. Her work on this helped us to almost enjoy (at least visually) the hours of scrolling through making edits.

Kendra Taylor
Project Manager
Housing and Community Development
City of Atlanta

Kendra is the backbone to much of this work. She pulled the data together, helped us to analyze it and make sense of it, and made sure that what we were saying was actually true. Kendra constantly reigned us back in and helped us to tell a story that was backed up by the history and the data. She helped us sort through tons of content to find data that showed the long-term impacts of discrimination and exclusion and how that impacts us to this day. Kendra gives this project much of its substance

Rodney Milton
Former Assistant Director in the Office of Housing and Community Development
(Currently advancing affordable housing initiatives at the Atlanta BeltLine)

Rodney was on the original team for this project. This project would not have been possible without the foundational work that Rodney did to advance the cause of housing affordability in Atlanta over the last several years. He laid the groundwork for this project with his work on 2018 Equitable Housing Needs Assessment. Rodney also played an invaluable role in the development of the Housing Affordability Action plan, helping to ensure a focus the need for a design-based approach to housing affordability.

Jordan Dowdy
Project Co-Creator
Project Manager
Department of City Planning
City of Atlanta

When this project began more than a year and a half ago, I was excited for the opportunity to make positive change in a city I love. I could never have imagined how much the process would change me, the way I see the past manifest in the everyday, and my thoughts about our city's future. This work has truly opened my eyes to the deep-rooted, structural nature of the challenges facing many of our communities, and the pressures at play in a rapidly growing Atlanta. Most importantly, it has convinced me that there are concrete policies that can be implemented to help address many of those challenges and ensure that the growth coming to our City can be leveraged for the good of all its residents.

Joshua Humphries
Project Co-Creator
Director
Housing and Community Development
City of Atlanta

This initiative has been likely been the most exhausting and time confusing project I've ever worked on. It has also been the most rewarding. I started this project with little hope that Atlanta could adequately address its growing need for affordable housing. Now, I'm a little more hopeful. I believe there is a path forward, a course we can chart together, that will move this city a little closer to Dr. King's vision of the Beloved Community. I hope that this project will inspire others as much as it has inspired me and that you'll come along side all of those that are fighting for a better Atlanta and help us to build a better future, together.

Department of City Planning Team

There is no way to name everyone that helped out, provided critical feedback or necessary criticism of this project, but here are some folks that stand out the most. Paul Thomas, Nathanael Hoezel, Vanessa Lira, Kevin Bacon, Jordan Williams, Carolina Rodriguez, Doug Young, Keyetta Holmes, Sonia Sequeira

Notes + Sources

Our full list of notes and sources for this project can be found here.

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