



MEMORANDUM

PLANNING DIVISION
DEPARTMENT of COMMUNITY and NEIGHBORHOODS

To: Salt Lake City Planning Commission
From: Andy Hulka & Alicia Seeley, Planning Division
Date: March 11, 2026
Re: PLNPCM2025-01184 – Expanding Housing Options

ACTION REQUESTED:

Work session only. No specific action requested.

BACKGROUND:

Following a presentation during a Council work session on February 11, 2025, the Salt Lake City Council adopted the following legislative action on March 4, 2025:

Initiate a text amendment to consolidate and simplify the R-1 single-family residential districts, including updates to the residential flag lot standards, the addition of new housing options, and to the extent possible, eliminating barriers to homeownership and consider similar changes to the other low density districts such as the R-2, SR-1, and SR1-A zones.

The intent is to continue to study the benefits and impacts through the process of drafting, engaging the public, and finalizing a proposal leading to consideration by the Planning Commission and potential adoption by the Council. Specifically, the Council wants to identify how these potential changes impact the affordable housing incentives and City goals related to housing, walkability, and water conservation.

A guiding principle of the Council is to increase home ownership opportunities for families in Salt Lake City. It is a priority of this Council to include affordable “missing middle” housing options along with family sized housing in any text amendment.

This informational memo details the proposed text amendments that staff recommends in order to accomplish the goals laid out by the Council. Planning staff has reviewed the proposal internally with other City departments and has worked to refine the proposal based on feedback received. The proposal, collectively known as “Expanding Housing Options,” creates a new defined land use called “Small Lot Dwelling,” includes regulations for this land use, amends the R-1, R-2, and SR-1A zoning districts, and modifies the standards for flag lots.

KEY ASPECTS

Creation of a “Small Lot Dwelling” Ordinance

Expanding Housing Options proposes the creation of a new land use category called “Small Lot Dwellings,” which would be a permitted use in the R-1, R-2, SR-1, and SR-1A districts. The Small Lot Dwelling ordinance would allow new types of housing on smaller lots, subject to limits on the size and footprint of each building. Any applicable overlay district requirements, including those of the Historic Preservation Overlay District, would still be applicable.

Small Lot Dwellings: Lot Size, Footprint, and Floor Area

The Small Lot Dwelling proposal would allow new units to be built with a minimum lot area of 2,000 sq. ft. per unit. These units would be limited to a maximum building footprint of 1,000 sq. ft. for single-family dwellings and 850 sq. ft. per unit for other dwelling types. The gross floor area of each unit (which includes the internal space on every floor) would be limited to a maximum of 1,200 sq. ft. These limits are intended to allow new construction that is relatively less expensive than the median standard single-family dwelling in Salt Lake City ([\\$615,000 according to Kem C Gardner Policy Institute](#)).

Small Lot Dwellings: Housing Types

The Small Lot Dwelling proposal would allow compact-sized duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and townhomes (containing no more than four units) in the R-1, R-2, SR-1, and SR-1A zones. These housing types are frequently referred to as “missing middle housing” and are currently allowed in the affected districts by the Affordable Housing Incentives, so no new building typologies are being introduced by this proposal. Before 1995, the zoning ordinance allowed duplexes in almost every neighborhood and small multi-family buildings in some residential areas.

Small Lot Dwellings: Building Regulations

The table below details the proposed lot, bulk, and building regulations for Small Lot Dwellings. The Small Lot Dwelling ordinance would not replace the R-1, R-2, or SR zoning regulations. Instead, it would be a separate set of regulations allowing more units at a smaller scale within residential neighborhoods. These standards would apply only to new buildings that meet the specific size limits proposed. Property owners would still be able to build a larger single-family home or an addition to their existing house under the base zoning regulations.

Summary of Proposed Small Lot Dwelling Regulations

Building Regulation	Building Type				
	Single-Family Dwelling	Two-Family Dwelling	Multi-Family Dwelling	Row House	Sideways Row House
Maximum Building Height	District maximum				
Minimum Front Yard¹	10 feet				
Minimum Corner Side Yard¹	10 feet				
Minimum Interior Side Yard (Corner)¹	4 feet				
Minimum Interior Side Yard 1¹	4 feet				
Minimum Interior Side Yard 2¹	10 feet				
Minimum Rear Yard¹	10 feet				
Minimum Lot Area	2,000 square feet per dwelling unit				
Maximum Dwelling Units per Building Type	1	2	4		
Maximum Building Coverage	60%				
Maximum Principal Building Footprint²	1,000 square feet per dwelling unit	850 square feet per dwelling unit			
Maximum Principal Building Gross Floor Area	1,700 square feet per dwelling unit if the building is less than or equal to 17 feet in height. 1,200 square feet per dwelling unit if the building is more than 17 feet in height.				
Required Landscape Yards¹	The front and corner side yards shall be maintained as landscape yards.				
Minimum Parking Required	1 off-street parking space per unit.				

1. The minimum yard and landscape yard requirements shall be applied to the perimeter of the development and not to the individual principal buildings within the development.
2. If the dwelling units are arranged in a manner where one unit is stacked on top of the other, the maximum footprint of the building shall be 1,200 square feet for each unit that is on the ground floor.

R-1, R-2, SR-1, & SR-1A Amendments and Consolidation

The Expanding Housing Options proposal also includes amendments to the R-1, R-2, SR-1, and SR-1A districts. The proposal reorganizes the code so the R-1/5,000, R-1/7,000, and R-1/12,000 zoning standards are all in one chapter with easy-to-read tables. This has been proposed to ensure that the same language and formatting remains consistent across each of the base zoning districts, with specific dimensional requirements being the only difference between the zones. The proposal would also reformat the R-2 and SR-1/SR-1A zones to include similar tables for consistency. Other proposed modifications to development standards include changes to building height, setbacks, lot width, and building coverage. These changes are detailed in the tables below, which compare the existing and proposed standards for each of the affected districts. Specific changes to dimensional requirements are discussed after the tables.

Summary of Proposed Changes to the R-1 Zoning Districts

Regulation	Current			Proposed		
	R-1/12,000	R-1/7,000	R-1/5,000	R-1/12,000	R-1/7,000	R-1/5,000
Maximum Building Height (Pitched Roof)	28 feet or average of block face			30 feet or equal to the average building height of the block face, whichever is greater		
Maximum Building Height (Flat Roof)	20 feet			24 feet		
Minimum Front Yard	Block face average or 20 feet if no buildings exist			20 feet or equal to one abutting front yard on the same block face		
Minimum Corner Side Yard	Block face average or 20 feet if no buildings exist		10 feet	20 feet or equal to one abutting front yard on the same block face		10 feet or equal to one abutting front yard on the same block face
Minimum Interior Side Yard (Corner)	8 feet	6 feet	4 feet	4 feet		
Minimum Interior Side Yard 1	8 feet	6 feet	4 feet	4 feet		
Minimum Interior Side Yard 2	10 feet			10 feet		
Minimum Rear Yard	25 feet		25% of depth, no more than 20 feet	20% of lot depth or 25 feet, whichever is less	20% of lot depth or 20 feet, whichever is less	
Maximum Building Coverage	35%	40%		50%		

Summary of Proposed Changes to the R-2 Zoning District

Regulation	Current	Proposed
	R-2	R-2
Maximum Building Height (Pitched Roof)	28 feet or average of block face	30 feet or equal to the average building height of the block face, whichever is greater
Maximum Building Height (Flat Roof)	20 feet	24 feet
Minimum Front Yard	Block face average or 20 feet if no buildings exist	20 feet or equal to one abutting front yard on the same block face
Minimum Corner Side Yard	10 feet	10 feet
Minimum Interior Side Yard (Corner)	Twin homes: 10 feet Other uses: 4 feet	4 feet
Minimum Interior Side Yard 1	4 feet	4 feet
Minimum Interior Side Yard 2	10 feet	10 feet
Minimum Rear Yard	25% lot depth, no less than 15 feet, no more than 25 feet	20% of lot depth or 15 feet, whichever is less
Maximum Building Coverage	45%	50%

Summary of Proposed Changes to the SR-1 and SR-1A Zoning Districts

Regulation	Current		Proposed	
	SR-1	SR-1A	SR-1	SR-1A
Maximum Building Height (Pitched Roof)	28 feet or average of block face	23 feet or average of block face	30 feet or average of block face	25 feet or average of block face
Maximum Building Height (Flat Roof)	20 feet	16 feet	24 feet	20 feet
Minimum Front Yard	Block face average or 20 feet if no buildings exist		20 feet or equal to one abutting front yard on the same block face	
Minimum Corner Side Yard	10 feet		10 feet	
Minimum Interior Side Yard (Corner)	Twin homes: 10 feet Other uses: 4 feet		4 feet	
Minimum Interior Side Yard 1	4 feet		4 feet	
Minimum Interior Side Yard 2	10 feet		10 feet	
Minimum Rear Yard	25% lot depth, no less than 15 feet, no more than 30 feet		20% of lot depth or 15 feet, whichever is less	
Maximum Building Coverage	40%		50%	
<p><i>Note: The required side yards may be less depending on lot width. Required yards apply to the perimeter of the property.</i></p>				

Setbacks

This proposal aims to simplify the code and reduce inconsistencies across similar zones. Side yard setbacks in all of the affected districts would be set at 4 feet on one side and 10 feet on the other. Front and corner yard setbacks would no longer be determined by averaging each of the yards on the block face. Block face averaging requirements can be difficult for staff to explain to residents and can also be difficult, costly, and time consuming for residents to implement.

Building Coverage

Building coverage is proposed to be increased to 50% in each of the affected districts. Building coverage maximums limit a property owner’s ability to build additions and accessory buildings, like garages and Accessory Dwelling Units. For example, a 5,000 sq. ft. lot with a 40% maximum building coverage requirement could only build on up to 2,000 sq. ft. Increasing the maximum building coverage to 50% would allow an additional 500 sq. ft. of buildable area, or up to 2,500 sq. ft. Lot coverage restrictions can limit the ability to expand the main level of the home, which may be more economically feasible than adding a second story.

Building and Wall Height

Another significant change proposed is a slight increase to the maximum building height allowed. The proposal would raise the maximum height in most zones to 30 feet for pitched roofs (+2 feet from existing) and 24 feet for flat roofs (+4 feet from existing). Increasing the overall building height is intended to allow property owners more options that may fit their needs and may promote more households with children living in the city. A 30-foot maximum building height would be consistent with what the city allows in other residential zones, like FB-UN1 and RMF-30. Residential zones in neighboring municipalities generally allow maximum heights between 30-35 feet. [South Salt Lake](#) allows up to 35 feet (R1), [Millcreek](#) allows up to 30 feet (R-1-8) or 32 feet (R-1-21), [West Valley City](#) allows up to 30 feet (R-1-7) or 35 feet (R-2-8), and [North Salt Lake](#) allows up to 35 feet. Because homebuilders and contractors frequently work across jurisdictions, aligning our maximum heights with what is allowed elsewhere is one way to make the building permit process less confusing.

In the SR-1A district, a district with lower building heights, heights have been increased to 25 feet for a pitched roof (+2 feet from existing) and 20 feet for flat roofs (+4 feet from existing). This proposed increase is consistent with what is proposed in the other affected zones. Building height analysis has shown that 35% of the buildings located in the SR-1A district are noncomplying buildings, exceeding the 23-foot maximum height allowed in the district. It is important to note that the data does not differentiate roof forms so some of the buildings included in that 35% could be compliant flat roofs. Increasing the maximum building heights in this district would allow for two-story residential structures to be more feasible. The current 16-foot maximum height for flat roofs buildings is not realistically high enough to allow a full two-story building.

Another proposed change that isn't noted in the tables above is the elimination of the maximum wall height standard. The current code limits both the overall height of the building as well as the height of the exterior walls. This standard can sometimes be difficult for staff to explain to residents. Removing this standard would help to simplify the code. Without a wall height standard, the allowed height in each zone would still be regulated by the overall maximum building height regulations.

The maximum height is different for buildings with pitched roofs and flat roofs. A pitched roof would still result in wall height that is less than the maximum building height because the zoning code defines a pitched roof as a 2-foot rise over a 12-foot run. A 30-foot-high building with a roof width of 36 feet would result in the walls being approximately 27 feet high. This proposal could consider modifying this definition to require a steeper pitch, requiring at least two roof planes to have a pitch, or requiring the pitch to angle down towards the exterior walls of the building.

Minimum Lot Area

Minimum lot areas in the R-1 districts have not been modified. What this means is that any new larger-sized, market-rate construction would still be required to meet the more restrictive lot size standards, while more options would be available to new construction that is more affordable, whether as an Accessory Dwelling Unit, Affordable Housing Incentives development, or a Small Lot Dwelling.

In the SR-1 and R-2 districts, the minimum lot area for two-family and twin home dwellings has been reduced from 8,000 sq. ft. total to 5,000 sq. ft. Because 5,000 sq. ft. is the minimum lot size for single-family dwellings, many existing lots in the zone are too small to meet the current lot area requirements for a duplex. This reduction is intended to promote the development of duplexes in the R-2 and SR-1 districts, where they are already permitted uses.

Minimum Lot Width

Removal of the minimum lot width could make some existing noncomplying lots (due to less lot width than required) buildable. This was briefly discussed in [Potential Approaches to Simplifying and Improving R-1 Districts](#). Zoning currently requires between 50-100 feet of lot width depending on location and land use. However, due to historical surveying practices and subdivision standards, there are many lots in the city that fall short by a mere couple feet of their specific required lot width, thus making them noncompliant. By removing the minimum lot width standards, all noncompliant lots due to lot width would become compliant and some lots that are currently unbuildable would become buildable.

There are other standards in the code that regulate the size of lots and the spacing between dwellings, so prescribing a minimum lot width may not be necessary. As detailed earlier, there are minimum setbacks that add up to 14 feet of lot width (10 feet on one side, and 4 feet on the other). After factoring in the width of a house and the minimum lot size, in addition to these required setbacks, it becomes apparent that lot width can operate as a self-regulating standard. If a property owner wants to divide their existing lot to create a new lot, the subdivision code requires a process to do so and requires the resulting lots to have a minimum building area. If the property is already in an existing subdivision, a subdivision amendment may be required.

Removal of Restrictive Language for Duplexes

In the land use tables, as well as within the R-2 zoning code, the following language is in place, restricting the development of duplexes and twin homes within the zone:

Provided that no more than 2 two-family buildings are located adjacent to one another and no more than 3 such dwellings are located along the same block face (within subdivisions approved after April 12, 1995).

Zoning standards that restrict duplexes and twin homes in the districts intended to allow these housing types are not consistent with the City's goals related to easing the housing crisis. The proposal removes this restrictive language, allowing duplexes and twin-homes regardless of when the land was subdivided and existing development on the block face.

Flag Lot Modifications

Currently, flag lots are difficult to create as there are additional regulations that must be satisfied such as additional lot area requirements and conditional use approval. Under this proposal, flag lots would be allowed by-right. The creation of a flag lot would still require a subdivision process, but it no longer would require a public hearing for a conditional use permit. The subdivision process to create a new flag lot requires a notice to those within a 300-foot radius of the property as well as a 10-day public comment period.

The additional lot area requirement for flag lots has been reduced from 150% to 100% of the zoning district's minimum lot size, excluding the access strip. This is intended to simplify the requirements and streamline the process of creating flag lots for new housing. It would also align the flag lot standards with those of the base zoning district.

Another modification intended to remove barriers to flag lot development is a reduction to the 24-foot-wide access strip requirement. After consulting with the City's Fire Code reviewers, staff proposes to reduce the minimum width from 24 feet to 20 feet, which is the minimum width required for fire access, ensuring adequate emergency vehicle access to the property. Flag lot access strips will require approval by the Fire Department.

A flag lot is currently only able to be used for a single-family dwelling. This regulation has been modified to clarify that Small Lot Dwellings would also be permitted on flag lots.

Impacts on Affordable Housing Incentives

One key concern that both Council and staff share is the potential impact the Small Lot Dwelling proposal could have on the recently adopted Affordable Housing Incentives. The Affordable Housing Incentives ordinance allows the construction of up to 4 units on a residential lot, but only if 1 or 2 of the units are sold or rented below market rate. This incentive is a good option for homebuilders who have experience with affordable housing, but the process can be complex for less experienced builders or average homeowners.

Small Lot Dwellings are an additional strategy to encourage new construction that is relatively more affordable than what is currently available. The Small Lot Dwelling proposal stipulates that new housing types must have a limited footprint and floor area. This is an effort to encourage new construction that is relatively more affordable than a larger residential building without requiring the additional complexity of a below-market-rate project. This approach is similar to what has recently been implemented in Durham, NC, and Portland, OR. These cities have demonstrated that missing middle housing types and smaller homes on smaller lots were between \$250,000-\$300,000 less expensive than larger new construction single-family homes.

The primary difference between the two options is that Affordable Housing Incentives limits price and Small Lot Dwellings limits size. Under the Affordable Housing Incentives code, new buildings and units can be any size, subject to the base zoning standards. Under the Small Lot Dwelling code, the maximum footprint and floor area regulations would limit the size of the building while no deed restriction is required to limit the price of each unit. In addition to the Affordable Housing Incentives' required deed restrictions, there are also yearly reports that the property owner must file with the Planning Division in order to verify compliance with the affordability standards. Small Lot Dwellings would not require deed restrictions or yearly reports, easing the burden on property owners and reducing the administrative resources and costs for the city.

Both ordinances are intended to increase production of affordable housing, but the ordinances differ in the route getting there. There is data that supports the claim that smaller homes on smaller lots cost less. The Small Lot Dwelling ordinance could be considered a form of naturally occurring affordable housing.

Renderings of Potential Small Lot Development

The following images are renderings of potential development scenarios created by staff. While every effort has been made to provide detailed, realistic examples, it is important to note that these are simply illustrative examples. Real world structures may differ in appearance and streetscape impact from what is shown in the renderings. Each example illustrates a different type of Small Lot Dwelling surrounded by typical single-family homes.



The image above shows two single-family dwellings on a 4,000 sq. ft. lot with a 33% lot coverage. One example is a single-story home, which would be allowed additional floor area in the basement. The other example is a two-story home with a smaller footprint and no basement. Small Lot single-family dwellings would be permitted to have up to a 1,000 sq. ft. footprint and 1,200 sq. ft. of internal space.



The image above shows a stacked duplex with a pitched roof on a 4,000 sq. ft. lot. The footprint of this duplex is 1,265 sq. ft. The lot coverage in this example is 31%.



The image above shows a two-story triplex with a pitched roof on a 6,000 sq. ft. lot. The lot coverage in this example is approximately 32%.



The image above shows four townhomes on an 8,000 sq. ft. lot, with a 29% lot coverage. The townhomes are each two stories with a pitched roof, and parking is provided in the rear yard.