

Urgent Changes to Planning Documents for Housing

What is the goal of the initiative?

The **Urgent Changes to Planning Documents for Housing (UCPDH)** is seeking to support housing supply in collaboration with the federal and provincial governments, the Halifax Regional Municipality is proposing amendments to planning documents that regulate development in the Urban Service Area.

The proposed changes to planning documents intend to by changing regulations that currently limit density, incentivize residential construction and create programs to support affordable housing and meet the targets of the HRM Action Plan, and include:

- Meet the housing objectives of the municipality, as well as the Federal Government and the Province of Nova Scotia to increase housing supply and streamline approvals;
- Create more supportive policy and regulatory conditions for building new housing, providing more housing options, and diversifying construction types;
- Build on the Centre Plan framework to further support gentle density, missing middle housing, more housing on transit, more housing for students and residential conversions;
- Advance suburban opportunity sites aligned with transit, and other amendments to suburban planning documents that improve regulatory conditions;
- Create more flexibility for backyard suites across the entire Municipality; and
- Create additional regulatory capacity for at least 200,000 units in the Urban Service Area

Initiatives in HRM's Action Plan include:

1. Make the permit application process more efficient and less expensive for applicants upfront
2. Encourage converting non-residential (e.g. office) buildings into residential units
3. Promote more dense development along proposed rapid transit corridors
4. Make it easier to include housing in heritage redevelopment projects
5. Work with partners to incentivize more density in residential neighbourhoods
6. Partner with the private sector to speed up approvals
7. Expand the Affordable Housing Grant Program
8. Create a program to identify available land for affordable housing

Additional planning proposals include:

- Expand the list of permitted dwelling types in the Established Residential (ER) Zones
- Increase height in Higher Order Residential and Corridor Zones
- Increase height and Floor Area Ratio (FAR) increases in Centre Zones
- Increase density near universities
- Permit up to four-unit dwellings in all residential zones within the Urban Service Boundary
- Remove/reduce minimum parking requirements
- Increase as-of-right development approvals
- Work with the Province of Nova Scotia to discharge Development Agreements



These are **proposed** changes and are **subject to Regional Council approval**.

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Where are these changes being proposed?

- The proposed planning document amendments will be implemented in existing serviced areas, which include the Regional Centre, the Suburban Area, and Rural communities with central water and sewer.
- The Regional Centre, Suburban Area **and** Rural Area will receive amendments to existing accessory structure regulations to allow more backyard suites.
- Visit the interactive map to see what changes are proposed in your area.

How will the proposed amendments impact existing municipal plans? ...

- The proposed amendments are guided by the principles set out in the Regional Plan and developed using existing frameworks and feedback from public consultation during the recent phase of the Regional Plan Review.
- Once approved by Regional Council, these amendments will enable higher density development as-of-right, to support more housing options within communities.
- The amendments will not directly build affordable housing, but will accompany the municipality's other affordable housing initiatives, including those outlined in the HAF agreement, to help address the housing needs of current and future residents.

What is the adoption process?

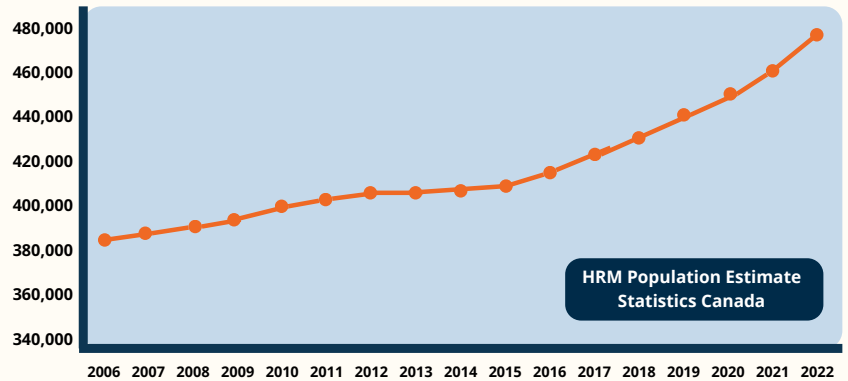
- Planning staff drafted proposed amendments to existing planning documents and collected initial feedback from the public between January 17 and February 16, 2024.
- A staff report with proposed amendments, revised to reflect what was heard from communities, and compiled public feedback will be presented to Regional Council at First Reading, anticipated in April 2024.
- An in-person Public Hearing, anticipated in May 2024, will be held for the public to attend and speak (please check the HAF website for an updated schedule).
- Regional Council may request staff to make further revisions to the proposed amendments prior to a Second Reading at Regional Council after the Public Hearing.
- The municipality must meet the conditions of the HAF agreement to receive funding.



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Why do we need more housing?

- **Rapid population growth** in the municipality (2 - 4.5 % per year) has greatly increased the demand for housing.
- The rate of **residential construction** has not been able to keep up with the demand for housing. As of 2024, the municipality is estimated to have a shortage of 20,000 dwelling units.

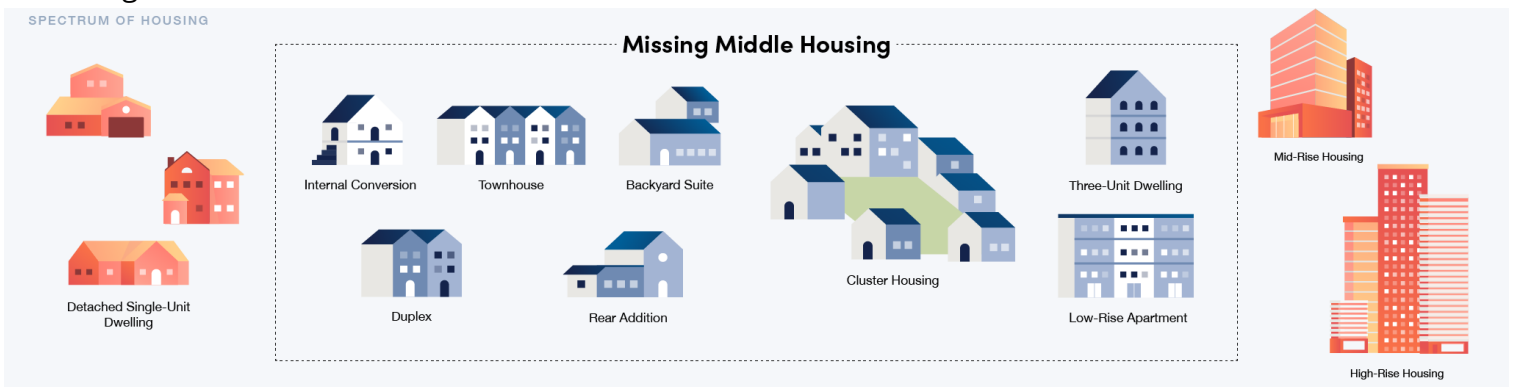


- Unprecedented growth has led to a **lack of supply** and **high costs** for renters and potential home owners. Since 2021, the vacancy rate in Halifax has remained at 1 %, while rent continues to rise (up 11.8 % between 2022-2023).
- The municipality requires not only a greater supply of housing, but also a more diverse supply with options that meet the needs of all residents. Without intervention, the gap between housing demand and housing supply will continue to increase every year.

What is “Missing Middle” Housing and Gentle Density?

Missing middle refers to housing that is intended to fill the gap between single-unit dwellings and high-density multi-unit apartments or mixed-use residential buildings. Missing middle housing options support walkable, complete communities that meet the needs of all residents.

Examples include: Townhouses, two and three-unit dwellings, cluster housing and small scale multi-unit housing.



Gentle density is additional housing that has a minimal impact on a neighborhood's built form and character. The benefits of gentle density include intergenerational living spaces, aging in place and additional income for property owners.

Examples include: Backyard suites, secondary suites and internal conversions of existing single unit dwellings to create new units.



For more information on housing affordability in Halifax, please read the **Municipal Housing Needs Assessment**.

For more information please visit halifax.ca/haf

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What is the Housing Accelerator Fund?

The Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) is a federal program that is administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) that aims to provide funding directly to local authorities to incentivize and support initiatives that accelerate the supply of housing. The Halifax Regional Municipality is one of 179 Canadian jurisdictions that have entered into contribution agreements to fast-track the construction of new homes.

How does the HAF funding work?


HAF funds will be released in four equal payments, over a four years period, with installments based on whether the municipality is meeting its HAF housing target. All funding must be spent by the end of the four-year program.

In order to receive funding, the municipality must meet the conditions of the HAF agreement, including implementing the eight specific initiatives and housing supply growth targets identified in the Action Plan within two years of the start of the HAF program.

Once funding is received, municipalities can choose how to use them, as long as it meets the broad range of permitted uses under the HAF program. This can include funding the Action Plan initiatives, or broader capital investments in housing infrastructure and community-related infrastructure that supports housing.

Application Stage	June 2023	Regional Council <u>approved staff's recommendation</u> to move forward with the HAF application process, which included the submission of an <u>Action Plan</u> .
	September 2023	The Federal Minister of Housing asked the municipality to commit to four housing policy changes to receive approval of its HAF application. These changes were considered and <u>largely endorsed by Regional Council</u> .
	October 2023	The municipality's application was <u>approved by the Federal Minister of Housing</u> and an <u>agreement was reached</u> to deliver \$79.3 million in support of housing initiatives that will be implemented by the end of 2026.

Funding Stage	October 2023	Round 1: Provided shortly after the approval and signing of the HAF contribution agreement.
	October 2024	Round 2: Assessment by the CMHC of the municipality's implementation and completion of HAF initiatives.
	October 2025	Round 3: Assessment by the CMHC of the municipality's implementation and completion of HAF initiatives.
	October 2026	Round 4: Assessment by the CMHC of the municipality's performance meeting its housing supply growth targets.

 For more information on the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) application process, please visit the [CMHC website](#).

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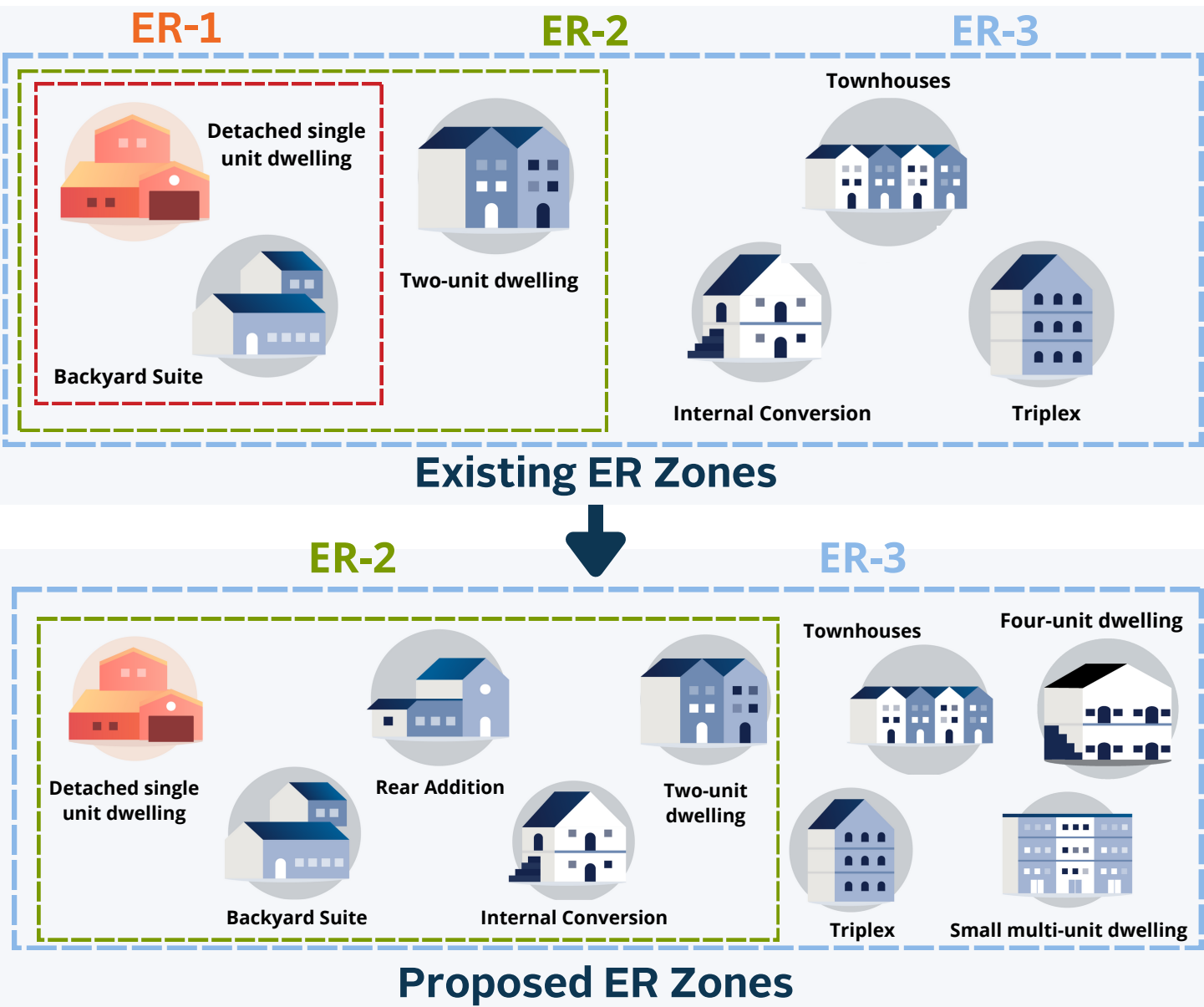
Regional Centre: Established Residential Zones

Proposed HAF Amendments: Permitted Uses

It is proposed that the municipality allow **four or more dwelling units** in all residential zones in the Regional Centre by amending the existing “Established Residential” (ER) Zones (ER-1, ER-2 and ER-3) to permit more housing options.

The proposed approach is to replace the ER-1 Zone, which currently limits a large portion of the Regional Centre to single-unit dwellings, with the ER-2 and ER-3 Zones, which allow for greater density and a range of housing types.

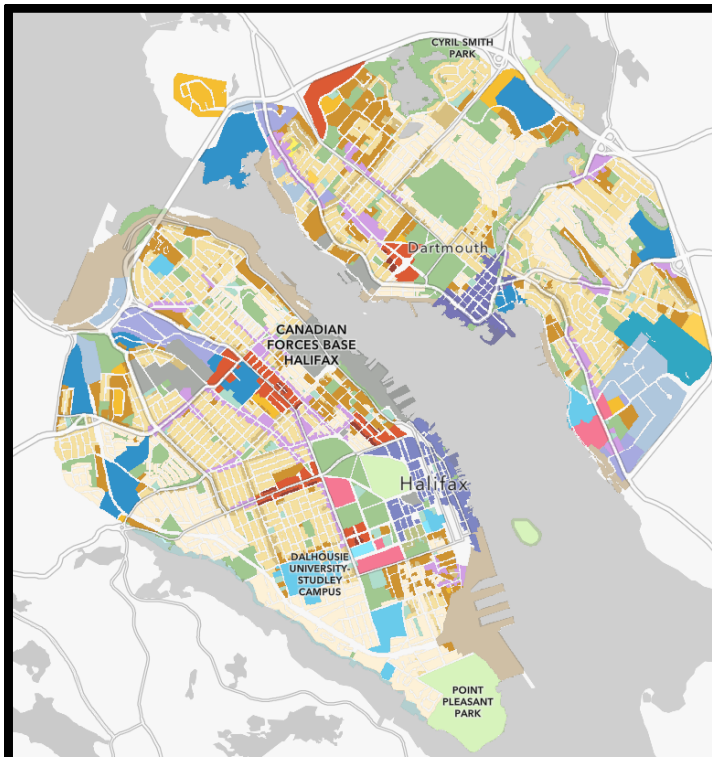
See the following table for more details about the proposed zone amendments.



URGENT CHANGES TO PLANNING DOCUMENTS FOR HOUSING

Regional Centre: ER Zones

Existing zoning



ER-1

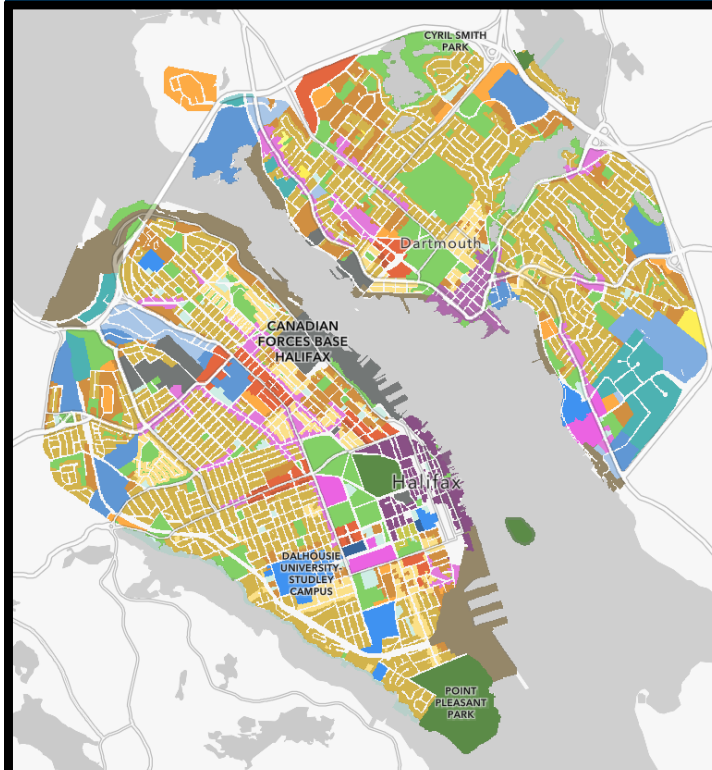
ER-2

ER-3

The **ER-1 Zone** (shown in light beige) currently **limits** a significant amount of the Regional Centre to **single-unit dwellings**.

The **ER-2 Zone** (shown in medium beige), which allows up to two dwelling units, is also applied broadly.

There are only a few pockets of **ER-3 Zoned** neighbourhoods (shown in dark beige), which are mostly located in downtown areas and near universities.



Proposed zoning

It is proposed that all **ER-1 Zones** (shown in light beige) and **ER-2 Zones** (shown in medium beige) are replaced with the **ER-3 Zone** (shown in dark beige), with the exception of Heritage Conservation District study areas which would be zoned **ER-2**.

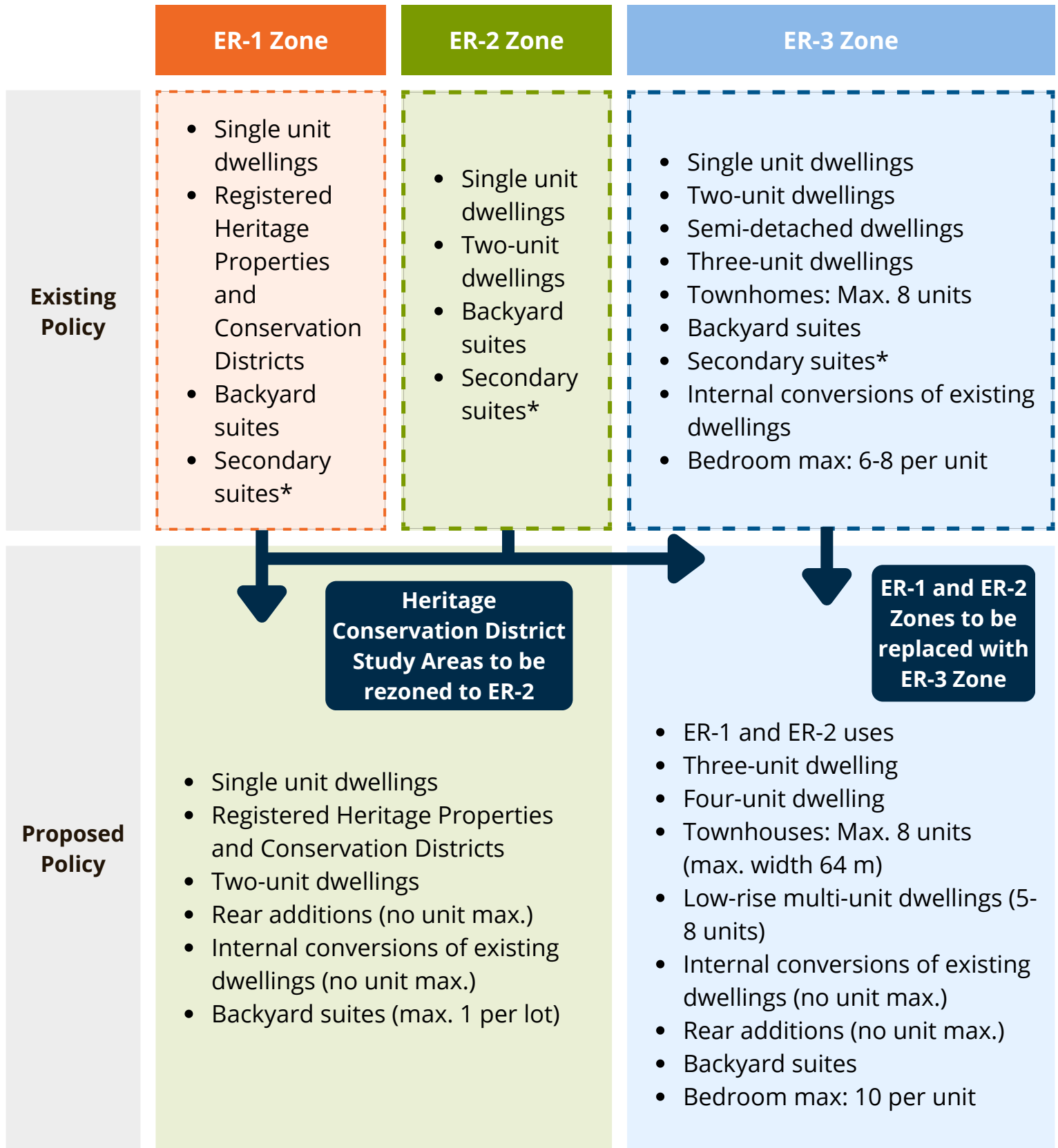
This would permit **greater density** across the ER designation within the Regional Centre.



Visit the [interactive map here](#).

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Regional Centre: ER Zones



***Note:** Secondary suites will still be permitted in the Regional Centre and Suburban Area subject to the National Building Code.

Proposed Amendments: Design Requirements

Included in the proposed amendments are new and modified design requirements for residential development in the ER Zones.

A complete list of proposed ER Zone amendments are on the municipality’s **HAF website** and on the **ER-3 Fact Sheet**.

	ER-2 Zone	ER-3 Zone
Proposed Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">8-11 metre max. height (no change)No minimum parking required for any residential developmentGarbage screening (applies to 4+ units)No ground floor balconies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">11 metre max. height, with a 3 metre exemption for a pitched roof or attic unitNo minimum parking required for any residential developmentFor multi-unit dwellings (5+ units):<ul style="list-style-type: none">Maximum building depth 30 metresMaximum building width 20 metresIf provided, parking must not be located in the front yardParking screening is required from neighbouring propertiesFenestration (window) minimums and articulation standards for walls facing the streetGarbage screening (applies to 4+ units)Street-oriented unit entrancesNo ground floor balconies

Proposed Amendments: Lot Coverage

The maximum lot coverage percentage is proposed to increase in the ER Zones, which means that residential development can build more than before on the same lot.

Single unit dwelling use



40%

Other residential uses on lots greater than 325 square metres



50%

Other residential uses on lots less than 325 square metres



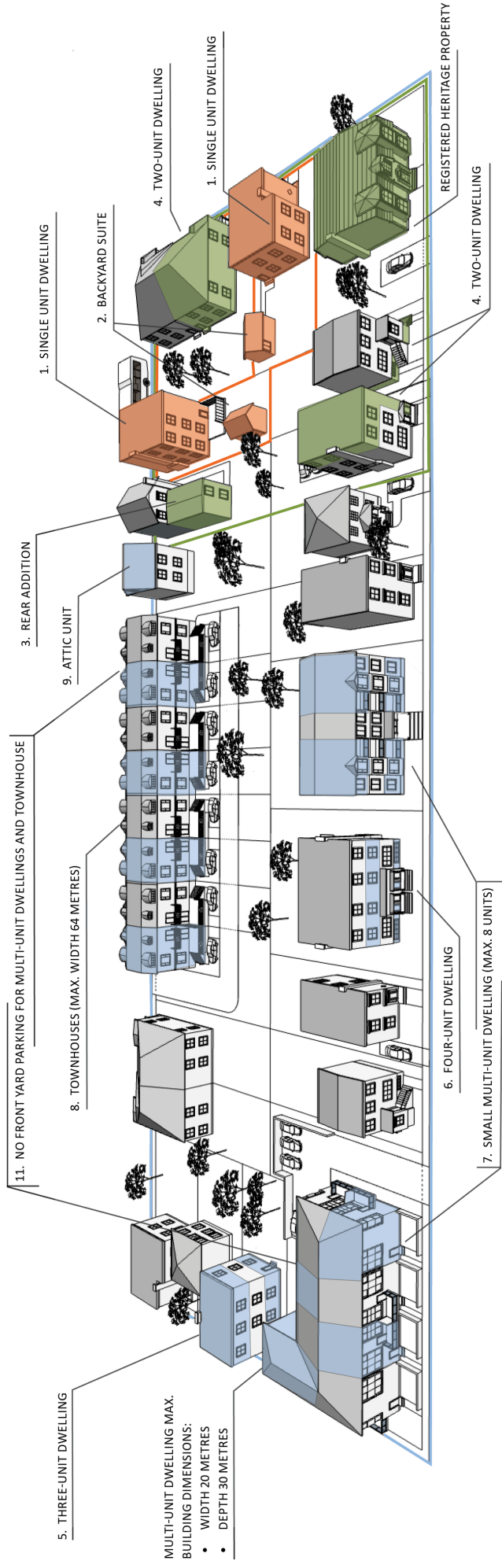
60%

? **Lot coverage** generally means the percentage of a lot that is covered by roofed structures over 0.6 metres in height.

Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) Proposed Amendments
Changes to Established Residential (ER) Zones

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ER-1, ER-2, and ER-3 Zones are “Established Residential” zones in the Regional Centre. The proposed zoning change would replace all ER-1 Zones with ER-2 and ER-3 Zones to allow for more housing options as-of-right.



ER-1 Zone

The ER-1 Zone permits:

- 1. Single unit dwellings
- 2. Backyard suites

ER-2 Zone

The proposed ER-2 Zone applies to registered heritage properties and proposed Heritage Conservation District and will permit:

- 1-2. All ER-1 Zone uses
- 3. Internal conversions and rear additions
- 4. Two-unit dwellings (e.g. duplex)

ER-3 Zone

The proposed ER-3 Zone will permit:

- 1-4. All ER-1 and ER-2 Zone uses
- 5. Three-unit dwellings
- 6. Four-unit dwellings
- 7. Small multi-unit dwellings (max. 8 units)
- 8. Townhouses (max. width 64 metres)

Other Requirements

Proposed requirements in the ER Zones include:

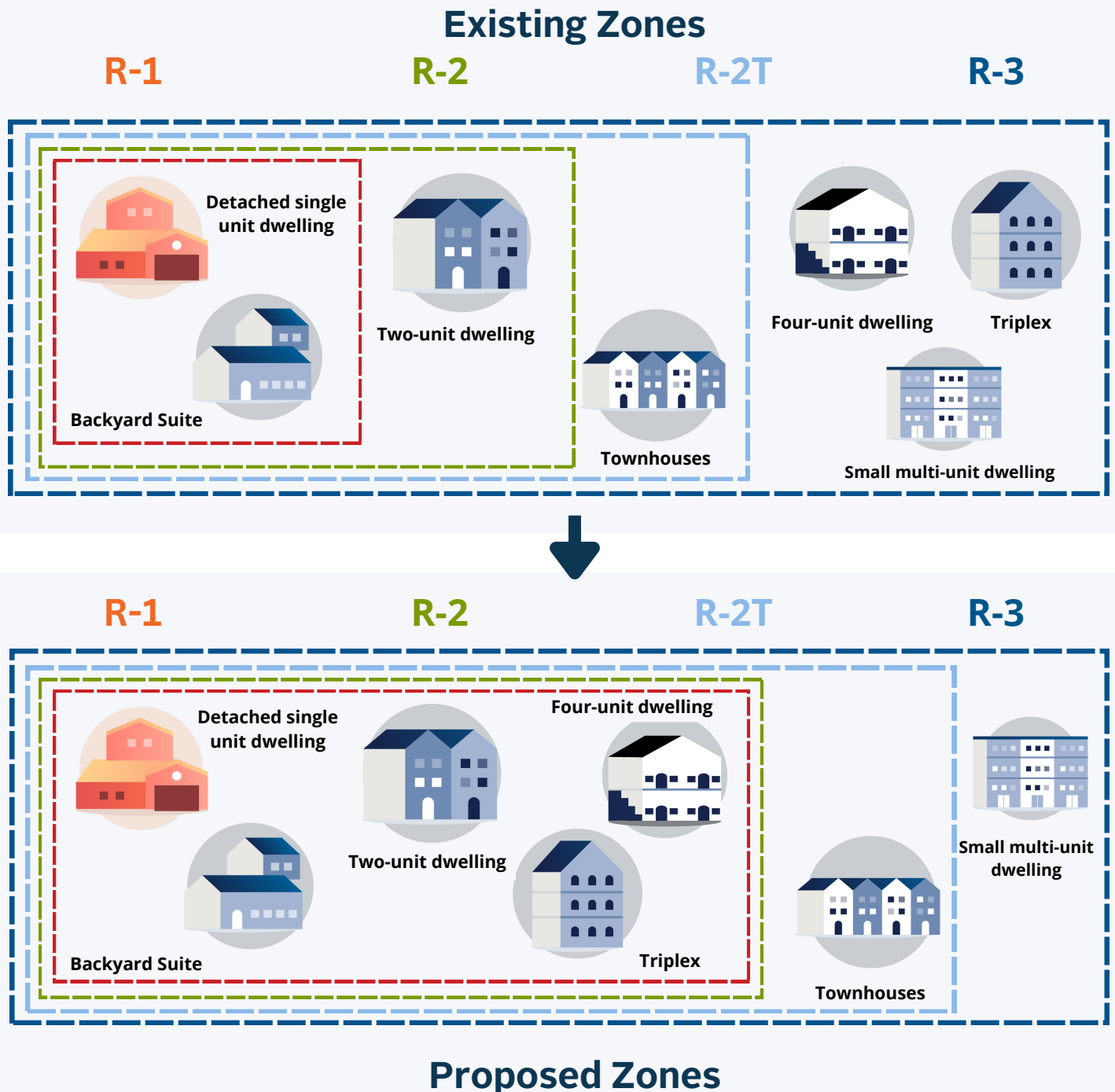
- 9. 3 metre exemption for a pitched roof/attic unit in the ER-3 Zone
- 10. No minimum parking will be required for any residential development
- 11. If parking is provided for a multi-unit dwelling (5+ units) or townhouse, it must not be located in the front yard
- 12. No unit count maximum for internal conversions or rear additions
- 13. Max. lot coverage for residential uses
 - 40% - single unit dwellings
 - 50% - lots > 325 sq. metres
 - 60% - lots < 325 sq. metres

URGENT CHANGES TO PLANNING DOCUMENTS FOR HOUSING

Suburban and Rural Areas: Proposed Amendments

Proposed HAF Amendments: Permitted Uses

It is proposed that the municipality allow a **maximum of four dwelling units** in all residential zones within the existing serviced areas by amending the “Low-Density Residential” Zones (R-1 and R-2) to permit more housing options.



What are the Proposed Changes to Residential Zones?

Four dwelling units on centrally serviced lots in all residential zones (except the Beechville Community)

- Like other municipalities across Canada, the municipality is proposing to replace exclusionary “R-1” (single family dwellings only) zoning with policy that allows more diverse types of housing to meet the needs of residents.
- “At least four dwelling units” means that a single unit dwelling, two-unit dwelling or a three-unit dwelling would be permitted on any lot, in addition to a backyard suite. A four-unit dwelling without a backyard suite would also be permitted on a lot.
- This provision would apply to lots in the Urban Service Area, outside the Regional Centre, which are already serviced with central sewer and water.

? Most R-1 (single family home) and R-2 (two-unit dwelling) zones already permit 2-3 dwelling units per lot (e.g. main + backyard or secondary suite*).

	R-1 Zone	R-2 Zone
Existing Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Single unit dwellingsBackyard or Secondary suites*	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Single unit dwellingsTwo-unit dwellingsBackyard or secondary suites*
Proposed Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Single unit dwellingsTwo-unit dwellingsThree-unit dwellingsBackyard suitesFour-unit dwellings (no backyard suite)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Single unit dwellingsTwo-unit dwellingsThree-unit dwellingsBackyard suitesFour-unit dwellings (no backyard suite)

***Note:** Secondary suites will still be permitted in the Regional Centre and Suburban Area subject to the National Building Code.

URGENT CHANGES TO PLANNING DOCUMENTS FOR HOUSING

Suburban and Rural Areas: Proposed Amendments

Remove policies in the Suburban Area that require single unit dwellings in new developments

- Some residential zones still contain outdated policy that require a minimum number of single unit dwellings to be built, even though other types of housing are allowed.
- Removing this policy would continue **to permit** single unit dwellings in new development, but would **not require** them.

Relax minimum parking requirements for residential development

- It is proposed that parking minimums be reduced for all residential buildings, including multi-unit dwellings and shelters, to 0.33 parking spaces per residential unit.

Adjust backyard suite requirements to be more flexible across the municipality

- Accessory structures that are considered “non-conforming” could be converted into backyard suites, up to a gross floor area of 93 square metres (1,000 sq ft).
- Accessory structures could be built taller, up to 7.7 metres (25 ft), and larger, up to 93 square metres (1000 square ft), to encourage more backyard suites.

What would these changes mean for my neighbourhood?

More choices for residents: Missing middle housing helps fill the gap between single-unit dwellings and high-density multi-unit apartments.

Inclusive communities: A range of dwelling types and greater supply provides more opportunities for affordable housing.

Greater density, same form: Maximum building height, minimum setbacks, and maximum lot coverage requirements will remain the same, creating minimal impact to the existing built form.

What is the Suburban Housing Accelerator (SHA) Plan?

To advance developments in suburban communities that are consistent with the direction of the Regional Plan, **Suburban Opportunity Sites** are proposed to be added to a new **Suburban Housing Accelerator (SHA) Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law**.

Selected sites will receive a new designation and zone based on a modern planning framework.

What are Suburban Opportunity Sites?

- Suburban Opportunity Sites were selected from the [list of site specific requests](#) submitted to the municipality as part of the ongoing [Suburban Planning process](#). This includes requests received through the [Regional Plan Review consultation process](#).
- Suburban Opportunity Sites were selected based on the following criteria:
 - **Lot Size:** Must be smaller than 2 hectares
 - **Location:** Must meet at least one of the following:
 - be within 800 metres of a [proposed Rapid Transit](#) route
 - be within 1200 metres of a [proposed Rapid Transit](#) terminal
 - be within 800 metres of a post-secondary institution campus, or
 - be a site identified by the [Provincial Land for Housing Program](#) or a housing non-profit
 - **No Net Loss:** Projects must not result in the demolition of an existing multi-unit dwelling (3 units or more)
 - **Environmental protection:** Sites are not located within a coastal or watercourse setback

Information on the selected Opportunity Sites and recommended changes is available [here](#).




Visit the [interactive map here](#) to see where HAF Opportunity Sites are located.

What does the proposed SHA Plan Permit?

The proposed Suburban Housing Accelerator (SHA) Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law’s **Housing Accelerator (HA) Zone**, would permit a range of residential uses from **low-rise (maximum height 3-4 storeys)** to **high-rise (maximum height 14 storeys)**, depending on each site’s surrounding built form and community context.

	HA Zone
Proposed Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single-unit dwelling• Two-unit dwelling• Three-unit dwelling• Four-unit dwelling• Townhouses: (max. width 64 m)• Multi-unit dwellings (max. building dimensions 64 m)• Commercial uses (ground floor)• Institutional uses (ground floor)• Backyard suites (for single to four-unit dwellings)
Design Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Site specific maximum building heights• 2.5 - 4 metres front yard setbacks requirements• 2 - 3 storey maximum streetwall heights for buildings over 5 storeys (6 storeys for wood and timber construction)• 70% Maximum Lot Coverage• 3 - 6 metre side setbacks• 6 - 8 metres rear setbacks• 2 - 4.5 metre streetwall stepbacks• Bedroom max: 10 per unit



For more details see the **Housing Accelerator (HA) Zone Fact Sheet (Attachment A5)** or the complete proposed **Suburban Housing Accelerator Land Use By-law (Attachment C4)**.