

Portland's ReCode: A promising start but insufficient to address our city's needs

The Urbanist Coalition of Portland (UCP) supports efforts to modernize Portland's land use code (ReCode). However, we feel the current proposal is insufficient to address the needs of our city today and into the future. The current proposal does not adequately remove barriers to addressing our housing crisis and building the walkable, bikeable, transit-accessible neighborhoods that we need to address our climate crisis. Below is a summary of our analysis of the Portland Planning Department's proposed Phase II ReCode changes.

Learn more at urbanistportland.me/policy/recode!

What's good

- **Streamlined housing options added by LD2003:** Allowing three and four unit housing types in all zones and approving them through the simpler minor site plan process maintains and streamlines the work that was done by LD2003 to increase housing options.
- **Streamlined Zones:** Combining some zones simplifies the code and allows for a more responsive housing market.
- **Transit-oriented development (TOD) zone type:** The new TOD zones encourage walkable and sustainable neighborhoods.
- **Removing parking minimums:** This barrier to housing has been removed city-wide.

What's concerning

- **Limited transit-oriented zoning:** The entire new transit-oriented zone category will only apply to three specific properties and the denser of the zones is not used at all. This is not a comprehensive plan for transit-oriented development in our city. It is spot zoning for specific projects while other, equally transit accessible, sites have their potential restricted.
- **New length maximums limit multi-family housing:** The new building length maximums will make multi-family housing more difficult to build in areas where it is currently allowed because these limits will make it difficult to fit more units alongside multiple staircases and elevators.
- **Multi-family housing limited to four units:** The new three- and four-family designations add complexity to the code in order to limit gently dense housing options.

- **Limited neighborhood businesses:** The proposed changes to allow for more neighborhood businesses are limited to just a handful of buildings and are complicated to comply with.
- **New restrictions on places of assembly:** Limiting places of assembly like religious centers to major roads is unnecessarily restrictive and removes the possibility of small walkable community gathering places.
- **Lack of Transparency and Predictability:** Zoning decisions lack clear justification and create confusion.

What's missing

- **Removing barriers to housing:** Setbacks, density limits, height restrictions, and minimum lot size reductions are needed to create walkable neighborhoods.
- **Overall code simplification:** The code remains complex and difficult to navigate.
- **Industrial land reform:** Underutilized industrial land could be revitalized with mixed-use development.
- **Streamlined approval process:** Allowing more housing types to go through the simpler minor site plan process could make it faster and easier for more projects to get approved.
- **Future-oriented planning:** Zoning should be based on data and future needs, not just catching up with current demand.

Take action

Portland deserves better than the status quo. ReCode should deliver meaningful change for a more affordable, livable, and sustainable city. The UCP urges city officials push for a ReCode that includes:

- **Housing:** Reduce barriers to building more housing such as building length, setbacks, and minimum lot size.
- **Transit:** Allow for transit oriented development along all of Portland's major transit corridors
- **Simplicity:** Further simplify the land use code by combining more residential zones and allowing more small multi-family projects to be considered minor site plans
- **Complete Neighborhoods:** Allow a neighborhood-scale mixture of uses in all residential zones

The UCP will provide detailed policy recommendations in the coming weeks. We urge you to join us in demanding the reform Portland needs.