

# Helping Housing Growth through Land Use

City of Helena | Helena

## Goals and Activities

In 2018, the Tri-County Housing Needs Assessment was completed, addressing key housing issues and needs for the greater Lewis and Clark, Broadwater, and Jefferson County region. As part of this effort, one of the actions that was recommended was to have jurisdictions "review development codes to include mechanisms that support affordable housing" in order to address the lack of housing available to meet demand at all levels of the rental and homeownership markets. With Helena having done away with single-family zoning districts years earlier so that every property in the city is allowed to have a second dwelling unit on-site by right (a regulation unique in the state so far), the question turned to: what other facets of zoning code could be changed to create more dwelling units? Also, given this allowance wasn't highly utilized, what was holding property owners back from, say, installing a backyard cottage or converting a floor of a house to an apartment? To address this issue, recommendations were developed amongst city planning staff at internal meetings for presentation to both the Tri-County Housing Task Force stakeholders and the city's Zoning Commission. All agreed that the clearest way to increase housing density in the near term was to move forward with changes to district dimensional standards so that some districts would be allowed greater lot coverage allowances, higher height allowances, and the removal of requirements that dictated you have to have a certain size lot to build more than 1 unit. Easing these regulatory barriers in the city's zoning code was unanimously passed by the City Commission early this year, and the city is excited to see the housing growth this may bring to the community in coming years.

## Major Outcomes

There are no firm, measurable outcomes and related evaluative criteria to determine success with such a zoning change. The expectation of the City Commission, though, is that these code changes will help increase housing unit density at a time when rental and homeowner housing stock availability and unit costs are far outstripped by market demand. The city hopes to see long-term growth within city limits as a result.



## Populations Served

The city of Helena is the largest incorporated area within Lewis and Clark County, and is home to just under 30,000 people.

## Major Partners and Funders

Chiefly, the Tri-County Housing Task Force, comprised of government, non-profit, and professional organization stakeholders with an interest in housing matters across Lewis and Clark, Broadwater, and Jefferson Counties.

## Advice for Others

Engage with stakeholders that represent those who are struggling to get a foot on the housing ladder, whatever the level of housing need, as well as with local developers, builders, and realtors that know your community's market. Their expertise in gauging true needs will help guide your planning efforts to address increased housing development opportunity. After all, there's no substitute for a good public process in informing your decision-making!

## Questions?

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