

The processing of approvals of development orders or permits, as defined in s.163.3164 for affordable housing projects is expedited to a greater degree than other projects.

Discussion

The City's Housing and Community Development Division staff certifies as "Affordable Housing Projects" residential projects that are either, funded by SHIP, CDBG, HOME, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, the State Apartment Incentive Loan program, or similar programs; or built by nonprofit affordable housing providers like Habitat for Humanity and Neighborhood Housing Development Corporation. The City expedites Affordable Housing Projects in the **two** ways listed below.

- The Building Department expedites the review and inspection of Affordable Housing Projects to a greater degree than other projects.
- ~~The Planning Department offers the affordable housing concept review and approval process to help Affordable Housing Projects meet the requirements of several State of Florida affordable housing programs (including the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program, and the State Apartment Incentive Loan Program). In addition to verifying that the project location has the appropriate zoning for the project, this review process notifies applicants of potential problems that would need to be addressed prior to final approval. The money saved by developers through the early review of the project can result in the delivery of housing at a lower cost than it would have been without the information generated by that review.~~

AHAC Recommendation

The Building and Planning Departments should continue their current programs to expedite affordable housing projects. The Housing and Community Development Division should expand the types of projects that it will certify as "Affordable Housing Projects" to include For-Profit projects that include affordable housing. Additionally, the City should develop written guidelines that clearly describe which projects will be expedited. Those guidelines should include a minimum percentage of units that must be affordable in order for the project to be expedited. Finally, if the City implements Incentives 3, 6, or 7, projects that use those incentives should also be expedited.

Allowance of flexibility in densities for affordable housing.

Discussion

By most measures (including age, wealth, income, and household size) Gainesville is a diverse community with diverse types of households and diverse housing needs. Therefore, to properly (effectively) serve its market, Gainesville needs a diverse housing stock. Although the City's current Land Development Regulations (LDRs) allow a wide variety of densities, those LDRs limit most of the City's residential land area to detached single family homes. In fact, a

recent study noted that, “In Gainesville, 63% of residential parcels allow for the construction of only one housing unit.” As detailed in the study, that development pattern incentivizes building larger, more expensive homes and can result in units that meet the needs of, and are affordable to, higher income households, but is not compatible to the development of housing that is affordable to the community’s moderate- and low-income residents. As a result, the existing and developing housing stock does not match the community’s housing needs, particularly for its lower income residents.

~~Currently, the City allows a wide variety of densities. This helps to provide many market rate housing choices for most residents of Gainesville.~~ Nevertheless, Gainesville’s experience with increasing density has been mixed. Generally, increasing density increases development potential and increases property values, both of which can spur development and redevelopment. While there are several benefits of development and redevelopment, they can increase the cost of both land and housing, and reduce the amount of affordable housing. This often results in the displacement of low-income renters and property owners. At the same time, increased density is often a windfall for developers and large property owners.

For these and other reasons, the City has retained a consultant to study how City regulations can be amended to incentivize development that is affordable to those that need it most (i.e., the City’s lower income residents).

~~For that reason, the City is reasonable to think that under certain circumstances, developers would provide affordable housing in exchange for increased density.~~

~~Additionally, experience indicates that in several zoning districts that permit multiple family development, the allowed density often exceeds the market demand. For that reason, in those districts, height, not density is the limiting factor. Therefore, in those districts, the City is reasonable to think that under certain circumstances, developers would provide affordable housing in exchange for increased height.~~

~~Land use intensity, including height and density, will probably be discussed in a study of Inclusionary and Exclusionary Zoning that is currently being conducted by a Consultant for the City.~~

AHAC Recommendation **(Option 1, No Change)**

The City should consider revising its Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations in two important ways. These changes can and should be implemented simultaneously. The first way would be to increase maximum residential densities and/or height limits, in at least some residential districts. The second way would be to link any density and/or height limit increase to the provision of affordable housing. In other words, the increase would not be by-right, it would be an incentive that would only be available to developments that legally commit themselves to providing affordable housing.

If the City implements this incentive, it should recognize a potential “loop-hole.” That loop-hole is that this incentive only works if the access to the additional density is through the provision of affordable housing, not by-right. If property owners can obtain the additional by-right density by changing their zoning or comprehensive plan land use designations, then they have no reason (or incentive) to provide affordable housing.

(Option 2)

The City should implement the recommendations of the Exclusionary Zoning and Inclusionary Zoning Study. The study lists those recommendations on page 62. Pages 73-84 of the study contain recommended implementation details. In general, this means that the City should require the following:

- certain new developments must provide minimum levels of affordable units; and
- in exchange for providing those affordable units, the City must compensate the developers of those units.

Enhanced Community Engagement and Education

The City should continue to study ways to increase meaningful community engagement as early as possible in the development process. This is especially relevant for initiatives that set the rules for development (e.g., the Comprehensive Plan, the Zoning Map, and LDRs). The goal is to use public engagement to develop plans and rules that reflect the community’s vision. Too often, the current system results in frustration from both the existing residents and the development community, particularly the affordable housing development community (both non-profit and for-profit). As such the AHAC recommends the following:

- The City should continue to require and improve “pre-application neighborhood workshops.” These workshops are a requirement that a developer meet with the community surrounding and/or affected by the development. However, these workshops are not a substitute for the City’s responsibility engage the community before setting zoning and land development regulations;
- The City should continue to consider implementing the Community Cultivar Fellowship Program;
- The City should create a planning and development outreach program. A core principle of this program should be to “meet people where they are.” This means that, in contrast to the City holding a meeting, City staff should attend a neighborhood or advocacy group’s regular meetings. This program should provide key concepts related to planning, zoning, and development. After completing the program, participants should have a basic understanding of zoning and LDRs. They should also know how to determine the zoning of any parcel in the City. Eventually, both City staff and participants should be able to describe the group’s vision, and how that vision fits into the overall community vision. Furthermore, both staff and participants should recognize whether or not the existing zoning and LDRs fit with the overall community vision. If not, City staff and the community should discuss realistic, proactive options to change or mitigate the existing zoning and LDRs. All participants in this program (including City staff) should recognize the complexity of the subject and be willing to take the time required to gain the needed understanding.