

Lawmakers Advance Zoning Reform Bills That Limit Local Decision-Making Authority

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Legislation that mandates higher density, removes parking requirements, and restricts city zoning authority for residential development continues to move through committees in the House and Senate.

During the week of March 10, The House and Senate housing committees advanced a series of bills with overwhelming committee support via bipartisan voice votes that would significantly limit local control over residential zoning and land use decisions.

While the League of Minnesota Cities continues to actively engage with lawmakers on these bills in good faith, concerns remain about local authority, resident input, implementation challenges, lack of scalability, and costs for cities and taxpayers. The League, along with other city groups, testified in opposition to the bills.

All hearings during the week of March 10 included testimony in support of zoning reform legislation from housing advocate groups, for-profit and nonprofit developers, the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, Americans for Prosperity, the Sierra Club, AARP Minnesota, and other groups making up the Yes to Homes coalition.

Below is a summary of the bills at the time of this writing. The proposals have all advanced to their next committee stops in the House Elections Finance and Government Operations Committee and the Senate State and Local Government Committee.

Zoning bills that advanced this week

Minnesota Starter Home Act

HF 1987 (Rep. Spencer Igo, R-Wabana Township) / SF 2229 (Sen. Lindsey Port, DFL-Burnsville)

The bills were heard by the House Housing Finance and Policy Committee and the Senate Housing and Homelessness Prevention Committee on March 11.

The bills would require cities to:

- Permit at least two units on any single-family zoned lot and allow accessory dwelling units on lots with single-family homes.
- Limit minimum lot sizes to one-eighth acre for duplexes and single-family homes.
- Prohibit minimum lot sizes for townhomes larger than 1,500 square feet.
- Allow at least 80% lot coverage and restrict floor area ratio and setbacks.
- Prohibits minimum parking requirements for any development.
- Require an administrative review approval process for residential developments with no more than one public meeting (not hearing).
- Ensure development complies with city infrastructure, health, safety, and general welfare standards.

During the House hearing, Rep. Andrew Myers (R-Tonka Bay) and Rep. Wayne Johnson (R-Cottage Grove) proposed amendments to scale back parts of HF 1987. Their amendments aimed to:

- Exempt cities with populations under 10,000.
- Remove the required administrative approval process.
- Extend compliance deadlines for small cities.
- Eliminate prescriptive mandates on lot sizes and setbacks.

However, the committee did not adopt any of the amendments.

More Homes, Right Places Act

HF 2140 (Rep. Larry Kraft, DFL-St. Louis Park) / SF 2231 (Sen. Liz Boldon, DFL-Rochester)

The bills were heard by the House Housing Finance and Policy Committee hearing and the Senate Housing and Homelessness Prevention Committee on March 12.

A “delete everything” amendment, which replaces the original bill language with new language, was adopted by the committee, changing several components of the bill. Key components of the bill include:

- **Urban municipalities** (cities of the second, third, and fourth class within 1 mile of a city with more than 150,000 residents) must:
 - Upzone 75% of residential areas to allow townhomes, duplexes, triplexes by right, or any combination of development to permit an average density of one unit per 1,500 square feet.

- **Nonurban municipalities** (cities over 10,000 residents that don't qualify as urban municipalities or first-class cities) must:
 - Upzone 50% of residential areas to allow townhomes, duplexes, triplexes by right, or any combination of development to permit an average density of one unit per 4,000 square feet.
- **First-, second-, and third-class cities** must create “commercial corridor districts” along municipal state-aid streets, allowing higher density development per acre.
- The bill would also:
 - Limit setbacks, floor area ratio, lot coverage, and minimum square footage rules in mixed-use housing zones.
 - Prohibit minimum unit sizes, construction material requirements, and local design standards beyond state building codes.
 - Eliminate minimum parking requirements for all developments.
 - Limit usage of planned unit developments and conditional use permits.
 - Require an administrative approval process with no more than one public meeting (not a hearing).

Transforming Main Street Act

HF 2018 (Rep. Liish Kozlowski, DFL-Duluth) / SF 2286 (Sen. Doron Clark, DFL-Minneapolis)

The proposals were heard by the Senate Housing and Homelessness Prevention Committee on March 11, and in the House Housing Finance and Policy Committee on March 12.

The proposals would:

- Require all cities to permit multifamily and mixed-use development in any commercial zoning district, except for heavy industrial zones.
- Allow cities to require that developments authorized in the bill include commercial use on the ground floor but only if the development is replacing existing commercial or industrial structures.
- Limit city review of projects under 300 units, prohibiting consideration of traffic, noise, or nuisance concerns.
- Require first-class cities, St. Cloud, and all metro-area cities to allow multifamily buildings up to 75 feet tall in commercial districts.
- Prohibit cities from requiring egress, durability, or energy efficiency standards, and limits any setback and lot coverage requirements beyond those required for commercial buildings.

- Eliminate parking minimums for all new developments.
- Require developments to comply with city requirements regarding adequacy of existing public infrastructure and other health, safety, and general welfare standards.
- Require cities to award density bonuses for affordable housing.
- Mandate an administrative review process with no more than one public meeting (not hearing).

Preemption of municipal design standards

HF 2013 (Rep. Jim Nash, R-Waconia)

This proposal was heard by the House Housing Finance and Policy Committee on March 11.

Note: A delete everything amendment limiting the scope of the bill was offered by Rep. Nash and adopted during the committee hearing.

The bill would:

- Prohibit all cities from imposing construction material or method requirements on residential developments with four or fewer units. This includes restrictions on architectural elements, building egress, durability, energy efficiency, and light access — unless required by the State Building Code
- Exempt historic districts from the requirement and allows cities to require an egress point on the street-facing side of the structure.
- Ban interim ordinances related to aesthetic mandates

Prohibition on minimum parking requirements for development

SF 1268 (Sen. Omar Fateh, DFL-Minneapolis)

The proposal was heard by the Senate Housing and Homelessness Prevention Committee on March 13.

The bill would:

- Prohibit all cities from requiring minimum parking spaces for any new development including commercial, industrial, and residential.
- Allow cities to specify disabled parking requirements.

Your next step

Cities should contact their House and Senate legislators to share concerns about these bills, particularly if their lawmakers serve on the House Elections Finance and Government Operations Committee and the Senate State and Local Government Committee.

These bills have broad bipartisan support, and committees are likely to hear the legislation before the first and second committee deadline, which is on April 4.

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