



Cottage Housing

Cottage housing developments are groupings of small, attached or detached single-family dwelling units, often oriented around a common open space area, and developed with a coherent plan for the entire site. Cottage housing is typically built as [infill development](#) in established residential zones. They can increase density and housing choices in established single-family neighborhoods and can be a slightly more affordable alternative to traditional detached single-family housing.

BACKGROUND

Cottage housing is effective in medium- to higher-density single-family areas, especially those with larger vacant or redevelopable properties or in neighborhoods built well below maximum density.

Households that locate in cottage housing tend to be demographically different than those seeking traditional single-family homes (e.g., seniors, smaller households, fewer children, fewer cars), which is important to consider when crafting a cottage housing ordinance. You may also want to consider [parking reductions](#) in areas with good transit access. Other issues to address in the ordinance include: density (using floor area ratio (FAR) instead of dwelling units per acre may be more appropriate), setback and lot size requirement exemptions, and common area/green space requirements.

Neighbors may be sensitive to the increased density and novelty of these developments. Pair a new cottage housing ordinance with [education and outreach strategies](#) that promote understanding of the program.

TOOL PROFILE

Objectives

[Housing Options in Expensive Markets](#)

[Missing Middle Density](#)

Type of Tool

Development types

Project Type

Single family

Ownership

Affordability Level

Market-rate incentives and tools

Cottage housing is generally built by private developers. Development interest is critical to this strategy's success. Avoid creating an overly burdensome approval process, which can discourage interest. Although cottage homes are smaller units, they may not be less expensive for the developer to construct. Common ownership of open space or single ownership of smaller lots may make the units more affordable in markets with high land values. Combining incentives like [density bonuses](#) with this strategy may also be helpful in making the homes affordable to lower-income households.

Communities should consider developing a trial period for cottage housing to ensure that the regulations and process meet the community vision for this development type. One bad project labeled as a "cottage housing" development can stigmatize this product type for an entire community.

