



No Maximum Densities

Eliminating maximum densities is a zoning approach for multifamily and mixed-use districts. For this type of zoning, jurisdictions focus on the height, bulk, and design of buildings in a zoning district instead of a maximum dwelling unit per acre requirement. Floor area ratios (FAR) are a regulatory alternative to maximum unit densities for establishing parameters around development intensity, while permitting some flexibility in building height, bulk and design.

BACKGROUND

Building form is emphasized when maximum density requirements are eliminated in particular districts. The number of dwellings allowed on a site zoned as residential is instead based on:

- Building envelope—height, floor area ratio, and setbacks
- Ability to meet parking standards
- Local market conditions

This tool is effective in areas where high density is particularly desired, such as downtown districts and transit-oriented development.

TOOL PROFILE

Objectives

[Housing in Centers and Near Transit](#)

[Housing Options in Expensive Markets](#)

Type of Tool

Other Regulatory Tools

Project Type

Multifamily

Ownership

Rental

Affordability Level

Market-rate incentives and tools

Eliminating maximum densities benefits housing development by allowing site developers to make efficient use of land and maximize height and floor area ratio to help achieve the community’s desired urban form. Given the impact of parking requirements on the effectiveness of this tool, communities should consider reducing parking requirements where applicable in neighborhoods with no maximum densities.

In the central Puget Sound region, several cities have removed maximum density requirements in downtown areas, including Renton and Tacoma. Community members may be concerned about the lack of certainty about how many dwellings may be developed in areas near their neighborhood. Establishing design standards, such as transitional height, setback, and landscaping standards where districts abut, may help to alleviate community concerns. Preparing some example case studies of development and design standards may also help.

Planners should coordinate with public works departments to ensure that functional plans for water, sewer, and other utilities are in sync with the level of projected growth and demand for services.

