

FACT SHEET

Missing Middle LA

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Summary

Los Angeles City Planning is launching the **Missing Middle LA Program**, a new initiative designed to expand pathways to more attainable housing options. The program would update the City's zoning code to encourage smaller for-sale housing options as well as accessible rental housing in neighborhoods across the city.

Los Angeles faces a well-documented shortage of affordable rental housing, and it also has one of the lowest homeownership rates in the nation. The limited supply of homes pushes many families to leave Los Angeles, undermining community stability and long-term economic health.

The **Missing Middle LA Program** will build upon recent changes in state law to advance several of the City's housing and urban design policy goals, without altering any existing zoning designations. Over the next few months, City Planning will prepare zoning code amendments to implement the program. These amendments will expand housing choices by enabling smaller, more attainable homes such as accessory dwelling units (ADUs), duplexes, townhomes and cottage clusters in all residential zones.

This initiative directly implements key goals of the City's Housing Element and supports Mayor Bass' [Executive Directive 7](#), both of which call for accelerating housing production and expanding homeownership opportunities as part of the City's multi-faceted response to the housing crisis.

Overview

The **Missing Middle LA Program** will consist of two related targeted code amendments designed to build upon state laws, tailoring them to align with City policies. It will create new opportunities for renters, first-time buyers and downsizers by allowing smaller homes, duplexes and smaller lots all while reducing other unnecessary barriers. Major anticipated components of the targeted code amendments are summarized below.

- **Small-Scale Homes Code Amendments:**
 - Bring the City's 2019 ADU Ordinance up to date with state law.
 - Allow ADUs to be sold separately as condos, per Assembly Bill 1033 (AB 1033).
 - Incorporate City Council direction on expanding protections in the City's hillside fire zones.
 - Consider additional provisions to further expand and streamline ADU creation.
 - Incorporate the Senate Bill 9 (SB 9) two-unit development provisions.
- **Small Lot Ordinance Update:**
 - Build upon the City's adopted Small Lot Ordinance last updated in 2018
 - Comply with state law which allows lot splits in single-family zones and streamlines the subdivision of lots to build up to 10 for-sale homes, per SB 9 and the Starter Home Revitalization Act (Senate Bill 684/1123).
 - Promote townhouses, row houses, bungalow courts, cottage courts, and other creative housing typologies in all residential zones.
- **Objective Design Standards:**
 - Incorporate objective ADU design standards for properties located within the City's Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZs).
 - Create a complementary local program that builds upon state law allowing small lot development and implements objective design standards addressing citywide policy priorities: creating walkable neighborhoods, fostering a sense of community, and encouraging existing buildings and mature trees to be retained while promoting infill development.

Key policy topics and proposed solutions are further detailed below.

Key Topics

LA's Housing Crisis

The scarcity of housing options in between single-family homes and apartment buildings, also known as “Missing Middle” housing (a concept conceived by Opticos Design, Inc.: for more information visit www.missingmiddlehousing.com) leaves out a large segment of the population seeking small, more compact homes. The lack of this type of housing option in Los Angeles, often drives families out of the city and hampers job growth.

Since 2020, only 6% of homes built in Los Angeles have been for-sale - the vast majority of which were detached single-family homes on larger lots. Newly constructed single-family homes are the most expensive type of housing in Los Angeles. The limited availability of affordable rental and for-sale housing in Los Angeles has wide-ranging negative consequences.

For would-be buyers, homeownership is the primary way wealth is built and sustained across generations. Along with more naturally affordable rental options, small scale multifamily homes provide housing stability, support for intergenerational living options, and reduce pressure on the housing market. The combination of low supply of housing and high demand has driven up costs which has, consequently, led to rental housing and homeownership opportunities in Los Angeles becoming unattainable for most families. As a result, many Angelenos unable to buy or rent are forced to move out of the City or endure long commutes, exacerbating both affordability and climate challenges.

In response to this statewide crisis, recent state legislation has enabled new forms of more attainable housing and homeownership through AB 1033 (the sale of ADUs), the HOME Act (SB 9/450) and the Starter Home Revitalization Act (SHRA). These laws establish a framework to provide new, streamlined pathways to build modest infill housing—such as duplexes, urban lot splits, and small-scale subdivisions—in all residential neighborhoods. The use of objective standards and a ministerial process is key to the success of small scale development. Building on these laws is expected to greatly expand housing choice, and introduce more gentle forms of density that can fit within the existing urban fabric.

By implementing these state laws locally, the City can exert more control to implement state mandates in a way that supports more livable, equitable and sustainable growth, while also better meeting housing goals.

Missing Middle Solutions

To address this crisis, City Planning is seeking public feedback on a proposed policy framework centered around “Missing Middle” housing solutions. The first approach will focus on making ADUs easier to build by allowing them to be sold as condos while also improving upon the SB 9 Two Unit Development policy. The second approach considers the “Missing-Middle” scale, bridging the gap between single-family homes and apartments by allowing for gentle density in the form of small lot development that offers a greater variety of housing choices within existing residential neighborhoods.

1. Small-Scale Homes

ADUs have emerged as one of Los Angeles’ most effective tools for adding new housing in existing neighborhoods. Since 2017, when state legislation first began easing local restrictions, Los Angeles has permitted tens of thousands of ADUs— proving that ADUs are a desirable option for many homeowners in neighborhoods across Los Angeles. These homes provide flexible housing options for extended families, aging parents, young adults, renters, and first-time homebuyers alike, while also diversifying the city’s housing stock.

State law has played a central role in expanding ADU production. Over the past several years, the Legislature has enacted a series of ADU reforms that have not been added to the City’s local ADU Ordinance, which was adopted in 2019. Local jurisdictions like Los Angeles must adopt ordinances consistent with these provisions, but are allowed to retain some discretion to tailor regulations in ways that respond to local needs.

Greater Flexibility with ADUs

Despite this success, there is more work to do. ADUs have largely been used as rental housing, leaving untapped potential for these small-scale homes to also serve as ownership opportunities. AB 1033 allows cities to opt-in to allowing the sale of ADUs under the premise that ADUs are expected to sell for less than comparable single-family homes, creating a point of entry into homeownership. The ability to sell a backyard unit could also offer vital financial security to existing homeowners, while allowing the property owner to retain their primary home as an asset. Unlocking this potential is critical for addressing Los Angeles’ low homeownership rate and widening access to wealth-building opportunities across communities.

SB 9: Two Unit Developments

Senate Bill 9 (SB 9), enacted in 2021, created a streamlined, ministerial approval process for Two-Unit Developments in single-family zones across

California. This provision allows property owners to build up to two primary homes on a single lot, effectively enabling duplexes in areas that previously permitted only one house (plus an ADU).

As with ADUs, state law sets baseline standards that cities must follow, while still allowing local governments to apply objective zoning, design, and building standards. The *Missing Middle LA* Program seeks to build upon this framework by ensuring that SB 9 projects can more effectively contribute to Los Angeles' goals of expanding housing supply and increasing pathways to homeownership.

2. Small Lot Ordinance Update

The Small Lot Subdivision Ordinance, adopted by the City of Los Angeles in 2005 (Ordinance No. 176,354), allows for fee-simple ownership of detached townhouses or single-family homes in commercial or multi-family zones by subdividing parcels into smaller lots. The ordinance allows for alternative standards suitable to this typology, including minimum lot sizes of 600 square feet, minimum lot widths (as low as 16 feet) and no interior setback requirements between units within a small-lot subdivision.

The program has been relatively successful in Los Angeles, although the number of project filings has declined in recent years. The new subdivision-related state laws described below appear to build upon the city's small lot ordinance to make the process ministerial, while adding a considerable number of additional eligibility requirements and conditions. A goal of this component of *Missing Middle LA* is to better integrate the City's local small lot program with the following provisions of state law while ensuring that local design and policy goals are met.

HOME Act: Urban Lot Splits

Senate Bill (SB) 9 also introduced provisions for urban lot splits, allowing qualifying single-family parcels to be subdivided into two separate lots, each eligible for a maximum of two units. This mechanism was intended to expand opportunities for small-scale homeownership and housing production. However, uptake of SB 9 lot splits has been minimal across California and in Los Angeles, largely due to restrictive eligibility criteria, high permitting costs, and limited incentives for homeowners. To better leverage this tool, the *Missing Middle LA* Program aims to refine implementation and address local barriers, ensuring that SB 9's urban lot split provisions can more effectively support infill development, address the City's equity goals, and support equitable growth in line with the city's broader housing goals.

Starter Home Revitalization Act (SHRA)

The Starter Home Revitalization Act, codified as SB 684 (2023) and expanded by SB 1123 (2024), creates a streamlined, ministerial approval pathway for “starter home” developments of up to 10 residential units (and up to 10 parcels) on qualifying lots. Under SB 684, lots in multifamily zoning districts (up to five acres) may be subdivided and developed with minimum 600 square-foot lots without discretionary review, hearings, or CEQA environmental review, as long as certain siting, density, tenant protection, design, and unit-size requirements are met. Average housing unit sizes are capped at 1,750 square feet to promote attainably sized homes.

SB 1123, which took effect July 1, 2025, broadened this framework by allowing the same streamlined treatment for vacant single-family zoned lots (up to 1.5 acres) that meet eligibility criteria (vacant or abandoned & uninhabitable, surrounded by urban uses, etc.). Other provisions include minimum lot size (1,200 square feet for single-family zoned lots) and restrictions on what local objective standards can be imposed (to ensure the law isn’t undermined by lot dimensions, frontage, or other rules). To integrate the Starter Home Revitalization Act at a local level, *Missing Middle LA* will build upon the existing Small Lot Subdivision Ordinance and design standards to promote missing middle housing typologies that harmonize housing and design goals while creating a wider variety of housing choices.

3. Objective Design Standards for Missing Middle Housing

New state and local policies introduced to expedite the processing of affordable housing projects often include requirements that limit design review to the application of clear, predictable, fixed, and quantifiable objective standards. The creation of citywide objective design standards for new infill housing under the *Missing Middle LA* program, including within historic districts, will provide predictability for new housing projects, create guidance for projects to retain a neighborhood scale, ensure consistency in the design review process in areas with Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) Preservation Plans, and create alignment with state and local housing legislation.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the City of Los Angeles updating the ADU Ordinance?

The City is updating its 2019 Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Ordinance to align with recent changes in California State Law and implement policy directives from the City Council. This includes adopting the provisions of AB 1033 (2023), which allow cities to permit ADUs to be sold. In addition, the City intends to expand restrictions on ADUs in designated Hillside Areas and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFSZs) by removing the exemption to these restrictions currently applied to the Silverlake-Echo Park-Elysian Valley and Northeast LA Community Plan Areas (Council File 16-1468-S2). The state law requires a detailed health-safety analysis and findings be included alongside any new restrictions, as well as review and approval by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). Revisiting the local ADU ordinance presents an opportunity to evaluate existing regulations that may create unnecessary barriers in areas where we want to encourage ADU development while ensuring that health and safety considerations in more sensitive areas are taken into account.

How are ADUs currently regulated by the City? What changes are proposed?

ADUs are generally permitted in all zones where residential uses are allowed. However, local ADUs are prohibited on lots in both a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone and a designated Hillside Area, unless they meet special safety requirements. ADUs must also be located on a lot with an existing or proposed primary dwelling.

On single-family lots, property owners are generally allowed to build one attached or detached Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU), as well as one Junior Accessory Dwelling Unit (JADU). However, there are four types of “state law” ADUs that are permitted to exceed these totals. Please see the Department’s [ADU Implementation Memo](#) (ZA Memo 143) for more information on the types of ADUs permitted under state law and the City’s local ordinance.

State law establishes mandatory standards that preempt local regulations on issues such as parking, passageways, setbacks, lot size, and impact fees. Local development standards cannot be applied to the ADUs governed by these state laws. Additionally, cities may not enforce other regulations that would have the effect of unreasonably restricting ADU development. The Missing Middle LA program seeks to implement the latest changes in state law, including an amendment that allows cities to adopt local ordinances that allow the sale of ADUs as condominiums.

Why is the City of Los Angeles Proposing an Ordinance for the State HOME Act and the Starter Home Revitalization Act (SHRA)?

Both the State HOME Act (SB 9) and the Starter Home Revitalization Act (SHRA) (SB 684/SB 1123) change California law to expand opportunities for new housing typologies and small-scale homeownership. The state laws address concerns stemming from exclusionary housing policies of past decades that have limited homeownership opportunities in many parts of the city. Both the HOME Act and Starter Home Revitalization Act seek to address housing opportunities equitably in all residential neighborhoods. These state laws are already in effect and apply citywide. The City of Los Angeles is proposing a local implementing ordinance to:

- Hear from communities about how to better leverage and improve upon the state laws—aligning them with local policy goals and addressing practical challenges
- More clearly define how these state laws will be applied in Los Angeles and how they relate to other local code provisions
- Ensure clarity and transparency in the zoning code for important development allowances
- Expand access to more diverse and attainable housing options across the city.
- Create a local program that allows for the application of design and other development standards that will help to modulate these unique forms of housing within existing neighborhoods.

What sites are eligible under the SHRA and the HOME Act?

Under the SHRA, sites located in any of the following areas are ineligible: prime or statewide important farmland; wetlands; very high fire hazard severity zones; conservation or habitat areas for protected species; hazardous waste sites, unless they have been cleared for residential use; regulatory floodways or specific flood hazard areas; and delineated earthquake fault zones without compliance with seismic safety standards.

Additionally, a SHRA subdivision is not eligible if it involves demolishing or altering units that are subject to affordable housing covenants or rent control, units occupied by tenants within the past five years, or units withdrawn from the rental market through the Ellis Act within the last fifteen years.

Under the HOME Act (SB 9), properties zoned for single-family use are eligible for either a two-unit development or an urban lot split—potentially allowing up to four homes (two on each lot). However, properties must meet many of the same eligibility criteria as SHRA.

How do these state laws support Los Angeles' efforts to address the housing crisis?

As described above, Los Angeles, like many California cities, is facing a severe housing shortage, particularly when it comes to smaller, more attainable homes for working families and first-time buyers. The State HOME Act and the SHRA provide new pathways to build modest infill housing—such as duplexes, urban lot splits, and small-scale subdivisions—in all residential neighborhoods, helping to unlock underutilized land, expand housing choice, and introduce more gentle forms of density that can fit within the existing urban fabric. By implementing these laws locally, with more local control and input, the City can make progress toward its housing production targets while supporting more livable, equitable and sustainable growth. Without a local ordinance, the parameters of the state law will apply automatically and may yield less compatible development that also does not further citywide housing policy objectives.

How might the *Missing Middle LA* Program enhance state law and what are the opportunities to further policy and design goals by crafting local provisions?

While state laws strictly limit a local government's ability to apply objective development standards that are either unique to these types of projects or do not apply uniformly to all types of housing in a particular zone, the housing types enabled by these laws—such as duplexes, lot splits, and small lot subdivisions—have unique characteristics that often warrant tailored design and development standards. As such, the City will propose a complementary citywide local program that includes design standards and also offers additional opportunities to facilitate Missing Middle housing. This also offers an opportunity to evaluate various state and local provisions to ensure they are meeting local objectives. By doing so, the City can better ensure these new housing options are well-integrated into neighborhoods while also supporting goals for affordability, livability, equity, and sustainability.

What does ministerial approval mean?

A ministerial approval process is non-discretionary and administrative in nature and must be based on objective standards only (see below). A ministerial project is not subject to a public hearing or CEQA. (Government Code Section 65852.2, subdivision (a)(3)).

What are objective standards?

“Objective zoning standards”, “objective subdivision standards”, and “objective design review standards” are standards that involve no personal or subjective judgment by a

public official and are uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion available and knowable by both the development applicant or proponent and the public official prior to submittal. Examples include quantifiable and fixed standards such as height or setbacks, or design standards such as specific dimensions or materials. Subjective standards require judgment and can be reasonably interpreted in multiple ways.

What are the next steps and upcoming opportunities to provide public comment?

In this phase of outreach, City Planning will be kicking off *Missing Middle LA* with an informational webinar on **October 28 from 5 pm to 7 pm** and to share information and collect input on the *Missing Middle LA* Program. Additional information on how to participate in the informational webinars will be provided via email and posted to our website. During the fall and winter months, City Planning will develop draft code amendment ordinances to be shared with the public, which will continue to be revised as public input is received. A public hearing on the proposed policies will be held in early spring 2026, which will inform the ultimate recommendations for the City Planning Commission. Following the public hearing, staff will present the draft ordinances to the **City Planning Commission in late spring 2026**. Members of the public may also submit written comments to planning.missingmiddlela@lacity.org.

Who can I contact for additional information?

Additional information about the Missing Middle LA Program is available on the [LA City Planning Housing Policy webpage](#).

Any media inquiries should be directed to Jamie Francisco at planning.media@lacity.org or (213) 562-8294.