

The Missing Middle Housing (MMH) study for Bloomington, IL (dated March 2025), identifies numerous barriers in the city's zoning code that restrict diverse housing options like duplexes, triplexes/fourplexes, townhouses, multiplexes, and cottage courts. Based on the study's recommendations and subsequent developments in 2025, local zoning has been affected through revisions aimed at removing these barriers, increasing density, and promoting infill development. These changes are not uniform across all zones but primarily impact residential and mixed-use districts (e.g., R-1C, R-2, R-3A, R-D, D-2, B-1). Below is a summary of key effects, drawn from the study and confirmed 2025 updates.

Key Zoning Changes and Impacts

- **Increased Allowance for MMH Types:**

- Zoning reforms in early 2025 (January–May) revised codes to allow MMH by-right in more districts, rather than requiring special use permits (which added discretionary reviews, costs, and delays). For example, duplexes and townhouses are now permitted in single-family zones (e.g., R-1C, R-2) without hearings, addressing the study's critique that only 14% of land previously allowed multifamily housing.
- This affects all residential zones by enabling "house-scale" multi-unit buildings (2–20 units) in walkable areas near downtown, universities, and commercial centers, promoting gentle density without large apartments.

- **Density and Lot Standards Adjustments:**

- Maximum density limits were raised or removed in multifamily zones (e.g., R-3A from 29 du/acre to higher thresholds; R-D from 43 du/acre). Lot area minima per unit (e.g., 3,000–5,400 sf) and widths (e.g., 50–70 ft minima) were reduced, allowing MMH on smaller infill lots (30–50 ft wide) common in historic neighborhoods.
- Impacts: Prevents lot consolidation needs, reduces costs for small developers, and enables types like fourplexes (17–35 du/acre) or cottage courts (19–24 du/acre) in preservation/regeneration areas. However, this could lead to pushback in stable suburban zones if not paired with design standards.

- **Setbacks, Height, and Parking Reductions:**

- Front/side/rear setbacks were narrowed (e.g., from 25–30 ft to averages based on context in R-D), and height limits adjusted (e.g., allowing 3–4 stories in R-3A/R-D for upper MMH).
- Parking minima dropped to 1 space/unit (from 1.5–2), with waivers near transit/downtown, addressing the study's finding that high parking (up to 2 spaces/unit) made MMH infeasible on typical lots.
- Impacts: Frees land for housing/open space, lowers costs (parking adds \$1,500–\$50,000/space), but may increase on-street parking in dense areas without mitigation.

- **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and Conversions:**

- ADUs now allowed with MMH types (not just single-family), with size limits raised (from 800 sf to 800–1,200 sf) and parking flexibility (e.g., tandem/existing driveways).

- Multi-family conversions (e.g., single-family to duplex/triplex) streamlined by-right in R-2/R-D, removing special use barriers.
- Impacts: Boosts gentle density in existing neighborhoods, supports aging-in-place/multigenerational living, but requires anti-displacement policies to protect renters.
- **Citywide and Overlay Reforms:**
 - Comprehensive Zoning Code update (Ordinance 2025-034, April 2025) revised Chapter 44 for economic development, indirectly supporting housing via updated use tables/definitions. An MMH overlay is proposed for walkable centers (e.g., downtown, Veterans Parkway), allowing mixed-use infill.
 - Streamlined entitlements (reviews to 10 days) and incentives (fee waivers, tax exemptions) for MMH projects.
 - Impacts: Affects all zones by prioritizing infill over sprawl, aligning with the comprehensive plan. Commercial districts (B-1) now encourage residential mixes, transforming auto-oriented areas.

Broader Effects on Local Zoning

- **Positive:** Enhances housing diversity/affordability amid a shortage (need 4,300–4,800 units by 2030), supports walkability, and revives underinvested areas (e.g., west side regeneration). About 52.8% of land (residential zones) sees direct benefits, with potential for 16+ du/acre in transit-supportive spots.
- **Challenges:** Risk of gentrification/displacement in historic/preservation areas without mitigation (e.g., rent controls). Population projections (97,000 by 2035) are debated as overstated (actual ~82,000), potentially overbuilding. Suburban zones resist changes, fearing character loss.
- **Status:** Changes adopted in phases (Jan–May 2025), with more (e.g., ADU expansions) planned for summer/fall. Influenced by the Opticos study and state trends (Illinois pushes density easing).

These reforms make zoning more permissive for MMH, but implementation varies by district—focus on testing fits in neighborhoods to avoid unintended scale issues. For latest updates, check bloomingtonil.gov.