Engagement Summary

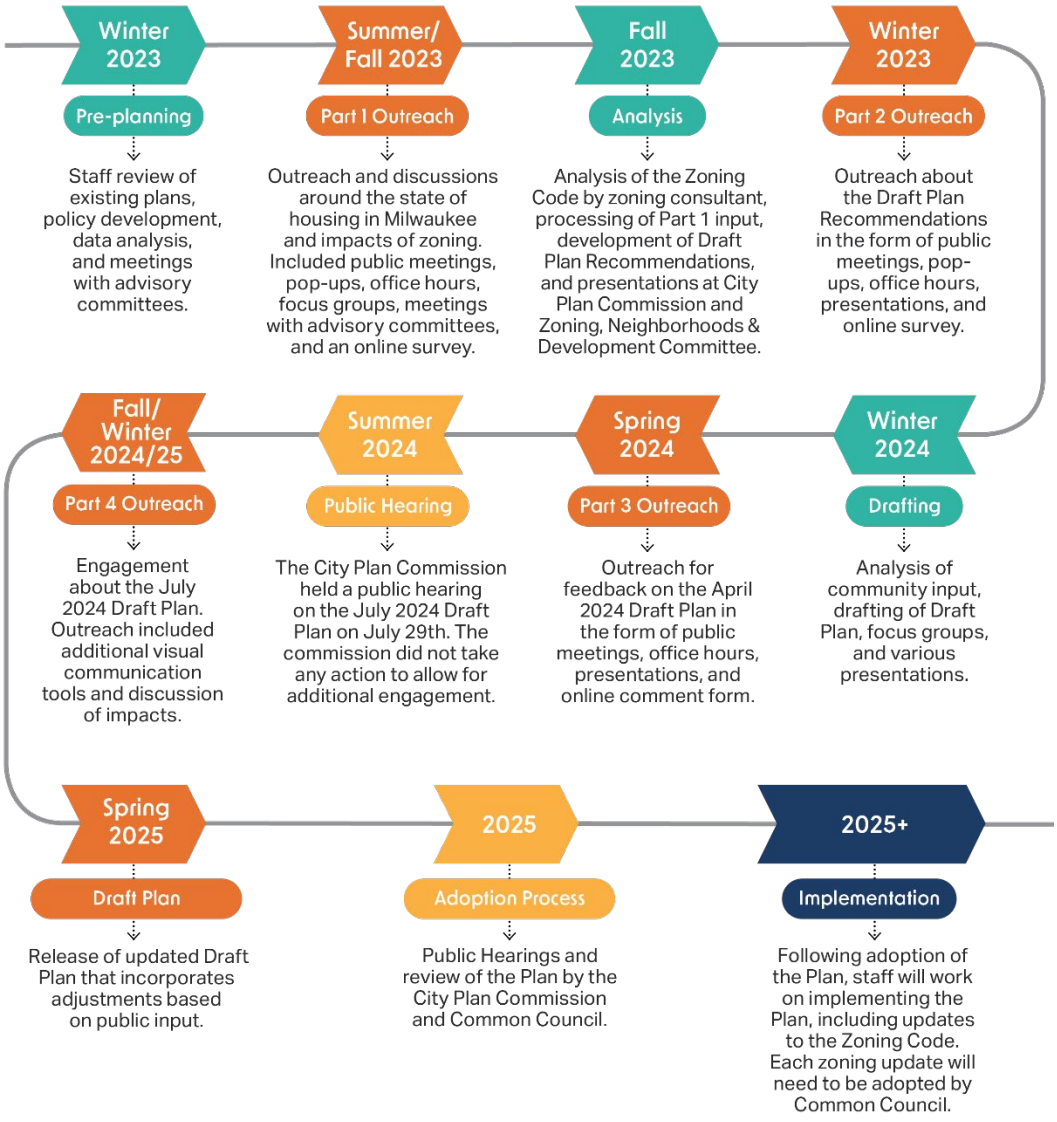
May 21, 2025

Planning Process Overview

The policies and recommendations in the Draft Housing Element were developed through a comprehensive planning process over two years.

Each policy was developed through a review of recently completed planning efforts, adopted City of Milwaukee Comprehensive and Area Plans, engagement, and research of best practices in land use and zoning policies in cities throughout the country. The policies are based on the citywide goals to: increase housing choice and access, support fiscal sustainability and economic development, foster walkable neighborhoods and connectivity, support a healthy and thriving community, and make Milwaukee and more sustainable and resilient city.

Timeline



HOUSING ELEMENT

Total Public Engagement for the Housing Element (as of 5/21/25):

- 10 Community Open House public meetings across 4 rounds of engagement *(as of 5/22/25)*
- 6 Webinars with Q&A + a Virtual Kick-off with Q&A
- 35 "office hour" events at Milwaukee Public Libraries throughout the city
- 24 focus groups & community meetings with neighborhood groups & local developers
- 20 pop-up engagement events at senior centers, farmers' markets, and other community events
- 4 Technical Advisory Committee meetings
- 4 Community Advisory Committee meetings
- 2 community-wide online surveys: The surveys were set-up as virtual versions of the Part 1 and Part 2 Open Houses. A shorter version of the same questions were asked at pop-ups, focus groups, and displays at each library.
- Displays at each library with new information for rounds 1-3 of engagement.
- 3,200+ views of meeting recordings *(as of 5/21/25)*
- 2,350+ people directly engaged at in-person and online meetings and events *(as of 5/21/25)*
- 9,400+ unique visitors to www.engage.milwaukee.gov/GrowingMKE *(as of 5/21/25)*
- Multi-lingual outreach materials throughout the process and Open House Public Meetings in English, Spanish, and Hmong.

Events were promoted through flyers, community partners, social media (Facebook, Instagram, and X), e-notify, the Growing MKE email list (over 1,000 emails), and displays at libraries.

Themes from Public Engagement – June 2023-January 2025

Affordability

- Ownership: Homeownership opportunities should be prioritized. First-time and low-income home buyers should have more affordable housing options, including ownership options for a greater diversity of housing style types.
- Neighborhood Choice: Every neighborhood needs affordable housing options.

Neighborhoods & Quality of Life

- Quality Neighborhoods: Vibrant, walkable cities make it easier to walk to bus stops, grocery stores, restaurants, shopping, and health care.
- Neighborhood Repair & Revitalization: Repairing and restoring existing housing is a critical priority. Repairing existing housing stock, ensuring safe housing conditions, and addressing vacancy is needed to support safer and healthier neighborhoods.
- Neighborhoods have unique housing needs: The neighborhood planning process should be a mechanism to evaluate future neighborhood specific zoning map adjustments.
- Anti-Displacement: Ensure that existing renters and homeowners are able to remain in their neighborhoods and are not involuntarily displaced.
- Meeting Needs: Housing and neighborhoods should meet the needs of Milwaukee's diverse population including immigrants and refugees, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and individuals returning from incarceration.

Housing Diversity

- Housing Variety: There is value of having a diversity of housing styles available to residents. Desirable housing types that are not currently common in Milwaukee including townhomes, accessory dwelling units, smaller homes, and container homes, should be available in more neighborhoods.
- Housing Supply: There is a need for more affordable, senior, multi-generational, accessible, and mixed-income housing.

Building Design

- Quality Design: New construction should be quality design that fits in with the community character.

Sustainability & Resilience

- Healthy Environments: New housing should be energy efficient and eco-friendly.
- Parks: New housing should not sacrifice existing parks and trees.

Transportation

- Transportation Options: Be considerate of how walking, transportation options and parking policy impact neighborhoods and housing choice.
- Safe Streets: Milwaukee has the opportunity to make its streets safer places to walk, bike, and drive.

Additional

- Fair & Quality Housing Conditions: Officials must hold bad landlords accountable to provide fair and quality housing for all residents.
- Accountability & Speculation: Officials should hold absentee landlords accountable and discourage predatory and speculative investment in homes.

Growth

- Economic Resilience: Economic growth and development should be distributed throughout the city and contribute to a healthy planet.
- Density: Population density supports public transportation and shopping, encourages housing diversity, and creates walkable neighborhoods.
- Livability: Economic and population growth should be carefully planned to benefit and retain existing residents.

Part 1 – Engagement – Checking in on the state of housing

What types of housing would you like to see in your neighborhood?
What types of housing would you like to see in the city?
What excites you about this project?

The engagement team asked these questions across multiple platforms – pop-ups, open houses, libraries, focus groups, and online. This is what was heard:

- In their neighborhoods and citywide, people want to see more of what they are familiar with and like – single-family homes, duplexes, and mixed-use multi-family buildings, etc.

- Most people liked the idea of more gentle-density housing types in their neighborhoods, including in neighborhoods where they don't exist - especially in the forms of duplexes, cottage courts, townhomes, and accessory dwelling units. There was excitement about having more flexibility of what can be done on a homeowner's property.
- There was a recognition by many that people need different types of housing during their lifetime and that we should make sure everyone has access to the housing they need.
- Other comments included concerns of displacement with development; worry of only allowing density in certain areas; a desire for safe and walkable neighborhoods; a need for more housing for seniors; a need for healthy and safe housing; encouraging the development of amenities; and varying views on parking.

Part 2 – Engagement – Goals & Draft Recommendations

Draft Growing MKE recommendations were presented to the public for review. Prompts for feedback were related to whether the draft recommendations helped us achieve City goals in housing choice, economic development, connectivity, and climate resilience.

After reviewing the Growing MKE draft recommendations, participants were asked to rate the recommendations on their ability to help meet our citywide goals in economic development, connectivity, housing choice, and climate resilience.

Many respondents said the recommendations will help the City meet its goals "To a great extent."

- Overall, responses illustrated widespread support for gentle density in neighborhoods and increasing density on major corridors.
- There was recognition of how changes to the zoning code could make small-scale development easier, how the changes could open up more housing availability, and that growth in the city's population means greater economic stability for Milwaukee.

Concerns varied:

- Some wanted more emphasis on homeownership in the plan. While this meant single-family to many, we also heard a desire for homeownership opportunities for other housing types like duplexes, condos, and townhomes.
- Some were concerned that multi-family would be oversupplied in some areas and not in others.
- There was also concern that more development could decrease green space.

Part 3 – Engagement – Draft Plan

After analysis of community input, staff drafted the April 30, 2024 Draft Plan. Feedback was requested through open houses, office hours, pop-ups, and online. Zoning recommendations did not change from Part 2 to Part 3, but Part 3 included an expansion of the policies, data, and implementation information. There were over 1,000 visitors to the Draft Plan website and staff engaged directly over 250 people at in-person and online meetings and events.

Overall, community members continue to express a desire for more inclusive, affordable, and diverse housing options. Many comments expressed general support for the plan overall. Comments also reflect a range of community concerns and suggestions, highlighting issues related to affordable housing, accessibility, transit infrastructure, rising rent prices, safety, community amenities, and the need for development across the income spectrum.

In support of the Draft Plan, we heard:

- Desire for more housing choices for all as new housing is built.
- Recognition of the need for additional housing units – There is broad support for low-density middle housing including accessory dwelling units (rear cottages), duplexes, and cottage courts. Additionally, many expressed a desire for more senior housing and ADA-accessible units.
- Recommendations to eliminate Lot Area Per Dwelling Unit (LAPDU) or Floor Area Ratio (FAR) have received support and little to no opposition.
- Many mentioned a strong desire for walkable, bikeable neighborhoods and support multi-family development near transit routes.
- Small, medium, and large developers expressed a need to streamline the approval process for development and excitement about the extent to which the recommendations simplify the process.

Concerns and fears expressed in the comments:

- Some expressed concern that some zoning changes may intensify the speculative real estate practices that have led to increased housing costs and poor housing quality in Milwaukee's low-income neighborhoods.
- Some expressed concern that allowing triplexes and small multifamily buildings, could lead to more renters and fewer single-family homeownership opportunities. This concern was also expressed specifically to the potential of conversions of homes into student housing in the neighborhoods near UWM.
- Concerns about the loss of homeownership because of zoning code changes comes from two perspectives:
    - Fear that there will be an increase of rental units with lack of property upkeep by transient renters and/or absentee landlords leading to reduced housing quality and neighborhoods.
    - Fear that recommendations will reduce the housing supply of single-family detached homes for owner-occupancy for middle to low-income families.

Additional Input:

- Community members expressed various opinions about short-term rentals as either harmful to the housing supply or a source of income for families.
- There are diverse views on parking requirements including support and opposition to removing parking minimums with some advocating for parking maximums.
- There were also comments regarding how to support small businesses, the need to improve transit infrastructure, and the importance of safety and environmental quality in building and site design.

July 15, 2024 Draft Plan & City Plan Commission Hearing

Based on public comments received on the April 30th draft, a number of edits were made and were reflected in the July 15, 2024 version of the Growing MKE Plan. Based on feedback, one of the zoning recommendations included in the April 30, 2024 Draft, the recommendation to allow small multi-family buildings in the RT3 and RT4 zoning districts, was removed from the plan and not included in the July 15, 2024

A public hearing was held before the City Plan Commission (CPC) on July 29, 2024 to review the July 15, 2024 version of the plan. In response to requests from community members to provide more time for engagement, City staff recommended that CPC hold the public hearing, but not take action on July 29th. The file was held to the call of the chair. This delayed the vote to allow for more time for engagement.

Part 4 – Engagement – Proposed Plan

In the fall of 2024 through early winter 2025, Staff engaged with the community in a variety of ways to discuss the proposed plan and concerns. As recommended by residents at the July 29th public hearing, staff is also began working on a Benefit and Harm Analysis to outline the potential impacts of the zoning code changes and respond to community concerns. Engagement during this period helped inform the components of the Benefit and Harm analysis.

Engagement included:

- 2 webinars in November 2024 – total of 179 attendees
    - Over 1000 views of English recordings, over 120 views of Spanish, and over 80 views of Hmong – one of the webinars had Spanish and Hmong interpretation available.
- 2 In-person public meetings December 2024 – total of 56 attendees
- Engagement website unique visitors (8/1/24-1/31/25): 1,881
    - (8,698 unique visitors since July 2023)
- Staff were invited to and presented at 11 community meetings (10 organizations) between September – January and met with around 250 people. Presentations and discussions were tailored based on the timing provided by the organization

Themes from the questions & comments:

- There was discussion about the engagement process and frustration that people didn't hear about the project sooner.
- People expressed that the plan didn't seem to be doing enough for affordable housing and it only impacts the middle class. They wanted the plan to include more about how to improve, retain, and build more affordable housing.
- There were also questions about why the City isn't doing more to bring vacant homes into use and helping homeowners and landlords repair existing housing.
- There were questions about how the proposed changes to the zoning code will impact property values and taxes. This was based on the expectation these zoning changes will lead to a lot of development quickly. People concerned with increased taxes. There were fears of both home values decreasing because of the recommended zoning changes and home values increasing too much because of the recommended zoning changes.

- Questions were asked about protections are in place for people that could be displaced and what the City is doing for anti-displacement.
- There is concern that developers will target development in areas of the city with vacant lots and that this will lead to displacement of Black and Brown communities.
- There were questions about the Benefit and Harm Analysis and requests for what it should include.
- There was frustration with the extent of enforcement for absentee/neglectful landlords and investors and concern that more development will make issues worse.
- There were some questions about how the City will be able to support more people.
- Some community members expressed a desire to retain single-family-only zoning, especially in historic districts, while other community members some are okay with more housing types in single-family districts, like ADUs or duplexes, but not triplexes.
- There continued to be a lot of discussion around homeownership and how the zoning changes could impact the City's homeownership goals.

Note: A citywide plan update requires engaging the community in many different ways. The project team focused on meeting people where they are and put in-person outreach in lower-income neighborhoods at the forefront. Over 80% of all in-person engagement activities (office hours, focus groups, pop-ups, Open Houses, community meetings etc.) were located in or directly adjacent to Qualified Census Tracts (QCTs) and/or Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Areas (NRSAs).

- Qualified Census Tracts are census tracts in which more than 50% of households are below 60% of the Area Median Income. 53% of the city's overall population lives in QCTs.
- A Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA) is a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) grantee-designated area targeted for revitalization. The Milwaukee's NRSA areas include census tracts where at least 70% of all residents are considered low income.