

Society Demands Shared Housing Options: Will Zoning Comply?

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At the recent APA National Planning conference in Chicago, a facilitated discussion was held as part of the Aging in Place track. Planners were eager to discuss the lack of sufficient options for housing which allows seniors to successfully age in place. Planners and experts discussed an array of obstacles to aging in place, as well as possible solutions.

One theme was various forms of shared housing. This is an important option as many seniors either have no relatives or no relatives geographically close by. These options can allow for non-relatives, or encourage multiple generations of a family to consolidate on one property. Other residents can provide peace of mind, assistance around the house, access to healthy food, transportation, and often much-needed income/reduction in one's share of household expenses. When communities remove restrictions on shared housing, not only do older adults benefit, but the community does as well, with shared housing providing informal caregiving, thus reducing demand for formal services.

Several planners expressed resistance in their communities to eliminating or minimizing restrictions to shared housing models, particularly ADUs. Planners cited working to change the tide of public opinion over possible negative impact on property values, class/income perspectives, and a time-consuming process as all limiting needed changes in this area. If communities struggle with a lack of appropriate senior housing options, then why maintain existing ordinances which restrict these models? One planner noted that as residents express the desire to age in place, there is the need for spaces for live-in caregivers, whether they be related or unrelated, paid or unpaid. There is demand, but are there options? With the [documented increase in multigenerational homesharing](#) due to the economy, scenarios may include an older parent moving into their adult child's home, or adult

children downsizing into aging mom and dad's home, or with a single or widowed parent. Beyond benefits of making informal and formal caregiving at home feasible, planners cited the social and emotional value of intergenerational relationships for all parties.

Planners discussed the value of these housing options to meet the needs of seniors:

- [Co-Housing](#) to provide informal social networks for assistance and human relationships

- [The Green House model](#) or similar to allow for economies of scale and provide needed care without the institutional model

- Medi Pods/[MED Cottages](#) , with [state mandating allowance in Virginia](#)

- Retrofitting existing large single family houses for several families or individuals

- "Golden Girls" new construction allowing 2-4 single seniors independent suite with shared common space and apartment for property caretaker/personal caregiver

- [Accessory Dwelling Units \(ADUs\)](#)

One attendee, Deborah Howe, PhD, FAICP, worked with the [City of Portland](#) to tackle this very issue. Dr. Howe shared that Portland

- eliminated the "Add a Rental" program which required 5 year previous property ownership prior to permit application

- Metro Regional government adopted a policy *requiring* all municipalities to allow ADUs

- broadened the definition of ADUs to include free standing units and apartments above detached garages

-Planning Commission recommended owner occupancy but *City Council removed this provision*

-ADUs rose from about 25 units/year to 140, which while significant, only addresses the needs of a fraction of the 600,000 residents

Proposed solutions included:

-Look to other communities for models and precedent

-Get creative: a church in Michigan was converted to assisted living

-Involve developers to influence existing zoning and respond to market needs

-Use multiple issues to drive change: transportation, sustainability, access to food, affordable housing

-Evaluate the overlap of older adults needs with other generations, especially the sizable Millennials/Echo-Boomers