

**Topic:** Affordable Housing; Density  
**Resource Type:** Guidance Materials & Scholarly Articles  
**State:** California  
**Jurisdiction Type:** Municipal  
**Municipality:** City of Berkeley  
**Year:** 2021  
**Community Type:** Urban, Suburban  
**Title:** Berkeley votes for historic housing change: an end to single-family zoning  
**Document Last Updated in Database:** August 2021

**Abstract:**

Berkeley's zoning code was amended to eliminate all single-family zones and replace them with multi-family zones, allowing for development of duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes to alleviate the city's housing strain. This is estimated to add an additional 9,000 housing units in the next several years. Berkeley was nationally known for being the "birthplace of exclusionary zoning," and the town decided it was time to address the issue. The new units will match existing neighborhood style while also maintaining historic character.

**Resource:**

# Berkeleyside

CITY

## Berkeley votes for historic housing change: an end to single-family zoning

The unanimous vote kickstarts a 2-year-long process which would see about 9,000 more housing units at various income levels built over the next several years.

By Supriya Yelimeli, March 25, 2021, 2:24 p.m.



Several homes in North Berkeley, large parts of which are zoned for single-family homes only. March 1, 2021. Photo: Pete Rosos

**Update, 11:06 p.m:** Both motions passed unanimously.

**Update, 7 p.m:** Follow Berkeleyside's [live tweets](#) and review [Mayor Jesse Arreguín's amended proposal](#).

**Original story:** After unanimously voting to move forward a historic, symbolic measure to [remove single-family zoning in Berkeley](#), the City Council will vote Thursday on beginning the two-year-long process to embed the change in the city's general plan.

Access the meeting agenda and sign in for public comment.

Mayor Jesse Arreguín called a special meeting at 6 p.m. due to the overwhelming interest in the plan, which has gotten [national attention](#)

because of Berkeley's claim to being the "[birthplace of exclusionary zoning](#)."

City Council members will comment and vote on two related components of the housing plan and the connected community process tonight.

### What's up for a vote?

The first [action item on the agenda](#), from Arreguín and council members Lori Droste, Rashi Kesarwani and Terry Taplin, initiates a zoning update process that could take over a year. This is in response to the [Regional Housing Needs Allocation \(RHNA\)](#) requirements from Senate Bill 828, which requires Berkeley to amend the housing element in its general plan and create about 9,000 more units in various income levels in the next several years.

Their item contains language to allow duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes in neighborhoods that formerly only had single-family zoning. In zoning codes, single-family areas are designated as R1 and R1A. This process would not ban single-family homes, but rather eliminate single-family zoning by opening up those lots to multi-unit homes.

It's one of the multiple ways to address RHNA listed in the item, which includes studies on [missing middle housing](#), transit-oriented housing and units in [priority development areas](#) like North Berkeley and Ashby BART corridors, downtown, Telegraph Avenue, areas around Cal and more.

Existing demolition protections for historically designated properties and maintaining "historic fabric" are mentioned in the plan, as well as assurances that new multi-unit homes will match the scale of the

existing neighborhood. It also allows for the subdivision of existing homes and incentivizes the building of accessory dwelling units.

The city's planning commission would take on the work of creating a general plan amendment. The community engagement process would span the next one-and-a-half years before a council vote in December 2022.

The [second action item](#) was proposed before the special meeting was called by council members Sophie Hahn and Kate Harrison (with cosponsorship from council members Ben Bartlett and Susan Wengraf) to address RHNA. It also kickstarts the general plan change but doesn't call for any specific changes before the policy process is underway.

"Mine purposefully did not include any substantive content on what the changes should be," said Hahn, who was part of unanimous council approval for banning single-family zoning. She said she and her colleagues didn't want to propose directed changes before community engagement happens.

"For me, theirs is the cart before the horse and it's a big cart," she said. "It's a lot of declarations...it's very sure of itself."

The other set of council members have described their proposal as building on decades of community input and emphasized the robust community process to come.

Both items could hypothetically be approved tonight, as they essentially move forward with the same local housing process and do not conflict with one another.

## Who is supporting the measure, and who isn't?

Berkeley community organizations that advocate for housing have drawn lines of support and opposition

around the first measure that would ultimately end single-family zoning.

Though most groups and residents in Berkeley support expanding affordable housing stock, there are differences in how they want to see it implemented.

A coalition of groups that include the Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board, the Berkeley Tenants Union and Friends of Adeline has put forward a [five-point plan of improvements](#), headed by [Leah Simon-Weisberg](#) of the rent board.

They've suggested that the current plan to end single-family zoning (action item number 1) does not have enough protections for affordable housing in Berkeley and called for stronger protections against demolitions for rent-controlled and deed-restricted housing. Council members in support of the plan have maintained that demolition is not a preferred method of creating more housing, but the rent board and others are asking for more codified protections.

"While we embrace increased density, we know that if the city is not careful with its actions to replace it, we will repeat the mistakes of the past and create a pattern of development that serves profit over people and exacerbates gentrification," Simon-Weisberg's letter reads. "It is vital that zoning amendments generate housing that will be affordable for working people and do not drive displacement."

The Sierra Club, which strongly supported the resolution to end exclusionary housing in Berkeley, sent a [letter](#) to the council saying it has no preference between the two action items and support the council's moves overall. It also listed support for strong demolition protections, anti-displacement and anti-speculation measures.

The City Council special meeting begins at 6 p.m. and can be accessed via [Zoom](#), and [live webcast](#).

---

*Supriya Yelimeli is Berkeleyside's homelessness and housing reporter. Email: [supriya@berkeleyside.org](mailto:supriya@berkeleyside.org).  
Twitter: [SupriyaYelimeli](#). Phone: 510-585-8315.*

---

© Cityside. All Rights Reserved.