



Enhancing Housing Access and Affordability in Counties

THE CHALLENGE

Washington's counties have limited tools to address our ongoing housing crisis.

Most strategies for improving housing access and affordability rely on funding subsidies for developments requiring urban services, increases in allowed density or housing types for new development and redevelopment, or are limited to projects within city limits. Obviously, such tools are more easily deployed in cities with urban services. *However, with legislative help, counties could implement strategies to improve housing access and affordability, too.*

THE FIX

County Housing Policy Priority Recommendations:



- 1. Allow detached accessory dwelling units (ADU) on all residential lots.**

HB 1345/SB 5470 authorizes detached ADUs on all rural residential lots with appropriate restrictions to prevent sprawl and protect the environment along with strict enforcement requirements.



- 2. Expand authority for counties to increase housing development potential in appropriate areas.**

HB 1840/SB 5471 Authorizes increased development potential in more urbanized areas for middle and multi-family housing to provide greater opportunity for more housing without any risk of increasing rural sprawl.



- 3. Make all counties planning under the Growth Management Act (GMA) eligible to utilize the Multi-family Tax Exemption (MFTE) program.**

HB 1206/SB 5679 removes the limitations on GMA counties and makes this tool available for a majority of our state's counties.



- 4. Expand state investment in infrastructure that supports housing development.**

HB 1763/SB 5576 creates a new competitive grant program that can be utilized to develop and improve infrastructure to support housing. The lack of adequate infrastructure is a significant barrier to increased density and new housing development in many areas. The program is funded by a new tax on short-term rentals, having no impact on the state's existing revenues.

- 5. Invest in a pilot program for counties to provide pre-designed and pre-approved housing plans.**



Counties request funding to support a four-county pilot program offering predesigned, preapproved plans for efficient single-family homes, accessory dwelling units, and duplexes. The plans would be designed to meet state and local development and construction requirements and offered free of charge, improving the permitting process and reducing applicants' costs.





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HOUSING PRIORITY CONTINUED

*“...the **state needs to add 1.1 million new homes** over the next 20 years, and more than **half of them need to be affordable** for residents at the lowest income levels.”*

Washington State Department of Commerce, March 2023

Many of the homes our state needs will **NOT** be built in cities...

34%

of residents live outside cities.



Outside King County, **44% of residents** live outside cities.

40%

of residents in 26 counties live outside cities.



In **15 counties**, the majority of residents live outside cities.

Lack of infrastructure is a major obstacle for housing developers

*“**Major infrastructure investments promote efficiencies** in transportation, land use, and public works that spur investments, ease regulatory barriers to construction, reduce costs for owners and operators, and support a healthy housing market. **Such investments will relieve stress on the housing market, open up new development opportunities, and promote housing affordability across the income spectrum.**”*

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