

Group Living Text Amendment – Responding to Misconceptions

Residential care / halfway houses / shelters

Residential care facilities allowing up to 40 residents are already allowed and already exist in neighborhoods. An overarching goal of this project has been to ensure a more equitable distribution of these uses citywide – to help us improve our ability to provide warm beds and care as a city without continuing to only place these facilities in the few neighborhoods that already support them, which includes Five Points, Capitol Hill, Northeast Park Hill, and Globeville.

Why change current rules:

- To remove discriminatory provisions and practices that unduly impact communities of color and overburden certain neighborhoods in the city.
- To help address housing needs in a humane way that allows more residents access to jobs, transit and the services they need.
- Denver voters overwhelmingly opted against allowing camping in public spaces, but current restrictions on shelters make it almost impossible to provide housing alternatives for people who are experiencing homelessness. This proposal would remove barriers in the zoning code that currently prevent the city from addressing a crisis that the pandemic has made even more urgent; the proposal would also help mitigate the impact wherever these facilities are located.

Household size / impacts

We looked at data from 36 other cities that have higher household limits than Denver (ranging from 3 to 8 unrelated adults) and found that, in each city, the average household size remained between 2 and 3.1 people, despite laws allowing more occupants than that. Legalizing larger households for those who would benefit from them by being able to share housing costs does not significantly impact the way most people choose to live, which is with fewer occupants.

Why change current rules:

- Zoning rules are intended to limit the impact of certain uses on neighborhoods—not to determine or judge how adults live. External impacts (trash, noise) have always been regulated and will continue to be. In fact, this proposal would create stricter parking restrictions than we have now.
- Denver’s current definition of household dates back to the 1980s and is among the most restrictive in the metro area at a time when the median price of a detached home in Denver is at its highest – in excess of \$600,000.

Property values

Property value is affected by a multitude of factors, many of which are not related to zoning. There is a large body of academic research that has found that property value impacts of formal group homes nearby — including shelters and halfway houses — is negligible, especially when compared to other uses in close proximity like shopping centers and even busy roadways.

Owner-occupants / commercialization

Rent-by-the-room scenarios managed by non-residents would still be prohibited in single unit, two unit, and row house zone districts, as they are today. This proposal would not change that.

Moreover, renting a home with roommates, living at a home with other people who share a common purpose (like sober living), or living in a home designed to provide a level of care in addition to the typical amenities of a home does not constitute a commercial use of a property.