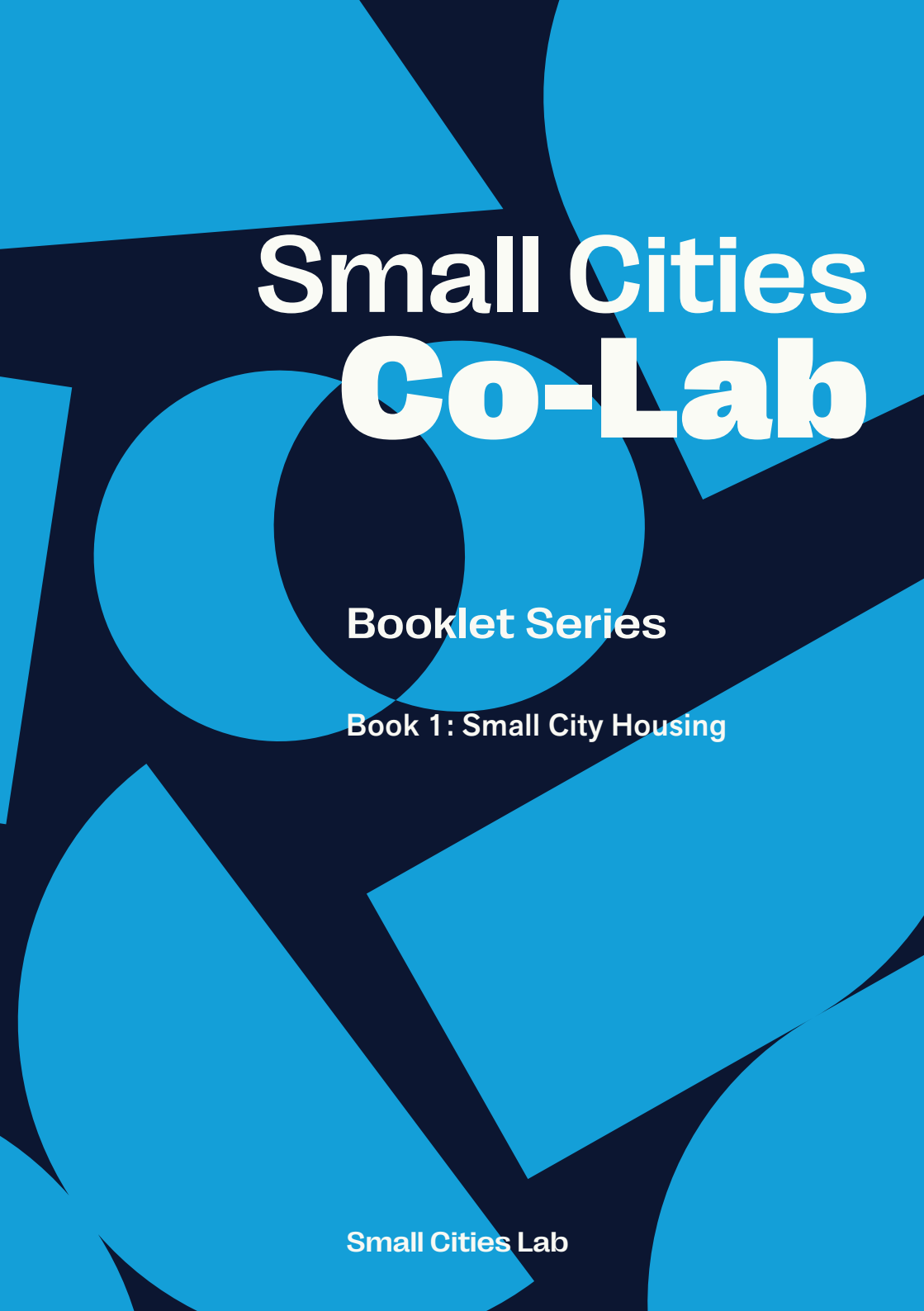


The background of the cover is a dark navy blue, overlaid with large, vibrant blue geometric shapes. These shapes include circles, triangles, and irregular polygons that overlap each other, creating a dynamic and modern visual effect. The text is white, providing a high contrast against the dark background.

Small Cities Co-Lab

Booklet Series

Book 1: Small City Housing

Small Cities Lab



Small Cities Co-Lab

Booklet Series

Book 1: Small City Housing

Examining how small cities can preserve, produce, and diversify housing that keeps pace with who lives there — and who is priced out.



Small Cities Lab



Rowhouses in Allentown, PA

“Simply eliminating single-family zoning isn’t magically leading to more density or housing. What will?”

– Ellie Abrons and Rachael Hobbs

Across the country, small cities are adopting new zoning codes, policy reforms, and housing strategies, but many struggle to move from regulatory change to projects and new housing production. This chapter offers a look at housing in small cities, including what exists, what is missing, and what is changing in order to identify paths forward.

During the Co-Lab, participants surfaced familiar constraints, including regional housing pressures, zoning restrictions, and limited local capacity. At the same time, people expressed a clear interest in more diverse housing types, viewing middle housing as a key way forward. Running through these discussions was how we make development possible. How do we build more of what we value and need?

Core Housing Themes

We defined housing themes using a quality-based framework tied to the City Portrait exercises, where participants defined attributes of their built environment and rated each on a 1 to 5 scale, identifying it as a liability or an asset.

Examining the scores revealed patterns:



Regional Affordability

Affordability crisis, brought upon largely by regional housing pressures, received low-rated scores (1–2.5)



Zoning Constraints

Constraints from single-family zoning or a lack of missing-middle housing were low-rated attributes (1–2.5)



Good Bones but Blight

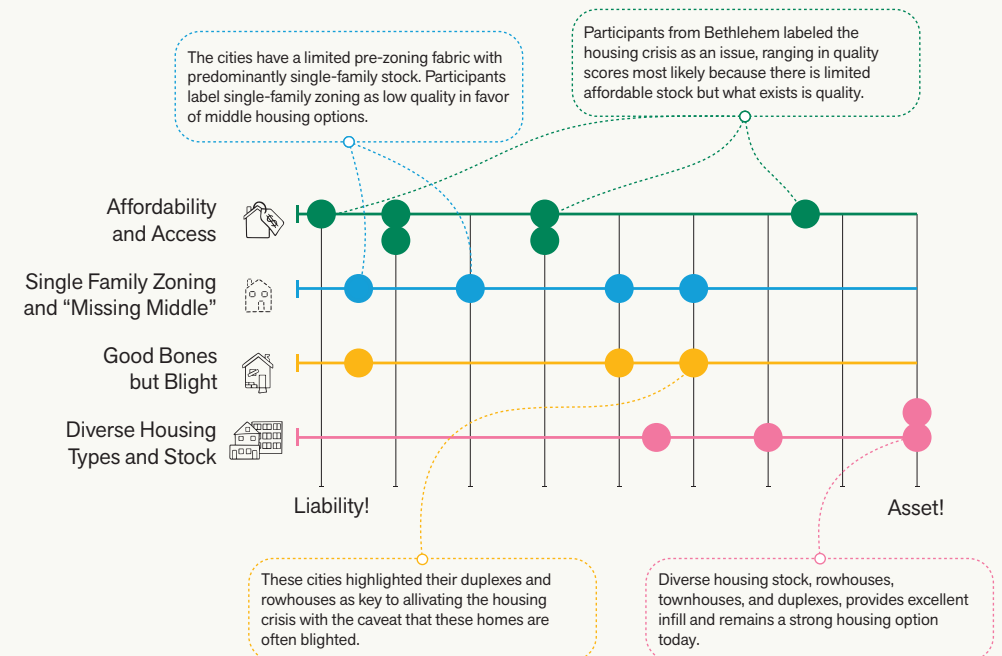
Aging infrastructure and blight, often in the context of old, middle housing received moderate scores (2.6–3.5)



Diverse Housing

The presence of diverse and middle housing types are high-rated attributes (3.6–5)

Small Cities Portraits Exercise Quality Chart



The chart above displays participant "quality" ratings of various housing attributes. Each bubble represents one participant's entry, describing an attribute of their city's housing. Participants identified attributes, such as "rowhouses," "single-family homes," "aging housing stock," "affordable housing stock," among others.

Participants rated the attribute they identified on a scale from 1 (liability) to 5 (asset). We then organized the chart by theme, grouping together the attributes that corresponded to the same theme along a connecting line.

Local Context, Regional Trends

Clear relationships emerged between housing themes and geographic or regional context. Cities within the same county or region often share development histories, housing types, policy frameworks, and housing market conditions which shape the challenges or opportunities they face today. Among the cities represented at the Co-Lab, several housing conditions clustered geographically.

Blight



Blight emerged as a particularly prominent concern among several Pennsylvania cities. Pottsville, Meadville, Harrisburg, and Hazleton face weak housing markets characterized by low home values, limited new construction, and, in some cases, high vacancy and “abandonment.” These cities have some of the oldest housing stock among participants, with median build years in the mid-20th century and minimal development since 1990.

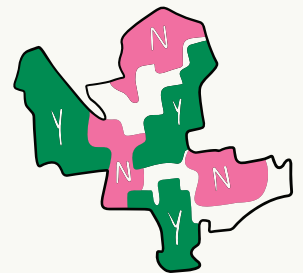
Although their housing composition is similar to other cities in terms of attached and small multifamily units, participants emphasized “blight,” “deteriorating

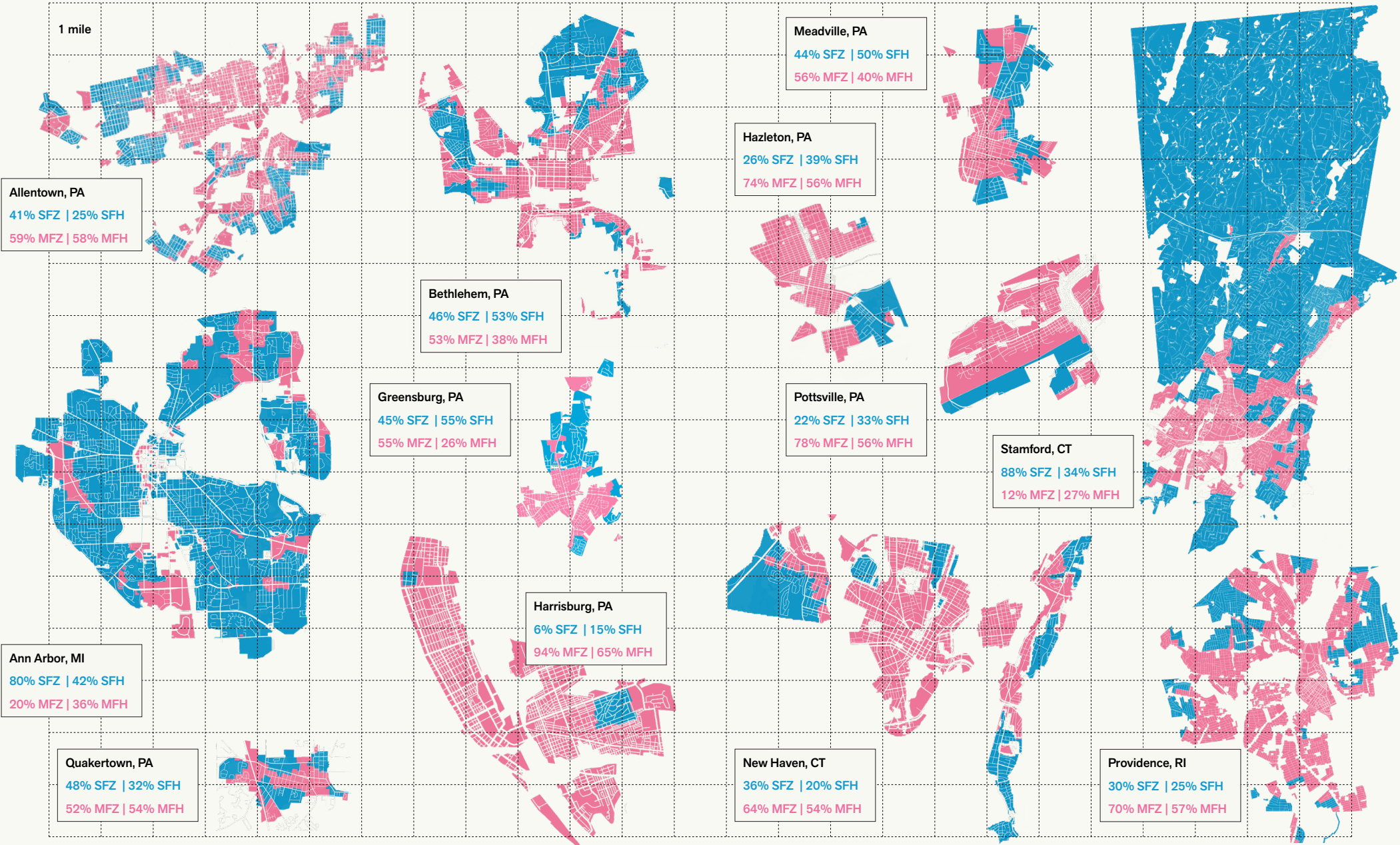
conditions,” safety concerns, and the lack of reinvestment, creating ongoing challenges. This lack of reinvestment is often tied to long-term economic decline and stands in contrast to other Eastern Pennsylvania cities, like Allentown and Quakertown, where diverse housing stock is generally well preserved but limited.

Constraints related to single-family zoning were most often highlighted in cities already dominated by single-family development. Low-density zoning reinforces these patterns and limits housing choice. These places include Ann Arbor, Martha's Vineyard, Greensburg, and Meadville. While every city represented at the Co-Lab has some form of single-family zoning, it was discussed predominantly as an issue in communities without a strong history of diverse housing types or extensive pre-zoning fabric.

Although they share housing form, their market conditions differ significantly, and each also share qualities with cities in other thematic categories. Ann Arbor's housing market has strong demand and rising prices, mirroring the cities that highlighted the affordability crisis. Greensburg and Meadville more closely mirror the weak-market conditions of aging cities. Despite these differences in local context and housing demand, the challenges of single-family zoning remain a common burden.

Zoning Constraints





Comparative Residential Map of Selected Co-Lab Participant Cities: Zoning districts permitting single-family versus multi-family (2–9 unit) dwellings vary widely across smaller cities. Some show distinct centers and fringes; others are monolithic. Land area zoned for a dwelling type often differs significantly from its share of the city's actual housing stock.

Key

City Name

% Single Family Zoned Land (SFZ) | % of Total Housing Stock, Single Family (SFH)

% Multi-family Zoned Land (MFZ) | % of Total Housing Stock, 2-9 Dwelling Units (MFH)

Regional Affordability



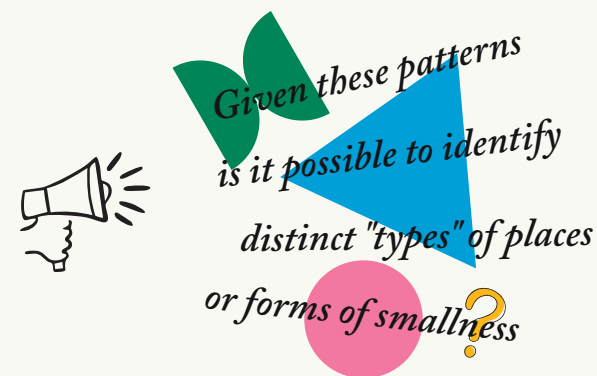
Bethlehem, Stamford, and New Haven cited the affordability crisis when they discussed housing in their cities. These cities are located within strong regional housing markets, with median home values ranging from \$236,500 to over \$600,000 and value-to-income ratios as high as 5.7. These cities tend to have more compact, mixed housing stock, with relatively low shares of single-family detached homes and higher proportions of attached and small multifamily units. Despite this diversity, demand far outpaces supply.

These cities also share important geographic characteristics. All are commuter cities to New York City, connected by major highways and transit systems, with thousands of people traveling in for work while choosing to live in places perceived as more affordable. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, increased movement out of larger metropolitan areas has accelerated population growth to these smaller cities, placing added strain on existing housing stock.

In addition, all three are notably “eds and meds” cities, where large institutional presences were identified as intensifying affordability pressure. These institutions attract people who have short-term or transitional housing needs, increasing demand for a limited local supply.

At the same time, the value of housing diversity was less geographically linked and emerged across various regions. Allentown, Quakertown, and Providence highlighted their diverse housing stock as a key asset. These cities share a similar pre-zoning fabric where historic development patterns continue to shape present-day conditions. They have an older housing stock, much of it built before 1940, and high percentages of attached

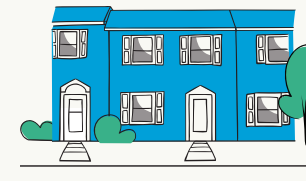
and small multifamily buildings, including “duplexes” and “rowhouses”. These valuable housing types are often non code compliant. In these cities, housing costs remain more moderate than in cities that focused their responses on the affordability crisis, with value-to-income ratios closer to 3.5 - 4.8.

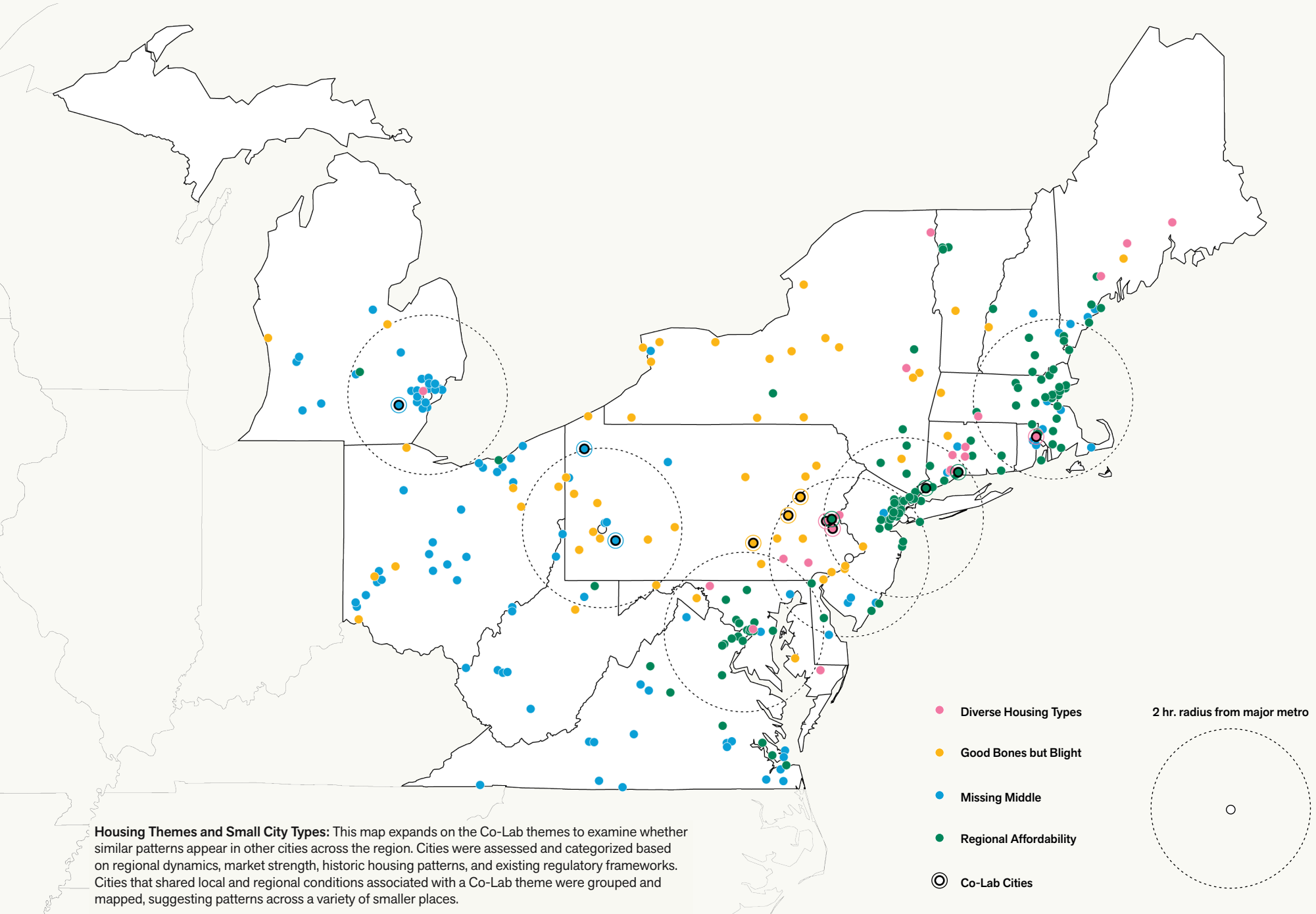


Several small cities were grouped based on the conditions or issues that participants identified as most prominent in their communities. When overlaid with additional factors, the groups also reflect shared combinations of regional dynamics, market strength, historic housing patterns, and regulatory frameworks. As a result, clusters prove quite meaningful.

For example, affordability is a national issue, but the specific pressures on local housing stock vary. Cities face blight and weak markets, constrained single-family urban fabrics, or rising demand as “commuter cities” with major institutions. As a result, making these groupings clarify the opportunities and constraints that shape different housing outcomes and inform where learning exchanges can be most effective in smaller urban contexts.

Housing Diversity





Housing Choice

The themes that emerged are interconnected. At the center is the housing crisis, defined by unaffordable rents, strong markets, and growing neighborhood gentrification. The deterioration and outlaw of new middle housing has significantly worsened the crisis and limited housing options.

Cities facing blight highlighted the value of middle housing types, like duplexes and rowhouses, but with important caveats. Many noted that “the infrastructure is often old or blighted” or they “require money for repair and at times become abandoned.” The lack of investment coupled with weak market conditions exacerbate the crisis, limiting supply of the housing types communities value and need.

Single-family zoning, while pervasive nationwide, presents a different set of challenges. Cities that pointed to single-family zoning are largely composed of “many single-family homes.” Participants gave these low scores, suggesting how these housing types are not what people value most. Participants went on to note that these regulations have created a “resistance to increased



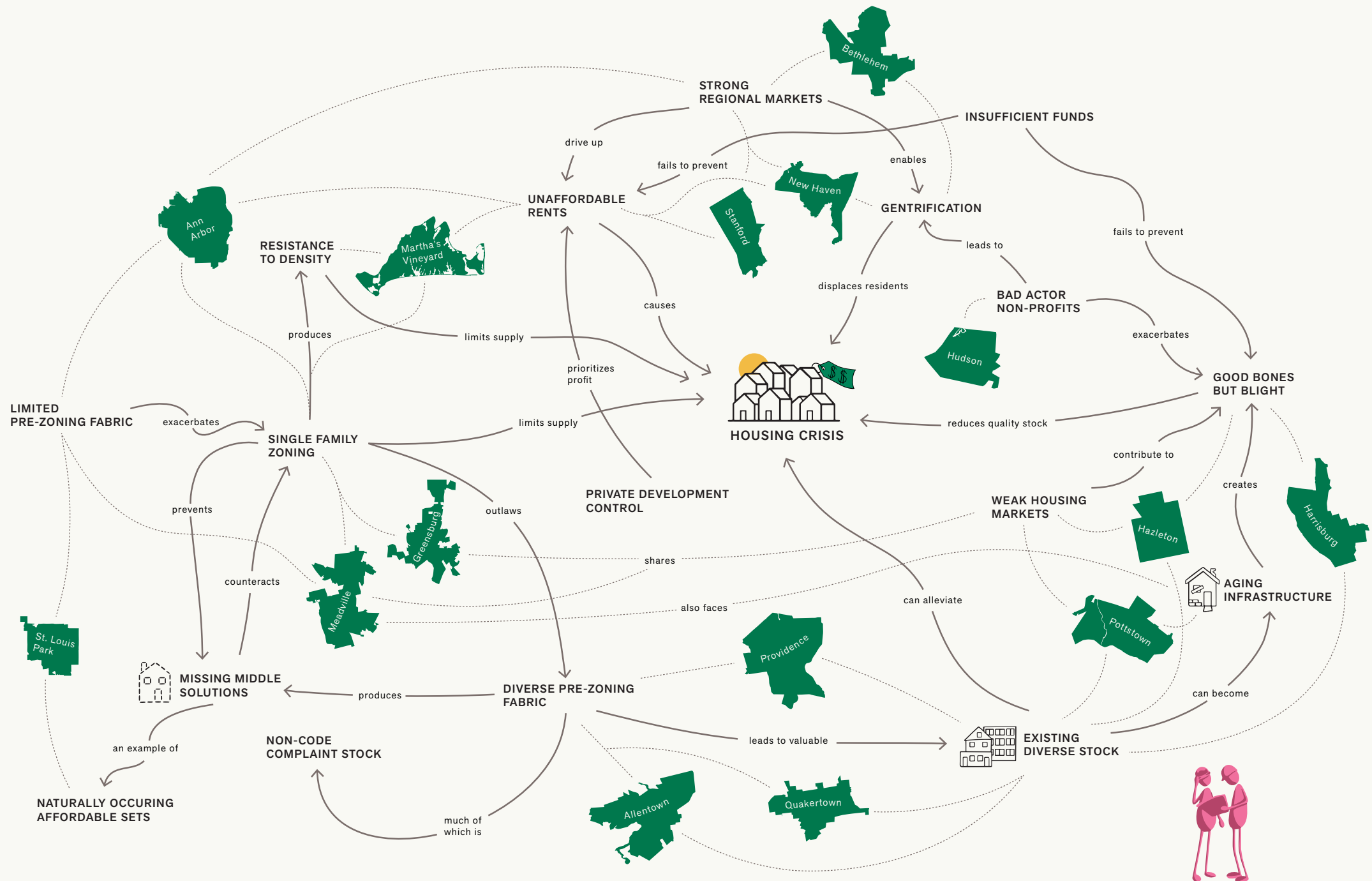
density” and that “increasing density is very hard,” which prevents the introduction of middle housing solutions and ultimately limits supply.

At the same time, single-family zoning outlaws the pre-zoning fabrics that shape communities today. Participants highlighted the importance of their “naturally occurring affordable units,” “historic row-houses,” and “wonderful missing middle” types, as important elements in their communities. These forms of housing were identified as tools to “alleviate the housing crisis,” expanding both diversity and overall stock.

These themes reveal a central tension in small city housing. Communities value diverse housing types, yet those same assets are often compromised because they are blighted or aging under weak market conditions. In stronger markets, single-family zoning limits the creation of these housing types and prevents communities from fully realizing the potential of their existing housing stock.

How can cities leverage existing housing assets and community priorities to respond to mounting housing pressures?





What is Changing? What Needs to Change?

Change in housing conditions across small cities is context-dependent, but consistently constrained. Participants' assessments of "change" varied based on whether they were discussing rising pressures from the housing crisis or the ability to respond or produce the housing they value.

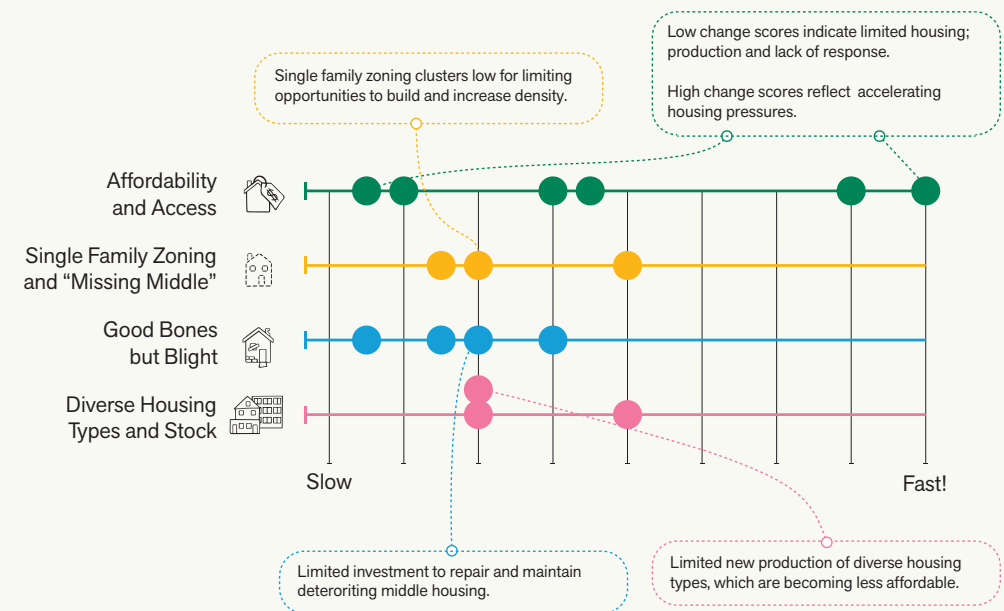
Affordability showed the greatest fluctuation: low change often reflected the slow pace of new housing production, while higher change signaled the acceleration of the issue or rapid gentrification that worsens the crisis.

Across themes, participants consistently pointed to limited capacity to act. Single-family zoning received low change scores due to the lack of opportunities to increase density, while blighted properties and diverse housing types also showed little change, indicating that redevelopment and new construction are not keeping pace with need.

Even where housing diversity is valued, participants felt that not enough is being built.

Low change scores reflect a shared frustration with inadequate housing production and the limited ability to respond effectively to the housing crisis.

Small Cities Portraits Exercise Change Chart



The chart above displays participant "change" rating of various housing attributes. Each bubble represents one participant's entry. Participants rated the attribute they identified on a scale from 1 (slow) to 5 (fast).

Early Signals for Action and Implementation

Across all exercises, participants emphasized that addressing housing challenges requires political will, institutional coordination, and partnerships.

The “I Wish I Knew” activity revealed a clear demand for practical guidance, with particular focus on zoning reform and development processes. Many questions centered on gaining the tools, knowledge, and footing needed to create change, either broadly or through specific levers such as land use regulation and development practices.

Beyond technical knowledge, participants also emphasized the challenge of creating momentum. They expressed a desire to influence political decision-making, bring stakeholders together, and build public acceptance for change. These responses signal a shared readiness to act, paired with a need for clearer pathways from policy and planning to implementation.

I wish I knew...

“

Why things are zoned the way they are, and how to change.

–Rachel

“

More about zoning policy and change to deal with climate change and permitting.

–Laura Stedenfeld

“

Development financing.

–Elijah Huges

“

How to address an older housing stock.

–Anna Smith

FEATURE

Local Types, Future Forms: Implementing *Zone Allentown*

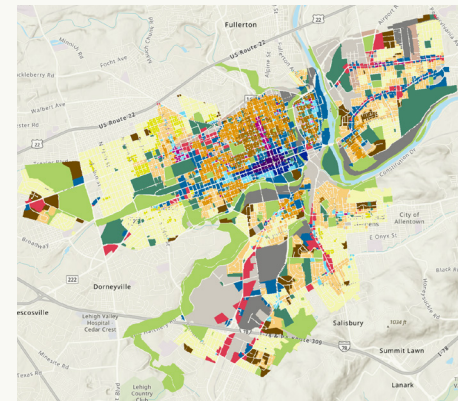
To understand the process of designing Zone Allentown – the City of Allentown’s new form-based zoning code – the Small Cities Lab team spoke with Director of Planning and Zoning, Jennifer Gomez, Chief Planner Trevor Tormann, and Senior Planner Melissa Velez. They discuss how Allentown’s zoning approach evolved and continues to adapt to better reflect the city where they live and work.

“The starting point was the building type study. From there, those were plotted on the map on a parcel-by-parcel basis,” says Trevor Tormann, Senior Planner. “Immediately, there were patterns and rings moving out from the center. But there was the mosaic.”

Allentown, Pennsylvania, is a small city of 125,000 people and the largest in the Lehigh Valley, located on the eastern edge of the state. By the time the city

adopted its first zoning ordinance in the 1940s, the population had already reached 100,000, with a dense urban core where residential neighborhoods surrounded industrial sites and small-scale commercial uses. People lived close to where they worked, and new neighborhoods extended steadily from the center.

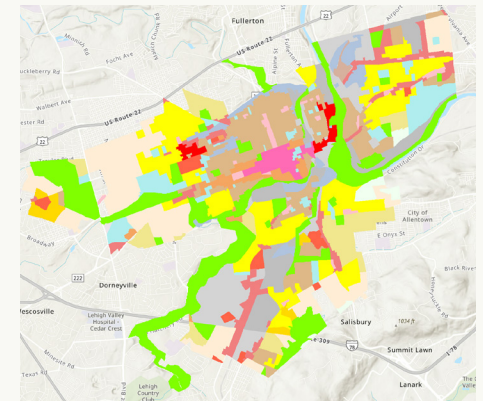
Nearly a century later, the city sought to rewrite its early zoning code through



Allentown zoning, before the new policy.

a comprehensive effort titled Zone Allentown. Zone Allentown is a form-based code. It seeks to manage growth and density by focusing on the size, shape, and placement of buildings.

Adopted in October 2025, Zone Allentown marks a major shift from the city’s more traditional Euclidean zoning, which organized development primarily around land use and the relationships between uses and occupants. In practice,



After the new policy, launched in January 2026. (City of Allentown, PA)

however, Allentown’s new code blends these approaches. It updates the city’s 1948 zoning framework by placing emphasis on building form, while still retaining select controls over the use of land and buildings.

Five years before Zone Allentown took effect in January 2026, the city completed a comprehensive inventory of every building in the city, organizing the outcomes into a “building type study”

that codified fourteen building types in Allentown. This process became the foundation of the new code and informed many of its regulations. The building type study documented housing types and commercial uses, as well as civic and industrial structures. Buildings were then classified into their discrete types based on their scale, architectural features, building placement, and relationship to surrounding context. Each type is governed by its own design standards and permitted within specific zoning districts. This understanding created a flexible framework that responds to the built environment and allows existing types as a means of accommodating evolving housing and development needs.

The study “helped us create zoning maps based on real neighborhoods, with a diversity of uses and building types, and not just a straight line on a zoning grid,” says Jennifer. With that understanding, patterns became so legible that planners could often identify the dominant building characteristics just by knowing a house’s zoning designation. “I think one of the things that was always fascinating to me,” Trevor recalls, “someone called Jenn, and she asked, ‘What zone are you?’ And the guy says his zone, and Jenn describes his house. It’s like a silly anecdote, but also like the dorkiest party trick. Give me your zone, and I’ll tell you what your house is, but it works.”

From this inventory, the city recognized the development patterns that shape Allentown’s neighborhoods, and revealed the city’s layered growth or the “rings” Trevor described. Melissa, who worked with the city during the study, recalls: “It’s interesting to see the transition from the historic districts to the Urban Rowhouse [building type], and then transitioning into the Suburban Rowhouse [building type] going through time and seeing how things have changed in the city.” The study reads almost like an onion: tracing building types – where they cluster or don’t – peels back successive eras of development and the historical patterns that shaped neighborhoods, from its urban core to its suburban corridors.

At the same time, the study also reveals areas where building types didn’t fit neatly into a pattern. Some neighborhoods contain a mix of types,



Small General Building Type

“It’s interesting to see the transition from the historic districts to the Urban Rowhouse, and then transitioning into the Suburban Rowhouse going through time and seeing how things have changed in the city.”

–Melissa Velez

creating a diversity that resists easy categorization. These areas form an important patchwork within the city, where variation itself is the defining characteristic. Much of this complexity stemmed from the fact that large portions of Allentown were built before zoning existed at all.

“Particularly in the older, central parts of the city,” says Jennifer, “you have things like manufacturing plants that were early employers, surrounded by neighborhoods of people who walked to work.” In these areas, building types fold into communities differently. City staff identified industrial sites next to residential buildings and commercial

uses on the corners of residential blocks. Under the city’s previous use-based zoning code, many of these buildings were technically nonconforming. The building type study reframed these “irregularities” not as anomalies, but as evidence of how the city developed to meet the needs of residents at the time.

That reframing shaped the logic of Zone Allentown. Rather than starting with abstract land-use categories, the new code grounded its regulations in the physical reality of the city – how buildings sit on their lots, how they meet the street, and how they relate to their neighbors. In many cases, this meant permitting building types that already existed but had



While we did decrease the intensity of some allowable uses within neighborhoods, we also created more consistency...

–Jennifer Gomez

been rendered incompatible by decades of use-based zoning. At the same time, the city was careful not to treat the focus on “compatibility” as a deterrence to new types of development. The building type study allowed for planners to design regulations based on continuing the desirable existing conditions in the city – many of which are the more compact, walkable urban forms of the city’s pre-zoning fabric – while also making space for aspirational development types that do not yet exist in the city, but could advance broader community and economic development goals.

Iterative Code Design

The zoning code was, therefore, designed outward from the study, integrating additional context, rather than translating it directly into a final regulatory product. Consultants drafted

the initial versions of the zoning code, translating building types into specific regulations. “Initially, the draft regulations felt very true to the building type study,” Jennifer explains. “I think it needed a lot more refinement to better reflect both the city’s capacity, the city’s goals, and the unique elements from the city.” Those early drafts were a starting point – very accurate to the building type study, but required adjustment to accommodate the city’s housing goals and the places that resisted easy “typing.”

Trevor describes how staff layered in additional context, including existing district boundaries, overlays, and corridors. “We leaned pretty heavily on the current zoning district boundaries, particularly commercial or mixed-use districts,” he explains, “defining where our corridors could extend. Then we looked at other overlays, like the

traditional neighborhood development overlay, and searched for patterns on the map – filling in gaps, smoothing blocks, and making the pattern more predictable from street to street.”

This process helped determine where different “uses” made sense and how building types should be regulated by reading the city’s broader development patterns, rather than forcing uniformity. On average, a single zoning district allows for four of the fourteen building types, but in the city’s denser, mixed-use core that number increases to as many as seven. This enables entire blocks to share a district while still accommodating a wide range of forms. As Jennifer adds, “while we did decrease the intensity of some allowable uses within neighborhoods, we also created more consistency in the allowable uses throughout various zoning districts when along the mixed use corridors.” Along these commercial corridors, nodes with strong storefronts, offices and continuous streetwalls were intentionally preserved to support the density and variety that residents value. In this way, the team iterated on the study to thoughtfully align building types within use categories to allow for irregular patterns to remain while creating coherent, flexible blocks that were legible to residents and developers.

Aspirational Development

As the team revised the initial drafts based on existing building types and urban form, they also began to consider how the new code could allow for different kinds of aspirational development throughout the city. How could Zone Allentown support the City’s recently developed housing plan? How could the code reinforce the City’s Recompete plan, Allentown Works, designed to encourage job creation in Allentown through targeted place-based investments? Trevor explains, “When we were working on the code and iterating, we were trying to translate the current code into a form-based context. But in that translation, we were making amendments where necessary to meet the city’s objectives in Vision 2030, the housing plan, the parks plan. My mind goes first to the density calculations.” One of the core intentions of Zone Allentown, he continues, was “really pointing growth to our corridors and letting that growth happen.” Along commercial and mixed-use corridors, the team deliberately adjusted density allowances, allowing more housing than existing building types alone might have supported. These changes aligned the zoning code with broader municipal goals to expand housing supply, make jobs more accessible, and reinforce the walkable urban form.

“*One of the core intentions of Zone Allentown was really pointing growth to our corridors and letting that growth happen.*

–Trevor Tormann

This same logic guided how building types were integrated with use designations to support greater density across the city. One important building designation is the Small General Building type, which is a small apartment building of three units, with up to 12 units allowed with special exception. This building type exists in Allentown, but they do not form a consistent pattern and are dispersed rather than clustered on specific blocks. This building type is both preferred by residents and something planners want to encourage. With three to twelve units (depending on location), these Small General buildings are a classic “missing middle” housing type, bridging the gap between single-family homes and larger multi-family buildings. As Melissa observed, “I think everybody’s going to want to be a Small General

because of the ability to convert to apartments without the density barriers that were in place in the previous code. The additional density that would be allowed helps us meet goals of additional housing and affordability.” Since Small General buildings align with community preferences and long-term housing goals, Zone Allentown permits them broadly, making them allowable in nearly half of all zoning districts and in previously multi-family zoned neighborhoods that had large lot width and area requirements that restricted low-scale multi-family from occurring. This iteration helps to increase density and generate compact walkable neighborhoods.

A similar story is true for the “House B Court” type. “The House B Court

configuration works in other parts of the city and shares elements the code prioritizes, such as strong frontage and communal green space with recreational and health benefits. It was acknowledged that these configurations could be added to existing communities in a compatible way” (Gomez). The court configuration clusters multiple smaller single-family homes around a shared green space which takes more advantage of the available land. Again, the city integrated more dense types or configurations to increase density in traditionally single-family areas.

Zone Allentown is a context-sensitive code, developed around a set of building types that reflect the city’s existing environment and its potential for future development. “It builds on that compact, walkable urban form that exists as you approach the center of the city. The question is how that style of development can be matched and scaled effectively across the city” (Tormann). Unlike traditional zoning, Zone Allentown aims to be “compatible” with what already exists and create opportunities to reintroduce the city’s most desirable historic patterns that have shaped walkable neighborhoods. At the same time, Zone Allentown avoids letting compatibility become a barrier to change. The city introduces new aspirational forms of development – including

allowing new building configurations and existing building types in new locations – to support Allentown’s housing, economic, and community goals.

These principles have created a code that can remain flexible and able to adapt to new priorities over time. “Zoning codes are living, breathing documents that need to be refined annually and updated regularly. We hope to keep that momentum going and make sure this is a code that evolves alongside the city’s growth and future needs.” (Gomez). With a committed post-adoption amendment period, Allentown is ensuring that Zone Allentown continues to evolve as it moves from regulatory reform to implementation. The code builds on the city’s past in order to respond to its present and make more room for the future.

INTERVIEW

A Conversation with Ellie Abrons

The Small Cities Lab spoke with Ellie Abrons, Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of Michigan and Planning Commissioner for the City of Ann Arbor. The conversation explored how working across academia, practice, and municipal governance can help bridge regulatory reform and housing production, and how architects and designers can play a more active role in the relational and regulatory work necessary to make development possible.

0:01

Isabelle O'Toole

The overarching question that we've heard from the Co-Lab was how do we move beyond zoning and policy reform to actually spur housing production? How does your position as both an architect and a planning commissioner create opportunities to bridge regulatory reform and implementation?



Photo Credit: MLive

0:33

Ellie Abrons

This is a complex but important question to be asking. I have a vantage point as a commissioner on a Planning Commission that has been engaged in updating our Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) for the past two and a half years.** I also sit on the Ordinance Revisions Committee, which is the small subgroup of commissioners that works on drafting updates to the city's zoning ordinances. And I'm also an architect, working not just in Ann Arbor, but in Detroit and other places. I think about the relationships between the text of the ordinance and the design outcomes – what's determined materially, spatially, and urbanistically. As an educator, scholar, and researcher, I am also thinking about the role of research, speculative design, visualization, and imagination. This gives me a multi-

*** I am speaking only for myself in this interview, and not in any official capacity on behalf of the Ann Arbor Planning Commission.*

dimensional view, and I would say unfortunately there's no magic bullet.

I think we need maximum input. In the planning and regulatory processes, we need inputs from planning professionals, city staff, architects, developers, builders and tradespeople, people in finance, advocates and activists, and residents, of course, including both renters and homeowners. The diversity of inputs and approaches is so important. There's also a really big role in all of this for community organizers. There's so much relational work. One thing I've observed in the CLUP process is how important community organizing and building consensus over time are. Part of what we're doing is simplifying regulation so it's more legible and predictable, reducing the cost and risk of development. More known knowns will allow development to happen more affordably and quickly. Yet, this organizing work, this relational work, moves very slowly and requires a lot of communication and patience. If you come into a community and say, "we've already done all the research and read all the scholarship, and we already know what's best, and here's what we think you should do," and people aren't on board with that, you really can't rush them into it. They need to come to it in their own time. So there's a tension there with the quick change needed to address the housing crisis.

Going from reform to implementation is going to require relational work, interdisciplinarity, multi stakeholder processes. Another set of tensions arises around the role of government, What is the role of public versus private entities? Whether you're thinking about financing or procurement processes or approval processes. What is the role of public input? How do you design a process so that it's useful and substantive and not just performative or bogging everything down?



As architects we do have unique skill sets that can come to bear on the process.

–Ellie Abrons

6:36

Wes Hiatt

To follow up on the comprehensive land use reform effort, I'm curious what the engagement, or relational work, looked like? How has your background as an architect and designer shaped the way you do that relational work?

7:49

Ellie Abrons

I think as architects we do have unique skill sets that can come to bear on the process. I'd name three things. One, we're good project managers – we can manage complexity and coordinate large, diverse data sets. Two, we're conveners – we bring people together with common interests or goals, but different viewpoints, expertise, motivations, or desired outcomes. And three, we're trained to be problem solvers, which is to say that we are (sometimes to our detriment) inherently optimistic. We possess an almost willful naivete that allows us to think we can design our way through a problem, and that has been really important for me on the planning commission.

Backing up a moment and thinking about whether I've personally been able to do a lot of relational work, unfortunately I really haven't. In part because the structure of the commission as a body, and the way we are allowed to interface with the public during our meetings, limits that. In addition, in Ann Arbor, these are volunteer positions. We are working full-time jobs and doing this work in the evenings and on weekends. However, the city attempted to do a very robust public engagement process, starting in the summer of 2023. The commission has received feedback that some residents feel the process was flawed – that they either didn't know about it or that they don't feel their voices have been adequately heard. I'm not saying the process was perfect, but there were public events held all over town, and we received hundreds of emails and many hours of public comment and I and my fellow commissioners listened, read, and reviewed every one. There is a valid question about what constitutes meaningful public engagement and how to balance that with limited municipal resources. It's complex.

One more thing about architects – we have a way of being able to “break the code.” You try to think of the min/max scenario that pushes right at the edges of what an ordinance might allow or disallow, to figure out whether it's having unintended consequences. Architects are really good at this because we have this dogged optimism about solving things, or finding loopholes. We're trained to think creatively, to figure out how to get around things.



Photo Credit: MLive

Academia and University Role

13:49

Isabelle O'Toole

We've talked about how it's limiting to work on your own. So what's the role that academic institutions should play in community engagement with the city? And how can these institutions better serve planning commissions or city staff?

14:26

Ellie Abrons

I'll speak for the University of Michigan, as opposed to generalizing for all academic institutions. Sometimes, these collaborations can be really good. Unfortunately the university has a fraught relationship with some communities. There can be tension between the motivations of some scholars and the needs of a particular community, leading to suspicion and mistrust. In particular, the relationship between U-of-M and the city of Detroit has been problematic at times, with some

Detroiters feeling that it's extractive. Also, the grant funding, research and publication, and tenure processes put pressures on scholars that may be at odds with what a community needs or finds beneficial.

In terms of the university and planning processes in Ann Arbor, U-of-M is unique because it is a public university that supersedes the municipality of Ann Arbor in the state constitution, which means that the university does not have to follow the city's zoning ordinances or land use plans. Over the past 20 years U-of-M's population has grown more than 25% and they have purchased an incredible amount of property. The university doesn't pay property tax on those parcels and can build whatever they want there, regardless of the city's zoning. The university has been engaged in a campus planning process for the past couple of years that has minimally engaged the city. I wish there was a lot more collaboration and cooperation there.

On a more positive note, the university is a wellspring of expertise and knowledge and many faculty engage with the city as commissioners, informal advisors, and public intellectuals. For example, on the Planning Commission, we have multiple U-of-M faculty: two planners, one architect (that's me), one developer, and one political scientist.

19:13

Wes Hiatt

It sounds like working through a vehicle that's outside of the university, but as a sort of extra activity, is the way in which folks have found that kind of impact. Are there existing programs at Michigan that at least try to have that kind of direct impact on the ground?

19:57

Ellie Abrons

A huge part of my motivation to be on the Planning Commission, and why I'm doing it six and a half years later, when I really don't have the time, is that it feels like one of the more important things I've done in my career. I'm not trained as a planner, but it allows me to serve my community, it's adjacent to my training and expertise as an architect where I feel like I can meaningfully contribute, and it opens up a way to be in my community in a really different way than I was as a professor who lives here. The connection to my community is so much deeper, richer, and more expansive than it was when I was in my academic bubble.

I've also learned a lot about how things get built. We aren't really taught in architecture school how things get built, where the money comes from, and why things often look so bad! That's been pretty eye opening for me. This opens up an interesting question: how can academic work provide the same sense of meaning and impact that volunteering on a commission might give? Part of the answer is going back to tenure structures, funding structures, what we're rewarded for in academia – and seeking reforms that would allow people to do different kinds of work.

22:42

Wes Hiatt

Do you feel that your work on the planning commission has shaped how you think about implementing efforts in Ann Arbor? And thinking as an educator, how do you see that knowledge carrying forward through students who will ultimately take this work to many different places?

24:04

Ellie Abrons

Starting first with implementation, we are right on the precipice of adopting this CLUP that we've been working



I think we can find some of the most interesting creative and intellectual problems to think about within real world constraints.

–Ellie Abrons

on for two and a half years. Hopefully, the City Council will adopt it soon. Then the implementation process begins.

First, this means updating the zoning to reflect the guidance in the plan, which could take years. So we're not talking about actual buildings being built yet. We're trying to think about how to expedite the process. We have to avoid a potentially harmful "disrupter" mindset but also be realistic about what it would mean to move so slowly that we don't see change for many years. We need to identify what would have the most impact the most quickly and focus there initially. That's probably rezoning the parcels along transit corridors that we've identified for denser, mixed use development. The most controversial thing in the land use plan is that we're replacing single-family zoning with multi-family zoning by right. Every residential parcel in the city will be able to have up to three units by right. That's by far the most controversial thing, but in reality, that development is going to happen very slowly and incrementally, and its measurable impact on housing in the city will take 10, 15, 20 years.

In terms of the classroom, when I was in school, I was discouraged from thinking about anything, pragmatic or real world because it was going to somehow limit my creative imagination. But I think education has changed a lot. Students now learn a lot more about practical and pragmatic things. I feel like I was done a small disservice by being led to believe that real world circumstances were anti-intellectual or anti-creative. I think we can find some of the most interesting creative and intellectual problems to think about within real world constraints. My experience on the Planning Commission means that I talk to my students a lot about zoning and regulation and policy. Knowing those things is part of being a good, responsible designer.

Professional Responsibility

40:27

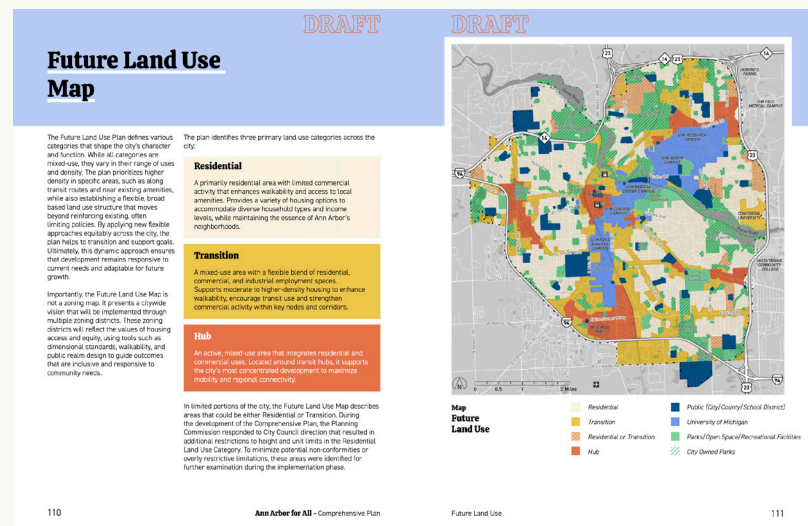
Wes Hiatt

Are you inspiring others, within your professional networks, to get involved in planning commissions where they are, or to think about relational work or regulatory change?

42:07

Ellie Abrons

I wish I was inspiring other people to do it! I don't know that I am. It's reminding me that when I applied, I reached out to a colleague who had been on the commission years prior, and they said to me, "Don't do it!" Their issue was that the commission has no authority over or even influence on the design. So we are often in a position where we have to vote affirmatively for something that meets all the regulatory requirements but in terms of design, is really awful. That was a conflicted space for this person and they hated doing it. I view that tension a bit differently, so while it's a bummer, it doesn't keep me up

Spread from the *Ann Arbor for All – Comprehensive Plan*

45:42

Ellie Abrons

I think I have raised awareness about the planning process and the existence of the commission among my colleagues and personal friends who aren't part of architecture or planning generally. How do these things even happen in our city? Why does it look the way that it does? What is going on? Why did this entire block of single family homes suddenly get demolished and a chain link fence went up? People want to know and I've tried to inspire them to pay more attention. My next step will be to get people to come to at least one meeting a year and make a public comment for or against a project. That would be a small way to engage that's not so time consuming. If you have a thought about a project that's on the books for your city, go tell somebody what you think about it!

46:57

Isabelle O'Toole

Do you think it's still easier to enter those planning conversations and to integrate those two spheres more?

47:16

Ellie Abrons

Sure, our city's planning staff are very accessible to the public. They're out in the community tabling at street fairs or standing by their posters at the farmer's market trying to spread the word. Also, this isn't the case in a lot of other, bigger cities, but in Ann Arbor, we don't limit public comment at our meetings. We limit the time any one person can speak, but we don't limit the total elapsed time or the number of speakers. So around the CLUP, we've had multiple meetings with more than three hours of public comment before we even begin discussion of our agenda items. We are small enough that we're able to remain quite accessible and that's a good thing.

45:05

Wes Hiatt

Exactly, in a lot of the conversations I have with architects in my generation and circle, there's a political consciousness, but not a confidence that they can contribute in the same way. And I'm just wondering how to inspire that.

CONNECTION

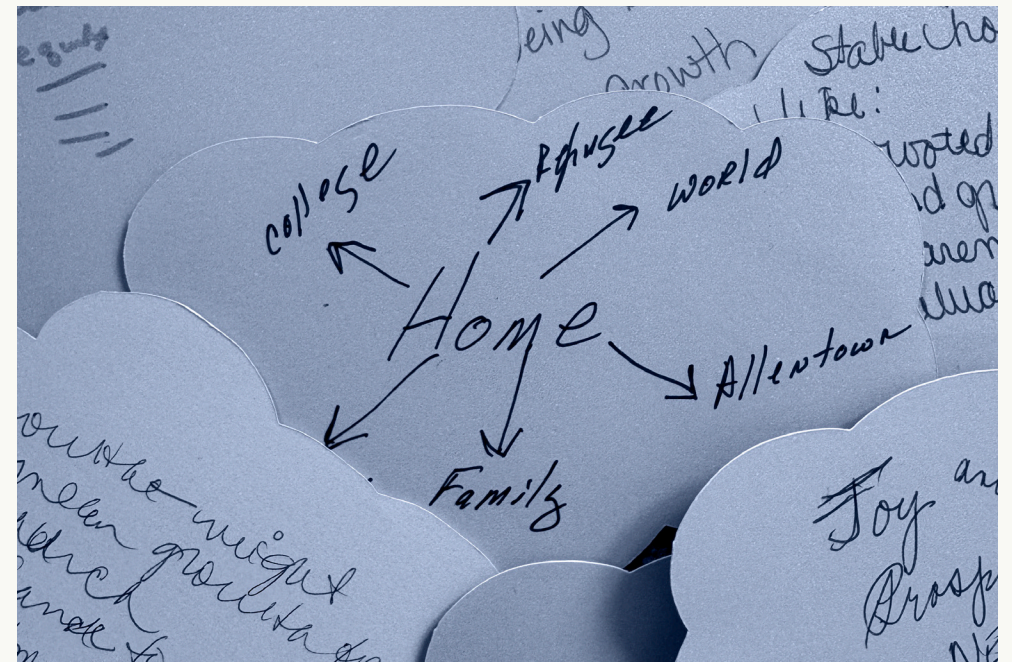
A Likely Combination: Faith, Theater, and Defining Home

Playwrights ashley sparks and Mark Valdez are creating a trilogy of plays on housing and community development. They are working on their second play about faith communities and their potential to respond to the housing crisis. This is a fictional email from ashley to Abby Goldfarb, Executive Director of the Lehigh Conference of Churches, a faith-based housing services non-profit.

Dear Abby,

I've just returned home from visiting several churches to talk about housing. This week, we chatted with Presbyterians and Methodists. It was so inspiring. Thank you for connecting us with other faith leaders! Our work is frequently done through "you should go talk with so-and-so" recommendations. Your suggestions paid off with some hilarious and some heartbreaking stories.

We have been humbled hearing about congregations really wanting to be in "sacred partnership" with the community.



Mark and I are two theater makers who create work with and for different communities—but Mark Tidwell's idea of "sacred partnering*" kicked off a whole new frame for us! Our practice has always centered on relational organizing that focused on transformation with an intention of moving audiences towards justice and joy. We are now starting to use this frame of "sacred partnering" in how we talk about our engagement work. The stories we have been hearing have inspired us to start working on a new play!

I remember Mark meeting you and describing you as a fireball of faith and joy embodied. Your loving vision for a housing future where all under heaven have a safe home is contagious. When we met, I thought, "Whoa! We can do this. If more people could feel Abby's energy and experience this vision, a beautiful housing future would be possible!"

But, our interviews slowed my hope. The “not-in-my-backyard” stories of neighbors blocking new mixed income development. Congregants fearing changing and holding onto a past church identity. It's expensive to renovate and repurpose a 100-year old building. And, this love and vision coupled with the messiness of humans felt like great fodder for a new comedy.

Here comes *The Pasture!* This will be our second play in our 10-year trilogy focused on housing and community development. We have a lot of writing to do, but right now the play is set in the sanctuary of an old church, with decades of deferred maintenance. Throughout the course of the play, the lights flicker, the pews fall apart, and the buckets come out when a sudden rainstorm reveals some holes in the roof. The church has a dwindling congregation, like 12 people. But those 12 are hardcore. The congregation is trying all sorts of things to get people to come on Sundays. They are running pancake fundraisers, karaoke, bingo, Christian yoga, bingo + Christian yoga at the same time. Since it's a fundraiser, you have to bring your own dauber and yoga mat. Surprisingly, this wasn't as popular as they hoped.

Here is a description of the characters. After each character, I have two questions for you. Could you let me know what other characteristics we should consider?



Jane (30's female) – Young Pastor

She's taken over a church with a shrinking congregation. This was in 2020, just as the COVID shutdown began. Since then, she has struggled

to maintain, much less grow, the congregation. She's desperate... attempting anything. She spends more time fixing the building than she does pastoring. She does not want to fail. She's having a crisis of faith. Leading a church no longer satisfies her heart. But she can't walk away... her congregation (all 12 members) rely on her.

*What types of building maintenance are unique to old churches?
What reasons do pastors have for not changing even when the writing is on the crumbling wall?*



Samuel (50's, male)

He has lived in a fancy house next door to the church for over 20 years. Because of rent control, he's been able to save a significant amount of money over the years and through wise investments, he finds himself with a lot of money. Unfortunately, the owners of the house are moving back in and he needs to find a new place to live. He is a New Age Astrologer and is working hard to manifest the church into being his personal home because the “vortex vibes are strong”. He hates being told “no” and it usually makes him more determined to get his way. He will go to extremes to convert this church into his home.

What are the renovation challenges of converting a sanctuary/church into housing?

How do next door neighbors relate to churches that are in decline?

Sam (80's, female) – Long time Congregant

In the mid-stages of dementia. Everyone is in denial about it—they just laugh at the confusion and forgetfulness. She's getting to the point that she can't live alone, but has no option. She is deeply committed to the church. She plays the organ... all the time.

How do pastors generally support aging congregants?

Do you know of any examples where churches have converted into senior care homes?

**Betty (40's, female)**

An independent mixed-income developer. She is staking everything she owns on the purchase and development of the church property. She recognizes that the land is highly valuable and sees the possible income she can make if she can develop the property. She has maxed out credit cards and has taken out a second mortgage to have enough cash to finance this dream. She views this as a path for wealth generation. She hasn't been to church in years, but is willing to do what it takes to convince the pastor to sell. She's packed a bathing suit for this meeting, just in case of baptism.

Do you know of any mixed-income smaller developers that have tried to do these types of conversion projects?

What are the obstacles for developers in working with churches to develop housing?

Lex (20's, trans masculine)

Was raised in the foster care system and at present, like many of his generation, they are joining churches, looking for deeper meaning and spirituality. They are squatting in the church. Lex is conservative Republican who has experienced broken and abused systems and believes that communities, not government, are the solutions. They are the newest member of the church and serve as the Deacon (no one else wanted to do the job).

How do younger congregants relate to the idea of "sacred partnering"?

What are the solutions that aren't solely based on subsidies for developing affordable housing?

Aaron (70's, male)

Dealing with the high cost of housing, Aaron has to take every job that comes his way. He's just trying to make ends meet and currently living out of his van. He's trying to be a "Vanlife Influencer" but he's also a Lyft driver, unlicensed electrician, roofer, plumber, and was recently elected to City Council. He works too much to have time to go to church. Unsurprisingly, he's become a jack of all trades and master of none. Always there when you don't want him. He is the same character working different jobs. When he's doing a job, he takes on the persona of that position, but he's the same person.

What are some of the best examples you've seen about how pastors and congregations support their community members who are housing insecure?

What's the most absurd part-time job you've ever heard of someone doing?

Oh—and there's a gaze of raccoons living in the church...maybe they talk? This is a place of miracles, afterall.

We are going into a writing intensive next month. If you have any thoughts, please write. We value your insights and humor. Audiences are already familiar with sad housing stories. We want the show to leave people with hope, solutions, and good belly laughs.

May our paths lead us to be together again soon. Until then, may your beloveds be safe and the path to housing be open.

With gratitude and grace,

ashley and Mark



* Shift: 3 Big Moves for the 21st Century Church by Mark Tidwell.



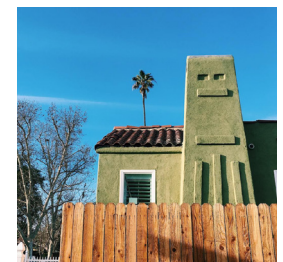
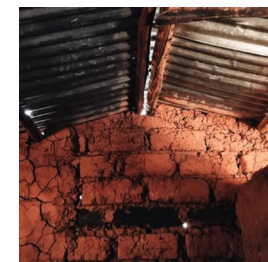
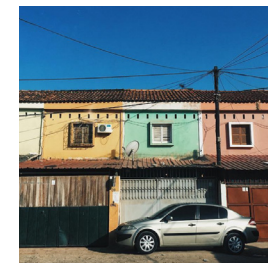
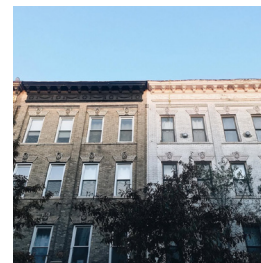
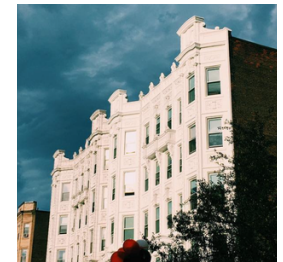
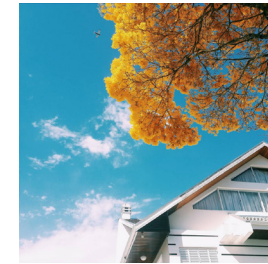
Housing Respondents

The following contributions come from Co-Lab Respondents who, after engaging with the housing booklet and participating in the webinar, developed their own creative responses to the open questions raised in both. The reflections add another layer of color to the questions explored, and illustrate the iterative, evolving nature of this work.

Wandy Pascoal

Senior Manager of the Future Forms Lab at Boston Society of Architecture, responding with a photo collage of housing typologies across Angola, Brazil, and the US.

The images featured here span a period of over a decade, showcasing housing typologies found across cities in Angola, Brazil, and the US. This collage focuses on building façades, insofar as they behave as moments where the public is offered glimpses into daily life shaped by neighborhoods. Many of the unique façades represented here also depict decay and a natural degradation of materials over time. This highlights the fact that not only were these buildings once designed, built, and inhabited by various people, over time they, too, will collapse or be transformed to better serve future needs.



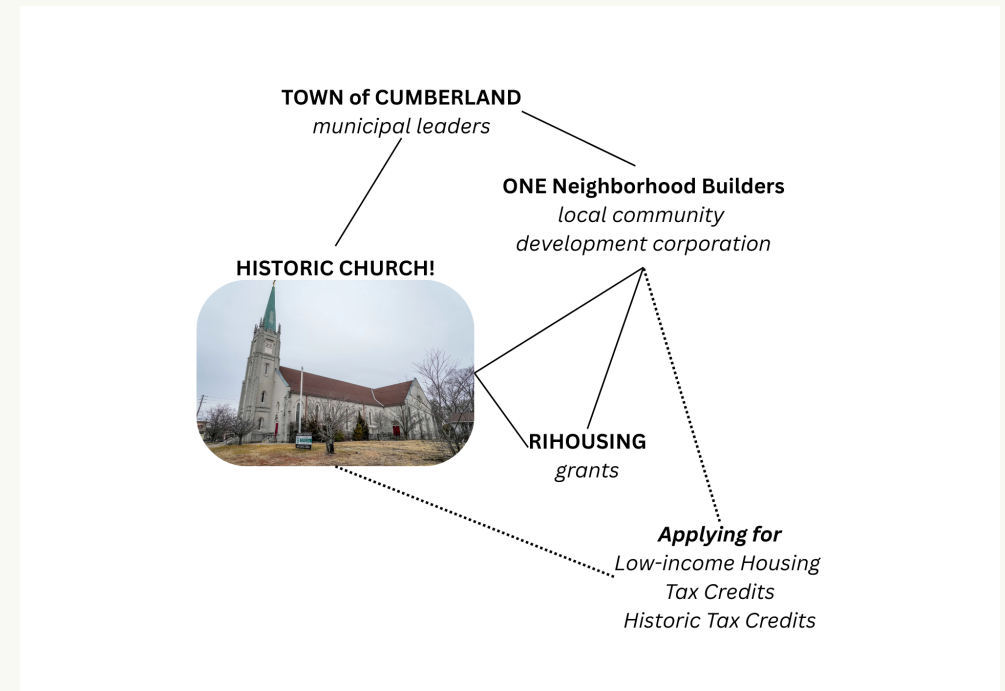
Kylee Hong

Student at RISD and Brown, on faith-based housing collaborations and the preservation of older architecture.

In response to the question, “how can we encourage the preservation of older architecture (adaptive reuse and facade maintenance)?” and the conversation about Faith-based housing collaborations, I wanted to share an snippets from a case study in Rhode Island from a research project I did in 2025.

St. Patrick's Church, located on Broad Street in Cumberland, RI, served the Catholic community of Valley Falls from 1861 until its closure in 2018 due to declining membership. The Diocese put the property on the market for sale. The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC), with concurrence from the U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), determined that the building was eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Town leaders, recognizing its iconic visual presence within the local landscape, were particularly interested in preserving and adaptively reusing the historic building. The Town of



Cumberland initially reached out to One Neighborhood Builders (a local CDC that builds affordable housing across the state and leads neighborhood-based health and equity initiatives) for their reputation for taking on difficult projects.

Note: As the FBO sold it to a nonprofit developer, the property cannot use the “St. Patrick’s” name and cannot host activities that conflict with Catholic values. There is no ongoing relationship between St. Patrick’s Church and ONB.

Abby Goldfarb

Executive Director of the Lehigh Conference of Churches, responding to questions posed by Ashley Sparks on how pastors and churches can support people who are housing insecure.

Can you describe how pastors and churches are supporting folks who are housing insecure?

Like most things, there are many ways the faith community supports people experiencing housing insecurity. Most commonly, congregations organize collections—hats and scarves, food drives, toiletry kits—and sometimes take on more robust efforts such as providing furniture or gas cards. A next level of support involves volunteering: many groups serve at soup kitchens, volunteer at local food banks, and even walk with street outreach teams to meet those living outside.

Another thing entirely happens which

folks who are housing insecure are invited in. Picture a large church door swinging wide to let in the huddled masses – much like the way I envision the great pearly gates of heaven. Churches host Family Promise families, welcome refugees, host NA/AA meetings, open weekend drop-in centers like Neighborhood House where those who stay at the nearby winter shelter come for breakfast, fellowship, church service if they'd like, and leave with a bagged lunch. These experiences tend to be the most powerful and often inspire "church" to come outside the walls. It is in these places where Christian principles come alive, show tangible, physical form through relationship, presence, and shared community. Love Thy Neighbor

becomes real.

What are some of the structural and relational barriers to do this?

In my experience, the most common barriers are born from learning something new and the fear that may cause. Knitting a few hats is one thing. Sitting next to a person without a home and asking how they are feeling is quite another. A good translator (usually a human service agency) can help to explore how this experience might look, how to maneuver through uncomfortable spaces, how to best serve those who need the support on their terms, and to temper expectations. The best experience comes when congregations are willing to learn before doing, have strong direction from the pulpit, and are open to evolution. It helps when they do it alongside an human service provider or when the pastor themselves are qualified. I have a friend who has a D.Div. and is an LSW. She is amazing, we need more like her.

This would be a great spot to lift up the network.

All of the above works best when different entities are supporting each other in reaching a common goal. For instance, there was a gap in Allentown where nowhere was open on Sundays

to receive a meal or stay warm after the shelters close at 7am. Allentown Collaborative Ministries did an asset inventory, were subjected to my peer pressure and created Neighborhood House – open each Sunday during the winter shelter season, they offer meals, activities, fellowship, the opportunity to worship and a bagged lunch. Conference staff trained all the volunteers and helped to set up an environment where guests would be successful. They have become the lynchpin of weekend services.

What is the background of faith-based development?

If you asked Pastor Lindsey Clifton, she would tell you that the black church community is decades ahead in faith-based development. A lot of what feels new to mainline, white protestant churches has actually been learned from the black community. I suppose that speaks to the different ways people experience faith and why they go to church at all. Black communities have been taking care of each other to survive far longer and far more successfully than the churches I visit today. As they now face the grief that comes along with traditions going extinct, they reach for something bigger to hold on to. Like the broken down, falling apart church in your play.

Lauren Finn

Senior Planner at the City of Lancaster, responding to Ellie Abrons, on what it takes to move from zoning reform to housing production.

Simply eliminating single-family zoning isn't magically leading to more density/housing.

What will?

FINALLY! The City in which Janet lives and works as a Planner is preparing to update the zoning ordinance. One change that the City is looking to make is to remove single-family residential zoning. This zoning prohibits multi-family buildings, duplexes/triplexes, townhomes, courtyard apartments, cottage courts, even accessory dwelling units (!) on properties zoned Single-Family (R1 for those in the biz). Without this legal barrier, Janet thought this would open the door to new housing options for diverse groups of people! She

thought, perhaps naively, the housing crisis could ease! But she is facing backlash... Why won't this have the impact that Janet believes is possible? She set out to do some community engagement to find out.

To begin with, developers were not interested in these newly available parcels for a few substantive reasons. The first most prominent reason is currently a hot topic in zoning reform: parking minimums. Outside the City's core, parking is required for each dwelling unit. Whether it is surface parking (least expensive, ≈\$5k/space), an above ground structure (≈30k/space, or below the surface (most expensive, ≈\$50k/space). This makes the financial "penciling out" of multi-unit

developments extremely difficult. Sure, the developer can go to the Zoning Hearing Board and request a variance but that only beleaguers the process, and there is no guarantee. Philadelphia was able to figure out how to eliminate parking minimums with two caveats – first, it is the largest city in Pennsylvania; second, the policy does not include single-family residential. But Janet thought to herself, for a smaller city that no longer has this designation... would it be possible?

The crazy thing about parking is, if the development is in a walkable area, residents do not even need the parking! Janet considers this – and it makes sense. She considers the fact that currently, there are no parking minimums in the downtown core of her city. But last year, a new development went up, in the City core (walkable to everything!), with parking provided as an optional add-on amenity. The reception was cool to say the least. Residents were turned off by lack of on-site parking; they did not want to walk a block to their cars. You can't win.

Janet was happy to hear that, along with developers, many residents are in favor of eliminating parking minimums. In place of parking, residents want more (and better maintained) bike lanes! Bike lanes get people from residential

neighborhoods to their jobs! They enable kids to bike to school! With some special travel bags attached you can run errands! Unless it snows... and the bike lanes don't get plowed. Say "Yes!" to less parking; say "No!" to prioritizing cars. The return on investment (ROI for acronym lovers – there's more coming!) for protected bike lanes comes in the form of increased ridership, which in-turn benefits neighborhood economics. Both cyclists and motor vehicle drivers feel safer on the road when there is a physical divide between users. What is considered a "divide" is a rabbit-whole unto itself, but Janet makes a mental note to catch up with her VisionZero colleagues.

Unfortunately, as it turns out many of these single-family residential neighborhoods are not "walking or even bicycling distance" to destinations such as work, school, and retail. Residents explain, without transit improvements, new developments in these neighborhoods will not be an option for individuals/families who do not own cars. This burden will fall disproportionately on low-income households. Residents complain about inconsistencies in bus schedules, long routes, and lack of bus stops, never mind sheltered bus stops. Reducing impact fees and prioritizing these projects in the City's capital budget could help – though it must be recognized that these shifts

do not take place overnight. Investing in infrastructure improvement after housing is built is an uphill battle – there needs to be forethought. The City needs to show that it is making a commitment to inclusionary zoning by building the infrastructure necessary for residents who do not drive to be able to live in these neighborhoods.

One take-away from these initial conversations is to prioritize development close to transit. Transportation Oriented Development (TOD). Janet was thinking about the locations of transit throughout the City that are close to areas currently zoned as single-family residential. For example, multiple bus routes stop at the mall. Just outside the boundary of the mall is a large residential neighborhood. As the City considers the future land use (based on the Comprehensive Plan, of course), this area could be a top priority, while some of the other areas await capital improvements and funding sources. The idea of medium-density residential units, with pedestrian friendly, tree-lined paths to the mall made Janet smile. Once there, residents could shop, eat, or hop on a bus to downtown (or elsewhere in the county).

Just as Janet was beginning to regain confidence that the elimination of single-family zoning would support community housing growth, she was hit by a

systemic issue. In this current economy, big developers are concerned about costs. There are obvious costs, such as those related to parking and building materials, but also hidden costs, such as those related to the land development and permitting processes. These costs are measured in both dollars and time. The application, the waivers, the various committees and commissions, permits, the list goes on. One of the top costs (both in terms of money and time) is stormwater management. This has become increasingly complex over the past two decades. Site planning to include stormwater, alongside sewer and water, adhering to MS4 requirements, all while understanding the legality of right-of-way, easements, and dedications requires a level of knowledge that only the best consultants can offer. Similar to transportation infrastructure, this is an area where the City must prioritize. Janet and her colleagues often discuss planning for 5-years, 10-years, 20-years down the line. This is the reality of planning. Unfortunately, this goes in one ear and out the other for a community that wants/needs housing now.

What is difficult for large developers, creates years-long obstacles for non-profit developers, and insurmountable barriers for small developers and homeowners. In a community experiencing a housing crisis – not in the

“Improving housing prospects, not just in number, but also in diversity, requires a holistic approach from the City that demonstrates commitment and builds trust.”

–Lauren Finn

amount of available housing but in the diversity of its stock – this is extremely frustrating. Infill development often comes from smaller developers, looking to construct semi-detached homes on small lots or redevelop a blighted building. Neighborhood landowners interested in building additional units on their property, or adjacent property, also face uphill battles.

Janet spoke with a disheartened landowner in the single-family residential zoning area that was soon to have relaxed requirements. He owns two parcels and was planning to build on each – a duplex on one parcel, a triplex on the other. Because the lots are adjacent, and they will be rentals, all

the units taken together trigger land development. Neither lot meets the minimum square footage requirement to begin with, and if existing setbacks are enforced, the units will not be large enough to make them worth developing. The landowner contends, this is the very housing that this neighborhood needs, the missing middle! This is housing for folks without intergenerational wealth, without the credit scores needed for a downpayment. This is for our blue-collar workers, the ones that keep the City running, for single-moms and recent college grads entering the workforce. In 2025, Pittsburgh passed legislation to reduce minimum lot size in all residential districts and eliminated minimum lot size per unit – another big city example,

but evidence that it can be done! Janet wonders whether there are examples from smaller cities that she could draw upon. She makes a mental note to hire a summer intern!

Another landowner in the single-family zone was almost as excited about the changes coming to single-family residential zoning as Janet was. The word to emphasize in that last sentence: “was.” When this resident considered building an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) on his property, he could not get over the costs associated with permitting and stormwater! Square footage and design elements, utilities, access for ingress/egress, emergency vehicles, even getting the address seemed like a hassle – and he was quite sure he was forgetting something! If only all the information about developing an ADU was in one place...and standardized...with no surprises. While acknowledging that California is always way ahead on things like housing, he was happy to tell Janet all about the ADU Guide for the City of Santa Barbara adding, “you know, their population is not much larger than ours.” File that one away for the intern as well.

Zoning and Subdivision and Land Development (SALDO) reform, potentially an entire rewrite of ordinances, was on the horizon. It was becoming increasingly clear that

eliminating restrictions in single-family zoning districts was not going to be enough to move the housing needle. It would need to be combined with other changes – both in combination with eliminating single-family residential requirements and outside of those zones as well. The City would also need to revisit the Future Land Use map and prioritize projects, relative to infrastructure improvements, that would draw interest from developers, big and small. Improving housing prospects, not just in number, but also in diversity, requires a holistic approach from the City that demonstrates commitment and builds trust.

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The background is a dark navy blue field filled with various geometric shapes in a vibrant blue color. These shapes include a large circle in the top left, a triangle in the top right, a quadrilateral in the middle right, a large triangle in the bottom left, and a semi-circle in the bottom right. The shapes are arranged in a non-representational, abstract pattern.

Small Cities Lab