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Each January at their annual retreat the MAP Board identifies a policy priority - an issue or challenge facing our industry - and over the course of the year seeks to learn more about that topic, ultimately developing a policy to guide the work of MAP, and of our members.

To that end, the board “links” with experts throughout the year, inviting leaders from planning or other industries to join the board for conversations about the topic, deepening our understanding, and informing our policy direction. What we learn is incorporated into our policies, and ultimately shared with our members through educational programming, Michigan Planner features, and advocacy. Sometimes it results in new partnerships or grants.

These board linkage conversations are so rich with content that we believe our members will find useful that we developed this series of Board Linkage Summaries to highlight the key findings of these exchanges with others - typically non-planners - who join us in the space of community building.

The objective of this series of to allow you to also better understand who the board is meeting with, the objectives of those meetings, and the takeaways that will help us all understand the interconnectedness we share with other disciplines and professions, and how we can apply this knowledge to our work as planners.

Board Linkage Briefs Allowing Most Housing By Right

Administrative approvals occur in Michigan communities every day. These are routine development approvals that receive sign-off from a designated staff person. If a development project complies with local regulations, then it can be administratively approved. Most communities already have administrative review for single family home construction; if the house meets the zoning ordinance requirements, it is permitted. Further, minor improvements, like an addition to a single-family home, or construction of a deck, are not typically reviewed in a public hearing or require permission from a board or commission. Administrative approvals are intended to make it easy to build a single family home, or for a property owner to improve their property by allowing development projects of a specified size and scope to be quickly processed by staff. Determining whether it meets the ordinance requirements is left to building department staff.

Contrast this process with the one usually required for housing other than a single family home. The midrise apartment building often requires site plan review and a public hearing before the planning commission. Even a duplex or a triplex typically requires site plan review. And this is where development approval can get stuck. Time and again rezoning to higher density housing, even if it's in the master plan, is met with angry citizens. Furthermore, in many communities, there are no housing options between detached single-family homes and mid-rise apartment buildings or multiple family complexes.

There are many housing options that could work well as infill development in a single family residential district. Accessory dwelling units, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, attached single family/townhomes, and cottage courts are all housing types that are not as large and dense as an apartment building and can more easily be administratively approved, like a single family home.

Including a range of additional housing types, and allowing administrative review, means a community must do its homework ahead of time to determine what kind of development is acceptable and desirable. This will entail a community campaign that includes meetings and discussions with staff, the commission, the legislative body and the public to both educate and inform as well as come to agreement on outcomes and processes everyone wants to see. This is a big shift for many communities; the single family model has been the norm for new residential development for many decades. Housing type, density, landscaping, screening, parking, and building materials must be considered and codified well in

advance of a building permit application, to ease the comfort levels of both the public and elected leaders. The goals and objectives of the new paradigm must be adopted into the master plan and codified in the zoning ordinance ahead of any development proposal.

Creating a predictable development review process for all types of housing can expedite housing variety AND assure that municipal policies and codes are honored.

The developer will know clearly what is expected, and can better anticipate the cost of development. This takes the guesswork out of what will be permitted, and opens the door to the creation of new housing units in neighborhoods that can support them. The community wins because they know they are going to get the pre-approved minimum in terms of use/density and aesthetics without having a contentious planning commission meeting.

Administrative approvals, when done correctly, can increase predictability and consistency while also implementing a community's vision. Finally, an added benefit is that power is appropriately placed in plans and ordinances, rather than at the dais in potentially politically charged meetings.

TERMS:

Duplex: A multi-family home that has two units in the same building. These two units always share a common wall, but the floor plan can vary. Units can be arranged either side by side or stacked on top of one another, each occupying an entire floor or two of the building.

Triplex: Three individual dwelling units combined into one building, with the individual units sharing one or two common walls. Each unit of a triplex has its own kitchen, bathroom(s), living room, separate doors to the outside, and its own address or unit number.

Fourplex or Quadplex: A multifamily property with four attached units under one roof.

Cottage Court: A group of small (1 to 1.5-story), detached structures arranged around a shared court visible from the street. The shared court is an important community-enhancing element and unit entrances should be from the shared court. It replaces the function of a rear yard.

Townhouse: A small-to medium-sized attached structure that consists of 2 to 16 multi-story dwelling units placed side-by-side. Entries are on the narrow side of the unit and typically face a street or courtyard. The street façades have entrances and avoid garages.