

President Pérez comments 4-7-2025

RE: The RT5 zoning proposal:

The Milwaukee code of ordinances currently has a progression for RT zoning, ranging from RT1 to RT4, with RT4 allowing up to a 4-unit structure as a matter of right. This presumes that the lot and the structure itself meets the zoning standards regarding size, setbacks, and height. The natural progression from RT4 zoning, is obviously, RT5. The purpose and intent of the RT5 category is to address the need of the “missing middle housing” element in Milwaukee. Typical middle housing types include multiunit structures such as townhomes, duplexes, triplexes and four-plexes. Other examples can include live-work units, cottages, and courtyard buildings.” In this case, the RT5 zoning would allow a slightly more dense structure to be constructed, up to 8 units, whereas RT4 only allows up to 4. Eight unit structures have been identified in various studies as a way for new and smaller developers, which often translates to developers of color that don’t necessarily have access to large amounts of capital, to begin to establish a commercial real estate portfolio. This can lead to larger projects for these emerging developers down the road.

The sponsors envision RT5 zoning as being a targeted housing strategy that will rely on the appropriate location being selected, in conjunction with robust Aldermanic and community input that will help offer a needed housing option. As RT5 would be a new zoning designation, and doesn’t currently exist anywhere in the City, approval would be needed from the common council to change any parcel to this zoning category. I want to be crystal clear that changing a parcel to RT5 zoning requires a public approval process, just as if someone currently wanted to build an 8-unit building on a parcel zoned RT4. Either common council or board of zoning appeals approval would be needed. This proposal is that simple, stands alone as a zoning code update, and when placed in the appropriate location...possibly on a corner, main thoroughfare, double lot, or a block with both commercial and residential properties on it, can lead to positive impact on the City’s housing offerings.

Chairwomen, I’ll conclude with my policy director and I met virtually on December 18th and March 4th, for several hours, with numerous communities groups in the effort to explain the purpose and need for this code language. The groups we met with were organized, well-spoken, and really spoke to the need for zoning policies and plans, to focus on our existing communities and what they need to stabilize and thrive. I wholeheartedly agree with those sentiments and told them as much. RT5 aligns with that vision of placing density on a residential parcels only where and when it makes sense, also puts forth design uniformity and predictability, but only after community notification and a robust dialog takes place first.

RE: The ADU zoning proposal:

When you visit older parts of Milwaukee, on the near North or South sides, you'll often see parcels of land with 2 residential structures on them. Commonly known as "mother-in-law suites", they "became highly popular in the early 1900s when caring for aging parents was the societal expectation after a couple married. At the time, multigenerational housing was more common than it is now. After WWII and America's exodus to the suburbs, many cities created zoning laws that banned in-law apartments. However, with housing prices rising, a large population of aging Americans to care for, and a high demand for passive income, ADUs are becoming quite popular again".

(Harvest Park Group, 1-5-2023)

Madam Chair, with both that historical context and our existing housing realities in mind, I put forth this Accessory Dwelling Unit legislation (ADUs). Cities in Wisconsin such as West Allis, Madison and Wauwatosa currently have legislation allowing the construction of ADUs. Wauwatosa's City Website does a nice job of laying out the goals and benefits of ADUs that include but are not limited to:

- Contributing needed residential units to the city's deficient housing stock
- Preserving the character of neighborhoods
- Offering residents — or soon-to-be residents — another affordable, flexible housing option
- Providing homeowners an option to generate rental income or provide a home for extended family
- Supporting residents through various life changes.

ADUs are one tool in the tool box...and currently it's an expensive and rarely used tool, in fact:

- Madison WI has only issued 32 ADU permits from 2012-2024
- St. Paul MN, 25 ADU permits issued from 2016 to present
- And Minneapolis MN, has issued 232 ADU permits between 2014 and 2023.

Recently, some cities have loosened their ADU policies to allow for more flexibility, while other such as Wauwatosa are now offering a \$25,000 forgivable loan to up to 4 individuals who build an ADU on their property in 2025.

ADUs likely will not change the landscape of the housing market in Milwaukee. There are only a few cities in the country (such as Los Angeles and Seattle), that are routinely noted as being

some of the most expensive cities to live in in the world, that ADUs are a relevant percentage of new construction permits. And that's not necessarily a bad thing because clearly the housing is filling a void in the market. I always attempt to put forth common sense legislation that will benefit the City of Milwaukee. This ADU legislation is no different. ADUs have been part of the cities DNA for a long time. They are nothing new, but is often the case, what's old can sometimes get confused for something new. Whether it be boomers desiring to age in place, or a parent constructing an ADU for their child to live in (to support them as parents and or possibly to support a child with a disability), there's no wonder that a well respected organization such as the AARP, that advocates for more than 100 million Americans over the age 50, not only supports the construct of ADUs, but they've gone so far as to create a template for local municipalizes to utilize in crafting ADU language. I've included that information for the file as well. Just as we did with the RT5 discussion, my office spoke to community groups regarding ADUs as well. I continue to respect them and their opinions. That said, again, this is a simple zoning amendment, being proposed for the residential and industrial mixed sections of the zoning code. It's in line with many cities in our state, peer cities nationally, and is in alignment with our cities legislative package (to the state) of increasing housing options. With that, Madam Chair, Commission...I seek your support. I'd also like to thank our Legislative Reference Bureau for researching this topic on behalf of my office.