

# OPPORTUNITY HOUSING MYTHS & FAQ



**MYTH: The City Council is about to vote on a policy to allow Opportunity Housing throughout the city.**

**FACT: No.** When Opportunity Housing comes to the City Council in August or September they will be only voting on **whether or not to direct city staff to continue exploring** how allowing duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes in single family neighborhoods might work in San Jose. Following extensive public outreach and analysis, expected to last up to 18 months, the Planning Department would return to the City Council with a policy recommendation that could then be accepted, rejected, or amended.

The General Plan Task Force recommended that city staff be directed to **explore** a policy that would be applied **citywide, and that the following would be included in this process:**

- Conducting robust citywide community engagement,
- Studying incentive to include units at affordable or moderately-priced levels,
- Developing tools to minimize displacement risks, and
- Proposing strategies to preserve historic areas.

**MYTH: San Jose already has a balance of residential neighborhoods, and development opportunities, without making any changes in areas restricted to single family homes.**

**FACT:** According to an analysis by The New York Times, [94% of San Jose's residential land is restricted exclusively to single family homes](#). However, [only 50% of San Jose's residents live in a single family home](#). This leaves just 6% of San Jose's residential land for half of its current residents, and almost all of its future growth. San Jose will need to use many tools to provide enough homes, including Opportunity Housing, Urban Villages, and more dense housing near transit.

**MYTH: Opportunity Housing, allowing duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes across all our city's neighborhoods, is an extreme proposal.**

**FACT:** Opportunity Housing has been a part of San Jose's most vibrant neighborhoods, like Willow Glen, Japantown, and the Rose Garden, for decades. Opportunity Housing is San Jose's unique term for allowing duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes across all our city's neighborhoods. These homes were once common in San Jose, but have been prohibited over the last few decades by restrictive rules that have allowed only single family homes to be built in most neighborhoods, even as we have experienced dramatic increases in housing costs pricing more families out of the city. Other cities in the region have embraced Opportunity Housing as a common sense approach to making these homes available again. You can see many beautiful examples of these homes in neighborhoods across the city at SJ Neighborhoods For All's [Opportunity Housing Gallery](#).

**MYTH: Opportunity Housing will change all the rules and eliminate opportunities for community review.**

**FACT:** Currently there are design guidelines for single family neighborhoods which include limits on heights, and mandates for setbacks that limit size. If a homeowner follows these guidelines they can build a new home without public review. This wouldn't change. There are also rules that protect heritage trees, and these rules do require notification of neighbors and possibly hearings. This also wouldn't change.

**MYTH: Opportunity Housing will change the character of our beloved neighborhoods.**

**FACT:** Evidence from around the country indicates that this will be a very slow process, and will be up to the decisions made by individual homeowners. Design guidelines will continue to determine how duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes blend into our existing legacy neighborhoods, just as they currently do for new single family homes and additions. Opportunity Housing is already a part of our neighborhoods, and it's neighbors, not just buildings, who make up a community's character.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Will the infrastructure, such as water and sewer systems, of existing legacy neighborhoods be able to handle the addition of duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes?**

**Yes.** [According to the City of San Jose's Planning Director, Rosalynn Hughey](#), the "gentle" housing increase wouldn't hurt the city's infrastructure- there is adequate capacity in the current systems.

**Would Opportunity Housing cause more people to drive further, creating more greenhouse gas emissions that harm the environment?**

**No.** Right now, San Jose's housing shortage means that San Jose workers who can't find a home here are commuting not from the edges of the city, but from Gilroy, Hollister, Tracy, and even further away. Opportunity housing is a form of [infill development](#), building within existing developed areas, which is widely recognized as ["critical to accommodating growth and redesigning our cities to be environmentally- and socially-sustainable."](#) Additionally, nearly the entire city of San Jose falls within the transit bikeshed (reasonable distance for biking to transit), which is why the VTA supports opportunity housing citywide.

**Would Opportunity Housing increase parking problems and traffic in neighborhoods?**

**Probably not.** Most neighborhoods in the city have ample street parking. Additionally, if directed to continue exploring the issue, the city will have the opportunity to assess [current parking standards](#), and home [design standards](#) for where driveway parking can be placed. The scattering of new homes is not expected to significantly affect neighborhood traffic, but is expected to reduce freeway miles traveled, reducing traffic congestion.

**Would a homeowner be able to build a fourplex and three ADUs, for a total of seven units on one residential property?**

**Probably not, but it could be possible on very big lots.** Under the [City's ADU ordinance](#), ADUs must be placed in the rear yard of a residence, and all of the structures in the rear yard, taken together, can't cover more than 40% of the space. Very few properties in San Jose's residential neighborhoods would be large enough to accommodate both a fourplex and multiple ADUs.

**Why is the City of San Jose responsible for making sure more housing gets built? What about other cities in the Bay Area?**

Each city in California has a [legal obligation](#) to plan for enough housing to meet the needs of all their residents, at all income levels. Our regional government assigns each city their fair share of housing to be built. In the current planning cycle, San Jose has issued permits for 67% of the homes it needs to build. Santa Clara, Mountain View, Morgan Hill, Monte Sereno, Milpitas, Los Altos, and Gilroy are [all outperforming San Jose](#) -- and none of that changes San Jose's obligation to respond to the needs of its residents!

**What kind of people would live in Opportunity Housing?**

Opportunity housing would provide owner-occupied or homes for rent, or both, depending on how the landowner designed the new homes. Duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes are more affordable by design since each home usually has a smaller footprint than a single family home, and between two and four homes can share the cost of one parcel of land. This does not mean that these homes will be available to people of all incomes in the city, but it does mean more starter homes for families, a place for young adults who've grown up here, and a way for seniors to downsize while remaining in their communities. It would also provide homeownership opportunities more accessible to middle-income earners like teachers, firefighters, and nurses.