



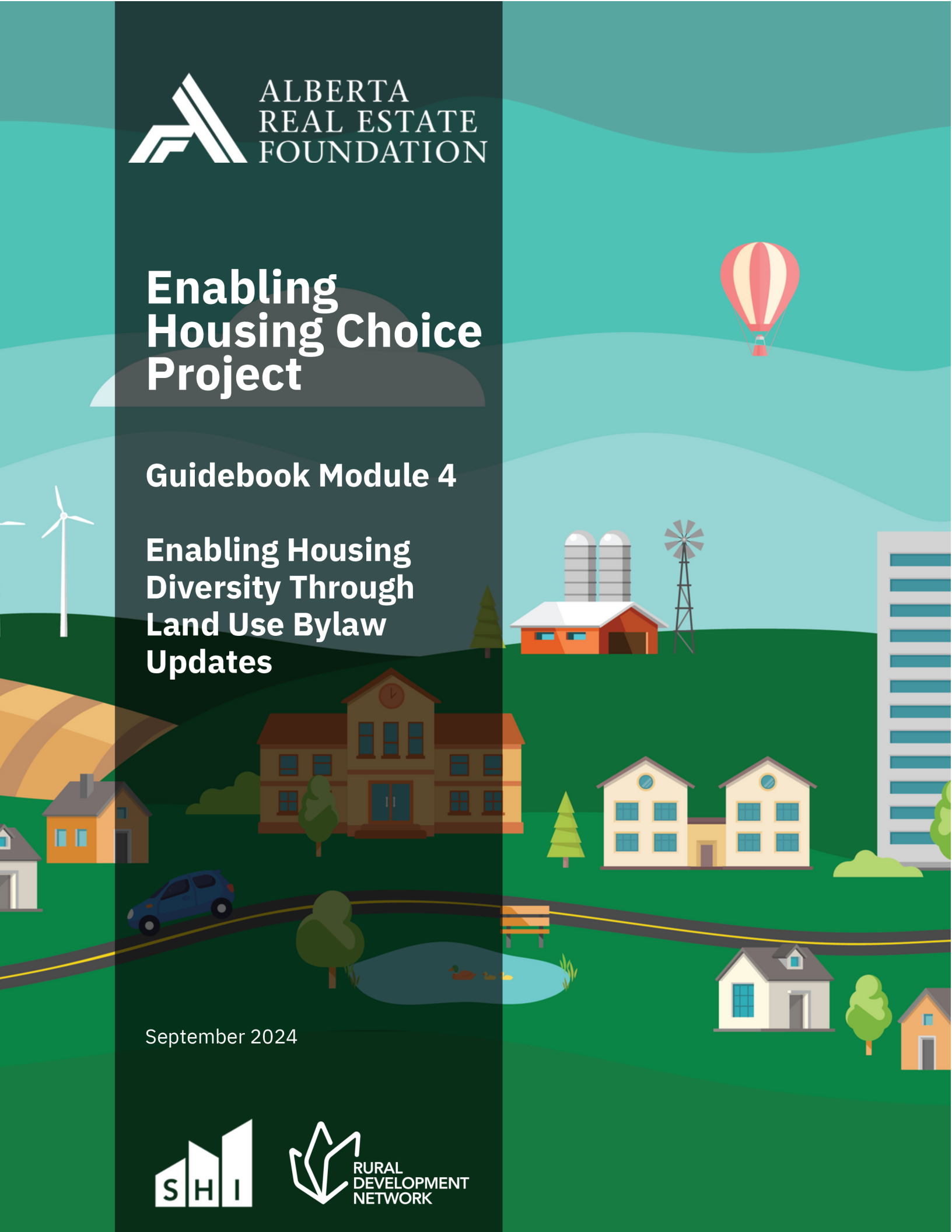
ALBERTA  
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FOUNDATION

# Enabling Housing Choice Project

## Guidebook Module 4

### Enabling Housing Diversity Through Land Use Bylaw Updates

September 2024



## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) team wants to acknowledge our connection with the ancestral peoples who have been on this land for millennia.

RDN's physical office is located on lands traditionally known as amiskwachiwaskahikan (A Miss Gwa Che Wuss Sky Gun) - aka Beaver Hills House, or Edmonton, the historical land of Treaty 6 Territory, which is also within the Metis Nation District 9.

We acknowledge and confirm our commitment and responsibility to foster better relationships with Indigenous peoples, and to improve our own understanding of the unique and diverse cultures of local First Nations, Inuit and Metis people. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we gather on.

RDN is committed to connecting our programming to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as benchmarks for our reconciliation journey.

It is our sincere hope that the information provided in this guide will help communities address their own unique and diverse housing needs, and provide greater housing security and inclusion for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, both in the community and the surrounding area.





## PROJECT ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, the Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) team wants to thank the Alberta Real Estate Foundation (AREF) for their funding and support in this research project.

We also want to acknowledge the 6 Alberta communities that participated in this research: (alphabetically) City of Airdrie, Town of Bow Island, Town of Claresholm, Town of Mayerthorpe, Town of Pincher Creek and Town of Trochu. These communities embraced the EHC team's mandate and research process, enabling them to collect practical and compelling information about current housing issues, barriers and opportunities in their community.

Finally, we want to express our gratitude to the housing stakeholders who participated in the various community engagement exercises that were conducted for this project. We appreciate the time and effort you dedicated to sharing your insights, identifying challenges, highlighting opportunities, and suggesting ways to improve housing diversity in your community. Your contributions have played a vital role in shaping the understanding of the current housing landscape and guiding the research towards meaningful solutions. Your generosity and willingness to collaborate have been instrumental in our goal to facilitate a more inclusive and diverse housing environment, both in your community and across Alberta.

# WHAT THIS MODULE EXPLORES

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# MODULE 4: ENABLING HOUSING DIVERSITY THROUGH LAND USE BYLAW UPDATES

MODULE 4 OF 8

## INTRODUCTION

As part of the Sustainable Housing Initiative (SHI) at the Rural Development Network, the **Enabling Housing Choice Project** (EHC) was set up through funding from the Alberta Real Estate Foundation. The EHC project's mandate was to conduct research focusing on housing issues, challenges and opportunities in a select group of rural Alberta communities, and then provide suggestions/recommendations to facilitate diverse housing development in those communities.

As part of the research process, local housing stakeholders – residents, home builders, developers, municipal staff and more – were engaged to provide insights into local housing matters. From this research the EHC team worked with the communities to prepare suggestions/recommendations to update their existing policies and bylaws in order to support diverse housing development in their community.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this module is to provide information and suggestions to rural municipalities about updating and enhancing the Land Use Bylaw in ways that will help diversify housing choice in the community.



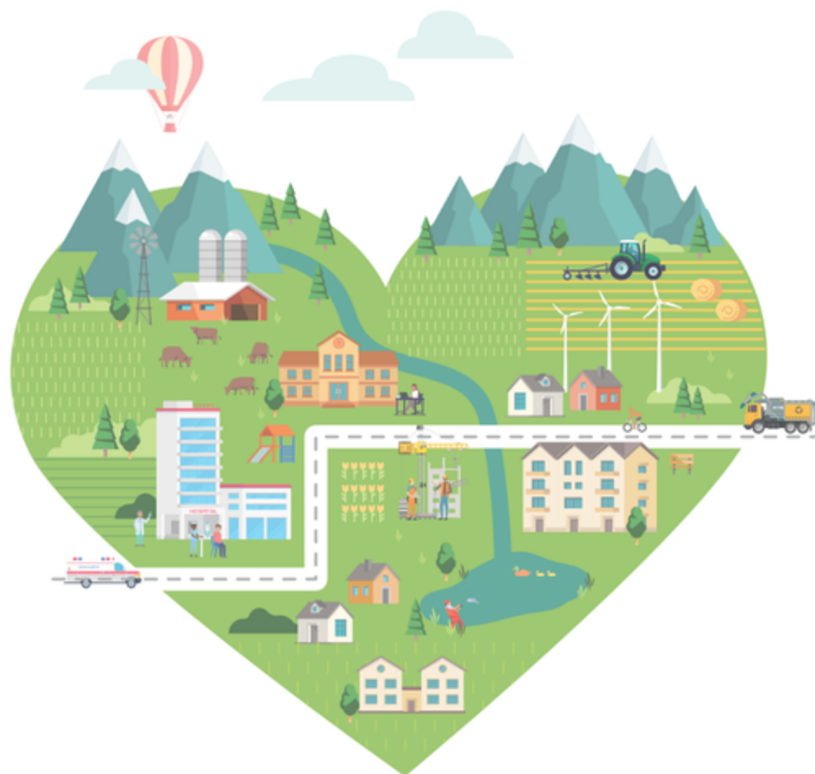
## 1.1 WHY ARE LAND USE BYLAW UPDATES IMPORTANT?

The primary purpose of a municipal Land Use Bylaw is to organize and regulate the use and development of land and structures in a community. Its intention is to ensure orderly and efficient development in a way that benefits both residents and businesses. The Land Use Bylaw accomplishes this through **designated Land Use Districts**, aka 'Zoning'. These districts organize uses and building types into categories and ensure that 'negative externalities' between types of uses are reduced or eliminated.

In addition, the Land Use Bylaw outlines the processes and procedures that will be used to make decisions about land use and development in the community.

A final note about every Municipal Land Use Bylaw: it is intended to be a **'living document'**. This means that it is meant to change and adapt as the needs of the municipality change.

The **Enabling Housing Choice Project (EHC)** research found that the partner communities would benefit from Land Use Bylaw updates so that housing diversity could be facilitated. The suggestions in this module are intended to be implemented as part of the regular Land Use Bylaw updating process, as it continues to meet the needs of the municipality.



## 1.2 EXPLORING LAND USE BYLAW UPDATES

It is important to note that any changes to the municipal Land Use Bylaw must take into account the specific goals of the municipality and the unique needs of its residents and businesses. By working closely with the partner communities, local strategies and land use bylaw updates have been developed to meet the needs of each of the partner communities.

As part of the groundwork to update the Land Use Bylaw in a rural community, it is important to make provision for the following research considerations:

### **Housing Needs Assessment:**

Conduct this **quantitative assessment** of the community's housing needs, through statistical analyses, in order to better understand local housing requirements, including affordable housing, housing preferences, and demographic trends.

### **Stakeholder Engagement:**

Collect this **qualitative information**, through community engagement sessions, in order to better understand what local housing stakeholders think are important housing priorities, needs, challenges and opportunities. This research should include a diverse range of participants: home builders and developers, residents, community organizations, homeowners and renters, land owners, and anyone else who has a stake in local housing.

### **Policy Alignment:**

Ensure that land use bylaw updates align with municipal policy incentives (Section 5), as well as broader community goals, other land use plans, and any provincial regulatory frameworks.

### **Financial Sustainability:**

Consider the financial sustainability of land use bylaw updates that are being implemented, as well as their long-term impacts on the community.

## 1.3 DEVELOPING LAND USE BYLAW STRATEGIES

As a component of the Enabling Housing Choice research, each of the 6 partner communities' current Land Use Bylaws was studied and then proposed updates were discussed with the community. The goal was to determine ways to increase housing diversity in the existing bylaw in ways that would meet the identified needs, issues, challenges and opportunities of the community

The Recommendations Report that outlines the suggested updates for each of the partner communities can be found on the RDN website.

Through the analyses of the collected information from the Land Use Bylaws, the community engagement processes, and the discussions with the partner communities, **3 general recommendations** have been developed, as a way to update a municipal Land Use Bylaw, and thus enable more housing diversity in the community:

**1. REDUCE** the number of residential districts in the Land Use Bylaw

**2.** Increase the **DIVERSITY** of housing types in the land use districts.

**3.** Increase the **DENSITY** of housing in the land use districts.

### BOTTOM LINE

The goal is to **update** the traditional municipal Land Use Bylaw in ways that reflect the current **needs** and **wants** of the community.

## A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON ZONING

Historically, the purpose of having different land use districts in a Land Use Bylaw has been to separate types of uses and thus reduce 'negative externalities' that may spill over from one land use to another. Initially, the goal was to separate residential uses from non-residential uses (particularly toxic industrial uses). Following that, uses within residential and non-residential districts were further separated into more specific sub-categories.

For the purposes of the discussion in this section, focus will be on residential uses. The Land Use Bylaw separates residential districts into areas that allow specific types and densities of housing. For example, large lot residential homes are in a separate land use district (zone) from manufactured homes. This is where the term 'exclusionary zoning' comes into play: generally, people who live in homes on large lots don't want to live next to manufactured homes or multi-family housing.

### 1.4 HOUSING IN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

Through a general examination of land use in rural Alberta communities (re: small towns, villages and hamlets), it has been noted that many have a large number of residential districts in their Land Use Bylaw.

Our first suggestion comes from the assertion that a small rural community does not benefit from having a large number of residential land use districts. In fact, having many residential districts in the Land Use Bylaw makes the development process restrictive, as well as unnecessarily complex and onerous for those attempting to navigate it.

Our analyses reviewed lists of permitted and discretionary housing types in the Land Use Bylaws of several small rural Alberta municipalities. In terms of housing types, many of the uses in the lists are simply an alternate form of the single family detached house. This will be discussed further under the heading 'A House is A House is A House'.



### 1.4.1 MERGING RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS - R1 & R2

In the following discussion, a blended residential land use district is created by combining typical R1 and R2 residential districts. It is suggested that the R1 and R2 districts are similar enough that they may be easily combined into one district. This will eliminate a land use district, simplify the new land use district, and facilitate the process for home builders. And, in doing so, all 3 suggestions from **Section 1.3** can be realized.

**Table 1** below illustrates a typical R1 - Residential district, common in many rural (and urban) municipalities. Generally speaking, R1 is typically the most prevalent residential district in the Land Use Bylaw.

In the R1 district, low-density development, typically single-family detached homes, are the norm as a permitted use; most other dwelling types are either discretionary uses or not allowed. This type of restrictive land use district is common across Canada.

**TABLE 1:**

#### Typical R1 - Residential District (Low-Density)

Permitted Uses	Discretionary Uses
Single-Family Detached (SFD) Dwelling	Modular Home
Accessory Structures or Uses	Moved-In Home
	Ready-to-Move / Factory Built Home
	Semi-Detached Dwelling
	Duplex
	Accessory Dwelling Unit



**Table 2** below illustrates a typical R2 - Residential district. Generally speaking, discretionary uses from the R1 district become permitted uses in the R2 district, and additional medium density dwellings become discretionary uses. This is the second most common residential district in the land use bylaw; it allows a broad range of dwellings, and it also includes a limited amount of medium density housing.

In most municipal Land Use Bylaws, the majority of the land in the community will be zoned under R1 and R2 residential land use.

**TABLE 2:**

**Typical R2 - Residential District (Medium-Density)**

Permitted Uses	Discretionary Uses
Single-family Detached (SFD) Dwelling	Rowhousing / Townhome (up to 4 units)
Ready-to-Move / Factory-Built Home	Fourplex
Modular Home	
Moved-in Dwelling	
Semi-Detached Dwelling	
Duplex, Triplex	
Accessory Structures or Uses	
Accessory Dwelling Unit	

**TABLE 3:**

**Proposed R1 – Combined R1 and R2 Residential Districts**

<b>Suggested Permitted Uses</b>	<b>Suggested Discretionary Uses</b>
SFD Dwelling	Triplex, Fourplex Dwelling
Ready-to-Move Home*	Rowhousing / Townhome (limits to height and/or # of units)
Modular or Factory-Built Home*	
Moved-in Dwelling*	
Semi-Detached Dwelling	
Duplex Dwelling	
Accessory Structures or Uses	
Accessory Dwelling Unit	

**1.4.2 A DISCUSSION ABOUT PERMITTED AND DISCRETIONARY USES:**

Before discussing the logistics of combining R1 and R2 Residential Districts (**Table 3**) municipal decision-makers will need to have a conversations around which uses should be listed as permitted in the district and which should be discretionary.

The focus for this discussion will be about development permit processing times between permitted use and discretionary use approvals.

First, the process descriptions that follow have been simplified for this discussion; there are invariably unique development circumstances that can and will affect time-lines for these processes.



### **Permitted Use Applications:**

In its simplest form, permitted uses in a land use district are considered 'as of right' uses - that is, as long as the development application meets the minimum Land Use Bylaw requirements for that use in the district, (i.e. setbacks, floor area, etc.) the application cannot be refused.

A permitted use application is processed and approved by the designated Development Officer (DO), within the time frames set out by the Municipal Government Act (MGA) and as outlined in the municipal Land Use Bylaw. Typically, a permitted use application is approved within a few days of the municipality receiving a completed application, as per MGA requirements. As a result, the applicant may start construction fairly quickly.

However, if the applicant requests any variance(s) from the requirements of the district (i.e. lesser setback), the application becomes discretionary and follows that process. (Note: There are exceptions to this as well)

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### **Discretionary Use Applications:**

A discretionary use application is also processed by the Development Officer (DO) within the time frames set out under the Municipal Government Act (MGA) and as described in the municipal Land Use Bylaw. However, the process also includes additional scrutiny that can add weeks to the review process. The final approval or refusal decision is made by a higher-level planning authority (i.e. Municipal Planning Commission).

Furthermore, the decision for a discretionary use application may be appealed, which adds even more time to the final outcome. In short, a discretionary use requires a longer processing time, and there is no guarantee that it will be approved.



### 1.4.3 SINGLE FAMILY DETACHED (SFD)

Referring again to **Table 1**, the traditional ‘single-family detached’ (SFD) dwelling is the only housing form that is allowed as a permitted use in the R1 Residential district. A variety of other housing forms are listed as discretionary uses: ready-to-move (RTM) homes, modular or factory-built homes, and moved-in dwellings. In the R2 land use district (**Table 2**), the discretionary housing forms from the R1 district become permitted uses. (Note: this is a simplified description)

By thinking in terms of “A House is A House is A House”, we suggest that some of the housing forms that are listed as discretionary uses in the R1 district (**Table 3, with \***) are simply variations of the single detached dwelling form.

The primary difference between the traditional SFD dwelling and the other forms is that a SFD dwelling is built on the lot, referred to as ‘stick-built’. In contrast, RTMs, modulars, or moved-in dwellings are built at off-site locations and then installed on the lot.

Unfortunately, there is a general thinking that housing forms other than ‘stick-built’ are inferior in design, appearance, and construction. As a result, they are listed as discretionary uses so that a higher level of scrutiny may be applied to their approval. It should be noted, however, that all homes built at ‘off-site’ locations/factories must meet the same Alberta Building Code requirements as ‘stick-built’ homes. In addition, once installed, these homes look the same as any other SFD home. Therefore, it is suggested that the current level of scrutiny as a discretionary use is no longer required.

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#### Let’s Talk About: Single Family Dwellings

It is recommended that **RTMs, modular/factory-built homes, and moved-in dwellings be added as permitted** uses to the combined residential district of the updated Land Use Bylaw, and be treated as the same as a SFD home. **Table 3** shows the full range of SFD housing forms that are proposed to be listed as permitted uses in an updated residential land use district.

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Keeping the discussion of permitted and discretionary use processing times in mind (**Section 1.4.2**), making these housing forms permitted uses will greatly shorten their processing times.

## Let's Talk About: A "House is a House is a House"

Furthering the idea that the **form** of the single detached dwelling is less important than the fact that it's used for residential purposes, it is recommended that the municipality develop a definition of 'single-detached dwelling' in the Land Use Bylaw, that includes the following forms:

- Traditional single family detached (aka 'stick-built'),
- Ready-to-Move (RTM)
- Factory-built home
- Modular home
- Moved-in dwelling
- Other similar types of SFD dwellings, as desired by the municipality

**NOTE:** Concerns about the design and construction of the house forms listed above may be addressed by adding guidelines to the Land Use Bylaw to ensure they meet the community's needs.

Defining SFD in this way will further simplify the permitted uses listed in the residential land use district (**Table 3**), since each form will not need to be listed and defined individually.

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### 1.4.4. DUPLEX AND SEMI-DETACHED DWELLINGS

In **Table 1 (Section 1.4.1)**, duplexes and semi-detached dwellings are listed as discretionary uses; this is very typical in an R1 district. These 2 forms are often similar in appearance: built side by side or as stacked units, with a common floor or ceiling between them and separate entrances. Due to title and ownership differences, however, they are typically listed as separate uses.

The pictures on the following page show, first, the classic unappealing duplex / semi-detached home from the 1980s and 90s. With modern construction techniques and innovative housing plans, the second picture illustrates how this housing form may be incorporated into traditional single family neighborhoods.



**Traditional duplexes often looked like this.**



**Now they can look like this!**

By adding duplex and semi-detached homes to the R1 district (**Table 3**) as permitted uses, housing diversity and density may be increased incrementally and without adversely affecting the neighborhood.

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT: Duplexes and Semi-Detached Homes as Permitted Uses**

It is recommended that **duplexes** and **semi-detached homes** be added as permitted uses to the combined residential district of the updated Land Use Bylaw (**Table 3**).

**NOTE:** Concerns about the design of duplex and semi-detached homes may be addressed by adding guidelines for their construction to the Land Use Bylaw to ensure that they fit with the character of the neighborhood.





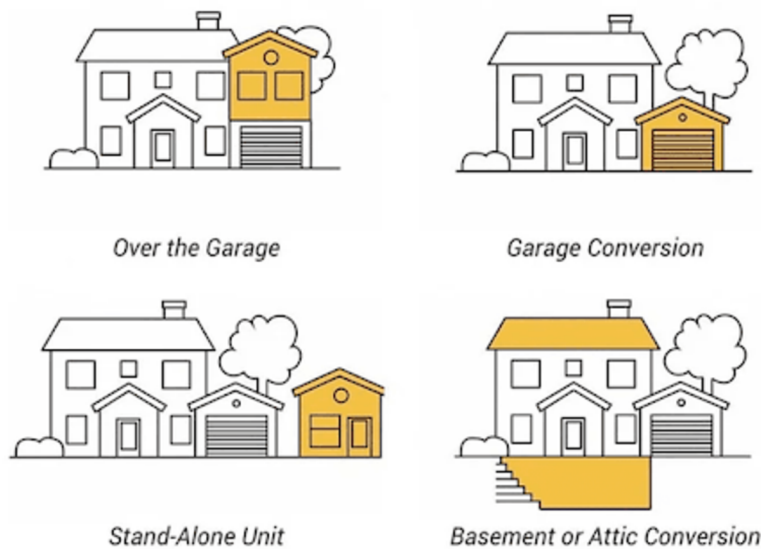
## 1.4.5 ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS (ADU)

During the engagement sessions with the partner communities, there was a great deal of discussion and interest around **accessory dwelling units (ADUs)**, both from a regulatory perspective and in terms of the desire to incentivize and support their construction.

For the purposes of this discussion, the type of ADU being referred to is a **secondary residential unit**, being built on a parcel where a primary residence already exists. The ADU may be built for rental purposes, but may also be used by other family members. A new house build that includes a residential suite is not included in this discussion.

In addition, to simplify things, the term **ADU will include all types of secondary suite development**, such as garage suite, garden suite, granny suite, basement suite, etc. The discussion includes ADUs that are within the existing dwelling, as well as those that are detached and on the same lot as the primary residence.

The diagrams below show typical variations of accessory dwelling units.



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Traditionally, ADUs are either not allowed at all in R1 districts, or may be allowed as a discretionary use (**Table 1**). This is common in most Alberta municipalities and across Canada.

By adding ADUs as a permitted use in the combined R1 district (**Table 3**), they may be approved more quickly, which will also increase diversity and density over time in the neighborhood, without major changes to its character.

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT: Accessory Dwelling Units as a Permitted Use**

It is recommended that Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) be added as a permitted use to the combined residential district of the updated Land Use Bylaw (**Table 3**).

**NOTE:** To mitigate concerns about ADUs as a permitted use in the R1 district, design and construction guidelines may be added to the Land Use Bylaw to ensure that this use works for the community.

Because of the cost to develop ADUs, there may be a need for additional incentives and support. The Policy Section in this Guidebook provides information about incentives and policies to assist with the construction of these units.

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### **1.4.6 MULTI-FAMILY DWELLINGS**

The final suggestion for the new combined residential district (**Table 3**) is to add multi-family dwellings - triplex, fourplex, row houses and townhomes - as **discretionary** uses in the district.

Similar to duplexes and semi-detached homes, the classic unappealing multi-family home from the 1980s and 90s has been replaced by modern and unique dwellings. Again, a wide range of designs and materials allows them to blend more effectively into traditional neighborhoods.

By adding these multi-family homes to the R1 district as discretionary uses, housing diversity and density may be increased incrementally and without adversely affecting the neighborhood.

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT: Multi-Family Homes**

It is recommended that multi-family attached homes (triplex, fourplex, row house and townhome) be added as **discretionary** uses in the combined residential district of the updated Land Use Bylaw (**Table 3**).

**Note:** To mitigate concerns about multi-family homes in the R1 district, design and construction guidelines may be added to the Land Use Bylaw to ensure that they fit with the character of the neighborhood.

For additional information about these types of dwellings, refer to: Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Building Small to Respond to Today's Housing Crisis by Daniel Parolek, 2020.

## **1.4.7 BENEFITS OF UPDATING RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS**

Merging and updating residential districts as discussed above means that all 3 of the suggestions from **Section 1.3** may be realized. For ease of reference, they are listed again below:

### **1. Fewer Residential Districts**

### **2. More Housing Diversity**

### **3. Increased Density**

In addition, while the discussion focused on merging the R1 and R2 residential districts, it would be reasonable to examine other residential districts in a similar way, with the intention of the following:

1. Combining districts that have common uses, or with few variations in use,
2. Making some of the uses in the district permitted instead of discretionary, and
3. Combining uses (i.e. combining the various housing forms into one definition)

Outcomes that may be realized may include, but are not limited to, the following:

### **1. Simplified Application Process**

- Fewer residential districts and more options in each district will simplify the process, for both applicants and municipal staff, and lead to less confusion about what is required.
- Defining single-family dwellings to include other forms will reduce processing times.

### **2. Faster Approval Times**

- Permitted uses may be approved more quickly than discretionary uses, allowing development to start sooner.

### **3. Increased Housing Diversity**

- Defining single-family dwellings to include other forms will increase housing options.
- Having more permitted use options will increase housing diversity and choice.

### **4. Lower Fees for Applicants**

- Fees for permitted use applications are generally lower than for discretionary use applications, resulting in a cost-saving for the applicant.

## 5. Less Review Time for Municipal Employees

- Permitted use applications require less time for municipal personnel to review, allowing them to focus their time on more demanding work (i.e. discretionary permits, redistricting).

## 6. Less need for redistricting (rezoning)

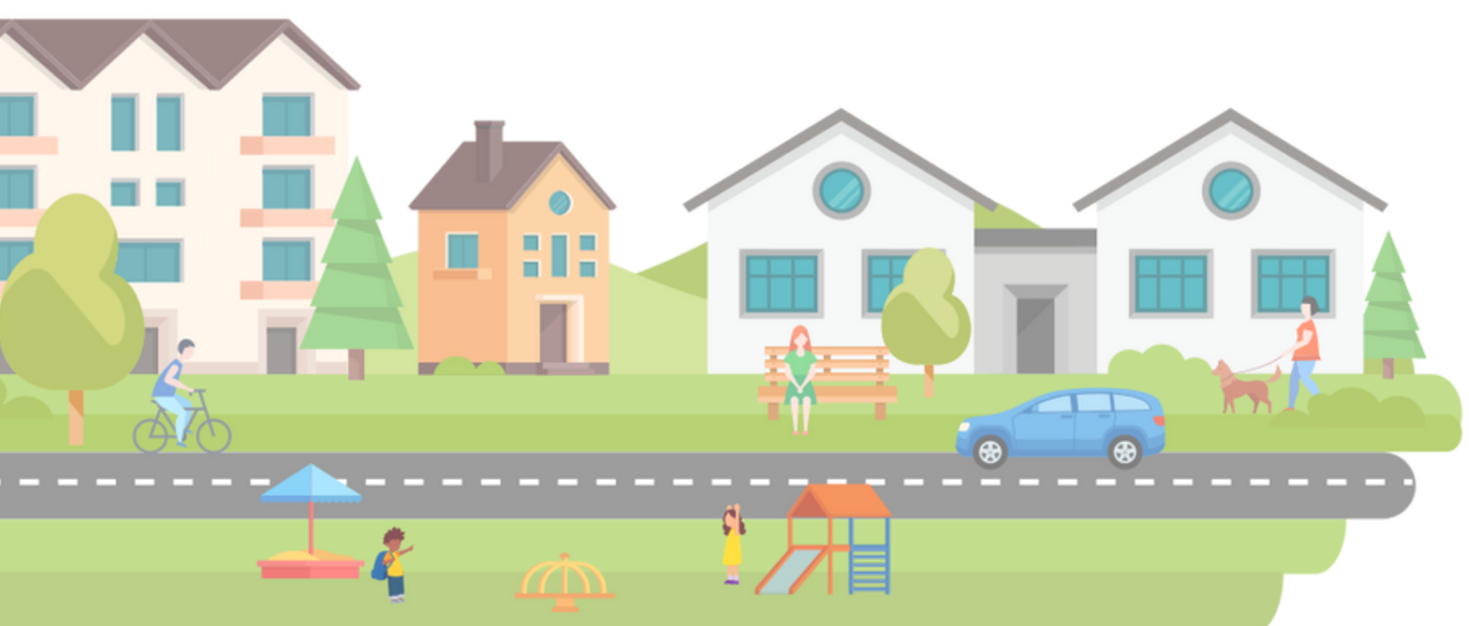
- Having more housing options in the land use district will reduce the need for redistricting in the neighborhood (i.e. request to change zoning on a lot or series of lots from single family detached to duplex).
- Fewer redistricting fees: a cost-saving for the applicant.
- Faster approval time because municipal personnel and Council don't need to review redistricting applications.
- All of the above items facilitates housing diversity and reduces wait times.

## 7. Incremental Density Increase

- Modern design and construction methods for multi-unit dwellings (i.e. duplex to four-plex) means that density may be added to a neighborhood without seriously affecting its overall aesthetic.
- Density changes to the neighborhood will occur slowly and over time.

## 8. More housing price options

- By providing a broader range of housing types (diversity) that can be approved quickly, will result in a broader range of housing price options, which will help with housing affordability.





## 2.1 HOUSING IN NON-RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

The current standard in most Land Use Bylaws is to limit residential development in commercial and industrial areas. This section provides suggestions and benefits that the community may realize from adding limited residential use to some of their commercial and industrial districts.

### 2.1.1 ADDING HOUSING TO NON-RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

From discussions with the partner communities, there was interest in adding housing for workers in some commercial and industrial areas in the form of Accessory Dwelling Units (secondary suites).

**Table 4** illustrates how limited residential development could be added to commercial and industrial land use districts. The districts that are listed in the table are generic examples; the municipality will determine where this type of use will be most beneficial.

**TABLE 4:**

#### **Residential Uses in Commercial and Industrial Districts**

<b>District Name</b>	<b>Proposed Discretionary Residential Uses</b>
Core Area or Downtown Commercial	Mixed-use development* Multi-unit dwellings**
General or Neighborhood Commercial	Mixed-use development* Multi-unit dwellings**
General or Light Industrial / Business Park or Warehousing	Mixed-use development* Multi-unit dwellings**

\* **Mixed-Use Development:** The definition below was derived from reviewing several other Land Use Bylaw definitions and the requirements of the Municipal Government Act (MGA). The municipality will need to develop a definition of mixed-use development for commercial / industrial districts to best meet its needs.

**Sample Mixed-Use Development Definition** means a residential use that is integrated as part of a building within a commercial or industrial land use designated district. Examples: a second floor residential suite above a ground floor restaurant; a residential suite behind a ground floor business.

\*\***Multi-Unit Dwellings:** Includes housing forms such as duplex, triplex, fourplex, low-rise apartments, townhomes, rowhouses, etc.

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT: Housing in Non-Residential Districts**

Many municipalities have already added various types of housing as discretionary uses in non-residential districts. It is recommended that municipalities review what other municipalities have added to their non-residential land use district, and determine whether this practice would benefit their community.

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## **2.1.2 BENEFITS OF ADDING HOUSING TO NON-RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS**

Since commercial and industrial areas typically have limited housing options, adding **mixed-use housing** in particular to these non-residential districts may help realize the following outcomes:

- 1.** Mixed-use housing is typically smaller units, more suited to the needs of single workers; it can be short-term or long-term, depending on the worker.
- 2.** Mixed-use housing may be provided at a lower price than regular rental units, adding to the affordable housing supply for new workers; since the units are typically at the worksite, costs in getting to work are also reduced.
- 3.** Having these units available may increase the ability for businesses to bring in and house new workers.

## 3.1 VACANT BUILDINGS & SITES

Vacant buildings and sites, both residential and commercial, can be a valuable resource in providing housing in a rural community. Many rural communities have several vacant buildings that may have the potential to be repurposed as housing. These buildings are often left to deteriorate, with the hope that a developer will come along to bring the building back to its former glory. This section provides suggestions and benefits that the community may realize in taking advantage of and adapting existing structures for new residential use.

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### 3.1.1 REPURPOSING OPPORTUNITIES

**Local vacant buildings** and **sites** may be viewed as opportunities that can add valuable residential living space to a community. In doing so, the municipality can not only prevent costly removal of a building, it can save a potential heritage building or site and take advantage of using an existing structure for residential or mixed-use development.

There are many examples of converting existing and abandoned buildings to residential use. One is in the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg, where a former school is being redeveloped into a property with 100 affordable living rental units along with commercial space. Another example is the Soaring Eagle Support Society project in Whitecourt, where a motel has been converted into transitional housing for up to 30 people experiencing homelessness and precarious housing situations. Both of these utilized buildings that would otherwise sit empty and eventually need to be torn down. These and more examples of conversions will be listed in the resources section at the end of this module.

Select zoning districts in the Land Use Bylaw could be updated to allow the conversion of existing vacant structures or the use of vacant lands to accommodate residential and/or mixed use development. Any site-specific concerns would be addressed through Land Use Bylaw regulations.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT: Repurposing Existing Buildings for Residential Use

Before adding this as a use to the Land Use Bylaw, it is recommended that the municipality prepare an inventory of vacant buildings and sites in the community and then determine whether it's feasible to repurpose them into residential or mixed-use development.

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### 3.1.2 BENEFITS OF REPURPOSING VACANT BUILDINGS & SITES

While there are often many challenges to repurposing vacant buildings and sites, there are also benefits.

1. Often the vacant building or site may be purchased at a substantially lower cost than buildings in the surrounding area.
2. Older vacant buildings may have heritage value that is worth preserving.
3. Vacant buildings that are repurposed may become a catalyst for additional community revitalization.

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## 4.1 EXPLORING FORM-BASED CODE

Finally, there is a relatively new type of land use districting that several Canadian (and American) communities have embraced: **Form Based Code**. This type of land use planning radically reduces the number of districts in the Land Use Bylaw. It focuses on how development relates to the context of the surrounding community, especially the relationships between buildings and the street, pedestrians and vehicles, and public and private spaces.

Uses in each district are based on characteristics of form and/or goals around what the municipality wants that district to look like, rather than the historical practice of separating residential use from commercial/industrial use (**Section 1.4**). The code addresses these issues by regulating site design, circulation, and overall building form.

Below is an excerpt from **Form-Based Codes: A Step-by-Step Guide for Communities**, which explains the concept a bit more fully:

*“In conventional zoning, zoning districts are primarily defined by land use. Form-based codes emphasize the **physical character of development** (its form) and include the regulation of land uses. Similar to conventional zoning, permitted and conditional or special uses are listed by district in most form-based codes. However, **land uses may be regulated more broadly, with land use categories in lieu of long lists of specific permitted uses.**”*

#### 4.1.1 BENEFITS OF FORM-BASED CODE

According to proponents of form-based code, this method of land use planning has many benefits. For example, proponents assert that form-based code will:

- encourage revitalization by creating better opportunities to reuse historic buildings and properties
- promote affordable housing because it allows more flexible forms of housing
- help small business because it allows mixed use development in residential areas
- promote walkability and preserve a sense of place because it allows diverse services and businesses in a neighborhood

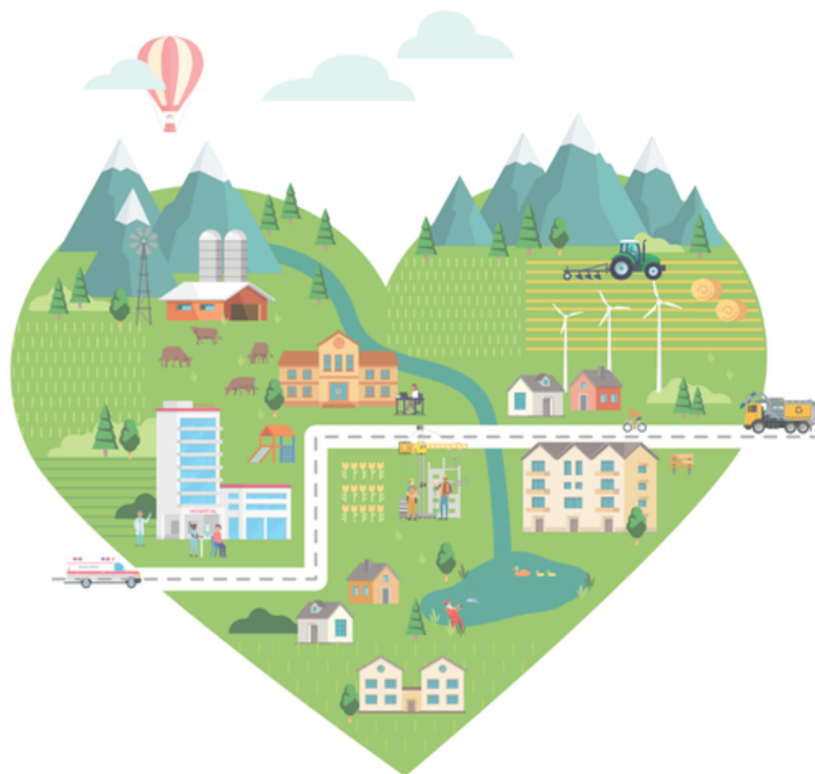
However, since form-based code has only been in practice for the past 10 - 15 years, it may be too early to state whether or not these benefits have been realized.

In order to properly determine whether form-based code is the right fit for the municipality, administration will need to research it.



Below are a few municipalities in Canada that are utilizing form-based code land use planning as well as resources for additional form-based code information:

- Town of High River – Land Use Bylaw
- Town of Beaumont – Land Use Bylaw
- *Form Based Codes: A Guide for Planners, Urban Designers, Municipalities, and Developers*: Daniel G. Parolek, Paul C. Crawford and Karen Parolek.
- *Form-Based Codes: A Step-by-Step Guide for Communities*: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, and endorsed by the Form-Based Codes Institute (FBCI)
- Form-Based Codes Institute (website) – has a list of recommended books to understand Form-Based Codes.
- *Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Building Small to Respond to Today's Housing Crisis*. Daniel Parolek.





## Moving Forward

Is your municipality or organization looking for ways to attract developer interest and investment in your community? At the Rural Development Network, our Sustainable Housing Initiative team can help you create, enhance and promote policy incentives that will enable diverse housing development.

Pursuing the goal of diversifying housing in any community is a complex endeavor. Our team will work with your community to help local housing stakeholders examine and understand local housing needs, barriers and opportunities. Then, we'll assist your community in developing solutions that will address your unique local housing needs and support growth by enabling more housing choice and diversity.

At RDN we believe in the power of collaboration and innovation to drive meaningful change. Our Sustainable Housing Initiative is also available to assist your community through comprehensive assessments, strategic planning, and actionable recommendations.

Finally, we also offer expertise in housing needs assessments, regulatory adjustments, and identifying funding opportunities, ensuring that your community can achieve its housing goals. Let us help you build a stronger, more inclusive community where everyone has a place to call home. Contact us today to learn how we can partner with you to create lasting, positive impacts in your community.





**Email:** [info@ruraldevelopment.ca](mailto:info@ruraldevelopment.ca)

**Website:** [housingredefined.ca/enabling-housing-choice-project](http://housingredefined.ca/enabling-housing-choice-project)