

# Let's Build More Housing, Detroit



**Opportunity  
Rising**

**July 2025**



## **Goals:**

- 1) Increase Housing Supply to Reduce Price Pressure**
- 2) Expand Opportunities for Residents and Small, Local Developers to Build**



# Detroit Needs To Build More Housing To Protect Long-time Residents

Detroit leads the state in population growth, adding nearly 7,000 residents last year, but housing growth did not keep up

Urgent need to build more housing: if housing is scarce, it pushes prices up & risks displacement of long-time residents

- 2,700 – 3,500 new units needed per year
- 1,600 new units created per year

We need to build at least 1,100 more units per year

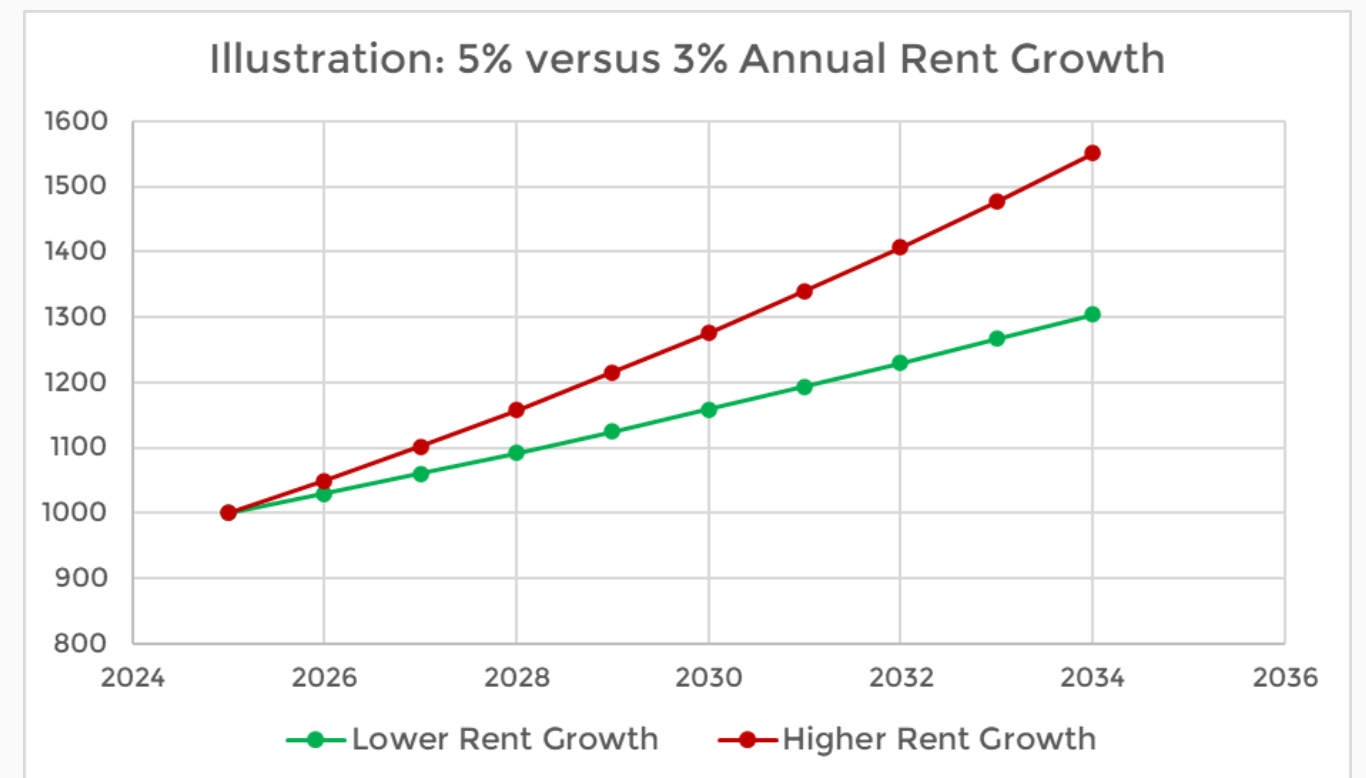


# Building More Housing Helps Keep Prices Lower

In cities that don't build enough housing:

- More competition for limited homes drives up prices
- Rent grows faster
- Families who cannot afford higher rents are displaced
- Homelessness rises

Increasing supply puts downward pressure on price

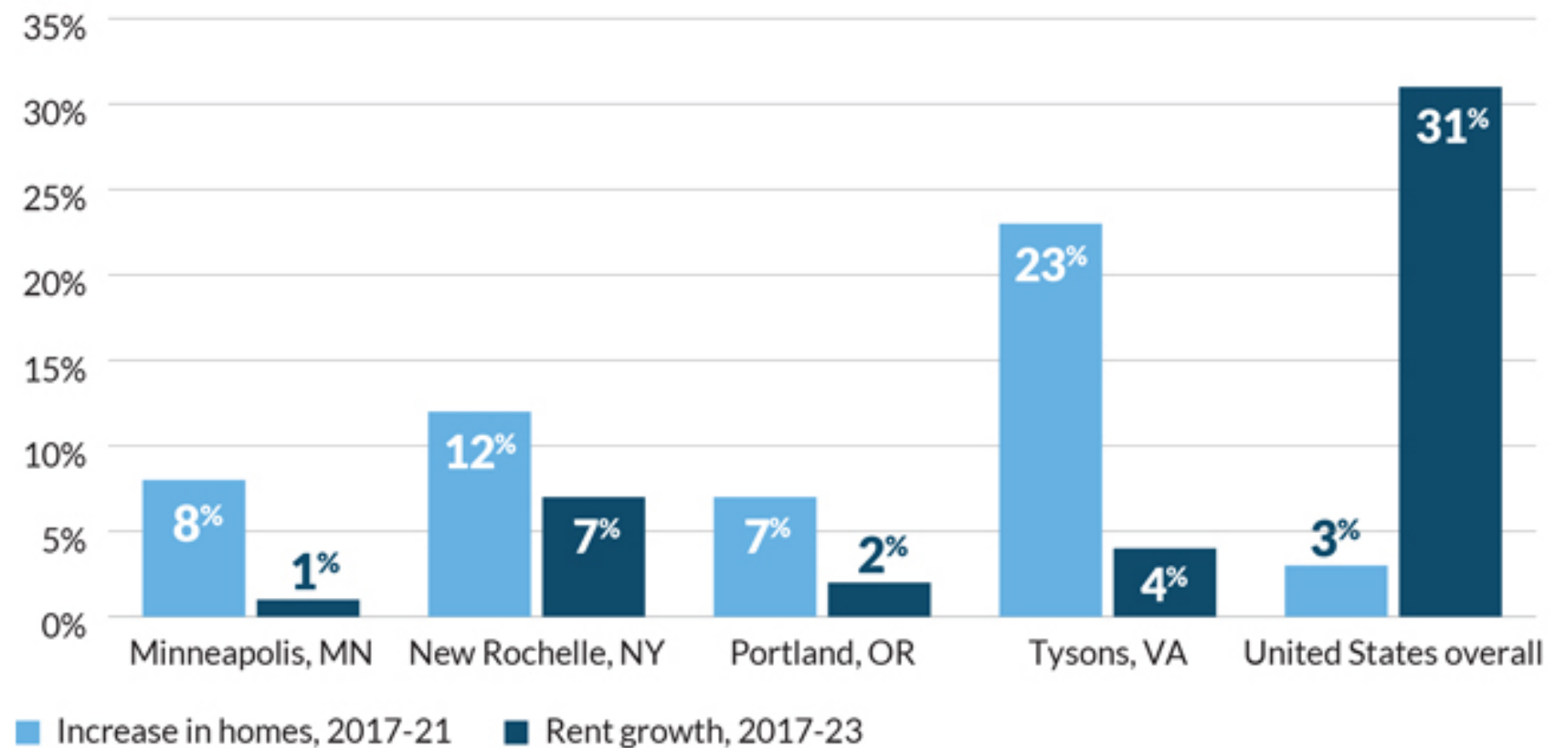


# Dozens of Cities Are Updating Zoning to Help Build More Housing

A small subset of examples:

- Grand Rapids
- Minneapolis & St. Paul
- Columbus
- Cincinnati
- Buffalo
- Champaign, IL
- Raleigh & Durham
- Ecorse & River Rouge

## Cities that Reformed Zoning Saw More Homes Built and Slower Rent Growth



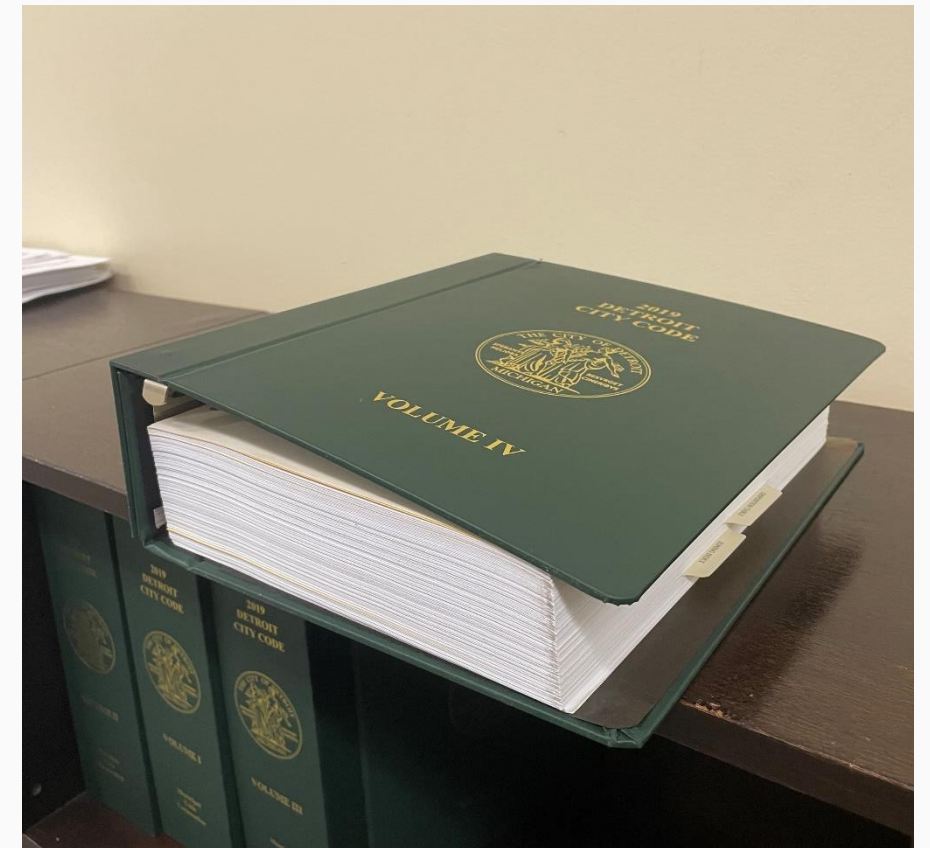


# Updating Zoning Can Even the Playing Field for Small, Local Developers and Residents

Current rules are complex & restrictive, putting residents & small, local developers at a disadvantage compared to large & sophisticated ones

- Big developers can hire consultants & attorneys to:
  - Navigate complicated rules
  - Seek special approvals & exemptions
- Small & new developers - often working in neighborhoods - don't have same resources
- Changes can even the playing field

*Detroit's 936 Page Zoning Code*



# Four Key Updates Proposed

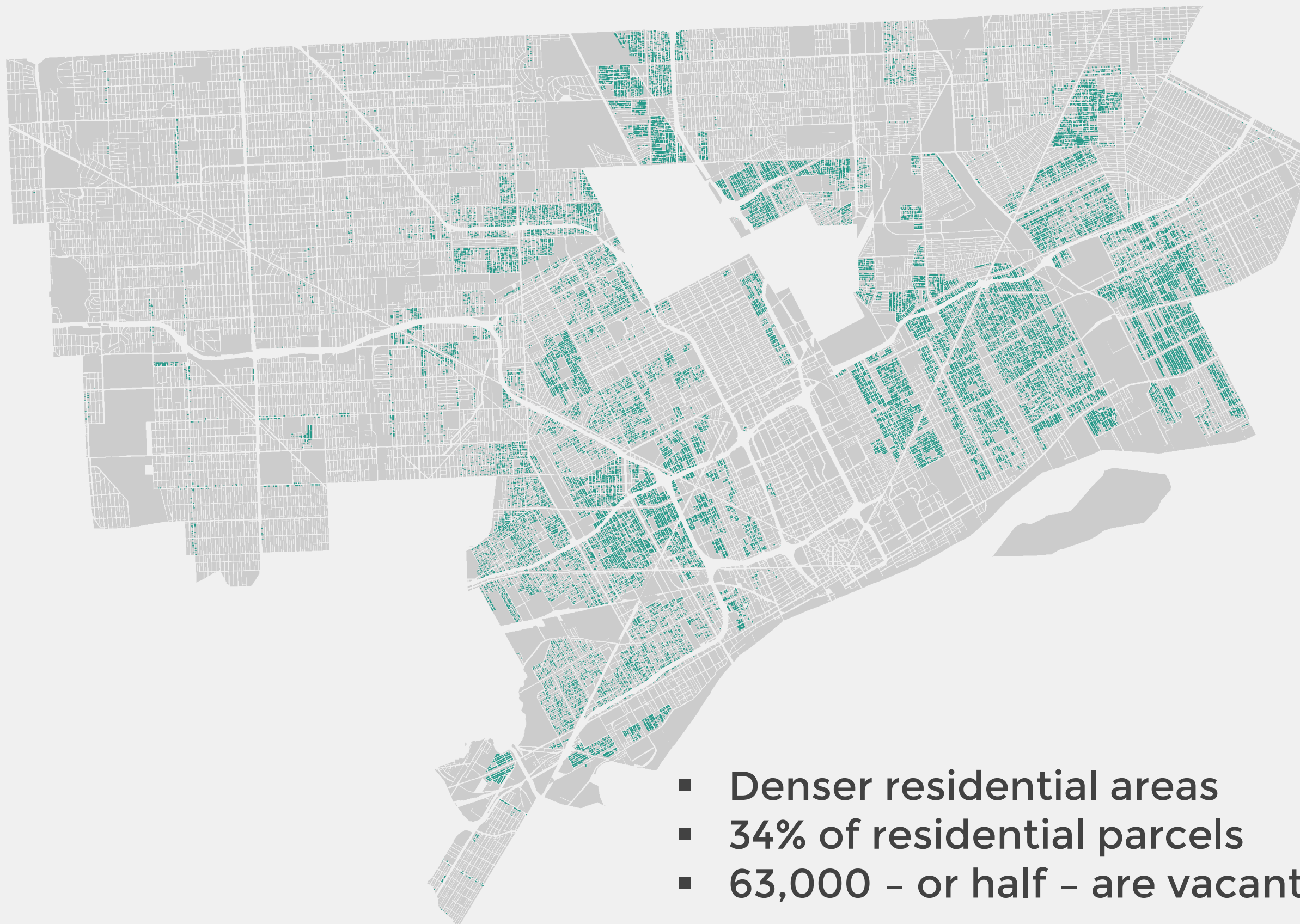
- 1 Expand the types of housing that can be built in R2
  - Triplexes, quads, townhouses
- 2 Make it easier to rebuild houses on vacant lots
  - Allow homes that match existing neighborhood
- 3 (New) Allow multi-family buildings on commercial corridors
  - Permit residential in addition to mixed-use
- 4 Offer more flexibility on the size of parking lots
  - Some projects may not need a big surface parking lot depending on location & clientele





# Build More Housing By Expanding Housing Types: What Parts of the City Do These Updates Apply To?

## Residential “R2” Zones

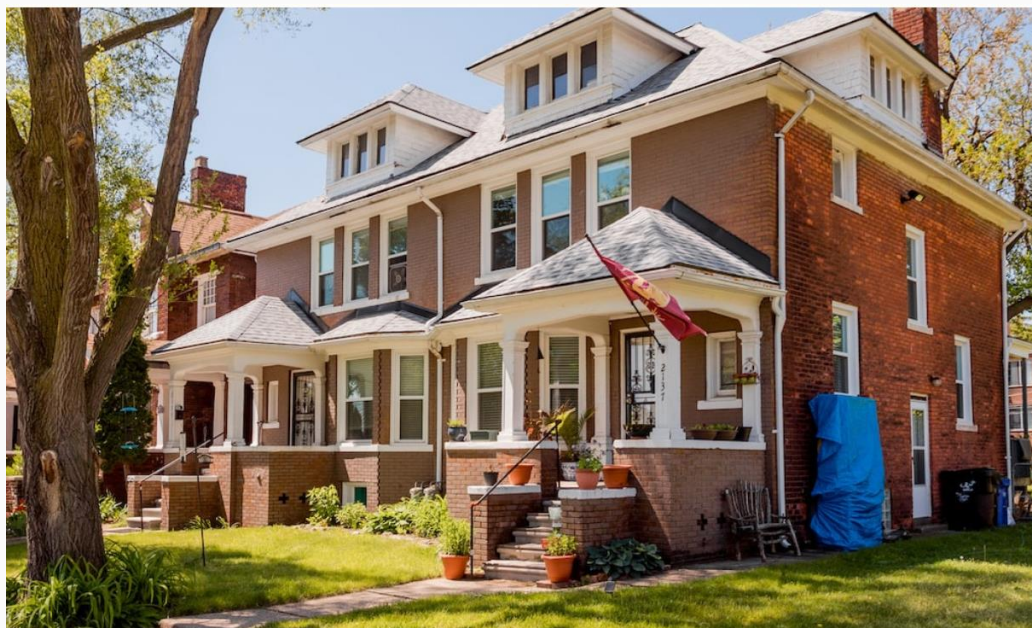




# 1 Build More Housing By Expanding Allowable Housing Types

- Before current rules took effect, triplexes, fourplexes, and townhouses were commonly built in R2 zones
  - Over 900 triplexes & fourplexes in R2: half of the total in the City
- Now, they require special approval from the City to build (conditional zoning)
- Proposal: Allow them to be built again without special approval (i.e., by-right)

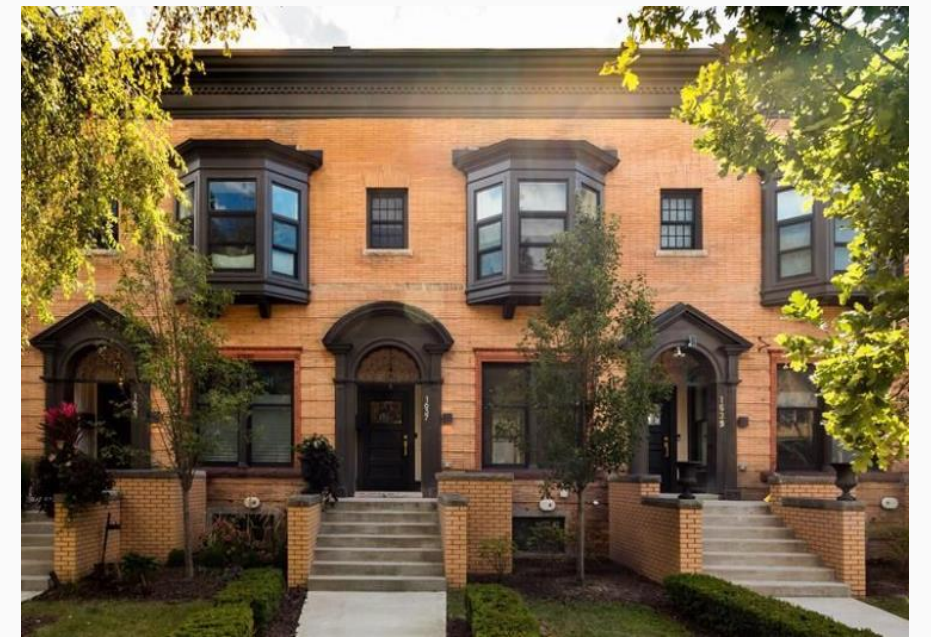
Current: Single Family or Duplex



Proposed: 3 to 4 Unit



Proposed: Townhouse





# What Are These Buildings Like?



Dexter Linwood



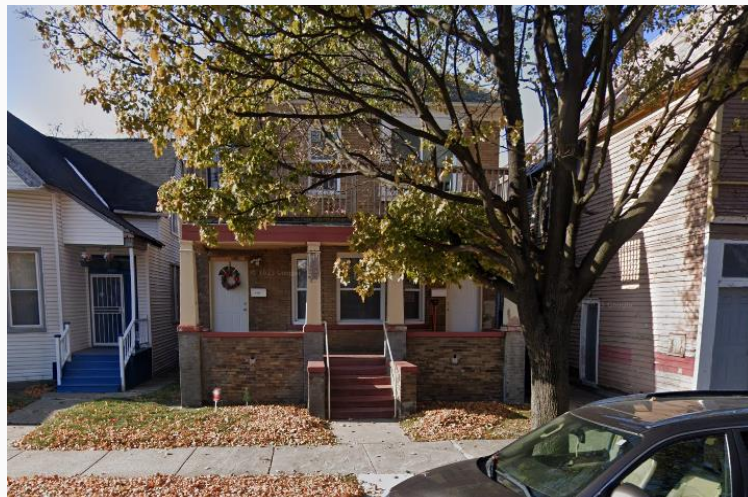
Hubbard Farms



Woodbridge



East Village



Gratiot-Grand



Central Southwest



Grant



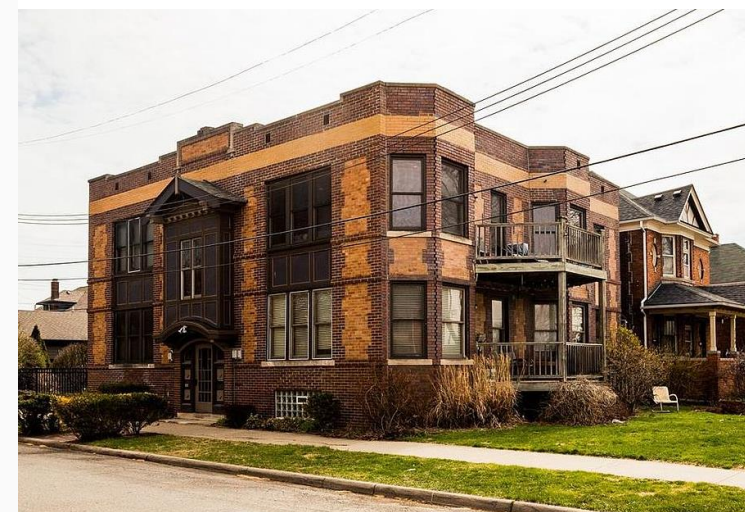
Regent Park



Wade



East Village



Woodbridge



Maple Ridge



# 1 Build More Housing By Expanding Allowable Housing Types

- Conditional zoning allows certain homes to be built only after a public hearing where neighbors can weigh in
- Proposal: increase the number of units that could be approved conditionally

Current: Up to 8 units can be approved

Proposed: Up to 12 units could be approved; maximum of 2 – 3 stories tall



Springwells, 8 units



Dexter Linwood, 10 units



Virginia Park, 9 units

There are dozens of these buildings already in R2 districts



# Expanding Allowable Housing Types: How Does This Help Residents & Small Local Developers?

1. More opportunities for small infill housing projects
  - e.g., rebuilding on vacant lots
2. Creates more opportunities for financially viable rehab projects
  - e.g., can convert large vacant single-family into three- to four-unit building
3. Creates diverse options for ownership – e.g., condos





## 2 Make it Easier to Rebuild Vacant Lots in line with Existing Neighborhoods

Current: Zoning rules on sizing & spacing of homes make it difficult to rebuild on vacant lots & often require special City approval to do so (i.e., variances)

- 85% of vacant lots are below minimum size needed to rebuild (5,000 sq. ft.)
- Several code provisions offer flexibility for lots below minimum size, but:
  - Can only build a single-family house
  - Dimensional requirements make buildable area very small: maximum home width is 19.5'
  - So complex that development professionals – and City staff – struggle to navigate

## 2 Make it Easier to Rebuild Vacant Lots in line with Existing Neighborhoods

Proposal: make it easier to rebuild on vacant lots by allowing size and spacing that more closely aligns with earlier homes in the neighborhood

*Existing Homes with Sizing Requirements Like Proposal*



*Newly Built Homes Like Proposal*





## 2 Make it Easier to Rebuild Vacant Lots Where Would this Apply?

Citywide: applies to lots below minimum size or width (5,000 sq. ft. or 50 ft.)

- Most impact for R2 – R6
- Very minimal impact for R1
- Historic District review will continue to apply in all designated districts

Zone	Current	Proposed
Homes allowed	Single family only	Any type allowed in zone
Side setback	10.5' combined (for lots below 43')	10' combined
Front setback	20' – but can move up or down based on neighbors	10' – but if neighbor is larger, must match
Rear setback	30'	20'
Height	Typically 35' limit	35'
Lot coverage	45% (for lots under 4.3k sq. ft.)	60%



## 2 Rebuilding on Vacant Lots: What Would This Look Like?



Virginia Park Community  
Duplex



Gratiot Woods  
Single Family



## **2 Rebuilding on Vacant Lots: How Does This Help Residents & Small Local Developers?**

1. Makes it easier to rebuild on vacant lots by offering more flexibility
2. Reduces the likelihood of requiring an expensive & lengthy variance process
3. Over 26,000 side lots have been sold to Detroiters – 99% of which can be rebuilt by the resident at will



### 3 (New) Allow Multi-Family Buildings on Commercial Corridors

- In 6<sup>th</sup> General Text Amendment, CPC recommended making mixed-use by-right in most business districts
- CPC staff identified opportunity to add to this proposal allowing multi-family buildings by-right on some business corridors (tentatively B2, B4, B5)
- Rationale:
  - Allowing apartment-only buildings (i.e., no commercial ground floor) gives different options & may facilitate more housing projects overall
  - Broader vision of mixed-use: on corridor, not only in one building
  - More residents on corridors = more small business customers & thriving corridors

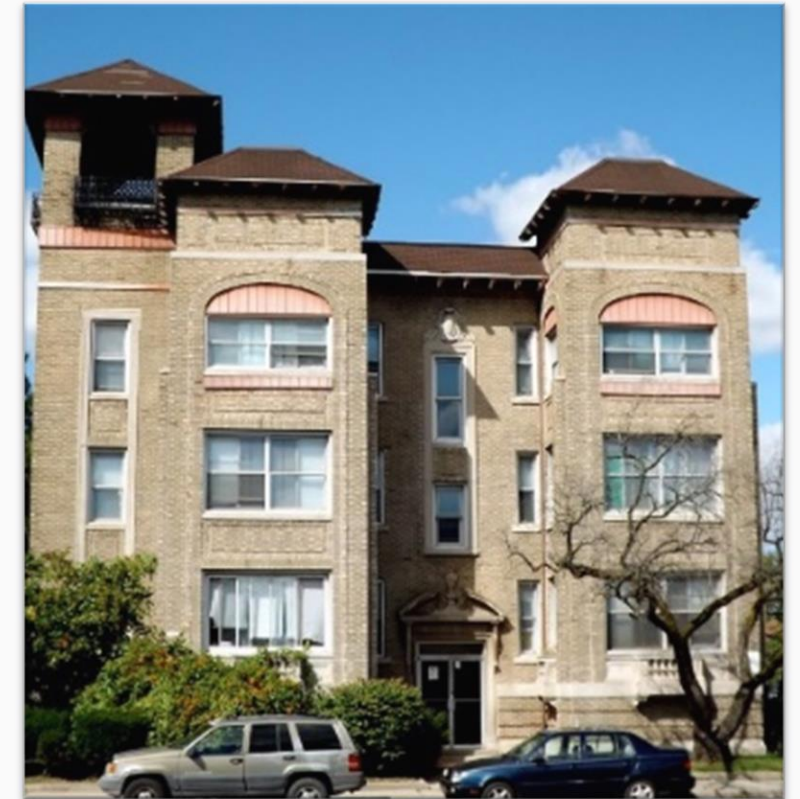


# 3 (New) Allow Multi-Family Buildings on Commercial Corridors

Like many parts of this proposal, these buildings already exist in these districts, built before modern rules

Use Type	B2	B4	B5	Total
3-5 Family	6	45	-	51
Apartments (Flat / Walkup)	66	366	1	433
Apartments (Elevator Buildings)	-	29	69	98
Total	72	440	70	582

*B4: LaSalle Gardens*



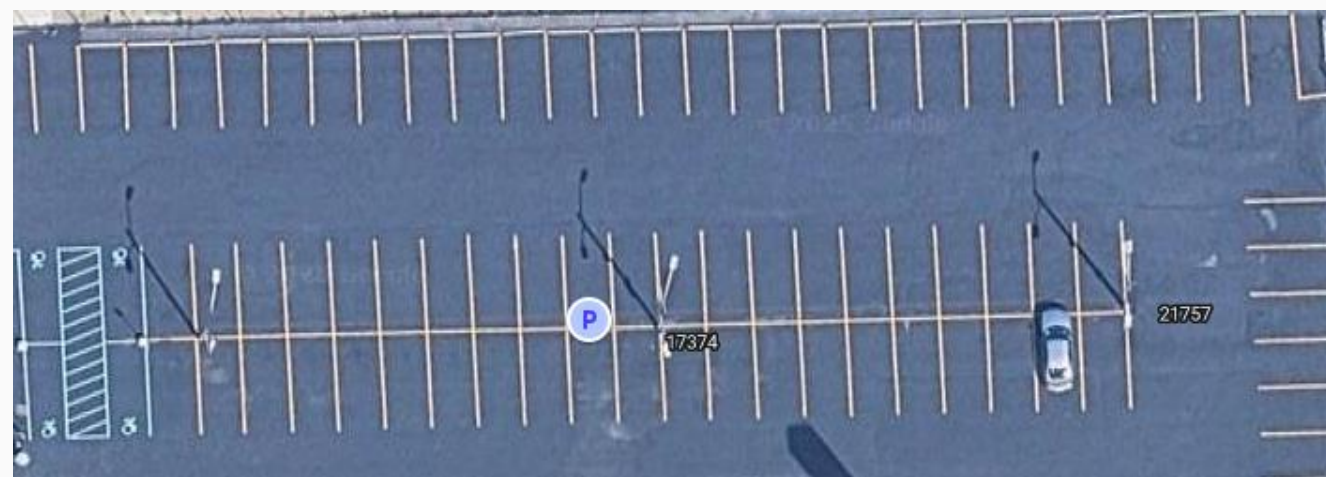
*B2: McDougall-Hunt*



# Giving Flexibility on Parking Lot Size Can Support More Homebuilding

**Current:** Zoning often requires that each building have a large parking lot

- Land & money used to build parking lot reduces what's available for housing – every 2 parking spaces roughly equals a 1-bedroom unit
- Each parking space costs \$8k to build & cost gets passed on to Detroiters
  - Raises rent by \$400/year
  - 1 in 3 families doesn't have a car
- Some parcels can't be developed if parking lot can't fit

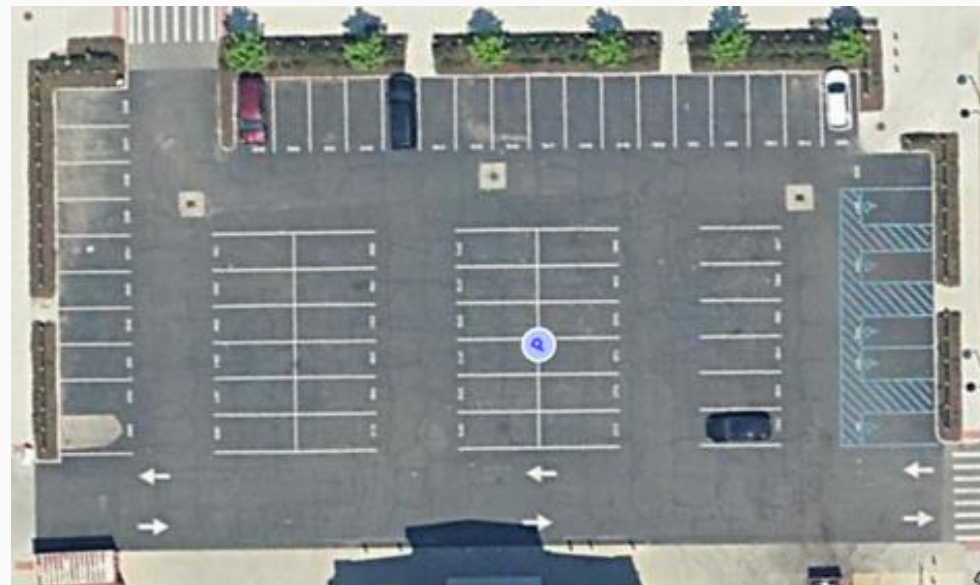




## 4 Give Flexibility on Parking Lot Size in Targeted Cases

What are we looking to do?

- Give projects moderately more flexibility on the minimum parking lot size
  - Goal: give projects more choice based on location, clientele, activities
  - Projects can still build as many spaces as needed – often go above the minimum, as seen in many cities that have made bigger changes
- Expand policies that have successfully fostered more housing & small businesses where they apply: e.g., Midtown, growing commercial corridors





### A. Policies with Most Impact on Residential Projects

- In areas near frequent transit, allow 10% greater reduction in size within 10-min walk of frequent transit
- Make it more feasible for projects to propose alternative plans

### B. Policies with Most Impact on Small Businesses

- Expand current policy that allows smallest buildings to decide how large a parking lot they need
- Expand permissibility of “district approach” to parking from only certain areas to citywide
- Expand exemption for small commercial spaces in larger buildings from only certain zones/overlays to areas near frequent transit



# Primarily Residential Impacts Flexibility Near Frequent Transit

**Current:** For “minimally deficient” buildings, BSEED can waive up to 20% or 10 spaces, whichever less

**Proposed:** Allow waiver of up to 30% or 20 spaces, whichever less, within 0.5 miles of frequent transit

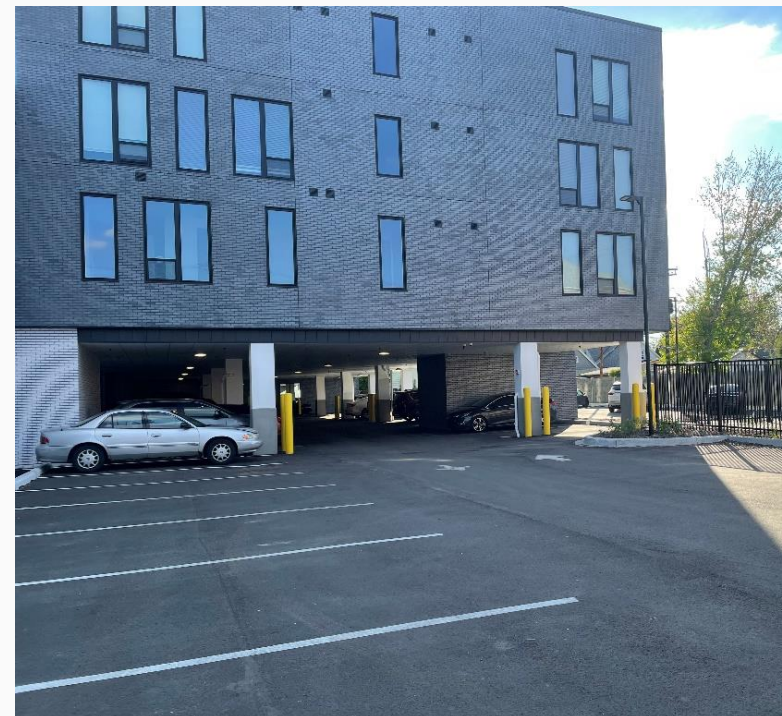
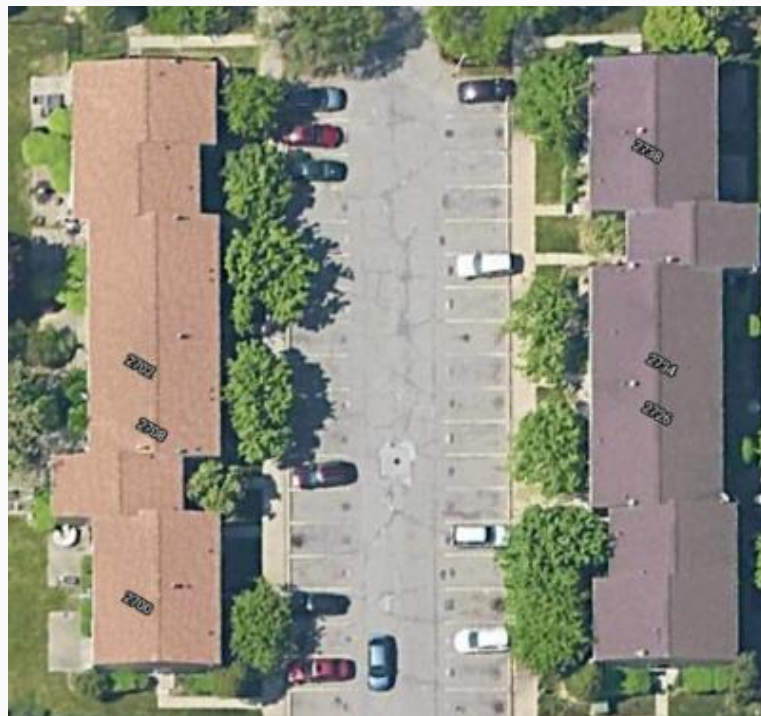
Only for residential, public/civic, and retail/commercial (except auto-related)

**Case study: Ruth Ellis Clairmount Center**

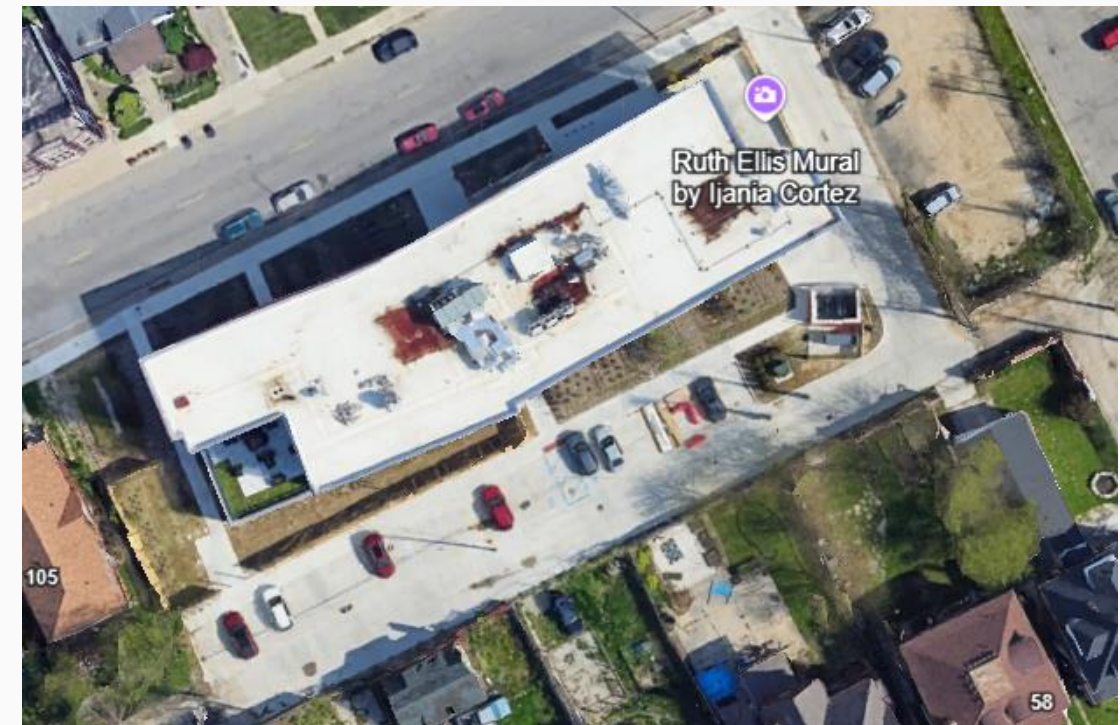
- 54 spaces required by baseline code
- 32 after discount from nearby transit
- 21 built after BZA approval

**Proposal:** allow by-right because located near frequent transit on Woodward

*Current Approach*

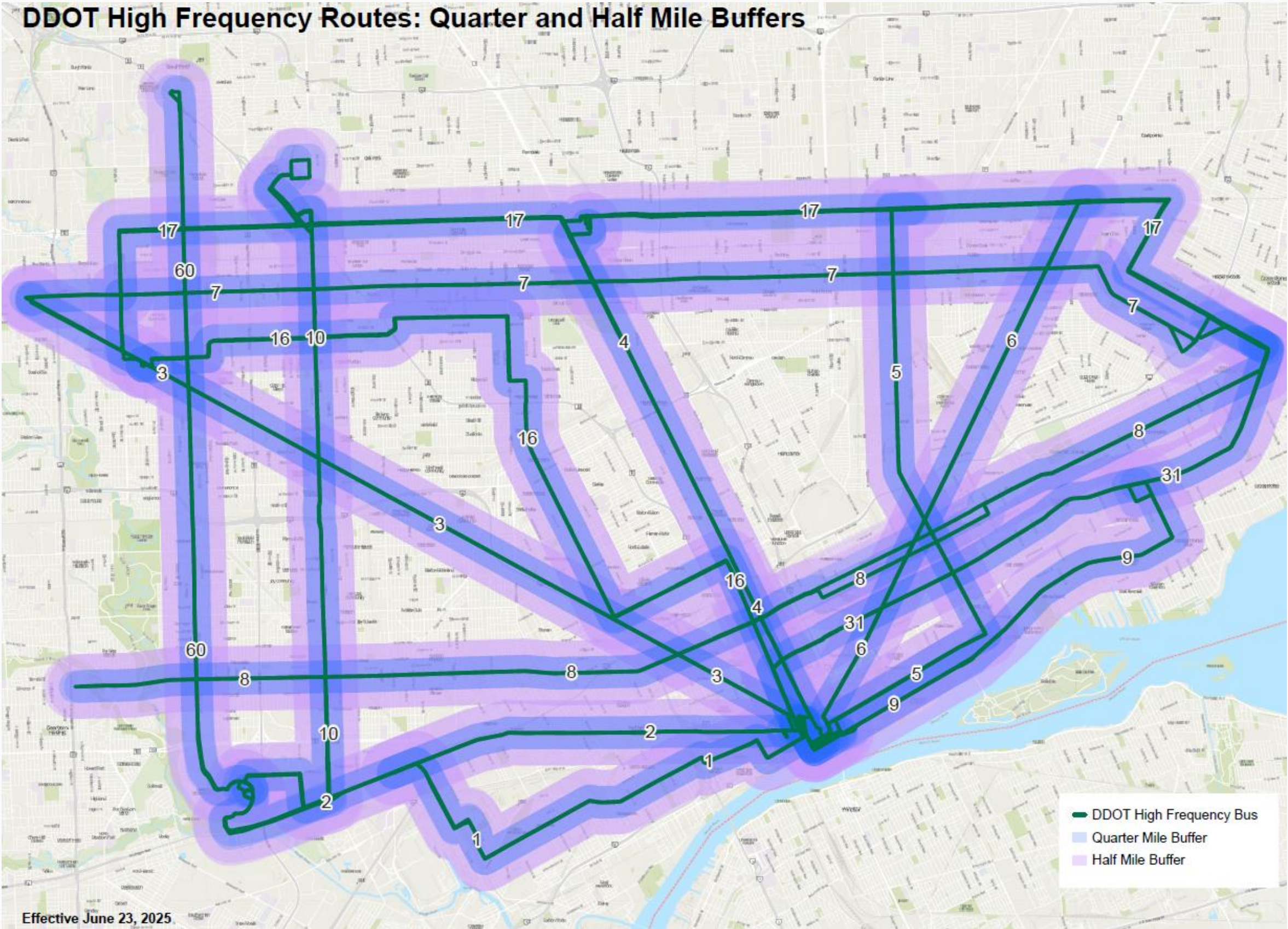


*Proposed Approach*





# Map: Frequent Transit Corridors





# Primarily Residential Impacts Alternative Parking Plan

**Current:** Projects can propose alternative parking plan to BSEED – but requires special land use hearing

- No known use of provision

**Proposed:** Allow review & decision on alternative parking plan through building permit review

Only for residential, public/civic, and retail/commercial (except auto-related)

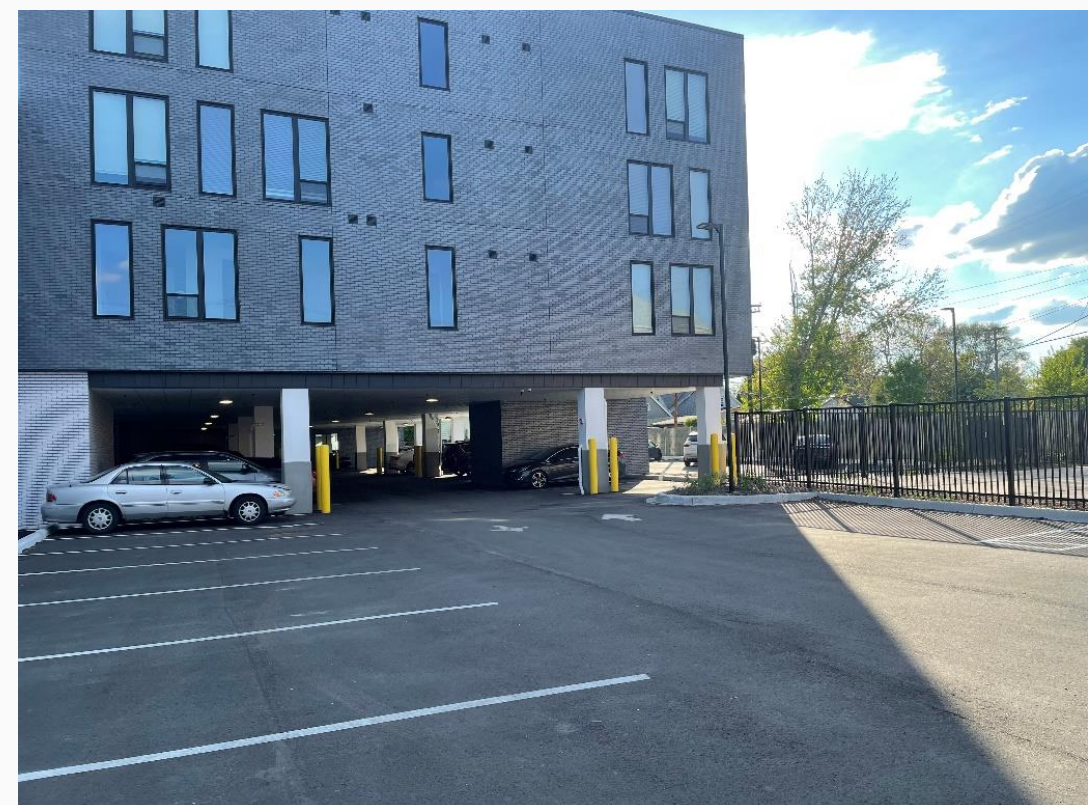
Alternatives could include smaller lot, bike parking, rideshare drop-off, etc.

## Case study: La Joya Gardens

- Affordable housing very near amenities
- 40 spaces required after reductions
- 19 spaces full (~50%) on recent visit

**Proposal:** allow project to propose alternative

*La Joya Gardens parking lot on a weeknight*





# Primarily Small Business Impacts Flexibility for Small Buildings

**Current:** Structures under 3,000 square feet – and built before 1998 – have no parking lot requirement

**Proposed:** Structures under 6,000 square feet – built any year – would have no parking lot requirement

Applies to residential but most buildings impacted are small commercial spaces

*What do affected buildings look like?*





# Primarily Small Business Impacts

## Small Space Discount & District Approaches

**Current:** in TMSOs, SD1 & SD2, first-floor pedestrian-oriented spaces under 3,000 sq. ft. are removed from square footage to calculate parking requirement for larger buildings – e.g., first-floor space in mixed use

**Proposed:** allow in frequent transit corridors too

*Example: Mixed Use First Floor Space*



**Current:** in TMSOs, SD1 & SD2, commercial uses can offer parking within 1,320 feet rather than typical 100-foot distance

“District approach” to parking; allows lots to serve multiple businesses for efficiency, including use of new municipal lots near corridors

**Proposed:** allow this citywide



# **Flexibility on Parking Lot Size**

## **How Does This Help Residents & Small Local Developers?**

1. Allows more land and funding to be used for housing or small businesses rather than parking lots
2. Reduces a key barrier to many projects: parking lot issues are the second most common reason for seeking a variance
3. Gives Detroiters more options based on their needs
  - Some Detroiters do not have a car because they have disabilities, are seniors or low-income, or choose not to
  - Projects serving these residents can tailor approach & cost

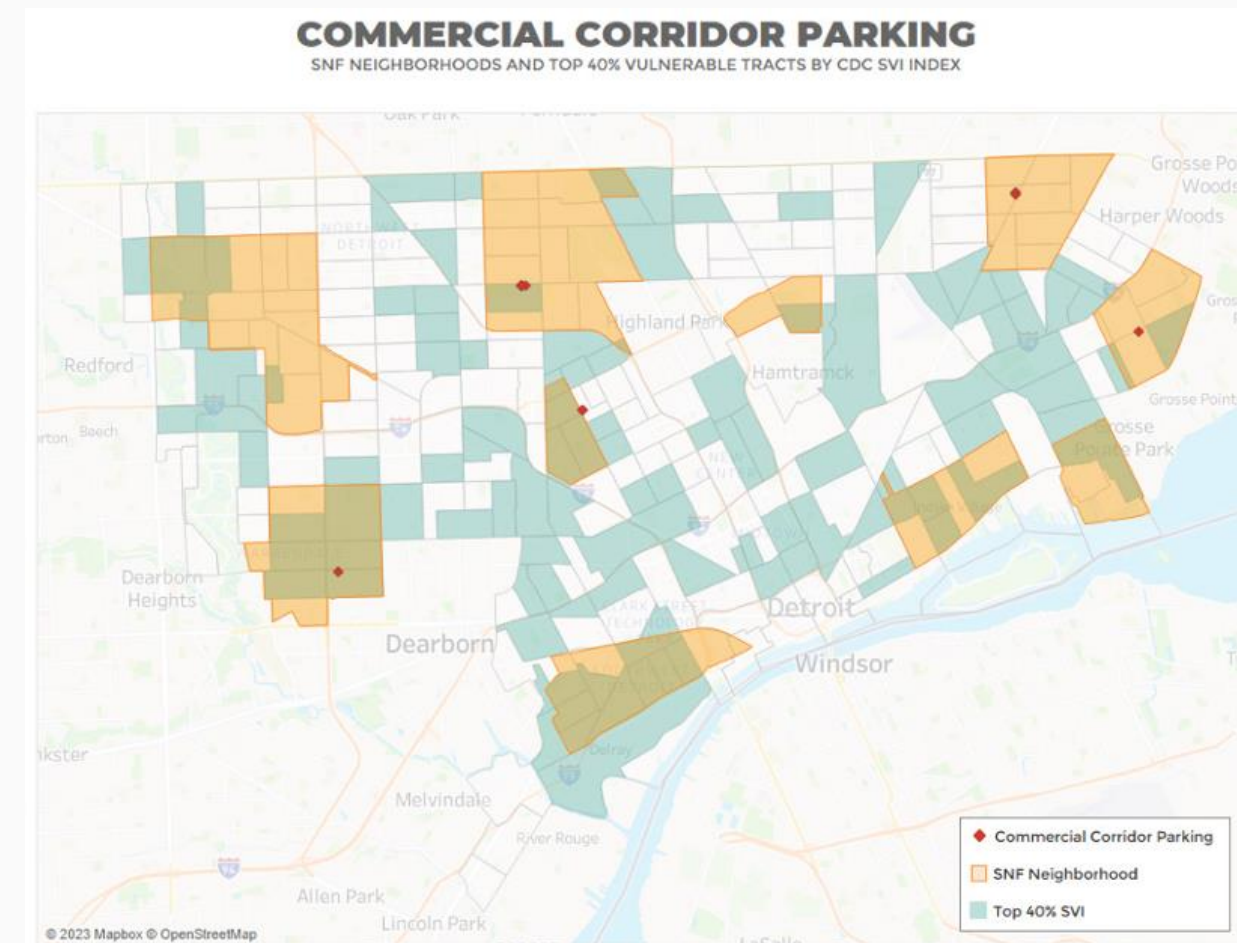




# What Is the City's Broader Parking Strategy?

**Goal: ensure parking availability & accessibility for corridors, while offering flexibility on lot size for individual buildings**

- \$10M in ARPA funds to build six free municipal lots along growing corridors
- Make it easier to offer shared parking (in this proposal)
- Steward on-street spaces: residential permit program, Park Detroit navigation, monitoring accessible spaces
- Expand DDOT service & paratransit





## 5 Potential Addition: Accessory Dwelling Units in R2

- CPC staff & Admin. identified permitting ADUs in R2 districts as potential complementary approach to add
- Rationale: builds on proposal goals:
  - Diverse housing options: in-law suites, family members, lower-cost options
  - Ability of residents to build infill
- Next steps: community engagement & policy refinement
- Potential to notice second public hearing to discuss







# **Community Engagement & Broader Context of City Planning**



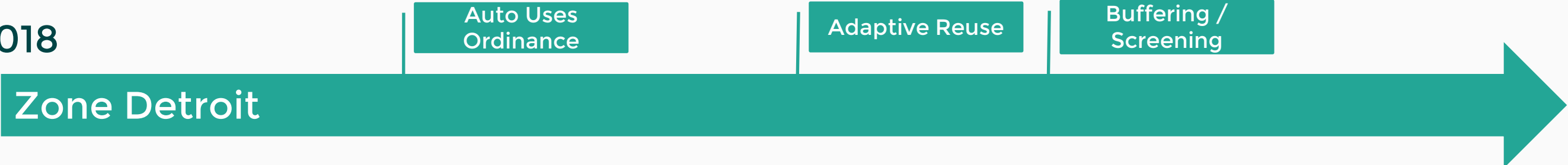
# How Does This Proposal Fit With Broader Planning Efforts?

This proposal is a downpayment on passing key policies that align with more comprehensive planning efforts

2016



2018



2024



2025





# Community Engagement: Drawing on Zone Detroit





# Community Engagement: Drawing on Neighborhood Framework Plans

Among 21 Neighborhood Plans: 100% wanted more housing options, affordability, or density and 90% wanted walkable or multi-modal transit

Plan	Year	Key Quotes
West Vernor	2018	<p>“We need to build more housing to keep housing affordable; if we do nothing, housing costs will increase.”</p> <p>“Reduce parking requirements, particularly for businesses that most customers reach by walking.”</p>
Greater Villages	2018	<p>“...rehabilitation and new construction of multi-family structures can restore neighborhood character [and] strengthen neighborhood appeal.”</p>
Russell Woods / Nardin Park	2019	<p>“Streetscape goals: create a walkable pedestrian environment for future retail”</p>
East Warren / Cadieux	2021	<p>“A diversity of housing choices increases the potential number of people who could move to the neighborhood and stay in the neighborhood.”</p>
Midwest Tireman	2023	<p>“Small, City-owned parcels represent opportunities for fourplexes and sixplexes with open space.”</p>
Brightmoor	2024	<p>“Improving mobility and safety for people who walk, bike, and take transit in Brightmoor is an important priority emphasized by many residents.”</p>



# Community Engagement Meetings

**120+** Residents engaged so far across 6 meetings: D1, D3, D4, D5, and D6.

- Additional meetings throughout August

**16** Letters of support from community orgs & builders shared with CPC



**Generally support for building more housing**, especially options for residents and neighborhood developers to build

- Detroiters have diverse living situations



**Many comments on programmatic approaches to housing & land:** purchasing public land, designing for neighborhood context, how neighbors can weigh in on development projects



**Relatively positive feedback on zoning proposals when weighing in item-by-item**



# **Answering Questions from July 17<sup>th</sup>**



# How Does Proposal Fit With City's Overall Housing Strategy?

Detroit's strategy to meet residents' housing needs:

- 1 Preserving existing affordable housing
- 2 Building more affordable housing
- 3 Helping more Detroiters become homeowners
- 4 Helping more Detroiters stay in their homes through home repairs
- 5 Ensuring safe & quality rental housing





## What Other Steps is the City Taking to Make it Easier to Build for Small, Local Developers?

## Tools available today:

- Preliminary Plan Review consultation
- RES permit for 1 & 2 unit homes

## Next steps (second half of 2025 – 2026):

- Pre-approved building plans
- Updates to technology systems & websites to make them easier to navigate
- Publishing development process maps & expected timelines

