

YMY (Yes My Yard): A Solution to NIMBY (Not In My Backyard)

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Introduction

I have seen firsthand how NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) opposition obstructs essential development projects. I propose a new approach—**Yes My Yard (YMY)**—that changes resistance into opportunity by directly benefiting property owners. YMY upzones residential properties, allowing homeowners to increase their property's value through greater flexibility in land use, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and impervious surface expansion with modern stormwater technology. Instead of fighting NIMBY, leverage individual self-interest to overcome fear of change.

The Core of YMY: Upzoning for Individual Gain

Traditional zoning restrictions, especially in low-density residential areas (R-1 and R-2), limit homeowners' ability to adapt to modern housing needs. YMY removes these barriers by granting property owners more freedom to develop their land as follows:

- **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) Allowed By Right** – Homeowners can build and rent out ADUs without complex approval processes, increasing housing supply.
- **Impervious Surface Expansion** – Modern stormwater management techniques, such as permeable pavement and bio-retention systems, allow for increased impervious area while mitigating runoff concerns. These systems should be required so that more impervious area of the lot can be filled with housing.
- **Building Coverage Increase** – The maximum allowable building footprint expands to match the newly permitted impervious area, optimizing land use efficiency.
- **Consistent, Low Setbacks** – A uniform **10-foot setback** on all sides, regardless of lot size, creates a predictable and fair framework that maximizes usable space.
- **Accessory Building Height Equal to Primary Structure** – Homeowners can construct detached buildings at the same height as their primary residence, enhancing flexibility for home offices, rental units, or multi-generational living.

Why YMY Works: Homeowners Overcoming Fear of Change

NIMBY thrives on fear—fear of congestion, declining property values, new disruptive neighbors, or aesthetic changes. However, property owners' **self-interest in financial gain** often outweighs those fears. By allowing homeowners to profit from upzoning, YMY aligns personal economic benefits with broader urban planning goals.

- **Increased Property Value** – Additional development rights directly boost home values, incentivizing homeowners to support zoning changes.
- **Additional Rental Income** – ADUs provide passive income opportunities, appealing to those looking to supplement their earnings or house family members.
- **Families Living Together** – ADUs and higher density housing of built neighborhoods allows for inter-generational families to live together. Younger members of the family can help take care of older members, a critical needs with the current aging demographic landscape.
- **Localized Growth Without Large-Scale Disruption** – Unlike large developments that face intense pushback, YMY empowers individual homeowners, diffusing opposition.

Stormwater Management: A Key to Expansion

A major argument against upzoning is the potential increase in stormwater runoff. However, modern stormwater solutions render this concern obsolete. With **permeable pavement, rain gardens, green roofs, and underground water retention systems**, these and other stormwater technologies can ensure that increased impervious surfaces do not lead to flooding, water contamination, or environmental degradation. By integrating these technologies into YMY policies, municipalities can expand housing while maintaining sustainable water management practices.

Implementation Strategy for Planners

For YMY to succeed, planners need to approach implementation with a mix of policy reforms, public engagement, and financial incentives:

1. **Modify Zoning Codes** – Update regulations to allow for increased density, ADUs, and impervious surface flexibility.
2. **Streamline Approvals** – Minimize permitting barriers to encourage homeowner participation.
3. **Educate Homeowners** – Publicize the financial benefits of upzoning to build community support.
4. **Incentivize Modern Stormwater Solutions** – Offer grants or tax breaks for permeable surfaces and rainwater management systems.
5. **Pilot Programs in Select Areas** – Start with test neighborhoods to demonstrate success before expanding citywide.

Real-World Examples of Upzoning Success

Several communities have successfully implemented upzoning policies similar to the principles of YMY, demonstrating that easing zoning restrictions can increase housing availability, benefit homeowners, and revitalize communities. Below are three key examples:

Minneapolis, Minnesota: Eliminating Single-Family Zoning

In 2018, Minneapolis became the first major U.S. city to eliminate single-family zoning through its *Minneapolis 2040* plan. This policy allowed duplexes and triplexes in all residential areas, enabling gentle density increases without the need for large-scale developments. By removing restrictive zoning barriers, the city aimed to address housing shortages, reduce racial and economic segregation, and provide more affordable housing options. Since its adoption, Minneapolis has seen a rise in small-scale multi-unit construction, increasing housing diversity while maintaining neighborhood character.

Bryan, Texas: Pattern Zoning for Faster Development

Bryan, Texas, took a unique approach to upzoning by implementing a *pattern zoning* policy in its Midtown area. This initiative provided pre-approved housing designs for missing middle housing types, such as duplexes and cottage courts, which streamlined the permitting process and reduced construction costs. Homeowners and developers benefited from lower design fees and shorter approval times, making it easier to add housing while maintaining a cohesive architectural style. By incentivizing small-scale development, Bryan effectively encouraged gradual density increases without overwhelming infrastructure or existing residents.

Chaffee Park, Denver, Colorado: Expanding ADU Rights

In 2020, Denver's City Council unanimously approved rezoning the Chaffee Park neighborhood to allow *Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)* by right. Previously, homeowners had to undergo a lengthy and uncertain approval process to build ADUs. With the zoning change, residents gained the ability to add backyard cottages, basement apartments, or garage conversions without additional bureaucratic hurdles. This policy expanded affordable housing options and provided homeowners with new income-generating opportunities, aligning with YMY's principle of leveraging self-interest to encourage development.

Conclusion

YMY is a practical and politically viable solution to NIMBY resistance by **harnessing self-interest rather than fighting it**. By giving homeowners the ability to increase their property value and generate income, YMY turns potential opposition into active support. With smart zoning reforms, modern stormwater solutions, and financial incentives, YMY can drive urban growth in a way that benefits both individuals and communities. It is time to embrace YMY and transform housing policy into a win-win scenario for everyone.