

Proposal for R4 – High Density Residential Zoning in Patton Township

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Executive Summary

This report outlines a proposal for implementing R4 high-density residential zoning in Patton Township as an alternative to the existing R3 medium-density zoning. The proposed R4 zoning is designed to address the growing need for affordable and workforce housing in Centre County, particularly in the Centre Region. By allowing greater building heights, incentives that allow for reduced parking requirements, increased residential density, the R4 zoning will provide significant benefits for the community while fostering sustainable development.

Key Features of the R4 Proposal

- **Increased Density:** The R4 zoning would allow buildings up to 55 feet (5 stories) in height compared to the 35 feet (3 stories) permitted in R3 zoning. This change would enable the development of approximately 71 apartments per acre, housing up to 142 residents, compared to 32 apartments and 64 residents per acre under R3 zoning.
- **Smaller Parking Requirements:** R4 would reduce parking requirements to 1.5 spaces per apartment (from 2 spaces in R3), provided a bus transit center is located on the property or within 1,000 feet. This incentivizes the use of public transportation, rideshare pickup, and reduces land area dedicated to parking.
- **Efficient Land Use:** R4 allows for a higher lot coverage for buildings, compared to 25% in R3 zoning. In calculations 25% of the lot was reserved for stormwater management.
- **Modern Amenities:** The R4 zoning encourages accessory uses, such as transit centers, grocery pick-up facilities, gyms, and co-working spaces, reducing residents' reliance on personal vehicles and the need for parking while also improving quality of life for residents.
- **Simplified Regulations:** Consistent and straightforward requirements across all residential units streamline the development process for property owners and township staff.

Comparison of R3 and R4 Zoning

Under the current R3 zoning:

- A 1-acre lot can house up to 32 apartments and 64 residents.
- Parking, setbacks, and limited building heights restrict development potential.
- Regulations vary based on the number of units, adding complexity to development.

In contrast, R4 zoning allows:

- Up to 71 apartments and 142 residents per acre, more than doubling the housing capacity.
- Flexible setbacks between buildings on the same property, maximizing buildable area.
- Enhanced transit accessibility and on-site amenities that reduce parking demands.

Community Benefits

- **Addressing Housing Needs:** The R4 zoning increases the supply of affordable and workforce housing, helping to alleviate housing shortages in the region.
- **Sustainability:** Reduced parking requirements, public transit incentives, and modern stormwater management promote environmentally responsible development.
- **Economic Growth:** Higher housing density supports local businesses and provides workforce housing, attracting and retaining talent in the area.
- **Improved Quality of Life:** On-site amenities and accessible public transit reduce residents' travel needs and enhance community livability.

The proposed R4 zoning offers a forward-thinking solution to Patton Township's housing challenges, providing a sustainable, high-density alternative to R3 zoning. By increasing housing capacity, simplifying regulations, and integrating modern amenities, R4 zoning will enable Patton Township to meet the needs of its growing population while ensuring a vibrant and sustainable future for the community.

Need for R4 – High Density Zoning in Patton Township

The Need for More Housing in Centre County

Centre County, including the Centre Region, is experiencing a pressing need for additional housing to accommodate a growing population and workforce. As the home of Penn State University and a hub for businesses, healthcare, and other essential services, the region attracts a diverse population of students, professionals, and families. However, the current supply of housing, particularly affordable and workforce housing, is falling short of demand. This mismatch creates significant challenges for the local economy, residents, and future development.

Increasing Housing is in the Financial Interest of Patton Township

Every year the price of things go up, impacting Patton Township directly. Municipalities have three options to address price increases; increase taxes, reduce services, increase tax paying residents. If tax paying residents do not increase then residents are either paying more for the same services and/or getting worse services. It is in Patton Township's financial interest and the financial interest of residents of the borough to attract new tax paying residents.

Consequences of the Lack of Workforce Housing

The shortage of workforce housing—defined as housing for individuals and families who work in Centre Region but cannot afford market-rate rents or home prices—has far-reaching consequences including higher taxes for residents, inflation and higher cost of living for everyone, reducing hours of business operation, and reduced services.

Workers in key industries, including education, healthcare, retail, and public service, often struggle to find affordable, conveniently located housing. This issue forces many employees to commute long distances from surrounding areas, increasing commute time, and transportation costs. This impacts Centre Region residents by increasing the cost of goods and services. The high cost of housing is a major drivers of inflation.

Additionally, the lack of accessible housing reduces the region's ability to attract and retain skilled workers, creating labor shortages that impact businesses, schools, and local services. Employers in Centre County report difficulties in hiring due to potential employees being deterred by the high cost of living. The continued housing shortfall risks further exacerbating these economic and social challenges.

Affordability Challenges in the Centre Region

The Centre Region is becoming increasingly unaffordable for many residents. According to recent data, the cost of both rental housing and homeownership has risen significantly, driven by limited housing supply and high demand. Many households are cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing. This affordability crisis disproportionately affects low- to moderate-income households, including essential workers who support the region's economy and quality of life.

The lack of affordable options places additional pressure on surrounding communities, leading to sprawl and further straining regional infrastructure. Without proactive measures to increase the availability of high-density, affordable housing, Centre County risks deepening the divide between housing supply and demand, making it increasingly difficult for residents and workers to thrive.

Average Rent and Income Analysis in Centre County, Pennsylvania

Average Rent in Centre County

RentCafe reports an average rent of \$2,052 per month for Centre County. [RentCafe](#)

Median Household Income in Centre County

The median household income in Centre County also varies slightly depending on the source:

- **Data USA:** Reports a median household income of \$70,087 as of 2022.
- **Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED):** Estimates the median household income at \$69,999 for 2023.
- **Census Reporter:** Indicates a median household income of \$69,101. [Census Reporter](#)

These figures suggest that Centre County's median household income is slightly below both the Pennsylvania state median of \$73,824 and the national median of \$77,719.

Rent as a Percentage of Income

Housing affordability is commonly assessed by the percentage of household income allocated to housing costs, with 30% being the standard threshold for affordability. The average rent of \$2,052 per month reported for Centre County, the annual housing cost would be \$24,624. This equates to about 35.1% of the median household income, exceeding the 30% affordability threshold and indicating potential affordability challenges for residents.

Comparing Centre County to the National Averages

The reported average rent of \$2,052 in Centre County is higher than both the state and national averages.

The median household income in Centre County is slightly below both state and national medians. The lower median incomes of Centre County makes it more difficult for residents to afford housing.

About the Proposed R4 Zoning

The proposed R4 zoning in Patton Township introduces a framework for high-density residential development that balances the need for increased housing with sustainability, accessibility, and community-focused design. Below are the key features and requirements of the proposed R4 zone:

Maximum Height and Lot Coverage

- **Maximum Building Height:** 55 feet (5 stories) from ground level, increasing the allowable height compared to R3 zoning.
- **Maximum Lot Building Coverage:** 75%, though practical constraints such as parking and stormwater management are expected to limit effective lot coverage to approximately 40%.
- **Stormwater Management:** All stormwater must be addressed on-site using innovative solutions, including holding tanks, retention ponds, permeable surfaces, and green roofs. This ensures that high-density development mitigates impacts from stormwater.

Simplified and Consistent Zoning Requirements

The R4 zone will implement consistent requirements across all residential units, regardless of the number of units within a development. This uniformity simplifies the zoning regulations, making them easier for developers to understand and follow.

Setback Requirements

- **Side Setbacks:** A 25-foot setback is required on all sides of the property.
- **Building-to-Building Setbacks:** No setbacks will be required between buildings on the same property. This allows for more efficient use of space while maintaining appropriate boundaries with neighboring properties.

Parking and Transit Accessibility

- **Reduced Parking Requirements:** Parking requirements will be reduced to **1.5 spaces per dwelling unit** if a bus transit center is located within the R4 property or within 1,000 feet. The transit center must:
 - Accommodate at least two buses simultaneously without blocking traffic.
 - Include a shelter for passengers waiting for transit.
- **Bicycle Facilities:** Require **1 bike rack per 25 residents** to encourage alternative modes of transportation.

Soundproofing Requirements

To minimize noise pollution between units and between the property and its surroundings, developers would be encouraged or required to use soundproofing materials in the construction of buildings. This also makes happy neighbors; reducing conflicts between neighbors and increases quality of life for residents.

Potential Accessory Uses

Accessory facilities in R4 developments are designed to reduce residents' reliance on personal vehicles by providing on-site amenities. These may include:

- **Transit Support:** Transit centers for moving people and goods to and from the property.
- **Modern Living Amenities:** Grocery pick-up centers, delivery logistics hubs, rideshare pickup, short term car rental (zipcar), and drone delivery landing areas.
- **Lifestyle Facilities:** Gyms, coffee shops, event spaces, and community event spaces.
- **Work and Wellness Spaces:** Co-working spaces, maker spaces, wellness clinics, and telemedicine booths.
- **Sustainability Features:** Indoor plant or algae farming to support green living and local food production.
- **Building Management Support:** On-site security and management offices.

Benefits of Accessory Uses

These on-site facilities reduce residents' need to travel for daily needs, thus lowering reliance on personal vehicles and minimizing parking demand. By incorporating these features, the R4 zoning is also future-proofed to adapt to changes in how people live, work, and interact with their environment.

Comparing the Proposed R4 Zoning to Current R3

Number of People and Residential Units for R3 and R4 Comparison

A calculator on rent prices and zoning regulations is available on elliottkillian.com. This calculator can be used to consider a possible R4 zone in Patton Township.

R3 Numbers

1. **Size of Lot: 1 Acre = 43,560 ft²**
2. **Maximum building lot coverage: 25%**
3. **Maximum building height: 35 ft (≈ 3 floors)**
4. **Setbacks: 30 ft front, 25 ft sides, 25 ft rear** (not directly used in the coverage calculation, but they reduce buildable area in a real design)
5. **Minimum distance between buildings: 30 ft** (we'll assume *one* building in this simplified approach)
6. **Parking requirement: 2 spaces per apartment**
7. (Assumed) **Apartment size: 1,000 ft²** per 2-bedroom unit (for consistency with the R4 example)
8. (Assumed) **Parking stall size: 9 ft × 19 ft = 171 ft²** per space (ignoring drive aisles in this simplified estimate)

Key R3 Numbers

1. **Building coverage: 25%** (the maximum allowed).
2. **Number of people: 64** per acre (assuming 32 two-bedroom apartments and 2 people per unit).

Proposed R4 Numbers

1. **Lot size:** 1 acre = 43,560 ft²
2. **Stormwater set-aside:** 25% of the site = $0.25 \times 43,560 = 10,890$ ft²
3. **Remaining area (for building + parking):** $43,560 - 10,890 = 32,670$ ft²
4. **Apartment size:** 1,000 ft² per 2-bedroom unit (interior floor area)
5. **Building height:** 5 floors
6. **Parking requirement:** 1.5 spaces per unit
7. **Parking stall:** 9 ft × 19 ft = **171 ft²** (stall only, ignoring drive aisles)
8. **Occupancy:** 2 people per 2-bedroom apartment (typical planning assumption)

Key R4 Numbers

1. **Building coverage:** ~33% of the 1-acre parcel (assuming one or more 5-floor buildings).
2. **Estimated population:** ~142 people per acre, assuming 2 people per 2-bedroom apartment (and 71 total apartments).

Comparing the Requirements for the Proposed R4 Zoning to Current R3

Proposed R4 Zoning:

1. **Maximum Building Height:**
 - 55 feet (5 stories) from ground level, allowing for higher-density development.
2. **Lot Building Coverage:**
 - Maximum building coverage of 75%, though effective coverage is expected to be closer to 40% due to parking and stormwater requirements.
 - Requires all stormwater to be addressed on-site through solutions such as holding tanks, retention ponds, permeable surfaces, and green roofs.
3. **Simplified and Consistent Requirements:**
 - Zoning regulations would be consistent across all units, regardless of the number of units, making the zoning simpler and easier to understand.
4. **Setbacks:**
 - 25 feet setbacks on all sides of the property.

- No setbacks required between buildings on the same property.

5. Parking Requirements:

- Reduced to 1.5 spaces per dwelling unit if a bus transit center is located within the R4 property or within 1,000 feet.
- Bus transit center must include:
 - A two-bus waiting area that does not block traffic.
 - A shelter for passengers waiting for transit.

6. Accessory Uses:

- Broader range of accessory uses permitted to support modern living and reduce residents' need for personal vehicles.
- Potential uses include transit centers, grocery pick-up facilities, gyms, co-working spaces, community event spaces, and more.

Current R3 Zoning:

1. Maximum Building Height:

- 35 feet (approximately 3 stories), limiting potential for higher-density developments.

2. Lot Building Coverage:

- Maximum building coverage of 25%.
- Does not incorporate innovative stormwater management techniques as a zoning requirement.

3. Complex Requirements:

- Setbacks, maximum height, and building coverage change based on lot size and the number of units, leading to more complicated zoning regulations.

4. Setbacks:

- 30 feet front, 25 feet side, and 25 feet rear setbacks for all buildings.
- Minimum distance of 30 feet required between buildings on the same lot, further limiting the use of available space.

5. Parking Requirements:

- Requires 2 parking spaces per apartment, regardless of proximity to public transit or other mitigating factors.

6. Accessory Uses:

- Limited scope for accessory uses, which restricts the integration of modern amenities and services within the property.

Key Differences:

- **Density:** The R4 zoning allows for more than double the number of residential units compared to R3 zoning due to increased building height and reduced parking requirements.
- **Simplicity:** R4 zoning simplifies regulations by applying consistent requirements across all units, whereas R3 zoning changes based on lot size and unit count.
- **Transportation and Sustainability:** R4 zoning incentivizes public transit accessibility and includes innovative stormwater management techniques, whereas R3 zoning does not.
- **Flexibility:** R4 zoning allows for a broader range of accessory uses, supporting modern lifestyle needs and reducing dependence on personal vehicles, while R3 zoning offers limited accessory uses.

By adopting R4 zoning, Patton Township can address the housing shortage, encourage sustainable development, and align with future transportation and lifestyle trends.

Benefits of the Proposed R4 Zoning

The proposed R4 zoning introduces a thoughtful framework to address the housing challenges and development needs in Patton Township while fostering sustainable growth and enhancing community quality of life. Below are the key benefits of implementing the R4 zoning:

1. Increased Housing Supply

- By allowing buildings up to 55 feet (5 stories) and increasing the maximum lot coverage to 75%, the R4 zoning would more than double the number of units that can be built compared to the current R3 zoning.
- This expanded capacity directly addresses the pressing need for housing in Centre County, particularly for workforce housing.

2. Improved Affordability

- Higher-density developments reduce per-unit land and infrastructure costs, making it more feasible to offer affordable housing options and encourages development.
- The reduced parking requirement for developments near public transit further lowers construction costs, which can be passed on to renters or buyers.

3. Encouragement of Public Transit Usage

- Incentivizing developments near bus transit centers reduces reliance on personal vehicles and supports a shift toward public transportation.
- Transit centers, with waiting areas and shelters, provide convenience for residents and contribute to a more sustainable and environmentally friendly community.

4. Efficient Land Use

- The elimination of building-to-building setbacks on the same property maximizes the use of available land, enabling developers to create cohesive, high-density communities without unnecessary spatial restrictions.
- The inclusion of accessory uses such as grocery pick-up centers, co-working spaces, and wellness facilities reduces the need for external travel, allowing more land to be dedicated to housing rather than parking and infrastructure.

5. Simplified and Flexible Zoning Regulations

- Consistent requirements for all residential units, regardless of the number of units, make the zoning easier to understand and enforce.
- Simplified regulations reduce administrative burdens on both developers and township staff, accelerating the approval and development process.

6. Support for Modern Lifestyles

- Accessory uses like gyms, maker spaces, telemedicine booths, and community event areas address the evolving needs of residents and support remote work, healthy living, and community engagement.
- Innovative amenities such as indoor algae or plant farming and drone landing areas future-proof developments, ensuring they remain relevant as technology and lifestyle trends evolve.

7. Economic Growth and Workforce Retention

- By creating more housing options near workplaces, R4 zoning helps employers attract and retain talent, addressing labor shortages in key industries within the region.
- Local businesses benefit from an increased population base with convenient access to transit and nearby amenities.

10. Alignment with Regional Goals

- The R4 zoning aligns with broader regional and municipal goals to encourage sustainable, transit-oriented development and address housing affordability challenges.

- It positions Patton Township as a forward-thinking leader in meeting the needs of its growing population.

What Needs to be Decided by Patton Township

- Should Patton Township have a maximum height of 5 floors (55 feet) in R4?
- Should Patton Township require a mix of housing types (1, 2, and 3 bedroom units)?
- Should Patton Township allow for many accessory uses?
 - If so, should accessory uses that reduce the need for residents to need a personal vehicle be incentivised by reduced parking requirement?
 - If so, what accessory uses should be allowed in R4?
- Should Patton Township allow for modern stormwater technologies to be used to have a high impervious coverage and high building coverage in R4?
 - If so, what should the impervious coverage be in R4?
 - If so, what should the building coverage be in R4?
- Should Patton Township intensives or require soundproofing materials and noise pollution mitigation in R4?
- Should Patton Township incentives public transportation in R4 by providing reduced parking requirement?
 - If so, what should the incentives be?
 - If so, should a public transportation terminal be incentivised to be on site or within 1000 feet?
 - If so, should ride share pickup hubs be incentivised?
- What are should be zoned as R4?

Conclusion

The proposed R4 high-density residential zoning represents a proactive solution to the housing challenges facing Patton Township and Centre County. By allowing for increased building heights, higher residential density, and modern design standards, R4 zoning addresses the need for affordable and workforce housing while promoting sustainable development. The proposed changes will not only double housing capacity compared to R3 zoning but also encourage the use of public transit, reduce reliance on personal vehicles, and support community-focused amenities. Adopting R4 zoning positions Patton Township as a forward-thinking leader in addressing regional housing needs while fostering economic growth and enhancing quality of life for its residents.