

Mid-Shore Board of REALTORS®
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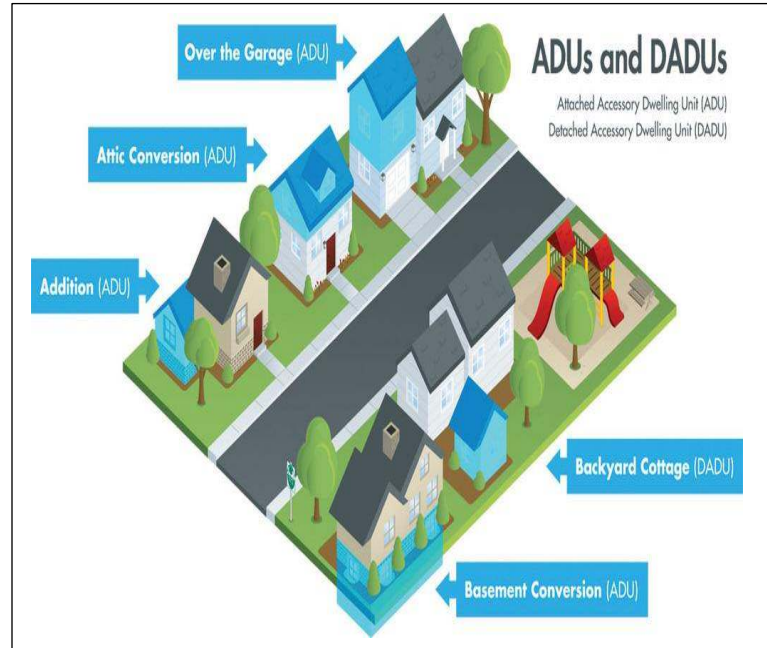
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Land Use Regulations and the Housing Crisis

Easton- America has an affordable housing crisis and for over two decades, supply has not kept up with demand. The result is housing, in both rentals and homeownership is out of reach for an increasing number of Eastern Shore residents, says MSBR President, Shelby Roney. This is not something impacting only lower income households, it is crushing the workforce's pocketbook. Even if you consider yourself well off, if you buy a house that costs double what it did a few years ago, this has a negative impact on your way of life.

We have seen area businesses close or hold back on expanding because they cannot recruit and retain workers. Many of those who grew up in this area are unable to stay local unless they continue living with relatives or stretch their incomes too thin. Much of this is because of the housing affordability gap.

When we look at state and local zoning and land regulations, we can see how zoning helped create the nationwide crisis, by restricting distinct types of development. Many cities and states are looking to help solve this crisis and they are adopting new planning and zoning regulations to help increase the housing supply. This year, Denton amended zoning regulations to allow more multifamily housing areas and streamlined the zoning approval process.

The National Association of REALTORS has found that some states that have in the past shunned subsidies and workforce housing programs are now voting for land-use reform. And other states that may have been viewed as protectionist are now removing restrictions and bringing housing to market faster by reducing the upfront infrastructure costs to encourage development. It is time for our Eastern Shore Counties to consider ways to help create affordable workforce housing and remove the not in my backyard mentality.

Many local land use regulations across the country make it nearly impossible to build affordable and what is considered missing middle housing. The missing middle housing refers to the range of housing that fits between single-family detached homes and mid-to-high-rise apartment buildings. Many people grew up in such housing, but current zoning restrictions tended to eliminate townhouses and fourplexes and segregated housing into only larger-lot, single-family zones, or denser, taller apartment districts.

Some states are beginning to recognize the urgent need for this type of housing and have passed laws that preempt local control over some land-use decisions. There are jurisdictions, that have done away with single-family-only zoning, which makes up most of the zoning in the United States. More local regulations are allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), or even duplexes or triplexes, by right, in single family districts. The Town of Easton allows Accessory Dwelling Units in some areas to help with this housing issue and they are considering other measures as well.

ADUs, also known as granny flats, are ancillary buildings on a single-family lot. They could be over a carriage house, in a converted garage or in a stand-alone building, usually about 500 to 750 square feet. They add gentle density to a neighborhood while creating affordable housing options, a place for relatives, whether just starting out or scaling down, to live without worrying over monthly costs, and an income stream for the lot owner to help keep up with those rising costs.

As REALTORS, we work with families daily who want to live near their employer and who want the American Dream of home ownership. Homeownership does not always start out as a single-family home, sometimes it starts out in a duplex, a townhome, or a condo unit, noted Roney.

As the Counties consider zoning reform, let us look to pro-affordable housing regulations that will support our workforce and start individuals and families on the path to the attainable American Dream of homeownership.

The Mid-Shore Board of Realtors mission is to advocate for its members and the public to preserve the right to own, transfer and utilize real property. For more information check out the website www.midshoreboardofrealtors.com.

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