

HAWAI'I ZONING ATLAS REVEALS WHERE AND HOW ZONING RULES LIMIT HOUSING SUPPLY AND INCREASE COSTS

For B-roll and Soundbites with Trey Gordner, Tyler Chong, and Mike Avendano, please download here: [Hawaii Zoning Atlas VNR 08.15.2023.mp4](#)

The local Atlas team is part of a national coalition of universities, nonprofit organizations, state and local public agencies, and professionals who aim to inform solutions to the housing crisis by cataloging land use policies across the U.S.

(Honolulu, Hawai'i) – August 16, 2023 – The Hawai'i Zoning Atlas announces the public launch of an online interactive map that shows how zoning regulations affect the location and availability of housing in the state: <https://hawaii zoning atlas.com/>. The map is based on an original dataset compiled by over 30 students and volunteers who combed nearly a thousand pages of regulations to extract key policy details, including whether housing units are legally allowed in an area and how many; restrictions on height, yards, and lot coverage; and parking requirements. All in all, more than 100 data points were collected for each zone in three counties—Honolulu, Maui, and Hawai'i. Kua'i will be available in a future release.

Journalists, policymakers, housing advocates, researchers, and the general public can explore highlights from the dataset at the link above. The full dataset is also available at no cost for public use. The goal of the team that built the Hawaii Zoning Atlas is to educate residents on the issues of land use and zoning, and empower them to participate in decisions that shape the future of their communities. “I hope that the Atlas will allow planners, politicians, and citizens to continue toward a Hawaii that maintains the unique and wonderful spirit of the state while allowing people to live in communities they love,” said Christian Schmidt, one of the project’s three student interns.

Zoning began in the early 1900s to protect public health and safety by preventing factories and other hazardous facilities from locating too close to homes or schools. But the legal framework was quickly co-opted for other purposes, including [race and class-based segregation](#). Scholars have also found that land use regulations [decrease residential construction and increase costs](#), contributing significantly to our housing crisis. A recent UHERO study estimated that these regulations in Hawai'i and its counties were among [the most restrictive](#) in the country, making zoning a particularly relevant topic for housing affordability here.

“Zoning is the most important law you’ve never heard of,” said Trey Gordner, director of the Hawai'i Zoning Atlas, “By regulating what buildings can be built where, what they look like, and what they can be used for, zoning determines the shape of our communities, the size of our houses, the length of our commutes, and more. The Hawai'i Zoning Atlas brings these rules to light to help our community determine whether they are delivering the future we want.”

While a graduate student in urban and regional planning, Trey learned about the [National Zoning Atlas](#)—a project headed by Sara Bronin, a professor at Cornell University—and volunteered to bring the project to Hawai'i. Today, teams in 24 states are working to produce a zoning atlas. Hawai'i is the fourth state to launch, following Connecticut, Montana, and New Hampshire. Because all zoning atlases use the same [data standard](#), interested parties can, for the first time, compare land use policy among jurisdictions in different states and across different periods to better understand their impact.

Two local community organizations were instrumental in building the project: Faith Action for Community Equity and Code with Aloha (formerly Code for Hawaii). In addition, volunteers interviewed stakeholders including nonprofit leaders, policymakers, academic researchers, and real estate developers to customize the National Zoning Atlas model for local use. The project was funded in part by grants from Code for America and the Mercatus Center at George Mason University.

“The National Zoning Atlas team has been thrilled to work with the dedicated members of the Hawai'i Zoning Atlas team,” said Professor Sara Bronin, founder and director of the National Zoning Atlas. “Their atlas will help stakeholders across Hawai'i assess how zoning contributes to the state's housing crisis - and ultimately make necessary changes to ensure more - and more affordable - housing for residents.”

At present, the plan is to update the atlas annually and to preserve previous data sets to provide critical information on the legal treatment of housing development. The project will continue seeking input from civic, nonprofit, and advocacy organizations focused on housing to best list information relevant to their work. Community members are encouraged to contact hawaiizoningatlas@gmail.com if interested in participating or learning more about the project.

When asked about the potential impact of the zoning atlas, public figures offered the following comments:

“When policymakers and Hawai'i residents have good information regarding our state and county zoning laws, they can make better decisions about what type of housing is needed and what changes may be necessary to get that housing approved,” said **Pacific Resource Partnership Interim Executive Director Kyle Chock**. “The Hawai'i Zoning Atlas is the type of comprehensive tool that's needed to address our housing crisis and helps ensure our policies lead to new homes being built for our people.”

“To accommodate the natural increase in population, Hawaii must build 10,000 or more new homes per year, and policymakers just don't know where they'll go. This new data will help us

answer that question and plan for sensible growth policies statewide,” said **Sen. Stanley Chang, Chair of the Senate Committee on Housing.**

Sterling Higa (Executive Director, Housing Hawai‘i’s Future)

“The Hawai‘i Zoning Atlas will help Hawai‘i leaders understand where pro-housing zoning reforms are needed and why they are necessary.”

Robert H. Thomas (Joseph T. Waldo Visiting Chair in Property Rights, William and Mary Law School, and Director of Property Rights Litigation, Pacific Legal Foundation)

“The Hawai‘i Zoning Atlas has made us aware that exclusionary zoning is one of the primary culprits in the affordable housing crisis—causing hardship for individuals, families, and employers across the state.”

For bookings or interviews, contact Hawai‘i Zoning Atlas Director Trey Gordner at hawaiizoningatlas@gmail.com or (910) 987-4207.

Supplemental information:

[Marketing one-pager](#)

Previous media coverage:

[Honolulu Civil Beat | This Group Is Trying To Make Sense Of Hawaii's Regulatory Landscape](#)

[ThinkTech Hawaii | Mapping Out Hawaii’s Housing Regulations \(Hawaii Together\)](#)

[The Conversation | Hawai‘i Public Radio \(17:00\)](#)