## ****Urban Planning and Land Use Reform: Building Equitable, Sustainable, and Climate-Resilient Communities****

* The structure of the American city didn’t happen by accident. It’s the result of deliberate policy choices that prioritized racial segregation, car dependency, exclusionary zoning, and sprawling development patterns. From redlining and racial covenants to highway construction and single-family zoning, these decisions systematically deprived Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized communities of wealth-building opportunities, environmental health, and access to well-resourced neighborhoods.
* Today, those legacies are still visible in our cities—in unaffordable housing, traffic-choked streets, polluted neighborhoods, and unequal access to opportunity. But we can reverse this trajectory. With bold reform, we can create cities that are more sustainable, inclusive, walkable, and resilient.
* This plan lays out a comprehensive set of policies to transform urban land use into a tool for climate action, housing justice, and equitable economic development.

### Core Strategies and Actions

* Eliminate single-family-exclusive zoning nationwide.  
  Single-family zoning blocks the construction of multifamily homes in most neighborhoods, limiting housing supply and driving up prices while reinforcing segregation. Legalizing duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and small apartment buildings in all neighborhoods will expand affordable housing options and promote incremental density.
* Legalize accessory dwelling units (ADUs) by right.  
  Homeowners should be allowed to build backyard cottages, garage apartments, and basement units without unnecessary red tape. ADUs increase housing supply, support multigenerational living, and provide flexible rental options.
* Abolish minimum parking requirements.  
  Mandating off-street parking raises construction costs, consumes valuable land, and encourages car dependency. Eliminating these requirements makes it easier to build affordable housing, adapt existing buildings, and create walkable, transit-friendly neighborhoods.
* Reform setback, lot size, and height limits.  
  Outdated zoning rules that mandate large setbacks, oversized lots, and restrictive height caps block the creation of compact, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods. Reforming these standards will enable sustainable infill development that supports public transit, reduces infrastructure costs, and fosters vibrant streetscapes.
* Transition from use-based zoning to form-based codes.  
  Rather than focusing on separating land uses, form-based codes prioritize the design and relationship of buildings to the street. This approach fosters human-scaled, mixed-use neighborhoods that are safe, walkable, and visually cohesive.
* Pair zoning reform with anti-displacement protections.  
  Land use reform must be accompanied by measures to protect existing residents from displacement. Policies such as rent stabilization, just-cause eviction protections, tenant right-to-return programs, and support for community land trusts will help ensure that new development benefits current residents rather than displacing them.
* Incentivize transit-oriented development (TOD).  
  We’ll prioritize upzoning, density bonuses, and streamlined approvals for housing and mixed-use development near transit stations. This strategy reduces car dependence, lowers transportation costs for households, and increases transit ridership.
* Repurpose vacant and underutilized land for public benefit.  
  Many cities have large areas of vacant lots, surface parking, and underused parcels, often concentrated in historically disinvested neighborhoods. We’ll establish public land banks and community land trusts to turn these sites into affordable housing, parks, community gardens, or other neighborhood assets.

### Expanded Policy Toolkit

* Inclusionary zoning requirements to ensure affordable units in new developments
* Elimination of minimum lot size rules to allow smaller, more affordable homes
* Density bonuses tied to affordability, green building standards, or proximity to transit
* Public acquisition of tax-delinquent or abandoned properties for community use
* Streamlined permitting for green retrofits and adaptive reuse
* Urban growth boundaries to limit sprawl and preserve farmland and open space

### Why This Matters: Climate, Equity, and Resilience

* Land use reform isn’t just a housing issue—it’s climate policy, racial justice policy, and economic sustainability policy all at once. Research shows that compact, mixed-use, transit-oriented development reduces per capita carbon emissions by lowering vehicle miles traveled and energy use per household. Compact urban form also makes public infrastructure more efficient and cost-effective to maintain.
* By dismantling exclusionary zoning and expanding housing supply near jobs, schools, and transit, these reforms promote racial and economic integration and begin to repair the harms of discriminatory land use policies. At the same time, reducing sprawl eases the fiscal burden on cities by avoiding the need for expensive infrastructure extensions.
* Land use reform is also essential for creating communities that are more walkable, safer, and healthier. Compact, people-centered neighborhoods reduce car dependency, improve air quality, support local businesses, and foster stronger social connections.

### Integrated with Broader Climate and Social Policy

* Urban land use reform works hand-in-hand with other strategies in this plan, including public transit expansion, green infrastructure investments, environmental remediation, and green jobs programs. Together, these policies form a cohesive approach to building low-carbon, equitable, and resilient communities.

### Key References

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