U.S. Chamber of Commerce

AEI

Strong Foundations

A Playbook for Housing and Economic Growth

National

Overview

Housing has long been a cornerstone of the American dream and the nation's economy, but a supply–demand imbalance has pushed the U.S. market into crisis, driving up prices and limiting workforce mobility. Addressing this shortage is essential to stabilize the market and sustain economic resilience, so the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the AEI Housing Center* have released Strong Foundations: A Playbook for Housing and Economic Growth, a guide that gives state and local leaders actionable solutions. The playbook is backed by location specific data on affordability, net migration, and homeless displacement pressure. These data allow officials to make informed decisions to reinforce housing stability and spur growth.

We thank our data providers – First American, Intercontinental Exchange, U.S. Parcl Labs, Zoneomics, and Cotality – our analysis would be impossible without their data. We also acknowledge the use of data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bureau of Economic Analysis, SafeGraph, U.S. Census, Overture Maps, OpenStreetMap, ESRI Community Maps, Microsoft, Freddie Mac, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, IRS, and the U.S. Geological Survey.

The Key to Housing Abundance

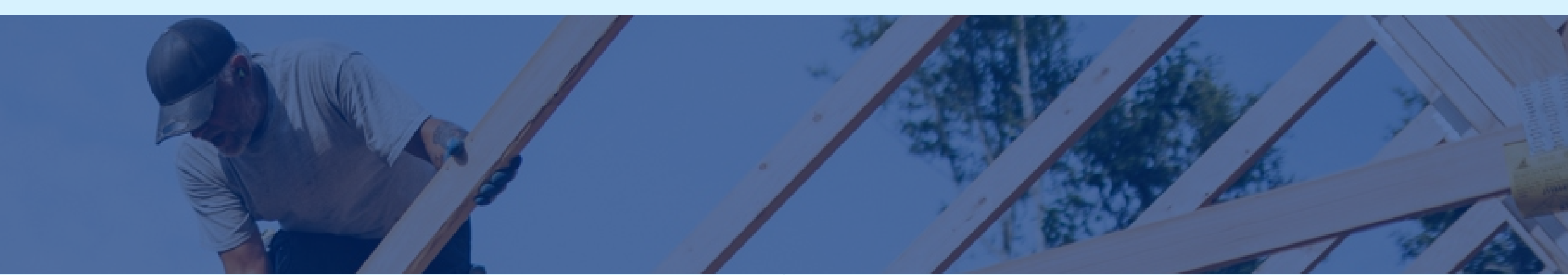
Small lots, small lots, small lots. Enabling small lots are essential to building more family-sized starter homes.

Key ways to unlock smaller lots and new housing supply

- **Lot size flexibility in new subdivisions:** allow the building of homes on small lots instead of only large lots. Small lots enable the construction of starter single-family homes and townhomes.
- **Home dwelling type and lot split flexibilities on existing lots:** allow the construction of a variety of dwelling types and sizes, including duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, townhomes, and ADUs.
- **Flexibility to build homes near jobs:** allow for a residential overlay by-right in non-residential districts such as commercial/retail, bringing people closer to jobs and amenities.

Building in flexibility for lot size and density will help unleash new housing supply, restore affordability for buyers and renters alike, and reopen the path to ownership for working families.

* *AEI Housing Center scholars Edward Pinto, Tobias Peter, and Arthur Gailes.*



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Executive Summary

Options Communities Should Consider to Add Up to 1,678,600 Homes Annually in the Nation

While every community has differences in infrastructure such as road, schools, and sewer and water availability, and local laws vary, our Housing Playbook offers strategies to help add more housing supply to meet growing demand.

Option 1: Lot Size Flexibility in New Subdivisions

- Allow the option to build homes on small lots instead of only large ones. This enables the construction of starter single-family homes and townhomes. States, counties, and municipalities should consider establishing minimum lot sizes no larger than 1,200 square feet for lots in new residential subdivisions.

Projection: 518,600 additional single-family homes per year with a median value of $451,000, which is 12% below today's median value of the nation's single-family homes built in new subdivisions from 2000-2024.

Option 2: Home Dwelling Type and Lot Split Flexibilities on Existing Lots

- States, counties, and municipalities should consider allowing duplexes, other multiplexes, townhomes, or accessory dwelling units (ADUs) on single-family lots and allow lot-splits by setting a minimum lot size of no more than 1,200 square feet for new lots.

Projection: 502,000 net new homes annually with a median value of $501,000, which is 3.4% above today's median value of the nation's new SFD infill housing built from 2014-2024.

Option 3: Flexibility to Build Homes Near Jobs

- Allow for a residential overlay by-right in non-residential areas, which could include shopping areas or other appropriate commercial districts, bringing people closer to jobs and amenities.

Projection: 512,000 net new homes annually.

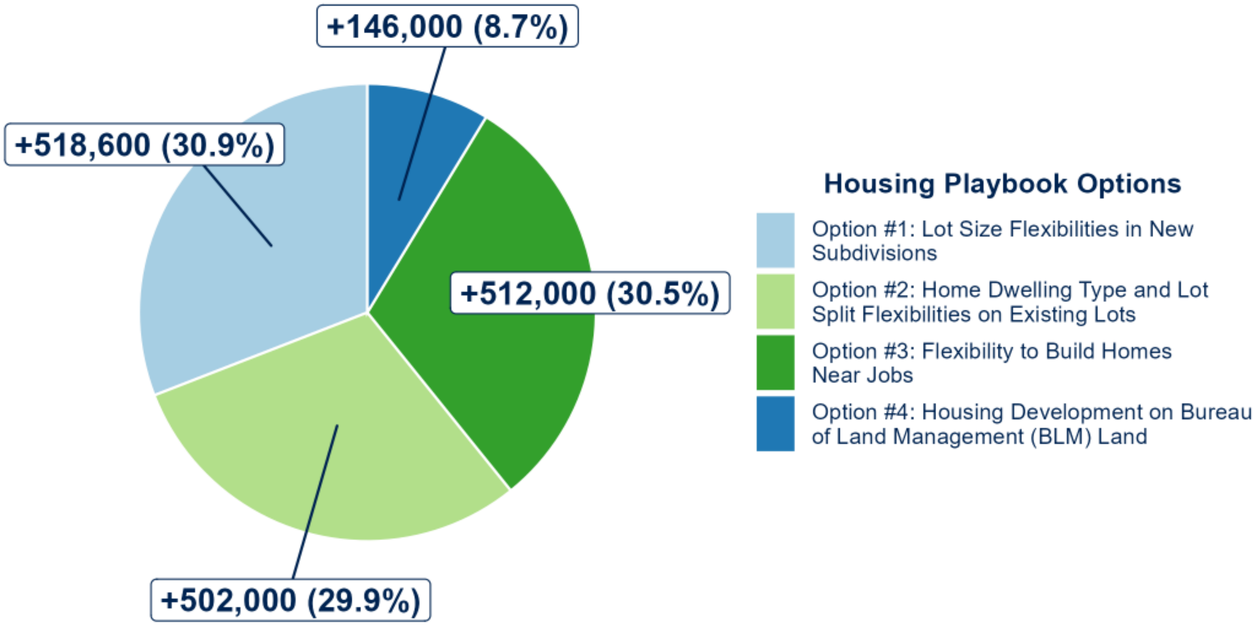
Option 4: Housing Development on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Land

- Request sale of developable BLM land for residential use through public auction (Homesteading 2.0). Focus on by-right development of small-lot single-family detached homes and townhomes.

Projection: 146,000 homes annually, using just 230 sq. mi. of land out of BLM's 267,000 sq. mi. nationwide portfolio.

How the Nation Could Add 1,678,600 Homes Per Year

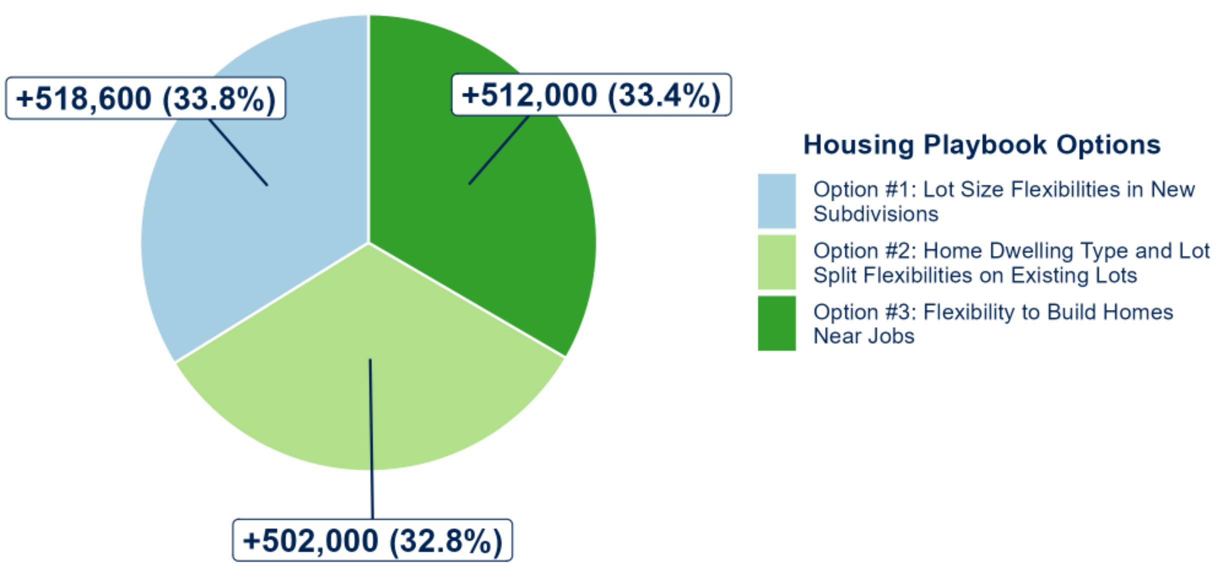
*Following the AEI Housing Success Playbook Would Increase New Homes by 128%**



** Compared to new single and multi-family homes built from 2010-2023. Source: 2023 5-year ACS and AEI Housing Center, https://aeihousingcenter.org/playbook.*

How the Nation Could Add 1,532,600 Homes Per Year (Excluding Option #4)

*Following the AEI Housing Success Playbook Would Increase New Homes by 117%**



** Compared to new single and multi-family homes built from 2010-2023. Source: 2023 5-year ACS and AEI Housing Center, https://aeihousingcenter.org/playbook.*

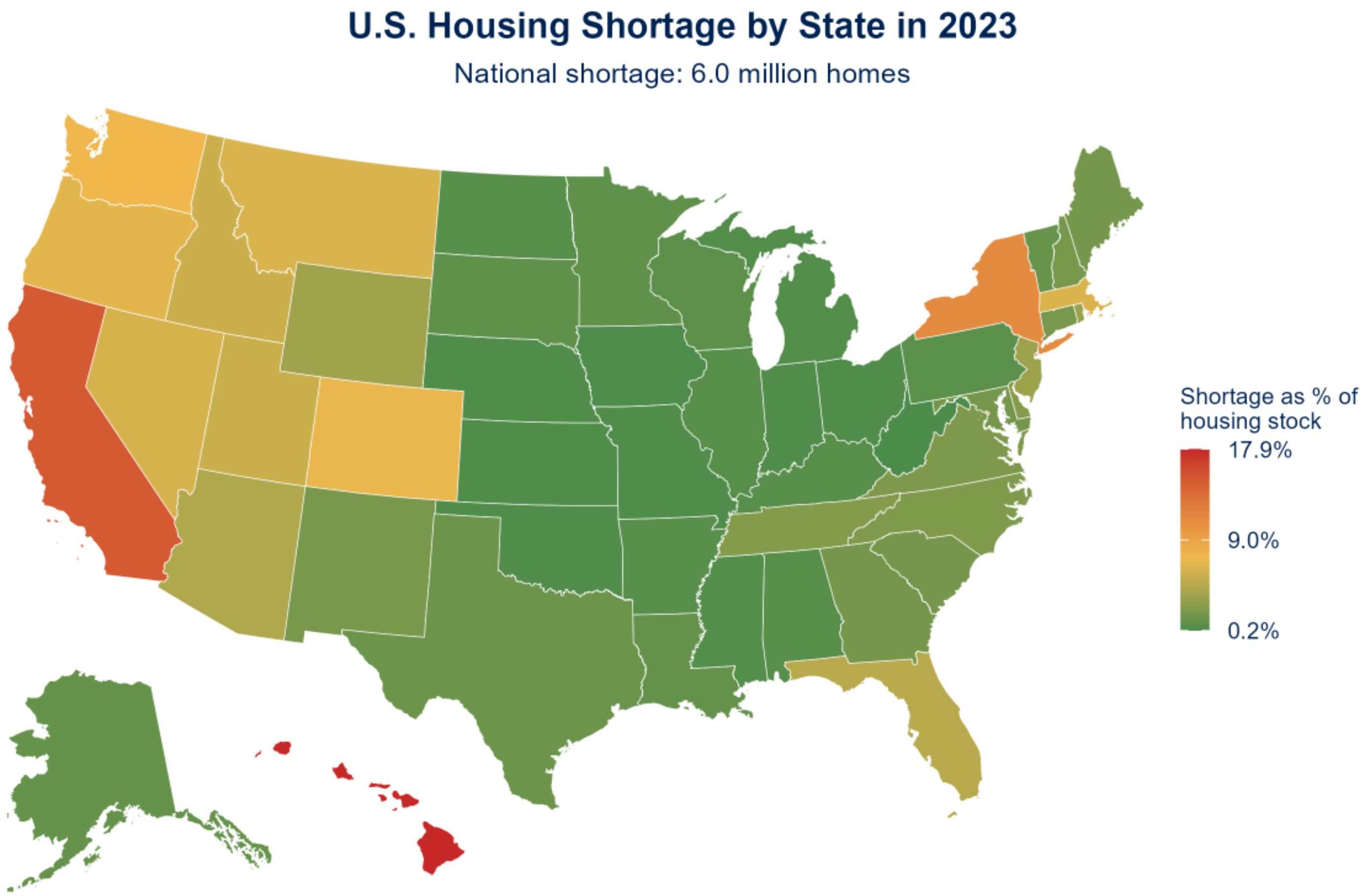
Impact of the Housing Shortage

Recent studies estimate that the national housing shortage ranges from around 4 to 8 million homes. In this shortage analysis, we use the mid-point of about 6 million homes.[1] The map below shows where that shortage lies.

The nation is short **6.0 million** homes—roughly **4.1%** of its entire housing stock. That shortage is an invisible hand squeezing families out of home ownership, pushing rents higher, and forcing workers to commute farther from jobs and schools. Every year we fail to close it, prices climb faster than wages, overcrowding worsens, and the dream of a starter home slips further away.

Fixing the nation's housing shortage would:

- Bring home price growth in alignment with wage growth.
- Give renting families a path to home ownership.
- Relieve upward pressure on homelessness and displacement.



Source: 2023 1-Year American Community Survey (ACS) and AEI Housing Center, https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/housing_shortage.

[1] We assume a national housing shortage of 6 million homes - a midpoint between various studies estimating a shortage of between 4 and 8 million (see for example: Up for Growth, Zillow, Realtor.com, McKinsey). We then allocate that shortage to counties (or cities) using the ratio of median home price to income.

Why Allow for Lot Size and Location Flexibility?

This gives owners the right to build homes that most people can afford—whether in new neighborhoods, existing communities, or near jobs. It increases supply and affordability by allowing people to build starter homes on **smaller lots in new residential subdivisions**, and by **allowing duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, townhomes, or ADUs** on single-family lots. It also refers to location – allowing **homes near jobs** and amenities in commercial and other non-residential areas.

It creates more affordable starter homes by using land more efficiently. This approach reduces sprawl, infrastructure costs, and energy use. By building smaller homes on smaller lots, we can significantly increase the supply of lower-priced, family-sized homes while freeing up existing housing stock.

It creates more workforce housing since single-family detached homes and townhomes average about 3.5 and 2.8 bedrooms respectively and are suitable for raising a family and naturally affordable shared living arrangements (42% of renters live in single-family homes).

What is the flexibility to build homes near jobs?

Legalizing single-family, multifamily, and mixed-use residential by right in all commercial, industrial, and mixed-use areas. This allows people to live near their jobs and amenities if they choose.

By-right housing can transform underused commercial and industrial properties into owner-occupied and rental homes, helping cities make better use of land and infrastructure. Combined with small lots, this helps give people of all incomes greater choice in where and how they choose to live.

The Housing Affordability Trifecta: Why Smaller Lots Mean Lower Home Prices

- **Smaller lots** → lower land costs
- **Smaller homes** with standard finishes → more affordable per home
- **More townhomes** → efficient land use, lower cost per square foot

Diving Deeper: Option 1: Lot Size Flexibility in New Subdivisions

Home values for single-family detached (SFD) and single-family attached (SFA) homes in new subdivisions vary significantly based on homes per acre (lot size). **As lot sizes shrink, home prices typically go down.**

From 2000-2024, **9.5% of new homes built in residential subdivisions in the nation have been townhomes (SFA)**—a form that uses land more efficiently, **requiring only 24% of the land** needed for a typical detached home (SFD).

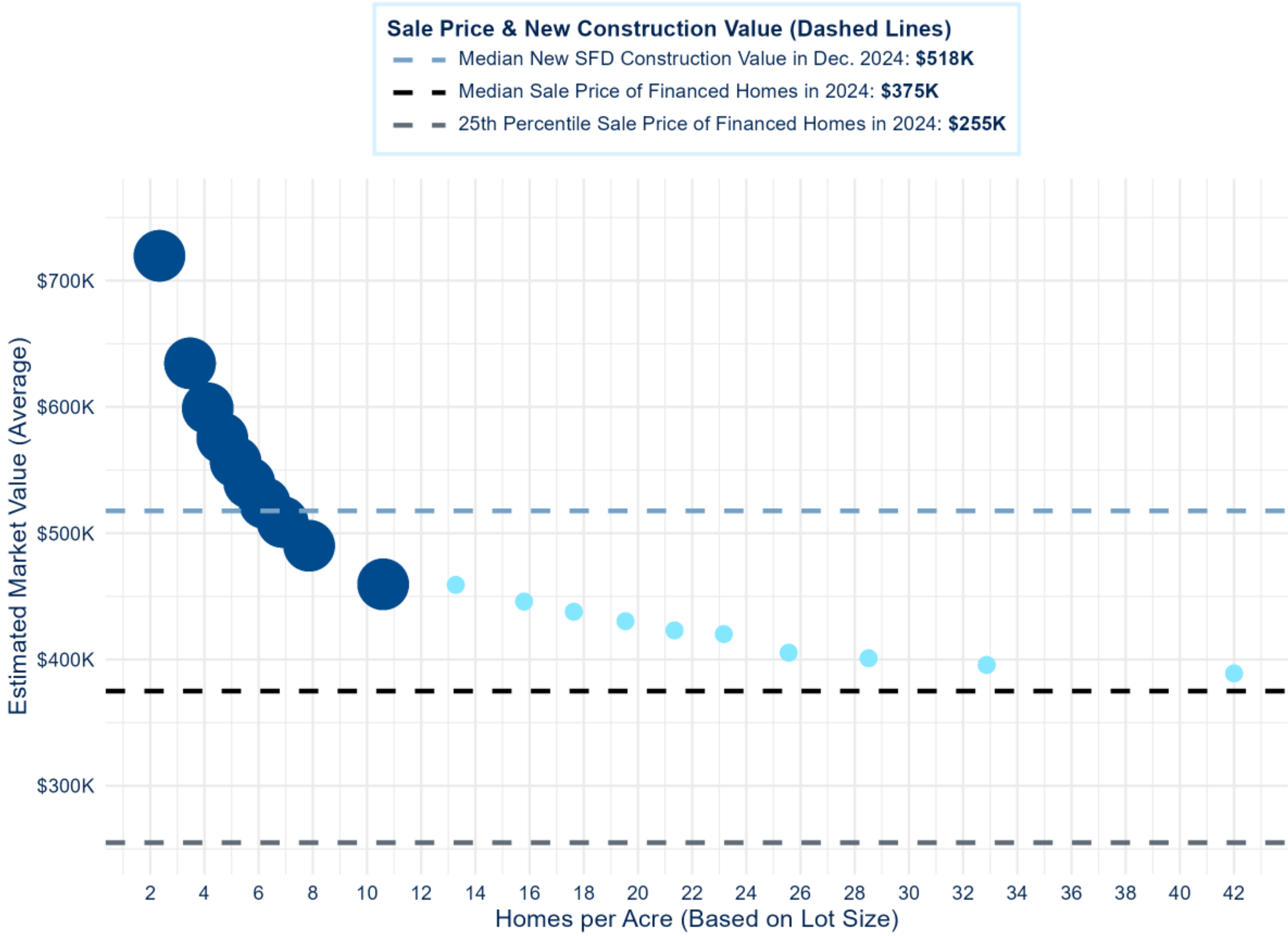
The impact of restrictive zoning is clear in home prices: In the nation, the median price of a newly built SFD home in a subdivision is $518,000—well above the median sale price of financed homes at $375,000.

Allowing smaller-lot subdivisions and more homes in existing single-family areas would enable the construction of more homes at lower price points—helping to add supply and close the gap between what is built and what most working families can afford.[2] To achieve this outcome, the nation should set a minimum lot size of no more than 1,200 sq.ft. for newly constructed single-family homes.

[2] For more details, see As-Built & New Residential Subdivisions.

New Residential Subdivisions (2000-2024): Lot Size and Market Value in the Nation

Hypothetical Estimates for Single Family Detached (SFD) and Attached (SFA)



Note: There were 11,880,600 new SFD and 1,221,900 new SFA homes built in residential subdivisions from 2000-2024. Dots are sized by the ratio of SFD-to-SFA homes built. The chart shows the hypothetical case assuming that SFAs were built in the same locations as SFDs, and illustrates the expected influence that legalizing by-right residential zoning and lot size variations would have on SFD and SFA home affordability. Data restricts to homes built in residential subdivisions from 2000-2024 with a lot size between 500 and 45,000 sq.ft. Source: First American, HMDA 2024, and AEI Housing Center, https://aeihousingcenter.org/playbook.

A common misconception is that developers prefer building big homes on large lots because it yields higher profits. In reality, local zoning codes and minimum lot size requirements often dictate the size of a home—not market preferences.

Consider a simple thought experiment: would a builder earn more profit by mass marketing one hundred $300,000 townhomes on 1/20-acre lots or building five $1 million custom homes on one-acre lots? Clearly, **total profit would be higher mass marketing $30 million worth of townhomes compared to $5 million worth of custom homes.**

New Residential Subdivisions (2000-2024): Lot Size and Home Value Scenarios for the Nation

	SFDs Built (Actual)	SFDs Built at Slightly Smaller Lots (Estimated)			SFAs Built		Mix of SFDs and SFAs on the Same Land (Estimated)	
	At Median	At 7th Decile	At 8th Decile	At 9th Decile	At Median		80% at 5.4 homes/acre (median SFD) and 20% at 24.4 (median SFA)	80% at 8 homes/acre (9th decile SFD) and 20% at 24.4 (median SFA)
					Actual	Hypo		
Density (Homes/Acre)	5.4	6.3	7	8	22.6	24.4	9.2	11.3
Homes Built in Residential Subdivisions (2000-2024)	11,880,600	13,761,000	15,309,400	17,619,300	1,221,900	NA	20,248,400	24,837,900
Owner Occupied	10,158,700	11,774,600	13,104,800	15,095,600	813,100	NA	14,626,800	18,575,900
Extra Homes								
Cumulative	NA	**1,878,800**	**3,428,400**	**5,739,300**	NA	NA	**8,366,900**	**12,958,200**
Per Year	NA	**75,100**	**137,100**	**230,400**	NA	NA	**333,100**	**518,600**
Home Value in 2024								
Median	**$517,000**	$494,000	$480,000	$463,000	$443,000	**$407,000**	$495,000	**$451,000**
25th Percentile	$443,000	$423,000	$411,000	$396,000	$397,000	$365,000	$427,000	$390,000
Living Area in Sq. Ft.	2,280	2,110	2,030	1,930	1,700	1,660	2,160	1,890

Source: First American and AEI Housing Center, https://aeihousingcenter.org/playbook.

- If single-family detached homes had been built at 8 homes per acre (instead of 5.4), the nation could have added **230,000 more homes per year (5.7 million over 2000-2024).**
- If 80% of single-family detached homes had been built at 8 homes per acre and the remaining 20% had been converted to townhomes at 24.4 homes per acre, the nation could have added **518,600 more homes per year (13.0 million homes over 2000-2024).**

These two changes alone would have increased the number of family-sized residences built from 2000-2024 by 99% – from 13.1 million to 26.1 million.

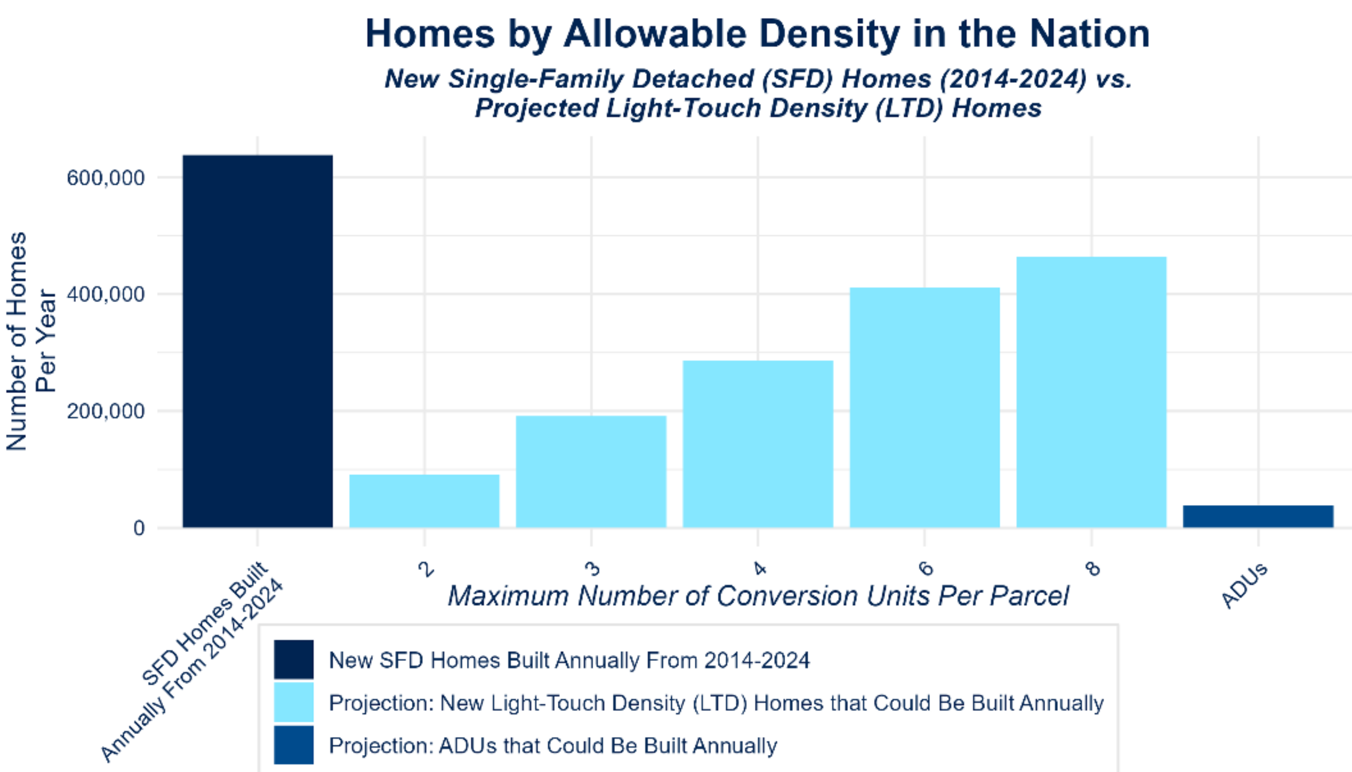
Going forward, building 80% of SFD homes at 8 homes per acre and converting the other 20% to townhomes at 24.4 homes per acre would increase the nation's recent single family permit levels by 52% – **from 994,000 to 1.5 million homes per year.**

Diving Deeper: Option 2: Home Dwelling Type and Lot Split Flexibilities on Existing Lots

Allowing home dwelling type and lot split flexibilities on existing lots in single-family neighborhoods in the nation could add 502,000 homes per year, or an increase of about 79% over the current rate of SFD construction in the nation.

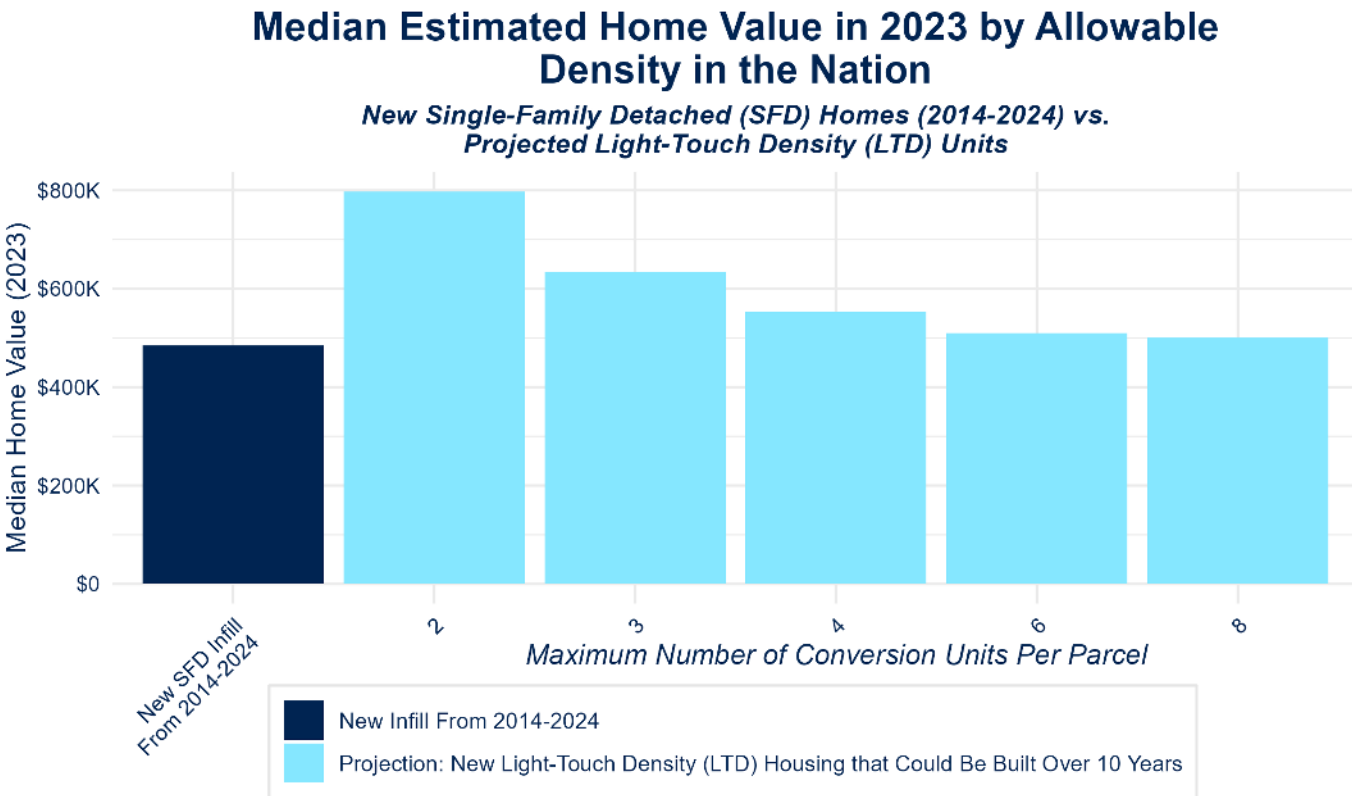
These new homes are created through the legalization of home dwelling types or by splitting existing lots into smaller parcels. They can take the form of smaller lot SFD homes, townhomes, 2–8 home multiplexes, and ADUs in neighborhoods currently restricted to single-family detached homes.[3] To achieve this outcome, the nation should set a minimum lot size of no more than 1,200 sq.ft. for new lots created through single-family lot splits.

This bar chart compares **the number of new SFD homes built in the nation from 2014-2024** (shown in dark blue) to the **potential number of homes** that could be created by these flexibilities.



Source: First American and AEI Housing Center, https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/ltd_chart.

[3] Projections for ADUs are given only in cases when they are the highest and best use of land. In areas with high land values, duplex, triplex, and townhome conversions are typically the higher and better land use. If both ADUs and small multiplexes make financial sense, we assume the option that produces the most homes on that lot. Light-Touch Density: Housing Supply and Affordability Estimates.



Source: First American and AEI Housing Center, https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/ltd_chart.

Diving Deeper: Option 3: Flexibility to Build Homes Near Jobs

Legalizing housing in commercial and other areas by allowing single-family, multifamily, and mixed-use residential homes to be built by right in non-residential areas.[4]

This allows for the transformation of underused land into vibrant walkable neighborhoods, without the need to expand into undeveloped areas or invest in new infrastructure.

This policy is a win-win-win:

- Residents can live closer to jobs, shops, and other amenities. This can be especially helpful for service workers working nearby.
- Cities can expand their tax base without increasing tax rates.
- Local businesses can gain more foot traffic and new customers.

Residential overlays help solve housing shortages, reduce commutes, cut transportation and housing costs, and make better use of existing infrastructure — easing costs for families, reducing strain on public services, and supporting healthier, more livable communities.

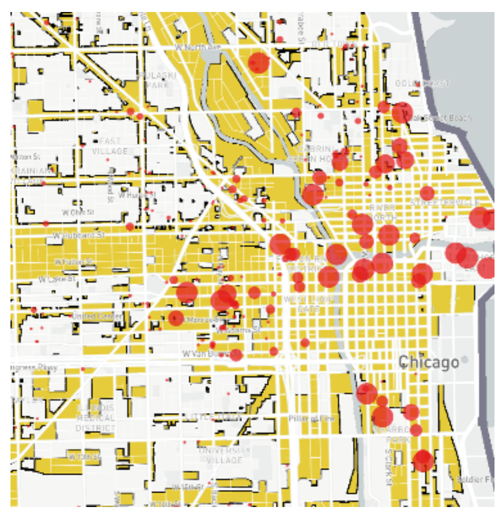
Option 3′s estimate for additional homes per year is based on the subject city’s current level of home production in its current commercial, industrial, and mixed-use areas as compared to best-in-class cities that are similar in size.

To explore Residential in Commercial areas in your jurisdiction, click here. Here are two successful examples:

Residential in Commercial Successes and Opportunity: Miami built over 2,000 homes/year in residential overlay areas (yellow) from 2012-2024. Chicago only built 600/year, and has more opportunity to grow.[5]

Miami

Chicago



Source: First American, Zoneomics, Overture Maps, OpenStreetMap, ESRI Community Maps, Microsoft, and AEI Housing Center, https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/luv_map.

[4] The playbook does not include estimates for the supply benefits gained from adding more housing in adjacent residential areas within 1/4 mile of residential overlay areas as they are included in Option 2 estimates.

[5] Note: Each dot represents a multi-family home built from 2010-2024, sized by the number of units in the property.

For more, see: AEI Housing Center’s Housing and Economic Analysis Toolkit (HEAT) Residential in Commercial

Diving Deeper: Option 4: Home Sweet Starter Home: The Sale of Public Land Across The Western U.S. for Residential Development

Home Sweet Starter Home is a housing initiative focused on the sale of land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that is suitable for residential development, with a focus on small lot, starter homes. The BLM currently oversees more than 247 million acres across the United States. Making just 0.1% of that land (approximately 200 square miles) available for private sector development has the potential to add **over one million homes over 10 years**, helping to address the home shortage of approximately 2.8 million homes out West and accommodate for future economic growth.

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (as amended), the BLM is directed to support economic growth, which includes making land that is suitable for residential use available for housing development and supporting infrastructure. This has not yet happened, therefore Home Sweet Starter Home leverages this authority to help address the nation's housing shortage.

Homesteading 2.0 - Making Housing Affordable Again

Homesteading 2.0 is a two-part initiative that has the potential to address the housing shortage in the West, both now and in the future. The first initiative, Home Sweet Starter Home, would add over one million homes over the next ten years. The second initiative, Freedom Cities, could add millions more over the next 40-50 years, while also adding the infrastructure and jobs needed to build new cities.

Home Sweet Starter Home (Homesteading 2.0 Initiative 1)

- Allows for up to 1.5 million homes over 10 years with less than 0.1% of BLM land (230 sq mi)
- Builds starter homes on small lots
- Targets land closest to city and sewer, where homes can be built immediately.

Freedom Cities (Homesteading 2.0 Initiative 2)

- Creates 20 new cities with less than 0.1% of BLM federal land (600 sq mi)
- Each city can grow 20,000 – 200,000 single-family homes at full capacity
- Build-out: 40–50 years
- Sites are near water, airports, highways, and within metros.

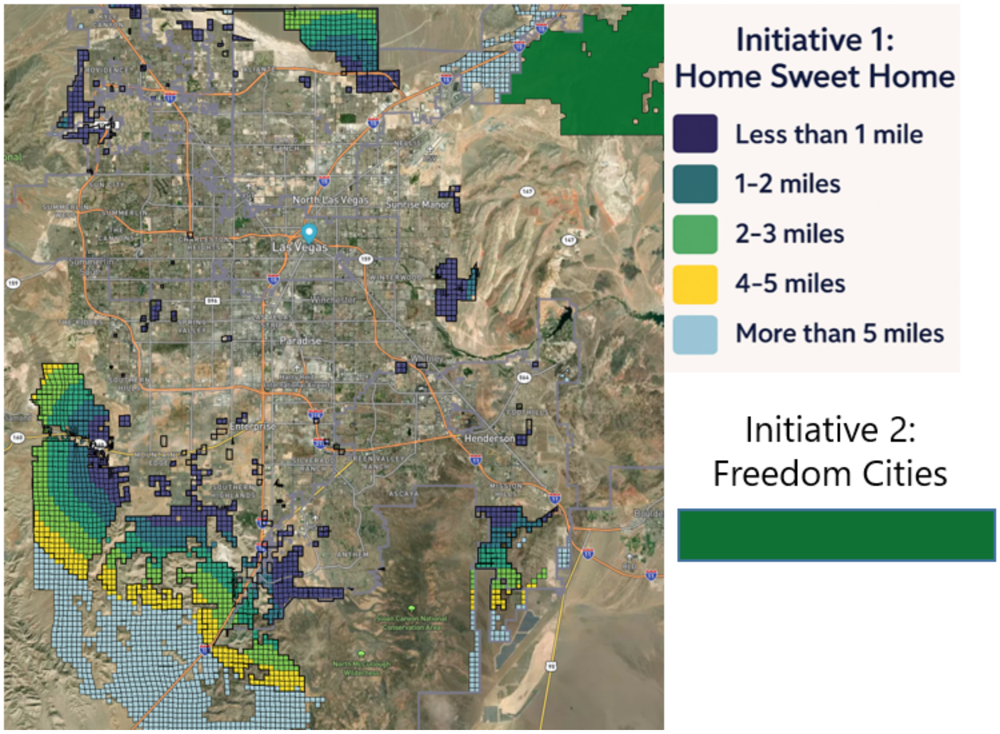
If implemented across the Western U.S., this initiative could support the construction of up to **1.5 million homes over the next 10 years**.

This approach would expand access to starter homes, particularly in states that are both among the least affordable and the fastest growing in the country.

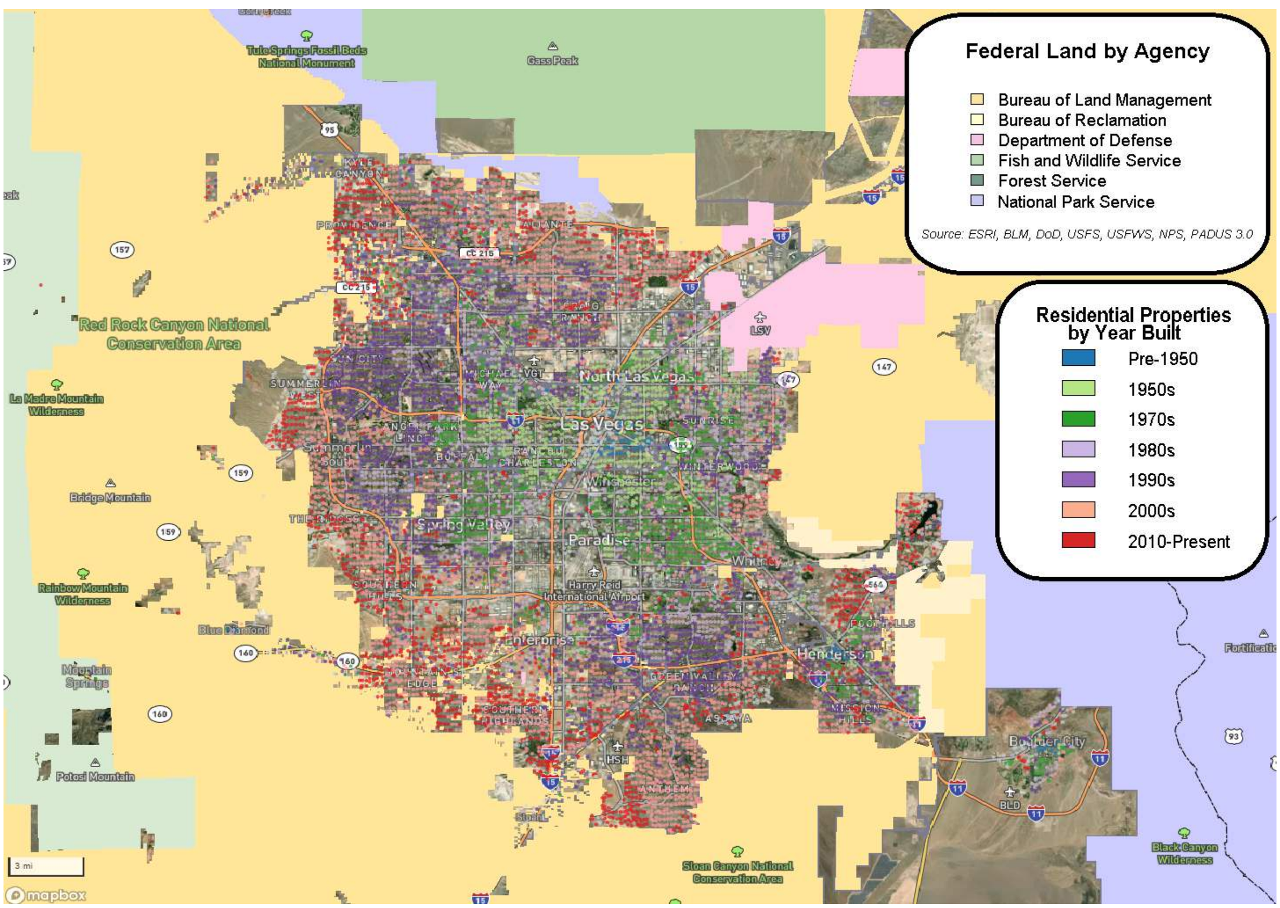
With a distribution of 80% single-family detached homes and 20% townhomes, roughly 80% of homes would be owner-occupied.

What's next? For this initiative to advance, the BLM would need to auction the designated land to the private sector. While federal action is required, strong local and state interest can help build momentum from the ground up. State and local leaders can engage with their local BLM offices to express support and explore potential opportunities.

Homesteading 2.0: Opportunity for new starter homes in the Las Vegas metropolitan area.



Federal Constraint: *Like many metros in the West, Las Vegas's growth is constrained by federal land.*



Source: BLM, AEI Housing Center, https://www.aei.org/housing. To see the rest of Homesteading 2.0, explore our Homesteading 2.0 interactive map: https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/homestead_map.

A Path to Housing Abundance: Implementation Strategy

The three most important things in addressing housing abundance and affordability: **"small lots, small lots, small lots."** Smaller lots allow more homes to be built on the same amount of land. This reduces land costs, leads to smaller, but usually still family-sized homes, and promotes townhomes, which cost less to build than a similarly sized detached home. They also provide home-sharing opportunities for service workers.

Across the country—and around the world—case studies consistently reveal a formula for successful housing supply reform:

- **Allow small lot flexibility for new subdivisions, home dwelling type and lot split flexibilities on existing lots, and the flexibility to build homes near jobs** by adopting one or more of the reform options outlined above,
- **Enable by-right zoning**, so projects don't get delayed or killed by discretionary reviews,
- **Follow the Keep it Short and Simple (KISS) principle** instead of micromanaging the process.

How Does the KISS Principle Unlock Housing Supply?

The KISS principle refers to eliminating unnecessary complexity in the homebuilding process. Simplicity brings certainty, lowers costs, and makes small-scale infill and larger-scale development both feasible and attractive. See *Full List of KISS Reforms to Consider* for more details.

Others Are Doing it, and Model Legislation Is Available

Several states—including Texas, California, Montana, Vermont, Oregon, and Washington—have recently enacted legislation to support housing abundance.

The key to successful reform lies in adhering to the Housing Abundance Success Sequence while avoiding unnecessary micromanagement. A range of legislative templates and model bills are readily available to guide this process. Texas SB-15 (lot size flexibility for new residential subdivisions in larger cities) and Texas SB-840 (residential and mixed-use housing on all commercial and light industrial land in larger cities) were enacted in mid-2025. Taken together, these two bills implement Playbook Options 1 and 3. Implementation of Option 1 and 2 can be accomplished through a single model bill: the AEI Model Starter Homes Act, which sets minimum lot sizes for both residential subdivisions and home dwelling type and lot split flexibilities on existing lots. A second model bill, AEI Model Multifamily and Mixed-Use Residential in Certain Zoning Classifications, covers Option 3. It would allow for a residential overlay by-right in commercial, industrial, and mixed use zones.

Boosting Housing Supply Keeps Home Prices in Check – Especially in High Job Growth Markets

In fast-growing metros, home prices tend to rise sharply when housing supply doesn't keep pace with job growth.[6]

This graphic shows that metros with high employment growth, but low new construction shares, experienced the steepest increases in home prices between 2012 and 2019 (before the pandemic).[7]

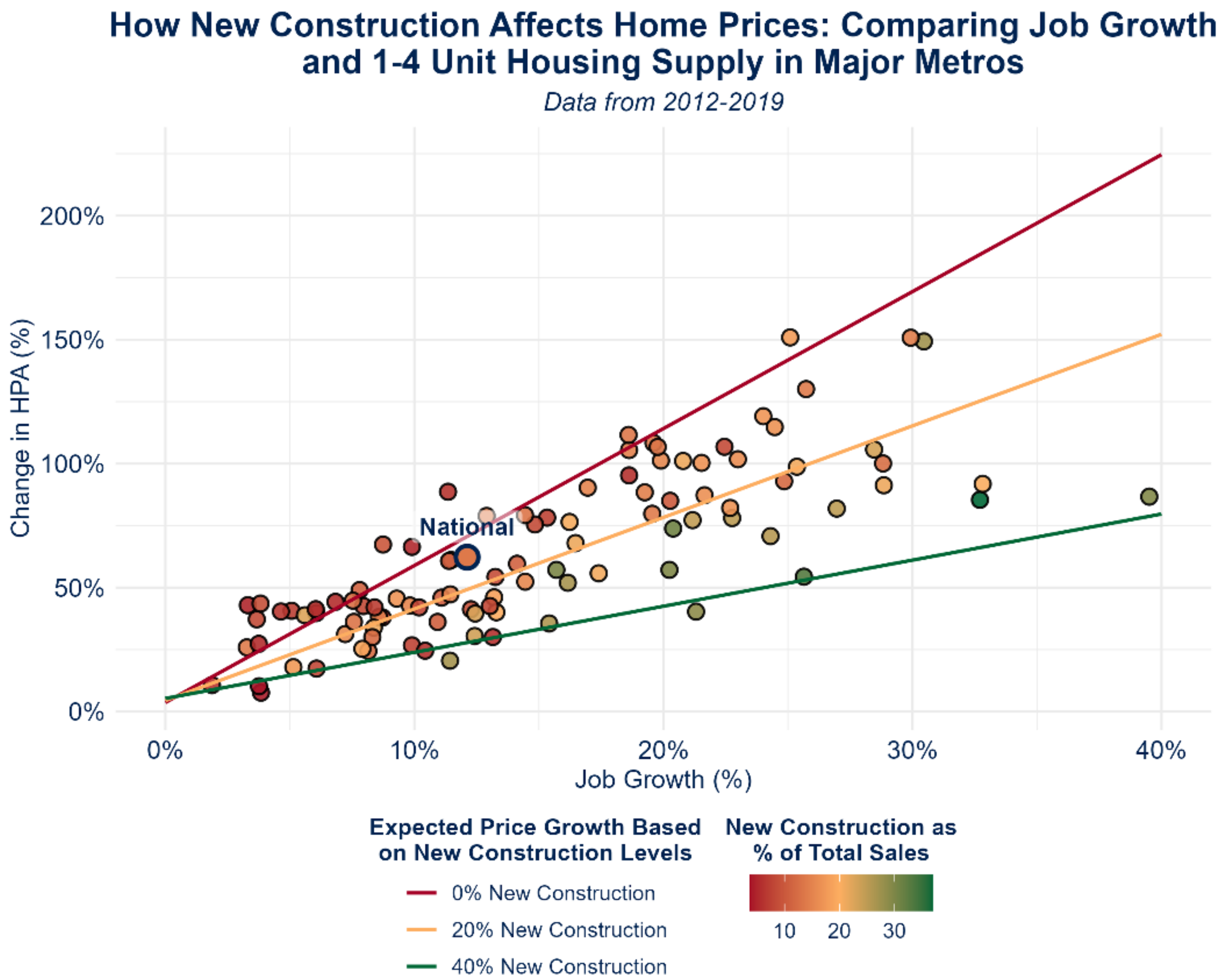
This trend is measured by home price appreciation (HPA)—the percentage increase in constant-quality home values over time. When demand for housing rises but new construction lags behind, prices appreciate faster.

Building more homes in high job-growth areas helps slow home price increases, making housing more naturally affordable. This highlights how boosting supply can relieve affordability pressures.

From 2012-2019, the nation had an **cumulative employment growth of 12%, share of new home construction of 14%, and home price appreciation of 62%.**

[6] AEI Housing Center's HEAT: Metro Supply & Demand.

[7] Although more recent data are available, we use data through 2019 to avoid the atypical market disruptions caused by the pandemic. This approach allows us to better capture the relationship between home prices, new housing supply, and job growth under more typical, pre-pandemic conditions.



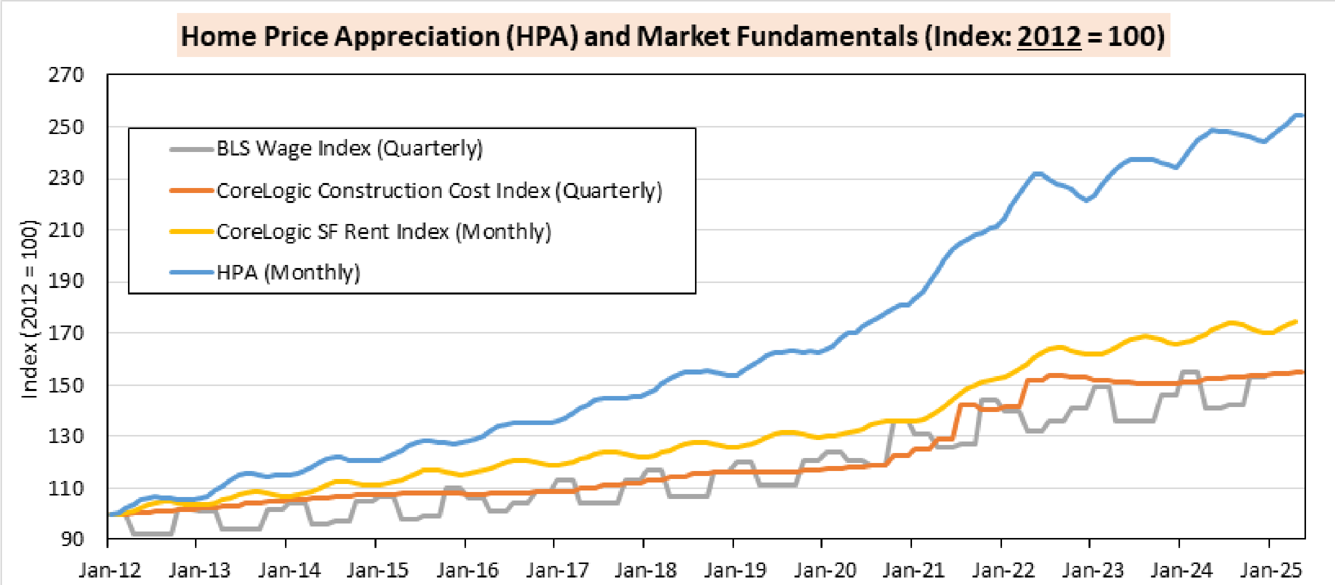
MSA	Job Growth	Home Price Growth	New Homes as % of 1-4 Unit Sales
National	12%	62%	14%

Source: Freddie Mac, Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), and AEI Housing Center, https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/supply_demand.

At the national level, home prices have become disconnected from fundamentals

- Home prices have nearly tripled since 2012, with many areas having risen much faster than incomes for decades.
- Wages, rents, and construction costs have risen much more slowly.

The growing disconnect between construction costs and home prices suggests the main force behind higher prices is regulation that makes land scarce and adds to building costs.



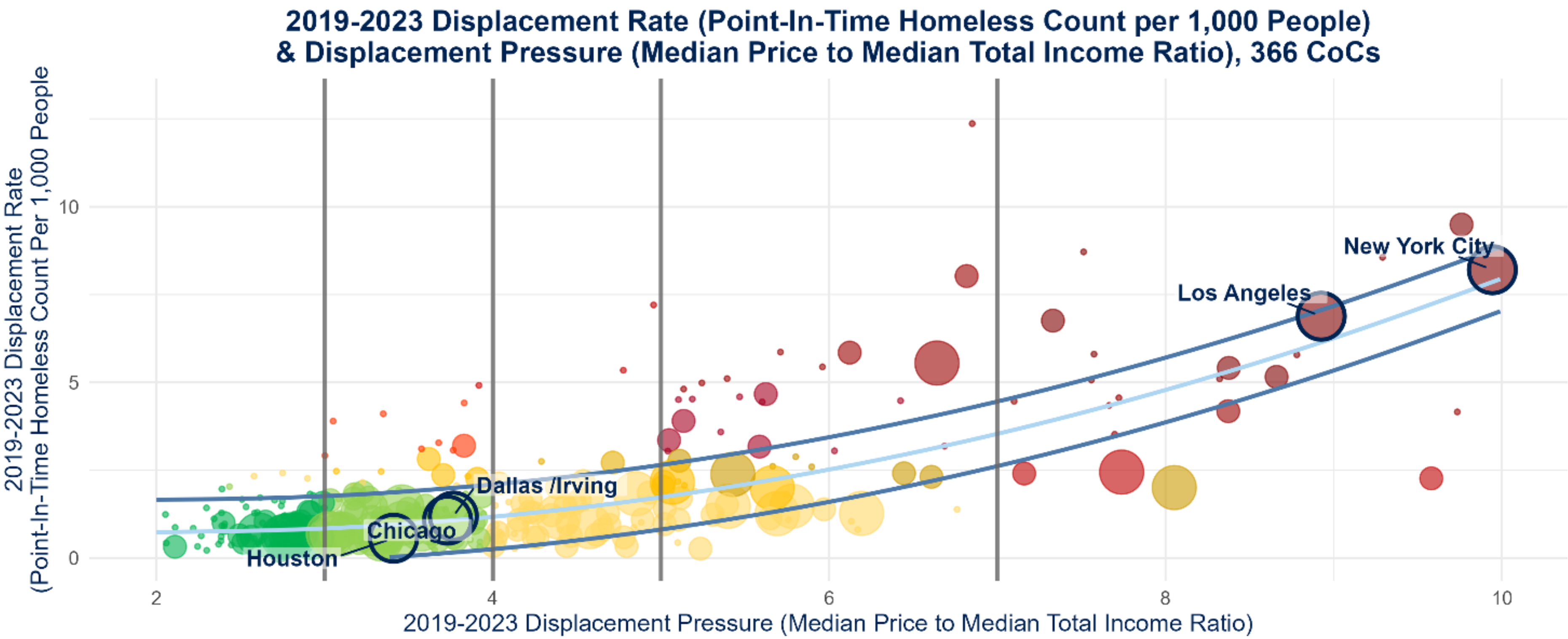
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Cotality, and AEI Housing Center, https://www.aei.org/housing.

Rising Home Prices Drive Displacement and Homelessness

When home prices rise faster than incomes, displacement pressure increases—and with it the risk of homelessness. Communities that fail to keep housing supply in line with demand experience the steepest price hikes, making even modest apartments unaffordable and pushing out those on the margins.[8]

The solution is clear: **legalize and enable the construction of more homes in the middle price range** so that more older homes "filter down" to lower-income households over time. This is important as it provides more rapid rehousing opportunities for formerly homeless individuals and families.

The chart below shows that as housing becomes less affordable—measured by the ratio of home prices to income—homelessness tends to increase sharply, especially once that ratio exceeds 5.0. Communities that build too little housing face the highest displacement rates.



Note: The chart shows the New York, Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas, and Chicago CoCs.
Source: 2023 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS), HUD Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), and AEI Housing Center, https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/gni_toolkit.

Source: 2023 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS), HUD Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), and AEI Housing Center, https://aeihousingcenter.org/good_neighbors_toolkit/.

[8] Of 54 variables tested, the ratio of median home price to median income had the greatest explanatory power. AEI Housing Center Good Neighbors Toolkit

Institutional Investors Own Less Than 1% of U.S. Single-Family Homes

Despite drawing widespread public condemnation, **institutional investors play only a minor role in most single-family housing markets.**[9] The data make this clear:

- Institutional investors—defined as those owning 100+ homes—make up just 1.0% of the national single-family housing stock.
- Nationally, mom and pop investors—defined as those owning less than 100 homes— own 12.4% of single-family housing stock. The vast majority of investor-owned homes are generally held by small, mom-and-pop landlords with portfolios of 2–9 homes.[10]
- In **96% of U.S. counties**, investor-owned homes account for less than 2% of all single-family homes.
- Just **14 metro areas**—including Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, Charlotte, and Tampa—account for half of all investor-owned homes nationwide.

Institutional investors capitalize on regulatory failures that have created a housing scarcity.

- They purchase homes in places where supply is constrained, betting on continued price and rent appreciation. Their focus is on markets with strong fundamentals, high demand, and limited new construction.
- They don't reduce housing supply; they shift homes from the owner occupied to the rental market. The total number of units remains the same.
- Most recently, low interest rates—especially during the pandemic—have fueled their activity.

The bottom line: **Fix the supply problem, and investor influence will fade.**

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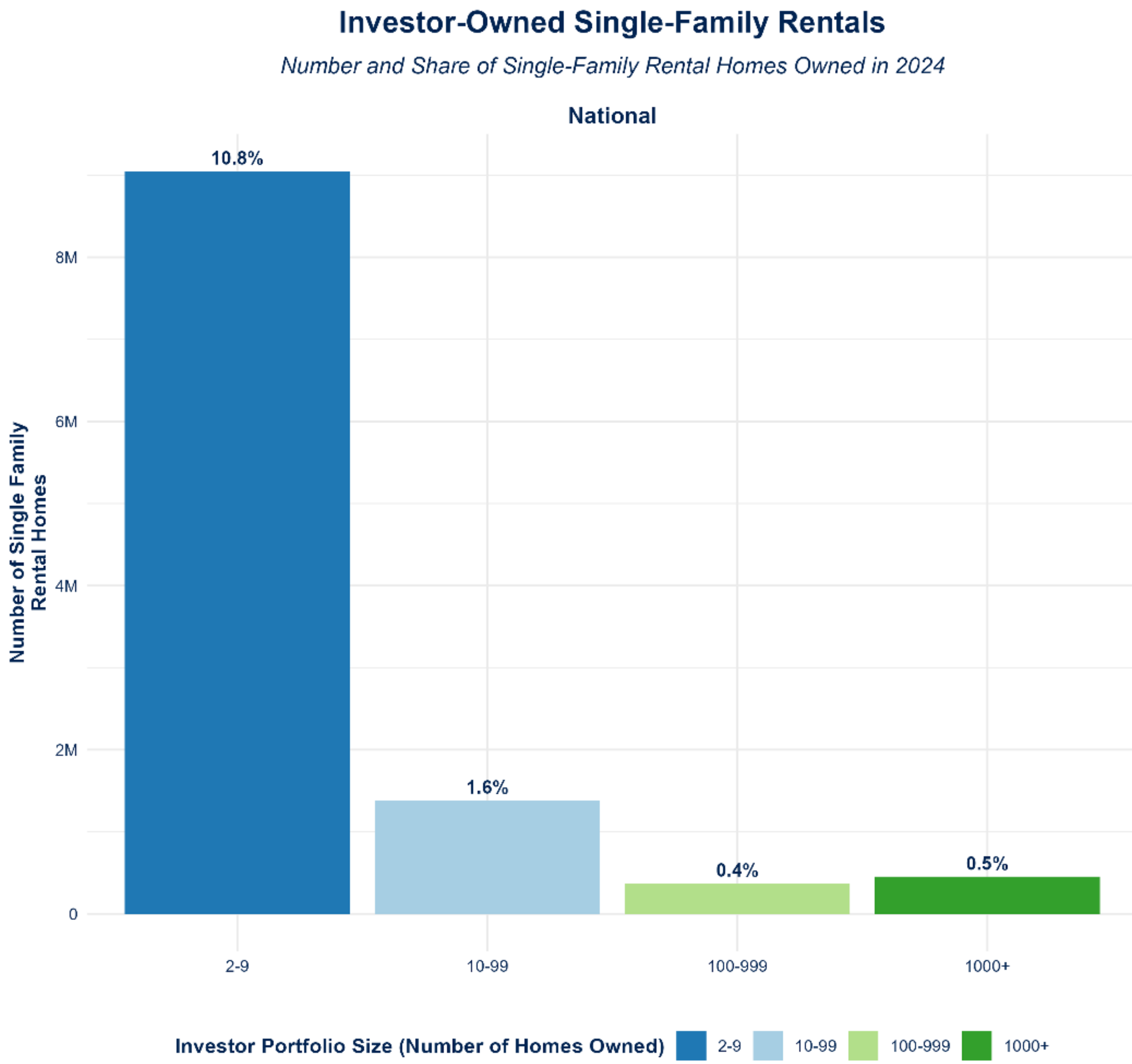
[9] AEI Housing Center's HEAT: Investor Shares

[10] We define institutional investors as entities that own more than 100 units. Their combined shares are add to 1% (0.44% + 0.54%). According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), there are about 11.2 million long-term rental units in the US in 2023, about the same number of rental units in the Parcl Lab's data. However, Parcl Labs' definition of investor-owned homes includes second homes, since they track the count of properties owned by individuals or entities. According to the ACS, second homes account for about 4.5 million homes. Since we assume that most of these second homes are owned by small-scale investors, this can reduce their ownership share from 12.4% to 7.4%.



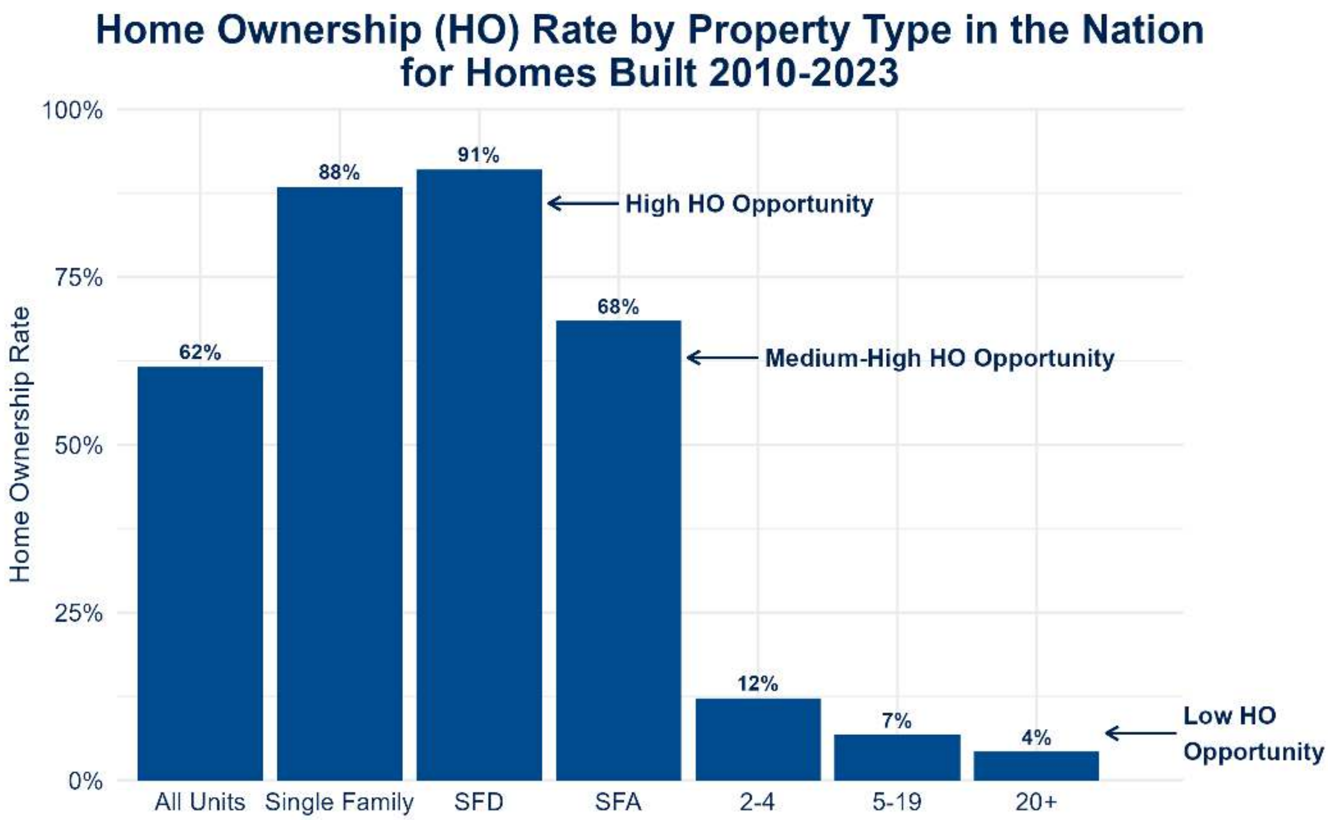
Note: Percentages represent the percent of the total single family stock held by investors in each portfolio size group in the nation. Source: 2021 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) Microdata, Parcl Labs, and AEI Housing Center, https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/investor_share.

Home Ownership and Number of Bedrooms by Property Type

The nation's home ownership rate for homes built from 2010-2023 is 62% – 4 percentage points below the national average of 66%.[11]

The bar chart below shows the national home ownership rate by property type for homes built from 2010-2023 and bedroom count by home type, for properties built from 2010-2023 and all properties.

- Single-family detached (SFD) and attached (SFA) have high or medium home ownership opportunity (91% and 68%, respectively), while multifamily (MF) properties with 20+ units have low home ownership opportunity (4.2%).



Average Number of Bedrooms by Property Type in the Nation

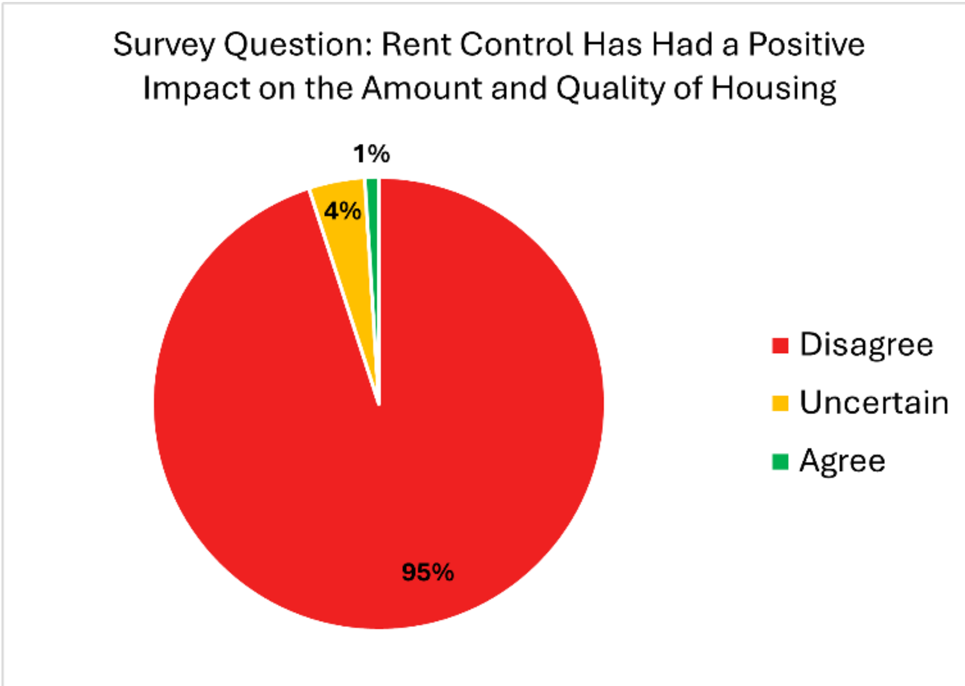
Bedroom Opportunity			High				Low
	All Units	Single Family	SFD	SFA	2-4	5-19	20+
Homes Built 2010-2023	2.8	3.5	**3.5**	**2.8**	2.1	1.8	1.4
Total Housing Stock	2.8	3.2	**3.3**	**2.6**	2.0	1.7	1.4

Note: All results are calculated using Census-created household weights. Source: 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Microdata and AEI Housing Center, https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/median_rent_value.

[11] FRED.

Rent Control: A Proven Way to Make Housing Scarce and Expensive

Economists from across the political spectrum agree that even modest rent controls would not help middle-income Americans. This consensus reflects decades of research and examples across the U.S. and around the world.



Note: The survey was conducted among 41 leading economists across the political spectrum. Question Text: Local ordinances that limit rent increases for some rental housing units, such as in New York and San Francisco, have had a positive impact over the past three decades on the amount and quality of broadly affordable rental housing in cities that have used them. Source: The Kent A. Clark Center's 2012 Expert Survey on Rent Caps in the U.S.

Rent control consistently **reduces affordable housing supply**.

- Developers halt new construction.
- Existing rental units are converted from standard units into luxury or for-sale housing.
- Mobility declines, as tenants in rent-controlled apartments stay put, worsening displacement pressures.

These dynamics often **benefit higher-income households**, who are overrepresented in rent-controlled units, while **lower-income renters face higher market rents** and fewer options.

The Economic Costs Are Significant

Studies show that rent control can:

- Reduce supply and raise overall rents: Rent control in San Francisco caused impacted landlords to reduce housing supply by 15%, likely resulting in long run rent increases
- Reduces the housing quality
- Depress employment and earnings
- Lowers property values
- Increase homelessness

The bottom line: Housing unaffordability is caused by demand outpacing supply. Increasing housing supply is the key to unlocking lasting affordability.

Full List of KISS (Keep it Short and Simple) Reforms to Consider:

The KISS principle refers to eliminating unnecessary complexity in the homebuilding process. Simplicity brings certainty, lowers costs, and makes small-scale infill and larger-scale development both feasible and attractive.

- **Enable smaller lots by reducing minimum lots sizes and simplifying lot splits**
  - *Why?* Enables cost-effective infill development by reducing time and administrative hurdles.
- **Implement pre-approved design templates**
  - *Why?* Streamlines the permitting of ADUs and small-scale units like backyard cottages, giving builders and homeowners clarity and confidence.
- **Implement permitting "shot clocks" or allow third-party reviews**
  - *Why?* Permitting delays are a hidden tax on housing.
- **Clean up the zoning code**
  - Adjust standards so they are small lot friendly, like: Floor Area Ratios (FAR), setback and height limits, demolition fees, etc.
  - *Why?* It's illogical to legalize townhomes, for example, but then cap building heights at 1.5 stories.
- **Reduce parking mandates**
  - *Why?* Parking takes up space and drives up costs. Let the market decide how much parking is needed; and if parking is really at a premium, charge for curbside parking rather than requiring costly off-street parking.
- **Lower or waive impact fees**
  - *Why?* Increased property tax revenue from more housing will offset lost upfront fees.
- **Align energy and building codes with affordability goals:**
  - Lower energy standards for small or infill projects.
  - Apply the International Residential Code (IRC) to 3–6 unit buildings (as Memphis and North Carolina have done).
  - Allow single-staircase designs in multifamily projects.
  - Allow modular or off-site construction.
  - *Why?* These changes allow more developments to pencil out without sacrificing safety or livability.
  - Reform condo defect liability laws.
  - *Why?* Reduce frivolous lawsuits and revive the construction of entry-level ownership housing.

Note: Many of these steps are included in the AEI Housing Center's Light-touch Density Model Bill.

What is Micromanagement – and Why Does It Kill Housing?

Micromanagement in housing policy refers to layering complexity, red tape, or contradictory regulations on the building process. These rules often sound reasonable in isolation but together make new housing financially or logistically impossible to deliver.

Common Micromanagement Pitfalls:

- **Spot upzoning**
  - *Why?* Delivers windfalls to a few rather than enabling broad affordability.
- **Reliance on subsidies to add new supply**
  - *Why?* Subsidy pipelines are slow, complex, costly, corruption-prone, and crowd out private development, especially by smaller builders. They are insufficient to meet demand on their own.
- **Inclusionary zoning & income limits**
  - *Why?* Shrinks profitability, inflates rents on market-rate units, narrows the eligible tenant pool, and adds compliance headaches, especially for smaller builders.
- **Special treatment for subsidized housing only**
  - *Why?* Creates an uneven playing field that discourages unsubsidized supply. Market-rate builders face all the red tape, while only subsidized projects are streamlined. To solve the shortage, reform must apply to all housing—not just subsidized.
- **Special programs to "jumpstart" housing construction**
  - *Why?* They're politically driven, complex, expensive, corruption-prone, and hard to scale—distracting from broader reforms. If real needs exist, like financing for small builders, the market will respond, once it's legal and feasible to build.
- **Permit caps**
  - *Why?* Artificially suppress supply and create political gatekeeping that deters investment.
- **Owner-occupancy mandates**
  - *Why?* Restrict the ability to build or finance ADUs and reduce flexibility for homeowners and builders.
- **Rent control**
  - *Why?* Reduces the return on investment, discourages new construction, and encourages condo conversions or disinvestment.
- **Uneven regulations**
  - *Why?* Requiring more of infill housing than single-family homes undermines housing diversity.
- **Open space and landscaping minimums**
  - *Why?* They reduce buildable area, drive up costs, and make small-scale or infill housing financially and physically unviable. They also ignore that trees regrow over time.
- **Prevailing wage requirements for small-scale projects**
  - *Why?* Applies large-project labor standards to small infill efforts, significantly raising construction costs unnecessarily.
- **Basement granny flat height limits**
  - *Why?* Blocks natural conversions of many existing basements.

- **Growth boundaries**
  - *Why?* Artificially constrain land supply and increase land costs within the boundary, undermining affordability.

- **Housing needs assessments**
  - *Why?* Top-down, bureaucratic exercises that drain resources and delay action—measuring the shortage and leaning on subsidies instead of enabling real solutions.

- **Exclusive focus on Transit Oriented Development**
  - *Why?* Limits growth to narrow corridors while leaving most land off-limits. This results in small, high-cost units dominated by rentals, and in practice relies heavily on subsidies for affordability.

Find this playbook online

To read this playbook (and over 6,000 others for states, cities, metros, and more) online, visit https://aeihousingcenter.org/playbook, or scan the QR code below.

Background and Methodology

To read the background and methodology for this playbook, visit https://www.aei.org/strong-foundations-a-playbook-for-housing-and-economic-growth-methodology/, or scan the QR code below.