

# Up to the Challenge

Asheville's infill plans support smart growth, multimodal transportation and green building



Accessory dwelling units are an important strategy to boost affordable housing in Asheville. City of Asheville photos

By **AMBER WEAVER** AND **VAIDILA SATVIKA**  
 Cities across our nation are growing and experiencing urban-planning challenges. From 2000 to 2010, Asheville's population grew more than 14 percent and is expected to continue its progression in the coming decades. Asheville's growth in population, crunch on housing supply and its inability to annex has left many scratching their heads and coming together to consider best practices for expansion. Planning for growth can be a daunting task. To address the challenge, the City of Asheville is about to embark on a Comprehensive Plan update that is expected to take up to 18 months. This a real

opportunity, a time where policy-makers, community leaders and local residents can consider best practices on the way Asheville would like to grow. The city's comprehensive planning process will reach out to our stakeholders, allowing feedback and vision from those who live and work within the area. In the meantime though, the city's Planning and Urban Design Department has responded to current land-use challenges by removing regulatory barriers and allowing more residential infill development that is compatible with neighborhoods and supportive of transit and walkability. The city's residential growth opportunities include three categories: the Downtown's Central Business

District, commercial corridors and residential districts. Downtown's Central Business District provides ample uses for multi-family housing and mixed-use developments. With well over 1,400 parcels of land totaling more than 270 acres and height limits upwards of 145 feet, there is enough developable potential in downtown to accommodate years of Asheville's growth within this area alone. Urban living provides many amenities that maintain a healthy and vibrant quality of life while producing fewer carbon emissions and supporting alternative modes of transportation. As the city designs for density it is imperative that it also plans for open space, parks and greenways while providing additional modes of access. Asheville's commercial corridors also provide significant housing opportunities. Changes to the city's code in December 2014 have effectively doubled the permitted density for projects that provide 20 percent affordable housing units. For example, the maximum residential density is 35 units per acre, but if 20 percent of the units are made affordable then the maximum permitted residential density is raised to 70 units per acre.

Asheville's commercial corridors play a role in supporting the city's affordable housing initiative, allowing for density bonuses. Affordable housing allows Asheville's workforce to grow more sustainably, enabling those that work within the city to live in the city. Asheville's residential districts are a little more challenging as

they are somewhat already defined in both character and land restrictions. In 2015, city council adopted new rules allowing for larger size Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). ADUs provide practical housing options for the elderly, empty nesters, young students and small families, and can provide additional rental income for homeowners. ADUs are smaller in size, do not require the extra expense of purchasing lots or land, can be developed by converting existing structures, and do not typically require the extension of city infrastructure for the additional housing units. Because of their smaller size, ADUs are typically more affordable, providing rental units for low- and



A seven-unit apartment home in Asheville's Montford neighborhood.

moderate-income residents. Using alternative modes of transportation to access the downtown corridor, allowing more residents to build accessory dwelling units, and preventing urban sprawl are all ways to support the city's efforts to grow denser and smarter. Amber Weaver is with Asheville's Office of Sustainability and Vaidila Satvika is with Asheville's Planning & Urban Design Department.

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