

City of Burlington

2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

Options for Increasing Housing and Employment Capacity						
Category	Option Number	Description	Reason	Code and Policy Sections	Capacity Impact	Complexity
A Housing	A-1	Change “middle housing” types from conditional use to permitted use in RD zones	<p>“Middle housing” is a term that refers to smaller scale housing such as detached dwellings, duplexes, townhomes and small apartment buildings. These housing types are currently allowed in the residential detached (RD) zones with a conditional use permit.</p> <p>Typically, conditional use permits are required for poorly defined uses with impacts that are hard to predict. Middle housing is well-defined, and the code already contains very clear standards. Requiring a CUP discourages middle housing without any corresponding public benefit.</p> <p>The recently issued North-Star Joint Statement commits all local governments in Skagit County to eliminating conditional permitting requirements for housing in</p>	<p>Changes to comp plan: 2.4.4.4, 2.5.1.2, 3.4.1.4, and 3.4.5.4</p> <p>Code changes: 17.15.050 & 17.15.080</p>	Small	Simple

			residential zones. In addition, because many of Burlington’s RA and MUC zones are located near freeways and railroads, which pose significant environmental health risks, opening up other areas of the City to middle housing might address the environmental justice and racially disparate impact requirements of the GMA (RCW 36.70A.070(2)(e)&(f)).			
	A-2	Adopt standards for cottage housing	<p>During the last comp plan update placeholder code sections were included for future cottage housing standards and the Planning Commission requested this be addressed in the future.</p> <p>Cottage housing is similar to the City’s existing “small lot” development standards but does not require that each unit be located on its own lot. This allows additional tenure options including rentals, condominiums, land trusts, etc.</p>	<p>Changes to comp plan: None</p> <p>Code changes: Chapters 17.15, 17.20, 17.25, 17.30, and 17.40</p>	Small	Complex
	A-3	Fee waivers for affordable housing	Existing comp plan policies (3.4.7.5 & 3.4.7.6) and the North Start Joint Statement call for the adoption of a fee waiver program for affordable housing projects. The Burlington City Council adopted an interim fee waiver	<p>Changes to comp plan: Revise policies 3.4.7.5 and 3.4.7.6 to clarify a program has been adopted</p> <p>Code changes:</p>	Small/Moderate	Simple

			ordinance (Ord. 1949) that requires a permanent program be developed and codified by the end of 2025.	Impact fee code in Title 15 BMC and develop new fee waiver code.		
	A-4	Develop MFTE program	<p>Washington State law allows cities to adopt a “Multifamily Tax Exemption” program. MFTE programs exempt certain types of development in designated target areas from property tax.</p> <p>Typically, MFTE programs are used to facilitate housing development that include a certain percentage of units set aside for lower income households and apply in specific areas where the city wants to incentivize redevelopment.</p>	<p>Changes to comp plan: Add policies to the Housing Element clarifying the parameters of the MFTE program. Add maps identifying target areas.</p> <p>Code changes: Add new code section(s) addressing program criteria and requirements.</p>	Unknown	Complex
	A-5	Revise ADU regulations	<p>Required by Washington State law (RCW 36.70A.680). Burlington’s current regulations address most of the new requirements; however, changes need to be made to allow an additional ADU per lot and to revise the maximum permitted floor area.</p>	<p>Changes to comp plan: None</p> <p>Code changes: Revise regulations in 17.15.090.K and 17.20.080.K. Also, RA and MUR code must be revised to either clarify that ADUs are only permitted with detached homes or eliminate detached dwellings from the list of permitted uses. State law requires that ADUs be allowed</p>	Small	Simple

				wherever detached dwellings are allowed.		
B Employment	B-1	Clarify requirements for ground floor commercial uses	<p>Currently the City requires that residential developments located in the MUC zones reserve at least 50 percent of ground floor building frontage for commercial uses. The intent was to promote active, pedestrian-oriented, shopping, and employment uses. However, the code language is vague, and developers have been trying to circumvent the requirements by using the ground-floor commercial space for things like exercise rooms or storage.</p> <p>This is significant because the City has a limited supply of arterial street frontage available for commercial development. Meeting our employment capacity obligations means ensuring that available commercial land maximizes employment capacity. Uses with few, if any, employees are not consistent with these objectives.</p>	<p>Changes to comp plan: Add clarifying language to 2.4.4.4</p> <p>Code changes: Changes to definitions and MUC zones.</p>	Moderate	Simple
	B-2	Additional restrictions on residential development in CI	Comp plan policy 2.5.5.2 states that housing “should” be prohibited in the CI zones. The code allows housing in	Changes to CI code to either prohibit housing out	Moderate	Simple

		(commercial/industrial) zones.	<p>the CI-1 zone with a conditional use permit and under strict criteria. The code provisions were intended to limit housing to sites that were small, remote, or that were otherwise unsuitable for car dealership and light industrial development. In practice developers have continued to push the boundaries of the code requirements.</p> <p>The supply of land available for car dealerships and large-scale retail are finite. These uses require large parcels with freeway frontage/visibility. Since the City has a limited supply of land adjacent to the freeway, and since expanding the UGA to encompass additional freeway frontage is infeasible, it is vital that the remaining land supply be reserved for its intended purpose.</p>			
<p>C Employment and Housing</p>	C-1	Adopt minimum density standards for MUC and RA zones	Development densities in the RA-2 and MUC-2 zones have varied widely. Higher density development uses significantly less land, maximizing the amount of land remaining for commercial and residential development.	<p>Changes to comp plan: Revise policy 2.4.1.3</p> <p>Code changes: 17.25.100 & 17.50.090</p>	Significant	Simple

	C-2	Annexation	The City's unincorporated urban growth area (UGA) contains approximately 438 acres of land. While theoretically developable, much of this land is remote, lacks adequate infrastructure, or is already divided into small parcels. These factors make redevelopment of much of the UGA difficult. However, approximately 46 acres of land comprised of large undeveloped parcels is located east of Burlington Hill and North of SR-20. This land could, potentially, be developed for industrial or light industrial uses. Any employment gains would be long-term and speculative.		Moderate	Complex
	C-3	Create additional incentives for placing parking under buildings	Placing parking under buildings significantly reduces the amount of land consumed. Parking under buildings adds to development costs which is a disincentive for more efficient development patterns. Incentives could be developed to offset the additional development costs.	Unknown	Moderate	Simple