DENVER
COMMUNITY PLANNING
& DEVELOPMENT

Project:	Unlocking Housing Choices
Subject:	Advisory Committee Meeting #3: Breakout Session Notes
Meeting Date:	Wednesday, November 12th, 2025
Meeting Time:	4:00pm - 6:00pm
Meeting Location:	Wellington Webb Building, Room 4G2 201 W Colfax Ave, Denver, CO 80202 Microsoft Teams Remote Option

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This is a summary of written notes taken during breakout sessions of the Unlocking Housing Choices Advisory Committee, during its meeting referenced above. During these sessions, the committee was asked to respond to questions found in the Advisory Committee presentation, which can be reviewed at this link. Visit www.denvergov.org/housingchoices to for a recording and other materials from this and previous meetings. Some of the individual comments below have been paraphrased from multiple similar entries from different breakout groups.

Overall Themes – the following is a summary of frequent comments and topics on which committee members appeared to generally agree:

- Many committee members said they support the proposed approaches to improve compatibility and incentivize more housing, but shared concerns about specifics and potential unintended consequences.
- Scale of residential structures matters more than style.
- More units within the same form are better than bigger single homes.
- Zoning should support affordability and diversity but cannot solve everything.
- Rules must work for both homeowners and developers.
- Flexibility across neighborhood contexts is important — one size won't fit all.

Breakout Question 1: What changes should we make to improve compatibility of infill?

Committee Member Comments

- Too many homes are being built in a "wedding cake" form; 3rd stories can be full-height and more compatible.
- FAR/bulk controls may be more impactful than bulk plane standards.
- Sliding-scale FAR could better match building size with unit count, but could be confusing or "scary" in single-unit areas.
- Compatibility concerns vary by neighborhood context; difficult to visualize outside central neighborhoods.
- Focus on **scale**, not **style**. Don't regulate architectural appearance.
- Height alone is not the biggest issue. **Lot coverage** and **setbacks** matter more for perceived bulk.

- Bulk plane is especially challenging on narrow lots; flexibility is needed.
- Consider keeping front façade / porch form for neighborhood character.
- Allow more units within the same building form rather than larger single units.
- 3 stories acceptable in urban contexts; some say acceptable everywhere.
- Concern about privacy/daylight loss in rear; rear bulk needs attention.
- Don't replace one overly prescriptive set of standards with another.

Summary and key themes:

Compatibility is best addressed through scale controls (FAR, lot coverage, bulk distribution) rather than style or height limits. The committee favors allowing more units within a house-scaled form, discouraging oversized single-unit homes, and ensuring front-facing character without dictating architectural design. Standards need to be flexible across different neighborhood contexts, with careful attention to rear bulk impacts and usability on narrow lots.

Breakout Question 2: Should we establish a floor area limitation and an FAR sliding scale?

Committee Member Comments:

- Strong interest in sliding-scale FAR
- FAR could be more impactful than bulk plane.
- Could encourage more/smaller/attainable units without strict "small unit" incentive.
- Concern that it might produce very large buildings in some areas or encourage lot aggregation.
- Mixed views on whether FAR should vary by neighborhood; some support context-sensitive approach.
- FAR historically was not used in low-density districts; reintroducing it raises questions.
- Worry that increasing FAR allowance will lead to fee-payment instead of onsite affordability.
- A flat max GFA could work instead of FAR.
- FAR may need modification for small lots or neighborhoods without alleys.

Summary and key themes:

There is broad openness to an FAR sliding scale tied to the number of units because it aligns building size with housing outcomes to incentivize mor housing options. However, the committee recognizes trade-offs and asks for careful calibration to avoid oversized structures, lot aggregation, or inconsistent results across neighborhoods. A sliding-scale approach is promising but requires data testing by context and lot size.

Breakout Question 3: What counts as "existing"?

Committee Member Comments:

- Confusion around "existing structure" requirement.
- Many ask why existing structures need to be preserved at all.
- Preserving existing buildings can be more expensive than redevelopment and harder to convert to multiple units.
- If preservation is desired, The incentives and goals should be clear
- Historic preservation already exists for buildings worth saving.
- Flexibility is needed — additions in the back are the easiest approach.
- Practical challenges: plumbing, structural walls, alley access.

Summary and key themes:

The committee wants clarity on what "existing" means and why preservation would be required. If the goal is affordability, preservation can sometimes help but is often more expensive and impractical. If the goal is neighborhood character, retention of the front façade may be sufficient. Overall, preservation of the existing structure may be helpful in enabling new housing options in limited circumstances, but more likely when a new structure is built in addition to the existing home.

Breakout Question 4: Should affordability requirements vary by geography?

Committee Member Comments:

- Concern about concentrating affordability only in West Denver and lower-cost neighborhoods.
- High-opportunity / higher-cost neighborhoods need affordability too.
- Barriers to inclusion in high-cost areas include land cost.
- Same rules citywide are simple and fair — but may not provide equity.
- Affordable units should support a mix of incomes, not be limited to small studios.
- AMI requirements need to reflect multiple income levels; 60% and below are the hardest to reach.
- City incentives must be strong enough to make on-site affordability more attractive than fee-in-lieu payments.
- Want to avoid fee-payment becoming the default.
- Some suggest tax incentives to complement zoning incentives.

Summary and key themes:

The committee supports placing affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods — not just low-income areas. While consistent citywide standards would be easier, many members believe geographic variation may be necessary to advance equity and avoid concentration of lower income households. Any affordability mandate must include strong incentives to ensure affordable units are actually built on-site rather than replaced by fee payments.

Breakout Question 5: How should we define "affordable"?

Committee Member Comments:

- Need a shared set of definitions (BP, DOLA, HOST, etc.).
- Affordability is not just AMI — housing + transportation + services + healthcare matter.
- Units sell for what the market will bear regardless of construction costs.
- Concerns about incentivizing too many very small units; families need options.
- AMI mixed with unit size may offer better affordability outcomes.
- Some members believe AMI targets should focus below 60%; others suggest 80–120% can improve attainability through density.
- Doubts about whether small-scale infill can deliver deep affordability without subsidy.

Summary and key themes:

"Affordable" needs a clear shared definition for regulatory purposes, but the committee stresses that affordability is more than square footage or AMI alone. Regulations should avoid over-incentivizing micro-units and ensure options for families and a range of incomes. Deep affordability will require subsidy, but zoning can support attainable pricing through more units at modest sizes. The housing enabled by this project will be focused on middle income households and the deepest levels of affordability will still be reached in projects that are larger than those within the scope of this project.

Breakout Question 6: Should there be an incentive for small homes?

Committee Member Comments:

- Some believe small-unit incentives could promote attainability.
- Others favor a FAR sliding scale instead of a direct small-unit incentive.
- Concern that developers may produce many small high-priced units rather than affordability.
- Incentives must be significant enough to meaningfully shift outcomes.
- Incentives should **support family-sized units and income diversity.**
- Questions about unit-count caps — some prefer no cap; regulate form and let units follow.

- Desire for homeowner-friendly pathways to add units and stay in place.

Summary and key themes:

The committee did not appear to be aligned on small-unit incentives. Some support incentives for smaller homes, but there is stronger enthusiasm for using FAR/size limits to get multiple moderate-sized units instead of one large house. If small-unit incentives are used, they must be paired with protections for family-sized units and income diversity.