

The era of single-family homes has ended. We need density in all parts of Sacramento

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The city of Sacramento is embarking on an update to its general plan, which will rewrite the blueprint for the city's growth through 2040. Sacramento has been a leader in progressive urban planning. But like many cities, the vast majority of land is zoned for single-family homes, which prohibits anything but a detached single-family house from being built.

If Sacramento is serious about inclusive growth, affordability and climate change, it's time the city opens up its most exclusive neighborhoods to more housing options.

We know there is a link between where a person lives and their probability to improve their station in life. Neighborhoods like East Sacramento and Land Park are considered high opportunity because they have great schools, pristine parks, easy access to employment and low pollution levels.

Unfortunately, past general plans have essentially guaranteed these neighborhoods are out of reach for low-income and minority communities. The ugly, racist origins of zoning explicitly prohibited non-whites from purchasing property in some neighborhoods. Even after explicitly-racial zoning was made illegal in 1917, public lending institutions refused to back loans to non-whites in exclusive neighborhoods through redlining.

While some of the more overtly exclusionary restrictions are gone, the same neighborhoods remain exclusive today through single-family zoning, which ensures that you cannot live in them unless you can afford to purchase a \$600,000, or more, house. This means that high-opportunity, single-family neighborhoods like Land Park and East Sacramento remain concentrations of affluence, perpetuating racial and class inequality.

We need more housing choices in these areas, and that starts with the city's general plan allowing different kinds of homes to be built. Large single-family houses are relics from a time when the nuclear family was the most common household. By 2025, over three quarters of households will not have kids and the most common household will be individuals living alone.

We have plenty of single-family housing. We need to be building more homes to reflect changing demographics and preferences. This means more rentable, affordable housing structures like fourplexes, bungalow courts and cottage apartments in high opportunity neighborhoods. There is no defensible reason why a humble fourplex shouldn't be legal to build anywhere we have deemed appropriate for any kind of housing.

Prohibiting more affordable housing types in high-opportunity areas also forces development to historically lower-income neighborhoods, which can contribute to displacement pressures, and thus gentrification. Relaxing zoning to allow for different types of housing everywhere will relieve some of this pressure by allowing growth to occur in higher opportunity neighborhoods, where neighbors are more affluent and face a lower displacement risk.

Sacramento is fortunate to be the economic center of a growing region, and growing regions have demand for new housing. Sacramento can choose to be a leader that accommodates growth in an inclusive way, or it can maintain exclusionary policies that push development to the exurban fringe.

When neighborhoods are more dense and human-scale, residents end up driving less for their everyday needs. This reduces automobile emissions, the Sacramento region's main greenhouse gas source. For a cautionary tale, look no further than the Bay Area, with its astronomical housing costs forcing thousands into hellacious 60-mile commutes from the San Joaquin Valley.

The city of Sacramento is seeing some new housing being built in midtown and downtown, but very little in its inner ring, high opportunity suburbs thanks to exclusionary, single-family zoning. We encourage the city's 2040 General Plan to incorporate policies and guidelines that accommodate smart, equitable growth in all neighborhoods.

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