



Medium Density for Western Australia

A proposed new Medium Density Residential Housing Code has been released for public comment.

The WA Government has released a new Medium Density Housing Code to encourage better designed housing and more choice to match the changing needs and expectations of our community. The policy forms part of the WA Government's initiative to reform the planning system and ensure good design is at the centre of all development.

This draft policy aims to challenge traditional thinking, to prioritise design excellence, improve liveability and deliver better social and environmental outcomes.

More housing diversity

When it comes to housing development, Western Australia is commonly considered to have traditional suburban blocks and high density apartments, with very little diversity of housing in between. In fact, Perth has always had medium density housing, from the quaint workers' cottages through Subiaco and Fremantle, to the two-up, two-down apartment developments alongside the stately homes of Floreat and Mount Lawley.

What we have not had is a unified, policy-driven definition of exactly what 'medium density' is, or many built examples of medium density done well.

Demand drivers

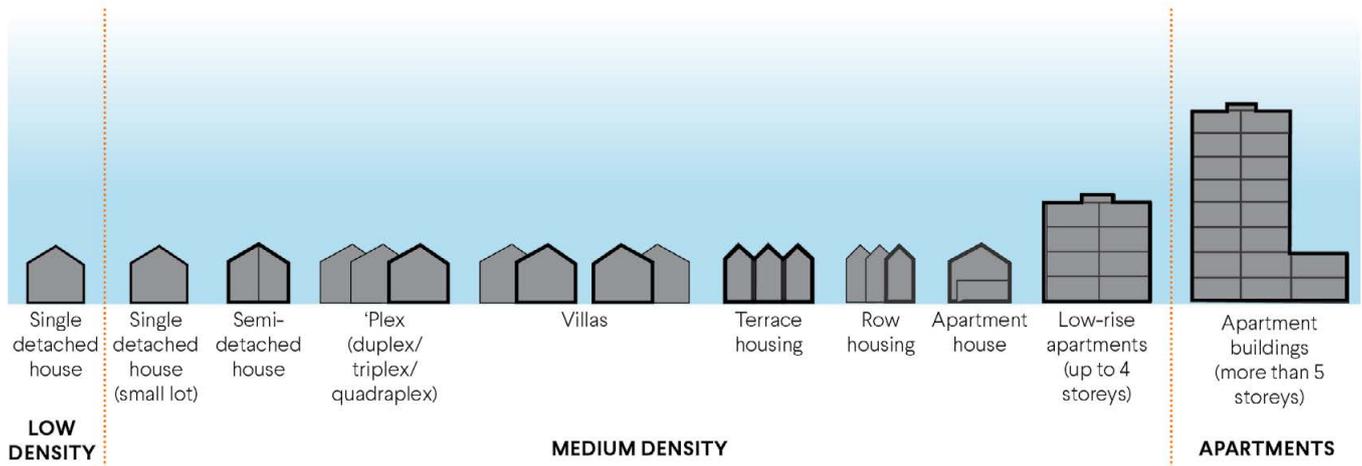
WA needs medium density development and we need to do it better because:

1. **Lifestyles are changing.** People want more choice in homes so they don't have to move out of their neighbourhood as their needs change. Young people also want to be able to afford to buy or rent in suburbs near family, jobs and education. Singles and blended families need flexible accommodation. And a diverse mix of people adds richness to our communities.
2. **Another 1.5 million people are expected to move to Perth and Peel by 2050.** These families don't just need houses, they need easy access to schools, shops, hospitals, transport and jobs.
3. **Good design makes a difference.** Industry and community have both said enough is enough when it comes to traditional infill, with its long driveways, hot rooftops, more cars and few trees. They are asking for new policies that will drive more innovative and thoughtful design.

What's new?

The new Medium Density Housing Code is built into the Residential Design Codes – or R-Codes. This draft new policy contains development controls for single and grouped dwellings, in areas coded R30 and above, and multiple dwellings coded R30-R60. This ranges from single detached or semi-detached houses on small lots, to terraces, villas, apartment houses and low-rise apartment buildings up to four storeys.

Figure 1: Medium density housing types



The cost of poor design

Over the past 30 years, as land values have soared, one form of medium density has dominated Perth. Villa-style infill housing, with three or more units squeezed onto a single suburban block, has proliferated – often with little concern for neighbours, and so tightly packed it has changed entire streets and suburbs.

This outdated approach costs WA an estimated \$117 million a year because of the inefficient way it handles issues like energy, stormwater, heat and the urban tree canopy. Each dwelling costs the community an estimated \$29,000, in social and environmental impacts, over its 20-year life.¹

“Western Australia’s business-as-usual approach to medium density development is not sustainable.”

Rita Saffioti, Minister for Planning

Design priorities

Good design is not about appearance or personal taste but about using the latest insights from architecture, urban planning and related research to achieve more sustainable, functional and cost-efficient development.

The new Medium Density Housing Code will improve the quality and consistency of housing in WA and promote a wider range of building types that are more in keeping with their site, the streetscape and neighbourhood around them. The policy emphasises:

- More trees and gardens
- Better solar access and ventilation
- Flexible, functional living spaces
- Safe, attractive streetscapes
- More space for people and less cars

¹ Apartment Design Policy Economic Evaluation, SGS Economics & Planning, 2018. www.dplh.wa.gov.au/getmedia/bd90c8e7-7811-4df0-a374-4a97e614b6bf/DWA-SGS-ADP-Economic-Evaluation-and-Secret-Agent-Report

Four key elements

1. Land

Minimum and average site area requirements are provided in the policy which determine the potential number of dwellings that a development can achieve under the applicable R-Code for that site.

Site area provisions also encourage a diversity of different housing types, including providing incentives for aged and dependent persons' accommodation and small dwellings. The provisions also include yield incentives for development that has street frontage (rather than dwellings in backyards) and those sites that are particularly suited to medium density, including larger sites, corner locations or laneway access.

2. The garden

Clear guidelines for the size and location of gardens recognise the importance of greenspace, sunlight and ventilation to physical and mental health, ensuring residents have access to a good outdoor space for recreation and socialising. The policy includes:

- Minimum garden sizes
- Outdoor spaces linked to main living areas
- Space for trees and deep soil areas
- Communal and private open space
- Climate and passive solar orientation

3. Buildings

The policy incentivises diverse building types, orientated for natural light, ventilation and an attractive outlook, with multi-purpose living spaces focused around 'one good room'. The policy includes:

- Flexible spaces for changing resident needs
- Minimum dwelling and room sizes
- Adaptable housing for people of all abilities
- Car parking that does not dominate
- Provision for ancillary buildings
- Site concessions to encourage one and two-bedroom dwellings

4. Neighbourliness

Well-designed homes that sit well in the streetscape, that encourage social interaction and that provide community amenity, make it easier for people to live closer together. The policy includes:

- Context-sensitive design standards for building height and boundary setbacks
- Site cover controls to preserve open air between buildings
- Consistent street setbacks with space for trees
- Protections for visual privacy and overshadowing
- Dwellings that face the street with reduced garage dominance
- More flexibility in front fencing



Industry and community input

Extensive testing, and consultation with local governments, planning and design experts and the property sector, have helped shape the draft policy to ensure it balances the need for better quality homes with construction costs.

The policy is now ready for public review. At the close of the consultation period, all submissions will be reviewed to help refine the policy.

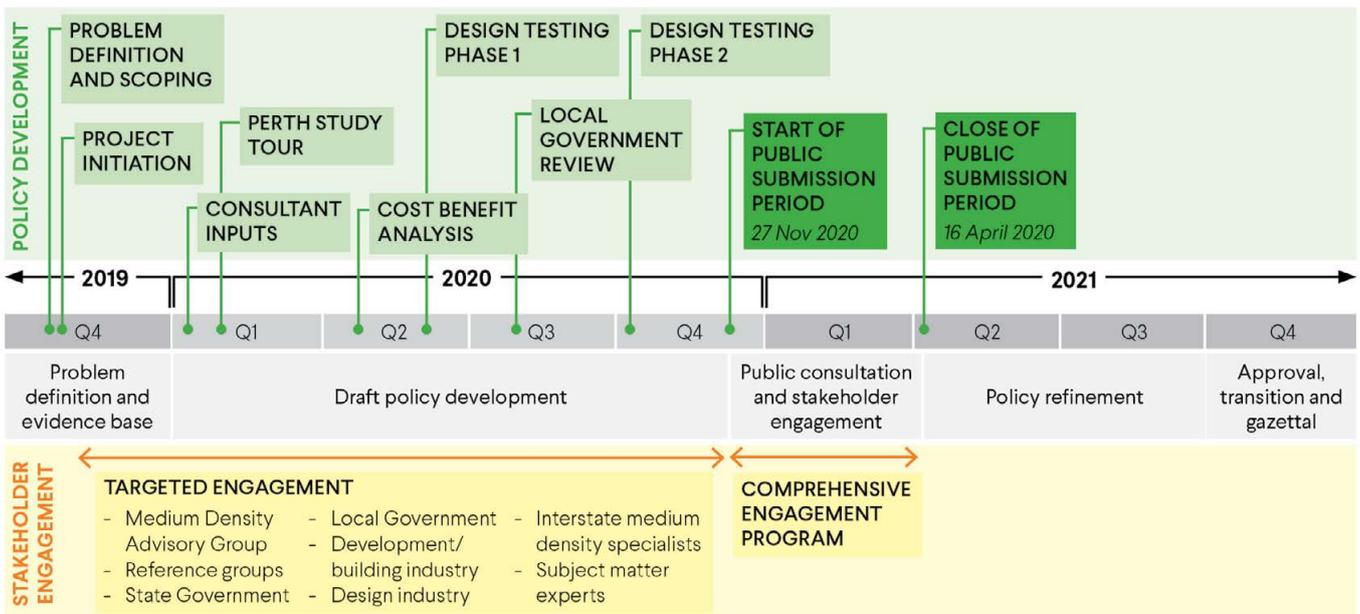
The policy is expected to be finalised and operational by late 2021.

Related publications

The Medium Density Housing Code will form part of State Planning Policy 7.3 Residential Design Codes, Volume 1 (SPP 7.3). The Draft SPP 7.3, together with the below supporting documents, can be downloaded from <https://dplh.wa.gov.au/DesignWA>

- **Medium Density Explanatory Guidelines** – contains guidance to help users understand and apply the principles and comply with the new policy.
- **Medium Density Housing Diversity Guide** – contains information on a range of residential building types with project sheets describing design and planning principles, site suitability, and example design templates for site plans, floorplans and elevation treatments.

Figure 2: Policy development and engagement process



Join the conversation

The future of medium density development is an important conversation for everyone living in Western Australia because it sets up a shared vision for how we are going to address our need for more homes and embrace our growing population. It defines the kind of homes we want to live in and the neighbourhoods we want to be part of. It sets expectations about the importance of thoughtful, considered and sustainable design in meeting our future needs. Please join the conversation and have your say.

Consultation is open until 16 April 2021

Submit your views online at <https://consultation.dplh.wa.gov.au>

Or in writing to:

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