Public Engagement Summary* Report: Anti-Displacement and Affordable Housing (ADAH) Project Workshop

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1. Executive Summary

This report summarizes public feedback from an in-person workshop on the Anti-Displacement and Affordable Housing (ADAH) Project, hosted by the City of Asheville on May 20, 2026. The event brought together a variety of key stakeholders representing neighborhood leaders, policy advocates and real estate developers. Participants included representatives from: Affordable Housing Advisory Committee, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, Asheville for All, Builders Association of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Buncombe Affordable Housing Network, Coalition of Asheville Neighborhoods, East End/Valley Street Neighborhood Association, East/West Asheville Neighborhood Association, Habitat for Humanity, Haw Creek Community Association, Just Economics, Land of the Sky Association of Realtors, Legacy Neighborhoods Coalition, Mountain Housing Opportunities, MountainTrue, Planning and Zoning Commission, PODER Emma and Rhododendron Creek Community Association. Facilitated across four roundtable discussions, the workshop served as a forum for dialogue on two key policy areas: three proposed interim housing amendments and the creation of a public-facing Displacement Risk Assessment Tool.

The discussions showed areas of general agreement as well as friction on certain policy issues. Most participants supported allowing duplexes by-right, viewing this change as a low-impact way to increase density gradually and create local wealth. The proposal to eliminate required parking minimums sparked debate, highlighting tensions between housing infill/density goals and neighborhood concerns around quality of life. For the Displacement Risk Assessment Tool, participants stressed the need for clear guidelines, neighborhood-specific measurements and the inclusion of environmental resilience factors following recent extreme weather events. Despite areas of friction, the resulting synthesis identifies shared priorities among stakeholders and outlines a path toward policy solutions that could help to reconcile citywide density goals with local neighborhood stabilization.

Data Limitations Note: *The information in this summary comes entirely from a voluntary workshop of public advocates and neighborhood representatives. The data does not include randomized demographic or community census information. Therefore, this text reflects the specific views and policy priorities of the stakeholders who attended, not a statistically representative sample of the broader community.*

** Summary generated by AI and audited by staff.*

2. Detailed Analysis: Proposed Interim Housing Amendments

A. Allowing Duplexes By-Right in All Residential and Most Mixed-use Zoning Districts

Allowing duplexes by-right in all zoning districts was the proposal that received the most support across the four groups. Supporters said this approach increases housing supply through small-scale development, offers attainable homeownership and allows current residents to remain in their communities. However, some conditions were noted. Many participants emphasized the need to maintain strict architectural compatibility and design within established neighborhoods to prevent oversized buildings/preserve neighborhood character. In addition, participants voiced concern that by-right development removes public notice and community oversight, which could increase developer interest without ensuring affordability for local residents.

B. Elimination of Parking Minimums

Eliminating parking minimums was the most debated topic of the workshop. Opponents stated that Asheville's public transit and pedestrian infrastructure is insufficient in many areas to support developments without vehicle parking. Participants representing neighborhoods near commercial or high-density zones described existing issues where commercial, stadium and event traffic overflows onto residential streets and private driveways, raising concerns about emergency vehicle access and resident safety. In addition, some advocates warned of unintended tenant impacts, noting that low-income families often own multiple vehicles for their economic needs, and a lack of on-site spaces could lead to landlord-imposed vehicle caps, fines or evictions. Conversely, a group of development, business and environmental representatives supported the proposed amendment, arguing that parking requirements increase construction costs, limit site design and prevent affordable development on difficult urban lots.

C. Increasing the Allowable Size of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

The concept of increasing the allowable size of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) was tentatively supported as a useful tool for wealth building, retirement income and housing flexibility. However, concerns about implementation were raised. Some stakeholders argued the proposed size increase is too limited, noting that other regional standards (specifically Hendersonville's) are more practical. Concerns were raised about the potential for expanded ADUs to be converted into short-term vacation rentals (STVRs), which participants cautioned could reduce the long-term rental supply and harm neighborhoods. From an environmental perspective, participants questioned allowing large, 1,200-square-foot units on small lots without

limits on environmental surface coverage or stormwater permits, warning this could increase neighborhood runoff and tree canopy loss. Finally, participants noted confusion over the definitions distinguishing a large ADU from a duplex, and suggesting simplified legal definitions could better help community understanding as the City engages on this topic.

3. Conflicting Priorities and Policy Trade-Offs

The discussions revealed clear trade-offs between goals for citywide density and neighborhood preservation efforts. The table below outlines the core viewpoints and community concerns discussed:

Policy Topic	Pro-Density & Market Flexibility Input	Neighborhood Stabilization & Infrastructure Input
Parking Minimums Elimination	Reduces direct building costs, unlocks constrained or steep parcels and allows builders to right-size parking based on actual site conditions.	Worsens street congestion, impacts neighborhood safety, disrupts commercial traffic and may lead to tenant issues due to lack of parking.
Short-Term Rentals (STRs / Airbnbs)	An economic tool for property owners to offset rising property taxes and generate household wealth.	Concentrates in gentrifying areas, reduces long-term rental housing supply and erodes neighborhood character.
By-Right Zoning Frameworks – Duplexes and Townhomes	Creates predictability for affordable housing developers and small-scale builders.	Undermines established neighborhood plans, reduces community oversight and without opportunities for neighborhoods and developers to connect can present conflict during public hearings.

4. Displacement Risk Assessment Tool: Community Input

and Mitigation Strategies

A. Ideal Tool Outcomes and Predictive Capability

Participants shared that the Displacement Risk Assessment Tool could provide a transparent, data-driven framework that sets clear expectations for developers, city planners and neighborhood residents. Participants emphasized that the tool should provide measurable data that allows the City to pause development review, adjust local zoning or enact specific policy changes in neighborhoods facing high displacement pressure. Instead of just being a mapping index, stakeholders shared that the tool should set clear requirements to protect vulnerable community members from displacement before construction begins.

B. Core Indicators of Displacement Risk

When identifying observable real-time indicators of displacement within local neighborhoods, participants highlighted several factors:

- Rapid inflation of county and municipal property tax assessments that outpace the fixed incomes of long-term legacy homeowners.
- Anecdotal and visible expansion of high-cost short-term vacation rentals displacing long-term tenants in urban neighborhoods.
- Outside real estate speculators rapidly outbidding local residents to acquire available parcels and vacant lots before community groups are notified.
- The decline of cultural identity, neighborhood support and minority populations within historically working-class neighborhoods.

C. Proposed Mitigation Strategies

To address displacement risks, workshop attendees proposed several policy ideas:

- **Home Repair & Compliance Relief:** Access to flexible, accessible home repair grants without strict requirements, ensuring older or low-income property owners can fix code violations while staying in their homes.
- **Property Tax Deferrals:** Implementing property tax deferments and local landlord tax incentives to reward property owners who keep rents affordable.
- **Homeowner & Small Builder Financing:** Offering zero- or low-interest loans, backed by local housing bonds, for individual homeowners and small local builders to construct

affordable housing.

D. Application of the Tool to Non-Vulnerable Neighborhoods

There was broad agreement that the displacement tool must be used citywide, including in affluent neighborhoods that are not vulnerable to displacement. Participants argued that wealthier areas historically have the political and financial resources to oppose multi-family or affordable housing developments, which unintentionally shifts growth pressure to more vulnerable neighborhoods. Applying the tool to non-vulnerable areas allows the market to redirect development into these stable neighborhoods. This acts as a relief mechanism that protects vulnerable areas from displacement while promoting density across the city.

5. Other Key Policy Ideas

Several new policy proposals came from individual workshop participants. While these concepts did not represent a majority consensus, they offer specific solutions for policymakers to consider:

- **Climate Resilience and Environmental Risk Integration:** Participants recommended expanding the Displacement Risk Assessment Tool beyond socio-economic data to include environmental metrics such as tree canopy loss, landslide tracking and stormwater runoff capacity. Drawing from recent severe weather events like TS Helene, advocates stressed that environmental factors and climate vulnerability are immediate causes of community displacement that require preventative environmental mapping.



- **Sliding Scale Floor Area Ratios (FAR):** To encourage smaller, more affordable housing, a participant suggested adopting a sliding scale for Floor Area Ratio, similar to the model in Portland, Oregon. This approach would favor smaller multi-unit configurations over large, single-family homes.
- **Localized Volunteer Capital:** A participant suggested that the City fund and expand public-private volunteer networks that match vulnerable homeowners with skilled local

tradespeople and youth summer employment programs. This would help perform essential home maintenance and bypass strict city loan requirements.

- **Legal Right of First Refusal for Land Trusts:** To counter fast, speculative land purchases by outside investors, a participant suggested a policy to give Community Land Trusts (CLTs) or neighborhood groups the legal right of first refusal on residential land and vacant lots.
- **Context-Sensitive Neighborhood Affordability Standards:** Participants argued that defining project affordability using standard Area Median Income (AMI) for the entire city (e.g., 80% AMI) does not reflect the local economic reality in vulnerable areas, where 80% AMI is still unaffordable for most residents. Stakeholders recommended that the Displacement Risk Assessment Tool use neighborhood-specific household income averages instead of broad citywide criteria to assess project affordability.

6. Potential Synergies - from Opposition to Synthesis

The following synthesis identifies prevailing community narratives regarding housing affordability and neighborhood preservation that initially appear in direct opposition. By facilitating a collaborative dialogue between neighborhood leaders, real estate developers, and policy advocates, the workshop uncovered shared priorities and potential policy synergies, which are detailed in the analysis below.

1. The Predictability Paradox: "By-Right" Streamlining vs. Community-Vetted Planning

- **The Seeming Opposition:** Housing developers and market-rate advocates often champion citywide "by-right" zoning to eliminate discretionary reviews, which they argue create unnecessary financial risk and project delays. Conversely, neighborhood associations often prioritize the protection of neighborhood-specific plans and early community engagement to maintain local oversight.
- **The Hidden Synergy:** Both groups fundamentally seek to minimize uncertainty and late-stage friction. Builders want to avoid having capital stalled in projects that face rejection after significant investment, while residents want to prevent being blindsided by developments that might disregard their neighborhood’s historic context and character.

2. The Mobility Nexus: Eliminating Parking Minimums vs. Protecting Car-Dependent Tenants

- **The Seeming Opposition:** Density supporters state that parking mandates act as a barrier to affordable construction by inflating development costs. Conversely, neighborhood representatives often argue that removing these mandates could harm low-income families who rely on vehicles to reach regional employment centers underserved by transit.
- **The Hidden Synergy:** Both perspectives are centered on reducing the economic burdens on vulnerable residents. Whether the focus is on lowering the base cost of housing or protecting a household's primary means of transportation, there is an implicit agreement that forcing a choice between housing and mobility on a single lot represents a failure of the current system.

3. The Tenure Stabilization Loop: Individual Income Generation vs. Long-Term Rental Supply

- **The Seeming Opposition:** Supporters of short-term rentals argue they provide vital income for fixed-income and moderate-income homeowners facing rising taxes. However, advocates argue that these units deplete the long-term rental market and exacerbate the displacement of local workers by driving up costs and reducing rental stock.
- **The Hidden Synergy:** Both sides aim to prevent the displacement of local residents due to economic pressure. While homeowners use rentals to maintain ownership of their property, tenant advocates seek to protect renters from similar displacement risks caused by a lack of housing supply.

7. The Work Continues - Next Steps

The ADAH Project will continue to advance the goal to ***develop community-driven policies, tools and processes*** that strategically pair necessary ***housing production*** with clear, concrete ***anti-displacement protections*** for the most at-risk neighborhoods. Updates on the project, including future opportunities for public involvement will be announced via the project page. Subscribe to the email list if you would like to receive updates on this work.