

New city housing plan aims to solve capacity crisis

City council initiative hopes to incentivize, create affordable units

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The College Station City Council approved a new housing plan last month aimed at addressing the city's ever-increasing population and housing demand — especially among college students.

The Housing Action Plan has two goals: creating more diverse housing units and incentivizing the production and preservation of affordable housing units in the Bryan-College Station area.

David Browne, a city community development analyst and staff liaison for the Housing Action Plan Housing Committee, said the idea stems from a 10-year-long plan aimed at improving the Bryan-College Station area.

"In that comprehensive plan, there are four separate action items, so this housing action plan is in essence an attempt to flesh out those action items and say, 'Here are we going to do that,'" Browne said.

Browne said the plan was under development while housing became a difficult market in the area. The report said that in 2023, the median sales price for a house not newly constructed was \$385,000 — a "price that is out of reach for most middle-income families." Roughly 18% of renters and 18% of homeowners spent more than 30% of their monthly income on housing costs.

"To put this in a house, most would just have an automobile, and incomes have not kept up," Browne said. "Now we need to think through and coordinate efforts to address this issue."

Environmental studies senior Luke Morrison, an off-campus senior and chairman of the Finance Committee for Texas A&M's Student Senate, said housing at College Station is complex, frustrating and — at times — discriminatory.

While the city's new initiative

seeks to address various rent categories of the housing crisis, Morrison said he biggest concern is with city ordinances, specifically the "roomer-than-four" ordinance making it a criminal violation if more than four unrelated individuals live in a single-family home.

"I think students, because of roomer-than-four and just the constraints on the housing supply in college and, more importantly, the affordable housing supply, struggle to find affordable housing that meets their needs," he said.

The issue has fired public ire in the past, especially within the Student Government Association. Student senators claim that ending the rule would allow more students to live in apartments, alleviating the city's housing crisis. City government members claim the ordinance stops hoards of large groups of students from disrupting local residents.

The city had multiple areas of feedback when constructing the new initiative, Browne said, such as in-person and online surveys for students and community members.

"I'll just say that there was a lot of good, constructive dialogue," Browne said. "Our surveys had lots of responses. What everybody agreed on was that housing was getting cost prohibitive and really expensive and that we've got lots of single-family homes, multi-family homes, but we don't have a lot in between."

From the surveys, Browne said the feedback they received from college students was consistent and largely revolved around affordability.

"A lot of it just sort of came down to, 'Things are getting expensive, and I'm just so stressed and have affordability as the top priority for housing,'" Browne said.

Morrison said college students are concerned not only with affordability but also about finding a place to live.

"The price of not just attending A&M and tuition is going up, but also, more importantly, all the extraneous associated with going into college, increasing food costs and increasing housing costs," Morrison said. "It becomes a struggle to find

Households across the income spectrum are affected by the lack of diverse and affordable housing options.



affordable housing that also meets the needs of college students."

Browne said the concern is not only coming from the college student but also city residents.

"We talked with lots of people, and the problem is we have a supply problem," Browne said. "There's more people needing housing... Our strategies include incentivizing allowing and encouraging increased density. Look at our current ordinances, look at zoning areas and create a process for expedited permitting for affordable housing development."

Morrison said that rather than considering college students a separate from other residents, the city needs to recognize students as community members.

"Recognizing A&M is the reason

College Station exists, and the concentration of A&M students is the community that make it the thriving and wonderful place I enjoy living in is the most important part," Morrison said.

Browne said the city has already begun this process and has even more plans to see it position to help with development.

"The plan will look at areas to increase density, which will directly impact college students because there'll be more availability and more supply," Browne said. "That it will also help create affordable units. The city's proactively working through middle housing and looking where increased density can go."

Morrison said goal No. 1 of the plan focuses on creating and incentivizing more housing units and diverse housing types.

The city's proposal for that aim to automatically zone various parts of the city," Morrison said. "The easiest way for more diverse housing types to happen is organically through college students choosing to live closer to the university and residents who don't want to live near students living farther away in South College Station."

Since the plan was only recently approved by the City Council, Browne said it will take some time to see results.

"This isn't going to be for a college student," Browne said. "This isn't going to automatically be like a completely different housing market because it takes longer than a semester or two to build housing."