Exclusionary Zoning in Southeast Michigan
Community Land Use a Barrier to Regional Integration

What do local zoning codes tell us about regional segregation and unequal access to opportunity?

The Southeast Michigan region includes the seven counties surrounding the metropolitan center of Detroit. For decades, exclusionary land use policies and traditional, competitive economic development strategies have failed the city of Detroit and left the region segregated both by race and class. Past plans to address fair housing issues in the region lacked teeth and failed to encourage a regional discussion of these issues.

This project aims to model how regional agencies, such as the Southeast Michigan Coalition of Governments (SEMCOG), could review and analyze individual community zoning ordinances on the basis of exclusivity. As zoning ordinances are complex documents, the best way to ensure change in the region would be to conduct an in-depth audit of land use regulations within each community. A broad review of zoning statistics in the region revealed that nearly 30% of municipalities in Oakland County have less than 1% of land zoned for two-family or multi-family uses. This project conducts an analysis of a sample of 6 zoning codes in Oakland County, the state’s wealthiest county and a growing suburban area.

South Lyon:
- Two-family used as transition, higher density developments placed in less desirable locations
- PUD used in the past for higher densities
- Little discussion of diversifying housing options
- NIMBYism and opposition against all new developments
- Increased demand for smaller housing for empty-nesters
- Aging multi-family stock with little pressure to redevelop or rehabilitate

Huntington Woods:
- Multi-family primarily permitted along busy Woodward Ave
- Multi-family viewed as a buffer
- 6-foot barrier walls required between zones
- Prohibitive design standards require MF to be designed to look like townhomes
- No multi-family built along Woodward corridor, all office and commercial

Auburn Hills:
- Multi-family used as a transition
- Density bonus incentive for the preservation of open space
- Opposition to all new development
- “Sufficient” amount of Affordable Housing Options
- New demand for age-friendly housing

Orchard Lake Village:
- No multi-family zones
- Resort-style, single-family community
- PUD is the only option for MF development
- Quarter of the municipality covered in water
- No discussion of diverse housing types

Royal Oak:
- Regional business district with a goal of improving Detroit region
- Multi-family housing permitted in other zones: Mixed-use, special redevelopment, and PUD districts
- Provides relatively greater flexibility for MF development

Berkley:
- Last full zoning ordinance update in 1980s
- Only highrise development was constructed nearly 40 years ago
- 6-foot masonry walls required to divide MF from SF
- Efficiency units not permitted
- High-rise multi-family must abut major thoroughfares in less desirable areas
- Form-based code in the works but behind schedule
- City planners want to allow MF development in SF districts
- City promotes diverse housing types for youth and aging populations, but sees no need for affordable housing

Barriers to Inclusivity
- No communities reviewed allowed for Accessory Dwelling Units, be it by right or by special permit
- All communities reviewed had relatively stringent parking requirements and codes rarely discussed transit when determining placement of housing
- No zoning ordinances include incentives for affordable housing
- Ongoing NIMBYism and opposition of change

Recommended Interventions
- Provide zoning assistance to small communities in the form of model ordinances, form-based code and fair share workshops, and grants for zoning reform processes
- Start a regional conversation about housing through stakeholder convenings, solutions conferences, press releases, and encouraging media coverage of housing and access to opportunity issues
- Promote innovative housing solutions customized for smaller, suburban cities, such as Cottage Housing ordinances, ADU ordinances, and best practices in King County, Chicago, and Baltimore regions

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