

**LAND AND SPACE**

# New proposal makes smaller apartment buildings easier to develop. It just won a key Milwaukee approval

**Tom Daykin**

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**Key Points**

The council committee approved a new zoning district that makes it easier to develop apartment buildings with up to eight units.

That zoning district will help create more housing--which will counter rent increases, supporters say.

Opponents say the proposal could give absentee landlords more leverage to raise rents.

**Two new proposals** that are responses to Mayor Cavalier Johnson's plan to increase housing construction are being endorsed by a Milwaukee Common Council committee.

One would create a new zoning district allowing development of apartment and condominium buildings with up to eight units — expanding on a district allowing buildings with up to four units.

The other would make it easier to build **accessory dwelling units**. Those generally are houses or apartments that share building lots of larger, primary homes — and tend to be smaller and less expensive than traditional single-family homes.

Both were recommended for approval by the council's Zoning, Neighborhoods and Development Committee on April 15. They could be reviewed by the council at its April 22 meeting.

The Plan Commission on April 7 recommended approval for the accessory dwelling units proposal while recommending rejection of the apartment zoning district.

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The zoning district proposal draws opposition from some central city residents. They believe it encourages more construction of apartments by absentee landlords – increasing their leverage to raise rents.

"You will decimate, annihilate Black Milwaukee," Nicole Robinson, a representative of 5 Points Neighborhood Association, told committee members.

The new zoning district would provide an easier way for developers to build smaller apartment buildings, said Alderman Robert Bauman, zoning committee chair, and council President Jose Perez – the proposal's chief sponsors.

That would help fill the "missing middle" of housing between single-family homes and larger apartment buildings, they said.

Also, creating a larger housing supply with more diverse choices would help combat rent increases, supporters say.

The new zoning district would be applied to properties through separate council votes for specific developments, Bauman said.

Without the new district, the developer of an apartment building with up to eight units would likely seek a Board of Zoning Appeals variance – which can be difficult to obtain, said Sam Leichtling, city planning director.

The committee endorsed the new district on a 4-1 vote, with Alderwoman Milele Coggs voting "no."

## Panel OKs accessory ADU housing plan

The separate proposal for accessory dwelling units would allow those projects to bypass a zoning board review only if the accessory unit or its main dwelling unit was owned-occupied.

The committee voted 5-0 to recommend approval.

Bauman and Perez crafted both proposals in response to Mayor Johnson's [Growing MKE plan](#) – which has been stalled by opposition from residents and some council members.

Growing MKE recommends other zoning code changes which favor increased housing density. The focus is on such smaller scale housing as duplexes, triplexes, townhouses and cottage courts.

The arguments for and against Growing MKE are similar to those focusing on the new eight-unit apartment zoning district.

Johnson's Department of City Development has been [revising Growing MKE](#) in response to community concerns.

*Tom Daykin can be emailed at [tdaykin@jrn.com](mailto:tdaykin@jrn.com) and followed on [Instagram](#), [Bluesky](#), [X](#) and [Facebook](#).*