

OFFERED BY COUNCILOR HENRY SANTANA



CITY OF BOSTON

IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND TWENTY FIVE

ORDER FOR A HEARING REGARDING LEGALIZING CONSTRUCTION OF TRIPLE-DECKERS AND OTHER 2- TO 4-UNIT HOUSING IN THE CITY OF BOSTON

WHEREAS, Despite estimates that Boston has over 15,000 existing triple-deckers (also often referred to as three-deckers or 3Ds), which are home to tens of thousands of Boston residents and families, the current Boston Zoning Code largely makes it illegal to build new similar moderate-scale multi-family homes with 2-4 units anywhere in Boston, even in neighborhoods these homes already exist, or even on the very parcels of land that already have these homes; *and*

WHEREAS, Many of the zoning code restrictions currently in place originated in the 1930s through 1960s, and were explicitly intended to limit the creation of housing for immigrants, Black people and other people of color, Jews, and low-income people; *and*

WHEREAS, The problem of the Boston Zoning Code forbidding the creation of popular existing types of housing is pervasive, with a 2023 study commissioned by the Boston Planning and Redevelopment Agency finding that “an incredible 58% of parcels citywide fail to comply with floor-to-area ratio rules,” a form of zoning restriction that limits the creation of homes like triple-deckers and other multi-family homes; *and*

WHEREAS, These zoning code restrictions inhibit the creation of much-needed affordable housing, and further drive up development and permitting costs, which raises the price of housing, and encourages the development of high-cost “luxury” housing that is not affordable to the average Boston resident; *and*

WHEREAS, These zoning restrictions also favor large-scale national corporate developers, who are more readily able to afford the legal and design services necessary to navigate obtaining approvals for variances to zoning code restrictions, which makes it harder for local Boston housing developers to compete, and additionally creates far more burdens for Bostonians trying to start or grow small businesses to build much-needed housing; *and*

WHEREAS, Since 2010, there has been an increase in the production of housing with 5+ units, yet the rate of production of 3-4 unit homes is approximately one-fifth the production rate of single-family dwellings, and one-tenth that of larger housing developments; *and*

WHEREAS, 2-4 unit multi-family homes are particularly popular among our immigrant communities, with 17% of immigrant homeowners in Massachusetts living in such homes, compared to 8% of native-born homeowners; *and*

WHEREAS, These 2-4 unit residences further facilitate home ownership for multigenerational families, low-income families, and families who pool resources to become homeowners, making the creation of more of these homes an important factor in supporting greater long-term economic independence for Boston families; *and*

WHEREAS, Most of Boston's triple-deckers were built between 1880-1930 because of the severe zoning code limitations in building additional similar units since then, which has caused these existing units to be among the oldest housing structures, and therefore in the greatest need of repair and structural maintenance; *and*

WHEREAS, Reforming Boston Zoning Code to legalize construction of more 2-4 unit homes would help meet Boston's current and anticipated future housing needs; facilitate the production of modern 2-4 unit housing, thus lessening the repair and maintenance burdens for those seeking such housing; and increase the accessibility of home ownership to immigrant, multigenerational, working, middle-class, low-income, and other families. ***NOW, THEREFORE BE IT***

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council holds a hearing regarding legalizing construction of triple-deckers and other 2-4 unit housing in the City of Boston. Representatives from the Planning Department and Mayor's Office of Housing will be invited, along with community advocates for affordable housing, and members of the public are encouraged to attend and testify.

Filed in Council: September 10, 2025