

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Proposed R-1/2 Single and Two-Family Residential District Ordinance

Prepared for: Richland Center Plan Commission

Date: December 17, 2025

I. PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

This ordinance consolidates the existing R-1 (Single-Family Residential) and R-2 (Two-Family Residential) districts into a single R-1/2 district. The primary goals are to:

1. Simplify the zoning code by reducing complexity
2. Increase housing options by allowing both single-family homes and duplexes on the same lots
3. Legalize and regulate Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to address housing affordability
4. Modernize standards to include electric vehicle charging, solar panels, and stormwater management
5. Support neighborhood commercial uses that enhance walkability while maintaining residential character

II. KEY CHANGES FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

A. Current R-1 Properties (Single-Family Only)

BEFORE: Only single-family homes allowed

AFTER: Can build:

- Single-family homes (still allowed) ✓
- Duplexes (NEW - now allowed by right)
- Accessory Dwelling Units/ADUs (NEW - "granny flats" or "in-law suites")

Impact: Property owners gain flexibility without losing any current rights

B. Current R-2 Properties (Single and Two-Family)

BEFORE: Single-family homes and duplexes allowed

AFTER: Same uses, plus:

- Accessory Dwelling Units/ADUs (NEW)
- Slightly smaller minimum lot size (6,500 sq ft vs. varies in R-2)

Impact: More flexibility, similar character maintained

C. All Properties - New Features

1. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

- Small secondary dwelling on property (max 800 sq ft)
- Must live on property (in main house OR ADU) or obtain CUP
- One-time \$100 registration fee
- Must have separate address and utility meters
- Uses: aging parents, adult children, rental income, caregiver housing

2. Modern Infrastructure

- EV charging stations allowed
- Roof-mounted solar panels permitted
- Swimming pool drainage standards added
- Stormwater credit for permeable surfaces (detailed calculation provided)

3. Adjusted Standards

- Rear setback reduced: 25 feet → 10 feet (more usable backyard)
- Minimum lot size: 6,500 sq ft (down from 8,000 sq ft)
- Minimum lot length: 130 feet (NEW - optimizes subdivision efficiency)
- Minimum lot width: 50 feet (down from 60 feet)
- May park up to 4 cars (increased from 3)
- RVs allowed in driveway May-September (previously restricted)

III. ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS (ADUs) - DETAILED

A. What is an ADU?

A small, self-contained apartment on the same property as a single-family home or duplex.
Examples:

- Apartment above a garage
- Converted basement or attic
- Small cottage in backyard
- Addition to existing home with separate entrance

B. Why Allow ADUs?

- **Housing affordability:** Creates smaller, more affordable rental units
- **Multigenerational living:** Keep aging parents or adult children close
- **Income opportunity:** Generate rental income to help pay mortgage
- **Aging in place:** Seniors downsize to ADU, rent main house
- **Caregiver housing:** Live-in help for elderly/disabled
- **Minimal impact:** Looks like regular house from street

C. ADU Requirements

Requirement	Standard	Purpose
Maximum Size	800 sq ft OR 50% of main house	Keeps ADU secondary
Owner Lives On-Site	Yes (main house OR ADU)	Ensures accountability
Registration	\$100 one-time fee	Tracking for planning
Separate Address	Required	Emergency services
Separate Utility Meters	Required	Fair billing, no disputes
Parking	0-1 space (location-dependent)	Most need none
Utilities	Water, sewer, electric	Health and safety
Setbacks (detached)	10 feet all sides	Emergency services and safety

D. Exception: Non-Owner-Occupied ADUs

Property owners who don't live on-site can obtain a Conditional Use Permit (\$500):

- Must meet "Good Neighbor Standards" (property maintenance, no excessive complaints, etc.)
- Annual certification required
- CUP may be revoked for violations
- Provides flexibility while maintaining accountability

E. Short-Term Rentals (Airbnb, VRBO)

- Limited to 15 ADUs citywide (prevents over-saturation)
- Requires Conditional Use Permit (\$500) + \$200/year registration
- Must collect and remit room tax
- Owner available 24/7 for issues
- First-come, first-served until cap reached

IV. SMALL-SCALE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL USES

A. What's Allowed (with Conditional Use Permit)

- Corner stores/markets
- Coffee shops, cafes, bakeries
- Small restaurants (no drive-throughs)
- Hair salons, barber shops
- Community gardens, farmers markets
- Co-working spaces
- Art studios/galleries

B. Strict Protections

- Maximum 2,000 square feet
- Hours: 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM only
- Corner lots: Easier approval
- Mid-block: Requires neighbor consent within 300 feet
- Must maintain residential appearance

C. Benefits

- Enhances walkability (corner store within walking distance)
- Supports small business/entrepreneurship
- Reduces car trips
- Size/hour limits protect residential character

V. DIMENSIONAL STANDARDS COMPARISON

Standard	Current R-1	Current R-2	New R-1/2
Permitted Uses	Single-family only	Single & two-family	Single, two-family, ADUs

Standard	Current R-1	Current R-2	New R-1/2
Min. Lot Size	8,000 sq ft	Varies	6,500 sq ft
Min. Lot Width	60 feet	60 feet	50 feet
Min. Lot Length	Not specified	Not specified	130 feet
Front Setback	20 feet	20 feet	20 feet ✓
Side Setback	8' min, 20' total	8' min, 20' total	8' min, 20' total ✓
Rear Setback	25 feet	25 feet	10 feet
Height Limit	35 feet	35 feet	35 feet ✓
Max. Impervious	None	None	50%
ADUs Allowed	No	No	YES

Legend: ✓ = No change | Yellow highlight = Reduced/relaxed | Green highlight = New provision

VI. ADDRESSING COMMON CONCERNS

CONCERN 1: "Will ADUs change neighborhood character?"

Response:

- ADUs limited to 800 sq ft (smaller than many garages)
- Must be subordinate in appearance to main house
- Some homes already have garage apartments/basement units
- This regulates and legitimizes what already exists

Protections in Place:

- Setback requirements prevent overcrowding
- Height limits (16-25 feet for ADUs)
- "Good neighbor" standards for non-owner occupied
- 50% impervious surface limit prevents over-development

CONCERN 2: "Will this bring too much density?"

Response:

- Lot size requirements still apply (6,500 sq ft minimum)
- One ADU per lot maximum
- Owner-occupancy ensures responsible management
- Promotes "gentle density" - more housing without changing look

Comparison:

- Current: 1 house on 8,000 sq ft = 1 dwelling unit
- Proposed: 1 house + ADU on 6,500 sq ft = 2 units
- Alternative: Tear down house, build duplex = 2 units (already allowed in R-2)

CONCERN 3: "What about parking?"

Response:

- No additional parking required if within 1/4 mile of downtown OR property has 2+ spaces
- Only requires 1 space if neither applies
- Some ADU residents may not own cars (elderly, young adults)

CONCERN 4: "Will property values decrease?"

Response:

- Studies show ADUs typically increase property values
- Adds income-generating potential
- Makes property more attractive to buyers (flexibility)
- Building an ADU is optional, not mandatory

CONCERN 5: "What about enforcement?"

Response:

- Registration system tracks all ADUs
- Annual certification for non-owner-occupied ADUs
- Clear "good neighbor" standards
- Fines/Penalties: \$200-500/day forfeiture (\$263.50 citation)
- Conditional Use Permits can be revoked
- 3-month grace period for voluntary compliance for existing ADUs

VII. BENEFITS TO RICHLAND CENTER

A. Housing Affordability

- Creates smaller, naturally affordable units (800 sq ft max)
- Increases housing supply without large developments
- Addresses housing shortage for seniors, young adults, working families

B. Economic Benefits

- Property owners gain rental income
- Increased property tax base (improved properties)
- Tourism revenue (new room tax generation with STR)
- Local construction jobs (building ADUs)
- Small business opportunities (neighborhood commercial)

C. Sustainability

- Efficient use of existing infrastructure (water, sewer, roads)
- Reduces sprawl (more housing in existing neighborhoods)
- Supports walkability (less car dependence)
- EV charging and solar provisions support energy diversification
- Stormwater management (permeable surface credits)

D. Community Benefits

- Multigenerational living - keep families together
- Aging in place support
- Preserves single-family character (no teardowns required)

VIII. IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Phase 1: Adoption (Months 1-3)

- Plan Commission first review (December 17, 2025)
- Plan Commission second review (January 28, 2026)
- Plan Commission public hearing and recommendation (February 25, 2026)
- Common Council adoption (March 3, 2026)
- Publication (March 12, 2026)

Phase 2: Transition (Months 1-6 after adoption)

- Automatic rezoning: All R-1 and R-2 properties become R-1/2
- 3-month grace period for education and voluntary compliance
- Existing ADUs must register within 3 months
- Zoning Administrator provides guidance and assistance

Phase 3: Ongoing Administration

- Registration system operational
- Conditional Use Permit applications processed
- Annual certifications reviewed
- Compliance monitoring

IX. FISCAL IMPACT

Revenue Increases

- Registration fees: \$100 per ADU (one-time)
- Conditional Use Permit fees: \$500 per application
- Short-term rental fees: \$200/year per STR-ADU
- Room tax revenue from STRs
- Property tax increases (improved properties have higher values)
- Zoning and Building permit fees from ADU construction

Costs

- Initial staff time: Education and outreach (temporary, significant)
- Ongoing administration: Minimal (absorbed into current duties)
- Database/tracking system: Minimal (existing software)
- Inspections: As-needed, complaint-driven

Net Fiscal Impact

Estimated Positive: Fees and increased property tax revenue expected to exceed administrative costs. ADU construction generates permit revenue and long-term tax increases.

X. LEGAL COMPLIANCE

This ordinance complies with:

- Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 62.23 (Municipal zoning authority)
- Wisconsin Act 170 (2011) (Nonconforming structures)
- Wisconsin Uniform Dwelling Code (Building standards)

- ADA requirements (Accessibility)
- Fair Housing Act (No discrimination)
- State and federal environmental laws

XI. COMPARABLE COMMUNITIES

Several Wisconsin communities have successfully implemented similar ADU ordinances:

Madison

- Adopted ADU ordinance in 2023
- Removed owner-occupancy requirement (more permissive than Richland Center)
- Seen as success in adding affordable housing

Milwaukee

- Allows ADUs citywide
- Positive feedback from homeowners

Other Wisconsin Communities

- Appleton, Eau Claire, La Crosse have ADU regulations
- Generally positive experiences as part of housing strategies

Richland Center's Approach

- More conservative than Madison (requires owner-occupancy or CUP)
- More protective of neighborhood character (good neighbor standards, STR cap)
- Balanced between housing flexibility and community concerns

XII. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends APPROVAL of the proposed R-1/2 Single and Two-Family Residential District Ordinance based on the following:

1. Addresses Critical Housing Need

- Richland Center faces housing shortage like most of Wisconsin
- ADUs are proven, effective tool for adding affordable units
- Minimal neighborhood impact, maximum flexibility

2. Protects Neighborhood Character

- Owner-occupancy ensures accountability
- Good neighbor standards are enforceable
- Size and design limits maintain appearance
- STR cap (15) prevents over-commercialization

3. Modernizes Zoning Code

- Simplifies administration (one district instead of two)
- Adds 21st century provisions (EV, solar, stormwater)
- Aligns with other Wisconsin communities

4. Fiscally Responsible

- Revenue positive (fees + property tax increases)
- Minimal administrative burden
- Leverages existing infrastructure efficiently

5. Legally Sound

- Complies with all state and federal requirements
- Based on successful models from other communities

XIII. QUESTIONS FOR PLAN COMMISSION DISCUSSION

1. Please refer to Plan Commission Review Questions document attached separately