

SUBSCRIBE

Sign In

Most popular
1. [John Ruffano, convicted in '04 shooting, was victim in sword attack](#)

2. [New gun laws set to take effect Thursday](#)

HUDSON VALLEY // NEWS

Kingston's zoning reform takes on single-family restrictions

A proposed new map would make the city one of a few nationwide to tackle housing costs by allowing apartments nearly everywhere

Steven Yoder
Aug. 23, 2022





— A new zoning plan would make Kingston one of the few cities in the U.S. to eliminate single-family restrictions. So far, opposition has been muted.

Barry Winiker/Getty Images

Zoning might seem like a backwater inside city bureaucracy, but not to the group Kingston Code Reform Advocates.

When the small Ulster County city revamped its comprehensive plan in 2016, it needed to update its 60-year-old zoning map to match the new vision. In spring 2020, the Kingston Common Council was preparing to put \$500,000 toward kick-starting a rezoning effort when COVID hit and it tabled the plan.

So in late 2020, residents Anthony Tampone and Tanya Garment started the code advocate group to push for a relaunch, working with allies on the council. That happened in April 2021, when the council authorized a contract with the consulting firm Dover, Kohl & Partners to start gathering community input and use it to create a new code.

This May, after several community consultations, the firm rolled out the first draft of the new zoning code, which envisions preserving Kingston's historic patterns while addressing a housing shortage that is reaching crisis levels. But if adopted, the new map would also make Kingston one of the first cities in the U.S. to take on the third rail of land-use planning: single-family zoning.

To build or to build more

Those who support the change say Kingston desperately needs more construction to bring down soaring housing costs. Minneapolis, which in December of 2018 became the first major city to open up single-family zoning, saw the number of rental units climb more than 7 percent in the following two years, while rents for one-bedroom apartments fell 14 percent and two-bedrooms 23 percent.

But upzoning there happened over fierce resistance. The coming weeks will be a test of whether Kingston follows suit by embracing more density to bring down housing costs.

The stakes are huge. Between 2016 and 2020, the average rent for a 1-bedroom in Kingston went from \$931 to \$1,235, according to county

figures. It's now at \$1,437, according to [apartment search site RentCafe](#).

Under the zoning proposal, it would be easier for homeowners in areas now limited to single-family dwellings to add apartments on their existing lots, in most places up to six units, as long as they abide by rules about minimum setbacks from property lines. Minimum parking requirements, which add huge costs to residential construction, would be eliminated.

Larger projects — like the 164 units forthcoming on the site of the old [Ulster County Jail at Golden Hill](#) — would still go through the city's planning board.

Bartek Starodaj, the city's director of housing initiatives, says more density is the only way to add to the city's housing stock. "Kingston is pretty much built out," Starodaj said. "So you need to have a zoning code that reflects the type of flexibility that you would need to actually build within established neighborhoods."

Tampone says his group is working to get more people engaged in rethinking the current code in part because of previous planning disasters like federally funded [urban renewal in Kingston](#) in the 1960s. Properties that once had beautiful historic buildings now are vacant lots and parking lots, he said.

"That was because somebody thought they knew better and didn't really pay attention to what the community actually needed and didn't leverage the resources that we already had there," Tampon said. "I was like, you know what? We can't allow this to continue to happen, especially as we see tons more money getting poured in."

To those who study town codes, doing away with single-family zones matters for another reason: its ties to racial segregation. In 1917 the Supreme Court outlawed ordinances that forbid Black people from living in white neighborhoods. To get around the ruling, federal and local

officials used zoning to reserve middle-class neighborhoods for single-family homes to stop lower-income African Americans from moving in, according to [Richard Rothstein](#), a segregation expert whose 2017 book *The Color of Law* chronicled the history.

Yes in my backyard?

So far, opposition to the upzoning provisions of Kingston's plan has been mostly muted.

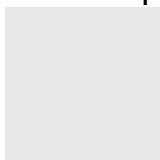
"I've had a couple of neighbors express concern," said Reynolds Scott-Childress, who represents the Third Ward on the council, an area mostly zoned single family. He favors the change and says he lives across from three duplexes that house lower-income neighbors. "We have just a wonderful block. The fact that there are duplexes on this block doesn't mitigate how nice it is," he said.

Barbara Hill, who represents Kingston's mostly single-family First Ward, said by email that she's heard only one couple in her ward express opposition. She's still formulating her view of that aspect of the draft, she says.

MORE HUDSON VALLEY NEWS

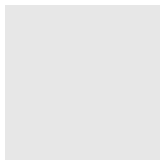
OUTDOORS

Hochul deploys National Guard to wildfires in Minnewaska



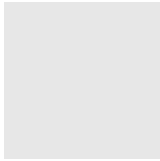
CATSKILLS

Near-drowning at Kaaterskill Falls



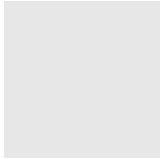
OUTDOORS

A new fire adds to battle at Minnewaska State Park



NEWS

Molinaro won his own county by just 3 points. Here's why.



Starodaj says the city got several hundred comments, only a few of which expressed opposition to the change.

But opponents are out there. Michael Olivieri, the council's lone Republican, represents the largely single-family Seventh Ward. He asked about 20 constituents for their views on the single-family change, he says by email, and all opposed it.

Kingston GOP chairman John Quigley says he's heard from "dozens of people" about it. "A lot of things fly under the radar that shouldn't. I think this is one of them," he said.

And while Kingston Tenants Union co-founder Alex Panagiotopoulos says some upzoning is inevitable, the city missed its best chance to get more housing built when it failed to launch the [Hudson Landing project](#), which would have put almost 1,700 houses on 500 acres along the Hudson River. "I think people's aversion to big solutions to our housing problem is kind of why we're pursuing this undignified solution," he said.

Pushback in Kingston wouldn't be a surprise. In Minneapolis, yard signs like "Don't bulldoze our neighborhoods" sprouted in the run-up to the passage of that city's plan, which [drew 10,000 public comments](#). In Gainesville, Florida, city commissioners approved a proposal on Aug. 4 to [eliminate single-family zoning](#) on a split vote at a meeting in a packed

city hall. At least five times as many people spoke in opposition as in support, according to the Gainesville Sun.

Even if Kingston's plan sails through, there's no guarantee of a huge increase in small apartment development. In Minneapolis, only about 50 duplexes and triplexes have been built since its plan took effect, said Janne Flisrand, co-founder of the Twin Cities group [Neighbors for More Neighbors](#), which advocated for it. Most of the increase in its apartment supply has come because the plan allows more mid-sized to large apartment buildings along commercial and transit corridors, she says.

Kingston may learn from that: Minneapolis allowed duplexes and triplexes but didn't permit owners to expand the size of their buildings, said Starodaj. Under the draft code, owners would be able to expand as long as they stay within setback limits, he said.

The biggest barrier to getting apartments built on existing lots will be financing: it's not clear how many homeowners could come up with cash or loans to pay for an addition, said Scott-Childress.

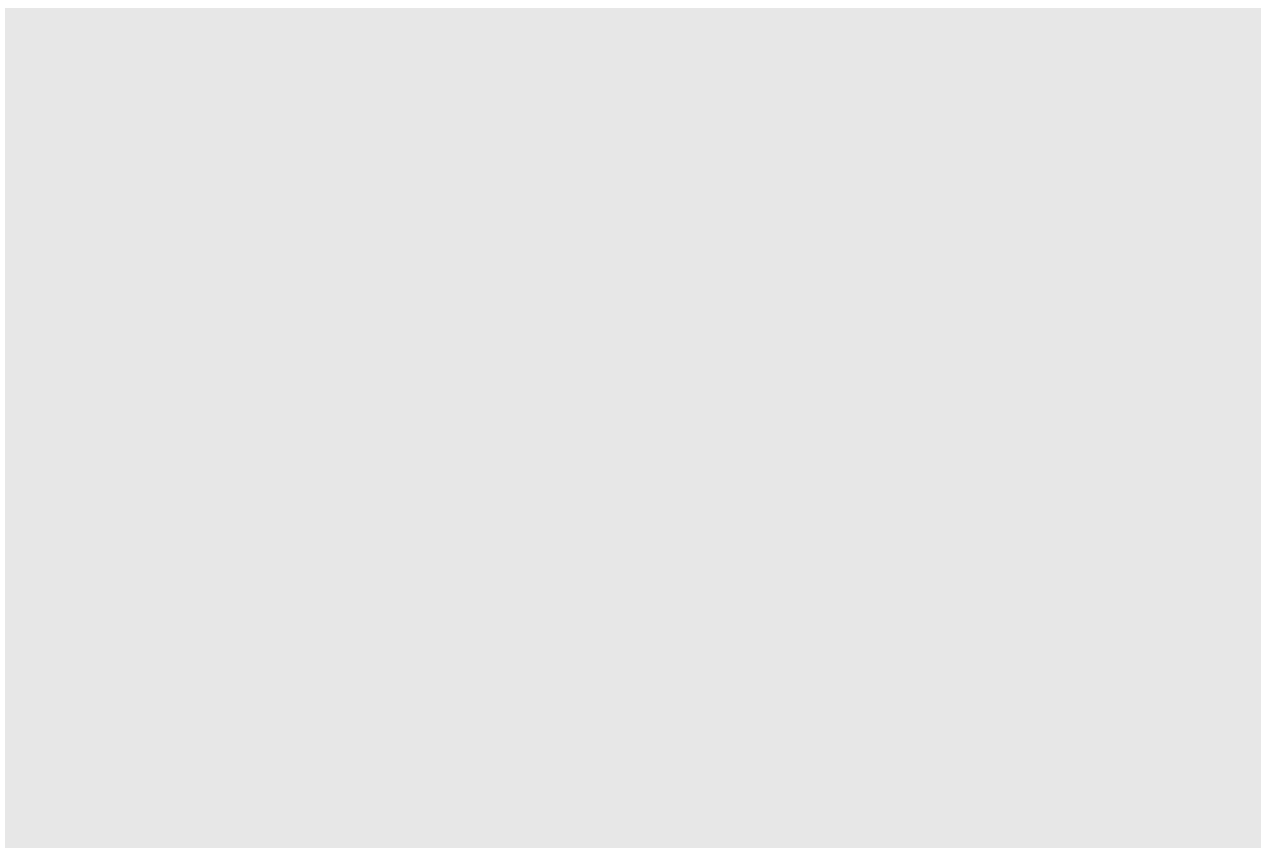
For all the attention to single-family zoning, the draft code's elimination of minimum parking requirements might actually do the most to get housing built. [Parking spots can add as much as \\$50,000 per space](#) to the cost of development, according to experts. Ending parking minimums might have been the most important change in Minneapolis, said Flisrand.

The next draft of Kingston's code is due out this month. After more community feedback comes a final draft, an environmental impact review and a vote by the council, possibly sometime this fall.

"I think that we have a pretty confident feeling that we will be able to pass this when it's presented in its entirety, hopefully in the next two months or so," said Tampone. "We're kind of counting votes and keeping everybody engaged as best we can."

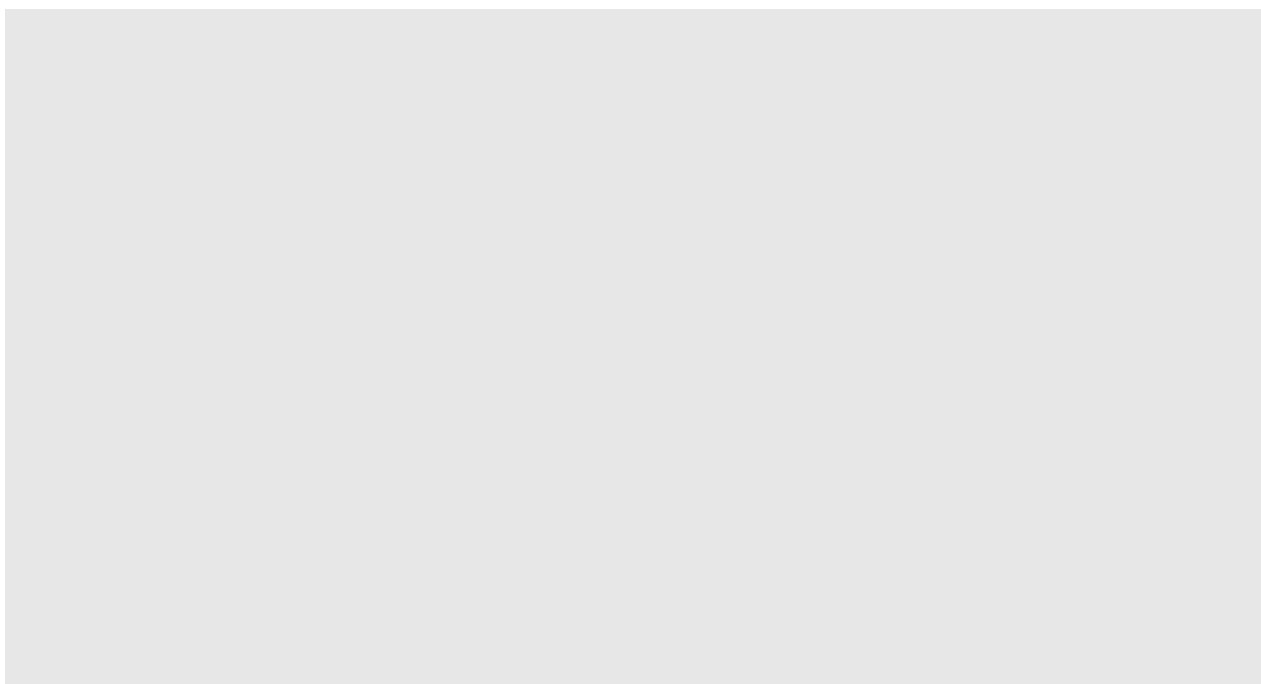
Written By
Steven Yoder

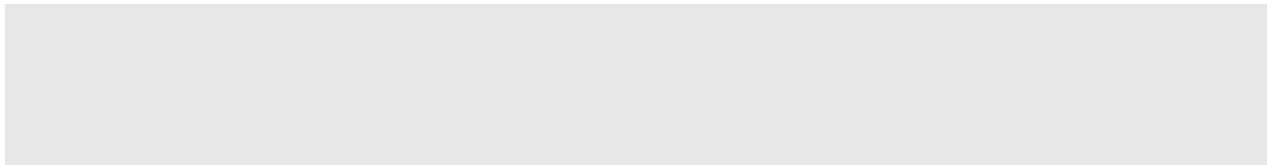
TOP SHOPPING PICKS



Shopping

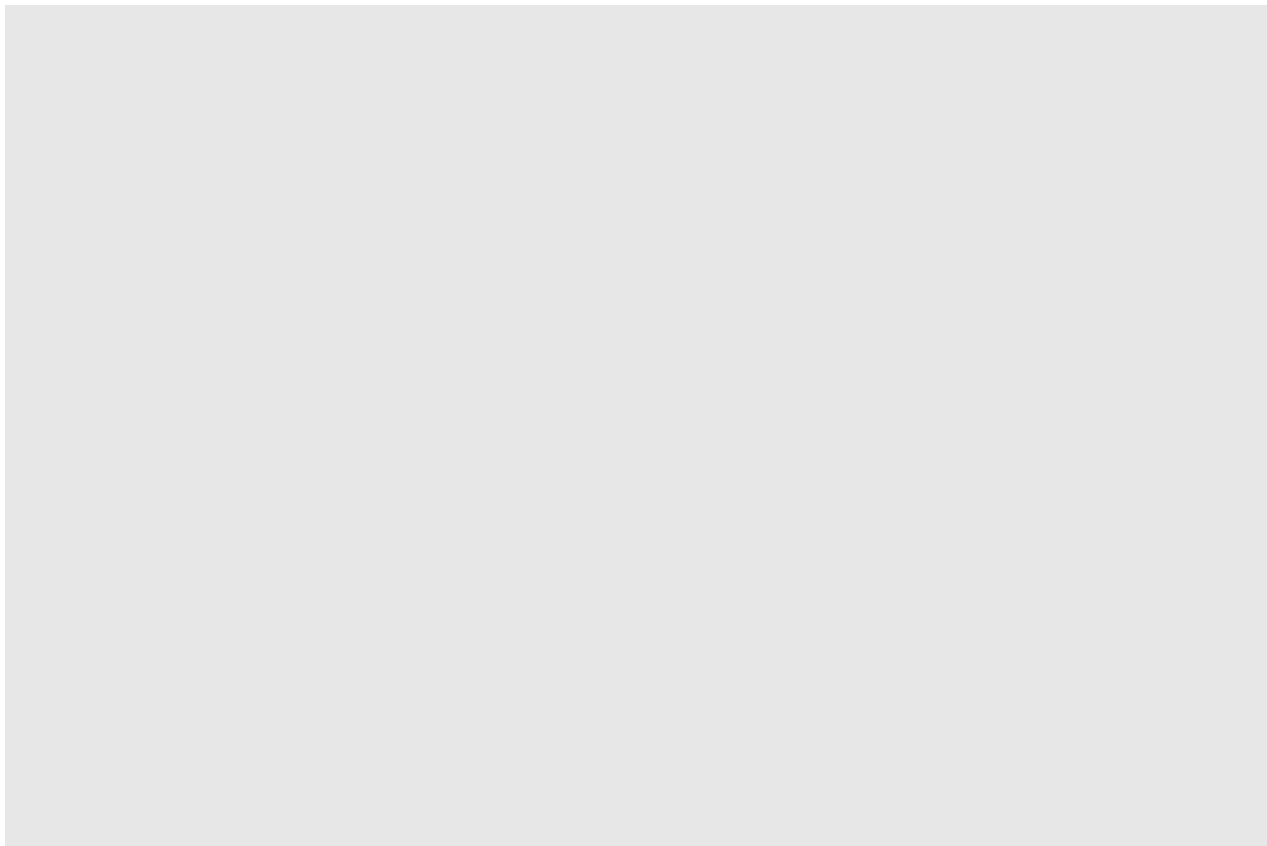
Dyson just released a new option on its crazy-popular Airwrap





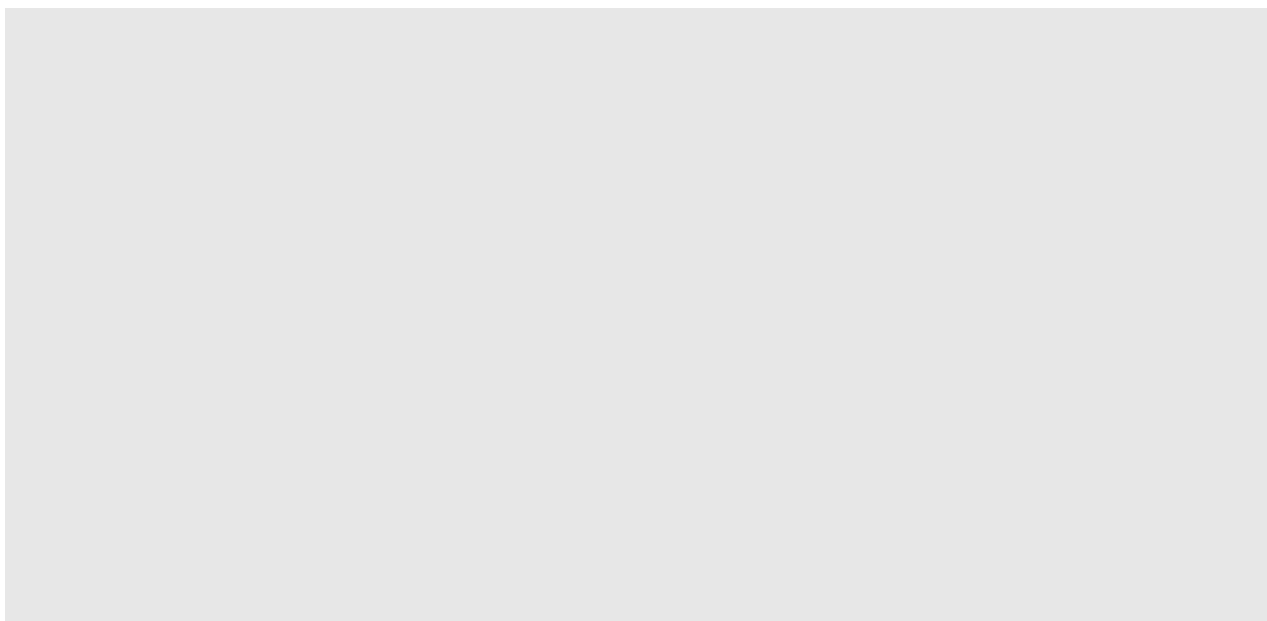
Shopping

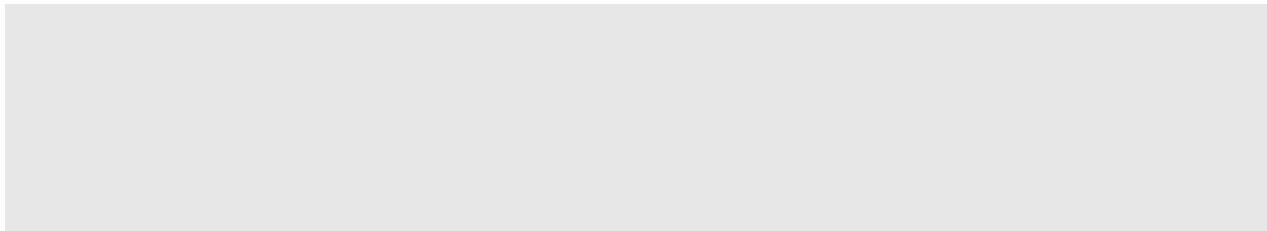
If you drink Ritas beverages, Anheuser-Busch might owe you money



Shopping

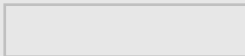
Can't find an Everywhere Belt Bag? Try this lululemon bag instead





Shopping

PSA: lululemon has military, first responder & medical discounts



[RETURN TO TOP](#)

ABOUT

[Our Company](#)

[General Standards and Practices](#)

[Newspaper Delivery Safety Procedures](#)

[Advertising](#)

[Interest Based Ads](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[Privacy Notice](#)

[Your California Privacy Rights](#)

[Jobs at the Times Union](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Weather](#)

[School Closings](#)

[Events Calendar](#)

[Celebrations](#)

[Obituaries](#)

[Online Store](#)

[Puzzles Palace](#)

SERVICES

[Subscriber Services](#)

[Home Delivery](#)

[Become a Carrier](#)

[e-Edition](#)

[Corporate Subscriptions](#)

[Mobile App](#)

[Copyright and Reprint](#)

[Archives](#)

©2022 Hearst

