

DENSITY WITHIN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

WHAT IS DENSITY? And what does it look like in Dignowity Hill?

“Density” is a term that has many definitions and many ways to document and measure people and buildings in a defined area. There are different standards of high, medium and low density depending upon what one is trying to document or plan.

In our ARC meetings, we've discussed in very general terms, **dwelling units per acre** as a way to think about neighborhood density and proposed projects in DH.

How we plan our neighborhood is very important to our quality of life. An increase in density effects everything from number of people, traffic patterns, noise, infrastructure service (power lines and drops, water, sewer, etc), solid waste pick up, tree canopy coverage, impervious coverage and storm drainage among other things. The results of higher density do not have to be negative, but good planning and neighborhood awareness to the re-development is imperative.

I've produced this quick list of some addresses for dwelling unit density comparison. The first group of addresses are existing historic structures and most are on originally platted residential lots.

413 N. Pine	1 unit on 20K SF = 2.2 units per acre
1025 E. Crockett	1 unit on 11.7K SF = 3.7 units per acre
515 Hays	1 unit on 11.1K SF = 3.9 units per acre
716 Hays	1 unit on 10.1 K SF = 4.3 units per acre
527 Burnet	1 units on 8900 SF = 4.9 units per acre
932 N. Pine	1 unit on 6.2K SF = 7 units per acre
815 Burnet	1 unit 4950 SF = 8.8 units per acre

What's noticeable is that the density spans between a little over 2 units per acre to a “tight” 8.8 units per acre. Note that the “perception” of density is also effected by the building’s height, width and overall massing. For example, a cluster of single-story houses at 8 units an acre *feels* ok while a cluster of two-story houses in this same area will *seem* denser although it’s also at 8 units per acre.

And it’s this range of different sized parcels and houses that contribute greatly to the historic character of Dignowity Hill. The characteristic diversity continues with the individual houses as well as there are very few duplicates houses in the neighborhood, and when they do occur, they exist a block or two away and they look very different from each other.

The second group of properties are those that are currently proposed or will be constructed. Keep in mind that these are project comparisons in dwelling units per acre. Not FAR (floor area ratios), buildable density, building size, etc. but just simple "dwelling front doors" per acre.

600 Burluson/Olive	23 units on 63.9K SF = 16.36 units per acre
422 Hays	4 units on 10.1 K SF = 17.25 units per acre
716 Cherry Modern	12 units on 21.8 SF = 24 units per acre
532 Dawson	5 units on 7852 SF = 27.7 units per acre
810 N. Olive	3 units on 22.5K SF = 6 units per acre

Compared with the original historic houses and lots, the new infill is more than twice the density and sometimes 3 times the density of the highest density existing in the neighborhood.

When 422 Hays requested a letter of approval during their re-zoning, the ARC provided them with one stating that we requested their development not to exceed 16 units per acre. This is a number that we believe could be built depending upon the lot, the project siting and the actual architecture.

To get an idea of the City of San Antonio's UDC Base Zoning District densities, see the chart below. The maximum density (column D) for Single Family is R-4 and RM-4 at 11 units per acre. The next highest density is at 18 units per acre, but one must be zoned MF Multi-Family to increase the density within the base zoning categories. The IDZ designation was developed to allow flexibility in these categories as it allows the potential waiving of all criteria. At a loose 16 units per acre, we're actually allowing a higher density than the most dense base zoning for Single Family occupancy.

Table 310-1
Lot and Building Dimensions Table

(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)	(I)	(J)	(K)	(L)	(M)	(N)
	LOT DIMENSIONS						BUILDING ON LOT				BUILDING		
Zoning District	Lot Size (min)	Lot Size (max)	Density (max) (units/acre)	Street Frontage (min)	Width (min)	Width (max)	Front Setback (min) * ***	Front Setback (max)	Side Setback (min)	Rear Setback (min)	Height (max) (feet/#of stories)	Size - Individual Building Size (max)	Size - Aggregate Building Size (max)
RP	10 acres		0.1	—	—	—	15	—	5	—	35/2-½	—	—
RE	43,560		1	100	120	—	15	—	5	30	35/2-½	—	—
R-20	20,000		2	65	90	—	10	—	5	30	35/2-½	—	—
R-6 ¹	6,000		7	30	50	150	10	—	5	20	35/2-½	—	—
R-5 ¹	5,000		9	30	45	150	10	—	5	20	35/2-½	—	—
R-4 ¹	4,000		11	20	35	150	10	—	5	20	35/2-½	—	—
R-3 ¹	3,000 ⁷		—	15	20	—	10	35	5	10	35/3	70% of lot area	—
RM-6 ¹	6,000		7	15	15	150	10	—	5	20	35/3	—	—
RM-5 ¹	5,000		9	15	15	100	10	—	5	10	35/3	—	—
RM-4 ¹	4,000		11	15	15	80	10	—	5	10	35/3	—	—
MF-18 ^{1,4}	—		18	50	50	—	—	20 ^{3,4,6}	5	10	35	—	—
"MF-25" 1,4,8	—		25	50	50	—	—	20 ^{3,4,6}	5	10	35	—	—
"MF-33" 1,4,8	—		33	50	50	—	—	20 ^{3,4,6}	5	10	45	—	—

To determine the rough residential dwelling unit per acre shown above, start with the lot size, then divide by number of dwelling units. This gives you the square footage allocated per unit. Divide that number into the square feet for acre (43,560 SF) for your estimated unit per acre. For example, a 7852 SF lot with 4 units = roughly 1963 SF per unit. 43,560/1963 = 22.19 units per acre. This allocated square footage per unit will need to accommodate everything: house, side and front setbacks, driveway, parking, yard and open space, place for trash can + AC compressor, drainage from lot, electrical feed, water and sewer lines, etc And if the project is in the Historic District, it still must meet the Historic Preservation Design Guidelines.

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