



SINGLE-FAMILY INFILL DEVELOPMENT

BUILDER RESOURCE

Getting Started on Infill Housing

November 2022

Image Source: Cuyahoga Land Bank

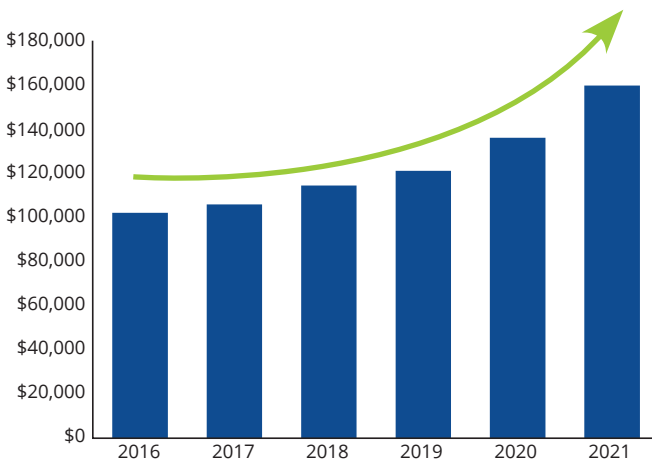
SINGLE-FAMILY INFILL OVERVIEW

Residential infill development is new construction of housing on vacant lots within established neighborhoods, often where homes have been demolished. Residential infill ranges from individual homes and attached homes to large-scale development including multi-family complexes. Single-family infill refers to a single home built on a single lot. Infill projects are common in the First Suburbs, as they are typically built-out with only smaller, scattered vacant lots available.

HOUSING DEMAND IN THE FIRST SUBURBS

There is a growing demand for housing in the First Suburbs as families and individuals are seeking smaller homes in walkable neighborhoods. This has led to a significant improvement in the housing market among First Suburbs, as indicated by the increase in the average number of single-family home sales and in median sale price. In 2021, there was an average of 411 homes sold among First Suburbs, representing a 23% increase from 2016, while the median sale price increased to \$159,757, a 56% increase during the same time frame. Although 2021 represents a more volatile housing market due to the Covid-19 pandemic and more modest increases are expected in the future, these improvements point to the growing potential for new infill housing in the First Suburbs.

56% increase in median single-family home sale price in the First Suburbs



Median Single-Family Home Sale Price, 2016 to 2021
Data Source: Northeast Ohio Metropolitan Data Resource

INFILL OPPORTUNITY IN THE FIRST SUBURBS

There is an opportunity to fulfill this demand as there are approximately 5,320 vacant lots in the First Suburbs where single-family homes could potentially be built. Many of these lots are land bank or city-owned lots and have been made available for future development through a proactive demolition program facilitated by the Cuyahoga Land Bank. These lots are key building opportunities—especially for property owners, small developers, and others new to infill development—as there is often technical assistance and potential financial and administrative incentives available.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUILDING INFILL HOUSING

Early preparation is important for infill development. Regulations, processes, and submission requirements vary from place to place, so early communication with a municipality—even before a property is acquired—is strongly recommended to limit any potential delays. For example, to acquire a city-owned or land bank lot, applicants must often have site plans or development proposals reviewed and approved before receiving ownership of the property.

This guide serves as an introduction to what can be generally expected from infill development in the First Suburbs and how best to prepare.



A Potential Infill Lot in a First Suburb
Image Source: County Planning, Garfield Heights, Ohio

CHALLENGES TO INFILL IN FIRST SUBURBS

Relative to greenfield development, infill development can have various regulatory, physical, and financial challenges. However, municipalities often assume an important role in reducing these challenges. Surveyed development professionals in Cuyahoga County identified the following top challenges of developing single-family infill housing in the First Suburbs:



REVIEW & APPROVAL PROCESS

It often includes several submission requirements, multiple steps of approval, complex regulations, design standards, and variances which can result in a lengthy process. Municipalities can improve regulations and provide incentives to facilitate a better infill process.



ECONOMY OF SCALE

Infill lots often have to be developed one at a time and the scattered nature and size of these lots can make it difficult for a developer to justify financially. Municipalities can assist by streamlining this process and assembling parcels to overcome this challenge.



PERCEPTION OF SAFETY

A lasting perception of safety issues in certain communities can affect infill's marketability. Additional improvements to neighborhoods and an emphasis on their amenities and assets can lessen this perception. Involving CDCs and community groups can be helpful.



NEIGHBORHOOD OPPOSITION

Many community members may be apprehensive about changes to their neighborhood, have a general mistrust of new development, or associate an influx of new residents with an increase in traffic, pollution, or noise. Meaningful engagement is important to ensure buy-in.


BENEFITS OF INFILL IN FIRST SUBURBS

Residential infill development is important for neighborhood reinvestment and restoration, and it is also increasingly sought out by developers and desired by homeowners. Surveyed development professionals in Cuyahoga County identified the following top benefits of developing single-family infill housing in the First Suburbs:




TAX ABATEMENTS

Many municipalities offer tax abatements for infill development, which delays increases in taxes from the new investment. This makes new infill homes more appealing to potential homeowners as it is a cost saving measure.



LOWER ACQUISITION COSTS

Many infill lots in the First Suburbs are acquired and maintained by a municipality or a land bank and are then sold to property owners and developers at a cheaper price, thereby lowering the cost of development.



NEIGHBORHOOD WALKABILITY

Neighborhoods in the First Suburbs traditionally have complete sidewalks and comfortable walking environments which is increasingly important and appealing to home buyers.



COMMUNITY AMENITIES & SERVICES

These neighborhoods are near different amenities and services such as parks, recreational opportunities, and walkable business districts, all of which appeal to home buyers. Developers also benefit from the existing utilities and infrastructure near infill lots.

BEST PRACTICES

In general, early preparation and communication are key to successful infill development. Below are best practices to minimize challenges and develop desired infill housing.

1. Choose site wisely

It is important to thoroughly review sites to accurately estimate cost and time and to avoid any potential issues that could hinder development. Potential issues can include tax delinquency, physical limitations, environmental or drainage issues, or defective utilities or infrastructure.

2. Select the right team

Infill development often includes a team of professionals—such as a developer, builder, engineer, architect, and consultant—and having the right team with the needed experience is critical to ensure adequate preparation, community buy-in, and an overall easier process.

3. Secure financing

Securing financing early is critical as infill housing can have significant upfront costs. It is also often a requirement to have proof of financing for acquiring and developing a city-owned or land bank lot.

4. Review a municipality's zoning code

Building within the limits of the zoning code ensures a smoother process and a better guarantee of approval within a reasonable amount of time. Some zoning aspects that can be challenging for infill lots and need particular attention include lot size, lot coverage, building setbacks, and design requirements.

5. Communicate with the municipality

Early and ongoing communication with a municipality provides important guidance on regulations, development expectations, approval processes, and available incentives. This ensures your project is on the right path towards approval. A municipality may also provide additional benefits such as waivers, preliminary reviews, pre-approved designs, or technical assistance.

6. Engage the community

Engaging neighbors and community members is an opportunity to understand what developments are accepted or desired by the community. Early engagement in the development process fosters a collaborative environment that builds trust which is important to ensure project approval. The municipality, Community Development Corporations (CDCs), or local community groups can be helpful resources.

7. Practice good design

Since residential infill development takes place in established neighborhoods, compatible design is essential for new homes to compliment or enhance the look and feel of the neighborhood. Municipalities often provide design guidelines—and sometimes pre-approved designs—to better inform the expectations for new development. It can be helpful to have the design concept previewed early by the municipality and/ or architectural review board members to ensure that the design meets standards and matches what is desired.

8. Construct responsibly

Minimizing any disturbances to surrounding properties during construction smooths the development process. Construction is often one of the top concerns for community members. Issues to consider during construction include: operating during designated times to avoid noise complaints, keeping equipment from obstructing the sidewalk, containing debris through screening; employing best management practices to reduce airborne particulates and control soil and sediment runoff, and being mindful of surrounding landscaping and trees.



Image Source: County Planning, University Circle, Ohio

SINGLE-FAMILY INFILL DESIGN

KEY EXTERIOR DESIGN FEATURES

Exterior design is important to ensure infill housing is harmonious with the surrounding neighborhood. The images on the next page show examples of well-designed homes with key design elements highlighted on the images and listed below.

- 1 Scale:** The height and size of the infill homes are complementary to surrounding homes, preserving privacy and space
- 2 Architectural Style:** The infill homes incorporate and balance modern touches with existing characteristics of surrounding homes
- 3 Parking:** Parking is located ideally behind the residence to emphasize walkability
- 4 Entrance:** The porches and main doors face the street and are in line with surrounding structures to create welcoming entrances
- 5 Frontage:** The front facade of the homes interact well with the public right-of-way with a front yard similar in size and depth to surrounding properties

OTHER IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Infill homes can also incorporate additional features that make them an asset to the neighborhood. For example, the infill home displayed in the image at the top right was specifically designed to be accessible and allow seniors to live comfortably and independently. Some of those features include wide doorways, open floor plans, first-floor bedrooms, and easy-to-operate handles, faucets, and windows.

Another important consideration is including environmentally friendly features that also provide cost savings to the homeowner. These features could include water-saving fixtures and energy-efficient systems such as lighting, heating, cooling, and ventilation. Municipalities will often offer financial incentives to encourage the inclusion of these features in infill homes.

SINGLE-FAMILY INFILL EXAMPLES



Image Source: Cuyahoga Land Bank, Cleveland, Ohio



Image Source: Cuyahoga Land Bank, Cleveland, Ohio

GENERAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Outlined below is a general development process with a focus on the typical components of a development review & approval process. Specific timelines and requirements vary across communities. It is important to be aware of a municipality's policies and to review a municipality's zoning code as it dictates what, where, and how something can be built.

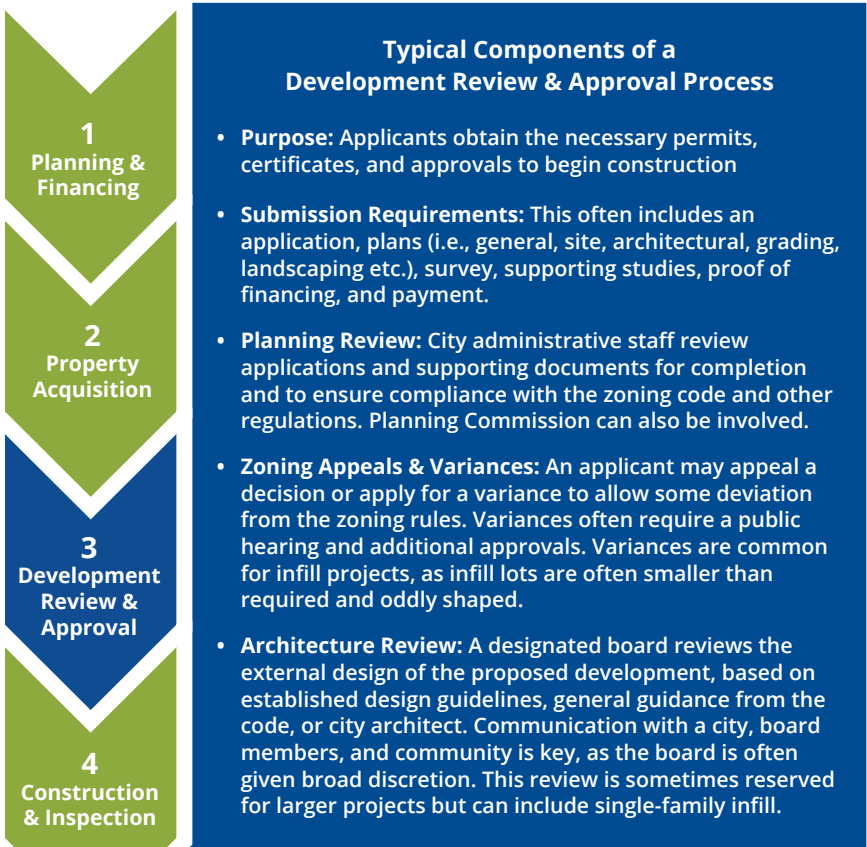


Image Source: Cuyahoga Land Bank, Maple Heights, Ohio

ROLES IN RESIDENTIAL INFILL

Residential infill development is successful when there is cooperation among various stakeholders. Below are key stakeholders and their roles.

Development Professionals

Development Professionals are responsible for presenting development plans that are financially sound and adhere to regulations; providing supporting data and studies to reduce unintended consequences; engaging the community early in the development process to ensure buy-in; and constructing responsibly.

Community Members

Community members have valuable firsthand experience and knowledge on the day-to-day needs and concerns of their communities, and they are often interested in building or purchasing an infill home.

Local Municipality

Municipalities review plans, issue permits, and conduct inspections of new developments. They are responsible for fostering development that aligns with the community's overall needs and goals by establishing and enforcing the rules and regulations that guide the development process. They can assume a key role in incentivizing and promoting infill development.

Other Governmental Agencies and Non-Profits

The Cuyahoga Land Bank can be instrumental as they acquire properties and develop them themselves or sell them to homeowners and small developers. They can also provide technical assistance and additional resources during the development process.

County Planning can assist municipalities in updating zoning codes and can engage stakeholders to establish development goals and a plan for the future.



Image Source: Cuyahoga Land Bank, South Euclid, Ohio

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This resource is made possible by the Northeast Ohio First Suburbs Consortium in partnership with the Cuyahoga Land Bank and First Federal Lakewood and is designed by the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission.

Northeast Ohio First Suburb Consortium

www.firstsuburbs.org/

The first government-led advocacy organization in the country working to revitalize mature developed communities, and raise public and political awareness of the problems and inequities associated with urban sprawl and urban disinvestment

Cuyahoga Land Bank

www.cuyahogalandbank.org/

A non-profit government-purposed entity tasked with acquiring blighted properties and returning them to productive use to increase property values, support community goals, and improve the quality of life for Cuyahoga County residents

Cuyahoga County Planning Commission

www.countyplanning.us/

An independent governmental agency that informs and provides services in support of the short and long term comprehensive planning, quality of life, environment, and economic development of Cuyahoga County and its cities, villages, and townships

Single-Family Zoning Analysis

www.countyplanning.us/singlefamily

The Single-Family Zoning Analysis aims to identify issues within zoning and outline best practices for making constructing desired infill housing more practicable

Contact your local municipality for the most up-to-date information about residential infill development in your community.



County Planning



First Federal
Lakewood

