

Make room for Micron with region-wide zoning compact (Guest Opinion by Sara Bronin)

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Micron Technology plans to build a massive chipmaking complex in the town of Clay. This conceptual rendering shows the scale of the development, which could be several times larger than the New York State Fairgrounds. Onondaga County

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By

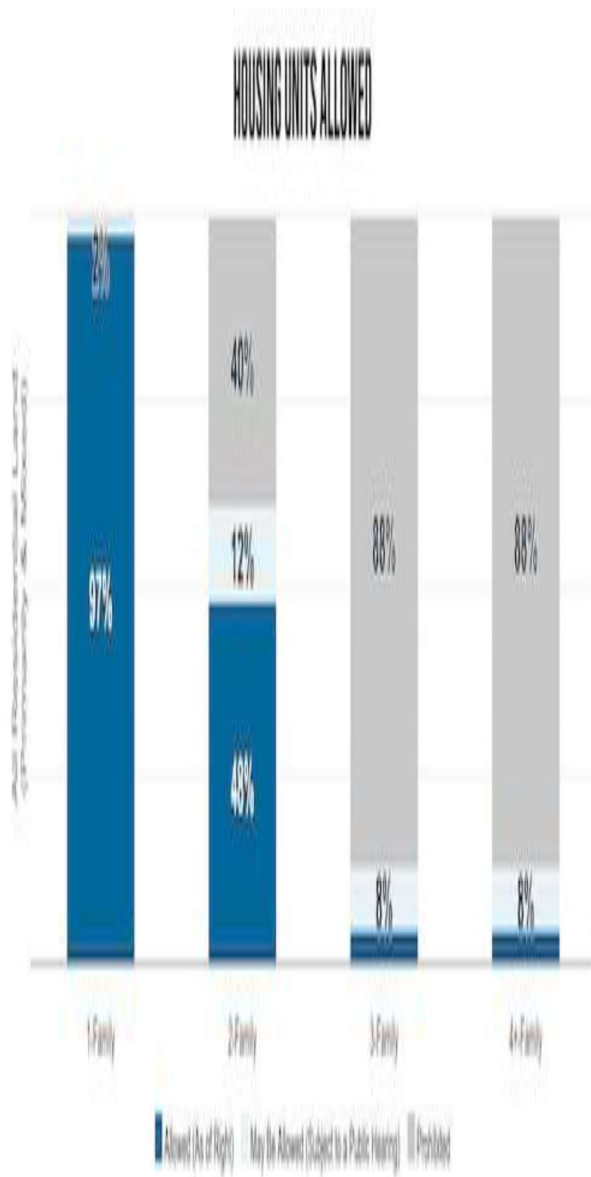
- Sara C. Bronin | Land Use Atlas Inc.

Sara C. Bronin is the CEO of Land Use Atlas Inc., which makes the [National Zoning Atlas](#), and the author of [“Key to the City: How Zoning Shapes Our World.”](#) [Bronin](#) is on the faculty at Cornell Law School and is professor of city and regional planning in the university’s College of Architecture.

In November, chip giant [Micron Technology](#) plans to break ground on a memory manufacturing facility in Clay, New York. The project is poised to [create 9,000 jobs and draw an estimated 100,000 new residents](#), positioning the region for a transformation. Policymakers have said they want to roll out the welcome mat for those new residents. Those policymakers don’t seem to understand that there’s literally *no room* for them to move to.

That’s because almost everywhere around the new Micron facility, restrictive zoning laws make it nearly impossible to build the types of housing that tech workers want and need in the places they would most likely want to live. Data from the [National Zoning Atlas](#) (NZA) reveals that the region’s zoning codes exclude the very housing that would help alleviate the shortage. The tax incentives that New York state [plans to offer](#) developers are meaningless if the housing isn’t permitted in the first place. Without major changes to zoning, Micron may not be able to attract and retain its workforce.

Across Onondaga County [as the chart below shows], 97% of land allows for single-family housing, while just 4% allows for multi-family housing (anything over three units) to be built by right. But not everyone wants to live in single-family housing. Some people — younger and older alike — prefer smaller and more affordable units, or places where they can easily meet new neighbors.



Housing units allowed in Onondaga County, as depicted in the National Zoning Atlas “Zoning Snapshot” for Onondaga County. (Courtesy of National Zoning Atlas)

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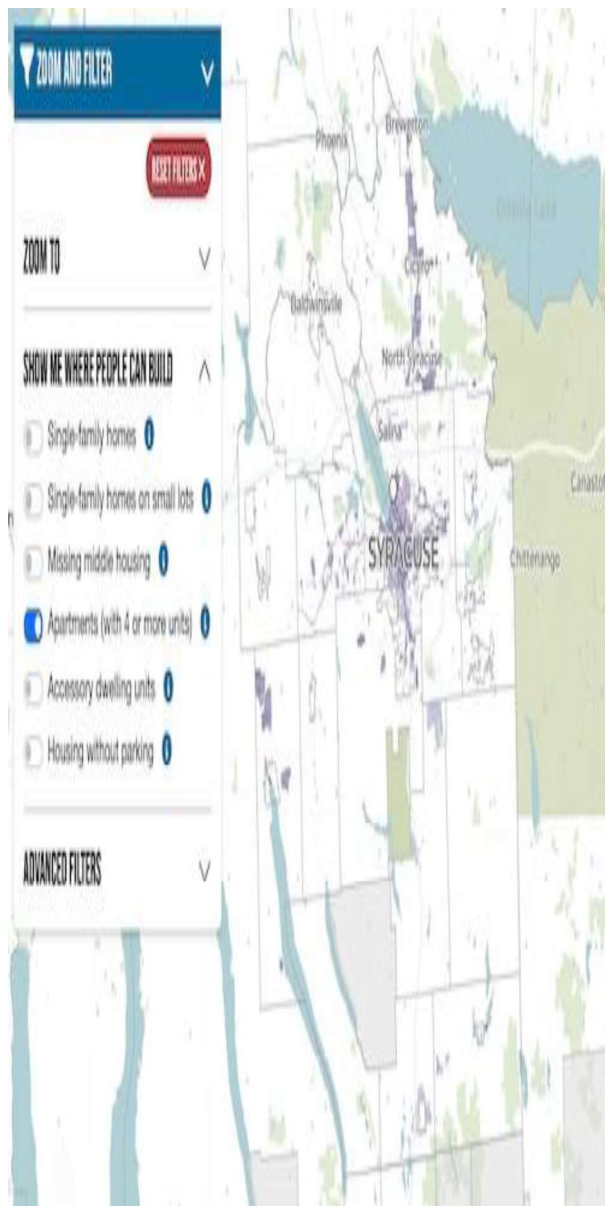
For newcomers who prioritize affordability, it’s not just apartments that the housing market is missing. It’s the workhorse of accessible, affordable housing: the accessory dwelling unit, tucked into a single-family lot. In many places, including California, these garage apartments, basement units or casitas have become popular ways for homeowners to make extra income. But just 7% of residential land in Onondaga County allows an [accessory apartment](#) to be built by right. And so, they hardly get built. What’s worse, 70% of single-family-zoned land requires a half-acre, an acre or even two acres of land. To provide a comparison: A football field is 1.3 acres. This traditional-style zoning requires driving between home, office, and shops — anathema to millennials who don’t even want to drive at all. It means lots of lawn maintenance, snow removal and other landscape-related costs. It means a much lonelier lifestyle — one where a new resident can’t easily socialize. Again, not everyone wants to live like that, but that’s what Onondaga County limits them to.



[‘Exclusionary’ zoning must go, report says. Housing costs in Onondaga County depend on it](#)
[Bottlenecks to development must be removed to make housing affordable, advocates say.](#)

Even before Micron, a scarcity of housing has [priced current residents](#) of their homes. The median home price in Onondaga County has [grown at nearly twice the national average](#) (12.3% vs. 7%).

Syracuse has tried to prepare for this future, starting with its [2023 housing strategy](#), which permitted new multifamily apartments and “missing middle” housing by right on 59% of its land [see map below]. But it takes years for builders to adjust planned projects, so recent projects have mostly included single-family homes, pricey duplexes and [seven new downtown hotels](#). As a result, the city was featured in *The New York Times*’ [2024 Rent Calculator](#) as having the highest one-year rent increase for one-bedroom apartments (22%) of any city nationwide.



Onondaga County as depicted in the National Zoning Atlas map. Areas in purple allow multi-family housing (4+ families) by right (light purple for residential-only, dark purple for mixed-use), while white areas do not allow multi-family housing by right. (Courtesy of National Zoning Atlas)

This isn't just Syracuse's problem to solve. To get enough housing for workers in the next two years, the 34 cities and towns in Onondaga County must act now, together, on a "Make Room for Micron" zoning strategy that fast-tracks permits for new and diverse housing options. Village centers and main street areas could be rezoned to allow gentle density — and small businesses in towns and suburbs could flourish with more foot traffic. Single-family homeowners, too, could benefit if they can build an accessory unit to rent out, without a lot of red tape. Overall, new development brings in new taxpayers and alleviates the burdens on existing property owners.

The region — or the state, if the region doesn't — must streamline zoning for housing. And to have any hope of making way for Micron, they need to act now.