



Small Housing: Unlocking Gentle Density Opportunities

Presentation prepared for **Township of Langley**
July 2025



**Township of
Langley**
Est. 1873

Land Acknowledgment



Small Housing is Canada's leading non-profit gentle density accelerator since 2012



- **Mission:** Make it easier to build gentle density housing.
- **Why?** Gentle Density represents the most viable path towards more attainable home ownership, while supporting community economic growth nationwide.
- **How?**
 - Strategic advisory and research
 - Technical support to all levels of government
 - Industry and workforce development
 - Education for homeowner-developers
 - Other products & services to fill market gaps

Gentle Density: What is it?

Gentle Density Housing is small-scale, multi-unit housing types that fit into existing single-detached neighbourhoods.

Key characteristics include:

- **Scale:** Fits within Part 9 of the BCBC (under 600m² and no more than 3-4 storeys).
- **Ground-oriented:** Residents often have direct access to the outdoors.
- **Infill-focused:** Builds on existing lots, without requiring major infrastructure overhauls.
- Often **wood-frame construction** – familiar construction methods, new configurations. **Pre-fab also growing in prominence.**



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Gentle Density: What is it?



Laneway/Garden
Suite



Pocket
Neighbourhood



Cohousing



Houseplex



Lock-off Suite



Small Lot Homes



Rowhomes



Secondary
Suites

Gentle Density: What is it?



Source: ReHousing

Why Gentle Density Matters?



- **Boosts housing affordability** by increasing supply and easing market pressure
- **Creates stable jobs** across construction, design, trades, and permitting
- **Strengthens local economies** by expanding customer bases in established neighbourhoods
- **Delivers municipal revenue gains** without major infrastructure costs
- **Keeps essential workers local**, supporting community resilience and reducing turnover



Shifting landscape:

What is Bill 44?

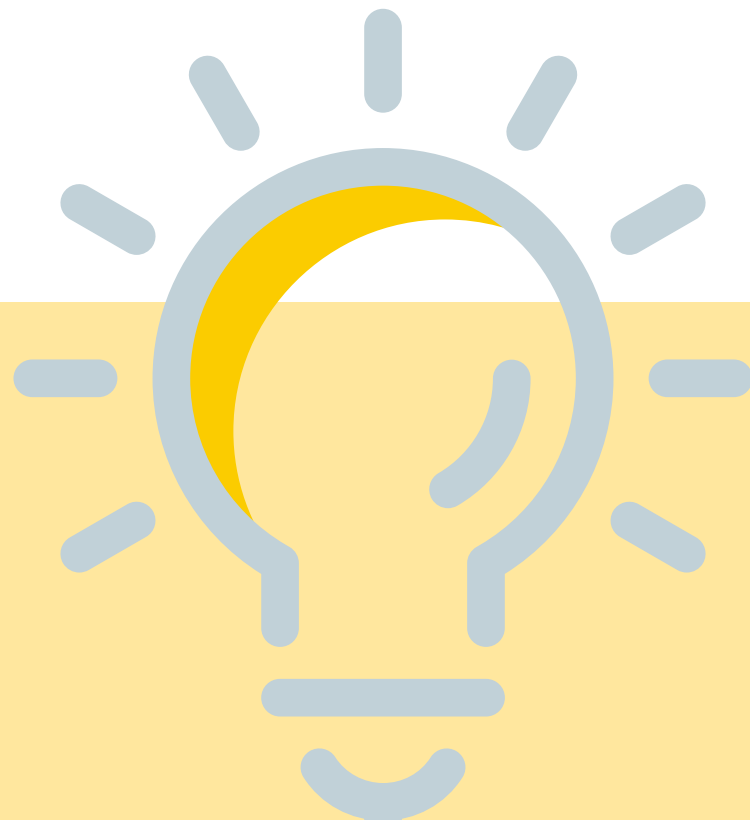
- Province-wide zoning reforms introduced in Fall 2023
- Applies to municipalities with over 5,000 residents
- **Permits up to 4 units on most single-detached lots**, up to 6 units near frequent transit stops
- Province has issued a recommended Policy Manual but Local Governments remain in control of their zoning bylaws



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A (gentle) solution to our housing crisis...



83% of British Columbians support gentle density solutions like laneway houses, small multiplexes, and suites.

Small Housing research, 2025

A (gentle) solution to our housing crisis...



42% of BC homeowners with the right property would add a secondary unit if the process were simpler and faster.

Small Housing research, 2025

Gentle Density: The Business Case for Builders

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Small Builder Advantage:
You Already Have the Skills



Small Builder Advantage:
You Already Know the Neighbourhood



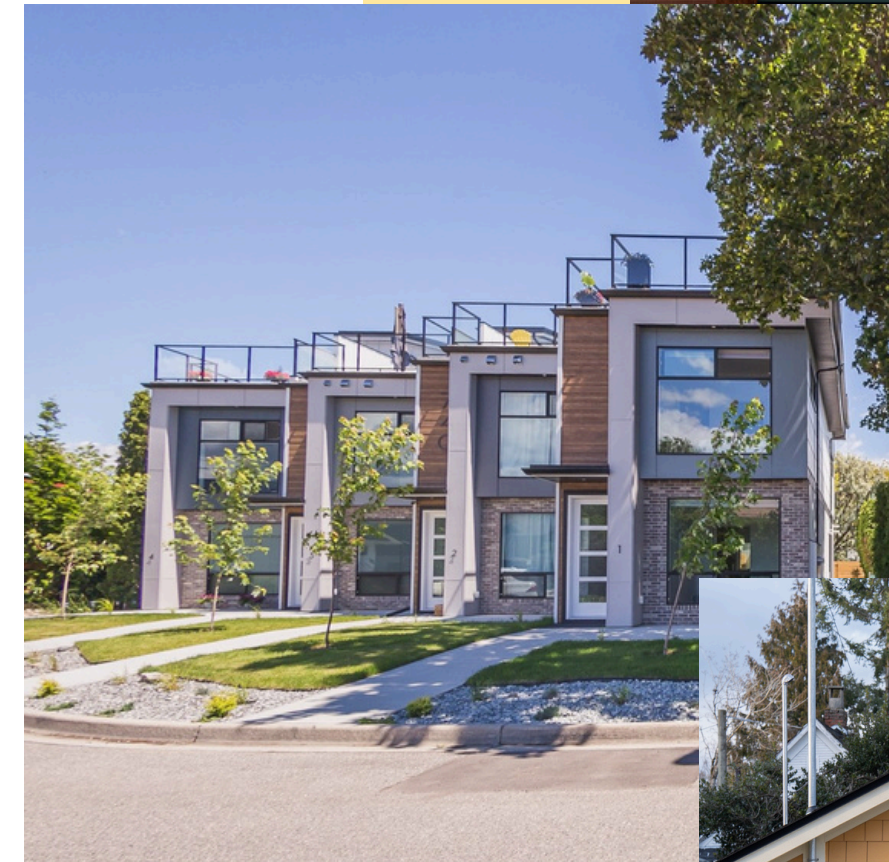
Small Builder Advantage:
You're not competing with big developers



Gentle Density: The Business Case for Builders

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- Spreads risk, boosts potential for steady returns
- Improved project economics
- Faster Approvals (potentially), via Standardized Designs
- Policy Support is growing

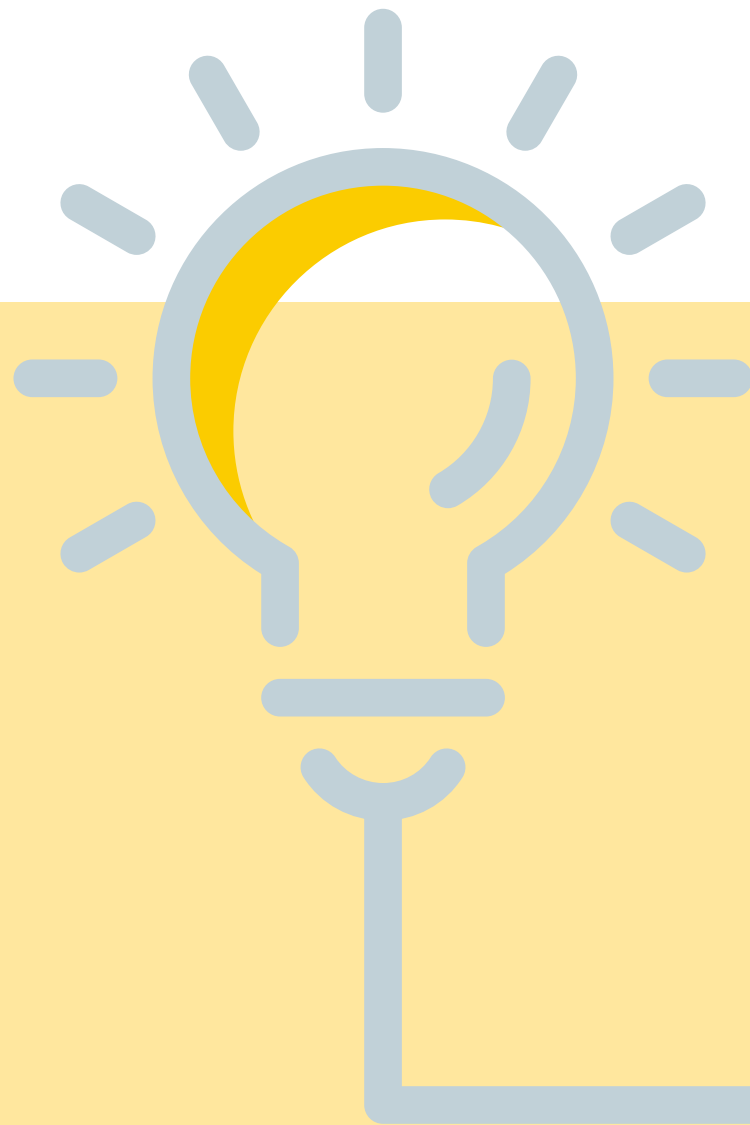


Gentle Density: Project Cost to Build vs. Profit



Project Type	Sellable Units	Total Build Cost	Sale Price per Unit	Gross Profit	Profit Margin
Single-Family Home	1	\$860,000	\$1,100,000	\$240,000	21%
Fourplex	4	\$1,800,000	\$575,000 × 4	\$500,000	21%

A (gentle) solution to our housing crisis...



If just **1% of BC's single-family lots** were activated under new housing rules, it could represent **\$21.7B** in annual property turnover – a major economic opportunity

Smallworks research, 2025

How to avoid common pitfalls



Risk Area	Common Pitfall	Smart Strategy
Zoning Delays	Misreading what is allowed	Early meetings with the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) or planning department; use pre-approved or standard plans where possible
Cost overruns	Missing soft costs	Get a Class D estimate with contingency; budget realistically
Neighbour Pushback	Community Oppositions	Talk to neighbours early; use visuals and highlight community value
Timeline Problems	Permits take longer than expected	Bring in your team early; use plans that are ready to go

Gentle Density: The Takeaways

- Gentle density is a major opportunity for small-scale builders: you already have the skills to succeed!
- Strong policy and market forces are driving demand
- The financial and business case is compelling



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Building Upskilling Tour this Fall!

- 4–6-hour, Continuing Professional Development-accredited training program designed to help small single-family homebuilders become “developer-lites”
- Topics include:
 - **Gentle density:** What is it and why is it kind of a big deal?
 - Making the **business case** (yep, there’s money in it!)
 - **Zoning, regulations, and site selection** decoded
 - **Designing** for both community charm and code compliance
 - **Building science** for multifamily projects
 - **Financial planning** hacks and incentive tips
 - **Project management** tricks to scale like a pro

Thanks to the **BC Workforce Innovation Program**, we’re keeping costs low to ensure broad access.



Any questions? Keep in touch!



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