



From Blueprint to Reality: Harnessing the Power of Pre-Approved Housing

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From Blueprint to Reality: Harnessing the Power of Pre-Approved Housing Plans with Real-World Examples

In the contemporary landscape of housing development and municipal planning, the concept of pre-approved housing plans has emerged as a transformative tool, fostering efficiency and expediency in the housing approval process.

Municipalities play a pivotal role in planning for and approving housing infrastructure in their regions, and embracing pre-approved housing plans represents a forward-thinking approach to navigating the challenges of housing affordability and rapid urbanization.

By streamlining regulatory procedures and promoting standardized, compliant designs, implementing pre-approved housing plans not only accelerates the pace of housing development but also produces housing attractive to current and prospective citizens.

What is Pre-Approved Housing?

Pre-approved housing plans refer to architectural designs and construction blueprints that have undergone scrutiny and approval by municipal authorities or regulatory bodies in advance of individual project applications. These plans adhere to established building codes, zoning regulations and other pertinent standards to ensure compliance with local requirements.

By offering a pre-approved framework for residential construction, this strategic approach expedites the development process for builders and home owners, and fosters efficiency, consistency and regulatory adherence in the realization of housing projects within a given municipality.

In urban infill areas, areas grappling with escalating housing demand and growing populations, and conservation or historical districts bound by stringent architectural guidelines, the implementation of pre-approved housing plans emerges as a strategic and timely solution to address housing development and affordability challenges.

In the context of urban revitalization, pre-approved plans expedite the approval process, facilitating efficient infill development that contributes to community renewal. Regions experiencing surges in housing demand and population growth can harness pre-approved plans to streamline construction timelines, ensuring a swift response to the pressing need for additional housing. Additionally, in conservation or historical districts, where adherence to specific architectural standards is paramount, pre-approved plans can offer a balance between preserving character and promoting affordability, aligning new developments with the unique design of these districts. By embracing pre-approved housing plans, these diverse areas can leverage a powerful tool to foster affordability, accelerate development and ensure the sustainable growth of their communities.

Small City - Ecorse, MI

Ecorse, Mich., is a city of about 7,500 people, located in southeast Michigan. As a suburb of Detroit, most of the homes in the city were built between 1940 and 1960 as a part of the post-war boom. Ecorse is also a historical manufacturing city and the home of a U.S. Steel finishing facility. As manufacturing became more automated in the 1980s, the city saw a decline in its workforce and overall population, and vacant lots began popping up throughout residential neighborhoods.



Today, Ecorse is aiming to infill these lots to:

1. Improve the taxable value of the lots and community,
2. Strengthen the neighborhood character, and
3. Alleviate Michigan's housing shortage.

Additionally, both newcomers and lifelong residents have voiced the desire for newer, more accessible homes with modern amenities. The city has launched a new [Pre-Approved Housing Plans webpage](#) with information and plans of various sizes for use. In an area where

the selling price of a home is only slightly more than the construction cost, pre-approved infill plans make a big difference. By taking \$10,000 off

the cost of a new home, Ecorse is making it more affordable for individuals to build their own home and easier for developers to make a profit. Pre-approved plans also expedite the permitting process, saving applicants both time and money on plan reviews. Today, the program offers four different ranch-style homes plans, each designed to be slab-built, universally accessible and fully electric.



Photo Courtesy of McKenna Assoc.

Big City - Kalamazoo, MI

On the far west side of Michigan, Kalamazoo is the cultural core for the region, with 73,000 people and numerous universities and major employers. However, the city has struggled with housing challenges over the last several decades, including contending with vacant and blighted properties scattered throughout the city.



Photo Courtesy of McKenna Assoc.

To incentivize the redevelopment of these lots, Kalamazoo took a two-pronged approach. First, the city changed its zoning regulations to ensure that required setbacks and minimum lot widths were not rendering lots unbuildable. Second, the city launched its pre-approved infill program with a series of home plans that was designed to fit on the average vacant lot. Like Ecorse, the city sought a solution that would improve the tax base, alleviate the housing shortage and improve neighborhood appearances. Today, the program offers seven different homes plans, ranging from single-family homes to quadplexes, which are designed to fit with the historical character of Kalamazoo's neighborhoods.

County - Yavapai County, AZ

Like many western communities, Yavapai County, Ariz., has been contending with extreme and rapid growth. With 75% of its land area covered by public land, the county's growth pressures are concentrated into a very small geographic area. This led to a rise in rents that now average \$982 per month, despite the median income being around \$42,000 after taxes.

To tackle the high demand for housing and worsening unaffordability, the county launched the "[Home of my Own](#)" pre-approved infill program in 2021. Considered to be the nation's first modern pre-approved infill program, the county led the way in program implementation. Today, Yavapai offers three different home plan sets, all ranch style and slab-built. Between the plans and the permitting process, an applicant can save \$10,800 off the cost of construction.



Photo Courtesy of Adobe Stock

Pre-approved housing plans exist as a useful tool amidst the complexities of modern housing challenges. Municipalities, recognizing the urgent need for efficient solutions, have begun to embrace this innovative approach to streamline the approval process and promote the development of affordable, compliant housing. Through case studies like those in Ecorse, Kalamazoo and Yavapai County, it's evident that pre-approved housing plans are practical tools yielding tangible results. From revitalizing neighborhoods to meeting surging demand, these plans offer a blueprint for sustainable growth and community resilience.