

Explanatory Document

Proposed Planning Scheme Amendment to facilitate infill development and subdivision in Zone LR (Low Density Residential)



1. Introduction

The Northern Territory Government is committed to facilitating development across the Territory by reducing approval timeframes and providing greater flexibility in how planning controls are applied. As part of this approach, the Government has identified the need to review provisions that limit residential land to single dwelling development.

In November 2025, the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment requested the NT Planning Commission (the Commission) undertake a review of the planning system, including community consultation, to identify opportunities to support infill development and subdivision within Zone LR (Low Density Residential). The Commission subsequently provided its findings and recommendations to the Minister on options to increase flexibility in the zone which can be found [here](#).

In response, and consistent with the Commission's advice, the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment has prepared a planning scheme amendment to change rules that apply to land in low density areas. This amendment reflects the Government's position that increasing flexibility in low density residential areas is an appropriate response to current housing challenges, while maintaining the intent and character of the zone.

2. Why we are making these changes

Under the [NT Planning Scheme 2020](#) (NTPS), most residential land in Zone LR is limited to single dwelling development. In established suburbs, subdivision is generally only allowed where lots are at least 800m², or only marginally smaller in limited circumstances.

These provisions constrain development within existing residential areas by limiting the range of housing outcomes that can be achieved, making it difficult to respond to changing household needs, accommodate smaller households, or provide more and alternative housing forms within well-established suburbs.

Infill development plays an important role in accommodating population growth within existing urban areas by making more efficient use of serviced land and existing infrastructure. It can provide additional housing in well-located areas close to jobs, services and community facilities, complementing new housing delivered through greenfield land releases. Increasing opportunities for infill development also supports a greater diversity of housing types, helping to meet the needs of a broader range of households.

The Commission's review identified that the existing Zone LR provisions may reduce opportunities for infill development, particularly in established suburbs. Feedback from consultation indicated there is some community support for increased housing diversity, provided new development is appropriately designed, maintains neighbourhood character, and includes suitable planning controls.

This amendment responds to these issues and seeks to enable a broader range of housing outcomes and more efficient use of land within Zone LR, while maintaining appropriate controls to ensure development remains compatible with the surrounding locality and the intent of Zone LR.

3. What is the NT Planning Scheme 2020?

Before outlining the proposed changes, it is useful to understand how the [NTPS](#) works, as it is the 'rule book' for land use and development in the NT. It controls and guides what can be built across the NT, except for Jabiru, which has its own town plan.

The Minister may make changes to the planning scheme from time to time to rezone land, implement a new policy or change other rules in the planning scheme in accordance with the requirements of the *Planning Act 1999* (the Act).

3.1. What does the NT Planning Scheme 2020 contain?

The NTPS includes several key parts that guide how land can be used and developed:

- [Overlays](#) - identify and set special rules for factors that could affect land use (such as flooding)
- [Zones](#) - control the types of use and development allowed in an area
- [Development and subdivision requirements](#) - provide direction on how a use or development should look or operate.

3.2. Zone LR (Low Density Residential)

Zone LR is primarily intended for low-rise urban residential development, consisting of individual houses on separate lots.

	Allowed	Dwelling-single (one house per lot)	Dwelling-independent (i.e. granny flat)
	Not allowed	Dwelling-group (i.e. duplexes, attached or semi-detached dwellings)	Dwelling-multiple (dwellings on separate levels)
	Subdivision requirements	Greenfield Areas (undeveloped areas) • Average lot size: 600m² • Minimum lot size: 450m²	Established Neighbourhoods • Minimum lot size: 800m² • Minimum building envelope: 17 x 17m
	Where is Zone LR?	• Darwin • Palmerston • Katherine Also in Howard Springs, Coolalinga, Batchelor and other regional locations	• Tennant Creek • Alice Springs

4. Proposed Amendments to the NTPS

4.1. Summary of proposed amendments

It is proposed to change rules that apply to land in Zone LR by amending the NTPS. The new rules would allow smaller lots and a broader range of housing types in Zone LR, as long as a development permit is obtained.

A summary of the changes is provided in the table below along with an explanation of the amendments in Section 4.3 of this document. A schedule of the draft amendment to the NTPS is included at Appendix A.

	Current Provision	Proposed Amendment
Minimum Lot Size	800m ²	450m ²
Lot Size Variations	Up to 5% reduction (minimum 760m ² lot)	Up to 10% reduction (minimum 405m ² lot)
Types of Homes	'Dwelling-group' & 'dwelling-multiple' <u>prohibited</u>	'Dwelling-group' & 'dwelling-multiple' – <u>development permit required</u>
Density	1 dwelling-single plus a dwelling-independent (i.e. granny flat)	1 dwelling per 450m ² as part of a dwelling-group or dwelling-multiple (with a maximum of 10% variation in some cases)
Minimum lot frontage (450-600m ² lots)	13 metres	12 metres
Battle-axe lots	To be avoided	Allowed in limited circumstances
Subdivision on land affected by flooding and storm surge overlays	To be avoided	Prohibited on affected portion of lot
Dwelling-group and dwelling-multiple on land affected by flooding and storm surge overlays	Allowed above flood level	Prohibited on affected portion of lot

4.2. Where will it apply?

The proposed amendment will apply to all Zone LR land across the NT, including greenfield areas, except for land affected by flooding and storm surge. Mapping of all Zone LR lots across the NT greater than 900m² not located in flooding or storm surge areas is provided at Appendix B.

While the new provisions will apply broadly, not all lots will be able to utilise them. Many sites may not meet the minimum requirements for subdivision or development due to factors such as lot configuration, access, or site constraints. In addition, increased development intensity may require upgrades to existing infrastructure, with the cost of any necessary works to be borne by the developer.

On the other hand, some properties not identified in the mapping may still be suitable for subdivision or development. This may occur where variations to minimum lot size or density controls are appropriate and can be justified through the development assessment process.

4.3. Explanation of proposed amendments

Minimum Lot Size

Proposal

Reduce the minimum lot size in Zone LR from 800m² to 450m² to facilitate smaller lots.

Why is this proposed?

This will create more opportunities in Zone LR to deliver a broader range of housing options. While smaller than the minimum in existing suburbs, a 450m² lot size is consistent with the minimum in greenfield areas. It therefore provides a gradual transition to Zone LMR, where a minimum lot size of 300m² applies, supporting a consistent and orderly pattern of development across zones.

The NTPS already contains controls and provisions that are applicable to 450m² lots, including:

- Minimum building area
- Lot frontage
- Continuous frontage (space where there is no driveway)

There are already close to 1,000 lots within Zone LR across the NT within the 450m² to 600m² range, predominantly in greenfield areas, but also some in older areas such as:

- Sovereign Circuit in Coconut Grove
- Ochre Court in Alice Springs

This demonstrates that smaller lots can successfully accommodate residential development

Under existing NTPS provisions, lots between 450m² and 600m² will require a site plan showing existing planning rules for parking, setbacks and open space can be achieved.

In recognition of the reduced minimum lot size, it is also proposed to remove the minimum building envelope requirement of 17 metres × 17 metres for lots 600m² and greater. Larger lots may still be created, but no specific requirements are needed as they are no longer the prevailing minimum.

Minimum Lot Size Variations

Proposal

Increase the consent authority's discretion to vary the minimum lot size from 5% to 10%. This would enable consideration of lots as small as 405m² where appropriate.

Why is this proposed?

The NTPS currently lets the consent authority approve lots that are up to 5% smaller than the minimum.

The proposed amendment provides a modest increase in flexibility, allowing the consent authority to apply a greater variation to support subdivision design. This is particularly relevant in established urban areas, where site constraints, irregular lot shapes, or existing development patterns may limit the ability to achieve standard lot sizes.

For example, a 900m² lot that already contains a dwelling the landowner wishes to retain may, due to the dwelling's position on the site, result in a subdivision layout creating one lot of 410m² and another of 490m², subject to approval by the consent authority.

By slightly increasing the variation allowance, the amendment supports more practical and efficient subdivision outcomes. It enables greater responsiveness to site-specific conditions and promotes increased housing diversity in established areas, while maintaining the overall intent of the minimum lot size control.

Where a variation is sought, the consent authority must still be satisfied that the lots are suitable for residential use and align with the purpose and outcomes of the relevant zone.

Types of Homes

Proposal

Make 'dwelling-group' and 'dwelling-multiple' *merit assessable* in Zone LR, where they are currently prohibited, meaning a development permit will be required for these uses.

These uses include developments such as two or more detached or semi-detached dwellings, including duplexes or dwellings on separate levels, where the maximum building height is two storeys.

Why is this proposed?

The amendment enables a broader range of housing types within Zone LR to support increased housing diversity, while maintaining appropriate oversight to ensure development is compatible with the surrounding locality.

By making these uses merit assessable, development proposals will be required to be submitted and assessed against the NTPS and notified to neighbours. This process ensures consideration of key matters such as building design, setbacks, height, site coverage, and consistency with the purpose and outcomes of the zone.

Building height will remain limited to the existing 8.5m applicable to Zone LR, ensuring compatibility with the scale of development in the area.

Density

Proposal

1. Introduce a maximum density of one dwelling per 450m² of site area.
2. Limit the consent authority's discretion to 10% above the prescribed maximum density. This would allow consideration of a density of up to one dwelling per 405m² of site area.

Why is this proposed?

Right now, Zone LR limits development to one dwelling-single per lot plus a granny flat. To enable 'dwelling-group' and 'dwelling-multiple' developments in Zone LR, it is necessary to introduce a maximum density control.

This amendment supports moderate infill development and greater housing diversity within Zone LR, while maintaining appropriate control over development intensity and ensuring outcomes remain consistent with the intent of the zone.

The proposed density of one dwelling per 450m² aligns with the minimum lot size, ensuring a coordinated and controlled increase in development intensity. It provides an alternative way to achieve similar outcomes without needing to formally subdivide the land.

This control also provides flexibility in situations where subdivision may not be feasible such as where lots cannot achieve minimum frontage or other subdivision requirements. In such cases, the maximum density provision would allow for alternative forms of development, such as 'dwelling-group' or 'dwelling-multiple' developments, provided the overall density limit is met.

Some flexibility is important to ensure that well-designed developments are not prevented by overly rigid requirements. However, there is currently no defined limit on the extent of any variation from the maximum density, which may be appropriate for higher density zones but is not considered appropriate for Zone LR.

Introducing a 10% cap on density variation establishes clear and consistent parameters for development while still allowing a degree of flexibility. It provides greater certainty for applicants and the community about the expected scale of development within the zone. The consent authority may only approve development that exceeds the maximum density where it is demonstrated that the proposal is appropriate to the site, having regard to factors such as location, scale, and potential impacts on adjoining and nearby properties.

Minimum Frontage

Proposal

Reduce the minimum frontage requirement for lots between 450m² and 600m² from 13 metres to 12 metres.

Why is this proposed?

While a 13 metre frontage is generally achievable in greenfield subdivisions, it can constrain subdivision opportunities in established suburbs.

What does density mean?

This is a calculation of how many homes can be built on a lot.

For example, if the density is one dwelling per 450m², a 900m² block could potentially accommodate two homes (subject to meeting other requirements).

Across Zone LR in the NT, many existing lots in established areas have wide frontages, typically ranging from 21 to 30 metres, but also have significantly larger lot sizes, often exceeding 900m².

In these cases, lots may be capable of meeting the proposed 450m² minimum lot size through subdivision but may be unable to achieve compliant lot frontages, limiting appropriate infill development opportunities.

Reducing the minimum frontage to 12 metres improves the feasibility of subdivision in these contexts while still supporting appropriate development outcomes. A 12 metre frontage provides sufficient width to accommodate vehicle access, servicing requirements, and a functional building envelope, while maintaining an appropriate streetscape presence.

Battle-axe Lots

Proposal

Allow battle-axe lots (also called flagpole blocks, hammerhead blocks or rear lots) that comply with the minimum lot size (excluding the access strip) only where:

- The configuration is necessary due to site layout
- The battle-axe configuration enables the retention of an existing dwelling

Why is this proposed?

A battle-axe lot is a parcel of land located behind another property, with access to the street only via a long, narrow strip of land. When viewed from above the layout resembles a battle-axe. The narrow driveway or laneway acts as the "handle", while the private rear section serves as the "blade". An example layout is provided in Section 4.4 of this document.

Currently battle-axe lots are discouraged in Zone LR and other urban residential zones. However, this approach can limit practical subdivision opportunities in certain situations.

While not suitable in all circumstances, battle-axe lots can provide a practical solution for subdividing land that cannot otherwise meet standard frontage requirements. For example:

- A site with a narrow street frontage but significant depth may not be wide enough to create two side-by-side lots, but could accommodate a new lot at the rear accessed via a driveway
- A property with an existing dwelling may have sufficient land at the rear to create an additional lot while retaining the original house

Allowing battle-axe lots in these limited circumstances provides a way to unlock additional housing opportunities on constrained sites. Importantly, it also supports the retention of existing homes and can help maintain the established character of the street, as development is located behind the primary frontage.

To ensure battle-axe lots are appropriately sited, maintain adequate separation from boundaries, and respond to the surrounding context:

- They will not be eligible for reduced setback provisions that currently apply to smaller lots in the NT. This ensures that development maintains appropriate spacing and amenity outcomes
- The access strip is to be provided in addition to the 450m² minimum lot size

Overall, this amendment provides targeted flexibility while maintaining appropriate controls to ensure that development remains compatible with the intent of the zone and the scale of development.

Flooding and Storm Surge Affected Lots

Proposal

Prohibit land within Zone LR affected by Clause 3.6 LSF – Land Subject to Flooding and Clause 3.7 LSSS – Land Subject to Storm Surge from being subdivided or developed for ‘dwelling-group’ or ‘dwelling-multiple’ land uses.

Why is this proposed?

It is proposed to exclude flood and storm affected lots from the new provisions to reduce the risk to people and property from flooding and storm surge events. Allowing more housing in these locations could increase the number of people exposed to hazards associated with flooding and place greater pressure on emergency response and evacuation arrangements during extreme events.

Restricting further subdivision and higher-density housing in these locations helps to avoid intensifying development in areas with known risks. Instead, it supports directing future residential growth to safer locations with fewer environmental constraints.

It is recognised that this change may limit subdivision opportunities for some properties in Zone LR that could otherwise be subdivided under the current rules. However, it does not remove all development options. Alternative pathways, such as applying for an Exceptional Development Permit, will still be available and can be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Other Minor Amendments

Other minor amendments to the NTPS are required to implement these changes and are illustrated in Appendix A.

4.4. What could it look like?

The examples below illustrate how different sites could be developed under the proposed rules, including smaller lots, retained dwellings, and 'dwelling-group'.



Standard **subdivision** creating two lots, each at least 450m² in area



Battle-axe subdivision enabling retention of existing dwelling and an additional rear lot



Flexible **subdivision** for irregularly shaped sites



Dwelling-group development where minimum frontage for subdivision cannot be achieved

5. Consideration of Legislative Framework

In the NT, the *Planning Act 1999* (the Act) provides the legislative framework and regulations for land use and development and dictates how land in the NT can be developed and how the NTPS can be amended.

A proposed planning scheme amendment to the NTPS should consider the purpose and objectives of the Act as well as the NTPS strategic framework.

5.1. Alignment with the *Planning Act 1999*

The proposed planning scheme amendment is exhibited in accordance with the requirements of the Act to gain an understanding of community views on infill development and subdivision.

The proposed amendment would align with the following purpose and objectives of the Act:

- (b) to ensure that strategic planning reflects the wishes and needs of the community*
- (c) to ensure that appropriate public consultation and input are included in the formulation of planning schemes and the making of decisions under planning schemes;*
- (e) to promote the sustainable development of land; and*
- (j) to promote the good design of buildings and other works that respects the amenity of the locality.*

5.2. Alignment with the NT Planning Scheme 2020 Strategic Framework

The strategic framework is made up of plans and policies that form part of the NTPS. They describe how the government expects land to develop now and in the future. The strategic framework comprises Territory-wide policy, regional land use plans, sub regional land use plans and area plans.

The strategic framework recognises the need to increase housing diversity and balance new housing across greenfield and established areas. It also emphasises the importance of providing additional housing opportunities that make efficient use of existing infrastructure and local services.

This amendment seeks to:

- Facilitate the development of well-located housing and increase housing diversity and choice across the NT, while ensuring that impacts of development are appropriately managed
- Facilitate housing in existing urban areas and where existing infrastructure is available or suitable for upgrade
- Ensure efficient use of valuable land and resources to cater for a growing and changing population

While it is acknowledged that density within Zone LR will increase, it will not fundamentally alter the low-density intent of the zone and will continue to provide an appropriate transition from higher density zones, aligning with the strategic framework's focus on housing diversity and the efficient use of land.

6. We are interested to hear your feedback

You may make a submission to the proposed amendment during the exhibition period through the following means:

- Online: [Development Applications Online](#)
- Email: planning.ntg@nt.gov.au
- Post:
NT Planning Commission
GPO Box 1680
DARWIN NT 0801
- Hand delivered
 - o Level 1, Energy House, 18-20 Cavenagh Street, Darwin City
 - o Ground Floor, Green Well Building, 50 Bath Street, Alice Springs
 - o Level 1, Government Centre, 5 First Street, Katherine

All submissions must include the name, contact details and signature of the person making the submission to be considered valid. A signature can be hand-signed, typed at the bottom of an email or uploaded document or a JPG (or similar) of a signature placed at the bottom of an email or uploaded document.

7. Where can you find out more information?

You can view further information on the details of this proposed planning scheme amendment online on [Development Applications Online](#).

If you have any questions about the planning scheme amendment please contact Lands Planning, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment at:

- Phone: 08 8999 8963
- Email: planning.ntg@nt.gov.au

8. Next steps

- A hearing may be held by the Commission, an independent body appointed by the Minister if submissions are received from the public or local council during exhibition. Those who make a submission will also be invited to speak at the hearing.
- The Commission will give a report to the Minister about all the issues raised in the submissions and at any hearing held, and any other matters that the Commission considers relevant.
- The Minister in making their decision will also take into consideration other matters as required by Section 25 of the Act. If the Minister approves the planning scheme amendment it will be incorporated into the NTPS.

9. Frequently Asked Questions

What is infill development?

'Infill development' refers to the development of new dwellings within existing areas rather than on undeveloped (greenfield) land.

It typically involves using vacant or underutilised lots, redeveloping larger residential blocks, or converting older properties into multiple smaller dwellings.

Infill development aims to make more efficient use of existing infrastructure, support housing diversity, and strengthen neighbourhood vitality.

Infill development can take many forms and can cater to a variety of household sizes and needs, ranging from free-standing homes on smaller lots, attached homes, duplexes, granny flats, row and terrace housing and low to medium rise housing.

How do I find out whether I could subdivide or develop my property?

The Department has prepared maps identifying lots that may be able to utilise the new provisions. However, these maps are indicative only and do not account for site-specific factors such as vehicle access, infrastructure capacity, or lot configuration.

Property owners should review the proposed new rules and the existing rules in the NTPS to assess whether their site can meet requirements such as minimum building envelopes, frontage widths, car parking provisions, private open space, and building setbacks.

In most cases, an existing lot size of at least 900m² is required to meet these standards, although smaller lots may be considered in limited circumstances.

My block is 800m² could I subdivide or develop my property?

No, you cannot subdivide a block in Zone LR that is 800m² with the proposed changes.

To subdivide, each new lot would need to be at least 450m² (or no less than 405m² with a variation), which is not achievable on an 800m² site.

Similarly, you would not be able to develop a duplex or other dwelling-multiple development on an 800m² block in Zone LR. This is because the proposed density allows one dwelling per 450m², meaning an 800m² site could only support one dwelling.

How will developments and subdivision be assessed?

All new developments must meet the requirements of the NTPS. These requirements ensure development and subdivision will provide appropriate building separation, access to sunlight and ventilation, and protection of residential amenity.

Proposals are assessed to ensure they:

- Comply with required setbacks from boundaries
- Provide sufficient private open space
- Meet building design and layout requirements
- Comply with building height limits (8.5m in Zone LR)

- Meet landscaping requirements

The amendment does not propose to alter these requirements.

Subdivision, 'dwelling-group' and 'dwelling-multiple' developments require a development application. The application will be assessed against the relevant planning rules and be publicly notified.

Where a proposal seeks flexibility or variations to controls, it must still demonstrate that it meets the purpose of the zone, relevant planning controls and is appropriate for the site.

Will development proposals be publicly available?

Yes. Applications for subdivision, 'dwelling-group' and 'dwelling multiple' will require a development permit and be available online.

This provides the community with an opportunity to review and provide feedback on proposals utilising the proposed rules.

To receive email notifications about new development applications, interested parties can subscribe to receive planning notices on the [Development Applications Online](#) website. To subscribe you'll need to create an account first then subscribe to all or certain application types in the suburb/s you're interested in.

I have an existing granny flat (dwelling-independent). Could I subdivide it?

If your property meets the relevant subdivision requirements (including for battle-axe lots, where applicable), you may be able to subdivide.

Alternatively, you may also be able to request development approval for a 'dwelling-group' if you can meet the requirements in the NTPS.

If my block is partially affected by a flooding and storm surge overlay could I subdivide it?

If part of your land is affected by a flooding or storm surge overlay, you will not be able to subdivide the land under the proposed changes.

Will overlay Clause 3.12 RDKE – Residential Development in Katherine East still apply?

Yes. Clause 3.12 will continue to apply to residential development in Katherine East.

'Dwelling-group' development may be allowed in Zone LR if it meets the requirements of Clause 3.12. If a proposal does not meet these requirements, a development application can still be submitted and assessed against the proposed new rules for infill development.

Where can I read about the NTPC's recommendations to the Minister?

The NTPC has provided Government with an outline of matters raised during consultation and recommendations to amend the Northern Territory Planning Scheme 2020 (NTPS) to allow infill development and subdivision within Zone LR (Low Density Residential).

The report from the NTPC to the Minister can be found [here](#).