

MEMORANDUM FROM STAFF

From: Marcellus Johnson, Planning Administrator
To: Thorntown Town Council
Date: 02/27/2026
RE: Concerns brought up in 2/23/2026 Special Meeting

Concerns voiced on 2/23/2026

In a special meeting held on February 23, 2026, Town Council members raised several questions and concerns with the UDO proposal certified by the Plan Commission. This memorandum presents staff's findings and recommendations regarding the issues raised.

UDO Adoption Process

The process for adopting this UDO is governed by IC 36-7-4-606.5. According to this ordinance, Town Council has no limit on how long they may consider a UDO proposal, but if council rejects the proposal, it may not be reconsidered for at least 1 year.

Staff Recommendation: It is therefore staff's recommendation that Town Council continue consideration of the proposal as long as necessary for it to reach a state that is acceptable to council.

Lowered Minimum Dwelling Area Requirement in R District

This has been addressed in a previous memo, which is summarized below:

Street	Smaller than 1200 sf		Smaller than 900 sf		Sample Size
	Count	%	Count	%	
Pearl	13	27	1	2	49
Main	13	17	1	1	78
West	13	42	4	13	31
Bow	14	28	3	6	50
Total	53	25	9	4	208

- Across all four sampled streets, about $\frac{1}{4}$ of all residential properties are smaller than 1200 sf.
- This proportion rises to almost $\frac{1}{2}$ of all residential properties on West Street.
- Houses between 900 and 1200 sf are part of the character of Thorntown.

The intention of reducing this standard is to create more room for the market to provide housing products that are in demand and to make it possible for residents to build smaller, and therefore less expensive, housing. For many years, the median home size in the United States had been increasing, but in recent years it has been in decline. The main explanation for this offered by researchers is that newly built homes have been shrinking as the costs of construction grow. Consumers continue to desire larger homes, but the initial buying price, the cost of maintenance and utilities, and property taxes place larger homes beyond the finances of most households. [According to a 2025 survey](#), 42% of respondents who had regrets about their most recent home purchase said that maintenance and other hidden

costs were more expensive than anticipated. This was twice as popular a response as the second most popular regret: buying too small of a house.

Reducing the minimum dwelling area does not guarantee that smaller houses will be built. Residential developers will build what they can sell; however, individual homesite owners may only be able to afford or might prefer a smaller home. This change would allow them to build to their preference.

The proposal changes the minimum dwelling area per unit for *both* single-family and multi-family developments in the R District. It is typical to allow smaller dwelling units with increased density as this helps with the finances and makes it possible to build smaller multi-family buildings that don't overwhelm surrounding single-family homes in terms of bulk and scale, the so-called "Missing Middle."

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends that both minimum dwelling area requirements remain as proposed; however, if Town Council objects to the minimum dwelling area requirement for single-family being 900 sf, another figure lower than 1200 sf should be considered.

Variances from Development Standards

Variances from Development Standards are governed by IC 36-7-4-918.5. Per this ordinance, a Board of Zoning Appeals may approve a variance request only upon the determination that:

- (1) the approval will not be injurious to the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the community;
- (2) the use and value of the area adjacent to the property included in the variance will not be affected in a substantially adverse manner; and
- (3) the strict application of the terms of the zoning ordinance will result in practical difficulties in the use of the property. However, the zoning ordinance may establish a stricter standard than the "practical difficulties" standard prescribed by this subdivision.

All three criteria must be met, and this last criterion in particular means that legally, it is insufficient for the BZA to grant a variance simply because it allows the applicant to build to their preference. Furthermore, Chapter 10 of the proposed UDO specifies that "claims based on a perceived reduction of or restriction on economic gain shall not be considered hardships" by themselves. Therefore, a person seeking a variance from the provisions discussed above would need to claim more than simply that it would cost them more money to meet the requirements. Put simply, it may be difficult for anyone looking to build a home under 1200 sf to actually get a variance from this standard.

Additionally, the variance process can be expensive. It costs \$300 to file an application for a variance, and in addition to the filing fee, applicant might have to pay more to prepare materials needed for the application such as a site plan or deed and to provide required notice. Additionally, even at its fastest, the process takes a month, which can represent a costly delay.

Staff Recommendation: It is generally good policy to adopt zoning ordinances that don't rely on variances to solve situations that can be and have been anticipated.

Recreational Vehicles

In the proposed UDO, Chapter 3, Section I, Subsection 8 Recreational Vehicles (RVs), Paragraph a states that permanent occupancy of RVs is prohibited outside of a campground or RV park that is approved by the Indiana State Department of Health (IDOH). As stated in this paragraph, this is because RVs are not required to meet the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) standards for manufactured homes. In fact, [per HUD's own guidance](#), RVs are properly regulated as vehicles NOT as dwellings. For this reason, the proposed ordinance prohibits them from being used for permanent occupancy. An exception is made for campgrounds/RV parks because it was determined that since these parks must receive approval from a state agency, the town can be reasonably assured that conditions in these parks are safe and will not cause increased risk of harm to residents' health and/or well-being. This paragraph says nothing about the quality or suitability for permanent occupation of any particular RV, RV model brand, or RVs more broadly; it is simply a finding that because RVs are not regulated with permanent occupation in mind, it would be irresponsible for an ordinance that is in part being adopted to protect the safety, health, and welfare of the public to allow them to be used for permanent occupation outside of an otherwise regulated environment.

All other provisions in the UDO concerning the occupation and storage of RVs are intended to prevent conditions tending towards or amenable to permanent occupancy.

Staff Recommendation: Language concerning RVs ought to be left unchanged.

Thorntown's "Look" or Character

Comments made throughout the meeting turned on questions about what the character of Thorntown is and/or should be, and how the UDO can help Thorntown project a particular "look." A question of this nature should be answered in part through engagement with the public: what do the citizens of Thorntown envision for the look and feel of their town? This is not a question that can be properly answered by Town Council (or the Plan Commission or any other town body) alone at one meeting. The last time residents were consulted on this question was in the production of the Comprehensive Plan between late 2009 and early 2010, and the public feedback did express a concern about the aesthetic quality of Thorntown.

However, this concern was focused on the lax enforcement of an already weak zoning ordinance as well as lax enforcement of the town's nuisance laws and the fact that too many homes and businesses appeared to be a state of disrepair or otherwise are aesthetically unappealing. While bulk standards (maximum height, minimum floor area, etc.) can contribute to the character of any particular zoning district, these concerns are best addressed via architectural standards. This is because at the end of the day, a bigger building does not necessarily look better. Attached to this memo in Exhibit A is a printout from a website that sells construction documents for new houses to property owners who don't wish to hire an architect but want to have a professionally designed home. All of the homes in the exhibit are between 850 and 1000 sf, with most being right around 900, the proposed minimum in this UDO. The purpose is to illustrate that you can build smaller houses in a variety of styles, some of which members of the council may find more attractive than others.

The proposed UDO does not include any architectural standards for new development because the team hired to write the UDO did not feel there was sufficient guidance in this area to produce such standards. The 2010 Comprehensive Plan does not provide an aesthetic vision for Thorntown; merely that it wishes to retain its “peaceful, pastoral character.” If it is council’s desire to regulate the “look” of Thorntown, it should do so by adopting architectural standards and exploring ways to provide assistance to property owners who may be struggling to maintain their buildings.

Staff Recommendations: It is staff’s suggestion that Town Council seriously consider updating the Comprehensive Plan. This need not be a full rewrite, but the current plan is deficient with regards to the aesthetic character and quality of Thorntown. Staff also recommends that Town Council adopt the proposed UDO with the intention of adding architectural standards to it at a later date, preferably after some kind of engagement process with residents.

EXHIBIT A. ILLUSTRATIVE EXHIBIT OF ARCHITECTURAL VARIETY OF SMALLER HOMES



Don't lose your saved plans!



Create an account to access your saves whenever you want. See our [Terms & Conditions](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

SUBMIT

/ Sq. Ft. / 900 Sq. Ft.

Most Popular ▾

< Prev 1 / 3 Next >

64 results

FILTER



Plan 430-3 From \$1345.00

900 sq ft	2 bed	2 bath
1 story	45' wide	36' deep



Plan 126-200 From \$1495.00

900 sq ft	3 bed	2.5 bath
2 story	21' wide	52' deep



Plan 21-464 From \$900.00

872 sq ft	1 bed	1.5 bath
1 story	32' 8" wide	36' deep



Plan 1016-50 From \$750.00

896 sq ft	2 bed	1.5 bath
2 story	16' wide	41' 6" deep



Plan 1016-91 From \$750.00

944 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
2 story	22' 2" wide	34' deep



Plan 1061-25 From \$1200.00

852 sq ft	3 bed	2 bath
1 story	24' wide	35' 6" deep



Plan 1064-75 From \$800.00

905 sq ft	1 bed	1 bath
2 story	38' wide	28' deep



Plan 1070-173 From \$1250.00

924 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	65' wide	45' deep



Plan 126-236 From \$1195.00

988 sq ft	2 bed	2 bath
1 story	38' wide	32' deep



Plan 18-1027 **Sale price \$772.20**

900 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	36' wide	30' deep



Plan 21-465 From \$900.00

904 sq ft	1 bed	1.5 bath
1 story	37' 2" wide	36' deep



Plan 21-467 From \$900.00

915 sq ft	1 bed	1.5 bath
1 story	47' 8" wide	44' deep



Plan 430-317 From \$1345.00

981 sq ft	2 bed	2 bath
1 story	30' wide	43' deep



Plan 44-203 From \$935.00

864 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	33' wide	36' deep



Plan 45-383 From \$770.00

984 sq ft	2 bed	2 bath
1 story	33' 9" wide	43' deep



Plan 47-1020 **ON SALE!** Sale price **\$715.50**

988 sq ft	3 bed	1 bath
1 story	38' wide	32' deep



Plan 47-1090 **ON SALE!** Sale price **\$715.50**

914 sq ft	2 bed	2 bath
2 story	40' wide	40' deep



Plan 497-23 **ON SALE!** Sale price **\$772.20**

891 sq ft	2 bed	2 bath
1 story	23' wide	61' deep



Plan 17-3176 From \$700.00

980 sq ft	2 bed	2.5 bath
2 story	20' wide	33' deep



Plan 22-575 From \$730.00

888 sq ft	1 bed	1 bath
2 story	38' 8" wide	34' 4" deep



Plan 932-525

From \$1188.00

900 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	33' wide	34' deep



Plan 45-438

From \$770.00

963 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	37' 6" wide	57' deep



Plan 1016-2

From \$750.00

965 sq ft	1 bed	1.5 bath
2 story	24' wide	25' 4" deep



Plan 124-1140

From \$1140.00

933 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	36' wide	42' deep

< Prev

1 / 3

Next >

You might also be interested in these collections...





Don't lose your saved plans!



Create an account to access your saves whenever you want. See our [Terms & Conditions](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

SUBMIT

/ Sq. Ft. / 900 Sq. Ft.

Most Popular ▾

64 results

FILTER



Plan 21-486 From \$900.00

964 sq ft	1 bed	1.5 bath
1 story	52' 4" wide	44' deep



Plan 22-598 From \$800.00

866 sq ft	1 bed	1.5 bath
2 story	23' wide	42' 8" deep



Plan 23-2519 From \$1275.00

973 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	32' 8" wide	32' deep



Plan 23-2604 From \$1275.00

943 sq ft	3 bed	2 bath
2 story	20' wide	30' deep



Plan 430-277 From \$1345.00

960 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	30' wide	48' deep



Plan 45-585 From \$770.00

975 sq ft	3 bed	2 bath
1 story	36' wide	40' deep



Plan 923-222 From \$700.00

921 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	24' wide	53' 2" deep



Plan 923-99 From \$1100.00

970 sq ft	3 bed	1 bath
1 story	24' wide	56' 6" deep



Plan 30-242

From \$815.00

864 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	36' wide	24' deep



Plan 1016-1

From \$750.00

896 sq ft	2 bed	1.5 bath
2 story	16' wide	28' deep



Plan 1060-38

From \$950.00

931 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	61' wide	25' 6" deep



Plan 124-1170

From \$505.00

900 sq ft	1 bed	1 bath
1 story	56' wide	32' deep



Plan 17-2607

From \$700.00

859 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	36' wide	39' deep



Plan 17-2634

From \$700.00

985 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	27' wide	65' 2" deep



Plan 17-2748 From \$700.00

930 sq ft	3 bed	1 bath
1 story	35' wide	28' 6" deep



Plan 17-3053 From \$700.00

989 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	39' wide	56' 2" deep



Plan 17-3162 From \$700.00

965 sq ft	3 bed	1 bath
0 story	48' 4" wide	37' 6" deep



Plan 18-327 **Sale price \$772.20**

900 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	36' wide	30' deep



Plan 22-605 From \$730.00

900 sq ft	1 bed	1 bath
2 story	38' 4" wide	26' 10" deep



Plan 23-2375 From \$1275.00

911 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	31' wide	31' 4" deep



Plan 23-2412

From \$1275.00

870 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	27' wide	32' deep



Plan 23-2653

From \$2285.00

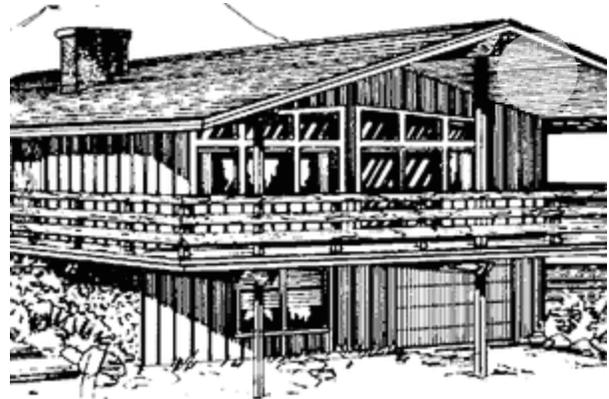
988 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	56' wide	30' deep



Plan 30-240

From \$815.00

952 sq ft	2 bed	2 bath
1 story	28' wide	36' deep



Plan 320-1023

From \$650.00

952 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	36' wide	46' deep

< Prev 2 / 3 Next >

You might also be interested in these collections...



Don't lose your saved plans!



Create an account to access your saves whenever you want. See our [Terms & Conditions](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

SUBMIT

/ Sq. Ft. / 900 Sq. Ft.

Most Popular ▾

< Prev 3 / 3 Next >

64 results

FILTER



Plan 320-1322 From \$650.00

904 sq ft	1 bed	1 bath
2 story	28' wide	28' deep



Plan 320-1323 From \$650.00

904 sq ft	1 bed	1 bath
2 story	28' wide	28' deep





Plan 320-617

From \$650.00

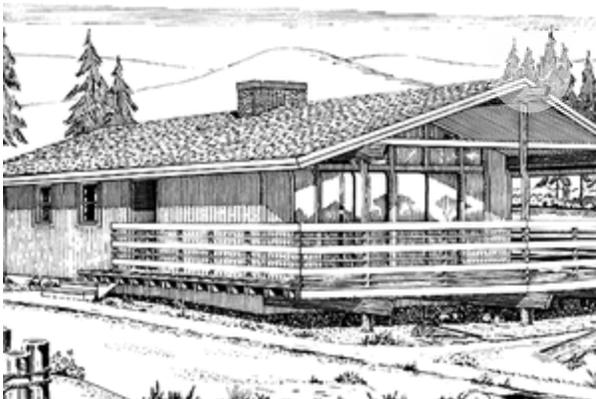
988 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	38' wide	46' deep



Plan 320-665

From \$650.00

890 sq ft	1 bed	1 bath
1 story	36' 4" wide	43' deep



Plan 320-802

From \$650.00

880 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	26' wide	52' deep



Plan 320-853

From \$650.00

988 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	38' wide	46' deep



Plan 417-579

From \$750.00

873 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	34' wide	29' 8" deep



Plan 47-652

Sale price \$715.50

988 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	38' wide	26' deep



Plan 57-651

From \$999.00

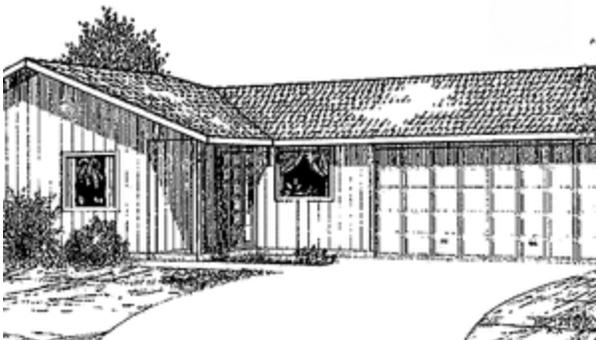
944 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
1 story	32' wide	34' deep



Plan 60-683

From \$750.00

979 sq ft	3 bed	1 bath
1 story	40' wide	49' deep



Plan 60-757

From \$750.00

963 sq ft	3 bed	1 bath
1 story	58' wide	30' deep



Plan 72-1046

From \$858.00

982 sq ft	3 bed	1 bath
1 story	40' wide	26' deep



Plan 72-629

From \$858.00

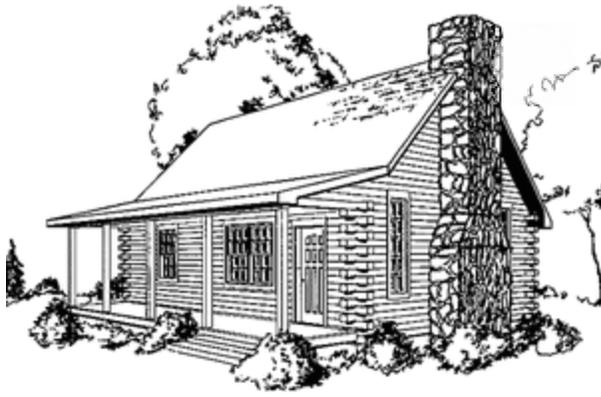
984 sq ft	3 bed	1 bath
1 story	40' wide	52' deep



Plan 932-253

From \$1188.00

910 sq ft	1 bed	1 bath
2 story	26' wide	35' deep



Plan 964-2

From \$516.00

910 sq ft	1 bed	1 bath
2 story	31' wide	27' deep



Plan 308-294

From \$520.00

936 sq ft	2 bed	1 bath
0 story	38' wide	42' 5" deep

< Prev

3 / 3

Next >

You might also be interested in these collections...



900 Sq. Ft. 2 Bedroom

Know your plan number?

Retrieve specific plans here.

Lookup plan #

Go