

Zoned for Houses, Rented by Half: Land Use, Rezoning and Housing Supply in Miami-Dade

What the county's land-use and zoning-hearing records reveal about where housing can go

Abstract. Miami-Dade's existing land-use survey shows that 78.2% of the county's residential land is used for single-family homes and only 11.7% for apartment buildings — in a county where 47.8% of households rent. Meanwhile, zoning hearing applications recorded by the county rose from an average of 175 a year (2015–2019) to 209 a year (2021–2025). This paper describes how land use limits housing supply and why rezoning decisions are a key moment for displacement.

Key findings

- Of 114,519 acres of residential land, 78.2% is single-family, 11.7% multi-family, 9.2% townhouses or duplexes and 0.9% mobile homes.
- 47.8% of Miami-Dade households rent, but apartment buildings occupy about one-eighth of residential land.
- County zoning hearing applications averaged 175 a year in 2015–2019 and 209 a year in 2021–2025, up 19%.
- 2025 recorded 227 applications, the most since 2013.
- Rezoning can add housing, but also replace older, cheaper units — the outcome depends on protections written into the decision.

Why land use and zoning matter for displacement

Zoning decides what can be built where. When most land is reserved for single-family homes, new housing concentrates on a small amount of land — often in older, lower-cost neighborhoods near transit, where apartments are already allowed. Rezoning can relieve shortages by allowing more homes, but when it opens a neighborhood to higher-value development without protections, it can replace existing affordable units and push out current residents. Either way, rezoning hearings are where these decisions are made in public.

Data and method

We used two Miami-Dade County public data services. The Existing Land Use survey (127,321 mapped areas) records how land is actually used; we summed the area of each residential category. The county's zoning layer records subject properties of zoning hearings; we counted applications with the county's Z-numbered process identifiers by the year in the identifier. Both services were read directly and require no key.

Findings: land use

Miami-Dade has about 114,519 acres of residential land. Single-family homes occupy 78.2% of it (low, medium and high density combined). Multi-family buildings occupy 11.7% — 8.1% low-density and 3.6% high-density. Townhouses (5.1%) and duplexes (4.1%) make up 9.2%, and mobile home parks 0.9%, about 996 acres.

Set against the Census, the mismatch is clear: 47.8% of the county's 975,411 households rent. Renters live in single-family homes too, but apartment land — where most rental supply is built — is roughly one-eighth of residential land.

Findings: zoning activity

Z-numbered zoning hearing applications averaged 175 a year in 2015–2019 (136, 167, 190, 178, 206) and 209 a year in 2021–2025 (193, 196, 213, 217, 227) — a 19% increase. 2020 dipped to 147, and 2025's 227 applications were the most since 2013. 2026 is partial (115 through late September).

Implications for displacement

More zoning activity means more decisions that can either expand affordable supply or erase it. The land-use picture suggests that pressure for new housing lands on the limited areas where apartments, duplexes and mobile homes already exist — which is often where lower-income renters live. Mobile home parks in particular sit on land that is valuable to redevelop and house residents who own their home but not the land beneath it.

For nonprofits, this supports attending and testifying at zoning hearings with specific figures, requesting affordability and relocation commitments when upzoning is approved, and monitoring applications that affect mobile home parks and older multi-family buildings.

Limitations

The zoning layer's "zone from" and "zone to" fields are empty for nearly all records, so this analysis cannot tell whether applications increased or decreased allowed density. It covers hearings recorded by Miami-Dade County, largely unincorporated areas, and does not include municipalities that run their own zoning (such as the City of Miami). Land-use areas are measured from mapped shapes and are approximate. Application counts measure activity, not approvals or displacement.

Sources

Miami-Dade County — Existing Land Use (Land Management GIS) — https://gis.miamidade.gov/arcgis/rest/services/LandManagement/MD_LandUse/MapServer/0

Miami-Dade County — Zoning hearing subject properties (Land Management GIS) — https://gis.miamidade.gov/arcgis/rest/services/LandManagement/MD_Zoning/MapServer/0

U.S. Census Bureau — American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2012, 2015, 2019, 2022, 2024 releases) — <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>

Miami-Dade County Open Data — <https://opendata.miamidade.gov/>

All figures were pulled directly from the official sources above in September 2026 and checked for internal consistency. Prepared by Project ReFrame.