



701 East Broadway, Columbia, Missouri 6520

Department Source: Community Development - Planning

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: April 20, 2026

Re: Revisions to the definition of "Family" – UDC Text Amendment (Case #102-2026)

Impacted Ward: Citywide

Executive Summary

Approval of the attached legislation would revise the definition of "family" by eliminating the numerical limits on the number of **unrelated adults** permitted within dwellings based on residential zoning classification in favor of a **single maximum** limitation of **4 unrelated adults**, revise how a "family" is defined to allow non-traditional and multi-generational family formations to occupy dwellings with no numerical limitations, and provide clarity that dwelling unit occupancy would be determined by using the adopted International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) standards such that "overcrowding" is appropriately addressed regardless of the home being a "registered" long-term rental or otherwise. The revisions are proposed as a means of addressing recommendations presented within the 2024 Boone County/City of Columbia Housing Study and are an incremental step toward increasing dwelling unit usage by **unrelated adults**.

Discussion

The definition of "family" within the Unified Development Code (UDC) has existed since the city adopted its first City Plan in 1935 and was last comprehensively amended in 1991. The definition has been amended numerous times (see attached May 15, 2025 Memo) with each revision generally becoming more restrictive with respect to familial characteristics and how many **unrelated adults** could occupy a dwelling unit.

The current definition lists specific familial characteristics that often create confusion as to what constitutes a "family" which has and can often result in non-traditional or multi-generational family formations being unnecessarily excluded from certain dwelling units within the city. Furthermore, the current definition has specific numerical limitations with respect to the number of **unrelated adults**, not total persons, that may occupy a dwelling that varies by residential zoning classification. As currently defined, the R-1 zoning district is restricted to a maximum of **3 unrelated adults** and the R-2/R-MF zoning districts are restricted to a maximum of **4 unrelated adults**.

An expressed recommendation on page 177 of the October 2024 Boone County/City of Columbia Housing Study was to eliminate preemptive zoning restrictions on the number of unrelated individuals who may occupy a single dwelling unit. This recommendation states:

Abolish zoning restrictions that cap the maximum number of unrelated individuals who are allowed to live together. These regulations related to the number of unrelated individuals are typically attempting to regulate potential externalities, like excessive noise and parking. Instead of regulating the number of unrelated individuals, these potential externalities should be regulated directly, through noise ordinances, parking standards, and other regulations.

Given this recommendation and direction from the City Council, the staff and the Planning Commission conducted research and evaluated alternative definitions (see attached May 15, 2024 Memo). Following this research and given the desire to remove unnecessary barriers to access/improve dwelling unit usage throughout the city, the attached definition of “family” was prepared.

The proposed definition does not remove all potential barriers to dwelling unit occupancy as recommended by the Housing Study, but proposes an incremental step forward that creates a single uniform **unrelated adult** occupant limitation of **four (4)** in all residential zoning districts. This minimal increase was a deliberate choice after giving consideration to potential for unintended consequences arising in neighborhoods in close proximity to Columbia’s academic institutions that may potentially be impacted by parking deficiencies as well as other pressures to accommodate higher residential densities. This choice, notwithstanding the public comments offered regarding this matter (see attached), was viewed by the Planning Commission as an appropriate first step to better permit usage of the existing housing stock, specifically in the R-1 zoning district, and would not preclude further relaxation once additional regulatory standards were identified to address possible unintended consequences.

As noted, the benefits of the proposed regulatory change will be most significant within the R-1 zoning district which is principally outside of the “central core” of the city as can be seen in the attached “map series”. Review of the “map series” also illustrates that most of the properties within the “central core” are already zoned R-2 or R-MF; therefore, will not be impacted by the revisions to the current “family” definition since these zoning districts already allow a maximum of **4 un-related adults**. However, given the expansion of what constitutes familial status, the revised definition would not only permit R-1 zoned housing, but also R-2 and/or R-MF housing the opportunity to be more readily available to non-traditional family formations or multi-generational families with greater than **4 related adults** without unnecessary limitations or confusing regulatory language.

In addition to the minimal expansion of **unrelated adults** permitted in R-1 dwellings and the potential broader usage of housing in all residential zoning district for non-traditional or multi-generational family formations with greater than **4 related adults**, the attached revisions specifically incorporate provisions that will address “over-occupancy”. “Over-occupancy” will be addressed by applying the standards contained within City’s adopted International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC). The IPMC, in addition to other regulatory standards, contains specific square footage requirements that must be met (bedroom, living room, dining room, combined living/dining room) from which a dwelling unit’s occupant load is calculated.

Presently these standards on **only** applied to “long-term” rental housing; however, would be extended to non-registered dwellings if the proposed regulations were adopted. Application of the IPMC standards on such non-registered housing would be addressed on a “compliant” basis where there was an alleged over-crowding situation. The current certificate of occupancy (CO) procedure used by the City with respect to residential dwelling does not include a procedure for assigning occupancy limits to a home at the time of CO issuance. Inclusion of the ability to evaluate all types of dwelling using the IPMC standards regardless of rental registration status will ensure equal application of relevant

occupancy rules and ensure that owner-occupied home are determined to be supportive of desired occupant load.

Finally, the proposed revisions to the definition of “family” include a definition of a “single housekeeping unit”. This term has been referenced in all city-adopted definitions of “family” dating back to 1935. The proposed definition merges definitions from two peer communities, calibrated to Columbia. The proposed definition provides clarity on what a “single housekeeping unit” would look like and is viewed as being broad enough to capture the unique dwelling unit rental arrangements seen within the Columbia market.

This matter was distributed for public comment through the City’s public engagement portal, Beheard, from January 21 through approximately March 3. Additional public comments relating to this matter was shared with staff from the Planning Commission Chairperson’s private Facebook account. All public comments are attached to this report and identified as “Public Comments”.

Comments receive were supportive of eliminating the zoning district distinction; however, showed clear preference for reverting to an earlier version of the city’s definition of “family” that did not contain numerical limitations on dwelling unit occupancy. Furthermore, comments received recommended that the term “family” not be defined and that the revised definition focus more on occupancy limits.

The Planning and Zoning Commission held a public hearing on this request at its March 19, 2026, meeting. Staff presented its report and summarized its findings regarding the process followed to arrive at the proposed revisions. There was general Commission discussion on the topic and acknowledgement that the standards were not as expansive as some desired; however, were an appropriate first step forward and open to further amendment after addressing potential unintended consequences. There was no public input on the proposed revisions.

Following limited additional discussion after the closure of the public hearing, the Commission made a motion to approve the revised definition as submitted which was passed by a vote of (8-0).

A copy of the Planning and Zoning Commission staff report, proposed text change, City-wide Residential Zoning District “Map Series”, public correspondence, and meeting minute excerpts are attached for review.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: None anticipated.

Long-Term Impact: None anticipated.

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Inclusive and Equitable Community, Secondary Impact: Not Applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Livable & Sustainable Communities, Secondary Impact: Land Use & Growth Management, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Legislative History

Date	Action
N/A	N/A

Suggested Council Action

Approve the revised definition of “family” as recommended by the Planning and Zoning Commission.