



**November
2025**



Proposed Plan Change 120 Information Sheet #18

Cohesive zoning response

From 3 November to 19 December 2025, Auckland Council invites submissions on Proposed Plan Change 120: Housing Intensification and Resilience (PC120) - a change to the Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP) (our city's planning rulebook) that proposes to rezone areas of residential land for greater intensification, to enable greater building heights and densities in many parts of urban Auckland, and to strengthen management of natural hazard risks.

Submissions are now open until 5pm on Friday 19 December 2025.

This information sheet explains what the cohesive zoning response is and how this has been proposed to apply through PC120.

Background to Proposed Plan Change 120

PC78 was Auckland's former intensification plan change as required by the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD). It incorporated the Medium Density Residential Standards (MDRS) which was legally required at the time. This generally allowed three dwellings of up to three storeys to be built on most residential sites without resource consent.

In August 2025, the government amended the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) which enabled PC78 to be withdrawn. Auckland Council withdrew PC78 (in part) and notified PC120 to improve Auckland's resilience to natural hazards and focus intensification around centres and transport nodes.

PC78 was withdrawn in part from 5pm on 9 October 2025, and included withdrawal of the MDRS in PC78.

P PC120 addresses central government requirements to:

- contribute to the same level of housing capacity in the AUP as was to be enabled by PC78

- enable building heights and densities within and around town and local centres which reflect the level of commercial and community activity these centres offer
- enable building heights of at least 6-storeys within walkable catchments from the edge of the city centre zone, the edge of metropolitan centre zones and around existing and planned rapid transit stops (train and busway stations) and
- enable building heights of at least 10- and 15- storeys around certain train stations listed in the RMA.

These heights and densities must be enabled unless a ‘qualifying matter’ applies to a site (see Information Sheet #13) which makes that level of development inappropriate.

PC120 also strengthens provisions that manage natural hazard risks. Areas potentially affected by flooding, land instability, coastal erosion or coastal inundation now and in the future are targeted with stronger rules and other planning measures. This approach is to improve Auckland’s resilience to severe weather events and natural hazards, following the storms in early 2023 which resulted in widespread flooding, landslips, and coastal inundation across the region.

What is the issue?

Application of specific zonings and/or qualifying matters to properties through a computer-generated ‘rules’ process can unintentionally produce irregular or ad-hoc zoning outcomes in particular locations.

The resulting PC120 zoning pattern has therefore needed to be reviewed and adjusted to ensure the overall zoning approach is coherent and rational.

Why does a cohesive zoning pattern matter?

The basic purpose of zoning is to provide for the grouping or co-location of compatible uses, and for the separation of incompatible uses. Zoning is a relatively blunt tool that works best over larger areas and areas where values can be clearly defined.

Where two different zonings adjoin each other, it is referred to as a zone boundary. The exact location of a zone boundary can be difficult to determine with certainty, as the boundary is a sharp cut-off and does not take into account any gradual variation in values that may exist. Therefore, zones tend to be applied to large cohesive areas. These can be a neighbourhood or suburb, and generally at least align to a road edge or a block boundary.

Where a zone of a specific property differs from those of the surrounding area, it is referred to as a ‘spot zoning’. Generally, spot zonings are discouraged as they can lead to inconsistent or haphazard development.

Cohesive zoning response as a qualifying matter

Any cohesive zoning response where intensification is required by the NPS-UD (for example, within walkable catchments and around suburban centres)¹ needs to be justified as a qualifying matter.

For more information on what qualifying matters are and how they are applied through PC120, please refer to information sheet #13 Qualifying Matters.

The cohesive zoning response in the walkable catchments and in areas adjacent to suburban centres has resulted in downzoning of some sites. This commonly involves isolated or small groups of a higher intensity residential zone (generally ‘islands’ of THAB, Mixed Housing Urban, or Mixed Housing Suburban). Through the cohesive zoning response these areas are zoned to match the surrounding lower intensity zoning.

As outlined above, these ‘islands’ were the outcome of the application of other qualifying matters (e.g. hazards, special character) that happened to impact most sites in an area but leave out one (or a small number) of sites.

The cohesive zoning response was applied sparingly. Some irregular zoning patterns remain in some areas, despite the cohesive zoning response.

Overall, the cohesive zoning response affects a relatively small number of properties within the walkable catchments and the areas adjacent to suburban centres (under 1% of the sites).

The cohesive zoning response was not used to ‘upzone’ any sites that had been ‘downzoned’ by another qualifying matter. However, it was able to be used to achieve a more legible zoning pattern.

The cohesive zoning response qualifying matter was not able to remedy all zoning anomalies.

Cohesive zoning response in other areas

The cohesive zoning response was applied in other areas of residential intensification outside of the NPS-UD and RMA directed areas. These were the Frequent Transit Network (FTN) Corridors and the wider residential zonings across Auckland.

The application of the cohesive zoning response in these areas achieved a logical zoning pattern where zones follow recognised physical boundaries such as roads, blocks, parks, or walkways.

Other cohesive zoning changes outside of the walkable catchments and the areas adjacent to suburban centres are summarised below:

Coastal edges:

- Expansion of the Mixed Housing Suburban zone or Single House zone where planning constraints affect some coastal properties in the vicinity

Gullies with flooding and Significant Ecological Areas:

¹ Policy 3(c) and Policy 3(d) of the NPS-UD

- Expansion of the Single House zone to link areas together where these planning constraints affect some properties in gully systems

Upzoning to THAB:

- Expansion of THAB zone in relatively small areas where it fills in blocks or links nearby THAB zonings

Overall, the cohesive zoning response improves the legibility, consistency, and integrity of zoning patterns by reducing the occurrence of ad-hoc or isolated zone outcomes (such as spot zonings). The resulting zoning patterns are more spatially coherent, defensible, and improve plan usability.

Further information

- For detailed information about the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD) [visit the Ministry for the Environment website.](#)
- For more information on the amendments to the RMA [visit the Ministry for the Environment website.](#)

Please note:

This information sheet is a summary document to assist with understanding Proposed Plan Change 120 – Housing Intensification and Resilience, which gives effect to Policies 3 and 4 of the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 and addresses the requirements of Schedule 3C of the Resource Management Act 1991.

Proposed Plan Change 120 to the Auckland Unitary Plan was publicly notified by Auckland Council on 3 November 2025.

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