

Auckland Council

Proposed Plan Change 120 – Housing Intensification and Resilience

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What has the council proposed? What is changing in the Auckland Unitary Plan?

Proposed Plan Change 120 - Housing Intensification and Resilience (PC120) has two primary purposes: to strengthen the management of natural hazard risks across the Auckland region, and to enable further growth and intensification primarily around urban centres and transport nodes.

PC120 largely replaces Plan Change 78 – Intensification (PC78) and will implement government direction for greater building heights and housing capacity, as required by the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD) and recent amendments to the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

The main changes are:

- Natural Hazards: Strengthening of natural hazard provisions that are better able to manage risks to people and property. This includes changes to Chapter E36 of the Auckland Unitary Plan and in some cases, to zoning. These provisions apply region-wide, including urban and rural areas. Some provisions apply to the Hauraki Gulf Islands.

For more information, refer to information sheet #8 Natural Hazards.

- Walkable catchments: Increased building heights and densities of either 6, 10, or 15 storeys are proposed in ‘walkable catchments’ from the edge of the city centre zone, metropolitan centre zones, and from existing and planned Rapid Transit Network (RTN) stops in urban areas. For more information, refer to information sheets #4 Walkable Catchments and #5 Intensification in Walkable Catchments.

- Suburban centres: Increased building heights and densities in and around local and town centres, to match the level of commercial and community activities these centres offer. The council can propose lower permitted building heights or densities where ‘qualifying matters’ apply.

For more information, refer to information sheet #6 Intensification in and around Suburban Centres.

- Qualifying matters: These are exemptions to enabling the building heights and density the council is otherwise required to provide for. The government specifies some qualifying matters that may apply, and the

council proposes to apply some additional qualifying matters in Auckland, including areas with special character values.

For more information, refer to information sheet #13 Qualifying Matters.

- Transit corridors and other urban areas: The council has chosen to enable intensification along many Frequent Transit Network (FTN) corridors, and to ensure that levels of residential development in other areas are enabled to match their level of accessibility to transport, facilities and centres.

For more information, refer to information sheet #7 Intensification around Corridors.

2. What happened to Plan Change 78? How is Plan Change 120 different?

PC78 was withdrawn in part on 9 October 2025. The Medium Density Residential Standards (MDRS) were withdrawn too. MDRS enabled 3 dwellings of up to 3 storeys on most residential sites across Auckland, without the need for resource consent.

PC78 decisions on the City Centre zone are now part of the Auckland Unitary Plan. PC78 decisions on the Metropolitan Centre zone will be made soon, so the Metropolitan Centre Zone was not withdrawn.

In other respects, PC120 replaces PC78. Key differences between PC78 and PC120 include:

- PC120 amends provisions in Chapter E36 of the Auckland Unitary Plan to improve management of natural hazard risks including flooding, coastal erosion and inundation, and land instability. In some cases, residential sites are proposed to be rezoned to a lower intensity zone to manage risks relating to natural hazards, with immediate legal effect. PC78 was unable to do this.
- PC78 implemented the MDRS across most residential sites in Auckland. The MDRS are not included in PC120. The council considers targeted growth allowed by PC120 will better align with infrastructure funding and planning.
- PC120 provides for greater building heights and densities in certain walkable catchments, based on RMA changes and maximising opportunities around the places best suited for intensification.
- PC120 includes additional suburban centres for growth and intensification than PC78. Key corridors with frequent transit bus routes are proposed to allow greater building heights and densities.
- PC120 excludes changes to the City Centre zone and the Metropolitan Centre zones, as these have been (or will be) decided through PC78. Natural hazard risk provisions in PC120 will still apply in these areas, though.
- PC120 includes changes to what is known as the Auckland Light Rail corridor that was excluded from PC78. The government decided not to proceed with the Auckland Light Rail project.

- Some proposed qualifying matters are the same in both plan changes. New qualifying matters are proposed in PC120, and some PC78 qualifying matters are not included. Refer to information sheets 13-18 for more information on this.

3. How did Plan Change 120 come about?

In August 2025, the government amended the RMA and allowed Auckland Council to withdraw PC78. The RMA requires the council to notify a replacement plan change: PC120.

PC120 must implement the government's direction to enable intensification in and around centres and transport nodes. The council must amend the Auckland Unitary Plan to enable at least the same amount of housing capacity as PC78 would have. The RMA amendments also require that building heights of at least 10 or 15 storeys are enabled around certain train stations that will benefit from completion of the City Rail Link project.

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.

The council decided in September 2025 to withdraw PC78 in part and replace it with PC120. PC78 was withdrawn in part on 9 October 2025.

4. Can Auckland Council say no to the government's changes?

Auckland Council does not have the option to say no to the government's intensification requirements. The changes directed by the government are mandatory.

5. What about protecting areas from more intensification?

Central government allows some exemptions to modify required building heights and densities, where it is necessary. These are called 'qualifying matters'.

These may limit building heights and densities where intensification is unsuitable, including sites or areas of cultural, historic, or ecological significance, or areas with natural hazards.

Potential qualifying matters are listed in the RMA. The council may identify other qualifying matters relevant and important to our city. To justify these qualifying matters, the council must provide strong evidence about why an exemption to required intensification is needed.

For more information on qualifying matters, refer to information sheet #13 Qualifying Matters.

6. How do exemptions to increased building heights, or other intensification, work?

The council must provide evidence to demonstrate why an exemption (a qualifying matter) should apply.

Reducing building height and density will be tested through submissions and public hearings in front of an Independent Hearings Panel (IHP). The council and submitters may present expert evidence on qualifying matters, amongst other issues. The IHP will make recommendations to the council on the plan change.

A qualifying matter does not prevent development from happening altogether, but limits development enough to ensure that what is being protected or managed is not compromised.

7. If many of the government requirements are mandatory, what has the council been able to decide?

- The council can propose how far the walkable catchments extend from the edge of the city centre and metropolitan centres, and from existing and planned rapid transit stops where greater building heights and densities must be enabled.
- Additional building heights and densities within some walkable catchments above the 6-storey minimum (or 10 or 15 storeys around certain train stations). The council proposes 10 and 15 storey building heights within other walkable catchments too, based on accessibility to jobs, amenities, and transport. Refer to information sheet #5 Intensification in walkable catchments.
- How much, and how far, additional building height and density is enabled in and around local and town centres, frequent transit bus stops and close to other forms of public transport.
- The unique qualifying matters proposed in Auckland, to allow less intensification where it is necessary to protect or manage Auckland's important characteristics.
- The council decided not to include the MDRS which allows growth to be more spread out. Instead, the council proposes to enable most housing capacity in and around centres, and around public transport.

8. What is a walkable catchment, and how are they sized?

Walkable catchments are areas around centres or rapid transit stops where the council must allow six storey building height (or in some places: 10 or 15 storeys).

The Ministry for the Environment says walkable catchment sizes should represent the distance an *average* person is likely to walk to a centre or station. Research shows that, on average, people walk at about 5km/hr so would cover about 400 metres in 5 minutes, about 800 metres in 10 minutes, and about 1200m in 15 minutes.

For more information on how walkable catchments are identified and applied, please refer to information sheet #4 Walkable Catchments.

9. How big is my local walkable catchment? How far away is my property from a centre or a rapid transit stop?

The PC120 map viewer includes a drawing and measuring tool. Anyone can measure the distance between locations, or areas in which they are interested.

[Watch this video on how to use the PC120 map viewer.](#)

The PC120 map viewer also has a written guide to assist you. Refer to information sheet #21 PC120 Map Viewer Guide.

10. What is rapid transit?

The Rapid Transit Network (RTN) includes stops (stations) on a dedicated busway or rail network where a bus or train arrives at least every 15 minutes during peak times or where this frequency is planned.

PC120 applies walkable catchments for existing and planned rapid transit stops along Auckland's rail network (the Western, Eastern, and Southern rail lines), the Northern Busway, and the Eastern Busway.

Planned rapid transit stops must have certainty around both their funding and their exact location before a walkable catchment can be identified.

Some parts of the public transport network are not rapid transit - parts of a busway may operate mixed in with general traffic, services may not have a 15-minute frequency and ferry services are excluded altogether (the government's definition of rapid transit is limited to road/rail). For example, the Onehunga station is at the end of a single-track branch line so trains can never reach that station with a 15-minute service frequency.

11. Doesn't the Auckland Unitary Plan already provide for enough housing? Why 2 million more houses?

Housing capacity is the theoretical number of houses that could be built, if houses were built to the full extent across the city within the rules that applied. What actually gets built is much less. For more information on housing capacity see information sheet #19 Housing Capacity.

Auckland Council has led the way nationally in enabling housing. The Auckland Unitary Plan provides capacity for over 900,000 homes in Auckland's residential areas alone. More housing capacity exists when the city centre and large metropolitan centres are included. There are far more opportunities for growth (housing capacity) than what is constructed each year (supply). The Auckland Unitary Plan resulted in record numbers of houses being built, including higher-density homes.

However, the RMA now directs the council to do more, requiring the Auckland Unitary Plan be amended to enable at least the same amount of housing capacity as PC78 would have done, had it been made operative. Almost all of the required housing capacity will be enabled by PC120. PC78 already created more housing capacity in the city centre, and upcoming decisions on the metropolitan centres are expected to provide more housing capacity, too.

More housing capacity would have been enabled by amending the Auckland Unitary Plan through PC78 or PC120. The council proposes PC120 to enable more of that capacity in good locations for growth to occur. It doesn't mean 2 million additional houses will be built or needed, but the enabled capacity creates opportunities for where growth will be realised.

12. Does this mean my property must be developed?

No. The Auckland Unitary Plan sets the rules for how land can be used, including what can be built and where. Changing the planning rules for what can be built does not mean that development must take place. Instead, it provides property owners with choices about how to use their land. It is entirely up to them to choose to develop their property if they wish, or not.

There is a reasonably long way to go before any final changes to the Auckland Unitary Plan are decided – at least until mid-2027. Once those decisions are made, it can take years before redevelopment starts happening to a level that is noticeable across areas.

13. Does this mean there will be apartments everywhere?

The council proposes more Terrace Housing and Apartment Buildings zoning in urban Auckland which will provide more opportunities for apartment buildings to be developed. These areas of change are around centres, stations and along key corridors. Other types of housing like single dwellings, terrace housing or townhouses are still allowed.

The NPS-UD and the RMA requirements do mean that there will be more places where apartment buildings of six storeys or more can be developed over time (including close to the city centre, metropolitan centres and rapid transit stops).

14. Is there a difference between historic heritage and special character areas?

Yes, the terms 'heritage' and 'special character' mean different things.

Historic heritage is recognised as a matter of national importance (section 6 of the RMA). The RMA requires that historic heritage be protected from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development. The Auckland Unitary Plan achieves this by identifying historic heritage places and areas. Rules protect them.

Special character values can derive from the history of a place or area. Special character values reflect patterns of Auckland's early development where those values contribute to streets or neighbourhoods in cohesive groupings. Special character areas are also identified in the Auckland Unitary Plan and more closely align with amenity and quality of the environment. They are provided for as an "Other matter" under section 7 of the RMA.

Historic heritage (along with all RMA matters of national importance) is specifically identified by the government as a qualifying matter, whereas special character is not. The council has chosen to include areas with special character value as a qualifying matter. There is further detail on this below, and further information is available in information sheet #14 Special Character Areas.

15. Will Auckland's historic heritage continue to be protected?

Yes. The Historic Heritage Overlay is identified as a qualifying matter and heritage overlay protections in the Auckland Unitary Plan will not change.

16. What is the council's approach to special character areas?

The council proposes removing some properties from the Special Character Areas Overlay – Residential:

- where the special character values do not meet required thresholds, including being of high-quality within walkable catchments;
- in the walkable catchments of Kingsland and Maungawhau / Mt Eden for strategic planning reasons, where 15 storey heights must be enabled

Although PC120 proposes these changes, the existing Auckland Unitary Plan special character rules and standards continue to apply, including for the properties proposed to be removed from the special character overlay. Decisions on PC120 after the submissions, hearings and recommendations process will determine the final identification of special character areas and the properties subject to this overlay.

The PC120 map viewer shows the properties the council proposes retaining in the Special Character Areas Overlay – Residential. To understand which properties are proposed to be removed, the PC120 map viewer should be compared with the Auckland Unitary Plan planning maps.

The PC120 map viewer property summary tool identifies the properties subject to particular rules. The information isn't available as a map layer so it is important to read the property summary.

The council is proposing a balanced approach to ensure areas of special character are managed while also delivering on the government's strong direction to enable more housing for current and future Aucklanders. To inform the Council's approach to residential special character areas, an extensive review of all existing special character areas was completed.

For more information, please refer to information sheet #14 Special Character Areas.

17. What does PC120 mean for areas zoned Future Urban or Rural?

These zones (and others outside the urban environment) are not part of the intensification proposal in PC120. Rezoning changes in PC120 affect residentially zoned land only. No future urban or rural land is proposed to be urbanised through PC120.

The other purpose of PC120 is to strengthen the planning framework for natural hazard risks. Stronger natural hazard provisions are proposed region-wide, including rural and future urban land.

18. How can I make a submission to give my views?

Making a submission is the only way to give your views on PC120. You can request changes to it, request parts of PC120 stay the same, or a mix of the two.

The submission period runs from 9am on Monday 3 November 2025 to 5pm on Friday 19 December 2025. Anyone can make a submission by completing an online submission form at on the Auckland Council Plan Change 120 web page. There are also options to make a submission by email or sending your submission in by mail.

Make sure you clearly state what in PC120 you want to see changed, and what you want retained. A submission can support or oppose a plan change, or do both. Referring to chapter or rule numbers helps make your submission clearer. Being clear about what you want PC120 to say makes it easier for the Independent Hearings Panel, and other participants, to understand your point of view.

The council will summarise all submission points, including any changes requested by submitters. The Summary of Decisions Requested (SDR) will be published in early 2026. There will be a further submissions called for, which are submissions in support or opposition to the earlier submissions. All of these documents will be sent to the Independent Hearings Panel (IHP), who will subsequently arrange hearings. You can indicate in your submission that you wish to be heard by the panel by attending a hearing and presenting your submission to the IHP.

If you are unsure how PC120 affects you or need help and guidance on how to participate, a 'Friend of the Submitter' service is available to the public free of charge. Further information on this can be found in information sheet #2 Friend of the Submitter.

19. What are further submissions and will there be a further submissions process available through PC120?

Further submissions allow people to tell the Council whether they support or oppose the decisions requested by other submitters.

Sometimes a submission requests a plan change is amended in a way that affect a person's interests or property rights. The further submission process allows the further submitter to support or oppose that request.

Opportunities for further submissions will be provided, with dates to be confirmed at a later stage.

20. What is the Streamlined Planning Process?

PC120 does not use the standard plan change process, but must utilise the Streamlined Planning Process (SPP). This bespoke process is determined by the government. It is intended to speed up the plan change process.

The council has received direction from the minister which outlines the process the SPP will take. This allows the council to offer a further submissions period, which the council will do – the exact dates for this will be confirmed at a later stage.

For more information on the Streamlined Planning Process, see information sheet #1 Streamlined Planning Process.

21. What is the Independent Hearings Panel and what is its role?

An Independent Hearings Panel (IHP) consists of nine members with combined expertise in planning, law, urban design, heritage, landscape architecture and Tikanga Māori. The government appoints up to half the IHP, and the council appoints the remainder.

The role of the IHP is to consider all submissions, enable differing positions to be resolved if possible, evaluate expert evidence, hold hearings with submitters who wish to be heard, and then make recommendations to the council on what changes the IHP considers are needed to PC120. The IHP can also make recommendations on things not raised in people's submissions or at the hearings.

When making recommendations, the IHP must make sure the same housing capacity will be included in the Auckland Unitary Plan as PC78 would have created.

The IHP is not the decision-maker on PC120. The council will consider the IHP's recommendations and make decisions.

22. What happens when the council decides on the IHP's recommendations?

The council will decide whether to accept or reject each of the IHPs recommendations. Accepted recommendations will become operative (be included in the Auckland Unitary Plan as final). Rejected recommendations may be appealed to the Environment Court.

23. When will the Independent Hearings Panel process be completed and decisions made?

The government requires decisions to be made on PC120 within 20 months of it being notified. The IHP will determine its programme once it is appointed later in 2025.

24. What new rules come into legal effect on 3 November 2025?

Usually a proposed plan change's new rules do not apply until decisions on the plan change are made.

This is true for most rules in PC120.

Rules that **do apply** from 3 November 2025 relate to the management of significant natural hazards. See:

- Chapter E36 Natural hazards and flooding
- Chapter H3 Residential – Single House Zone
- Chapter H5 Residential – Mixed Housing Urban Zone

- Proposed zoning with immediate legal effect in the PC120 map viewer (sites with special annotation in the map viewer in Residential – Single House Zone and Residential – Mixed Housing Urban Zone)

For more information, please refer to information sheet #8 Natural Hazards.

25. How is PC120 to be considered in resource consent applications?

PC120 rules with immediate legal effect from 3 November 2025 apply in addition to Auckland Unitary Plan rules. Rules from the Single House and Mixed Housing Urban Zones related to natural hazards will also apply to the properties whose proposed Single House or Mixed Housing Urban Zoning has immediate legal effect.

Proposed rule changes to Chapter E36 of the Auckland Unitary Plan in PC120 relating to natural hazards will apply straight away too.

Operative rules, and zones, in the Auckland Unitary Plan continue to apply.

The government allows natural hazard rules to apply immediately because managing significant risks from natural hazards is a matter of national importance. The council has long advocated for the ability to undertake intensification while managing natural hazard risks.

When deciding whether to approve a resource consent application, or what conditions may be appropriate, the council must consider both the Auckland Unitary Plan provisions and PC120 provisions (like policies), even though most rules and standards within PC120 do not apply immediately.

Where the Auckland Unitary Plan and PC120 policies propose different outcomes, a weighting exercise may need to be carried out to confirm the most appropriate outcome.