

Residential Zoning by Race: How Pittsburgh's Zoning Districts Promote Different Housing Options for Black and White Residents

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Residential Zoning by Race explores the factors that influence the location of zoning districts, which in turn influence what types of housing are built where. This research specifically focuses on the location of single-family and multi-family residential zoning districts in Pittsburgh. Four factors are commonly discussed in the field of zoning as influencing the location of zoning districts:

- Existing Built Environment
- Proximity to Other Uses
- Transportation Options
- Future Land Use Goals

These factors do not hold up when applied to the pattern of single-family and multi-family zoning districts in Pittsburgh. Instead, two other factors appear – redlining and race – that suggest an exclusionary pattern of residential zoning.

This hypothesis is tested using a GIS analysis of zoning, redlining, and race in Pittsburgh. The evolution of single-family and multi-family zoning districts is traced over Pittsburgh's 100 years of zoning through the zoning maps from 1927, 1967, and 2021. This evolution is then compared to the 1937 Home Owner's Loan Corporation's Residential Security Map (aka redlining map) and the percentage of White residents by census tract in 1930, 1960, and 2010.

The findings support redlining and race as significant factors that have influenced the location of single-family and multi-family zoning districts in Pittsburgh over the last 100 years. In particular, there is a continually strong correlation between the location of multi-family zoning districts and areas with negative redlining grades, and an increasingly strong correlation between majority non-White areas and multi-family zoning districts.

The second correlation is particularly concerning as it adds zoning districts to the list of historic and continuing regulations that restrict access to homeownership, and its related equity, for Black and other minority residents.

As zoning reforms continue to be discussed at a national level, it is important that these factors and the resulting inequitable impacts are part of the conversation. Zoning reform needs to look beyond changes to just the single-family zoning district and consider all residential districts to create a meaningful impact on the issues of housing affordability and equity.

Visit residentialzoningbyrace.com for the full results of this research, complete with maps and graphics.