

2026-4-89

Officials, residents respond to Lakewood special election

GTK

The Denver Gazette · 9 Apr 2026 · A7 · BY SAGE KELLEY The Denver Gazette

Nearly 17,000 residents fought back against Lakewood zoning changes on Tuesday, reversing the ordinances put in place that sought to allow for more housing density.



The City of Lakewood's special election regarding the zoning code changes put in place in October was held Tuesday after nearly a year of debate. About 16,700 residents voted to rebuff the proposed changes, instead sticking with the zoning enacted around 2014.

The ballot included four questions, each involving a different ordinance in the nearly 400-page zoning code update. A "yes" vote meant opposing the zoning changes while a "no" vote was in favor of keeping the changes.

Ultimately, between 16,600 and 16,700 residents voted yes on each question. Meanwhile, between 9,300 and 9,500 voted no.

The official results are set to be announced by April 17.

"If the results hold, then I believe this shows how the people of Lakewood feel," Karen Gordey, head of opposition group Lakewood Citizens Alliance, told The Denver Gazette on Wednesday.

Lakewood Citizens Alliance was one of several resident groups that worked together on a petition that caused the special election, arguing that residents wanted the right to decide on the zoning changes themselves.

Those who were in favor of the changes allege misinformation and fearmongering from the opposing camp, potentially leading to a vote that was not based on facts.

1

“When homeowners are inaccurately told that their home is under threat, they vote accordingly,” Sophia Mayott- Guerrero, Make Lakewood Livable campaign manager and a former councilmember, said.

Make Lakewood Livable was the biggest campaign in favor of the zoning changes.

“It was never just about this election, it was about creating a more compassionate system, and that continues to be an important goal,” Mayott-Guerrero added.

The changes aimed to create more multifamily housing development by allowing for “residential dwellings” — an umbrella category encompassing single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes and town-homes — on once single-family lots, according to supporters. *Note*

Critics said they would alter the character of neighborhoods without achieving their ends.

The opposition was never about the need for affordability, but whether the changes would actually create affordability, according to resident Joy Anderson.

“It’s not that we don’t want affordability, it’s just that upzoning established neighborhoods won’t create affordability,” she said. “You’re going to sacrifice quality of life in older neighborhoods. I’m not against affordability. We’re not rich.” *Note*

Now that the code will remain in its prior form, the city will maintain eight different residential districts instead of the three proposed in the changes. Seven allow single-family homes and accessory dwelling units that have met specific standards. Two include permitted uses of duplexes. One includes multi-family dwelling units and attached dwelling units.

None are single-family residential use only.

All eight districts include permitted use of group homes. Some allow bed and breakfast buildings, cemeteries, day cares and even golf courses.

Moving forward

The special election was the second time in five months that metro Denver voters have rejected efforts to permit multiple housing types in predominantly single-family home neighborhoods. *Note*

Last November, Littleton residents also sided with critics in voting against the city’s “density” campaign. The arguments for both sides looked identical to those in Lakewood.

But with only around 25% of registered voters turning out for Lakewood’s special election, questions still remain around how — or if — to approach affordable housing in the future.

“The people of Lakewood have spoken, and it’s too bad that the loudest voice in this entire election was the voice that remained silent and refrained from voting all together,” Ben David Hensley, a resident in favor of the zoning changes, said.

The priority of figuring out affordable housing in the future remains on the minds of officials.

“I hope both sides of the issues, and the 75% of voters who didn’t weigh in, will join in to move together as neighbors with this behind us,” Councilmember Isabel Cruz told The Denver Gazette.

Cruz added that she heard from some “yes” voters that they want affordable housing but didn’t agree with how the city chose to approach it — much like Anderson said.

“I just hope that all of the folks who were the most vocal, especially on Nextdoor, will be deeply involved in the revision zoning process,” resident Suzy Rosemeyer wrote on social media. “It’s not enough to just say ‘no’ to change. Please get involved and make positive contribution to the process.” Even the opposing groups agreed that open discussions around the future should be held.

“When the council would bring up one of the ordinances and pass it the same night, that wasn’t public engagement,” Anderson said. “When you say the word affordability, what does that even mean? Give me a number. Tell me what you’re talking about and what you can build.”

“We are hopeful that (the) City Council will engage in meaningful and thoughtful discussions going forward,” Gordey said. “As well, this particular election cycle was a pretty divisive topic and as a community we need to begin healing and come to common ground.”

“It’s too early to know what course we may chart from here, but setbacks are an opportunity to revisit, refine and re-direct,” Mayor Wendi Strom told The Denver Gazette.

