



Frontier Institute believes in solving problems with **more freedom not more government**. When government gets in the way of people pursuing their dreams, we elevate powerful stories and sound policy solutions to break down barriers **so all Montanans can thrive**.



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graph TD; A((Is the private market solving this problem on its own?)) --> B((If not, are there federal-level policies that stand in the way of a private market solution?)); B --> C((If not, what sort of government action will best promote a private market solution?)); C --> D((If not, are there state-level policies that stand in the way of a private market solution?)); D --> A;
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**Is the private market solving this problem on its own?**

**If not, are there federal-level policies that stand in the way of a private market solution?**

**If not, are there state-level policies that stand in the way of a private market solution?**

**If not, what sort of government action will best promote a private market solution?**

# Montana Zoning Atlas

The ***Montana Zoning Atlas*** uses a parcel-level analysis to evaluate how Montana's most in-demand communities treat affordable types of housing.

## **Cities evaluated:**

Bozeman • Missoula • Kalispell • Whitefish • Billings • Helena

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# KEY POINTS

- Over 70% of primary residential areas in Montana's most in-demand communities either outright prohibit or penalize affordable multi-family housing development.
- Among all the cities assessed in the Montana Zoning Atlas report, two-family housing is welcomed without Minimum Lot Area Penalties on just 29% of primary residential land, while 3+ housing is welcomed on only 8%.
- The Montana Zoning Atlas demonstrates the need for communities to reduce or eliminate Exclusionary Single-Family Zoning practices and Minimum Lot Area Requirements.
- Policymakers should enact Pro-Housing Reforms to make Montana cities a more welcoming place for low and middle-income residents.

# EXCLUSIONARY ZONING

Exclusionary zoning practices restrict the types of homes allowed in a particular neighborhood, often separating single-family homes from multi-family homes like duplexes and triplexes, which are **more affordable by design.**



# TYPES OF EXCLUSIONARY ZONING EVALUATED

## **Single Family Zoning**

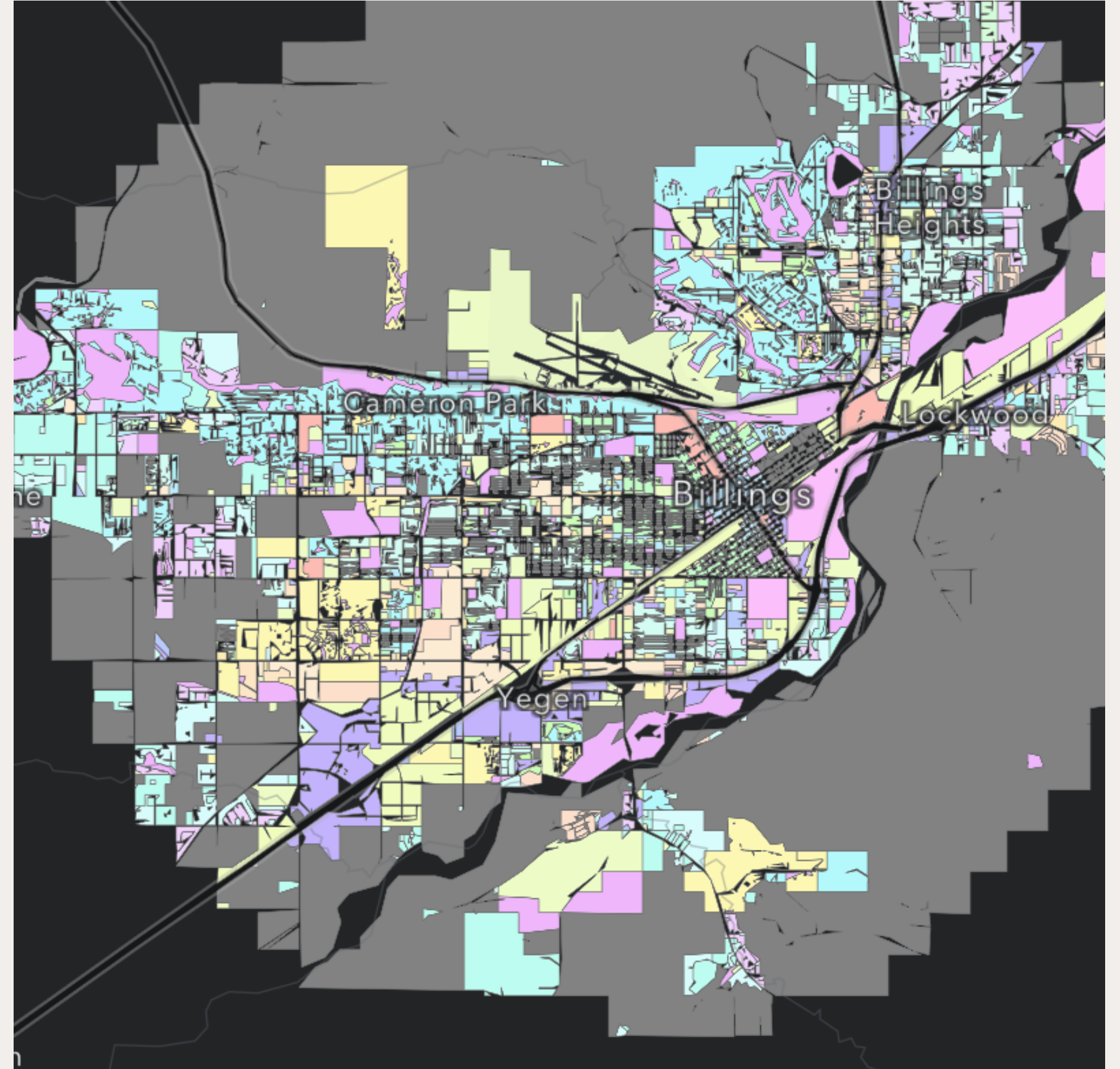
Exclusionary Single-Family Zoning can either outright prohibit multi-family homes or penalize them by conditioning approval on public hearings, special requirements or a long and costly discretionary permit process.

## **Minimum Lot Areas**

Minimum Lot Areas effectively prohibit multi-family development when the lot area required exceeds the dimensions of existing lots, creating de facto Single-Family Zoning. Minimum Lot Areas can also penalize multi-family housing by requiring larger and more expensive lots for each additional unit added to a building.

# HOW REGULATIONS EXCLUDE

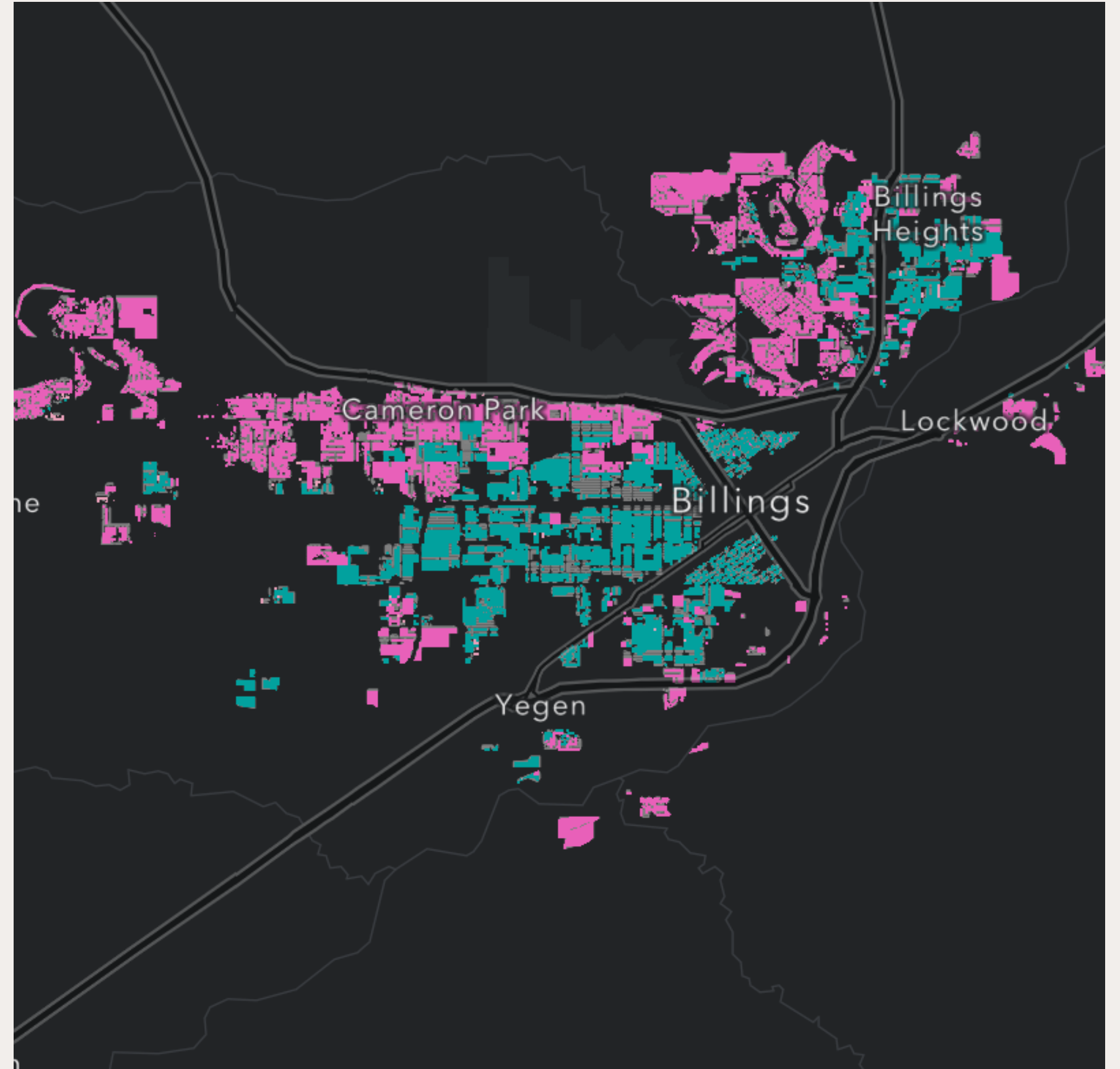
Strict local zoning regulations exclude low and middle-income residents and worsen Montana's housing shortage.



# EXCLUSIONARY ZONING IN BILLINGS

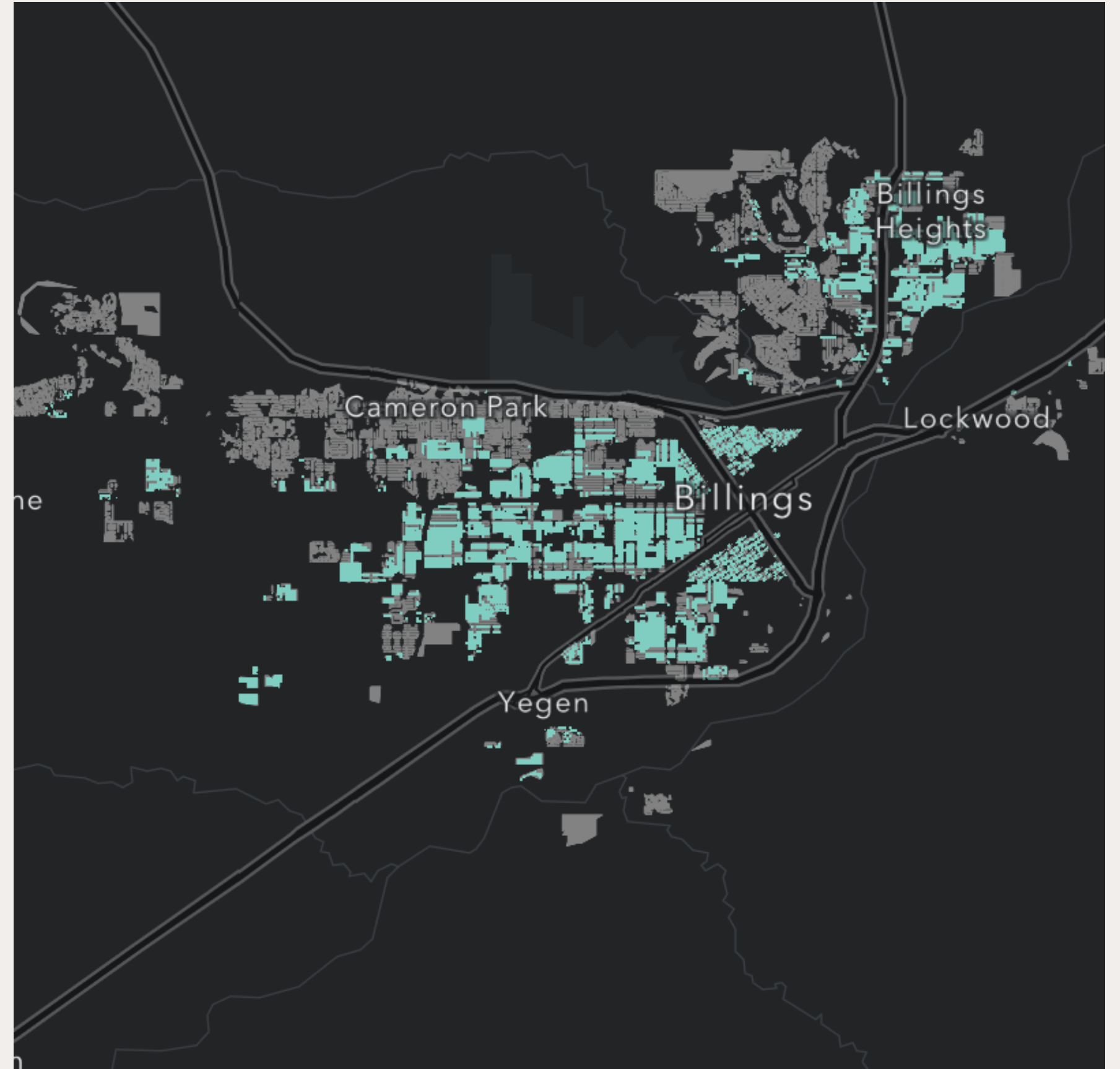
The pink areas indicate where 2+ family homes are prohibited in Billings due to Exclusionary Zoning.

**Over 57% of primary residential areas in the City.**



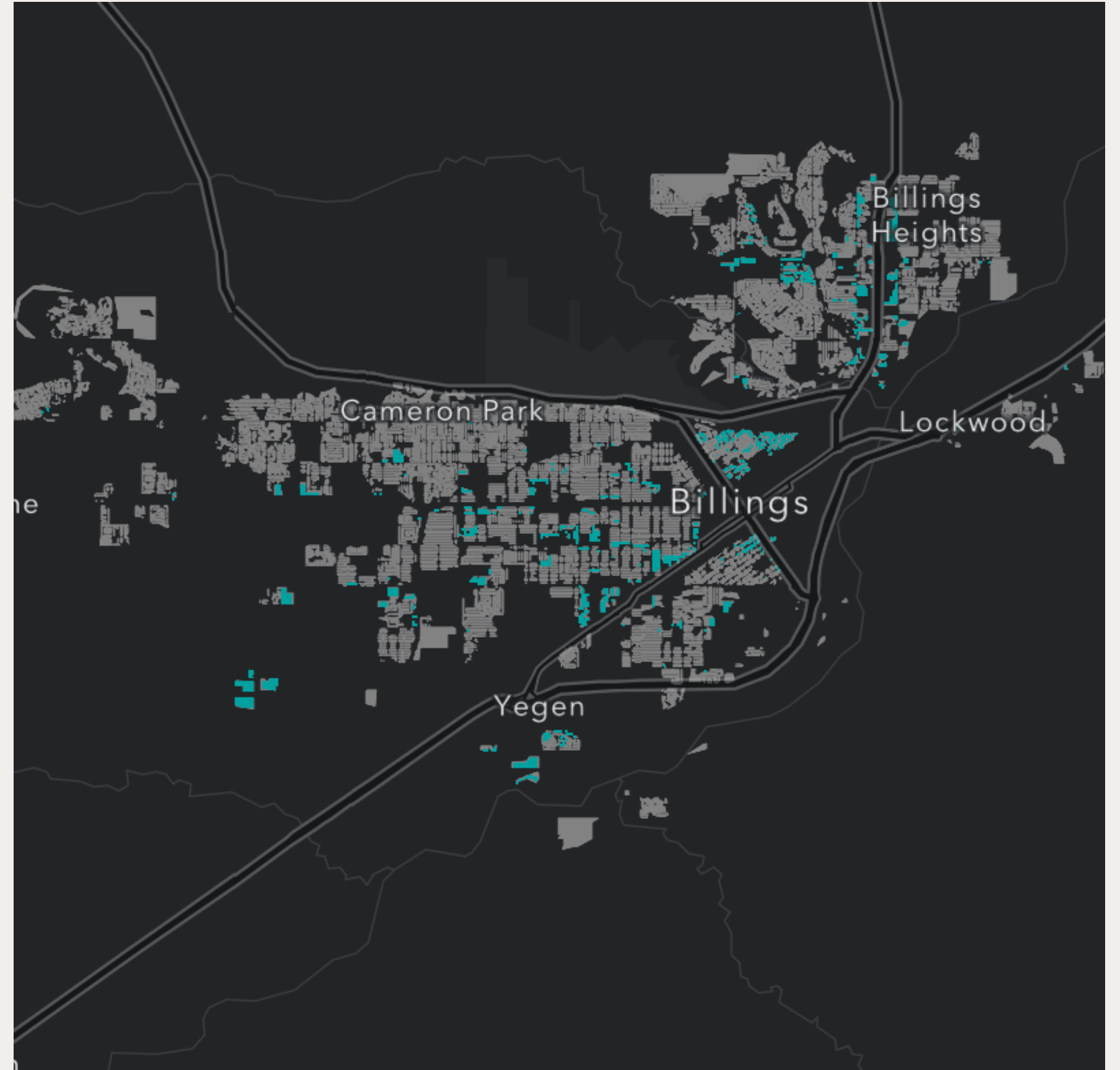
# SINGLE-FAMILY ZONING IN BILLINGS

Only 42% of residential zones in Billings welcome more affordable duplexes or townhomes via an explicit "by-right" zoning designation.



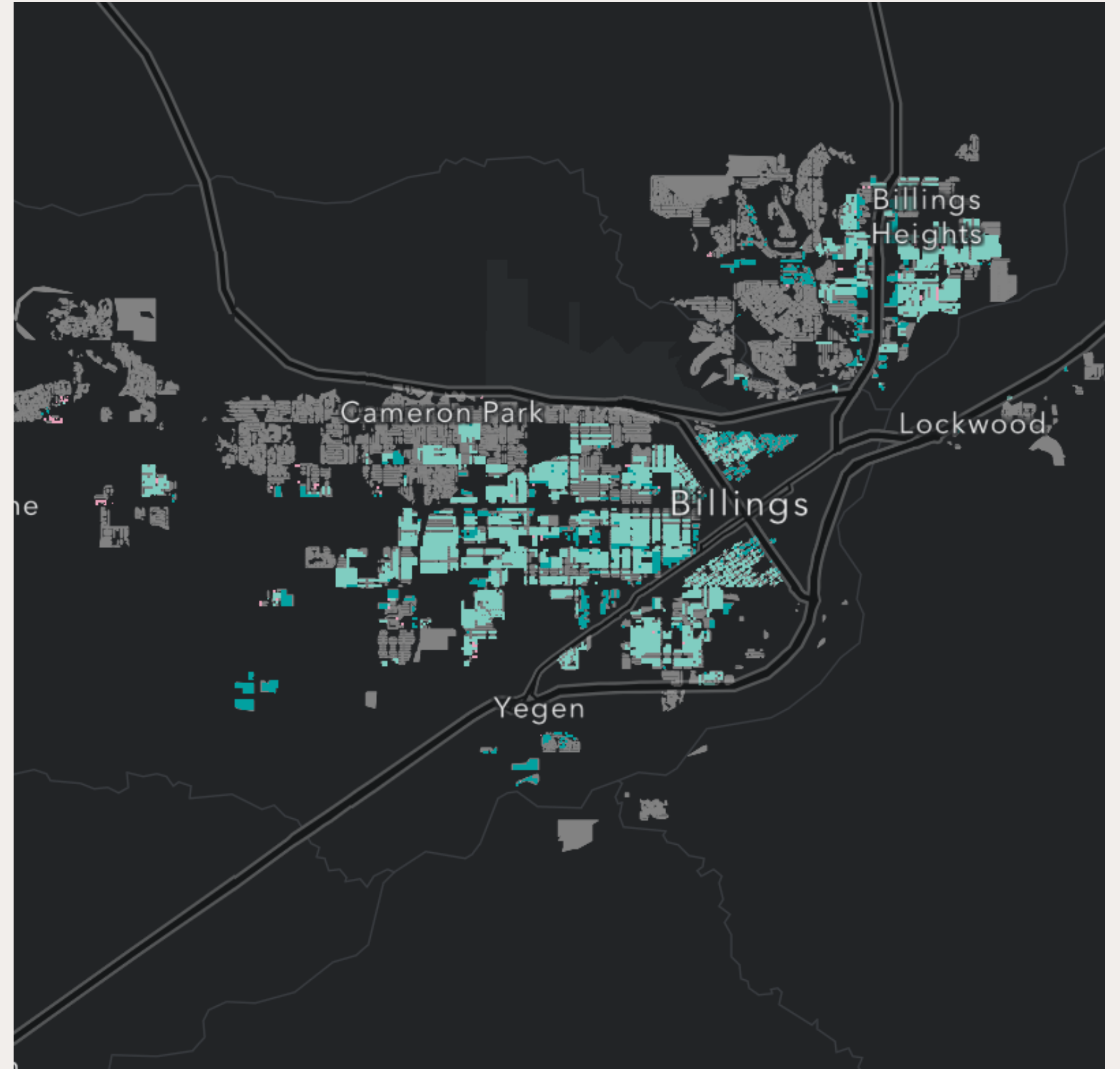
# SINGLE-FAMILY ZONING IN BILLINGS

Even less welcome 3+ unit  
development via an explicit "by-  
right" zoning designation.



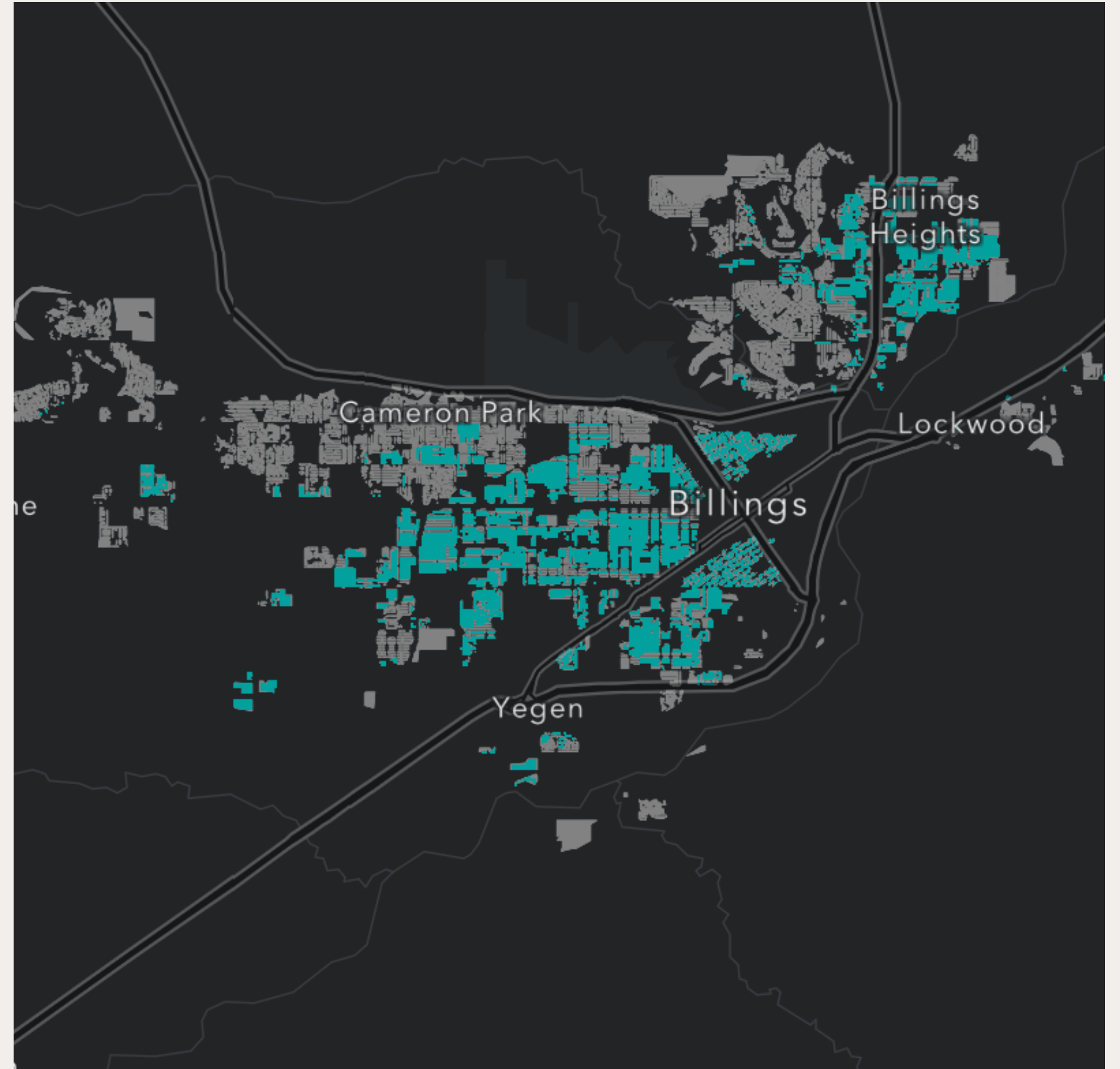
# MINIMUM LOT AREAS IN BILLINGS

Minimum Lot Areas effectively prohibit multi-family development when the lot size required exceeds the dimensions of existing lots. This creates **De-Facto Single-Family Zoning** (Pink Areas).



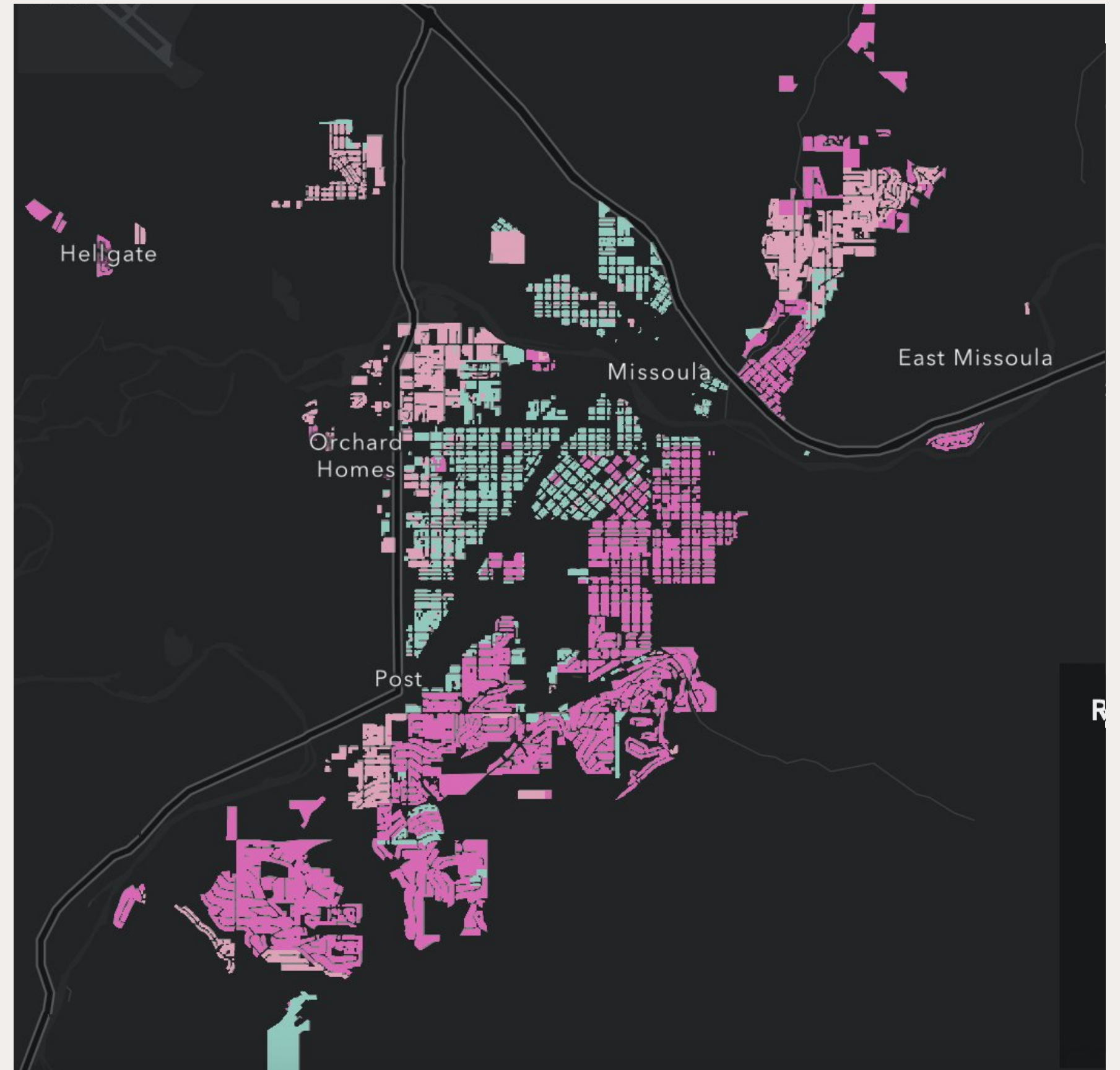
# MINIMUM LOT AREAS IN BILLINGS

When Minimum Lot Areas are added on top of Exclusionary Zoning practices, this leaves 42% of primary residential areas in Billings that permit affordable multi-family development.



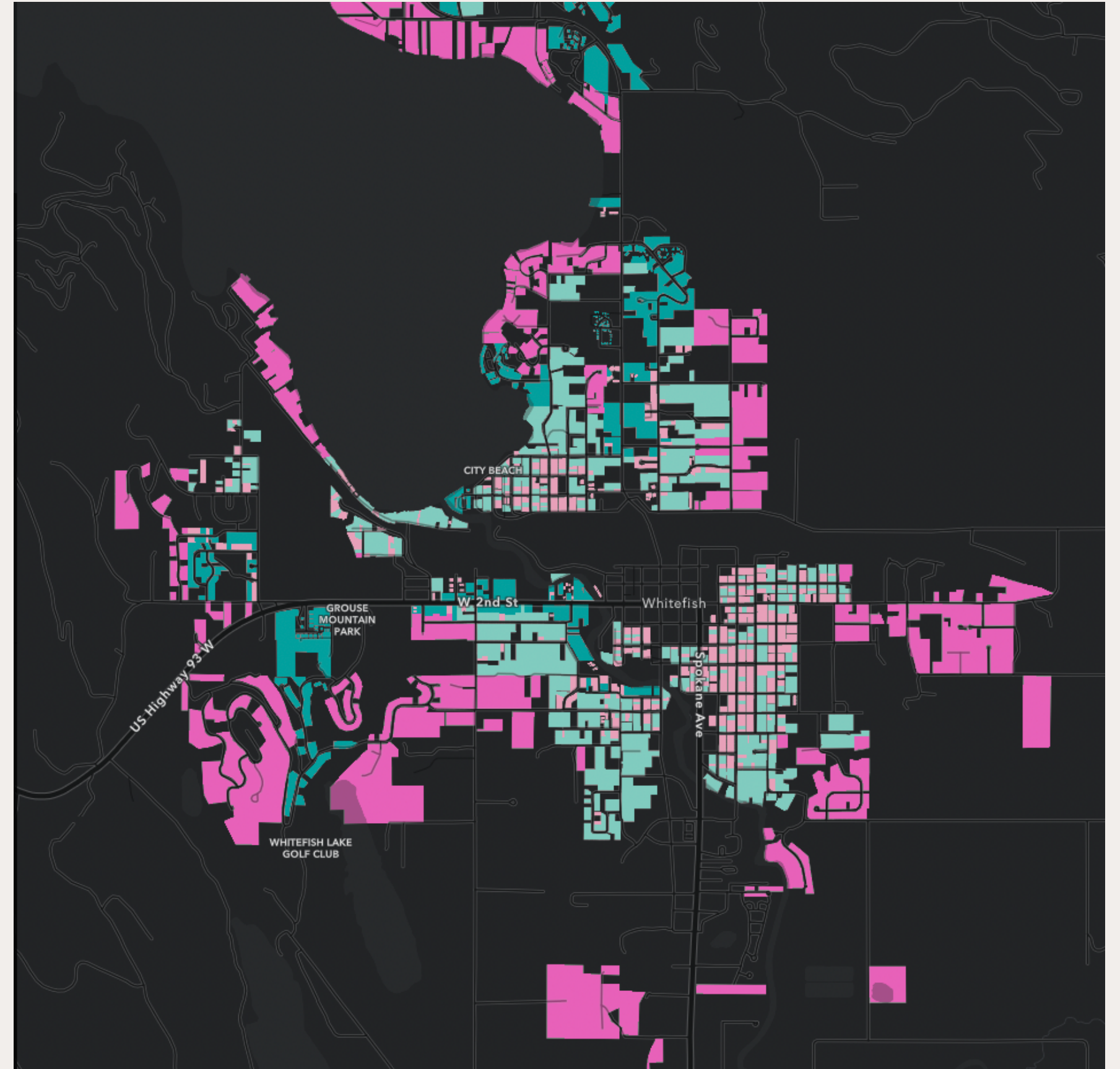
# MISSOULA

2+ family homes are **prohibited in over 75% of primary residential areas** due to Single Family Zoning and Minimum Lot Areas.



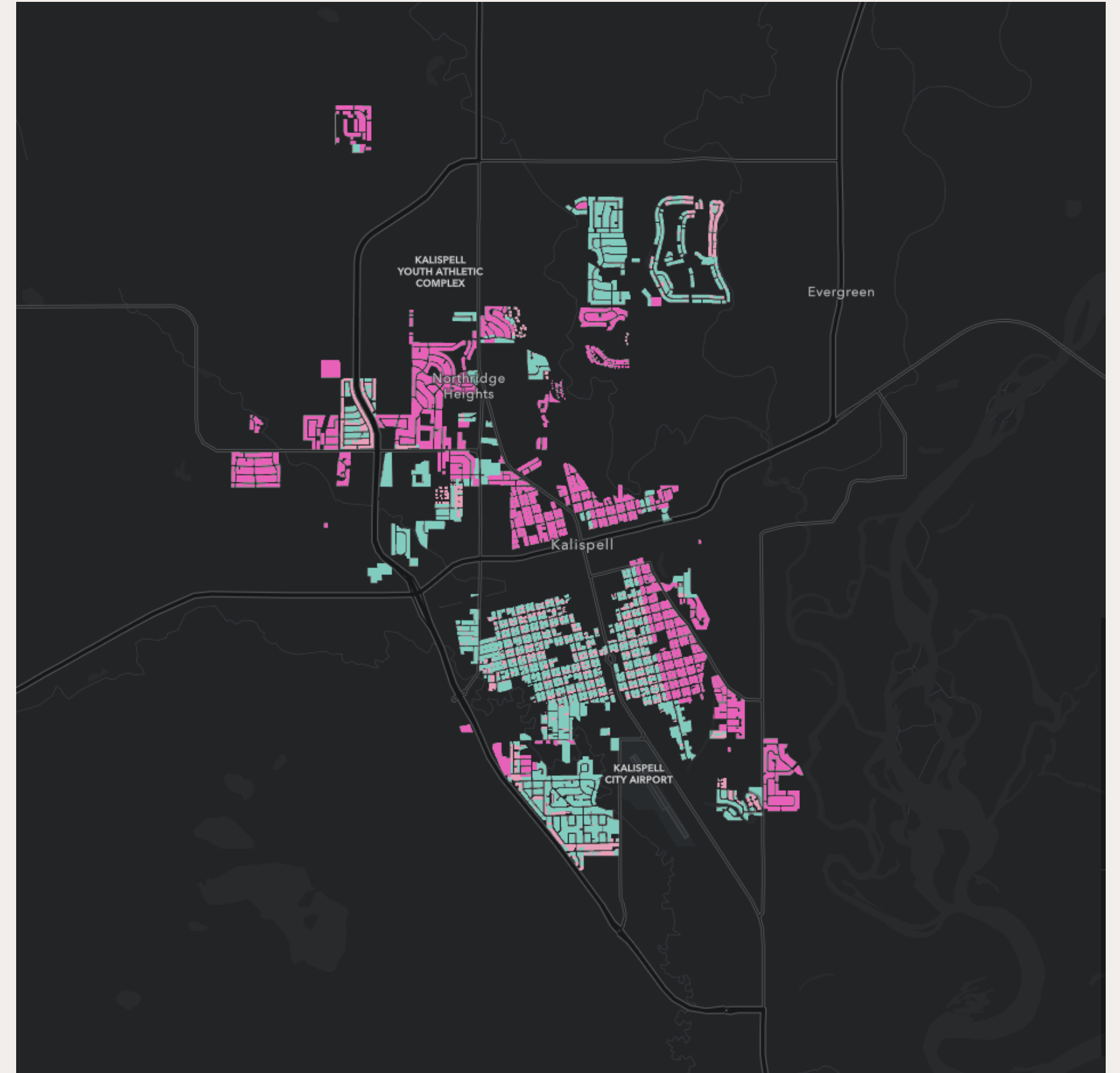
# WHITEFISH

2+ family homes are prohibited in  
63% of primary residential areas due  
to Single Family Zoning and  
Minimum Lot Areas.



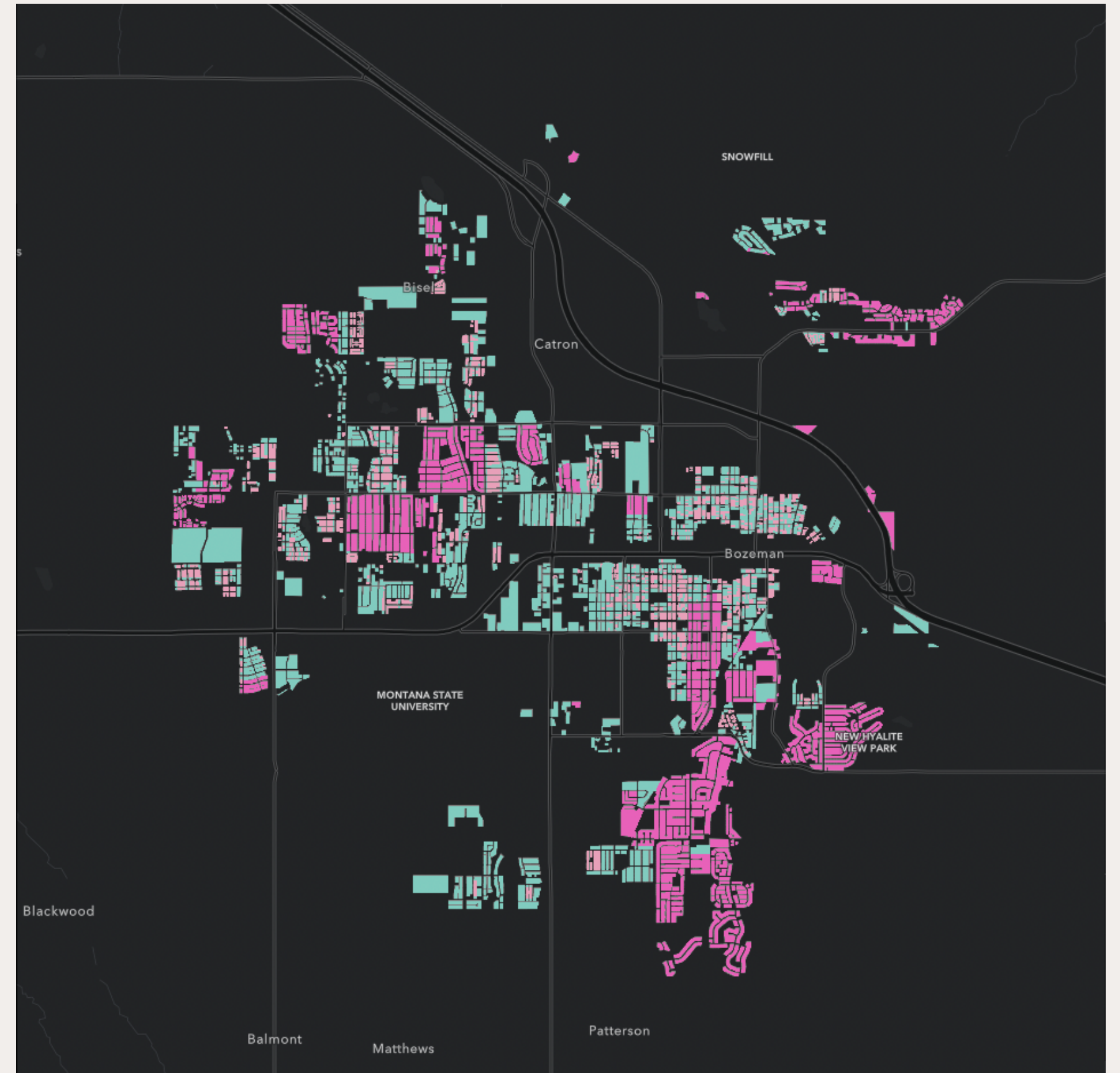
# KALISPELL

2+ family homes are **prohibited in over 54% of primary residential areas** due to Single Family Zoning and Minimum Lot Areas.



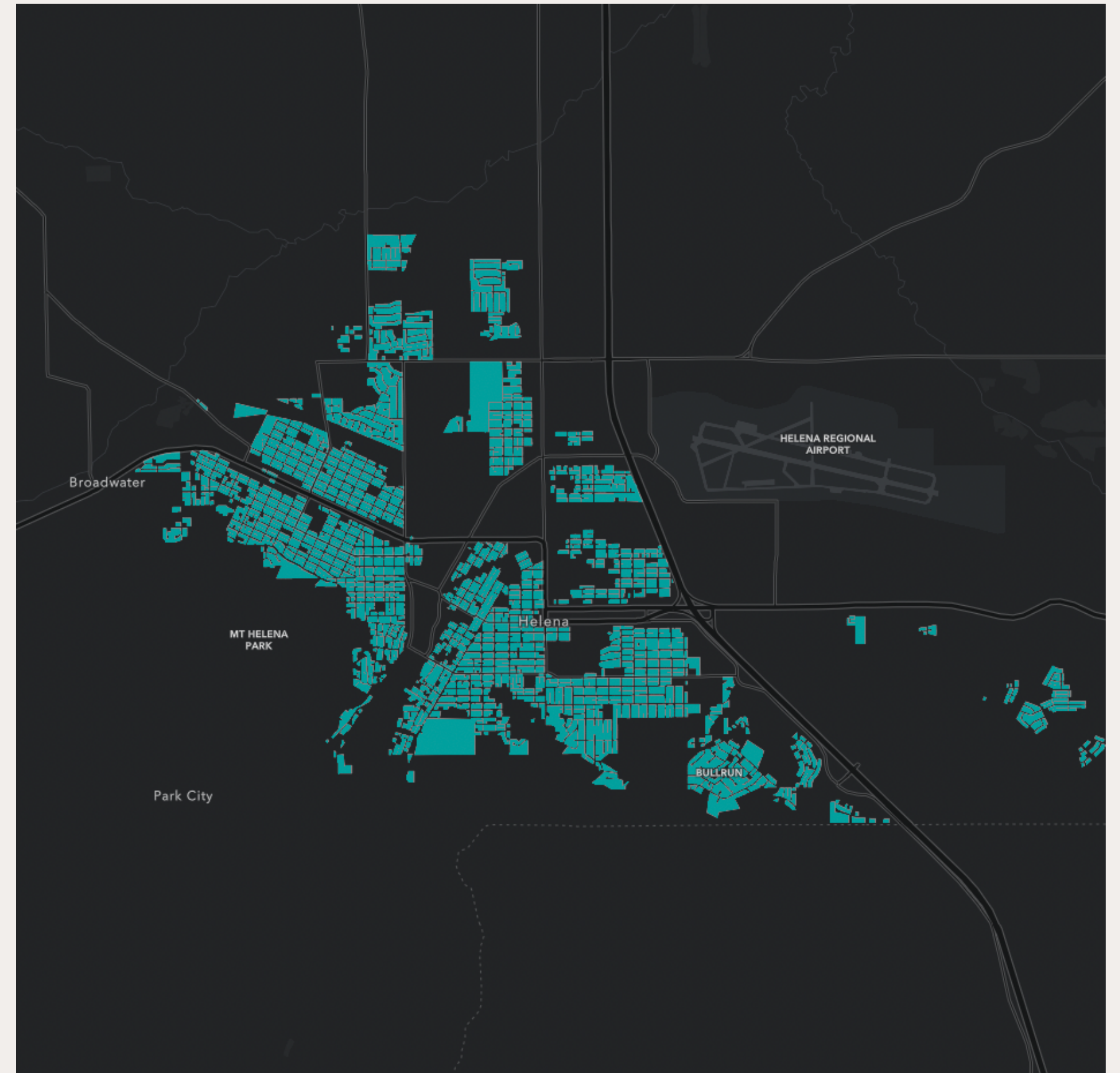
# BOZEMAN

2+ family homes are **prohibited in over 50% of primary residential areas** due to Single Family Zoning and Minimum Lot Areas.



# HELENA

2+ family homes are permitted in  
100% of primary residential areas  
and the City Helena does not impose  
Minimum Lot Areas.



# PRO-HOUSING REFORMS

## **#1: Restore the Right to Build Housing**

Our proposal: Expand areas in Montana's cities where multi-family housing is permitted by-right.

## **#2: Eliminate Minimum Lot Areas**

Our Proposal: Eliminate Minimum Lot Areas

**Expand areas in Montana's cities where multi-family housing is permitted by-right.**

**Local Officials Should:**

Reform city zoning codes to restore landowners' right to build two-to-four family housing in zones which currently only permit single-family.

# Eliminate Minimum Lot Areas

In 2019 Helena abolished nearly all minimum lot area requirements. Billings also recently moved from a lot area requirement to a simpler lot width requirement.

These changes may be one factor keeping average home prices in those cities relatively affordable compared to cities with minimum lot area requirements like Bozeman and Missoula.

## **Local Officials Should:**

Consider following the City of Helena's lead by eliminating Minimum Lot Areas entirely.

# Additional Considerations

## **#1: Permitting**

Permit approvals are often a barrier to development. Consider implementing a "self-certification" model, which has seen success in Phoenix.

## **#2: Parking Requirements**

Minimum parking requirements are frequently cited as driving up costs of development. Consider relaxing on-site parking requirements.

## **#3: Setbacks, Max Building Coverages**

Other lot geometry requirements can effectively impose a minimum on the size of a lot, which limits development potential.

# Montana Zoning Atlas In The News

## **Daily Inter Lake Editorial:**

"We challenge city and county officials to take a hard look at the study to see what can be done locally to encourage the medium-density housing that would produce the homes we need for the families who want to live here. Then work to rewrite zoning codes, as necessary, to make it easier for denser housing to be developed."

## **Bozeman Daily Chronicle Editorial:**

"Still the study raises points worth considering: that the cities' zoning policies mandate single-family dwellings on too much land area. Those policies cover 50% of all available land in Bozeman and 75% in Missoula. That means multiple-family dwellings – more affordable apartments, condos and townhouses – cannot be built on a lot of available land."

# Montana Zoning Atlas

**To see all the cities evaluated go to:**

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**Contact:**  
**[kcotton@frontierinstitute.org](mailto:kcotton@frontierinstitute.org)**

