# Community Open House: SPR Regulations Update

December 10, 2024

# DC-24-0003: Text Amendments to the Land Use Code related to Site Plan Review

Commissioners expressed concerns with the increasing size of homes in the unincorporated county, the rate at which they were increasing, sustainability, and affordability.

Staff were directed to focus on:

- Reducing the current compatible size from 125% of the median to the median
- Changing what is currently a size presumption to a size limitation based on the neighborhood median
- Clarifying the regulations and creating more certainty for applicants

**We're interested in hearing your thoughts about these potential changes before we begin drafting our proposal.**

# Brief History of Site Plan Review

- Site Plan Review first adopted in 1993—expanded to the plains in 1994.
  - Adopted to address concerns about the impacts of development on natural resources and the existing character of surrounding neighborhoods.
- Updated in 2008 to better address concerns about increasing home sizes
  - Created a size presumed to be compatible with a neighborhood, which is currently 125% of the neighborhood median.

## How do we define a neighborhood?

- For applications in a subdivision, the platted subdivision is the defined neighborhood.
- For applications within a mapped historic townsite, the defined neighborhood is that mapped townsite
- For all other applications, the defined neighborhood is the area within 1,500 ft. of the parcel, excluding any parcels inside municipalities, subdivisions, or historic townsites.

# Neighborhood Examples

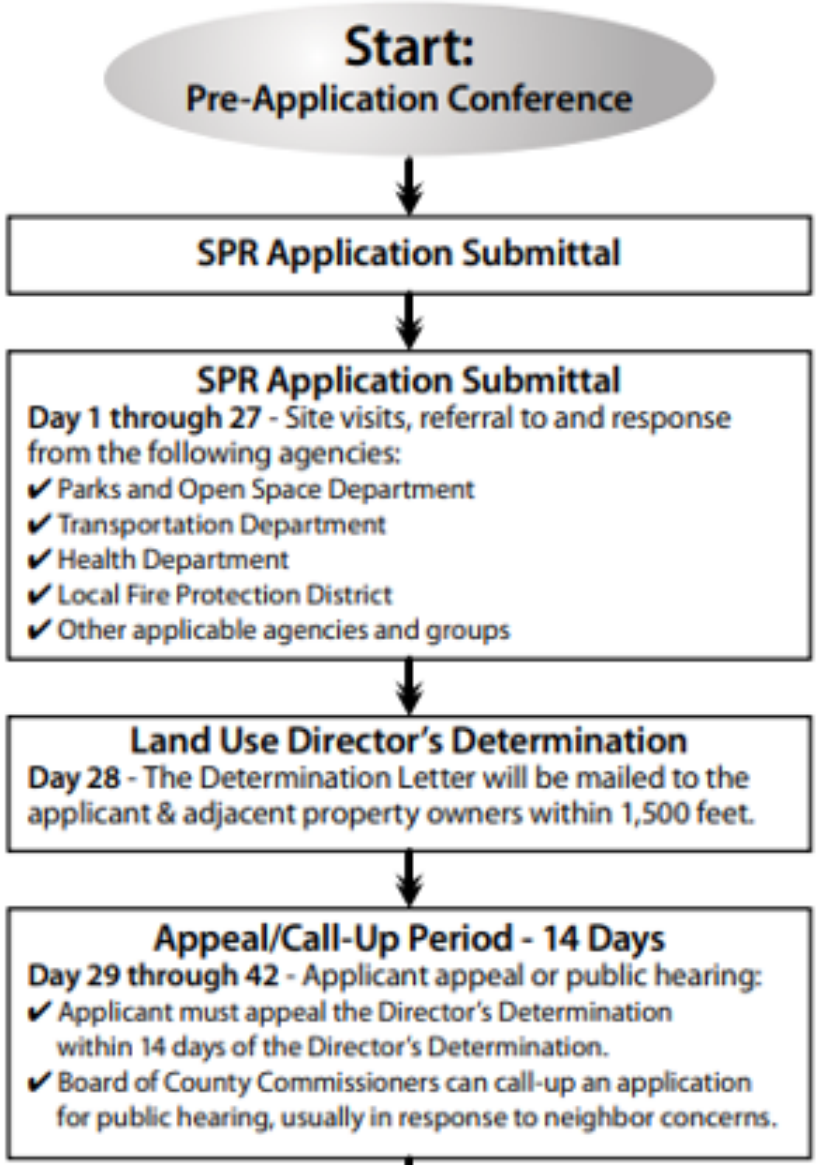

# What is Residential Floor Area (RFA)?

- Residential Floor Area includes all attached and detached floor area on a parcel associated with a residential use, including principal (i.e., a home) and accessory (i.e., shed, garage) structures.
- There is an exemption of up to 400 sq. ft. for gazebos, carports, solar parking canopies, detached greenhouses, renewable energy storage facilities, and hoop houses

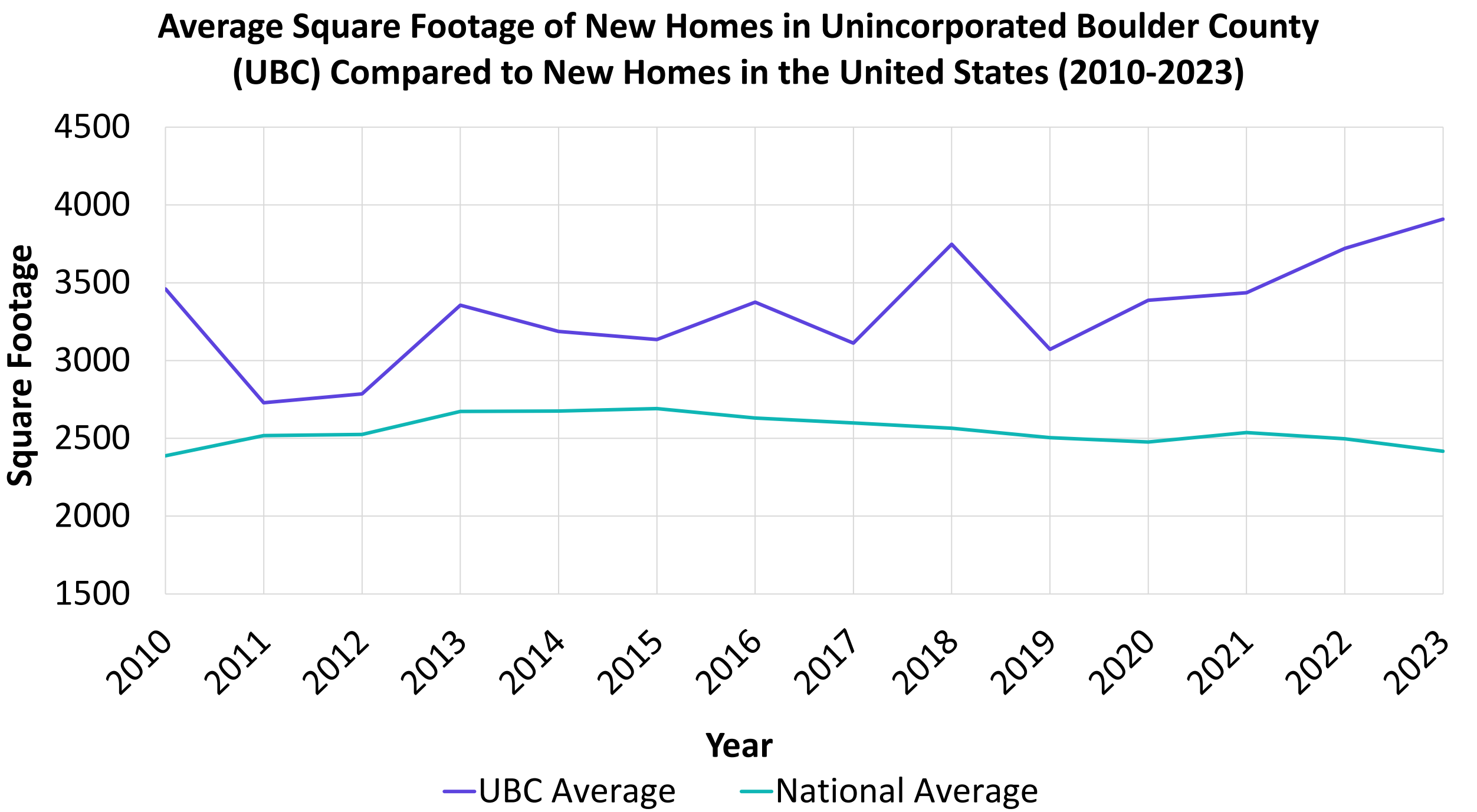
## What is the size presumed to be compatible?

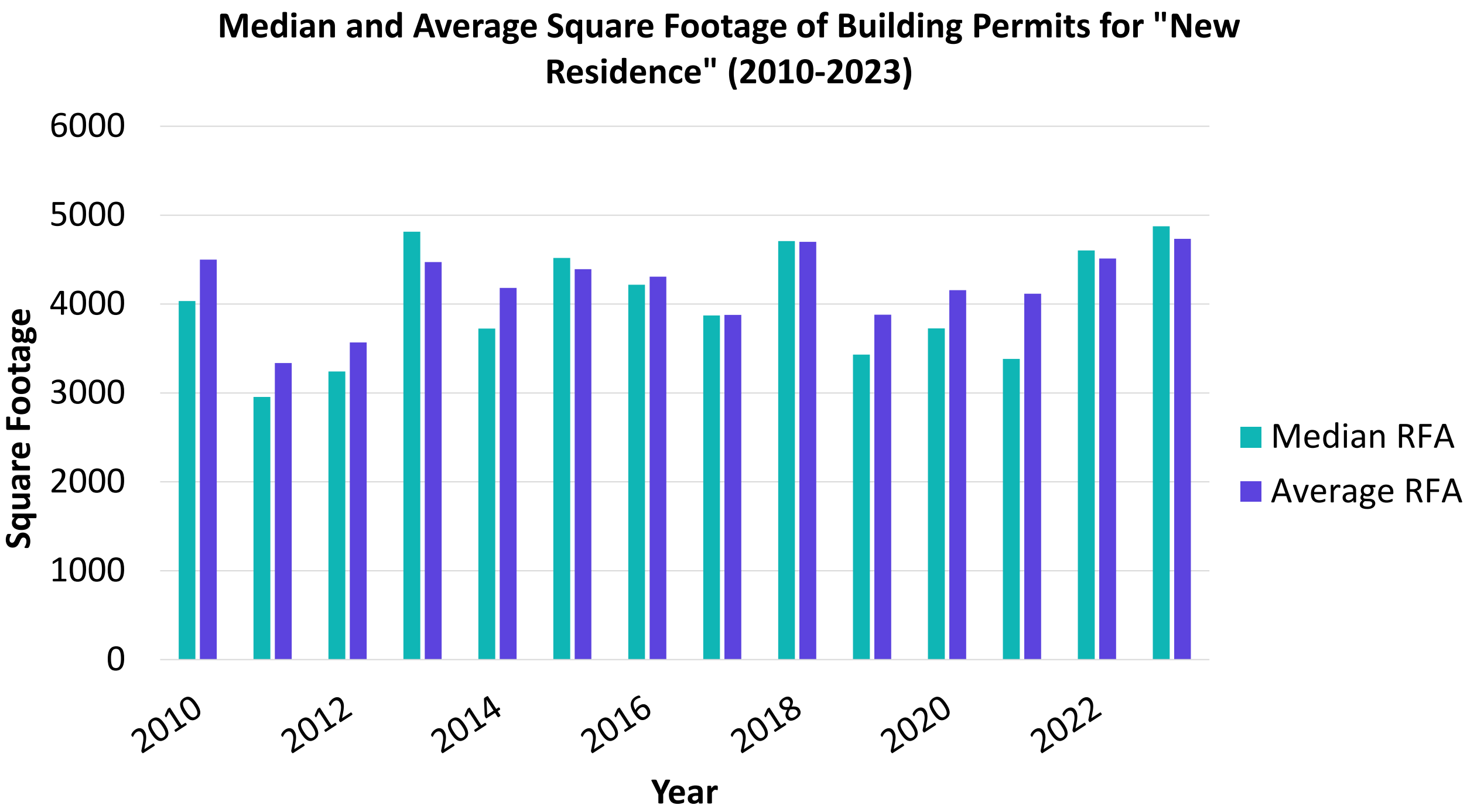
- A way for staff to measure the compatibility of proposed development
- Varies depending on neighborhood
- In mapped townsites it's 1,500 square feet (sq. ft.)
- Outside of mapped townsites it is either 125% of the median RFA for a defined neighborhood or 2,500 sq. ft., whichever is larger
- A few ways for an applicant to try and overcome the presumption
- Staff use the Boulder County Assessor's records as the base source of data for determining these numbers

# General SPR Process

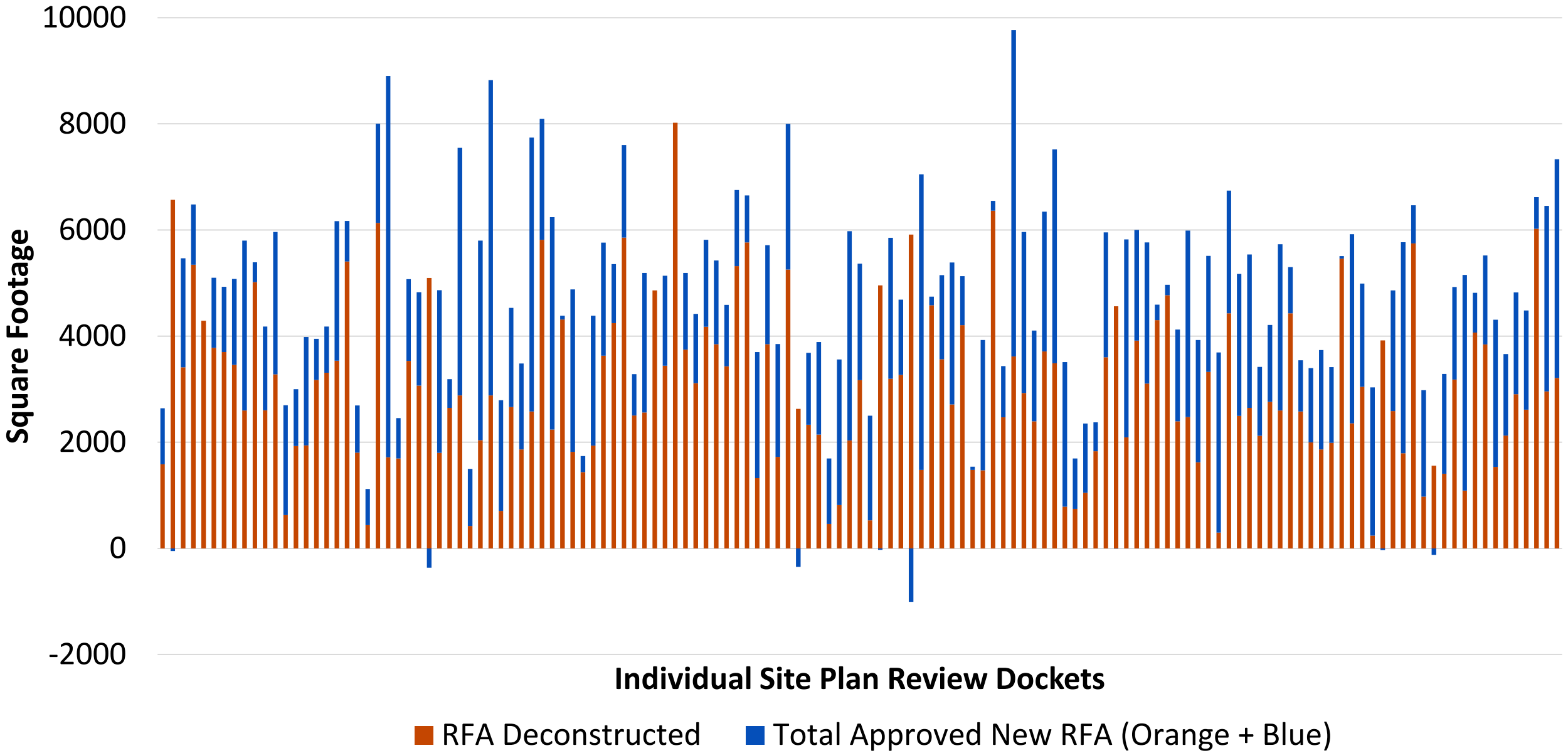


# Charts, Data & Research

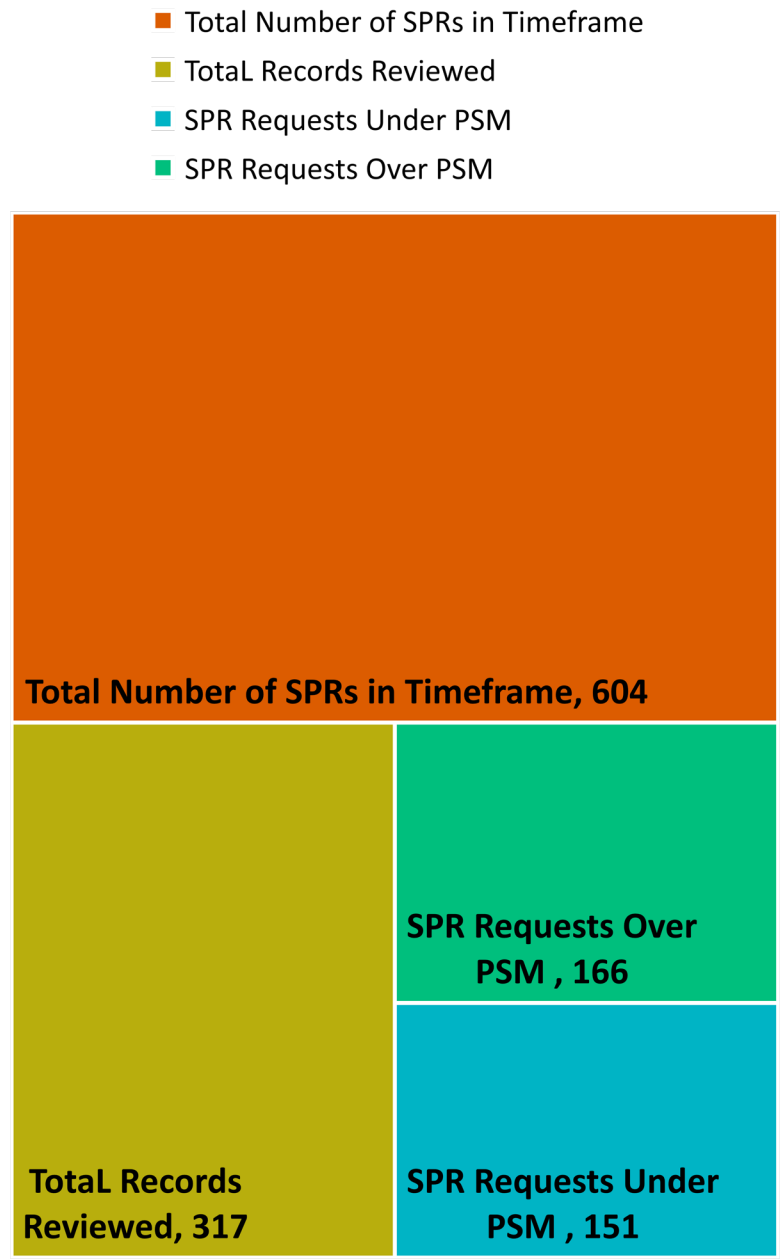

Average Square Footage of New Homes in Unincorporated Boulder County (UBC) Compared to New Homes in the United States (2010-2023)
Square Footage
4500
4000
3500
3000
2500
2000
1500
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
Year
UBC Average
National Average

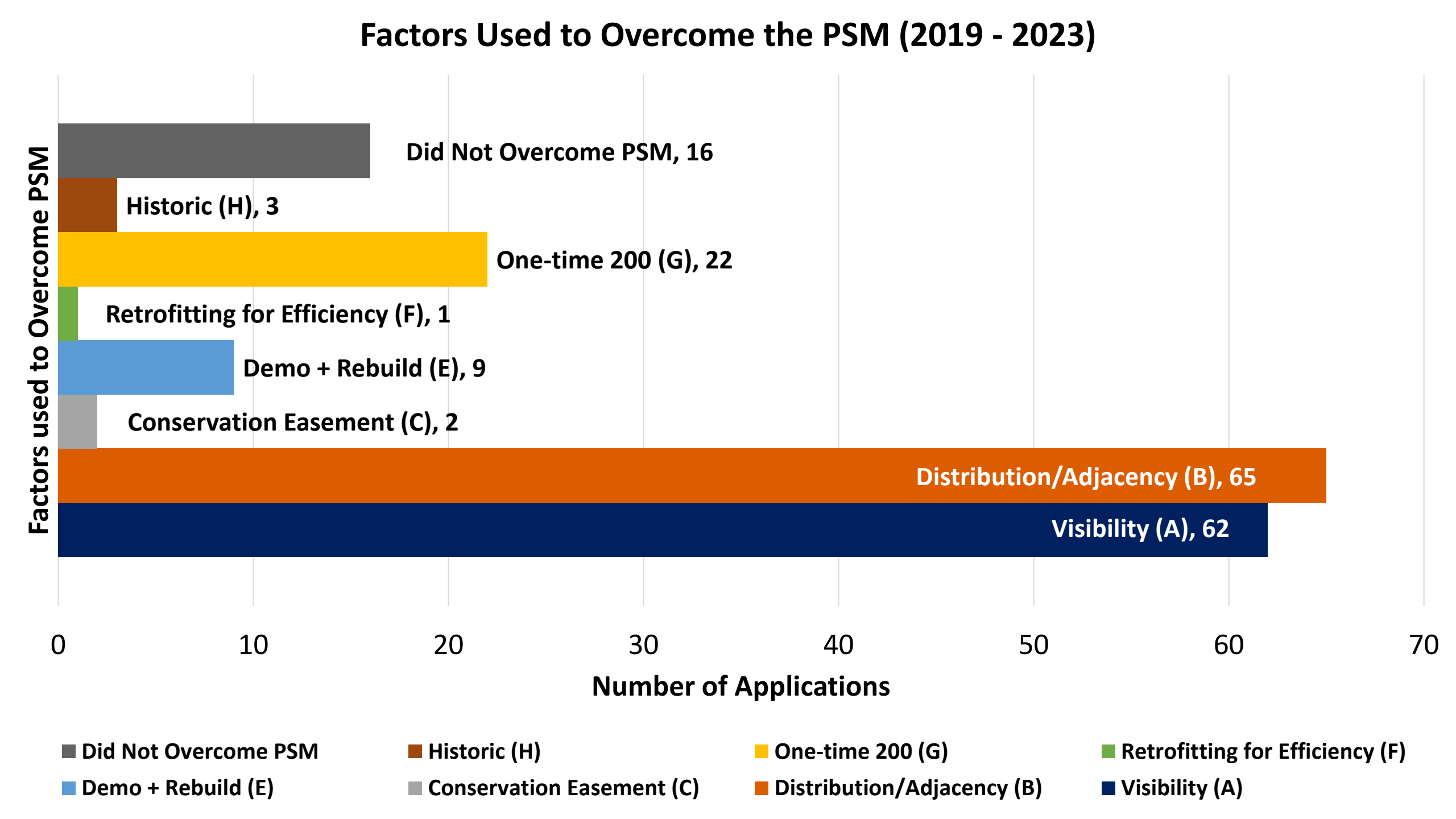

Median and Average Square Footage of Building Permits for "New Residence" (2010-2023)
6000
5000
4000
3000
2000
1000
0
Square Footage
2010
2012
2014
2016
2018
2020
2022
Year
Median RFA
Average RFA

# SPR Applications: RFA Deconstructed and Total New Approved RFA (2010-2023)



# SPR Requests Compared to PSM (2019 - 2024)



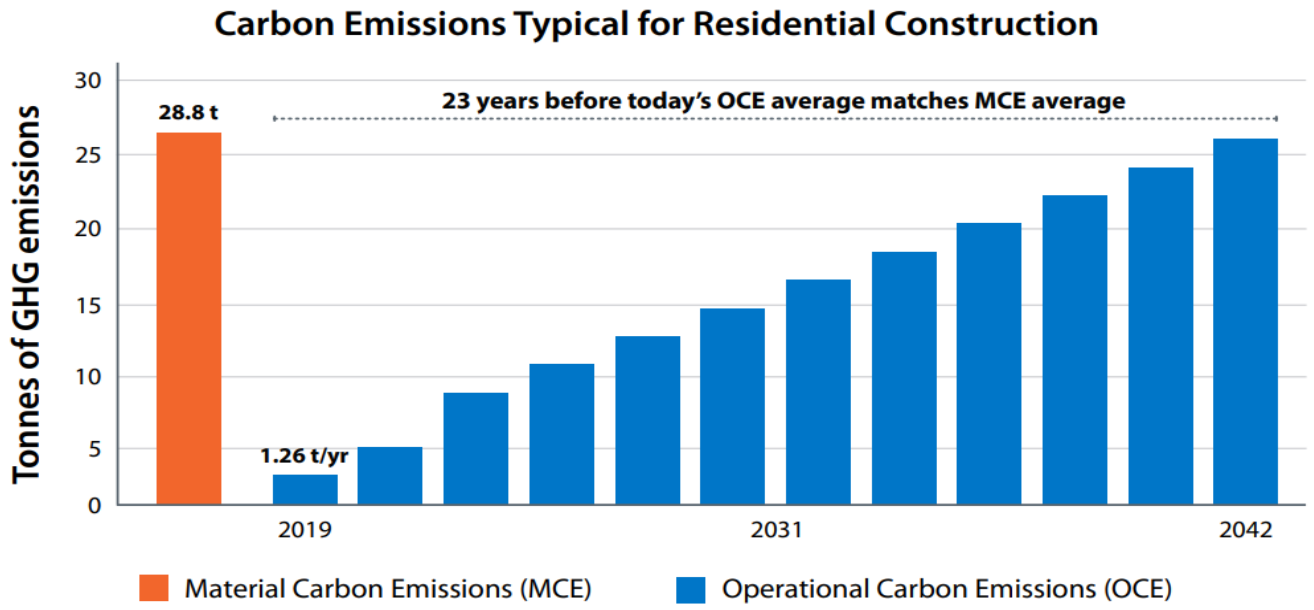

Factors Used to Overcome the PSM (2019 - 2023)
Factors used to Overcome PSM
Did Not Overcome PSM, 16
Historic (H), 3
One-time 200 (G), 22
Retrofitting for Efficiency (F), 1
Demo + Rebuild (E), 9
Conservation Easement (C), 2
Distribution/Adjacency (B), 65
Visibility (A), 62
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
Number of Applications
Did Not Overcome PSM
Historic (H)
One-time 200 (G)
Retrofitting for Efficiency (F)
Demo + Rebuild (E)
Conservation Easement (C)
Distribution/Adjacency (B)
Visibility (A)

## Summary of Key Takeaways

- The average, new home in unincorporated Boulder County is larger than the average, new home nationwide.
- On average, the size of homes in unincorporated Boulder County has been increasing.
- When Residential Floor Area (RFA) is removed from a parcel, it is almost always replaced with more RFA.
- When an applicant is going through an SPR related to floor area, they are requesting an amount over the size presumed to be compatible more than half of the time.
- When overcoming the size presumed to be compatible, the factors used most often are distribution/adjacency and visibility.

# Research: Key Takeaways

- Generally, it takes 23 years for a typical home's cumulative operational emissions to equal the amount of material carbon emissions.
- Material carbon emissions are of greater concern because the emissions are in the atmosphere now, whereas operational emissions occur over time.



## Research: Key Takeaways (Continued)

- Residential energy use accounts for 24% of greenhouse gas emissions in Boulder County.
- New homes constructed in unincorporated Boulder County likely consist of greater embodied energy.
- Reducing per capita floor space, along with energy retrofits and a transition to low-carbon energy sources our a few ways to help meet climate goals.
- The tendency for affluence—or wealth—and floor area per capita to increase together is a key emission driver for wealthier households.

# Conclusion

- Homes in unincorporated Boulder County are growing larger, which contributes to changes in neighborhood character.
- Based on our research, we can conclude that larger homes are generally less sustainable than smaller homes built to the same specifications.
- If we want to achieve our sustainability objectives then we need to consider the size of homes in the unincorporated county and the resources consumed to construct or enlarge them.
- Larger homes impact affordability.

# Next Steps

- Staff will draft regulations
- Draft will be posted online for comment
- Meeting to outline the proposed changes
- Planning Commission

You can follow along with this process at boco.org/dc-24-0003.

# Questions

Department of Energy. 2023. “Carbon Emissions in a Typical New Production Home: A Case Study.” Carbon Emissions in a Typical New Production Home: A Case Study

Department of Energy. 2023. “New Residential Construction Carbon Emissions.” https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy23osti/83049.pdf

Goldstein, B., Gounaridis, D., Newell, J.P. 2020. “The carbon footprint of household energy use in the United States.” https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1922205117.

Magwood, C., Huynh, T. 2023. “The Hidden Climate Impact of Residential Construction.” RMI. https://rmi.org/insight/hidden-climate-impact-of-residential-construction/

Sartori, I., Hestnes, A.G. 2007 “Energy Use in the life cycle of conventional and low-energy buildings: A review article.” *Energy and Buildings* (Vol. 39, Iss. 3 p. 249-257). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enbuild.2006.07.001.

Data for charts and graphs is a combination of information available from data.census.gov, fred.stlouis.org, and Boulder County permitting data, available at accelapublic.bouldercounty.org.