How lot size requirements shape building footprints across Tokyo neighborhoods

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Abstract

This paper investigates how minimum lot size requirements (MLSRs) shape building footprints in the southwestern wards of Tokyo—an area characterized by compact, high-density housing interspersed with historically upscale neighborhoods. Using detailed building-footprint data on detached houses, we find that stricter MLSRs are associated with larger building footprints. Specifically, increasing MLSRs from unregulated to the smallest regulated value leads to an expansion of 28.0 square meters. Stricter MLSRs also appear to reduce block-level density: raising MLSRs from zero to the smallest regulated value is associated with a decline of about 2.4 buildings per block. The emergence of small building clusters in Tokyo thus reflects relatively permissive MLSRs. These findings highlight how flexible land-use regulations shape neighborhood form and inform urban policy.

Keywords: Land use regulations; Residential zones; Single-family housing; Building densities

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