

**CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VA  
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING  
2023 ZONING FOR HOUSING/HOUSING FOR ALL**

**FACT SHEET:**

**Proposed Bonus Height Zoning Text Amendment**

**PURPOSE:**

The City has two provisions in its ordinance that offer additional development potential in exchange for affordable housing under its residential Bonus Density Program. One provision provides more density in a project in exchange for a designated number of affordable units and the other provides more height in a project in exchange for a designated number of affordable housing units. The current proposal was designed to explore the possible extension of the Bonus Height provision, under Sub-Section 7-703(B) of the Zoning Ordinance for applicability in zones with maximum heights between 45 to 50 feet. Currently, up to 25 feet of bonus height can be requested in zones with height maximums of greater than 50 feet. Under the current proposal, the 25 feet provision of allowable additional height would not change. Staff analysis shows that, as it exists today, Subsection 7-703 (B) of the Zoning Ordinance has had limited use since its inception.

The purpose of this initiative is to explore whether the City should expand the availability of the bonus height provision to neighborhoods that have lower height limits, potentially adding some committed affordable units in more locations. An initial concept for a Bonus Height Text Amendment went through a public review process, including a Planning Commission public hearing, in 2022. That proposal was deferred pending additional study which has now been completed and summarized here.

To provide context for the potential use of an expanded bonus height provision: the City has had 14 projects that have been approved to use the bonus height afforded by Section 7-703(B). Half of these projects were paired with the bonus density provision and two were affordable housing projects. To date, 60 committed affordable units have been created in projects that involved bonus height and another 166 committed affordable units are either in the pipeline or are under construction. 130 of the 166 units are in the two affordable housing projects; both of which paired bonus height with bonus density. Staff's analysis indicates that a revised bonus height tool is not likely to be used, and would therefore not generate additional housing units.

**METHODOLOGY:** Staff reviewed the compatibility of up to 25 feet in additional height in zones with height maximums between 45 – 50 feet. Staff also prepared several case studies to determine whether the other zoning regulations in such zones would allow that additional height to be advantageous. Further, a financial feasibility study was conducted to determine if the additional height would be enough to stimulate redevelopment of the test sites. In addition, staff spoke to several developers of small-scale projects to obtain input regarding the utility of the proposed update. These studies were pursued to address community concerns, such as the potential unintended consequences stimulating redevelopment of “market affordable” modestly scaled multifamily buildings in exchange for a limited number of new committed affordable units; potential impact on historical development patterns of a neighborhood; and perceived impacts on neighborhood infrastructure (although every development project is evaluated for infrastructure impacts).

**KEY FINDINGS:** The studies indicate that this proposal has very limited potential for use, primarily because other provisions of the zoning ordinance (limits on overall square footage, requirements for setbacks and open space, etc.) would nearly always prevent a developer’s ability to use this provision. One specific example, involving a proposal to add a story to an existing office building as part of a residential conversion, could use this provision, but that proposal is not dependent on this proposal to move forward. At this time, the very limited potential benefit has convinced staff to not recommend its adoption.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Table consideration of this proposal.

**TEXT CHANGE ELEMENTS:** Not applicable.

**FISCAL IMPACTS:** Not applicable.

**EQUITY IMPACTS:** Section 7-700 (Bonus Density Program) is an important tool to help expand housing production and affordability while also creating more opportunities for choice of housing types and location and more opportunity for affordability.

**LIST AND LINKS:**

- [City of Alexandria Zoning Ordinance \(Current\)](#)
- [Applicability Map for Proposed Update](#)

**CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VA  
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<b>FACT SHEET:</b>	<b>Historic Development Patterns</b>
<b>PURPOSE:</b>	Identify favorable historic development patterns within the city’s historic districts and established neighborhoods and provide recommendations that would allow these types of development to be built in the future.
<b>METHODOLOGY:</b>	Staff identified neighborhoods within the city (Parker-Gray, Rosemont, Del Ray, and Old Town) that exhibit characteristics that are often cited by members of the community as enjoyable, engaging, and vibrant places. These neighborhoods have been used as the basis for design guidelines and pattern books. We identified typical blocks containing a mix of uses and building typologies and analyzed them for compliance with the current Zoning Ordinance. We also reviewed and analyzed previous versions of the Zoning Ordinance, previous Zoning and Land Use maps, and Sanborn Fire Insurance maps.
<b>KEY FINDINGS:</b>	Subsequent updates to the Zoning Ordinance have introduced additional restrictions and zones which have made the ability to construct these types of historic development patterns increasingly difficult. The majority of staff’s study areas include buildings (such as small apartments and townhouses) and/or uses that are not in compliance with the current Zoning Ordinance either due to being constructed before there was a zoning ordinance or under an earlier ordinance. Examples include zones which prohibit the construction of apartments or lots too small to permit the construction of townhouses. Several sections of the Zoning Ordinance would need to be changed in order to allow such historic development patterns to continue. For example, the current Zoning Ordinance has multiple, duplicative restrictions on the amount of development that can occur on a parcel: height and standard setback requirements, zone transition setbacks, floor-area ratios, and units per acre. Many jurisdictions successfully achieve their development objectives with a few (but rarely all) of these tools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

Staff recommends a two-phased approach to change the Zoning Ordinance through a series of text amendments based on the following guiding principles:

- Allow smaller lot sizes, a mix of uses, and a mix of residential typologies in all zones.
- Simplify the number of zones – i.e., consolidate some residential zones, some mixed-use zones, and some commercial zones.

Current zoning restrictions that do not consider the existing built environment or historically-acceptable lot sizes include:

- The requirement for a zone transition line setback,
- Regulating density through units per acre and floor-area ratio in addition to height, setback and floor area.
- The minimum lot area requirement and the lot area requirement per multifamily unit;
- The widespread use of different floor area limits for different uses in the same zone; and
- Limited allowance of compatible commercial uses in residential zones.

## TEXT CHANGE ELEMENTS & PHASED APPROACH:

**Phase I (November 2023):** Text Amendments to:

- Remove dwelling units per acre limitations in multifamily zones to allow smaller unit sizes within the same development envelope. Removing the dwelling units per acre limits as well as the average unit size in some zones, this could increase unit production by an estimated 1.5 to 2.5 units in some projects.
- Remove zone transition setback requirements, which require additional setbacks when adjacent to residential zones regardless of the actual use of the properties and the proposed new construction (i.e. a mixed-use building would have to have this additional setback on a residential portion of the building when adjacent to a residential zone). This requirement is inconsistent with historic building patterns which typically feature a mix of uses in close proximity; and
- Implement the Zoning for Housing townhouse zone recommendations.

## **Phase II (for future study):**

Future Text Amendments to consider:

- Simplifying the number of zones;
- Changing or eliminating minimum lot size requirements;
- Creating more standardization of uses across zones; and
- Study increasing flexibility of bulk and area regulations.

Create Design Guidelines for Traditional Neighborhood Development.

Evaluate the potential of selective use of the Neighborhood Conservation District tool to preserve existing examples of historic development, especially small-scale multifamily buildings and other housing types not currently being constructed.

### **FISCAL IMPACTS:**

Removing restrictions on units per acre could potentially, albeit marginally, increase the value of multifamily buildings.

### **EQUITY IMPACTS:**

These recommended zoning changes would diversify housing options, including housing unit size, for all income-levels and allow low-scale multifamily developments that would likely provide housing opportunities for lower income households.

### **LIST AND LINKS:**

#### **Links:**

[City of Alexandria Zoning Ordinance \(Current\)](#)  
[Estimated Increase in Units \(Multiplier\) Smartsheet](#)

#### **References:**

1. [City Zoning Ordinance 109, 1931](#)
2. [City Zoning Map, 1931](#)
3. [City Zoning Ordinance 279, 1939](#)
4. [City Zoning Ordinance 286, 1939](#)
5. [City Zoning Map, 1939](#)
6. [City Zoning Ordinance 708, 1951](#)
7. [City Zoning Map, 1954](#)
8. [City Zoning Ordinance 1206, 1963](#)
9. [City Zoning Map, 1963](#)

**CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VA  
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<b>FACT SHEET:</b>	<b>Residential Multi-family (RMF) Zone Analysis</b>
<b>PURPOSE:</b>	This initiative analyzed potential expanded opportunities for the Residential Multi-family (RMF) Zone.
<b>METHODOLOGY:</b>	Staff analyzed approved projects that have utilized the RMF zone to evaluate the limitations and opportunities with the zone, evaluated the economic feasibility of the zone, and met with affordable housing developers. Staff evaluated the potential for creating a second, more modestly-scaled RMF zone and determined the existing RMF zone already allows development at smaller scales, and the economics of affordable housing generally require higher densities to move forward.
<b>KEY FINDINGS:</b>	<p>Given the RMF zone requirements for one third of the increase in density permitted by the zone to be provided as affordable housing at an average of 40% AMI (Area Median Income), recent applications of the zone have demonstrated that City, State, and/or Federal financial participation is typically necessary to make the projects financially viable and to enable additional enhancement of affordability.</p> <p>There have been five projects approved since the approval of the zone in 2019. Four of the five projects have been undertaken by affordable housing developers; due to the density incentives of the zone, in addition to preserving existing affordability, these projects have been able to expand affordability beyond the one third requirement. All of these projects have involved City, State and/or Federal financial participation.</p> <p>Due to the involvement of government funding, there will be a limited number of RMF projects each year. This is consistent with the expectation when the zone was established.</p> <p>In addition, these projects have had to rezone and, in most areas, have request a Master Plan amendment. The Housing Master Plan is the chapter of the Citywide Master Plan where the intent for application of this zone can be clarified.</p>

The current RMF zoning district requires Special Use Permits for several uses, including restaurants, medical care facilities, and fitness studios, that are normally allowed by-right in other zoning districts. These uses do not undermine intent of the zoning district and so staff is recommending a text amendment to make the RMF zone more flexible regarding these uses.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Amend the Housing Master Plan to state that it is envisioned that the RMF zone can be located in areas planned and/or zoned for medium or higher density development, as well as other specific locations where the proposed project is compatible with adjacent development and consistent with City policies. While this amendment will set the City policy, each project will still have to request all necessary approvals, evaluate impacts, and involve a community process.

Allow more flexibility for ground floor uses and permit uses that currently require SUPs.

**TEXT CHANGE ELEMENTS:** Amend the RMF Zone in the Zoning Ordinance to expand the number of uses allowed on the ground floor of RMF buildings.

Amend the Housing Master Plan to establish general intent for RMF rezonings.

**FISCAL IMPACTS:** N/A

**EQUITY IMPACTS:** Amending the Housing Master Plan will provide more intent regarding where RMF projects are consistent with City policy.

**ESTIMATED UNIT YIELD:** The recommended changes in the Housing Master Plan and zoning text amendment related to ground floor uses will not directly affect the number of units produced through the RMF Zone. Ultimately, the biggest factor for housing produced through the RMF Zone is outside funding. Due to the magnitude of the requirement for deeply affordable units in the RMF Zone, local, state, and/or federal resources are anticipated to typically be necessary and to limit the number of feasible developments.

**LIST AND LINKS:**

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/64246f5ba49f41159c59858e59c559b3>

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**DRAFT FACT SHEET FOR INDUSTRIAL ZONE INITIATIVE WITH PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS**

**FACT SHEET:** **Industrial Zone Initiative**

**PURPOSE:** The Industrial Zone currently does not allow residential uses but many uses within the Industrial Zone may be compatible with residential uses. This analysis looked at the potential for allowing land zoned industrial to apply for Residential Multi-Family (RMF) zoning. It also looked at any barriers to the planned transition in some areas from industrial uses to mixed-use/residential uses.

**METHODOLOGY:** Staff conducted research and analysis of background materials, such as the 2014 Industrial Study, national best practices, business license data, and real estate information on elements such as vacancy rates, existing uses and rental rates. Staff also met with commercial and industrial real estate brokers.

**KEY FINDINGS:** A limited portion (2.3%/224 acres) of the City is zoned Industrial. Eighty-seven acres of the industrial zone in the Eisenhower West and Landmark Van Dorn Small Area plan are currently planned for higher density mixed-use development.

Approximately 80% of the land uses in existing industrial zone areas (gyms, child-care, dog care, breweries etc.) can occur in other zones in the City.

The vacancy rates in the industrial zones are relatively low (1% to 6%) due to the high demand for these relatively low-cost spaces. These spaces are generally half the rent charged by retail locations.

Some of the landowners are land banking some of the sites in anticipation of future higher demand for redevelopment.

A significant portion of the industrial area in Eisenhower West and Landmark Van Dorn Plans and the industrial areas south of Duke Street (12.8%) is impacted by the 100-year floodplain.



Interim uses such as the uses outlined above are allowing the industrial buildings to be occupied and create a potential barrier to short-term redevelopment.

Some uses in the industrial zone that permit new buildings preclude the mid- and long-term implementation of City plans, including market rate and affordable housing.

Land currently zoned industrial *can* apply to rezone to RMF. This is especially true for industrially zoned land in the Eisenhower West Small Area Plan, which envisions medium and higher density mixed-use and residential land uses. The bigger barrier for RMF in the Industrial Zone is securing funding for all-affordable projects. See RMF fact sheet for recommendations and more information.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Because the majority of industrial-zoned land is already planned for mixed-use redevelopment, there is already the regulatory framework in place to support housing in those locations. For example, the Eisenhower West Plan envisions redevelopment to include or accommodate some uses now defined as industrial, or located in “industrial” buildings, when those uses have limited offsite impacts and can co-exist well with housing. The recommendation is to provide criteria for new non-residential construction in the industrial zone to promote its compatibility with future redevelopment.

Major land uses changes (i.e., adding residential uses or other potential changes) for industrially zoned land south of Duke Street will be addressed by the upcoming Duke Street corridor plan.

**TEXT CHANGE ELEMENTS:**

Add site and building criteria to the Industrial zone to require new buildings to be compatible with any potential future residential/pedestrian-scale development.

**FISCAL IMPACTS:**

N/A

**EQUITY IMPACTS:**

Future rezonings to implement the Eisenhower West and Landmark-Van Dorn Corridor small area plans (and other small area plans that address industrial-zoned land) will evaluate which, if any, land uses now permitted in the Industrial Zone will be permitted in the future. Until then, compatibility of new industrial buildings with planned redevelopment is key.

There are some small businesses located within the Industrial Zone. The upcoming Duke Street Corridor Plan will evaluate and consider land use impacts to the affordability and diversity of small businesses.

**ESTIMATED UNIT YIELD:**

Approximately 44 acres of industrially zoned land are planned for new residential and mixed-used development blocks in the Eisenhower West Small Area Plan. Based on development trends over the past 10 years, staff estimates that, over the long term build-out of the Plan (25-30 years), these industrially zoned blocks have the potential of generating 3,000 to 4,000 residential units.

**LIST AND LINKS:**

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/bc7e43eeba2b47d9b4c0884f7359fa82>

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<b>FACT SHEET:</b>	<b>Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs)</b>
<b>PURPOSE:</b>	The purpose of this initiative is to increase the number of committed affordable housing units constructed in CDD zones.
<b>METHODOLOGY:</b>	Staff has researched several recently approved CDDs for best practices to increase affordable housing production.
<b>KEY FINDINGS:</b>	<p>“Coordinated Development Districts” are a zoning tool that is used to coordinate the redevelopment of large parcels that will have multiple blocks and buildings and need to coordinate the provision of public infrastructure and facilities, such as roads, sewers, open space, and more. Good examples of CDDs include Potomac Yard, Eisenhower East and Landmark Mall. The additional development density provided by the Small Area Plans (SAP) for these growing neighborhoods provides an opportunity for the City to require the developer to mitigate the offsite impacts of the development, and these mitigation expectations are outlined the small area plan.</p> <p>In some cases, through the development review process, it becomes clear that additional density even above that provided by the Small Area Plan can be accommodated on a site. Virginia law allows that additional density to be subject to an affordable housing requirement.</p> <p>In the recent CDD for the Potomac River Generating Station, the City included a requirement that 1/3 of bonus density (above what is recommended in an SAP) to be committed affordable units, as part of the bonus density program. Staff is now recommending that this approach be applied in future new, and under certain circumstances, newly amended CDDs.</p> <p>Part of the benefit of this approach is it would eliminate a separate SUP approval for the bonus density, and the affordable units would be phased in with the new development and not potentially wait until later in the buildout of the CDD.</p> <p>Amendments to existing CDDs can only be initiated by the property owner and not by the City. Staff references “amended CDDs” only in instances where the relevant property owner requests a change to the CDD which would add density above the amount recommended in the relevant small area plan.</p> <p>In the PRGS case, the amount of additional density (above that anticipated by the small area plan) is 275,000 sf; if the developer does</p>

utilize all of that additional density, one-third of it (or about 91 units), would be affordable.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Establish a City Council policy, possibly memorialized in the Housing Master Plan, affirming that the City should continue its practice of including condition language in future new and amended CDD requests that would require 1/3 of bonus density (above what is recommended in an SAP) to be committed affordable units.

**TEXT CHANGE ELEMENTS:** N/A

**FISCAL IMPACTS:** The additional development in these growth centers of the City would positively impact the City's tax base.

**EQUITY IMPACTS:** Increasing the number of committed affordable housing units in the City helps to improve housing inequality. It would also locate more affordable units in CDDs where they would be close to transit and jobs opportunities.

**LIST AND LINKS:** [Potomac River Generating Station CDD docket item](#)

**CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VA  
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<b>FACT SHEET:</b>	<b>Expansion of Transit Oriented Development</b>
<b>PURPOSE:</b>	This initiative analyzed existing barriers that limit increased development densities around transit stations. The purpose is to identify themes to guide future small area plans so that they better support densities near high-capacity transit.
<b>METHODOLOGY:</b>	Locating higher density development near high-capacity transit has been a guiding principle for the City since the 2008 Transportation Master Plan and as reinforced in the 2021 Alexandria Mobility Plan, where it is a central theme. For this initiative, staff reviewed existing Small Area Plans (SAPs) and zoning within the walksheds of existing and planned Metrorail stations and priority transitway corridors. Staff also researched best practices/policy innovation for affordable housing within transit oriented developments (TODs).
<b>KEY FINDINGS:</b>	<p>Because of the desirability of land near Metrorail stations, the land values are generally +/- 25% higher than other comparable areas.</p> <p>To achieve the higher densities and heights near transit stations, buildings generally require a more expensive type of construction (steel and/or concrete).</p> <p>The condo and rental fees associated with many of the high-rise buildings create challenges for housing affordability.</p> <p>While bonus density and/or height are an option, there are often some market limitations. For example, developers generally do not want to deliver more than 350-450 units/building because of market conditions/absorption rates.</p> <p>Parking (underground or structured) can be a limit to additional units both because of cost and space limitations.</p> <p>The planned priority transit corridors in Alexandria West and the Duke Street corridor present an opportunity to add more market rate and affordable housing.</p>

Most areas within TOD walksheds are planned for higher density development, both through Small Area Plans and Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs), consistent with best practices for development surrounding transit.

Undeveloped or under-developed (currently developed at low density) parcels are located near Metrorail stations. Except for parks, these parcels offer an excellent potential opportunity for redevelopment at higher densities. For example, King Street and Braddock Road Metrorail stations have adjoining land that should be evaluated as part of a future planning process.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

As part of the upcoming Duke Street corridor plan, evaluate undeveloped or underdeveloped land adjacent to the King Street Metrorail station, both public and private.

Review the Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan's requirements for non-residential development immediately adjacent to the Braddock Road Metrorail Station.

As part of the Alexandria West Small Area Plan (SAP) and upcoming Duke Street corridor plan, promote transit-oriented levels of development to support affordable housing.

Conduct a future study on removing parking requirements for affordable housing within ½ mile of a Metrorail Station.

**TEXT CHANGE ELEMENTS:**

Not applicable. These recommendations will guide future planning efforts.

**FISCAL IMPACTS:**

Potential to increase taxable real estate with redevelopment of parking lots and vacant land.

**EQUITY IMPACTS:**

Potential to expand affordable housing options in locations with high levels of transit service.

**ESTIMATED UNIT YIELD:**

Staff estimates there are approximately 17 acres of publicly owned, underdeveloped, non-park land within the TOD walksheds in the City. Based on development trends over the last 10 years within TOD walksheds, staff estimates that the build-out of these properties could generate 800 to 1,200 residential units in the long-term.

**LIST AND LINKS:** <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0167ea7d9e8c45dcb133c3e6da584f7f>

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**FACT SHEET:**                      **Office to Residential Conversions**

**PURPOSE:**                      Review the City’s experience with conversions and determine if the City’s current approach should be confirmed or amended. Investigate whether the Zoning Ordinance includes impediments to office-to-residential conversions and whether there are areas in the City where conversions should be incentivized or discouraged.

**METHODOLOGY:**              Compiled a comprehensive list of conversions and looked at aspects of each project to identify trends.

Reviewed Zoning Ordinance to determine challenges to conversions, including requirements or limitations on setbacks, bulk (including floor area ratios), parking, open space and canopy coverage.

Reviewed national literature on this topic; interviewed staff from from all relevant departments as well as local developers and land use attorneys; and participated in regional discussions on the topic to identify conversion trends, opportunities and challenges.

**KEY FINDINGS:**              The City is a nationwide leader in office to residential conversions, due to location, existing building stock, local and nationwide trends, and the City’s willingness to consider and support conversions. *Examples: the Oronoco, the Foundry, Park Center.*

Office conversions have been a clear financial “win” for the City, with the increase in tax revenues significantly outpacing any increase in the cost of providing services to residential development. For example, student generation in converted buildings has been very modest.

Developers consistently describe conversions as a challenge. While they have the same considerations as other developments (financing and carrying costs, etc.), not all buildings are good candidates for conversions, and they generally require higher contingencies for unanticipated challenges in the conversion process. Industry specialists point to: construction complexity,

cost of construction, parking/open space, City processes, and requirements such as green building, etc.) as complications for conversions. *Examples: e-Lofts, Park Center.*

Often, the amenities desired by new residential uses are similar to those desired by office (good transit and parking, walkable neighborhoods, retail opportunities). Alexandria has general policies about where existing and future office should be protected. For existing office buildings, they are good candidates for conversion unless the building characteristics (age, condition, amenities, proximity to transit) indicate that it remains competitive for an office tenant or if other City policies or plans (such as the relevant small area plan) calls for a non-residential use in that location. Recent small area plans are flexible as to the overall mix of residential and non-residential uses in the plan area, but often require that a minimum percentage (and/or certain locations) are office. *Examples: Some buildings in Carlyle are examples of office buildings that may still be competitive; in the West Alex (King and Beauregard) development, the City allowed senior housing to be built instead of a planned office building.*

Many buildings that have already converted have been Class B or C office that were generally able to meet parking and open space requirements on-site. In the future, office buildings that are less able to meet parking, open space, and other requirements on-site may come forward. These will require regulatory flexibility.

Alexandria has a number of mixed-use zones which allow greater floor-area ratios (FAR) for commercial than for residential. This creates a barrier to conversion of an office building that contains more FAR than is permitted if it became housing. This barrier can be overcome by affirming that these buildings can use Section 7-700 to increase the residential density on the site, in exchange for affordable housing. Additional opportunities exist for conversions in smaller buildings and mixed-use locations, such as upper floors on King Street.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Continue to work with the development community to support conversions in Class B and C office buildings that can be approved under the current Zoning Ordinance. *Examples: 5001 Eisenhower (Victory Center), Tidelock (Transpotomac Plaza).*



Continue with the City’s current policy to generally encourage conversions of older, obsolete or non-competitive buildings and discourage cases where the building remains competitive (because of condition, location, on-site or nearby amenities, transit access, etc) or in cases where City policies or plans provide guidance that use should be preserved or the location should remain non-residential.

Establish a City Council policy, possibly memorialized in the Housing Master Plan, affirming that conversions should use Section 7-700 to increase the residential density on the site, in exchange for affordable housing.

Work with Office of Climate Action and the City Attorney to develop conversion standards for Green Building.

Review the City’s voluntary affordable housing contribution policy for conversions during the Housing Master Plan Update to ensure the contribution is aligned with the City’s residential affordable housing contribution policy and reflects the value of the change in use, and pursue legislative authority to enable the City to make all voluntary affordable housing contributions mandatory.

Continue to monitor conversion activity for ongoing challenges; when identified, consider whether regulatory or financial tools are needed. Future reviews will focus on whether building or fire code issues are creating challenges.

**TEXT CHANGE ELEMENTS:** None at this time.

**FISCAL IMPACTS:** Adding residential potential to buildings currently permitted as commercial adds value to underutilized parcels. Review indicates student generation is modest. Impacts on water, sewer, and stormwater are covered by fees.

**EQUITY IMPACTS:** Conversions can increase the number of available residential units in job-rich areas well-served by existing and future transit options. Given the costs of conversion and restrictions on the City’s ability to require affordable housing, the overall number of new designated affordable units may be limited.

**LIST AND LINKS:** [City of Alexandria Zoning Ordinance \(Current\)](#)  
List of Alexandria Building Conversions Since 2014

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**FACT SHEET:**

**Townhouse Zones**

**PURPOSE:**

Identify opportunities to increase consistency in zoning rules (lot requirements, Floor Area Ratio (FAR), and bulk/open space regulations) across the zones that allow townhouses. Revise lot, bulk, open space, and parking requirements to allow for small-scale residential infill development in zones that permit townhouses without public hearing approval.

**METHODOLOGY:**

This initiative involves examination of detailed technical specifications related to how the Zoning Ordinance regulates townhouses and townhouse-like dwellings. The complexity can defy simple summarization but is also an indicator that simplification of how Alexandria regulates townhouses is desirable. To explore this goal, staff reviewed each townhouse zone in detail, including the evolution of townhouse zoning regulations over time. Additionally, staff reviewed the past seven years of City Council, Planning Commission, and Board of Zoning Appeals approvals of 39 requests for the creation or expansion of one or two-family dwelling units in the City's townhouse and commercial zones. Staff reviewed these approvals to determine similarities across the requests and the issues they presented.

**KEY FINDINGS:**

All the applicants for the 39 studied cases requested relief from lot, bulk, open space, and/or parking requirements to accommodate proposed residential infill projects. In each case, staff found that approval standards were met. Given that all 39 cases were approved, staff concludes that, in general, special approval for these types of requests should not be required. Instead, the regulations should allow for contextual infill residential development by-right.

Staff identified several differences between the lot, bulk, and open space requirements across the City's townhouse zones. In early iterations of the Zoning Ordinance, townhouse lot, bulk, and open space regulations were relatively consistent across the City. As time passed, some townhouse zones were amended (RM, for example) and others (RB, for example) were not. In reviewing the

evolution of these amendments, staff has that changes are appropriate.

Many of Alexandria's townhouses are zoned either RM or RB. Old Town, roughly bounded by 495 to the south, the train tracks to the west, Slaters Lane to the north, and the Potomac River to the east, contains quite a high concentration of townhouses and/or townhouse-like buildings. Old Town also contains a high number of properties zoned either RM or RB. In general, the RM zone's standards are oriented toward the smaller lots and urban design expectations of Old Town. Despite their location in the same geographic area, their similar lot sizes and configurations, and that they contain either a townhouse or townhouse-like dwelling, properties not zoned RM in Old Town are subject to different zoning requirements. Staff recommends that these requirements be amended to align more closely with the RM zone.

Additionally, many of the zones which allow townhouses establish lot, bulk, and open space requirements based on how a building is constructed, instead of a lot's size and dimensions. For example, many houses zoned CL (Commercial Low) in Old Town are considered single-family because they are not attached to neighboring houses or because there aren't three attached dwellings in a row. These houses and their lots generally match the size and configuration of nearby townhouses in residential zones. Despite this, the CL zone requires lot frontage, size, and setback requirements that are much larger than those in the adjacent residential zones. 1209 Prince Street, image below, illustrates this example.



Because this house is not connected to its neighbor to the right at 1207 Prince Street, this property is considered a semi-detached dwelling. This lot is 20 feet wide. The CL zone requires a minimum width of 37.5 feet. Further, it requires an eight-foot side yard. The existing house at 1209 Prince Street provides a 2.5-foot side yard. The existing house at 1207 Prince Street encroaches onto the 1209 Prince Street property by 0.8 feet leaving just 1.7 feet between the two houses. If the townhouse regulations were applied to these lots, they would comply with the CL zone's requirements.

Staff determined that the townhouse and commercial zone requirements do not allow for desirable, context-sensitive residential development. The proposed changes to zones that allow townhouses would allow for outcomes in better alignment with the Master Plan's goals and objectives for compatibility.

**Guiding Principles for Recommendations:**

- Establish lot requirements based on location and similarity of lot size/pattern/configuration instead of housing type.

- Eliminate bulk and open space inconsistencies across townhouse zones for lots of similar size/pattern/configuration.
- Revise bulk and open space requirements to more closely align with existing lot size/pattern/configuration.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends a two-phase approach.

Phase I Text Amendments (November 2023):

- Apply RM zone townhouse lot, bulk, and open space requirements to all properties within Old Town in zones that allow townhouses.
- Apply RM lot, bulk, and open space requirements to single and two-unit dwellings on narrow lots where townhouse dwellings are currently permitted in Old Town
- Establish contextual front setback requirements for townhouse zones and for residential development in commercial zones City-wide
- Eliminate side yard setback requirements for lots 25 feet in width or less
- Establish 35 percent open space requirement across all townhouse zones and for residential uses in commercial zones
- Eliminate off-street parking requirements for single-unit, two-unit or townhouse dwellings within the Enhanced Transit District and require one space per dwelling unit for dwellings outside the Enhanced Transit District.

Phase II Text Amendments (for future study):

- Replace open space requirement with a maximum lot coverage requirement
- Eliminate lot size minimums
- Apply RM zone FAR maximum to all townhouse zones

**FISCAL IMPACTS:**

Eliminating the discretionary approval process reduces development costs and could lower sale/rental prices.

**EQUITY IMPACTS:**

Removing inconsistencies across lot, bulk, and open space regulations would grant similar development opportunities currently only afforded to property owners within the RM zone.

**CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VA  
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING  
2023 ZONING FOR HOUSING/HOUSING FOR ALL**

**FACT SHEET:** **Expanding Housing Opportunities in Single-family Zones**

**PURPOSE:** This initiative proposes changes to the Zoning Ordinance to broaden access to traditionally single-family neighborhoods. The initiative evaluated the current limit of one household per lot in the City’s single-family zones and the potential benefits of allowing a greater number of households per lot in those zones. In support of this purpose, staff examined and is proposing changing the definition of “family” and how parking reductions are both possible and necessary to achieve housing access goals, as well as preserve open space. These proposed actions will improve access, modestly amplify our housing production goals, enable new housing typologies in neighborhoods where they do not exist now, and/or are by their multi-unit nature are less expensive.

However, this initiative is not proposing to mandate that these new units be affordable to specific income levels.

**METHODOLOGY:** With community input, staff examined areas of the City restricted to single-family detached housing; how housing demand is not being met by supply and the attendant economic factors (such as price increases/decreases and vacancy projections, types, and price points); and income needed to purchase/rent specific dwelling price ranges and correlation with missing typologies in the current housing stock. Options for adding missing housing types were created, for which forecasts were generated to show the potential increase in units in these zones. Staff conducted analysis to inform proposed options for reducing parking requirements. The forecasts allow estimates for factors such as impacts on schools, public infrastructure, and environmental sustainability.

**KEY FINDINGS:** **Number of units and diversity of housing unit types**

The analysis conducted shows that sale and rental properties in the City are [generally outside an accessible price range](#) for many residents. This indicates that increasing the supply of dwelling units with a more expanded range of price points, typically

through the creation of smaller individual dwelling sizes, would contribute to increasing the availability of dwelling options for a broader range of income levels in all City neighborhoods. A greater diversity of housing options in single-family zones would also likely contribute to increased diversity amongst residents within neighborhoods.

Single-family zones R20, R12, R8, R5, and R2-5 first appeared in the City of Alexandria in 1951, and now encompass 34% of the total land area or 5.17 square miles in the City. Noting the potential to increase dwelling unit density in single-family zones, this initiative studied the feasibility of adding multi-unit dwelling types ([townhouses, two-family, three to six unit multi-family](#)) while maintaining the zones' existing setbacks, floor area ratio (FAR), and lot size requirements. A [consultant study](#) identified that approximately 66 comparatively lower-valued properties could be financially feasible for developers to redevelop in single-family zones, resulting in an estimated 66 new residential buildings and an additional 150-178 new dwelling units created over 10 years. The estimated range of 150-178 units is based on adding two-family dwellings or up to four-family dwellings in the single-family zones.

Staff also researched an option to focus construction of new multi-unit dwellings in single-family zones within ¼ mile of transit and shopping amenities. GIS mapping revealed that only 0.39 square miles of single-family family zoned land was located outside of a ¼ mile walkshed. Staff does not recommend the transit-oriented development option given that the land areas outside of the ¼ mile walkshed are minimal and not significant enough to inform a policy to expand housing opportunities. This more limited approach would not fully increase access to single-family zones, and therefore would not fully address the equity component of the Zoning for Housing/Zoning for All initiative.

One of the sixteen policies in the City's Master Plan adopted to support a set of "Goals and Objectives" states "Areas of the city currently zoned residential should remain zoned for residential use at no higher than their current density." The term "density" when related to housing typically refers to dwelling units per acre (or per lot), but density can also refer to the total square footage that is permitted to be built. This proposal increases the potential units per acre by increasing the number of permitted units per lot, but it does not increase buildable square footage. That is, the size,

height, setback, and other “compatibility” characteristics of the housing would not change. The analysis conducted for this initiative justifies amending this policy in the Master Plan, wherever it appears to delete the phrase “...at no higher than their current density” as this proposal continues to support the overall residential goals of the Master Plan, albeit at modestly increased residential densities. The City’s 2013 Housing Master Plan and housing policies within small area plans support this evolution in how we view density. The City Council-adopted Long Range Planning Work Program has scheduled an update to the 1992 Plan’s citywide chapters through a new “Vision Plan.”

### **Zoning ordinance definition for “family”**

In line with the theme to expand housing opportunities, an analysis was conducted to learn if the Zoning Ordinance [definition for “family”](#) could create obstacles for individuals or groups seeking housing. Historical research shows that local jurisdictions in the early Twentieth Century typically defined those residing in a dwelling in simple functional terms. From 1931 and until 1989, the City of Alexandria followed suit by defining family as any number of individuals living and cooking together in a single housekeeping unit.

With the exponential growth of the suburbs after WWII, jurisdictions amended their family definitions to reflect the concept of a traditional, nuclear family. Alexandria amended its family definition in 1989, aligning with this trend. The 1989 definition established the basis for today’s definition, specifying that a family unit was determined through blood, marriage, and adoptive relationships, including household staff, but not to exceed four unrelated people. Up to nine unrelated individuals in a dwelling were possible, however, through City Council approval of a special use permit if it found the proposed family compatible with the character of the neighborhood.

[Research](#) has identified that the traditional, nuclear family zoning ordinance definitions can perpetuate unequal access to housing across neighborhoods because residency options are non-existent for different types of functional family groups, as they are commonly referred to in current research. Reinterpreting the family unit alternatively as a one that allows for undefined individuals to live together responds to changing social and



cultural viewpoints on what constitutes a family, as evidenced in the rise in alternative living arrangements since the 1970s.

### **Parking requirements**

The current parking requirements for residential dwellings are found in Article [8](#) of the Zoning Ordinance. The requirement for single-family detached, two-family and row or townhouse dwellings is two (2.0) spaces per dwelling unit for single-family detached, two-family, and townhouse dwellings. The multi-family unit parking requirement is calculated by considering the number of bedrooms and proximity to transit.

The [Alexandria Mobility Plan, Curbspace and Parking Chapter](#) reveals that providing parking as part of new housing construction has a major impact on the cost of a project, environmental sustainability, and neighborhood quality of life. The cost increase is passed onto the resident, resulting in more expensive housing. Additionally, a residential parking requirement can make construction impractical on certain lot sizes, dominating the aesthetics of a neighborhood, occupying more open space, and increasing traffic. Policy A of the plan, “Connect parking policy to City goals,” states:

*Achieve broader City goals related to sustainability, congestion, and housing affordability through parking. Parking facilities are expensive to build and maintain, and when it is easy to park, more people will drive. The City of Alexandria will continue to use policy to right-size parking facilities and unbundle the cost of parking from housing to reduce the cost burden of parking on non-vehicle owners and limit its role in contributing to traffic.*

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **Increased number of dwelling units**

Staff recommends that City Council adopt one of two options to add different housing typologies to single-family zones. Neighborhood compatibility would be safeguarded with either option as existing requirements for minimum lot size, setbacks, open space, floor area ratio, and tree canopy coverage would be unchanged. The student generation rate for both options is 15 over a 10-year period. The options are noted below.

**Option 1:** Add the opportunity to construct two-unit dwellings in the R20, R12, R8, and R5 zones and three to four multi-unit

dwelling in R2-5 zone. An estimated 66 new residential buildings would be developed over a 10-year period containing an estimated 150 units.

*OR*

**Option 2:** Add the opportunity to construct two-unit and three to four-unit dwellings in the R20, R12, R8, R5, and R2-5 zones. An estimated 66 new residential buildings would be developed over a 10-year period containing an estimated 178 units.

### **Zoning ordinance definition for “family”**

Delete the definition of “family” from the zoning ordinance, shifting the land use emphasis from the composition of dwelling occupants to the residential building description. The statewide building code requirements would address the primary concerns for residential dwellings – health and safety – and determine dwelling occupancy maximums, regardless of who resides at the property. Although this recommendation falls under the Expanding Housing Opportunity in Single-family Zones category, it would apply Citywide to all residential dwellings.

### **Parking requirements**

Staff recommends amending Article 8 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise parking requirements for residential dwellings throughout the City based on location within or outside the [Enhanced Transit Area](#). The enhanced transit area displays an aggregate 1/2-mile transit walkshed mapped to existing City streets and parcels. The walkshed is based on existing and anticipated mass transit stations and entryways. The enhanced transit area is currently used to determine commercial parking requirements. In 2018, the City Council approved a text amendment to update the commercial parking standards to include parking minimums and maximums that were differentiated whether a parcel is located within the enhanced transit area or beyond the enhanced transit area.

Options 3 and 4 below provide flexibility for developers to determine the amount of parking for a project, eliminating the extra cost of unnecessary parking space production, and lowering dwelling unit costs. Each reflects the City’s goal of multi-modal transportation within the existing and any future planned enhanced transit area.

**Option 3** is recommended by staff:

- No minimum parking requirements for dwellings up to four units within the enhanced transit area.
- Minimum 0.5 parking spaces per unit for dwellings up to four units beyond the enhanced transit area.

<b>No minimum parking requirements within enhanced transit area</b>	
Number of Units	Minimum Required Number of Parking Spaces
1	0
2	0
3	0
4	0
<b>Minimum 0.5 parking spaces per dwelling units beyond enhanced transit area</b>	
Number of Units	Minimum Required Number of Parking Spaces
1	1
2	1
3	2
4	2

Although staff supports the above option, it would like to offer for City Council consideration an alternative,

**Option 4:**

- Minimum 0.5 parking spaces per dwelling unit for dwellings with up to four units within the enhanced transit area.
- Minimum 1.0 parking spaces per dwelling unit for dwellings with up to four units beyond the enhanced transit area

<b>Minimum 0.5 parking spaces per dwelling unit within enhanced transit area</b>	
Number of Units	Minimum Required Number of Parking Spaces
1	1
2	1
3	2
4	2
<b>Minimum 1 parking space per dwelling unit beyond enhanced transit area</b>	
Number of Units	Minimum Required Number of Parking Spaces
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

**TEXT CHANGE ELEMENTS:** Add dwelling typology option 1 or 2 as a permitted use in the R20, R12, R8, R5, and R2-5 sections.

Delete the family definition and amend or delete any definition that refers to family. Replace single-family dwelling with single-unit dwelling; two-family dwelling with two-unit dwelling; and multi-family dwelling with multi-unit dwelling.

Amend Article VII – Supplemental Zone Regulations to align with amendments to the dwelling definitions.

Amend Section 8-200 to include parking requirement option 3 or 4.

Explore avenues to allow multi-unit dwellings as by-right uses.

Additionally, amend the following sentence in the City’s Master Plan wherever it occurs (citywide chapters and Small Area Plans): "Areas of the city currently zoned residential should remain zoned for residential use at no higher than their current density." The proposed amendment is to delete the phrase "...at no higher than their current density."

**FISCAL IMPACTS:** The potential exists for an increase in property tax revenue to support City infrastructure, services, and schools.

**EQUITY IMPACTS:** Broaden the population diversity in all single-family zones.

The application of state building code criteria to determine the number of individuals in a dwelling, adequately ensures health and safety and allows for a diversity of functional family units.

**LIST AND LINKS:**

Housing Costs and Need

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/planning-and-zoning/zoning-for-housinghousing-for-all#HousingCostsandNeedinAlexandria>

City of Alexandria equity index maps

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/equity/equity-index-map>

## Dwelling Type Definitions

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/planning-and-zoning/zoning-for-housinghousing-for-all#DwellingTypesasDefinedinAlexandriasZoningOrdinance>

## Single-family Zone Map

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Single-Family-Zone-Map-May-2023.pdf>

## Zoning Ordinance Family Definition

[https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIID\\_2-143FA](https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIID_2-143FA)

## Zoning Ordinance Single-family Zones

R20:

[https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIIREZORE\\_DIVASIMITMIZO\\_S3-100R-SIMIZO](https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIIREZORE_DIVASIMITMIZO_S3-100R-SIMIZO)

R12:

[https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIIREZORE\\_DIVASIMITMIZO\\_S3-200R-SIMIZO](https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIIREZORE_DIVASIMITMIZO_S3-200R-SIMIZO)

R8:

[https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIIREZORE\\_DIVASIMITMIZO\\_S3-300SIMIZO](https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIIREZORE_DIVASIMITMIZO_S3-300SIMIZO)

R5:

[https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIIREZORE\\_DIVASIMITMIZO\\_S3-400SIMIZO](https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIIREZORE_DIVASIMITMIZO_S3-400SIMIZO)

R2-5:

[https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIIREZORE\\_DIVASIMITMIZO\\_S3-5005SIMIZO](https://library.municode.com/va/alexandria/codes/zoning?nodeId=ARTIIREZORE_DIVASIMITMIZO_S3-5005SIMIZO)

## “Zoned Out: How Zoning Law Undermines Family Law’s Functional Turn”

<https://www.yalelawjournal.org/note/zoned-out>

## “What is Family? Ask a Zoning Official.”

<https://reason.com/2022/10/26/what-is-a-family-ask-a-zoning-official/>

## “A Recipe for Achieving Real Housing Affordability”

<https://www.governing.com/community/a-recipe-for-achieving-real-housing-affordability>

## Enhanced Transit Area Map

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2023-08/Enhanced-Transit-Area-Map-Aug2023.pdf>

The Color of Law, Richard Rothstein

Fixer Upper: How to Repair America's Broken Housing Systems, Jenny Schuetz