

Joint City Council - Planning Commission Worksession

Zoning for Housing & Housing for All

Release of Staff Recommendations

September 5, 2023





Why Zoning for Housing/Housing for All

- **TO HELP ADDRESS ALEXANDRIA'S HOUSING NEED**
 - Approximately 15,500 Alexandria renter households with incomes up to \$75,000 are cost burdened, paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing (American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates).
 - Approximately 3,500 Alexandria homeowner households with incomes up to \$75,000 are estimated to be housing cost burdened (American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates).
 - More information on Alexandria's housing need can be found in the [presentation](#) given by Helen McIlvaine during the Zoning for Housing [kick-off event](#) in March.
- **TO HELP ADDRESS VESTIGES OF PAST DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES**



What are the goals?

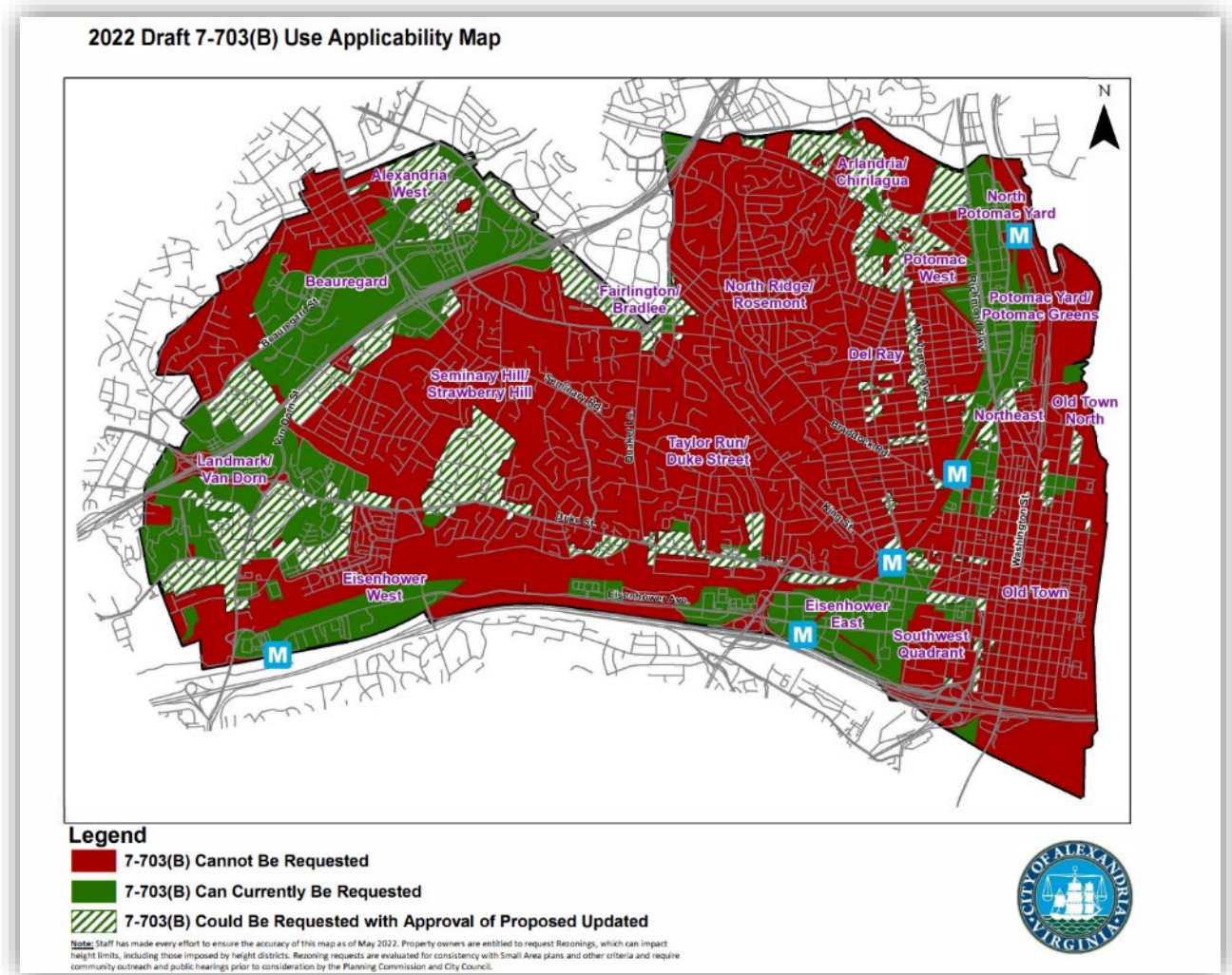
Zoning for Housing is a comprehensive proposal of zoning reforms with the goal of expanding housing production and affordability and addressing past and current barriers to equitable housing access.

- **Accessibility:** There is unequal access to housing opportunities in Alexandria
- **Affordability:** Far too many Alexandrians cannot afford a place to live in our City
- **Availability:** Housing production has not kept pace with increasing demand, reducing housing options for everyone

Bonus Height Text Amendment



Visual depiction of "bonus height."



Green hatched areas – where the proposal would have been applicable



Bonus Height Text Amendment

What we explored: Allowing additional density and height in exchange for affordable housing is one of Alexandria's major affordable housing tools. This initiative explored allowing bonus height (up to 25 feet) in neighborhoods with lower height limits (45-50 feet).

What we hoped to achieve: Modest additions of committed affordable units in more areas of the City.

What we studied: Multiple case studies using Alexandria examples, financial feasibility analysis, interviews with builders of smaller scale projects.

What we found: Bonus height is not a valuable tool for redevelopment of Alexandria parcels with height limits between 45 and 50 feet 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 from using it.

Our recommendation: Do not pursue this initiative.



Bonus Height Text Amendment

Frequently asked questions

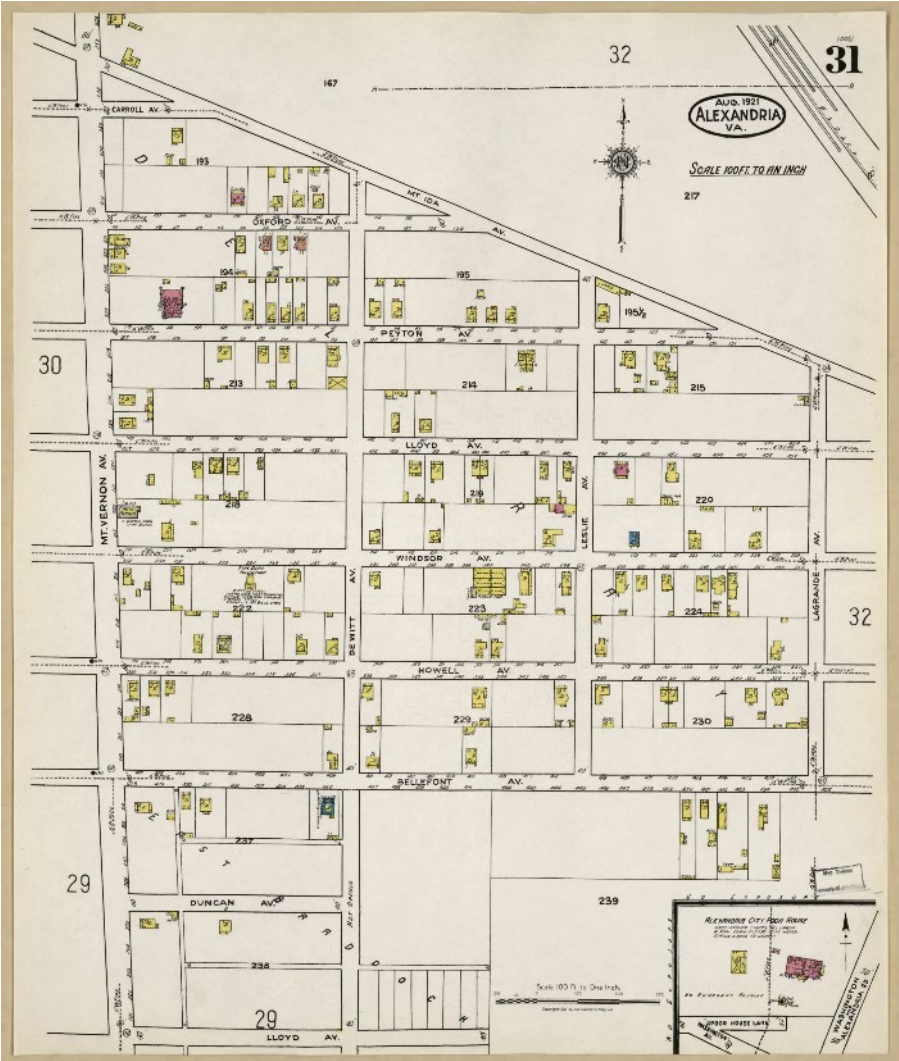
The City intends to place 577,000 sf of development on Mt. Vernon Avenue, through the Zoning for Housing/Housing for All Initiative and the Washington Metropolitan Council of Government's (COG) Regional Housing Initiative.

That's not the case. Neither *Zoning for Housing* nor *the Regional Housing Initiative* have a development goal for Mount Vernon Avenue. That figure is the total development permitted by the Mount Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan, approved in 2005. It is the same number now as it was in 2005 when the Plan was approved. Moreover, a substantial fraction of that development has already occurred.

Will the Bonus Height provision stimulate redevelopment of existing modestly-scaled apartment buildings?

No. The analysis showed that the additional height would not stimulate redevelopment. That's because other regulations prevent its utility and because additional height doesn't meaningfully increase the value of redevelopment.

Historic Development Patterns



1921 Map of Del Ray



Alexandria Square condominiums, Del Ray
Year Built: 1940
Now zoned RB (townhouse)



Historic Development Patterns

Our recommendation:

- **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 commercial buildings are proposed on land adjacent to residentially zoned parcels; and
- **Implement the Zoning for Housing townhouse zone recommendations.**

For the future

- Simplifying the ordinance and adding flexibility
- Creating design guidelines for traditional neighborhood development
- Consider the Neighborhood Conservation District tool to preserve our best examples of building types not currently being constructed.

Residential Multi-family (RMF) Zone Analysis



ParcView II
Illustrative Rendering



Witter Place
Illustrative Rendering



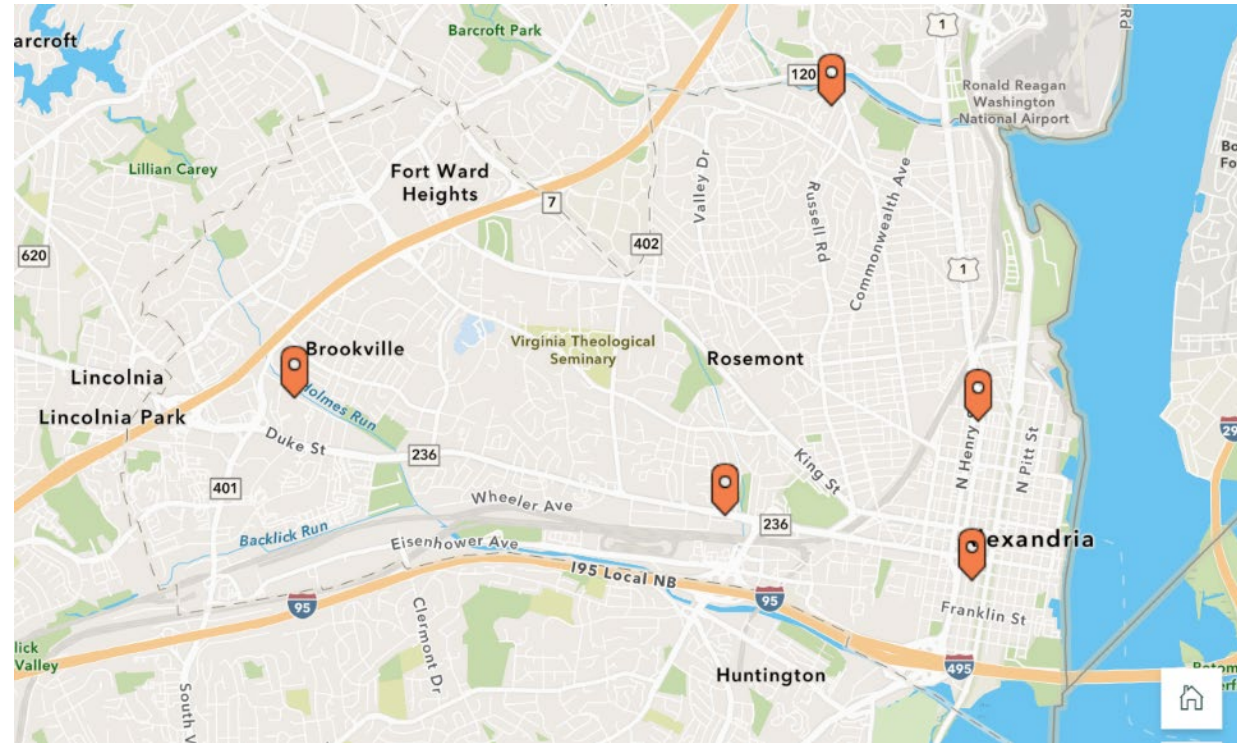
The Heritage
Illustrative Rendering



Samuel Madden Redevelopment
Illustrative Rendering



Elbert Aveune
Illustrative Rendering



From the online story map for the RMF Zone analysis, showing the affordable housing projects approved with the RMF zone tool.

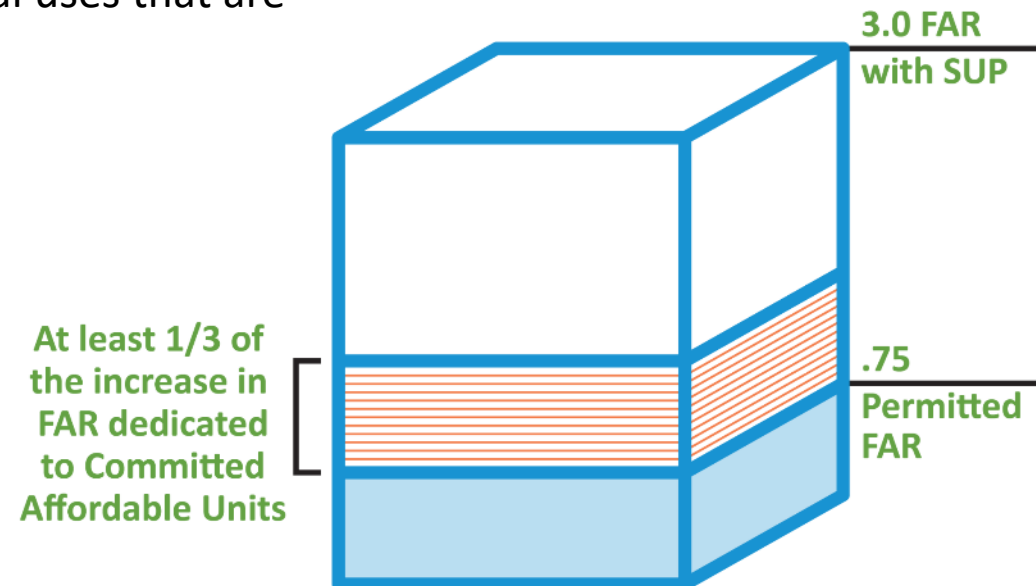
Residential Multi-family (RMF) Zone Analysis

What we found: Projects that meet the enhanced affordable housing requirements of the RMF zone can be compatibly located on sites planned for medium and high density residential development, as well as other specific locations. The existing RMF zone already allows development at smaller scales, but the economics of affordable housing generally require higher densities to move forward, so a second, lower FAR version of the RMF zone would be not helpful. The zone currently requires SUPs for ground non-residential uses that are permitted by right in other zones.

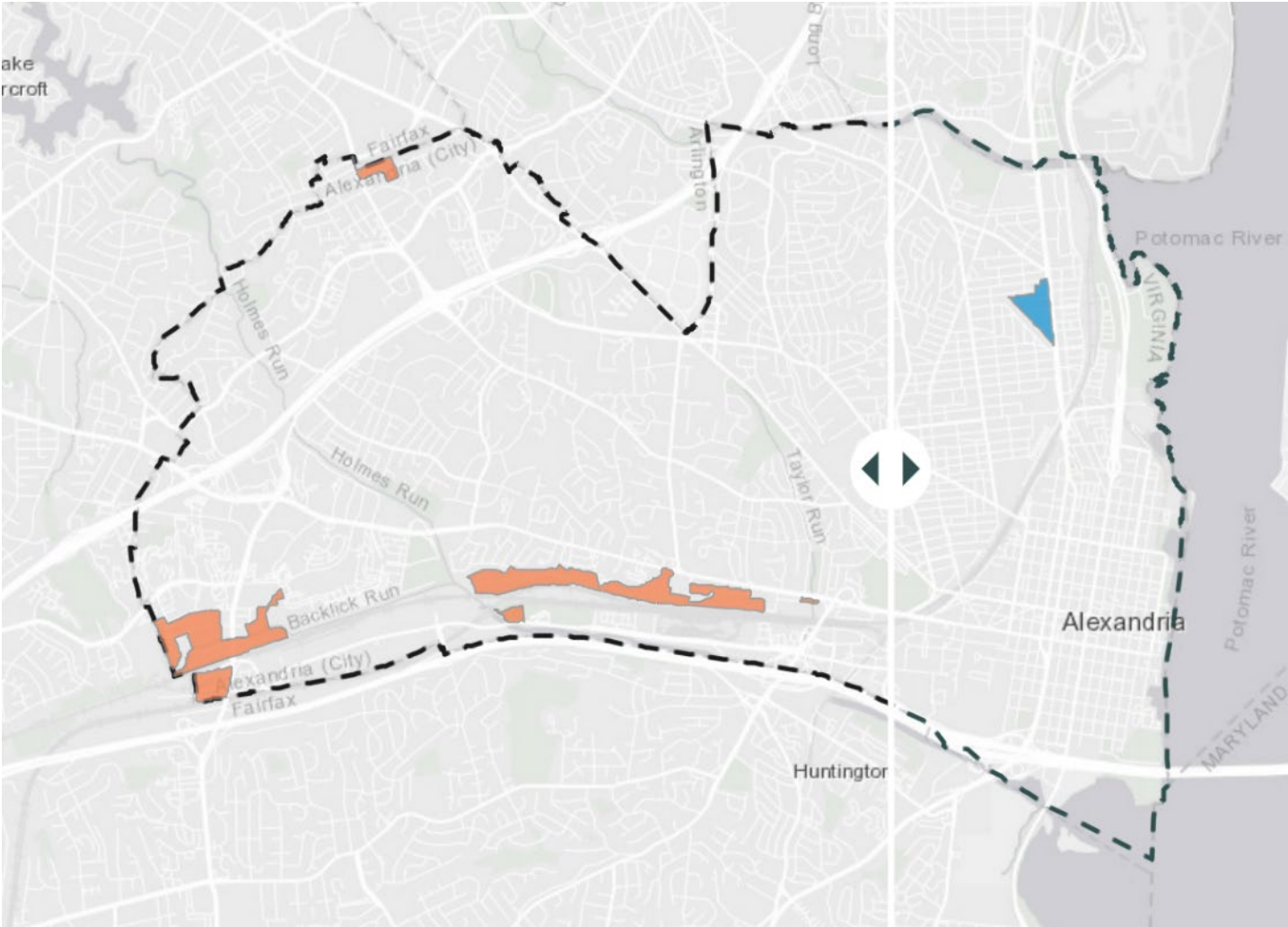
Our recommendation:

- Amend the Housing Master Plan to establish general intent for RMF rezonings.
- Amend the RMF zone to expand the uses permitted by right on the ground floor of RMF buildings, consistent with other zones.

The RMF zone works by providing a substantial density bonus along with a requirement for committed affordable housing



Industrial Zone Analysis

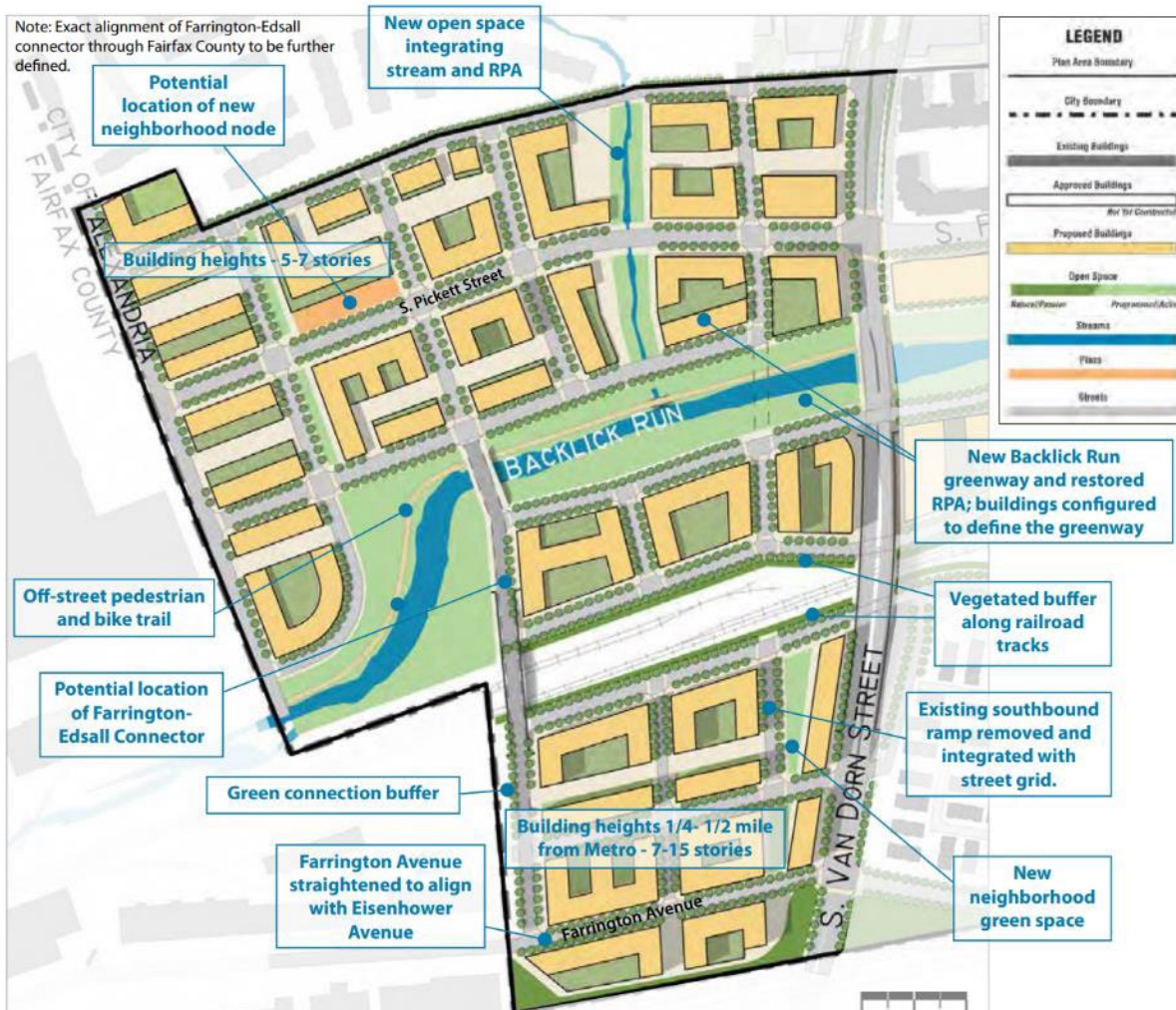


Story Map of Alexandria Industrial Zoned Property 2014 (blue) and today (orange)



Recent industrial building constructed on Pickett Street

Industrial Zone Analysis



Plan for redevelopment of industrial zoned land in Eisenhower West

What we found:

- Many buildings in industrial zoned land have uses like retail, exercise studios, offices, and even churches, that are compatible with housing. But the sites and buildings are developed in a way that's pedestrian unfriendly and anti-urban.
- The ordinance doesn't prevent RMF zone requests from being considered.
- The lack of urban design performance standards for new industrial buildings can impede the transition to the mixed-use walkable future that is planned.

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



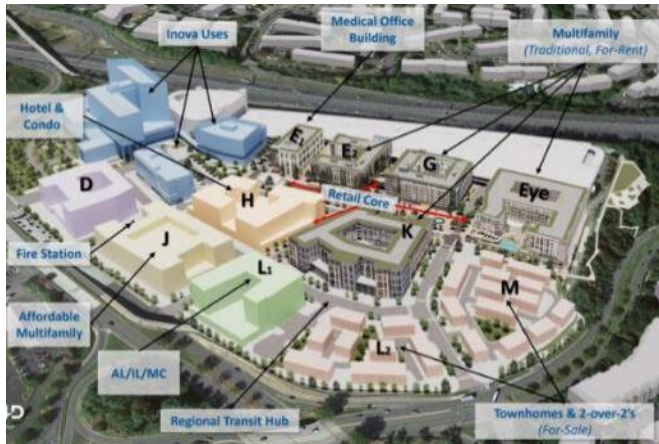
Industrial Zone Analysis

Frequently asked questions/comments

Is Zoning for Housing/Housing for All the single largest change to our neighborhoods in the history of Alexandria?

No. The City has more extensively changed its land use policies and regulations several times over its history. This most notably occurred in the early 1990s, when the entire Master Plan and the entire Zoning Ordinance were rewritten.

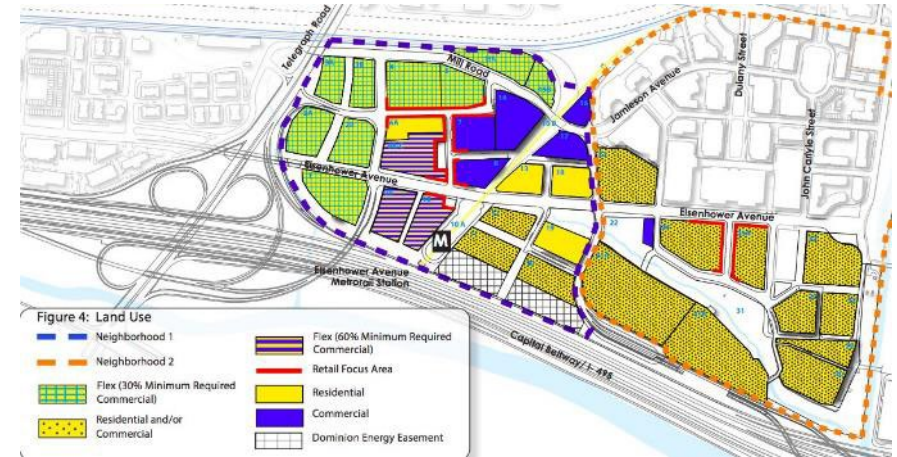
Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs) and Affordable Housing



Landmark



Pickett Place



Eisenhower East



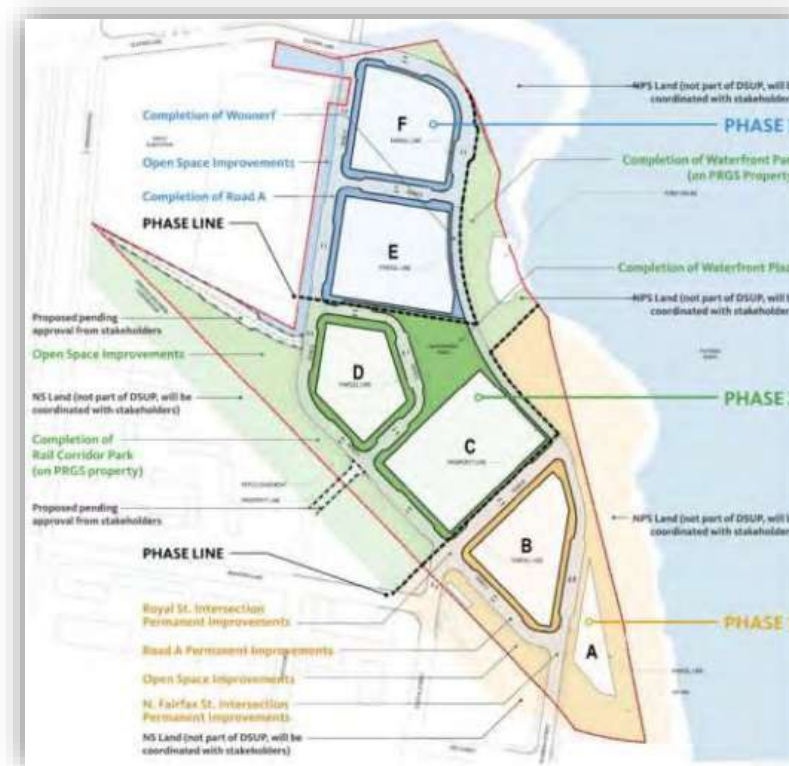
North Potomac Yard

A few of the Coordinated Development Districts in Alexandria

Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs) and Affordable Housing



PRGS, Old Town North



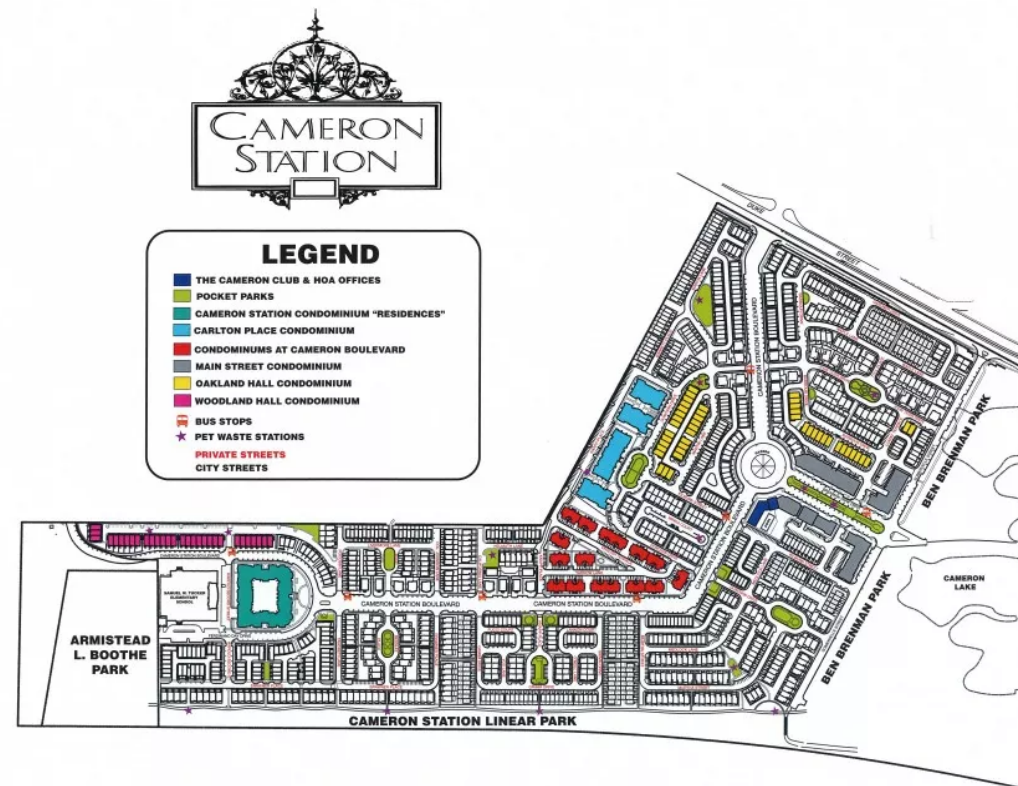
Our recommendation: When the City approves density above that provided by small area plan through a CDD, one-third of that additional density should be committed affordable units. This policy would also clarify that the City's affordable housing bonus density program applies to CDDs.

Coordinated Development Districts and Affordable Housing

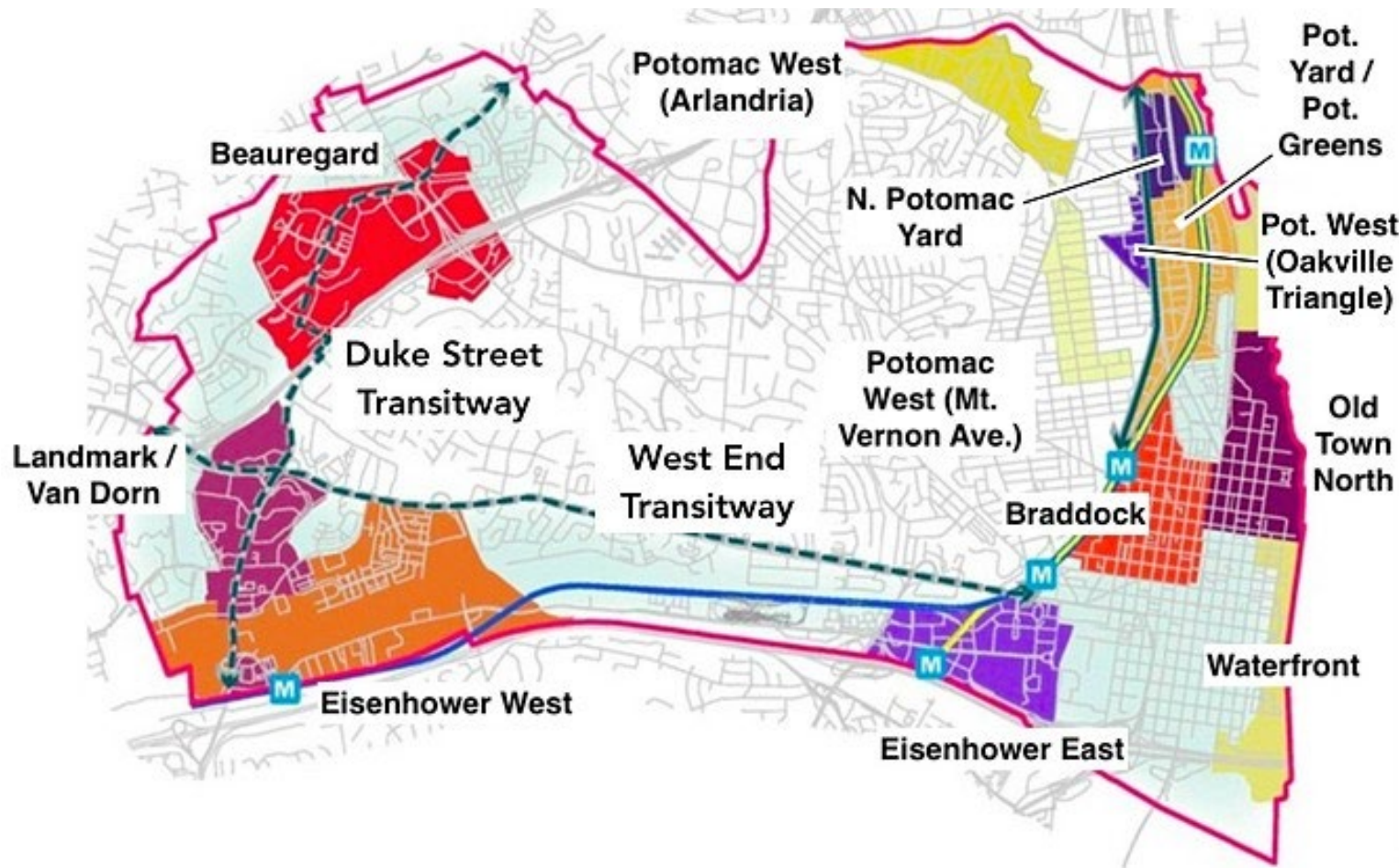
Frequently asked questions/comments

Will this proposed change apply to existing neighborhoods, such as Cameron Station, approved and completed under a CDD?

No, it will not apply retroactively. This will apply only to new Coordinated Development Districts, or to CDDs proposed by property owners for an amendment to request additional density in excess of that granted by the small area plan.



Expansion of Transit Oriented Development



Many of the small area plans approved since 2005 follow a principle of locating higher density development in the vicinity of high capacity transit, including Metro and bus rapid transit.



Expansion of Transit Oriented Development

Specific challenges of transit-oriented development:

- Land is more costly (+/- 25% higher than other comparable areas).
- Higher density construction types (steel and/or concrete) are also more costly.
- Urban blocks are more constrained and more challenging to develop.
- 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.
- Parking (underground or structured) can be a limit to additional units both because of cost and space limitations.
- The planned priority transit corridors in Alexandria West and the Duke Street corridor present an opportunity to add more market rate and affordable housing.



Expansion of Transit Oriented Development

Frequently asked questions/comments

Will any of the proposed changes allow taller buildings?

No. The set of proposals no longer includes a provision for bonus height. The recommendations in the other categories do not propose height increases.

Office to Residential Conversions



Park + Ford



The Oronoco



The Foundry

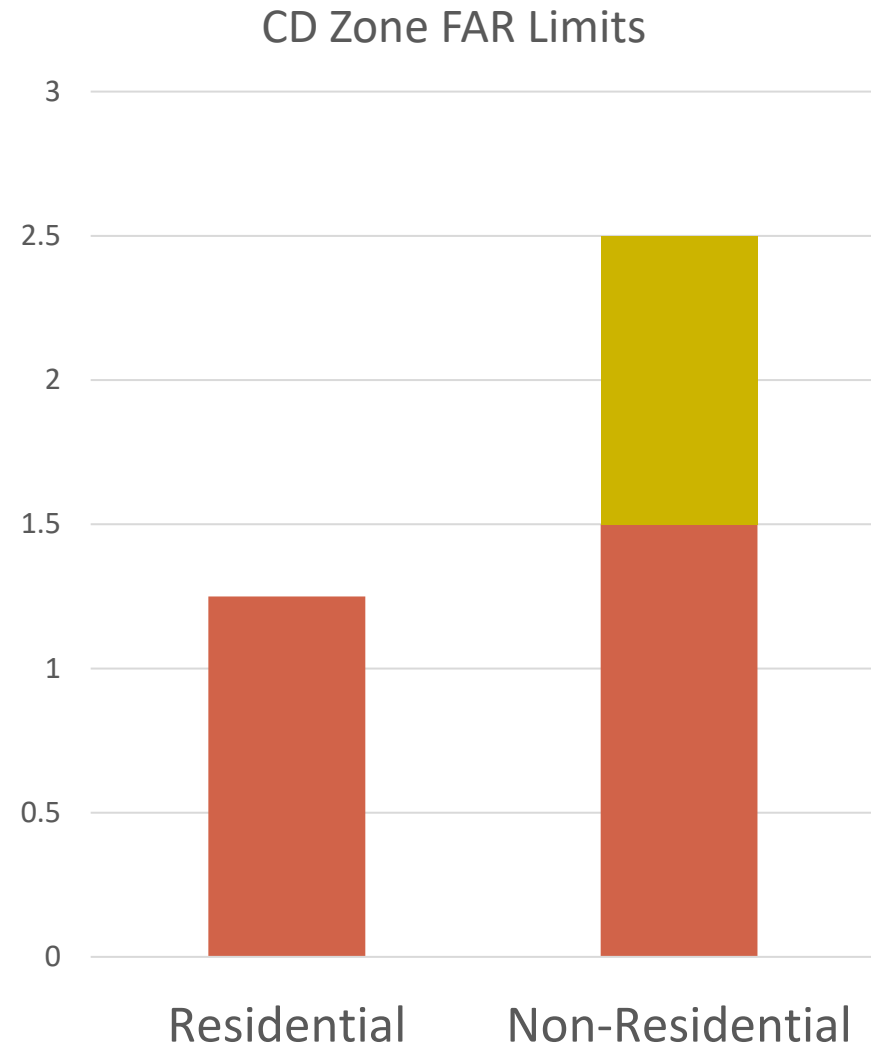




Office to Residential Conversions

Our recommendation: Continue to support conversions of older, obsolete buildings. Prioritize for retention office buildings that are competitive or where City policies or plans call for non-residential development in that area. 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. Continue to look for barriers to desirable conversions and for opportunities to increase support for affordable housing.





Office to Residential Conversions

Frequently asked questions/comments

How many students have been added to school enrollment totals because of office to residential conversions?

Approximately 2,400 housing units have been approved, perhaps half are completed. The student generation rate for new multifamily units is 0.04 students per unit, or a total of 98 students over about a decade. In FY 2023, ACPS had 15,723 students. Enrollment is forecast to peak between FY2025 and FY2029, depending on the City's overall rate of growth, and then level off.

The Census Bureau reports a decline in Alexandria's population. Doesn't that mean we no longer have a housing supply and demand problem?

Alexandria's population has dipped from time to time over its history, and then resumed a steady rate of growth. Some followed demographic shifts (the baby boom) and others were tied to recessions. This latest change may be due to the pandemic. In any event, our local and regional job and population forecasts show growth continuing for at least several decades.

Townhouse Zoning Analysis

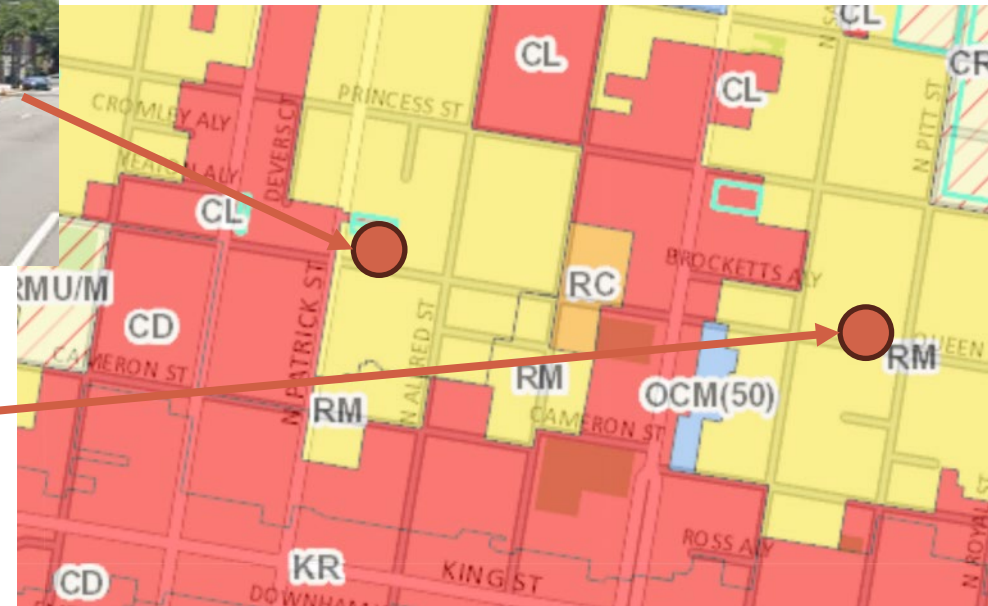
300 block of North Patrick, zoned RB

Minimum lot size: 1980/1600 sf

Required open space: 800 sf

FAR: 0.75

Heights 30-45 feet



300 block of North Pitt, zoned RM

Minimum lot size: 1452 sf

Required open space: 35%

FAR: 1.5

Heights 35-45 feet

Townhouse Zoning Analysis

What we found: Townhouse regulations were more consistent in the past than they are today; some townhouse zones have been modified over time (RM, for example) and others (such as RB) have not. Some sites zoned RB are quite similar to sites zoned RM, even though the two zones are different in key aspects. The 39 public hearing cases in the past seven years – all approved -- indicate the current ordinance makes review of these projects unnecessarily complex.



This house on Prince Street (CL zone) is not a townhouse because of the small gap between it and its neighbor to the right. That makes it subject to completely different development rules.



Townhouse Zoning Analysis

Our recommendation:

- **Establish lot requirements based on location and similarity of lot size/pattern/configuration instead of housing type.** (Apply RM townhouse standards to all properties in Old Town where townhouses are permitted, including when reviewing single and two-unit dwellings on narrow lots).
- **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**
- **Apply the same parking approach that is recommended in the single family zoning recommendation** (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).



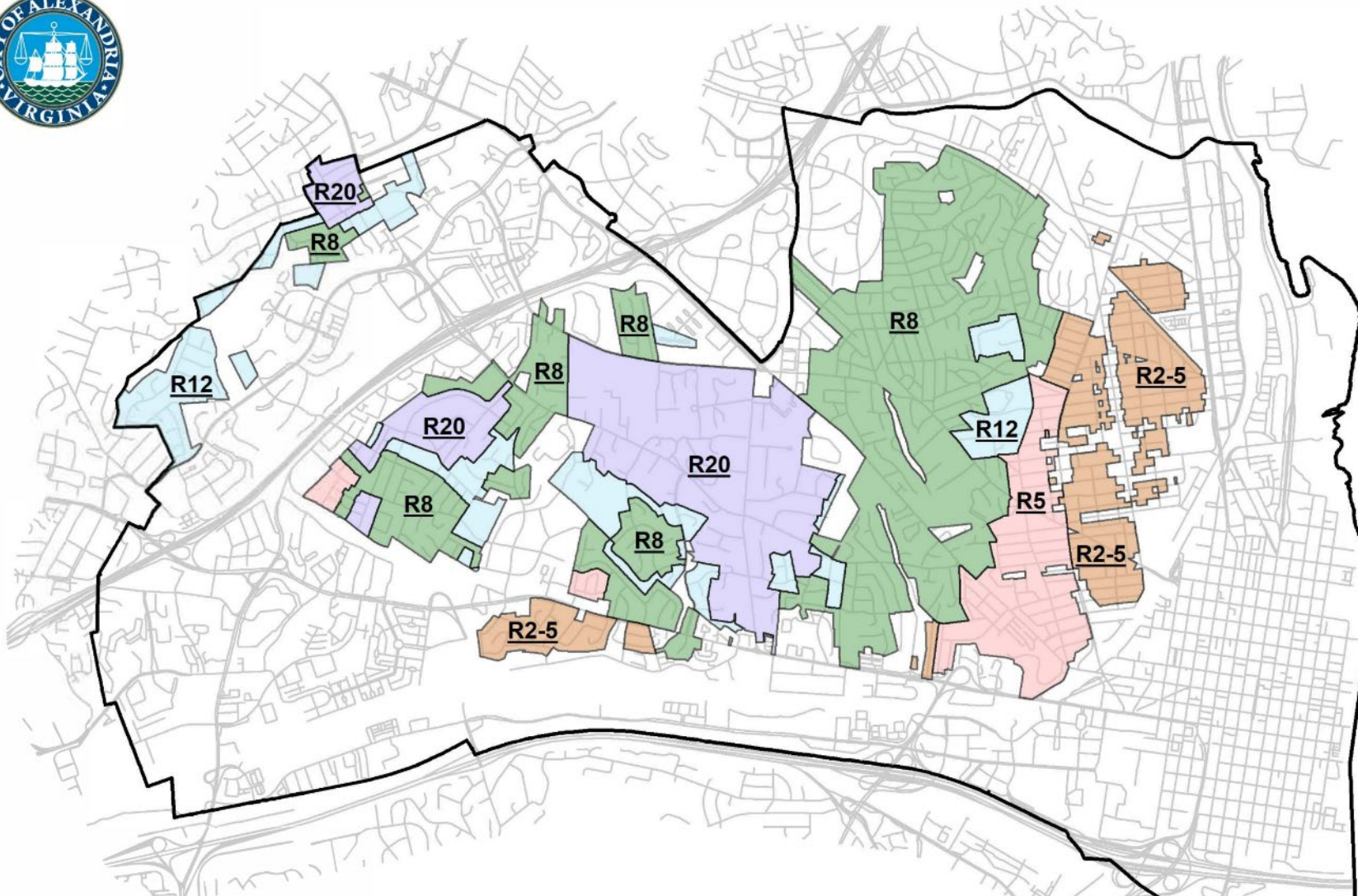
Townhouse Zoning Analysis

Frequently asked questions/comments

Making all townhouse regulations the same doesn't reflect that all neighborhoods are not the same.

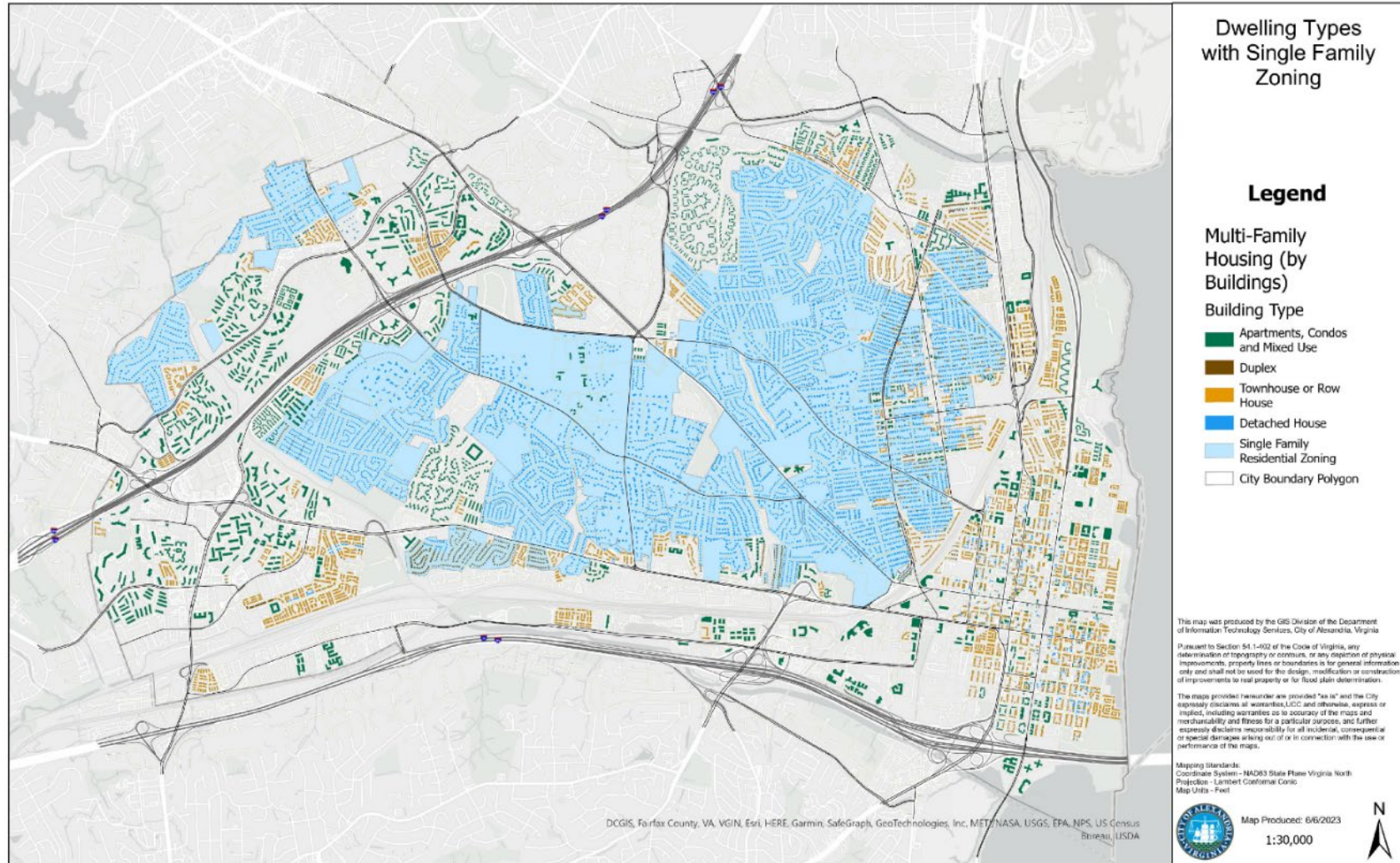
The recommendations do not apply to all neighborhoods. The recommendations only apply the predominate Old Town standards to similar lots throughout Old Town. Future studies may look at townhouse zones in other areas.

Expanding Housing Options in Single Family Zones



Single-family zones account for 5.17 square miles or 34% of the total land area of the city. The single-family zones are R2-5, R5, R8, R12 and R20.

Expanding Housing Options in Single Family Zones



Housing units in Alexandria by type and location

Expanding Housing Opportunities in Single Family Zones



What we found:

Prices in single family detached neighborhoods are outside an accessible range for many residents.

It is feasible for multiple units to fit within the same development envelope now permitted for single family detached homes. Under certain circumstances it is also financially feasible. If adopted, we estimated 66 properties would take advantage, adding 150-178 units over 10 years.

Staff analysis supports significant reduction of parking requirements in enhanced transit areas, which already guide parking requirements for multifamily dwellings.

Many jurisdictions have moved away from regulating building occupancy based on relationship status, such as blood or marriage.



Expanding Housing Options in Single Family Zones

What we recommend:

Staff has developed two options for the number of housing units to be permitted in single family zones (Option 2 is recommended):

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

(Continued next slide)



Expanding Housing Options in Single Family Zones

What we recommend (continued from previous slide):

Staff has developed two options for parking requirements for single family zones (Option 3 is recommended):

Option 3:

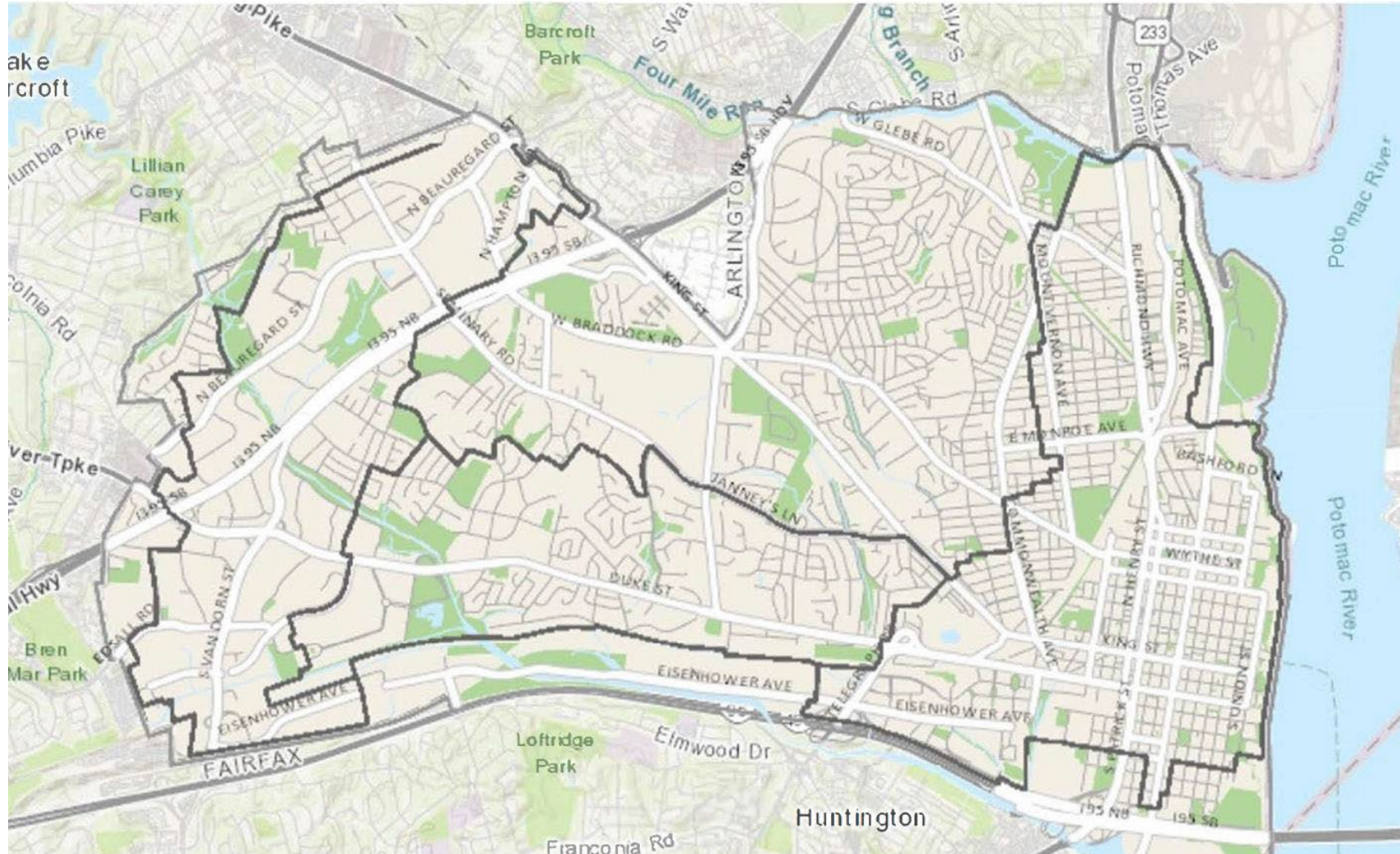
- No minimum parking requirements for dwellings with up to four units within the enhanced transit area.
- Minimum 0.5 parking spaces per unit for dwellings up to four units beyond the enhanced transit area.

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

(Continued next slide)

Expanding Housing Options in Single Family Zones



Enhanced transit areas in the City, proposed for reductions in parking requirements.



Expanding Housing Options in Single Family Zones

What we recommend (continued from previous slide):

Staff recommends deleting “family” from the zoning ordinance, with occupancy solely based on capacity as determined by statewide building code. Some nomenclature changes will also be required to implement this recommendation (i.e., “single family” detached dwelling might become “single unit” detached dwelling).

Staff recommends an amendment to a policy statement contained in some 1992 chapters of the Master Plan. That policy statement states that densities in single family residential neighborhoods should not be increased. Staff believes that our housing and planning policies have evolved since 1992 such that the overall goal of supporting and protecting residential neighborhoods is no longer dependent on strict adherence to one dwelling unit per lot.



Expanding Housing Options in Single Family Zones

Frequently asked questions/comments

Q: Would two-family and three and four unit multi-family dwellings be larger than single family homes?

A: To preserve neighborhood compatibility, the proposed new residential dwelling types would have to follow the same limitations for lot coverage and height as any new single family dwelling would. Setbacks, lot frontage, floor area ratio and height requirements would be equally applied to any new residential dwelling constructed in a zone.

Q: Would the area devoted to driveways for parked cars increase when residences with multiple units are constructed in the neighborhood?

A: No, for two reasons. The area devoted to driveways is regulated by the Zoning Ordinance, allowing for no more than 50% coverage of a front, side or rear yard. Second, the proposed reduction in parking space requirement would keep parking spaces to no more than two if City Council supports Option 3 and no more than four for Option 4.

Q: Will these provisions mean that single family detached homes are outlawed?

The proposals include no change to the allowance for single family dwellings wherever they are currently permitted in the City. The addition of two-family and small-scale multi-family dwellings to the single family zones simply adds the option for these housing typologies to be built.

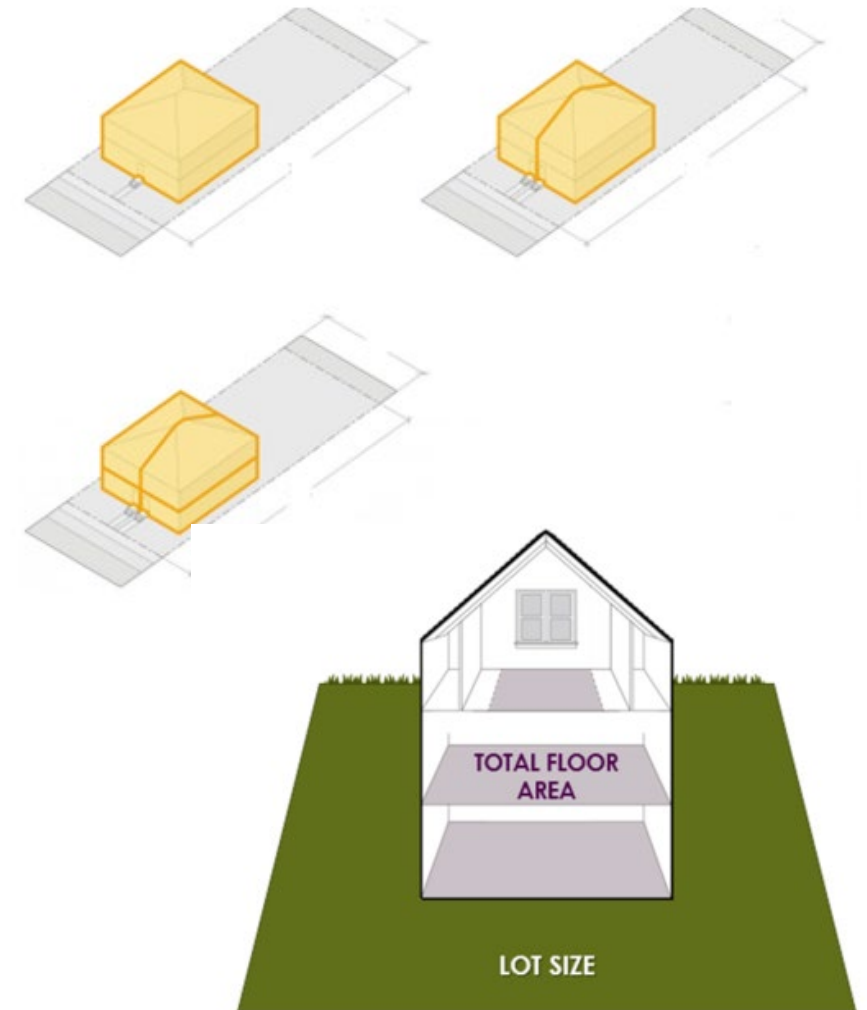
Maintaining the same “development envelope” in single family zones

The building envelope is defined by setbacks and heights, which are not proposed for change:

- Proposal will maintain required setback (distance of dwelling) from the street and from neighbors
- Proposal will maintain height limits.

The building envelope is also defined by lot size and floor-area ratio, which are not proposed for change.

- Proposal will maintain minimum lot size, including minimum area, width and frontage
- Proposal will maintain limits on floor-area ratio (a measure of bulk)





What are the next steps?

September 5: Joint Planning Commission/ City Council Work Session, City Hall (draft recommendations released).

September 14: Community meeting, Location coming soon.

September 23: City Council Public Hearing, City Hall (opportunity to comment)

September 24: City Council Town Hall (opportunity to comment) Location coming soon.

October 5: Community meeting, Location coming soon.

October 12: Community meeting, Location coming soon.

October 14: City Council Public Hearing, City Hall (opportunity to comment)

October 21: City Council Town Hall (opportunity to comment) Location coming soon.

November 1: Planning Commission Public Hearing on Zoning for Housing, City Hall (opportunity to comment)

November 14: City Council Public Hearing on Zoning for Housing, City Hall

November 18: City Council Public Hearing on Zoning for Housing *continued*, City Hall

November 28: City Council Meeting, City Hall (scheduled vote on Zoning for Housing reforms)