



City of Alexandria

# Substandard Lots Discussion Item

Planning and Zoning – Land Use &  
Preservation



# Agenda



1. What is a Substandard lot?
2. Policy History
3. Current Regulations
4. SUP Case History
5. Discussion
6. What We've Heard and Observed
7. Draft Policy Recommendation and Discussion
8. Next Steps

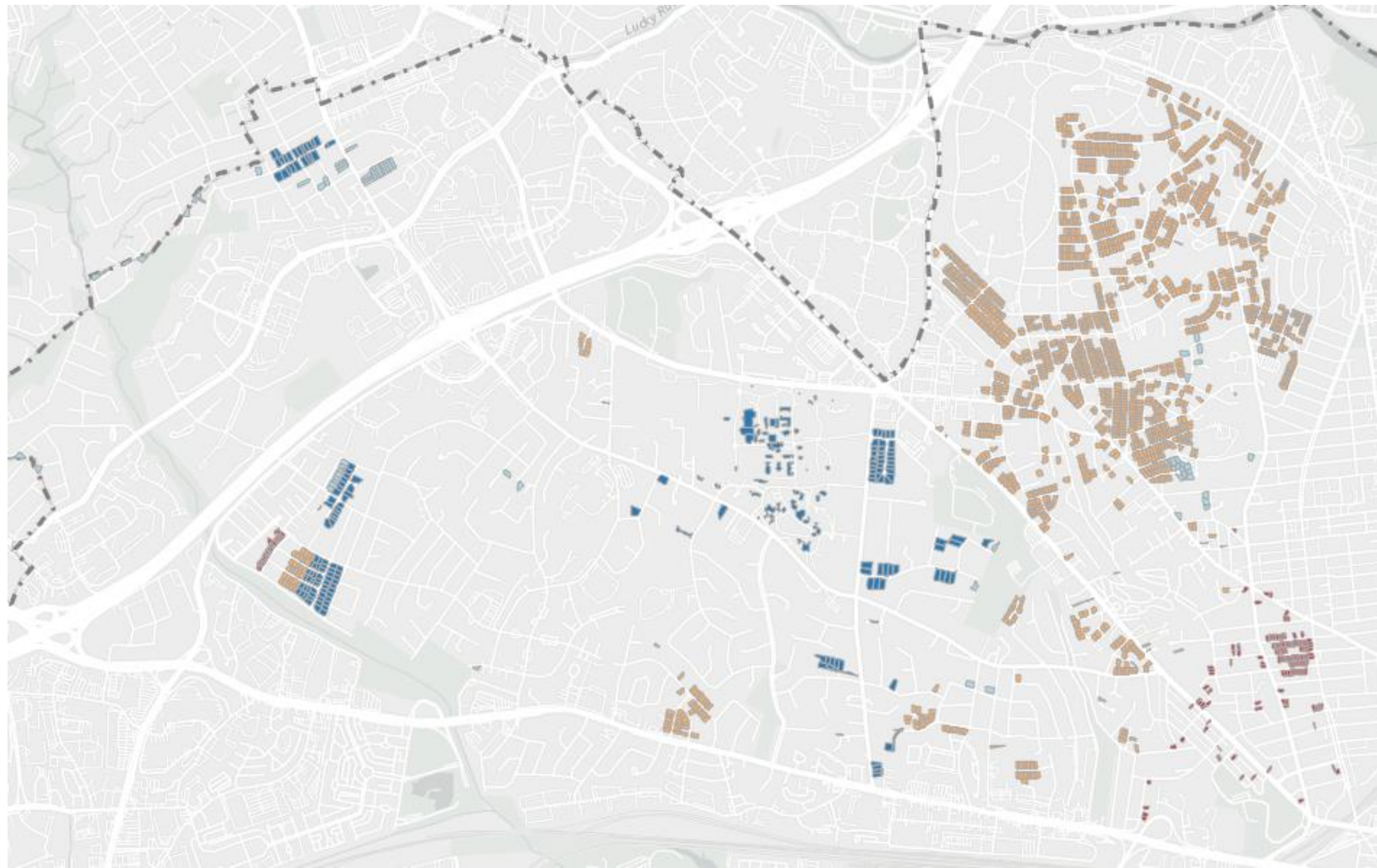


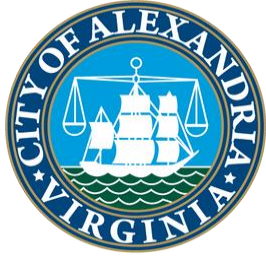
# What is a Substandard Lot?

**Substandard lots** do not meet the zone's minimum size, frontage, and/or width requirements. These lots were created prior to adoption of these lot requirements.

These lots were created prior to adoption of the lot requirements, prior to amendments to lots requirements, or prior to rezonings/annexations

They are located throughout the City but are primarily concentrated in areas the City annexed from adjacent jurisdictions (North Ridge/Rosemont).





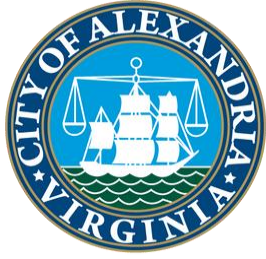
# Policy History

**1974:** City Council adopts SUP requirement to develop vacant substandard lots in the R-20, R-12, R-8, R-5, and R-2-5 zones only

- Before this, substandard lots could be developed by-right and were subject to reduced side yard requirements
- Council adopted this policy over concerns that two houses constructed on substandard lots were too small and too narrow

**2008:** City Council adopts regulations which restrict what can be built on developed substandard lots; redevelopment now requires SUP approval

- The SUP requirement was adopted as part of a comprehensive update to address infill development



# Current Regulations

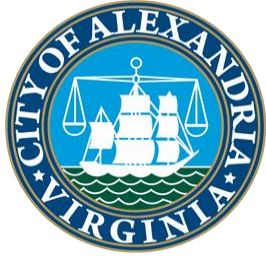
## **Vacant Substandard Lots**

May only be developed with SUP approval if ownership and lot character requirements are met

## **Developed Substandard Lots**

- Additions to existing houses permitted without SUP if the footprint is generally maintained
- “Replacement” houses with generally the same size and height permitted without SUP approval
- Redevelopment only permitted with SUP approval

**SUP requests reviewed for neighborhood compatibility (bulk, height, and design) and general SUP standards in section 11-500**



# SUP Case History

## **Vacant Substandard Lots**

Since 1973, 36 vacant substandard lot SUP cases have come forward

- 28 approvals
  - 13 requested yard, open space, or parking modifications
- 8 denials
  - 4 requested yard, open space, or parking modifications

## **Developed Substandard Lots**

Since 2008, 35 developed substandard lot SUP cases have come forward

- 35 approvals
  - 9 requested yard, open space, or parking modifications
- 0 denials



# Discussion Questions

**Does the SUP process feel like the right level of review for all substandard lots or do you think it depends on the situation? What factors matter most to you?**

**Are there types of substandard lots where you'd feel comfortable with by-right development? What types of substandard lots do you think necessitate a public hearing process? What's the difference?**

**What does neighborhood compatibility mean to you? Are there specific factors that you think are most important?**

**Have you had a personal experience with a substandard lot in your neighborhood? What does that experience tell you about the current process?**



# What We've Heard and Observed

## **The line between complying and substandard isn't always perceptible**

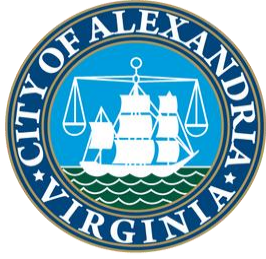
Many lots fall just below minimum requirements.

## **Substandard lots are already somewhat self limiting**

Their smaller dimensions necessitate smaller and shorter dwellings than would be permitted on complying lots.

## **Zoning changes in response to infill development discourage incompatible redevelopment**

In 2008, along with the developed substandard lot SUP requirement, City Council passed zoning changes which ensure more compatible infill development on all residential lots. Staff now has 16 years of experience in applying and refining these regulations.



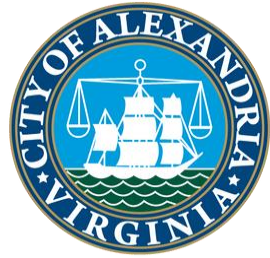
# What We've Heard and Observed

## **Do these regulations reflect the City's current housing goals?**

The substandard lot rules were created in 1974 and amended in 2008 – each time in response to concerns of the moment. Alexandria's housing goals have evolved since then.

## **The process likely adds cost and buyers may bear it**

An SUP application takes time and money; application fees, legal costs, and uncertainty. These costs may get built into the final sale price of the home.



# Draft Policy Recommendation and Discussion

**Retain existing lot without frontage requirements and process**

**Allow by-right development of most substandard lots**

Based on our research and experience, staff believes the SUP process may no longer reflect current City housing goals and may no longer be necessary to ensure compatible infill development.



# Next Steps

## **Continue community engagement**

This meeting is the first of several opportunities for public input as the proposal is refined

## **Complete background research**

Including detailed inventory of affected properties, which is a time-intensive process requiring parcel-by-parcel analysis

## **Refine policy proposal**

Including whether any elements of the existing approval process need to be retained, if any substandard lots warrant different approval pathways, and if any updates are needed to increase compatibility of infill development



# Next Steps – Continued

## **Report out to Planning Commission**

Discussion item scheduled for May 5 – staff will provide an update on the project including feedback received. This is a discussion item only - Planning Commission will only provide feedback and discussion – no vote will be taken.

## **Current target public hearing dates**

June 23 – Planning Commission

July 1 – City Council