



Memorandum

To: Arlington Redevelopment Board
From: Alexis Smith, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Date: December 11, 2018
Re: Town of Arlington Multifamily Zoning Project Update
Attached: Multifamily Zoning Recommendations (dated 12/11/18)

Project Background

The Town of Arlington Multifamily Zoning Project, building on the recommendations in the Town's Housing Production Plan, seeks to increase housing diversity and affordability by facilitating production of multifamily housing in key smart growth locations. The project studied constraints to multifamily development within the Zoning Bylaw's dimensional requirements and proposes zoning amendments to be considered at the spring 2019 Annual Town Meeting. To accomplish this, Arlington engaged the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to provide technical assistance. The project is supported by a Planning Assistance Grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs and by technical assistance funding from MAPC.

Analysis of the Current Zoning Bylaw

The project involved several layers of analysis of the current Zoning Bylaw, including a zoning audit, a parcel analysis examining lot size and density, and a buildout analysis of select parcels. A project working group, consisting of Town staff, a local realtor, and representatives from the Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB) and the Housing Plan Implementation Committee, met three times throughout the fall of 2018 to review these deliverables and provide guidance regarding zoning recommendations. The material was also shared with the ARB at their October 1, 2018 meeting.

The project began with an audit of the current Zoning Bylaw. The audit found that, while Arlington has recently made substantial strides towards updating its Bylaw to reflect the vision articulated in its Master Plan, barriers to multifamily development still exist. Generally, the Bylaw's dimensional requirements are appropriate for Arlington's lower-density districts but restrict or discourage multifamily development that would be appropriate in the higher-intensity districts along main corridors. Specific dimensional constraints were identified for further study, including lot size, density, yards, open space, building height, height buffer, floor area ratio, and parking.

MAPC subsequently conducted a town-wide mapping parcel analysis to determine the extent to which parcels with an existing multifamily use meet current lot size and density requirements, or in other words, whether Arlington's historic development patterns could occur under current zoning. The analysis showed that parcels in the Business districts are largely compliant with existing lot size and density requirements, primarily due to the mixed-use zoning bylaw amendments adopted by Annual Town Meeting in 2016. However, residential-zoned parcels are far more likely to be nonconforming; only one-third meet lot size requirements and less than half meet density requirements. The analysis then considered how various zoning changes might increase the number of compliant parcels. The mapping analysis was supported by photos of existing buildings in town to illustrate various lot sizes and densities.

Finally, MAPC conducted a buildout analysis of four sample sites to understand development potential under the existing Bylaw. The buildout analysis for each site was structured as a series of step-by-step illustrations to demonstrate how each of the major dimensional pieces of the Bylaw impacts what can be built on the site. While constraints varied by site and district, the most prohibitive requirements were typically front and side yards, usable open space, height buffer, floor area ratio, parking, and density. The analysis also looked at the ways in which various changes to the dimensional requirements might encourage multifamily development by increasing each site's capacity for housing.

Zoning Recommendations

Based on the above analyses, MAPC developed draft zoning recommendations which were refined based on input from the project working group. The recommendations are typically limited to higher-intensity districts (R4-R7 districts and B districts) in which multifamily and mixed-use development is permitted. They include:

- Eliminate the usable open space requirement for multifamily and mixed-use development, and instead increase the landscaped open space requirement
- Decrease the minimum lot area and minimum lot area per unit (density) in R4-R7 districts
- Reduce front and side yards in R4-R7 districts
- Reduce the distance within which the height buffer applies
- Increase floor area ratio in higher-intensity districts
- Decrease the parking ratio for multifamily housing to be consistent with the requirements for single family and duplex housing
- Allow up to six units by right in higher-intensity zoning districts

Please see the attached document for a complete list of recommendations and explanations.

Next Steps

The zoning recommendations will be discussed with the larger Arlington community at a public forum scheduled for January 10, 2019. Based on input received from Town staff, the project working group, the Arlington Redevelopment Board, and the general public, MAPC will finalize the recommendations and prepare zoning amendments for consideration at the 2019 Annual Town Meeting.

Arlington Multifamily Zoning – Recommendations

December 11, 2018

Open space: Eliminate the usable open space requirement for multifamily and mixed-use development, and instead increase the landscaped open space requirement from 10% to 20% of gross floor area.

- Allow up to 25% of landscaped open space to occur on balconies and/or roof deck. This would involve an amendment to the landscaped open space definition.

Rationale: There were several comments at the last working group meeting that large, programmed usable open space is not necessarily what’s needed along main corridors. However, there was also acknowledgement that community members are interested in ensuring that developments have sufficient ground-level greenery. Shifting the entire open space requirement to landscaped open space eliminates the confusion resulting from the different kinds of open spaces, offers more flexibility in how the space is distributed across the site (landscaped open space does not require the 25x25’ minimum dimensions), and reduces the overall open space requirement (from 30% total to 20% total) while still maintaining sufficient green space.

Townhouses:

- Clarify (in definition and in dimensional charts) that dimensional requirements are for the entire townhouse structure, not an individual townhouse unit.
- Amend the maximum size of one townhouse structure from 6 units/150’ length to 8 units/200’ length

Rationale: 200’ is roughly the length of Arlington’s smaller blocks, and is approximately half the length of a larger block.

Apartment conversions: Generally eliminate dimensional requirements.

Rationale: Because apartment conversions deal exclusively with existing structures, many dimensional requirements can be an undue constraint, especially when the structures are often historic and nonconforming.

Density and lot area

- In the B2 district, decrease the density requirement for mixed use >20,000 sq. ft. from 1450 sq. ft./unit to 1,000 sq. ft./unit
- For R districts – reduce minimum lot areas, min lot area per unit, and minimum lot frontage:

	Use	Min Lot Area		Min Lot Area per Unit		Min Lot Frontage	
		Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed
R4	Three-family dwelling	7,500	5,000	0	no change	70	50
R4	Townhouse	30,000	5,000	2,500	1,500	100	50
R4	Apt conversion	12,500	0	2,500	1,000	80	0
R5	Townhouse/apartment	20,000	5,000	1,450	1,000	100	50
R6	Townhouse/apartment	20,000	5,000	700	no change	100	50
R7	Any permitted structure	20,000	5,000	550	no change	100	50

Lot size rationale: Per the parcel analysis, there are a substantial number of lots above 5,000 square feet on Arlington’s main corridors, a size which could comfortably accommodate four- or six-plex apartment buildings. Density and other dimensional requirements still apply, so lowering the minimum lot size would not result in disproportionately large buildings being constructed on small lots.

Density rationale: When reviewing the density study, the working group gravitated towards the 1,000 sq. ft. of lot area per unit as an appropriate baseline for Mass Ave and other main corridors.

Yards:

- In the B1 district, change front yard requirement for mixed use from 20’ to 10’, and the side yard requirement from 10’ to 0 (bringing it closer to the front and side yard requirements for other B districts, which are both 0’ for mixed use).
- For corner lots, change from minimum street yard depth shall be equal to the required front yard of the adjoining lots to minimum street yard depth shall be equal to the front yard depth required for the district in which the parcel is located as in Section 5.3.8.
- In R districts – reduce front yards and side yards:

	Use	Front Yard		Side Yard		Rear Yard	
		Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed
R4	Three-family dwelling	25	15	10	no change	20	no change
R4	Townhouse	25	15	15	10	25	20
R4	Apt conversion	25	0	10	0	20	0
R5	Townhouse/apartment	15	10	10+(L/10)	15	25	20
R6	Townhouse/apartment	15+(H/10)	10	(H+L)/6	10**	(H+L)/6	20
R7	Any permitted structure	15+(H/10)	10	(H+L)/6	10**	(H+L)/6	20
** Where R6 and R7 parcels abut a business district, no side yard setback is required adjacent to the business-zoned parcel.							

Rationale: Decreased front and side yards are more consistent with traditional main street building patterns and create a stronger and more consistent street wall, which enhances pedestrian experience. The front yard setbacks proposed here are still sufficient to allow room for a bench, landscaping, or other pedestrian amenity. The side yard setbacks allow for a continuous streetwall in business areas, while providing relief where apartment districts abut residential districts.

Setback: Require the setback above the third story (rather than above the second story if the building is greater than three stories as in Section 5.3.17).

Rationale: A three-story façade before a setback creates a stronger street wall and is more proportionally appropriate for wide main streets with buildings 4-5 stories tall.



Height buffer:

- Reduce buffer distances to 25-50' depending on orientation (rather than 100-200').

Rationale: These dimensions retain a reasonable degree of relief for adjacent residential parcels, particularly for the lowest-intensity R0 and R1 districts, while not effectively lowering height limits across entire parcels.

Height and FAR in R districts:

- Increase heights in R5 and R6, and FARs in all multifamily residential districts:

	Use	Max Height (ft.)		Max Height (stories)		Max FAR	
		Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed
R4	Townhouse	35	No change	3	No change	.7	1.5
R4	Apt conversion	40	n/a	3	n/a	--	No change
R5	Townhouse/apartment	35	45	3	4	.8	1.5
R6	Townhouse/apartment	40	55	4	5	1.2	1.8
		35	45	3	4		
R7	Any permitted structure	60	60	5	No change	1.5	2.0
		40	45				

Height and FAR in B districts:

- Increase FARs in all B districts:

	Use	Max Height (ft.)		Max Height (stories)		Max FAR	
		Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed
B1	Mixed Use	35	45	3	4	.75	1.5
B2	Mixed Use <20,000 sq. ft.	50		4		1.5	1.8
B2	Mixed Use >20,000 sq. ft.	40		3		1.0	1.5
B2A	Mixed Use <20,000 sq. ft.	60		5		1.5	1.8
		50		4			
B2A	Mixed Use >20,000 sq. ft.	50		4		1.0	1.5
		40		3			
B3	Mixed Use <20,000 sq. ft.	60		5		1.5	1.8
		50		4			

	Use	Max Height (ft.)		Max Height (stories)		Max FAR	
		Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed	Existing	Proposed
B3	Mixed Use >20,000 sq. ft.	50	60	5		1.4	1.5
		40	50	3	4		
B4	Mixed Use <20,000 sq. ft.	60		5		1.5	2.0
		50		4			
B4	Mixed Use >20,000 sq. ft.	50		4		1.0	1.8
		40		3			
B5	Mixed Use <20,000 sq. ft.	60		5		1.8	2.2
		50		4			
B5	Mixed Use >20,000 sq. ft.	60		5	5	1.4	1.8
		40	50	3	4		

Parking:

- Change Apartment Building requirements from 1.0/1.15/1.5/2.0 spaces per unit to 1.0 space per unit. Project would still be eligible for TDM and affordable housing reductions.
- Add R7 to the districts eligible for TDM parking reduction as in Section 6.1.5.

Rationale: Reducing the parking requirements for apartments to one space per unit is consistent with the current parking requirements for single family, duplex, and triplex housing.

Special permit triggers: Allow up to 6 units by right in the R5-7 districts, and up to 6 units mixed use by right in all B districts.

Rationale: This allows a reasonable number of residential units by-right in districts where development at this scale is appropriate. Six units is the threshold for the inclusionary zoning ordinance.