



DOCKET ITEM #6
Text Amendment #2026-00002
Beekeeping Zoning Regulations

<p>Issue: A) Initiation of a Zoning Text Amendment; and B) Public Hearing and consideration of text amendments to Zoning Ordinance Articles II (Definitions) and VII (Supplemental Zone Regulations) to define beekeeping and beekeeping equipment, allow beekeeping as an accessory use, allow beekeeping equipment as permitted accessory structures, and establish requirements for beekeeping and beekeeping equipment.</p>	<p>Planning Commission Hearing:</p>	<p>May 5, 2026</p>
	<p>City Council Hearing:</p>	<p>May 16, 2025</p>
<p>Staff: Tony LaColla, AICP, Division Chief anthony.lacolla@alexandriava.gov Sam Shelby, Principal Planner sam.shelby@alexandriava.gov Catherine McDonald, Urban Planner catherine.mcdonald@alexandriava.gov</p>		
<p>Staff recommendation: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission INITIATE and recommend APPROVAL of the text amendment.</p>		

I. SUMMARY

Staff propose a Zoning Text Amendment to create beekeeping regulations. These changes include definitions of beekeeping and associated equipment, setbacks for beehives, and rules establishing the maximum number of beehives permitted on a property. The proposed text changes are included in Section VI of this report.

II. BACKGROUND

City Council asked staff to include beekeeping regulations on the interdepartmental workplan in June 2025.

Regardless of whether the City Code or Zoning Ordinance has beekeeping regulations, Virginia requires all beekeepers to comply with the [Code of Virginia; Title 3.2 Agriculture, Animal Care, and Food; Subtitle III. Production and Sale of Agricultural; Chapter 44. Beekeeping](#). This chapter mainly focuses on five main topics: (1) the suppression of bee diseases; (2) apiary identification requirements; (3) colony strength standards for pollination services; (4) the promotion of the sale and distribution of bees and their products; and (5) administration and enforcement of the rules. These provisions include references to best management practices that, if followed, can limit beekeeper liability as follows:

A person who operates an apiary in a reasonable manner, in compliance with local zoning restrictions, and in conformance with the written best management practices as provided by regulation of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall not be liable for any personal injury or property damage that occurs in connection with his keeping and maintaining of bees, bee equipment, queen breeding equipment, apiaries, or appliances. The limitation of liability established by this section does not apply to intentional tortious conduct or acts or omissions constituting gross negligence or negligence.

The best management practices for beekeeping are established in the [Code of Virginia; Title 2. Agriculture; Agency 5. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; Chapter 319. Best Management Practice for the Operation of Apiaries in Order to Limit Liability](#). The best management practices cover a variety of items, including hive and water source maintenance, control techniques to reduce swarming, and the type of hives and bees maintained. Additionally, the best management practices require that colonies be at least 10 feet from all lot lines and limits the number of colonies – social units of bees that follow a queen – allowed on a lot depending on the lot size.

There are no existing provisions in the City Code or Zoning Ordinance that regulate beekeeping.

III. DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED TEXT CHANGES

Staff recommends changes to both Article II – Definitions and Article VII – Supplemental Zone Regulations to create beekeeping regulations. To inform the appropriate land use consideration, staff spoke with a representative from the Northern Virginia Beekeepers Association, reviewed the

Code of Virginia beekeeping regulations as well as those in other local ordinances including Fairfax City, Fairfax County, Fredericksburg, Prince William County, and Roanoke, and Washington, D.C.

Below is a discussion of the proposed text changes for beekeeping and beekeeping equipment. The proposed regulations establish beekeeping as an accessory use and establish appropriate land use controls. The proposed zoning text changes encourage compliance with the Code of Virginia's best management practices, while balancing the flexibility needed for safe beekeeping in urban and semi-urban environments.

A. Define beekeeping and beekeeping equipment.

Both the proposed definitions of beekeeping and beekeeping equipment are based on beekeeping regulations in the Code of Virginia and the other jurisdictions reviewed.

B. Allow beekeeping as an accessory use and beekeeping equipment as permitted accessory structures.

Staff propose beekeeping and beekeeping equipment to be permitted as an accessory use and as accessory structures, respectively.

The Zoning Ordinance currently defines an accessory use as follows:

A use which is clearly subordinate to and serves a permitted principal use; and is subordinate in area, extent and purpose to the principal use served. An accessory use occupies less than one-third of the gross floor area of the principal use and does not change the character of the principal use.

Accessory structures are defined as:

A structure, which is clearly subordinate to the principal building or structure. An accessory structure generally does not exceed the height of the principal building or structure.

C. Create accessory use and structure limitations for beekeeping and beekeeping equipment.

While the Code of Virginia's best management practices regulate the number of bee colonies allowed, colony numbers cannot be verified in the field. A single colony may occupy multiple hives, and there is no practical way for a City inspector to determine how many colonies exist on a given property at any given time. The number and location of hive structures, by contrast, are readily observable and enforceable. Limiting the number of hives is intended to reduce the likelihood that beekeeping activities will create impacts on the surrounding community. Staff proposes the following hive limits:

- No more than two beehives on lots having 5,000 square feet or less of lot area

- Lots larger than 5,000 square feet allowed to have an additional hive for every additional 2,500 square feet

All the surrounding jurisdictions staff reviewed have similar limitations in their beekeeping regulations. Staff also recommend that beehives be permitted only in side and rear yards. Prohibiting hives in front yards is intended to keep hives away from public sidewalks and streets.

Staff proposes a 10-foot setback requirement for hives based on the Code of Virginia’s best management practices, as well as beekeeping regulations in surrounding jurisdictions. Because the City contains many lots, especially townhouse lots, where it would not be possible to meet the 10 feet setback due to dimensional constraints, staff also recommends allowing a lesser setback of five feet if there is some sort of flyway barrier installed between the hive and the lot line. Other nearby jurisdictions, such as Fairfax City, Fairfax County, and Prince William County, all provide a similar reduced setback in their own beekeeping regulations.

D. Allow beekeeping equipment as a permitted obstruction.

In most residential zones, the proposed setbacks for beekeeping equipment are larger than the existing side and rear setback requirements. For instance, in the R-8 zone, the required minimum side and rear yard setbacks are 8 feet and, therefore, a beehive 10 feet from side or rear lot line would meet that setback. However, this is not the case in some instances. For example, if a lot is zoned R-20, the required minimum side and rear yard setbacks are 12 feet and a beehive 10 feet from a side or rear lot line would be within that setback. In another scenario, a lot zoned R-2-5 has required minimum side and rear yard setbacks of seven feet; if a beekeeper chose the closer setback option of five feet with a flyway barrier, the hive would be within the required setback. Therefore, staff recommends beekeeping equipment be allowed as a permitted obstruction in required side and rear yards.

IV. Community Outreach

Staff met with a representative on the board of directors for Northern Virginia Beekeeping Association on April 10, 2026, to learn about the general standards for beekeeping and their experience keeping bees.

V. Recommendation

Staff recommends initiation and approval of the proposed text amendments in Section VI, below.

VI. Recommended Text Changes

ARTICLE II. – DEFINITIONS

2-121.06 – Beekeeping.

The production of, care, and management of colonies of bees.

2-121.07 – Beekeeping equipment.

Structures associated with beekeeping, including but not limited to hives, hive stands, and flyway barriers.

ARTICLE VII. – SUPPLEMENTAL ZONE REGULATIONS

7-101 – Permitted accessory buildings, uses and structures.

Permitted accessory buildings, uses and structures shall be limited to the following and any additional building, use or structure which the director finds is similar to those listed in scope, size and impact, is associated with a permitted building, use or structure, and is otherwise in compliance with this ordinance:

(P) Beekeeping and beekeeping equipment in accordance with section 7-103(F).

7-103 – Accessory building, use and structure limitations.

The following limitations apply to accessory buildings, uses and structures:

(F) Beekeeping and beekeeping equipment shall only be permitted subject to the following:

- (1) No more than two beehives shall be permitted on any lot, except lots larger than 5,000 square feet shall be permitted one additional hive for every additional 2,500 square feet of lot area above 5,000 square feet.
- (2) No hive shall be located forward of a front building wall or in any required front yard.
- (3) Except as provided in subsection (4) below, no hive shall be permitted within 10 feet of any side or rear lot line.
- (4) A hive may be located 5 feet from a side or rear lot line, if a flyway barrier that prevents the passage of bees is installed and maintained between the hive and the lot line. The flyway barrier shall consist of a solid wall or fence measuring 4 to 6 feet in height or a vegetative hedge measuring at least 6 feet in height.

7-202 – Permitted obstructions.

The following obstructions shall be permitted when located in a required yard and placed so as not to obstruct light and ventilation and when otherwise permitted by law:

(C) In any yard except a front yard.

(6) Beekeeping equipment in accordance with section 7-103(F)(3)

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