

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 27, 2020

TO: CHAIR NATHAN M. MACEK AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: KARL W. MORITZ, DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING

SUBJECT: MARCH 3, 2020 PLANNING COMMISSION DOCKET # 8: DISCUSSION ITEM UPDATE ON INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT PRODUCTION OF MARKET AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

This memorandum provides information to help guide your March 3 Planning Commission discussion pertaining to Item #8 on the docket titled “Initiatives to support production of market and affordable housing.” Through the discussion, staff will seek your response to a proposed prioritization plan for work initiatives under the “Zoning for Housing” category of the City’s FY 2020-2021 P&Z-Housing Work Plan (see slide # 8 in the accompanying presentation for the FY 2020-2021 P&Z-Housing Work Plan); the Work Plan was initially presented to the Planning Commission and City Council at your October 2019 meetings. While the Planning Commission is reviewing the prioritization plan on March 3, the City Council will review it on March 24.

Background

During the October 2019 meetings, staff presented information pertaining to the Washington Metropolitan Council of Government’s September 2019 Report titled [*The Future of Housing in Greater Washington*](#) (“Report”). The City of Alexandria is actively participating in a Regional Housing Initiative, which is based on this report. The Directors of the City’s Office of Housing and Department of Planning & Zoning (P&Z) played a key role, along with other Housing and Planning Directors in the region, in the report’s research and recommendations.

The report identifies an anticipated shortfall of 75,000 housing units across the region over the next 10 years and a shared plan to produce those units above and beyond each jurisdiction’s already anticipated forecasts. This is particularly important as economic forecasts show that housing production is not keeping pace with job growth. In fact, housing production is currently shown at two-thirds its pre-recession levels. As reviewed in October 2019 with you, Alexandria is producing approximately 840 housing units per year and, as a participant in this regional initiative, it will commit to a target of another 310 units per year for a total of 1,150 housing units each year for the next ten years. Also, like other participants in this regional initiative, Alexandria will commit to a target of 75 percent of the net new units being affordable to those households of low to moderate incomes.

In October 2019, the Planning Commission and City Council discussed this regional initiative and approved a revised Interdepartmental Long Range Planning Work Program to add multiple initiatives to further the goals of expanded production and affordability over the next 10 years. That work program proposed returning to the Planning Commission and City Council in March 2020 with specific recommendations for the Zoning for Housing initiative.

Proposed Prioritization Plan for Zoning for Housing Category

The Zoning for Housing initiative is a multi-departmental effort led by P&Z and Housing. Initial steps included staff workshops to systematically identify work initiatives (new provisions or modified provisions) under the Zoning Ordinance which could help expand housing production and affordability under the Zoning for Housing category. This effort included all staff involved in planning for and regulating development to ensure that a broad range of relevant factors would be considered.

In February, P&Z and Housing took the regulatory ideas which were generated placed them within the proposed prioritization plan for Zoning for Housing and are included in the table below. The proposed prioritization plan for Zoning for Housing is divided into three Phases: (1) Phase I (through June 2021) includes those items which may already be underway but are subject to appropriate levels of community outreach, are on the horizon for staff's work plan or may be easy endeavors in the effort to promote housing production and affordability due to existing community support and/or support from the Commonwealth. (2) Phase II (FY 2021) items may require more extensive study, more time and longer community outreach to ensure full stakeholder input is received and considered; and (3) Phase III (FY 2022) may also require more time, more extensive research and analysis, and more outreach to ensure all voices are heard. Beneath the table are the staff descriptions which have been slightly to moderately expanded for this document along with graphics for some of the descriptions.

Early Stakeholder Input on the Zoning for Housing Category

The City's Housing Summit on January 11, 2020, organized by the Office of Housing, drew approximately 300 participants and was highly successful and well received. A number of themes resulted from the Summit including: (1) concurrence around the importance of more density to increase housing production and affordability and (2) the importance of an equity component to ensure housing opportunities and resources are accessible across populations and incomes. Also in January, staff updated the ARHA Redevelopment Work Group on the FY 2020-2021 P&Z-Housing Work Plan, including several items under the Zoning for Housing Category. Subsequent to January, P&Z and Housing staff crafted the proposed prioritization plan for Zoning for Housing and did some additional early outreach to other stakeholders. The list of the early stakeholder meetings is below. For the most part, there was general consensus that there is a need to expand housing production and affordability. The Federation of Civic Associations did question the City's participation in the regional housing initiative, citing concerns over added density and suggested funding additional transportation improvements instead. Once the prioritization plan receives Planning Commission and City Council review in March, the City will start a more robust outreach effort around the elements of the Zoning for Housing elements and other elements of the FY 2020-2021 P&Z-Housing Work Program.

EARLY ZONING FOR HOUSING STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH	
January 11, 2020	Housing Summit
January 16, 2020	ARHA Redevelopment Work Group Meeting
February 6, 2020	AHAAC Board
February 10, 2020	TES and DOH Input
February 19, 2020	NAIOP
February 21, 2020	City's Equity Core Team
February 24, 2020	AEDP
February 26, 2020	Federation of Civic Organizations

Related Components to this Process: Civic Engagement and Equity Components

There will be a civic engagement process designed for the entire P&Z-Housing Work Program, including Zoning for Housing, with consistent messaging and efficient and creative use of outreach tools to ensure sufficient education regarding the need to expand housing production and affordability and to leverage natural constituencies and to grow support. Additionally, the City has hired an Equity Officer who is working with those staff involved with this process on creating an equity element that will be tied to a common equity vision to ensure fairness and equity in new regulatory provisions to help populations of all communities and incomes and to provide equal access to programs and services.

**RECOMMENDED “ZONING FOR HOUSING” PRIORITIZATION PLAN TABLE
(March 2020)**

* PHASE I Through June 2021 (+ = work is underway)	PHASE II FY 2022	PHASE III FY 2023
Study Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) +	Streamline Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs)+	Consider increasing permitted units in Single Family Zones
Study Inclusionary Zoning +	Examine permitted densities within walking distance of existing and planned stations for High Capacity Transit	Study existing zoning near King Street Metro
Examine Townhouse Zoning Consistency	Examine additional Parking Requirements for Multi-family Zones	Further examine the redevelopment of industrial zones for computability of light industrial uses with residential uses
Examine KR Zone Modifications - 1400 and 1500 King Street+	Examine possible expansion of By-Right Development	Examine creation of Traditional Neighborhood Zoning Districts and New Housing Types
Examine expanding opportunities for RMF Re-zoning	Flag Lots: Look to see how other jurisdictions permit development of these lots with fewer restrictions	
Examine Section 7-700 Height and Affordability Levels	Examine Zoning flexibility for adjacent Parcels	
Examine consistency of regulations for Open Space+	Examination of a possible Zoning Ordinance Rewrite and included would be feasibility analyses of possible alternative approaches such as Form-based Code versus FAR and Dwelling Units Per Acre	
Examine locations for Health Care Uses		
Study Co-Housing/Rooming Houses+		
Study parking requirements in Single Family Zones		
Examine Subdivision Modifications+		
Units per acre inconsistent with FAR in Mixed Use Zones		

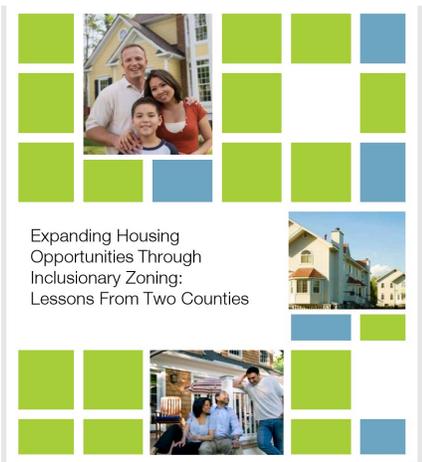
PHASE I: Timeline through June 2021



Examples of ADUs above garages (non-Alexandria example on the left and Potomac Yard example on the right).

Accessory Dwelling Units

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), also referred to as accessory apartments, second units or granny flats, are additional living quarters on fee simple properties that are independent of the primary dwelling unit. Staff is conducting an analysis of the feasibility of an ADU policy as one option to increase the stock of affordable and accessible housing in the City, working with The Urban Institute. Outreach will begin in March 2020 and the final analysis and policy recommendations are expected in late Spring 2020, but specific timing will depend on the length of engagement necessary to learn and address issues raised by the community.



[Expanding Housing Opportunities through Inclusionary Zoning: Lessons From Two Counties.](#) Prepared by The Urban Institute for the US. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2012. Looks at lessons learned from Montgomery County, MD’s Inclusionary Housing Program and Fairfax County, VA’s Inclusionary Housing Program.

Inclusionary Zoning

Using the 2019 Housing Contributions Work Group policy recommendations as a baseline, this analysis will evaluate the feasibility and desirability of an Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) policy for the City. IZ policies require developers to set aside a certain percentage of housing units in new or rehabilitated projects for low- and moderate-income residents. The analysis will examine whether new development will facilitate production of more affordable units than are yielded currently through existing City housing policy and investment, along with the knowledge of Virginia legislative laws and rules regarding housing policy. Based on the economic analysis anticipated to be performed by a third-party consultant, the effort will review successful IZ programs elsewhere, including in comparable markets within the DC region; evaluate how such a policy may impact the short- and long-term economic impacts on Alexandria real estate development market; and, consider how an IZ program can be efficiently administered. The consultant's work, and staff's preliminary recommendations regarding next steps, will be completed on a schedule to potentially inform the 2021 City legislative package requests to the General Assembly.



Similar townhome comparison. Townhouses on the left are zoned RM (1.5 FAR and 35% open space) and townhouses on the right are zoned RB (.75 FAR and 800 sf open space requirement, regardless of lot size).

Townhouse Zoning Consistency

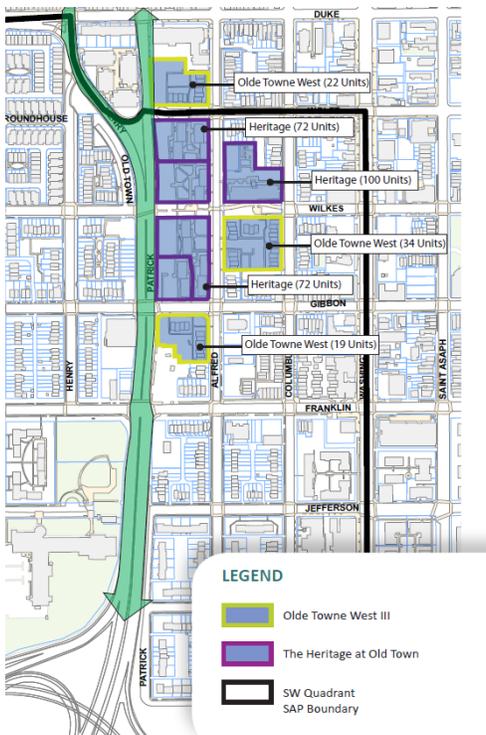
Townhouses can be an affordable housing type and they are permitted in most zones, which allow residential uses, but the requirements for townhouses can be vastly different depending on where a property is located. For example, the RB Zone is located throughout the City but has a fixed open space requirement, regardless of the lot size, and a much more limited FAR than some other townhouse zones, such as the RM Zone. Staff will examine existing Zoning Ordinance inconsistencies for townhouses and recommend that similar land uses be regulated equitably, thereby standardizing the Zoning Ordinance for townhouses. This project has the support of the West Old Town Citizens Association.



Buildings in the 1400 block of King Street subject to the KR requirement which precludes conversion back to ground floor residential once change is made to commercial.

KR Zone Modifications - 1400 and 1500 Block of King Street

The KR Zone does not allow for the conversion of commercial properties to full residential uses without providing ground floor commercial uses. While the intent of the KR Zone is to ensure that King Street is a lively commercial street, there are some historic townhouses in the 1400 and 1500 block of King Street that were constructed exclusively for residential uses in the early 20th century, when this part of King Street had few, if any, commercial uses. This initiative would **evaluate** and likely propose changes to the KR Zone for these two blocks of King Street to allow for these townhouses to be converted back to their original residential uses without requiring commercial uses on the first floor.



Locations of properties with 215 Committed Affordable Units currently in the South Patrick Street Affordable Housing Strategy Area. The Area generally extends from Wolf Street (north) to Franklin Street (south) and between S. Columbus Street (east) and S. Patrick Street (West).

Expanding Opportunities for RMF Rezoning

Under the South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy, an early implementation goal was the adoption of the Residential Multifamily (RMF) Zone to incentivize the creation and preservation of affordable housing through the provision of additional density. The City’s current “Criteria for Re-zoning Without a Master Plan Study” sets limits for City support of re-zonings that would require a Master Plan Amendment, among other criteria. The overall effect of this policy has been to discourage re-zonings that are not preceded by a full Master Plan study, or Small Area Plan update, significantly slowing down the approval process. This initiative would identify locations, or location attributes, where the City would examine proposals to re-zone properties to RMF under less stringent requirements. These would likely be locations with good transit service and walkable access to services that support daily living, such as shopping centers. Any site-specific application for a re-zoning to RMF would undergo its own staff analysis and public outreach. The product of this effort would be a revised “Criteria for Re-zoning without a Master Plan Study” that identifies location types where re-zonings to RMF would be encouraged, potentially accompanied by amendments to the Master Plan where needed.



Parc Meridian is located at 750 Port Street in Eisenhower East. Through the use of Density Bonus provisions under Section 7-700, 33 dedicated affordable rental units were included within the 505-unit building.

Section 7-700 Height and Affordability Levels

Section 7-700 of the City’s Zoning Ordinance provides for increases in floor area ratio, density and height, and reductions in required off-street parking, as incentive for provision of low- and moderate-income housing. This is commonly referred to as Density Bonus. Section 7-703 states height that may not be increased pursuant to this section by more than 25 feet beyond the height otherwise permitted by this ordinance; provided, however, that no building located in any zone or height district where the maximum allowable height is 50 feet or less may be allowed to exceed such height limits. This initiative would **examine** locations where the 50-foot height limit is in place and where Section 7-700 cannot be applied and would consider revised language to allow for the application of this Density Bonus program in all – or some - locations in the 50 foot height district. Affordability levels would also be studied and may be amended to ensure that the City has the flexibility to obtain the optimal affordability mix (such as fewer units at deeper levels of affordability) in each situation.



Open space within The Henry which includes a public access easement.

Consistent Regulation of Open Space

This initiative would examine how open space is calculated for various land use types. For example, some zones require a percentage of the lot to be provided in open space; other zones require a specific number of square feet per unit. The initiative would determine if there is value in moving to a system whereby the open space requirements are more consistent across zones. Moreover, the initiative would also consider whether there is value in moving to a system where both residential and some non-residential development have similar standards or similar contribution requirements, facilitating conversions of buildings from residential to non-residential and back, and potentially providing more resources for expanding common off-site open space in the surrounding area. The work would be coordinated with the work of the recently established Open Space Steering Committee.



Chiropractic, dental and urgent Care uses on the ground floor of The Henry.

Health Care Uses

This initiative would examine any current limitations on the provision for health care services in multi-family buildings and determine if the use should be a permitted in multi-family buildings. The impetus for this initiative comes from the Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan public forums where attendees expressed an interest in ensuring that residents have access to health care options.



An eight-room rooming house in operation for over 40 years at 1001A Queen Street (300 N. Patrick Street).

Co-Housing/Rooming Houses

Co-housing, which can include rooming houses, are a type of housing designed with private rooms and shared common spaces, such as kitchens, dining, laundry and living rooms, but can also include recreational area and outdoor space, gardens and parking. Rooming houses have historically been an affordable housing type in the City. Over time, the Zoning Ordinance has been revised to discourage this type of housing and only a few rooming houses remain in the City, although those that exist have stable long-term tenants who are good neighbors and the City has received no complaints related to these properties. In the 21st century the term co-housing has emerged, which is housing intentionally designed with private units, or potentially homes, with ample shared common space. This initiative would examine the variety of housing options that fit within the co-housing/rooming house model and determine ways that the Zoning Ordinance can be amended to permit their continued existence.

Single Family Parking Requirements

The City of Alexandria commenced a study in 2014 to evaluate existing parking standards for development projects and establish updated parking standards for new development projects. This project was conducted in two phases, with new multi-family residential parking requirements approved in April 2015 and new retail, commercial, and office parking requirements approved in January 2018. With diminishing reliance on the car, due to trends to promote more transit-oriented development and walkable communities close to amenities and services, the City is continuing to examine parking requirements and would next **study** the parking requirements for single family houses. The same trends that justified a reduction in the multi-family parking requirements – increase transit access and locations in walkable neighborhoods where residents live, work, play and shop – may also justify a change in the parking requirements for single family homes.

Units Per Acre and Inconsistent FAR Requirements in Mixed Use Zones

In the City's mixed-use zones development must comply with both the maximum floor area ratio (FAR) and the units-per-acre requirements, which has had the unintended consequent of creating fewer, larger and less affordable housing units. This initiative would look at the conflicts that can arise between FAR and the units-per-acre and would consider whether increasing and/or eliminating the units-per-acre cap may allow for the creation of more affordable housing units. The City has already evaluated and implemented some policies and regulatory provisions to allow and even support the conversions of commercial properties to residential uses. The next step is to look at mixed use zones where the permitted densities for residential uses are less than the permitted densities for non-

residential uses, potentially resulting in less residential development. Furthermore, these different FAR requirements also make it more difficult to convert between the two uses.

Subdivision Modifications

This initiative would consider amendments to the Subdivision regulations to ensure that they support infill development that is consistent with existing patterns of development. In particular, the standards for a variation are unclear. The initiative would **evaluate** minimum lot size requirements and other minimum requirements and would also look at the potential for administrative review/approval of minor boundary line adjustments.

PHASE II (FY 2022): Content and timing of Phase II to be confirmed based on progress with Phase I

	CDD		CDD
1	Duke Street	15	Braddock Gateway
2	Eisenhower Avenue Metro	16	James Bland
3	Cameron Center	17	Landmark Gateway
4	Winkler Tract	17a	Cameron Park
5	Stone Tract	19	NPY
6	Mt. Vernon Village	20	Harris Teeter/OTN
7	Route 1 Properties	21	Beauregard
8	Trade Center	22	Seminary Overlook
9	Cameron Station	23	Fillmore/Beauregard
10	Potomac Yards/Greens	24	Oakville Triangle/R1
11	South Carlyle	25	ABC Giant/OTN
12	Safeway/Datatel	26	Public Storage/Boat House
13	Triangle Sites	27	Green Hill/West Alexandria
14	Giant/CVS	28	Green Hill South

Chart of Alexandria’s approved CDDs

Streamline Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs)

CDDs are established for those areas which are of such size or are so situated as to have significant development related impacts on the City as a whole or a major portion thereof and in order to promote development consistent with the master plan. A site zoned CDD is intended for a mixture of uses to include office, residential, retail, hotel and other uses with appropriate open space and recreational amenities to serve the project users and residents of the city. A CDD Zone is intended to encourage land assemblage and/or cooperation and joint planning where there are multiple owners in the CDD zoned area. A review process is established to ensure that such developments exhibit a proper integration of uses, the highest quality of urban and architectural design and harmony with the surrounding areas of the City. Right now, CDDs can be cumbersome to create and even more difficult to amend. In response, staff is undertaking a review of CDDs to determine if a new model is necessary to streamline CDD regulations and the review process and to better standardize CDDs so that they are more consistent with intended zoning and guidelines. A handbook might accompany this new model and an educational piece to help staff, the public and developers better understand the improvements and standards and review process.



Braddock Metro Station

Eisenhower East Metro Station (proposed enhancements)

Examine Densities in Proximity to High Capacity Transit Areas

An explicit element of the Regional Housing Initiative is to increase housing production near high-capacity transit and activity centers in general. To further encourage more walkable communities and transit-oriented development, this effort would examine those areas with high-capacity transit, or which are slated for high capacity transit stations. The goal would be to consider increasing density levels in those areas where it might be under capacity, creating more opportunities for people to live within walkable neighborhood with amenities and near jobs but also close to public transit lowering their need for a car and/or to commute to work via a car.

Multi-family Parking Regulations

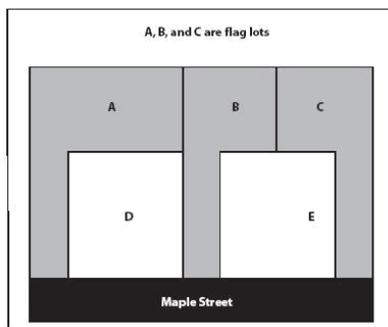
The City of Alexandria commenced a study in 2014 to evaluate existing parking standards for development projects and established updated parking standards for new development projects. This project was conducted in two phases, with new multi-family residential parking requirements approved in April 2015 and new retail, commercial, and office parking requirements approved in January 2018. With diminishing reliance on the car, due to trends to promote more transit-oriented development and walkable communities close to amenities and services, the City is continuing to examine parking requirements. Phase I of Zoning for Housing would seek to examine single family parking requirements and Phase II would look further at multi-family parking requirements. Waiting until Phase II would enable staff to assess the requirements after the facilities have been in operation for a reasonable period of time. Therefore, it is believed that by Phase II, there would be more information on which to evaluate the earlier changes to the multi-family parking requirements and whether refinement or more changes may be appropriate.

Potential Expansion of By-Right Development

This effort would examine zoning regulations to determine where it might be appropriate to expand by-right development to help accelerate housing production. It should be noted that Virginia law limits a locality’s ability to place conditions on by-right development (i.e., development permitted without a Special Use Permit in the relevant zones). Many of these conditions are used by the City to ensure that

development complies with City-wide policies to mitigate the impact of the development (for example, the Green Building Policy). In addition, the City’s ability to influence the design of a building, the architecture, etc., is limited when the development is by-right. This project would evaluate whether the City could increase the amount or type of development that can occur by-right while also applying the policy and design objectives most valued by the City. Standards would be guided by Small Area Plan guidelines and zoning provisions to ensure quality development. Examples of this work could include:

- Examining whether the threshold of development that can be approved administratively should be increased.
- Examining whether Site Plan review can be strengthened so that key City policies can be accomplished even with by-right development.



Pipestem or “Flag” Lots

A Pipestem (or “Flag”) Lot is a lot configuration where the bulk of the developable land is located behind another lot and is connected to a public right of way with a narrow strip of land. Pipestem lots are commonly found where road frontage is at a premium or where relatively deep lots were created. They may occur when owners of a single-family home on a large lot decides they would like to build another home on what is now their back yard. Current regulations make development of flag lots very difficult; this effort would examine how other jurisdictions treat flag lots to determine if Alexandria should adjust development restrictions.

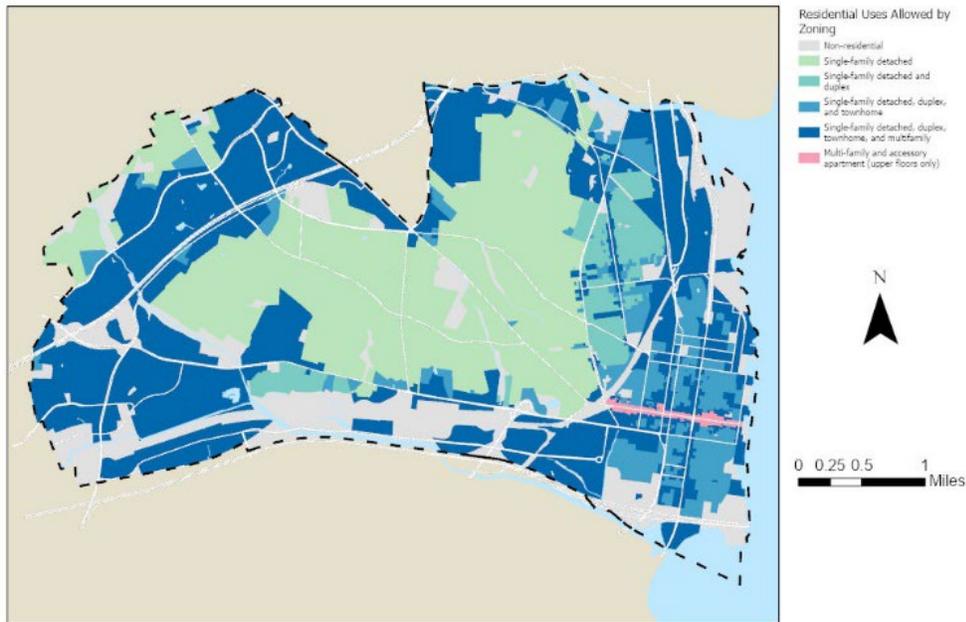
Zoning Flexibility for Adjacent Parcels

Alexandria has a number of adjacent small lots with the same property owner. This effort would examine potential amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to allow zoning on an adjacent lot to flex from one lot to another if under common ownership. Through this initiative an owner might then be able to choose the zoning that would work best for them at the time of development without the need for a rezoning.

Zoning Ordinance Rewrite

At the conclusion of Phase II and the start of Phase III, the City may want to consider whether zoning changes should continue incrementally or whether an effort toward a more comprehensive rewrite of the Zoning Ordinance might be appropriate. A possible comprehensive rewrite of the Zoning Ordinance might look at a variety of ways to simplify and reduce categories, including an analysis of possible alternative approaches such as form-based code versus FAR and dwelling units per acre.

PHASE III (FY 2023): Content and timing to be confirmed based on progress with Phase I



Map of Residential Uses Allowed by Zoning in Alexandria

Consider Increasing Permitted Units in Single Family Zones

Approximately 2/3 of Alexandria land permits more than one housing unit per lot. The palest green color in the above map shows the areas of the City where the only permitted housing type is single-family detached (one unit per lot). This effort would evaluate the current limit of one housing unit per lot in the City’s single-family zones, including the options of allowing a greater number of units per lot in specific limited cases (such as near transit or activity centers), or more broadly. The effort may evaluate moving toward a form-based code (i.e., emphasizing height, bulk and placement of housing rather than units-per-acre *per se*).

Study existing zoning near King Street Metro

This effort would examine opportunities for more development around the King Street Metro; specifically, the area bounded by King Street, Commerce Street, Duke Street and Reinkers Street. The intent would be to study the area to determine if redevelopment is desirable and, if so, what the appropriate zoning tools should be to further facilitate transit-oriented development within this accessible and amenity-rich environment.



Mixed use development integrated with light industrial uses. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Industrial Zone Study

In a 2015 study of industrially zoned land, staff determined that the great majority of land uses on industrially zoned land are either light industrial or are office, retail or other commercial uses that are compatible with housing. In the Eisenhower East Small Area Plan and in the Oakville Triangle Plan, the City contemplates redevelopment of industrially-zoned properties in ways that retain light industrial and similar uses as long as they are compatible with residential uses (that is, the offsite impacts of noise, etc., can be mitigated). To achieve the vision of these documents, parcels now zoned industrial must be individually re-zoned. This initiative would evaluate amending the Industrial Zones to allow housing, to facilitate the co-location of housing and compatible non-residential uses, and to fulfill the goals of the Small Area Plans.

Traditional Neighborhood Zoning Districts and New Housing Types

This effort will examine the creation of “Traditional Zoning Districts” based on historic development patterns for places like Del Ray or Old Town, rather than trying to make old properties conform to new zoning. If neighborhoods originally were built with a diversity of housing types, setbacks, open spaces, etc., consider whether new infill development standards can be established to allow those patterns to guide the future. Also, unless completed in earlier phases, evaluate housing types, styles or arrangements not permitted by the Zoning Ordinance (cottages, bungalow, courts, alley homes etc.) to determine if the ordinance should be revised to permit them.

Cc: Helen Mellvaine, Director, Office of Housing
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