



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** NOVEMBER 15, 2022

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**THROUGH:** JAMES F. PARAJON, CITY MANAGER /s/

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

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Update on Zoning for Housing Initiatives and the Companion Housing for All Equity Component in Support of the Production of Market and Affordable Housing.

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**ISSUE:** Should staff combine remaining Zoning for Housing Initiatives into one Comprehensive Zoning for Housing Package for study and community engagement, along with the Housing for All Equity companion program, for City Council consideration potentially in fall 2023?

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the City move forward with the review of a comprehensive package of zoning reforms for the purpose of (1) removing from City policies and regulations those provisions that were intended to support exclusion and segregation, and intended to deny opportunities for property ownership and wealth creation to persons of color, (2) create new, more equitable land use policies that improve demographic and economic indicators that show that there are lasting vestiges of exclusionary practices even today, and (3) materially increase the supply of committed affordable and market rate housing in the City.

**DISCUSSION:** Staff's proposed comprehensive package is largely the same as that initially proposed, discussed, and approved in 2019 and 2020 as a phased program of reforms. While important progress has been made on that list, factors such as the pandemic affected the pace with which these initiatives could move forward.

This project, as accelerated, is proposed to be completed in Calendar Year 2023. A tentative framework for a timeline outlining the anticipated work program is included in Attachment 1. Accelerating this project will have an impact on the FY 2023 Long Range Interdepartmental Planning Work Program. If City Council concurs with the recommendations in the memorandum, staff will return in January/February with proposals to make room for it in the work program, likely by proposing to postpone one or more projects.

*Proposed Components:*

**Single-family zoning** - Evaluate the current limit of one household per lot in the City's single-family zones and the potential benefits of allowing a greater number of households per lot in the zones. The initial approach will be to largely retain the amount of development (height, square footage, footprint) currently permitted in these zones. Staff will review the history of single-family zoning and the extent to which this type of zoning effectively limited access to these neighborhoods by persons of color, both

nationally and in Alexandria specifically. Staff will also explore the Zoning Ordinance definition of “family” and concerns that have been expressed about its application and will address parking issues.

**Removal of restrictive language** from the Zoning Ordinance - This effort is to remove from the Zoning Ordinance restrictive language tied to past laws and policies which created exclusionary barriers for some groups to equitable living opportunities across the City. Examples include the definition of family, language regarding “impact on property values” and “character of the neighborhood,” and others. This project will be directly linked to historic research on the origins of this language, the identification of other Zoning Ordinance language that may be exclusionary, and a discussion of how this language operates in present-day Alexandria.

**Bonus Height** - This proposal was deferred in July 2022. Staff will add to the body of research and analysis already completed, by examining testimony by members of the public and suggestions by the Planning Commission during the hearing.

**RMF Zones** - Staff will analyze expanded/targeted opportunities for RMF (Residential Multi-Family zone) re-zonings in two topic areas:

1. Instances where a rezoning to RMF could be considered under existing small area plans. In recent past, this has included parcels explicitly recommended for RMF in small area plans, parcels where the planned land use in existing small area plans is “Residential High” or an equivalent residential or mixed-use density.
2. Criteria for consideration of the RMF designation in future small area plans. For example, locations well-served by transportation options and within walking distance of services needed for daily living.

**Opportunities for Expansion of Transit-Oriented Development** - This project will review existing permitted densities within walking distance of existing and planned Metro stations and existing and planned High-Capacity Transit stations. The study will highlight transit-rich locations where existing zoning and/or plans tightly limit the densities of redevelopment. The outcome would be used as a basis for discussion in future planning efforts.

**Industrial Zones** - While the Industrial zone does not allow housing at all, much of Alexandria’s industrial uses are light industrial or retail - and potentially compatible with residential. Some industrial zoned properties are planned to be rezoned to encourage mixed use redevelopment - residential over compatible commercial that could include some land uses now considered light industrial. This project will evaluate the potential for Industrially zoned land to be allowed to apply for RMF zoning and/or circumstances where affordable housing could be approved on industrially-zoned land without a rezoning, such as if it is clear that there would not be compatibility (i.e., environmental justice) concerns. Staff will also analyze industrially zoned land planned for rezoning and redevelopment to determine if there are barriers to that planned transition.

**Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs)** - Over time the City has evolved and strengthened how affordable housing is addressed through CDDs. Staff will provide an analysis of how the issue of affordable housing has been addressed through CDDs and either confirm that the latest practice should be continued or recommend that further evolution for consideration.

**Remove Zoning Ordinance barriers to office-to-residential conversion** - Staff will examine key aspects of density - FAR and Units Per Acre - in mixed use zones and consider several regulation options to facilitate office-to-residential conversion when in line with City principles. Staff will summarize the City’s experience with conversions that went forward as well as those that did not through the lens of performance criteria such as impact on job growth, the tax base, and housing affordability.

**Town House Zones** - This project will examine strategies to reconcile varying regulations (such as FAR and open space) within the City’s town house zones, with the working hypothesis that consistent zoning standards for townhouses Citywide is desirable.

**Existing/Historic Development Patterns No Longer Permitted** - Staff will identify a set of existing land use patterns, such as the mix of uses and building types found in sections of our historic districts and permitted under previous zoning ordinances, that are no longer permitted today. Staff will prepare a list of future potential changes to the ordinance that might allow these patterns to occur in the future.

**Inclusionary Zoning** - Staff will summarize the current status of recent examinations of a potential Inclusionary Housing policy for the City and describe what a future review will consist of. This initiative will be tied to a multi-year assessment of the City’s Contribution Policy and accordingly may require additional time for completed recommendations.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** It is anticipated that this project will not require additional funding beyond what is currently budgeted. Resources will be existing staff time and expertise, budgeted financial resources for any external technical assistance that may be required, including any that might be needed to support community engagement.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1: Background, Purpose, Previous Activities Related to “Zoning for Housing” and “Housing for All”

Attachment 2: Tentative Framework/Timeline for “Zoning for Housing” and “Housing for All.”

Attachment 3: 2020 Zoning for Housing Prioritization Plan

Attachment 4: Presentation

**STAFF:**

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