



Memorandum

To: Erin Zwirko, Town of Arlington
From: Alexis Smith, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Date: September 20, 2018
Re: Multifamily Parcel Analysis – Lot Size and Density Requirements

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. As part of this project, The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) conducted a town-wide parcel analysis to determine the number of parcels with existing multifamily use that meet current lot size and density requirements. This memo summarizes the findings from the parcel analysis.

When reviewing the results of this analysis, it is important to remember that the ultimate project goal is not for every parcel in town to comply with the Zoning Bylaw, but rather to ensure that the Bylaw reflects the kind of development that the Town would like to see in the future. This analysis is meant to serve as a tool to determine whether Arlington's historic development patterns could happen under current zoning. It will be one piece of input in assessing whether the current Bylaw reflects the Town's vision for future development.

Existing Zoning

Minimum lot size. Arlington's Zoning Bylaw stipulates a minimum required lot size that varies based on district and use. For mixed-use development in the business districts, these requirements are generally conducive to small infill development; most B districts have no minimum lot size for mixed use. The requirements for single-use multifamily residential are more restrictive, with a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet for apartments in most multifamily and business zones. (Sections 5.4.2(A), R District Lot Regulations; 5.5.2(A), B District Lot Regulations)

| Minimum Lot Size Requirements (sq.ft) | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Use | Zone | Extg Zoning |
| Townhouse | R4 | 30,000 |
| Apartment or Townhouse | R5, R6, R7 | 20,000 |
| | B2 | 5,000 |
| | B2A, B3, B4, B5 | 20,000 |
| Mixed Use | B1 | 5,000 |
| | B2, B2A, B3, B4, B5 | 0 |

Minimum lot size per unit. The Bylaw also dictates a minimum lot area per residential unit. This controls the maximum number of units that can be built on a lot of a given size, or in other words, the allowable density. These requirements differ by use and district, ranging from no minimum requirement for mixed use on small lots in B districts to 2,500 square feet per unit for townhouses in the R4 district. A complete summary of these requirement by use and district is below. (Sections 5.4.2(A), R District Lot Regulations; 5.5.2(A), B District Lot Regulations)

| Minimum Lot Size Per Unit Requirements (sq.ft.) | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Use | Zone | Extg Zoning |
| Townhouse | R4 | 2,500 |
| Apartment or Townhouse | R5 | 1,450 |
| | B2 | 1,450 |
| | B2A, B4 (street <50') | 1,450 |
| | R6 | 700 |
| | B2A, B4 (street >50') | 700 |
| | B3 | 600 |
| | R7, B5 | 550 |
| Mixed Use | All B lots <20,000 sqft | 0 |
| | B2 (lot >20,000 sqft) | 1,450 |
| | B2A, B4, B5 (lot >20,000 sqft) | 700 |
| | B3 (lot >20,000 sqft) | 600 |

Density can sometimes be a difficult concept to visualize. Density requirements dictate how many units can go into a building, but do not directly determine how big the building can be. For example, a three-story building with one large unit on each floor would have a much lower density than a building of the exact same size but with two smaller units on each floor. On the other hand, projects of very different sizes can have similar densities: a two-unit building on a small lot could be the same density as a project with dozens of units on several acres. Density is also highly dependent on the amount of open space on a lot. An apartment building with a large yard or parking lot would have a lower density than the same building on a smaller lot.

For specific examples of various densities in Arlington and in the greater Boston region, see the accompanying density examples provided by MAPC.

Parcel Analysis: Existing Zoning

MAPC conducted an analysis to determine the degree to which the Town's residential parcels meet the current Bylaw's lot size and density requirements. The analysis includes all parcels with existing multifamily use, including residential mixed use, based on data from the Arlington Assessor's office.¹ It

¹ The analysis does not include parcels with non-residential uses.

covers parcels in districts R4-R7 and all B districts, which are the districts in which multifamily development of greater than three units is permitted.

The analysis showed that parcels in the B districts are largely more compliant with existing requirements than those in the R districts. This is due largely to the 2016 Bylaw amendments intended to facilitate infill mixed-use development in the B districts. Ninety percent of parcels in B districts with multifamily use are compliant with existing lot size requirements, whereas only one-third of parcels in R districts meet the requirements. Likewise, 84% of parcels in B districts were compliant with the minimum lot size per unit, whereas only half as many (42%) R district parcels were compliant.

| Minimum Lot Size - Existing Zoning | | |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| B Districts | Parcels | Percent |
| Total parcels | 61 | 100% |
| Compliant parcels | 55 | 90% |
| Nonconforming parcels | 6 | 10% |
| R Districts | | |
| Total parcels | 95 | 100% |
| Compliant parcels | 31 | 33% |
| Nonconforming parcels | 64 | 67% |

| Minimum Lot Size Per Unit - Extg Zoning | | |
|---|---------|---------|
| B Districts | Parcels | Percent |
| Total parcels | 61 | 100% |
| Compliant parcels | 51 | 84% |
| Nonconforming parcels | 10 | 16% |
| R Districts | | |
| Total parcels | 95 | 100% |
| Compliant parcels | 40 | 42% |
| Nonconforming parcels | 55 | 58% |

Minimum Lot Size Alternative Scenarios

The next piece of the analysis looked at the way in which various changes to zoning requirements might impact the number of parcels that complied with the minimum lot size. **Note that these scenarios are not recommendations.**

The first scenario considers how many additional parcels would be brought into compliance if the minimum lot size for apartments in most R and B districts was reduced from 20,000 square feet to 10,000 square feet. This scenario also reduced the minimum lot size for townhouses to 2,000 square feet, which is a standard size for a townhouse lot in urban areas. These changes did not impact the number of compliant B district parcels, which was already high (90%), but they doubled the percentage of compliant R district parcels, to 66%.

In the second scenario, the minimum lot size of 10,000 square feet for apartments was further reduced to 5,000 square feet. This brought the number of compliant parcels R districts to above 90%.

| Minimum Lot Size Requirements (sq.ft) | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Use | Zone | Extg Zoning | Example 1 | Example 2 |
| Townhouse | R4 | 30,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 |
| Apartment or Townhouse | R5, R6, R7 | 20,000 | 10,000 | 5,000 |
| | B2 | 5,000 | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| | B2A, B3, B4, B5 | 20,000 | 10,000 | 10,000 |
| Mixed Use | B1 | 5,000 | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| | B2, B2A, B3, B4, B5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Please see the accompanying maps illustrating the various scenarios for more detailed information.

Minimum Lot Size per Unit Alternative Scenarios

Similarly, the analysis considered how changes to density requirements might impact the number of parcels that complied with the minimum lot size per unit. **Again, these scenarios are not recommendations.**

In this case, the first scenario considered only changes to the B districts, reducing the requirement from 1,450 to 1,000 square feet per unit. These changes increased the percentage of compliant B parcels to 98%.

The second scenario made the same changes to the R districts, also reducing the minimum lot size per unit down to 1,000 square feet per unit in the districts where it was higher. This change increased the percentage of compliant R parcels to 73%.

The third scenario further reduced limits in the R5, R6, and R7 districts, which brought the number of compliant parcels in the R districts up to 95%.

| Minimum Lot Size Per Unit Requirements (sq.ft.) | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Use | Zone | Extg Zoning | Example 1 | Example 2 | Example 3 |
| Townhouse | R4 | 2,500 | 2,500 | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| Apartment or Townhouse | R5 | 1,450 | 1,450 | 1,000 | 700 |
| | B2 | 1,450 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| | B2A, B4 (street <50') | 1,450 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| | R6 | 700 | 700 | 700 | 500 |
| | B2A, B4 (street >50') | 700 | 700 | 700 | 700 |
| | B3 | 600 | 600 | 600 | 600 |
| | R7, B5 | 550 | 550 | 550 | 0 |
| Mixed Use | All B lots <20,000 sqft | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | B2 (lot >20,000 sqft) | 1,450 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| | B2A, B4, B5 (lot >20,000 sqft) | 700 | 700 | 700 | 700 |
| | B3 (lot >20,000 sqft) | 600 | 600 | 600 | 600 |

Please see the accompanying maps illustrating the various scenarios for more detailed information.