



## 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.