

Memorandum

To: Nancy Floreen
From: Zoning Rewrite Team, Planning Department
Date: 7/9/2013
Re: Affordable Housing in the Revised Zoning Code

The proposed zoning ordinance and zoning map include several elements that will preserve and expand the County's affordable housing goals. These elements are described below.

Zones that currently allow density bonuses for MPDUs will continue to allow them.

The proposed zone translations (e.g. CBD to CR) preserve the current density bonus allowed when a development provides greater than the required 12.5% of units as Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs). In addition, the proposed code requires at least one additional MPDU be provided in exchange for the bonus density. This eliminates the possibility of additional density being awarded without the provision of an additional unit due to rounding.

Also, zones that currently allow additional height for workforce housing will continue to allow it. Zones that translate under these provisions include a 'T' after the C/R zone formula.

The zoning rewrite introduces a new incentive for providing MPDUs and Workforce Housing.

Existing C/R zones will have an added incentive to provide more than the required 12.5% of units as MPDUs- the gross floor area of any MPDUs provided above 12.5% is exempt from the calculation of FAR. Because more market rate units can be built, this exemption allows a developer to recoup some of the costs associated with providing extra MPDUs.

The proposed zoning ordinance introduces Workforce Housing as an optional public benefit in the C/R and Employment zones.

More housing equals more opportunities for affordability and MPDUS.

The proposed zone translation has the potential to increase the housing supply in the County because housing will be allowed in commercial zones where it is currently prohibited or allowed only under very limited circumstances. By increasing the overall number of units in the County, it follows that the total number of MPDUs will also increase.

One criticism of the proposed zone translation is that multi-family housing will be allowed in locations inaccessible to transit, allowing for “un-smart growth.” While many of the places where housing is being introduced as a permitted or limited use are not adjacent to metro stations, they are often on metrobus routes with frequent service. Furthermore, the land is typically less expensive in these areas and the cost of developing new housing could be less expensive- thus providing more market-rate affordable housing, and for projects building more than 20 units, 12.5% of construction will be MPDUs.

Greater zoning flexibility allows for more housing options.

Introducing building types across all zones allows for development of small detached houses on small lots in areas zoned for mixed-use, townhouse or multi-family units. This does not increase the density within these zones but allows for a smaller scale detached house – a housing type not seen much within the County but becoming more popular with older adults and young couples as these units are typically more affordable.

In a similar fashion, for MPDU optional method development in the Rural Residential and Residential zones, the minimum lot size per unit has been slightly reduced while the percentage of open space required has been increased. The density of such development has not changed, but the reduced lot size allows for greater flexibility in siting and construction while the increase in open space allows for a greater buffer area around new development.