

MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Kinsey O'Shea

DATE: April 12, 2024

SUBJECT: Small Lot Residential Zoning Ordinance Amendment

There was a public input meeting held on March 27, 2024, at 5:30 PM to review and discuss the Small Lot Residential Zoning Ordinance amendment. There were a number of attendees. Notes from the meeting are attached.

ATTACHMENTS:

Public Meeting Notes March 27, 2024

Public Meeting: Small Lot Residential Zoning Ordinance Amendment

March 27, 2024

5:30 pm

Blacksburg Motor Company Building

400 South Main Street

Blacksburg VA

- An attendee noted that nothing west of the bypass was included in the map and asked if they wanted to utilize the district, would they first have to rezone to R-4?
- An attendee asked if a property is rezoned from R-4 to Planned Residential (PR), but remains unbuilt, does the previous R-4 still count, or is it the unbuilt PR.
- An attendee noted that a developer could buy up R-4 lots in a neighborhood to meet the 2-acre minimum standards, and now doesn't have to jump through any hoops for development. They noted that this takes away neighborhood and community input, and that the process has people feeling left out and this makes neighborhoods uncomfortable.
- An attendee asked if the developments will be single-family or student residences.
- An attendee asked how this zoning change keeps people from being priced out. They noted the vision is for more affordable development, and pointed out that the Town uses Echols Village as an example of the type of development, but a large percentage of that neighborhood is rental, not owner-occupied. They stated that if the price point on these new developments is right, the lower occupancy of 2 unrelated people won't make a difference and they'll become investment properties anyway.
- An attendee asked what constituted affordable development.
- An attendee asked how the Town can ensure that these developments are aimed toward the right market, and not turn into student or investment properties.
- An attendee noted that over a third of the owners at Echols Village are out-of-town owners.
- An attendee noted that the impervious surface percentage of these dense developments can be really high and cause stormwater and runoff problems.
- An attendee asked how many potential unrelated occupants could live in the 2-acre area, based on density calculations.
- An attendee asked if this was an amendment for all of R-4 or just parts of it.
- An attendee stated that they had a house in McBryde and wondered how this amendment would affect them and their property. They noted that most of the housing in McBryde is overoccupied student rentals. Each of the 3 student homes on the block has 6 students living in it. They stated that it seems that no one is doing any enforcement. The attendee noted that since this will be allowing more people, it would be even worse. They noted that they know homeowners who have left the neighborhood because of the lifestyle conflicts with student neighbors.
- An attendee noted that they live near one of the eligible areas, and wondered how to get ahead of potential development to voice concern over the possible extension of a street.

- An attendee was concerned that there aren't sidewalks in some of the areas where eligible properties exist, and that this will be a problem for more density. They were also concerned about the possible connection from Eastview Terrace to Hubbard Street through the Lincoln Lane ROW. They were concerned that people don't drive slowly enough for the current level of density and activity.
- An attendee noted that when 2-acre parcels become available in these neighborhoods that the Town should purchase them for neighborhood parks. They noted that some of these areas are becoming very urbanized without adequate park space, and that the Town should be talking to these property owners to purchase these properties.
- An attendee asked if someone could purchase together 2 acres, demolish existing structures, and then build more densely.
- An attendee asked why there were two options, instead of a range of lot sizes and regulations. They also asked how someone would develop more density in R-4, but not with this district.
- An attendee asked if someone could develop like this today, if this ordinance amendment isn't approved.
- An attendee asked how someone would go about purchasing multiple lots for development, and also asked if someone could speak out against one of these potential developments.
- An attendee asked if Virginia law would allow a restriction to require owner-occupancy.
- An attendee noted that everyone in the room was older, and that the thing missing from the town's population is younger people who can afford to live here. They noted that if the town continues to prevent young people living here then the town will suffer, and the town will lose vibrancy in the long term. They noted that this ordinance does need to find a way to limit occupancy. They also noted that there shouldn't be any minimum lot sizes, and that most townhomes around town are on lots approximately 1900 sf. They noted the cost of construction is too high, and that there are lots around Blacksburg that are less than 3000 sf.
- An attendee stated that the intent of this change is noble, but wondered if something achievable can actually be created.
- An attendee noted that most of the PRs lately have been advertised for students.
- An attendee noted that too often homes up for sale go to investment properties, even when the seller wants to sell to families.
- An attendee noted that some of these issues could be addressed in HOA covenants, like senior living.
- A number of attendees agreed that owner-occupancy requirement would solve the problem.
- An attendee asked if there was a requirement for open space.
- An attendee noted that once you factor in streets and sidewalks, a developer would never get the full calculated density out of a parcel.
- An attendee wanted to discuss public facility capacity, especially sanitary sewer. They noted that the models have been based on R-4 density, and not increased density, and wondered if any of that had been taken into consideration with the recent CIP projects for sanitary sewer upgrades.
- An attendee noted that the maximum footprint still allows for a very big home to be constructed, and therefore they won't be affordable.

- An attendee asked what success models from other jurisdictions the consultant used in preparing the ordinance language. They wondered if other jurisdictions were able to achieve the goals of the development model or not.
- An attendee asked if any of the model communities were university towns with owner occupancy issues.
- An attendee asked what kind of timeframe the amendment is on, and that the timeline for this change seems quick.
- An attendee asked if accessory dwelling units would be allowed, and that it would be one way to ensure owner-occupancy and help affordability.
- An attendee was concerned that developers might use this as a way to develop in floodplains which is bad for consumers/homeowners. They wondered what the Town is doing to prevent this.
- An attendee noted that they were surprised to see that there is no parking requirement, and wondered if the thought was to leave it up to the market to decide. They noted that other successful models require 1-1.5 spaces per unit, but that it can be on-street. They noted that communal lots/walking streets/alleys like Shadowlake Village is another good model for parking requirements.
- An attendee asked if the occupancy standard could be written to prohibit unrelated individuals from living together at all.
- An attendee noted that Chris Hurst (former delegate) was trying to push a bill that had development restrictions, and wondered what happened with the bill.
- An attendee noted that the Knob Hill development is supposed to be all owner-occupied, and wondered how this was achieved.
- An attendee noted that if this ordinance amendment is approved, then this sort of dense development will be by-right and would bypass all of the public process.
- Several attendees noted that code enforcement is the issue.
- An attendee stated that the desire of the town needs to be fulfilled, not just visionary statements.
- An attendee asked how the Town would enforce occupancy, if there is so much trouble with enforcement already.
- An attendee noted that the meeting was publicized on Facebook 12 days ago, and that re-advertising / reposting would have been helpful.