

## **ZORC Report**

The purpose of the coverage study is to determine reasonable coverage limits that would protect neighborhoods from very large houses in the future while still allowing reasonable sized houses for today's market. Coverage determines how much of a lot can be covered by structures and driveways. Therefore, controlling coverage has a direct impact on the size of the footprint of houses, garages and driveways. The County Board directed the Zoning Ordinance Review Committee (ZORC) and staff to analyze options for limiting the impacts of the one-family detached house development on existing neighborhoods. Based on the direction from the County Board, ZORC has developed the following recommendation.

## **ZORC Report to the Planning Commission on Single Family Residential Lot Coverage**

Report Date: February 4, 2004

ZORC Chair: G. Procanick

### **Summary**

The County Board tasked ZORC with reviewing current zoning practice with respect to lot coverage as part of an overall study that included the impact of building height, required lot widths, and pipe-stem lot requirements on single-family residential neighborhoods. The overall goal is to recommend standards that would minimize the impact of homes that deviate significantly in form (“mansions”) from existing homes in a neighborhood. The affected zoning ordinance districts for these studies are the R-5, R-6, R-8, R-10, and R-20 districts.

Issues identified by the community concerning “mansions”) include perceived loss of space, bulky and incongruous buildings that are incompatible with the neighborhood character, loss of separation between houses, visual intrusions, loss of trees, and more area devoted to parking and driveways. Coverage issues include what is physically built and how it is massed on a residential lot, perceptions of compatibility, and building character. The proposed coverage recommendations that follow are the result of over three years of study and discussions.

The current Zoning Ordinance stipulates a maximum of 56% coverage for all residential lots in the five zoning districts studied. The proposed recommendations focus on form as much as overall lot coverage. This is reflected in building footprint size caps in each district and incentives to encourage homes with detached garages and front porches, a form that remains a predominant and preferred building type in much of Arlington.

### **Methodology**

The coverage recommendations set out in this report were arrived at using three different methodologies. The first included an exhaustive review of possible building variations on standard lots in each of the five zoning districts and an informal market survey of homes typically constructed in each of those districts. Initial recommendations were developed based on this review.

The second method involved a statistical analysis of a sample of 372 properties, representing approximately 1.5 percent of the total lots in each of the five affected districts. The database of 372 properties was drawn from several sources, including 1) properties that had recently undergone new construction and had been issued building permits; 2) properties identified by citizens as having large houses; and 3) a sample of properties from different neighborhoods chosen as being representative of their districts.

Preliminary recommendations were developed based upon the first two methods. However, ZORC members expressed some concern over the representativeness of the database of 372 properties, and County staff undertook additional research. As a result, these recommendations have since been slightly refined based upon a third methodology, which involved a comprehensive analysis by County Staff of over 26,500 residential lots from around the county in the five residential zoning districts under study. In general, 90% of all developed lots analyzed would remain in compliance under the proposed recommendations.

### **Recommendations for Coverage Determination**

As part of its effort to set out what constitutes lot coverage, ZORC considered the current items included in the determination of coverage to evaluate whether the definition of coverage should be modified. Tables 1 and 2 present ZORC's recommendations for items proposed to be included and excluded, respectively, in the definition of coverage. In evaluating each item, ZORC considered whether the item was currently included in the coverage determination, and the ability of County government to enforce inclusion of the item. Most of the items recommended for inclusion in coverage in Table 1 are presently part of the County's coverage determination. Furthermore, all of the items require either a building permit or a zoning review, and consequently provide a mechanism for enforcement.

### **Recommended Proposed Coverage Percentage and Caps.**

Table 3 sets out ZORC's recommendations for coverage maximums, by zoning district. The coverage permitted under these recommendations would vary not only by district but would also distinguish between properties with detached garages and front porches. The intent of these additional distinctions is to encourage and reward building forms compatible with Arlington neighborhoods, in response to community concerns raised regarding some of the infill and renovation projects considered to be in conflict with neighborhood character. The specific coverage percentages selected are intended to ensure that Arlington homeowners remain able to renovate and expand properties while constraining a small proportion of properties which reflect particularly high coverage percentages.

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Total Lot Coverage** This is coverage that includes specific items as "coverage" and excludes other items. The proposed list of included and excluded items is provided in Tables 1 and 2.

**Standard Size Lots** The following are standard size lots in each of the five zoning districts studied: R-5 -- 5,000 sf; R-6 -- 6,000 sf; R-8 -- 8,000 sf; R-10 -- 10,000 sf; R-20 -- 20,000 sf.

**Main Building** This is the main house on the residential lot.

**Main Building Footprint (on standard size lots)** The recommended percentage and square footage for main building footprint in each zoning district is based on an analysis of standard size lots including what has been the trend and what was historically built in each district. The table indicates the percentage of existing lots that would be in compliance should the Zoning Ordinance be amended in accordance with the recommendations.

**Main Building Cap** The Main Building Cap is associated with oversized lots, i.e., lots that are larger than the standard size lot for that district. This cap equals 1.2 times the Main Building Footprint (for a standard size lot) in each respective zoning district. The cap reflects what has been the trend and what was historically built in each district. The table indicates the percentage of existing lots that would be in compliance should the Zoning Ordinance be amended in accordance with the recommendations.

**Detached Garage and Front Porch Incentives** The Total Lot Coverage allowance increases 5 percentage points if a detached garage is included in the residential lot. The Main Building Footprint and Total Lot Coverage may increase up to an additional 3 percentage points if a front porch is included with the Main Building, but only to the extent of front porch area.

**Non-Conforming Uses/Use Permits** These recommendations are not intended to apply to affected community swimming pools and churches in residential districts.

**Front Porch** Roofed, but open-sided and incompletely walled living area contiguously attached to the frame and to the front of a house with an area of at least 60 s.f. The front porch generally incorporates the formal entrance to a home and enhances approachability by extending laterally along the house frontage. The area of any wrap-around or side porch would not be included as part of a coverage bonus in Table 3.

### **Next Steps**

ZORC's efforts should be regarded as just one of a number of steps in a process that balances widely held community expectations with individual property rights. Review and comment of key County staff on these recommendations is needed, including from the County Attorney, Zoning Administrator, Director of

Community Planning, Housing and Development, and County Manager. Board of Zoning Appeals review should also be considered if deemed appropriate. A final Staff report is also needed.

County staff has already held a number of briefings, engaged in dialogues with the community, and has solicited general feedback on this issue. The next steps will require further public outreach to specifically test ZORC recommendations through a community process that informs, affords a straightforward means of determining the impact of the proposed recommendations on individual properties, and offers ample opportunity for full public discussions to ensure a fair hearing for all interested Arlington citizens.

The outreach process needs to be well defined including dates for public forums with adequate time for analyzing community comments. This process should provide information on homeowner options in the event that a property is determined to be in noncompliance under the recommendations, including an appeals process such as through the Board of Zoning Appeals. What follows is a list of options for possible consideration in a developing a community outreach process. This list is for information only based on ZORC discussions and does not constitute a recommendation.

- County Board Work sessions.
- Civic Federation meeting.
- Civic Association notification.
- Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee meeting.
- Session with Northern Virginia Building Industry Association.
- Set up a special County Web Site for Coverage.
- Town Meetings by the Planning Commission or others.
- Newspaper Articles.
- Mailings to all residents/owners including the “Citizen”.
- Contact homeowners who may be in non-compliance with the proposal.
- Establish a “Hot-Line” for homeowners to call with questions and for assistance in determining whether specific property would be in compliance with the recommendation.

**TABLE 1**  
**ZORC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ITEMS INCLUDED IN COVERAGE DETERMINATION**

	<b>Preliminary Staff Position</b>	<b>Included in Current Definition of Coverage?</b>	<b>Building Permit Req'd?</b>	<b>Zoning Review Req'd?</b>
<b>Included Items – Total Lot Coverage</b>				
Main Buildings (See below for details of main bldg coverage)	<b>Agree</b>	Yes	Req'd	Req'd
Garages	<b>Agree</b>	Yes	Req'd	Req'd
Accessory Structures (sheds, gazebos, other detached structures w/min. floor area of 150 sf)	<b>Agree</b>	Yes	Req'd	Req'd
Paved or Unpaved parking pads and driveways	<b>Agree</b>	Yes	Req'd	Req'd
Pergolas	<b>Agree</b>	Yes, if paved floor	Req'd	Req'd
Swimming pools	<b>Agree</b>	Yes, if in-ground	Req'd	Req'd
<b>Included Items - Main Building Coverage</b>				
Bay windows w/floor space	<b>Agree</b>	Yes	Req'd	Req'd
Chimneys	<b>Agree</b>	Yes		
Covered porches	<b>Agree</b>	Yes	Req'd	Req'd
Decks supported by posts and w/floor 4' or higher	<b>Disagree</b>	No	Req'd	Not Req'd
Cantilevered decks w/ horizontal projection 4' or more	<b>Disagree</b>	No	Req'd	Not Req'd
Breezeways	<b>Agree</b>	Yes		

**TABLE 2**  
**ZORC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ITEMS EXCLUDED IN COVERAGE DETERMINATION**

	<b>Preliminary Staff Position</b>	<b>Included in Current Definition of Coverage?</b>	<b>Building Permit Req'd?</b>	<b>Zoning Review Req'd?</b>
<b>Items To Be Excluded From Lot Coverage</b>				
Tents and other temporary structures	<b>Agree</b>	No	Req'd	Not Req'd
A/C units and/or compressor w/ or w/out foundation	<b>Agree</b>	No	Not Req'd	Not Req'd
Decks less than 4' in height	<b>Agree</b>	No	Req'd	Not Req'd
Cantilevered decks w/ horizontal projection 4' or less	<b>Agree</b>	No	Req'd	Not Req'd
Ground level patios (concrete/brick/stone)	<b>Agree</b>	No	Not Req'd	Not Req'd
Steps and stoops	<b>Agree</b>	No	Req'd	Not Req'd
Outside bsmt steps/areaways/from ground to bsmt	<b>Agree</b>	No	Req'd	Not Req'd
Walkways	<b>Agree</b>	No	Req'd	Not Req'd
Play equipment	<b>Agree</b>	No	Not Req'd	Not Req'd
Picnic tables	<b>Agree</b>	No	Not Req'd	Not Req'd
Benches	<b>Agree</b>	No	Not Req'd	Not Req'd
Barbecue ovens	<b>Agree</b>	No		
Other outdoor furniture	<b>Agree</b>	No	Not Req'd	Not Req'd
Hot tubs	<b>Agree</b>	No	Req'd	Not Req'd

**Table 3**  
**Recommended Proposed Coverage Percentage and Caps**

	<b>R-5</b>	<b>R-6</b>	<b>R-8</b>	<b>R-10</b>	<b>R-20</b>
<b>Lot Coverage</b>					
All lots  Note: Total lot coverage may increase by an amount equal to the footprint of the front porch area, but not to exceed 3% of the total lot area.	45%  Approximately 90% of all existing R-5 lots would be in compliance with this proposed standard.	40%  Approximately 95% of all existing R-6 lots would be in compliance with this proposed standard.	35%  Approximately 92% of all existing R-8 lots would be in compliance with this proposed standard.	32%  Approximately 90% of all existing R-10 lots would be in compliance with this proposed standard.	20%  Approximately 78% of all existing R-20 lots would be in compliance with this proposed standard.
Total Lot Coverage w/ detached garage (subject to a potential increase of up to 3 percentage points for the front porch area)	50%	45%	40%	37%	25%
<b>Main Building</b>					
Main Buildings On Standard Size Lots	34%  Approximately 96% of all existing R-5 lots would be in compliance with this standard.	30%  Approximately 97% of all existing R-6 lots would be in compliance with this standard.	25%  Approximately 90% of all existing R-8 lots would be in compliance with this standard.	25%  Approximately 94% of all existing R-10 lots would be in compliance with this standard.	16%  Approximately 90% of all existing R-20 lots would be in compliance with this standard.
Main Building Footprint -- On Standard Sized and Buildable Undersized Lots	1700 sf	1800 sf	2000 sf	2500 sf	3200 sf
Main Buildings (with up to an additional 3 percentage points for front porch on standard sized lots)	37%	33%	28%	28%	19%
Main Building Footprint -- On Standard Sized and Buildable Undersized Lots with front porches	1850 sf	1980 sf	2240 sf	2800 sf	3800 sf
Main Buildings Caps For Oversized Lots	2040 sf [2200 sf with front porch]	2160 sf [2376 sf with front porch]	2400 sf [2688 sf with front porch]	3000 sf [3360 sf with front porch ]	3840 sf [4560 sf with front porch]

**Coverage Hotline:**

The County established a coverage hotline to receive comments and to answer questions citizens may have concerning coverage study. The number is 703.228.4793. Please leave your question with your name, phone number, and mailing address. Staff will call back to answer the questions.