

On September 5, 2023, the City rolled out summaries (but not the actual language) of its proposed comprehensive rewrite of the City's zoning code, Zoning for Housing. Nowhere in the 30-page document does it explain why these changes are intrinsically interconnected and unsuited for standalone consideration.

While the City maintains the “Zoning for Housing/Housing for All” tagline, the proposal doesn't mention the City's previously expressed goals of expanding housing production and affordability or addressing past and current barriers to equal housing access. By the City's own estimate, these “reforms” will do little to solve housing affordability. Instead, they would create more favorable conditions for developers of luxury housing, and lead to increased gentrification. We are not opposed to fair zoning reform when it is a proven remedy for a defined problem with tangible public benefits. Despite the proposal failing to meet this simple test, we attempted to find areas where we might be able to find common ground.

**Proposed Bonus Height Zoning Text Amendment:** The Coalition for a Livable Alexandria, Inc. (CLA) supports the decision to withdraw this amendment from the overall proposal.

**Historic Development Patterns:** CLA is unable to support this initiative in its current state. It lacks necessary detail and has many possible unintended consequences; however, we are open to reconsideration given legislative specificity, changes, or amendments.

**Residential Multi-family (RMF) Zone Analysis:** CLA opposes this sweeping initiative. As proposed, nearly every neighborhood could be considered “medium or higher density,” terms undefined by the City. The “specific locations” the City mentions could cover everywhere else. With this vague language, almost any area of Alexandria could be designated an RMF district, with unchallengeable by-right development of high-rise multifamily housing and commercial uses that currently, and wisely, require a special use permit.

**Industrial Zone Initiative:** CLA is unable to support the Industrial Zone Initiative in its current state. There are too many unknowns and potential adverse impacts. Chief among these: environmental concerns, unrestricted by-right development, and the likelihood of driving up costs and forcing existing smaller businesses to relocate outside of the City, thereby shifting an even greater share of the tax burden to residents.

**Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs):** CLA conditionally supports the initiative, if the City uses additional density in the CDDs to build additional affordable housing. It would make sense to evaluate the ultimate buildout of the CDD at the initial approval stage. There needs to be legislative language specifying that the additional density be used only (or at least primarily) for affordable housing, rather than using a small number of additional affordable units to justify the construction of many more luxury units.

**Expansion of Transit Oriented Development:** CLA is unable to support this proposal without substantial clarifications or amendments. Significant stretches of two of the designated transit corridors are flanked by residential neighborhoods. Unilateral changes to existing negotiated area plans need to incorporate and address residents' concerns regarding adequate infrastructure and sufficient off- and on-street parking. We are also concerned about unrestricted by-right development, and the interaction with RMF designations.

**Office to Residential Conversions:** CLA conditionally supports this, with reservations. While converting vacant or uncompetitive office buildings to residential use may be a good idea, there is no known evidence to support the notion that these conversions are economically viable other than as high-end luxury units, which would drive up adjacent and neighboring land costs, fostering gentrification and class exclusivity. We hope to see mitigating language in the final legislation.

**Townhouse Zones:** CLA is unable to support this initiative in its current state because it lacks necessary detail and has many possible unintended consequences. While we do support the elimination of obvious anomalies in the zoning code, this plan could result in the destruction of many of the smaller townhouses that provide opportunities for first-time homeowners. Much of this demolition is likely to occur in the same four neighborhoods (Old Town, Parker-Gray, Del Ray, and Rosemont) that the City holds up as models elsewhere in the Zoning for Housing proposal.

**Expanding Housing Opportunities in Single-family Zones:** CLA opposes this initiative. As proposed, it maximizes developer profits to the detriment of neighbors and the community, imposes incompatible parking reductions, and will result in the demolition and redevelopment of numerous single-family homes, of which there is a shortage in Alexandria. Nothing in this initiative will make Alexandria more affordable. On the contrary, prices will soar.

**Combined 2023 Zoning for Housing Proposal:** CLA opposes the City's plan to adopt all these zoning initiatives in a single piece of legislation subject to an all-or-nothing vote. This combined approach will grant developers windfall profits and dramatically increase densification. It will gentrify neighborhoods with existing modest, older, affordable properties in favor of more expensive housing and few new affordable units. It will drastically reduce available parking, especially in the areas near transitways such as Duke and Beauregard Streets. It fails to enhance green space, protect the tree canopy, or improve Alexandria's overburdened infrastructure and schools. Finally, it will greatly expand by-right development, preventing residents from having a say in what is built.

The City provides no explanation why the remaining eight of the original nine proposed Zoning for Housing initiatives deviate from the alleged purpose of addressing housing affordability. It is difficult to decipher exactly what is being proposed, what effect the changes will have, or how they are interconnected. Alexandrians have a right to know how this proposal will contribute to livability and quality of life where they reside, in every neighborhood, for every housing type, as well for as the surrounding businesses and services they rely on. The City should take the time needed to consider these initiatives separately in a more deliberate and transparent way.