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AND ZONING APPEALS**

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MEMORANDUM

To: The Honorable Members of the Land Use and Transportation Committee
From: Justin A. Williams, Interim Executive Director
CC: Geoffrey Veale, Zoning Administrator
Date: October 14, 2025
Re: Council Bill No. 25-0064 – Zoning – Bulk and Yard Requirements Amendments
Position: No Objection; technical amendments suggested

NOTE: Due to timing constraints, this report was prepared by BMZA staff and has not been reviewed or voted upon by the full BMZA Board. The observations and recommendations herein represent staff analysis based on the Board's historic caseload and operational experience.

OVERVIEW

City Council Bill 25-0064 proposes to amend certain bulk and yard requirements in residential zoning districts by modifying Tables 8-401 and 9-401 of the Baltimore City Zoning Code. The amendments would:

- Increase maximum lot coverage by 10% across most residential districts (R-1A through R-4), and by 10-20% in higher-density districts (R-5 through R-8)
- Reduce minimum interior-side yard requirements by 5 feet across all applicable uses
- Reduce minimum corner-side yard requirements by 10 feet where applicable
- Reduce minimum rear yard requirements for rowhouses and multi-family dwellings in the R-8 district from 20 feet to 12 feet
- Reduce minimum lot area requirements per dwelling unit for multi-family developments

ANALYSIS

Impact on BMZA Caseload

BMZA staff has reviewed variance application data and concurs with the analysis presented in the Planning Commission's report: these proposed amendments would significantly reduce the number of variance applications that require BMZA review.

The intent of these amendments is to align bulk and yard regulations with historic trends in variance applications. When a substantial number of similar variances are granted for properties seeking relief from the same dimensional standards, it indicates that the Zoning Code may define a "standard" lot too narrowly. The proposed changes would create a broader definition of compliant development, meaning fewer properties would need to prove a "practical difficulty" exists (i.e., obtain a variance) in order to develop or improve a site.

Specifically, the proposed changes to bulk and yard regulations would:

- Remove the need to seek zoning relief for certain lot conditions that currently require variance approval
- Shorten development timelines by allowing more projects to proceed by-right rather than through the variance process
- Create a diversity of housing opportunities by making more lots developable without Board action
- Reduce barriers to homeownership and housing development by eliminating a procedural hurdle for common development scenarios

Based on BMZA's caseload data, staff anticipates these amendments would result in a meaningful reduction in variance applications related to lot coverage, side yard, and corner-side yard requirements in residential districts.

TECHNICAL AMENDMENTS

BMZA staff has identified the following typographical errors in the bill text that should be corrected before final passage:

1. Page 4, Line 21 (R-7 District, Multi-Family Dwelling, Maximum Lot Coverage)

The bill currently shows the maximum lot coverage for "Dwelling: Multi-Family" in the R-7 district as "[50%] 70%," indicating an increase from 50% to 70%. However, the current Zoning Code already permits 70% lot coverage for this use in the R-7 district. City Council may wish to clarify whether the intent was to increase this figure beyond 70%, or whether this represents a drafting error.

2. Page 5, Line 1 (R-9 District, Multi-Family Dwelling, Minimum Front Yard)

The bill text currently reads "45 or 65 feet 6" in the sixth column. The "6" should be formatted as a superscript footnote reference (i.e., "45 or 65 feet⁶") to properly reference footnote 6 at the bottom of the table.

The Planning Commission has already identified two additional technical corrections in their September 10, 2025 report, which BMZA staff supports.

For any questions regarding this report or to discuss these concerns further, please contact **Justin Williams** at justin.williams@baltimorecity.gov or **(410) 396-4301**