


FROM	NAME & TITLE	CHRIS RYER, DIRECTOR	CITY of BALTIMORE MEMO	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING 8 TH FLOOR, 417 EAST FAYETTE STREET		
	SUBJECT	CITY COUNCIL BILL #25-0064 / ZONING – BULK AND YARD REQUIREMENTS – AMENDMENTS		

TO

The Honorable President and
Members of the City Council
City Hall, Room 400
100 North Holliday Street

DATE: September 10, 2025

At its regular meeting of August 28, 2025, the Planning Commission considered City Council Bill #25-0064, for the purpose of amending certain bulk and yard requirements in residential zoning districts.

In its consideration of this Bill, the Planning Commission reviewed the attached staff report, which recommended approval of City Council Bill #25-0064, along with two technical amendments offered verbally during the meeting, and adopted the following resolution, with six members being present (five in favor):

RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission concurs with the recommendation of its departmental staff, adopts the findings and equity analysis outlined in the staff report, with consideration for testimony and facts presented in the meeting, and recommends that City Council Bill #25-0064 be **amended and approved** by the City Council, with the two amendments as follows:

- On page 2, in line 25, in the column for the R-1D District that reads “[20] 10 20 feet” should strike the extraneous “20” to read “[20] 10 ~~20~~ feet” to correct a typographical error; and
- On page 2, in line 17-18, in the column for the R-2 District that reads “[10] 5 feet 10” should strike the extraneous “10” to read “[10] 5 feet ~~10~~” to correct a typographical error.

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Eric Tiso, Division Chief, Land Use and Urban Design Division at 410-396-8358.

CR/ewt

attachment

cc: Ms. Nina Themelis, Mayor’s Office
The Honorable John Bullock, Council Rep. to Planning Commission
Ms. Rebecca Witt, BMZA
Mr. Geoffrey Veale, Zoning Administration
Ms. Stephanie Murdock, DHCD
Ms. Hilary Ruley, Law Dept.
Mr. Francis Burnszynski, PABC
Mr. Luciano Diaz, DOT
Ms. Nancy Mead, Council Services



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Jon Laria, Chair; Eric Stephenson, Vice Chair

STAFF REPORT



Chris Ryer
Director

August 7, 2025

REQUEST: City Council Bill #25-0064/ Zoning – Bulk and Yard Requirements – Amendments:
For the purpose of amending certain bulk and yard requirements in residential zoning districts.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

STAFF: Brandon Kanoy

INTRODUCED BY: Councilmember Gray

OWNER: Citywide

SITE/GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: This code amendment does not impact a single site, but applies citywide.

SUMMARY

- Modifies Table 8-401 (R-1A to R-4) by:
 - Adding an additional 10% to Maximum Lot Coverage across the table;
 - Reduces the required minimum interior-side yard by 5' for all uses; and
 - Reduces the required minimum Corner-side yard by 10' for all uses.
- Modifies Table 9-401 (R-5 to R-10) by:
 - No changes to the following single-family uses: Dwelling: Detached or Dwelling: Semi-Detached.
 - Lot Area requirement is reduced for Dwelling: Multi-Family.
 - Adding an additional 10% to Maximum Lot Coverage in R-5, 15% in R-6 and 20% in R-7 and R-8 for rowhomes and Dwelling: Multi-Family. R-9 and R-10 unchanged
 - Minimum Interior-Side Yard reduces by 5' for SFD Detached, Semi-Detached, and all other uses. Reduces by 5' (except where no yard is required, as applicable), for Dwelling: Multi-Family;
 - Minimum Corner-Side Yard reduces by 10', where applicable.
 - Minimum Rear Yard reduced for Rowhomes and Dwelling: Multi-Family in R-8 from 20' to 12' (i.e. 40% reduction).

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

The 2024 Comprehensive Master Plan for the City of Baltimore was enacted by Ordinance #24-426, dated December 2, 2024. The subject amendment impacts many aspects of the Comprehensive Master Plan, mainly including the Livable Places and Healthy Communities sections under the category of Policy Recommendations. Discussion of each of these aspects can be found in the following paragraphs of this report.

Livable Places – These amendments would assist with current efforts for production and preservation of housing stock, as it will make more empty lots developable. The amendment will also improve the ability for individuals to renovate/improve existing vacant structures. Changes to bulk and yard regulations remove the need to seek zoning relief for certain lot conditions, which will shorten development timelines, and create a diversity of housing opportunities. A greater supply of such development sites can help reduce acute demands for useable housing stock.

Healthy Communities – These proposed amendments may heighten the impact of historic underinvestment in green areas and open space throughout the City, especially in R-7 and R-8 zoning districts. Reduction in the required greenspace on individual lots means that lack of greenspace in shared spaces, such as the streetscape and parks, will be felt even more acutely by residents who lack greenspace the most. The potential reduction in greenspace in individual developments will likely hinder the ability of the Planning Department to reach goals outlined in documents such as the Climate Action Plan and other forward thinking environmental documents.

ANALYSIS

Background: The intent of these amendments to the zoning code is to largely align the relevant bulk and yard regulations with historic trends in applications to the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals (BMZA). Decisions from the BMZA are required to find that a “practical difficulty” exists with a property – a designation that shows a property cannot reasonably comply with the standard requirements to develop or improve a site. A substantial number of similar variances necessarily indicates that the zoning code may define a “standard” lot too narrowly. A change to the bulk and yard regulations will create a broader definition of the “standard” yards. Therefore this amendment, if approved, would mean fewer properties would need to prove a “practical difficulty” exists to develop or improve any subject property.

Equity:

- Impact: This amendment will necessarily be a trade-off between buildable area and required green area. A discussion of the relevant points is listed in this section.
 - The proposed changes to the zoning code could potentially reduce barriers to homeownership and housing development by allowing more lot coverage before a BMZA hearing is required.
 - Reductions to the minimum lot area required per-unit under the use of Dwelling: Multifamily will allow for more effective reuse/redevelopment of existing properties.
 - Reductions in the lot area requirements for Multi-Family Dwelling developments will allow for greater density and flexibility with existing lot constraints.
 - Reductions to the minimum rear yard dimensions for Multi-Family Dwellings will allow for greater utilization of space on existing lots.
 - R-7 and R-8 districts, which make up approximately 11% of the land area in the City (~7,850 acres), will see the greatest gain in buildable area, with a 20% increase in permissible coverage for rowhome development.
 - Greater allowed lot coverage can permit larger structures to meet modern expectations for household space.
 - An unintended consequence of this proposal is the reduction of required greenspace on sites, especially in higher-density residential districts which allow moderate/low density housing developments.
 - The blanket increase of 20% allowed lot coverage in R-7 and R-8 districts necessarily reduces potential greenspace in districts that historically lack robust green areas and tree canopies.
 - This is especially apparent in Rowhouse developments which have no requirement for side yards. Applicable rear yard requirements for rowhomes do not compensate for the lack of side yards, and in fact this amendment reduces the rear yard requirement.

- Lack of greenspace can diminish desirability of properties, especially for new residents.
 - Increased impervious surface will also increase the volume of stormwater runoff that needs to be treated during major and minor storm events.
 - Given that many redevelopments already struggle to effectively implement stormwater management on-site, this change could push more developments to pursue fee-in-lieu instead of infrastructure implementation.
- Engagement:
 - Community Planners have notified various community groups that the Planning Commission will host consideration of this item.
 - Internal Operations:
 - The increase in permitted lot coverage will reduce staff time dedicated to BMZA review.
 - Cases which formerly would come for BMZA review would now be permissible by-right.
 - The increase in permitted lot coverage will increase staff time dedicated to improvement and maintenance of greenspace on sites during and after development.
 - Sustainability experts on staff recommend consideration of a standard adopted by multiple comparable cities such as Denver, Seattle, and Virginia Beach.
 - Instead of a maximum lot coverage, sustainability experts recommend consideration of a new standard (not currently proposed, but being workshopped by staff) which would implement a Green Area Ratio (GAR) or other similar standard for new residential development.
 - GAR standards outline a minimum area and quality standard of greenspace for developments. Current Baltimore City standards only require a minimum area.
 - Any change to standards (such as implementing a GAR or other kind of greening requirement) would take reasonable staff time to develop, as no proposals for such changes are prepared

Notification: The Planning Department used GovDelivery to notify over 17,100 residents and stakeholders of this action.



Chris Ryer
Director