



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Rebecca Witt, Executive Director, BMZA
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	March 5, 2025
SUBJECT	City Council Bill 25-0016 – Zoning Code – Modifications

Position: No objection.

BILL SYNOPSIS

The bill would increase flexibility in lot width and setback reductions, parking requirements, and alley width regulations, expand minor variance eligibility for older nonconforming structures, create a new minor variance category for single-family dwellings, and allow approvals by either the Zoning Administrator or the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

At its General Meeting on February 18, 2025, the Board voted 5-0 to submit a report to the City Council expressing no objection to CCB 25-0016 – Zoning Code – Modifications.

In its consideration of this Bill, the Board reviewed the attached staff report.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

AMENDMENTS

None.

BMZA Staff Report

City Council Bill #25-0016 Zoning Code – Minor Variances – Modifications:

FOR the purpose of amending provisions of the Baltimore City Zoning Code relating to minor variances.

BMZA STAFF RECOMMENDATION: No objection.

SPONSORS: Council Member Schleifer

ANALYSIS:

This bill amends the Baltimore City Zoning Code by modifying the criteria for minor variances.

Key changes include:

- Increasing the allowable reduction in minimum lot width and required yards/setbacks from 10% to 15% (or from 2 feet to 5 feet, whichever is less).
- Allowing a 10% reduction in required off-street parking spaces and modifying regulations on alley width for parking access.
- Expanding minor variance eligibility for nonconforming structures over 50 years old, permitting up to a 15% cumulative increase in bulk and density.
- Introducing a new minor variance category for single-family dwellings in residential districts.
- Allowing either the Zoning Administrator or the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals to approve minor variances.

In practice, Zoning Administration does not issue any minor variances; that office forwards all variance requests to BMZA. This bill will have no practical effect unless this process changes.

Both major and minor variance appeals require adherence to the same variance approval standards; the only difference between the two is the venue. If an Appellant cannot demonstrate uniqueness and practical difficulty, along with the rest of the approval standards, the minor variance cannot be legally approved, regardless of who approves it. Therefore, the only difference in outcome should be that Zoning Administration could hypothetically process these appeals more quickly and without a public hearing.

This bill could speed up the process for certain types of variances by allowing the Zoning Administrator's Office to process these appeals, if the Zoning Administrator's Office changes its practice and actually does consider them.



Rebecca L. Witt
Executive Director