



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Alice Kennedy, Commissioner, Housing and Community Development
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	November 19, 2025
SUBJECT	25-0066 Zoning – Housing Options and Opportunity

Position: Favorable

BILL SYNOPSIS

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reviewed City Council Bill 25-0066 Zoning – Housing Options and Opportunity for the purpose of amending certain provisions of the Baltimore City Zoning Code to promote increased development of low-density multi-family dwellings in certain residential districts; striking residential conversion standards for single-family dwellings into multi-family dwellings; amending certain permitted and conditional uses; amending certain bulk and yard standards; and defining certain terms.

If enacted, City Council Bill 25-0066 would establish a new land use category; *Dwelling: Multi-Family (Low Density)* and permit its use, by right, in residential districts R-1-A through R-8. This new permitted use would allow for multi-family dwellings of up to 4 units when all other requirements, such as minimum enclosed gross floor area, have been met. This Bill would also permit, by right, conversions of already existing single-family homes into multi-family homes of up to 4 units, with the applicable number of units determined by the interior square footage of the building. If approved, this Bill will take effect on the 30th day following its enactment.

BACKGROUND

Housing instability is a major problem for Baltimore City residents, many of whom are cost-burdened and potentially subject to eviction and foreclosure. An estimated 54% of City residents cannot comfortably afford the average \$1500 1-bedroom apartment and 30% of homeowner households also experience housing cost burdens. These financial challenges contribute to Baltimore having an eviction rate 1.7 times higher than the Maryland average and 2.3 times higher than the national average. The gap between wages and the cost of housing is particularly stark for some of our most essential workers. For example, according to data provided by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, half of Baltimore's retail and food service workers cannot afford a 1-

bedroom apartment within the City. That figure drops to 40% for secretaries or administrators and only 35% of maintenance and repair workers can handle those costs without being unduly burdened. Similar figures are shared with other critical workforce areas. When adjusted for the average \$1700 2-bedroom apartment, even fewer can manage.

It is important to note that these figures rely on HUD data that includes not just Baltimore City, but the six surrounding counties that make up the Baltimore-Towson-Columbia Metropolitan Statistical Area: Baltimore, Anne Arundel, Carroll, Harford, Howard, and Queen Anne's Counties. Drawing from that much broader region results in an 80% Area Median Household Income of \$104,200, which is the amount required to qualify for “Affordable” housing. In comparison, Baltimore City’s actual Area Median Household Income is just \$59,579. This results in nearly 3 out of 4 Baltimore City households being unable to afford even HUD-designated low-income housing.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

City Council Bill 25-0066 *Zoning – Housing Options and Opportunity* seeks to increase the supply of affordable housing in Baltimore City by ending single-family zoning and permitting the conversion of single-family homes into multi-family homes of up to 4 units in residential zoning districts R-1-A through R-8. Currently, multi-family housing is permitted in districts R-5 through R-10, with this Bill expanding that option to the lower density R-1-A through R-4 districts. Conditional Use Conversions of existing single-family homes into multi-unit homes is currently permitted in districts R-7 through R-10, with R-7 and R-8 requiring a City Council ordinance. These restrictions on conversions first began in 1999 with Ordinance #99-425, which changed the Zoning Code of the time to outright prohibit the conversion of single-family homes in the R-6 and less dense zones, and to require a conditional use approval through the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals in the denser residential zones. Successive City Council Ordinances continued to place further restrictions on such conversions until the comprehensive City-wide rezoning of 2017.

Removing these barriers to both new, lower density multi-family housing and the conversion of appropriately sized, existing single-family homes into multi-family housing could provide Baltimore with more naturally occurring affordable housing options. This would be made possible through increased density and the development of the often discussed “missing middle” of housing types that fall between detached single-family homes and larger apartment buildings with at least 5 (and often many more) units. This “missing middle,” exemplified by the *Multi-Family (Low Density)* category that this Bill creates, could offer greater affordability while maintaining both walkability and a more intimate setting than what can be offered by the highest density designations. This flexibility could also support greater homeownership and homeowner retention. For example, having a second, rental income generating unit can help an applicant qualify for a mortgage. Retention could be increased by giving homeowners the option of renovating and renting out space that is no longer needed. Greater possibilities for elder parents or grandparents to “age in place” with dignity and near family would also be made available.

Similar reform efforts are beginning to gain momentum across the Country. Announced in 2018 and fully implemented in 2020, Minneapolis Minnesota became the first major American City to

eliminate exclusively single-family zoning. When considered with other reform efforts, such as their elimination of parking minimums, data collected by Pew showed that from 2017 to 2022 Minneapolis increased its housing stock by 12% while rents grew by just 1%. Over the same period, the rest of Minnesota added only 4% to its housing stock while rents went up by 14%. Both Minneapolis and the rest of the state experienced population and household growth but despite increased demand, Minneapolis was able to limit rent growth by building more housing.

DHCD applauds the efforts of this administration to establish policies that support the creation of greater housing availability and affordability throughout the City. On its own, this Bill has the potential to help alleviate the significant shortage of attainable housing options suited for Baltimore's residents. When synergistically applied with the other, recently signed Bills within Mayor Scott's legislative housing package (such as the elimination of parking minimums, bulk and yard updates, and permitting "single stair" housing options) their combined efficacy could have an even greater effect to that end, mutually supporting their individual reform efforts. Furthermore, allowing more multi-family construction and conversions of already existing homes in a greater diversity of communities could help supply our workforce with the housing that they need and at a price point that works for them and their families.

DHCD already supports nearly all Conditional Use Conversions that come before the Council as part of the current Ordinance based approval process required within the R-7 and R-8 districts. We encourage such efforts so long as they are in the public interest and have not been deemed detrimental to public health, safety, or welfare. This Bill would help facilitate those projects without the time, money, and bureaucratic navigation required by the current system. Removing such barriers could increase the likelihood of returning presently vacant structures back to productive use and offering new housing options to communities throughout the City. These potential benefits would be felt in areas our agency already focuses on such as our Community Development Zones and Impact investment areas. For these reasons and more, DHCD requests a favorable report on City Council Bill 25-0066 *Zoning – Housing Options and Opportunity*.

FISCAL IMPACT

As drafted, this Bill would have minimal fiscal or administrative impact on DHCD.

AMENDMENTS

DHCD does not seek any amendments to this Bill at this time.

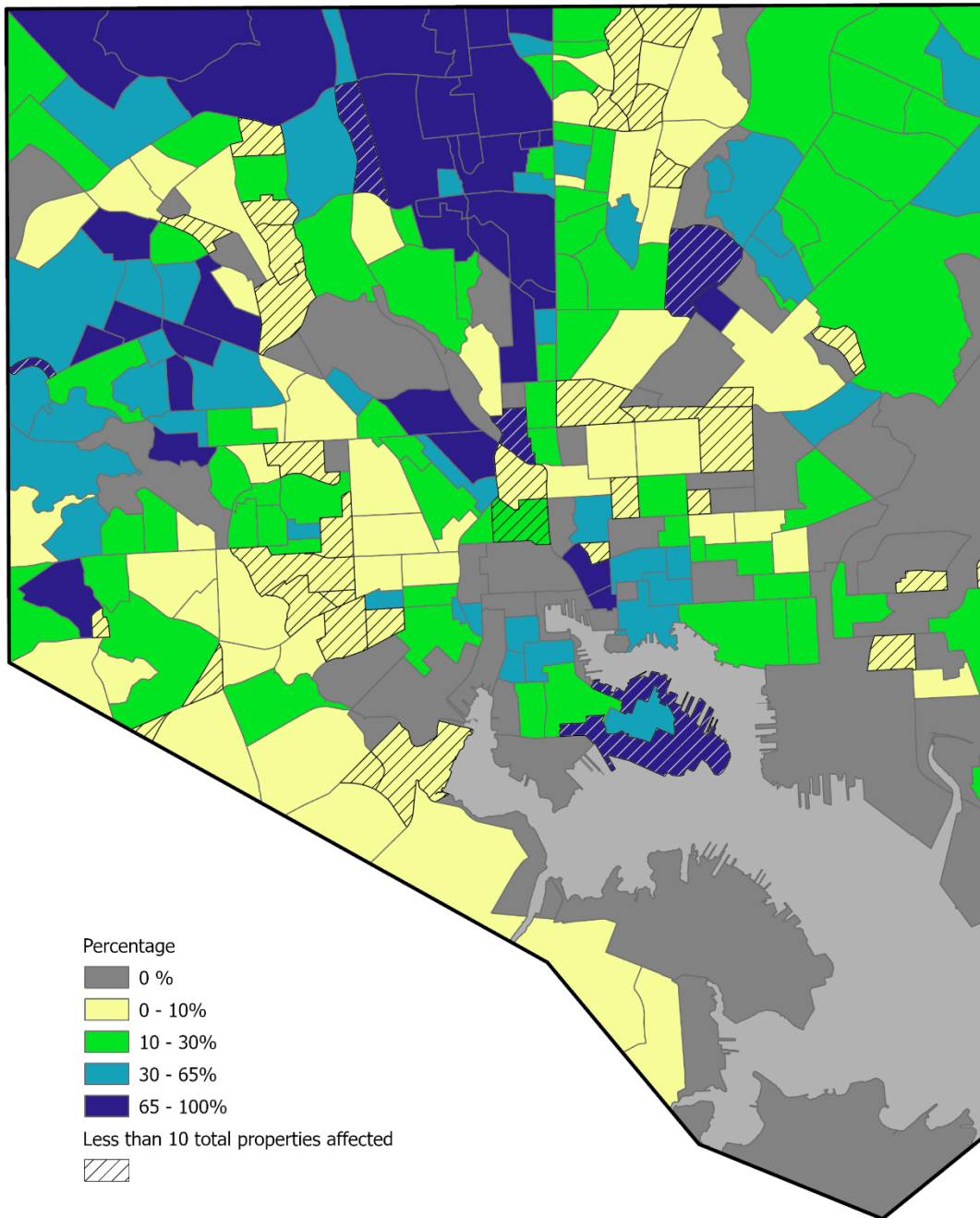
APPENDIX

DHCD has included below three maps of Baltimore City. These maps are broken down into recognized neighborhoods and show what percentage of their housing stock (in the R-1-A through R-8 designation) could potentially be applicable for 2, 3, and 4-unit conversions, based on qualifying minimum enclosed gross floor area. We have also included diagonal line shading to indicate neighborhoods wherein less than 10 individual homes would likely be impacted by the changes proposed within this legislation.

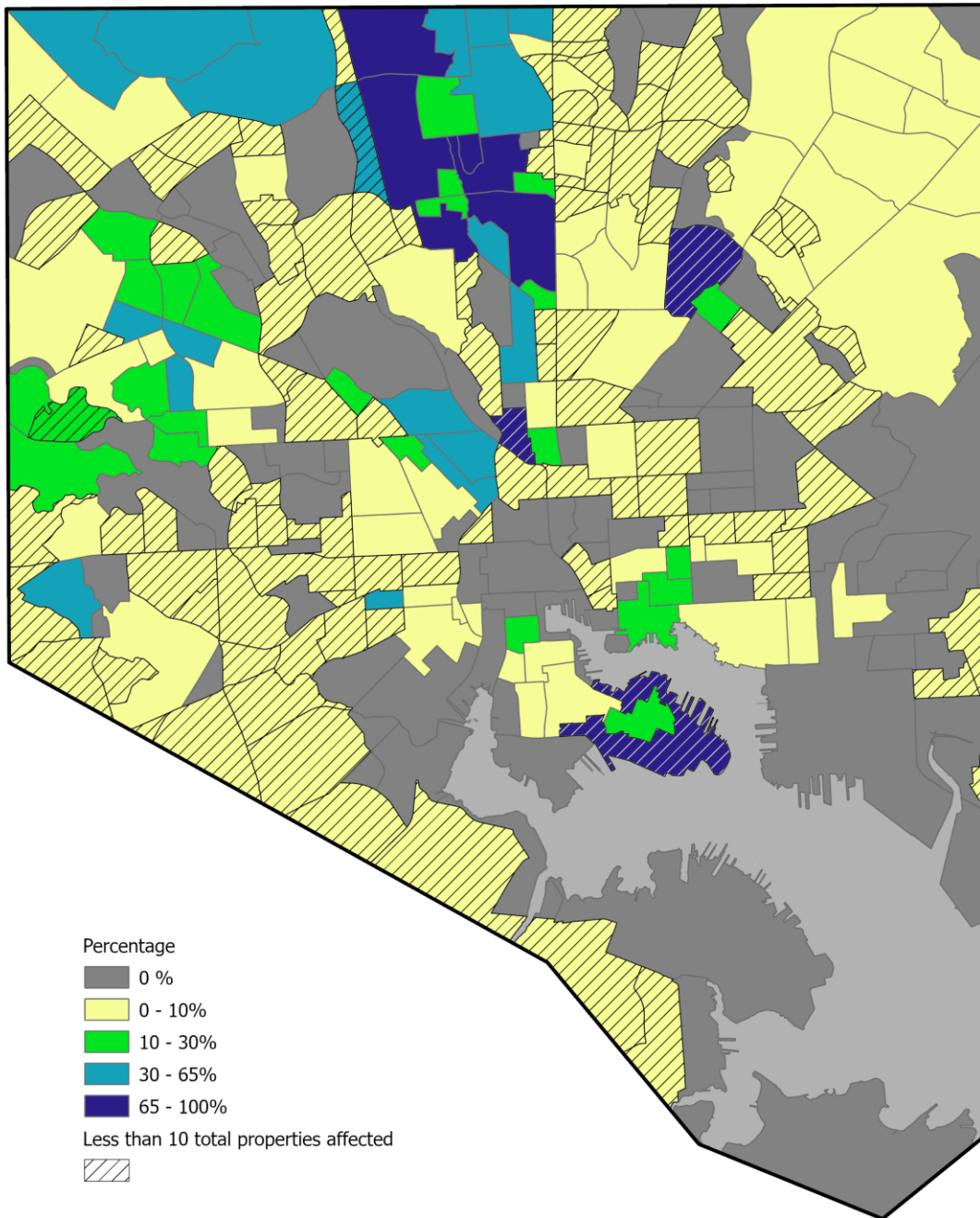
Note on data: There are geographic concentrations of properties where we do not get square footage from SDAT. DHCD used the following steps to generate estimates for missing square footage:

1. Gathered all properties in Zones R-1-A through R-8 with a DHCD use code that means a single-family dwelling.
2. For properties from #1 where structure area in SDAT data was null or zero, we then calculated the median value for all properties with data on the same block that also meet the criteria in #1 *OR* that have use codes designating them as multi-family residential but have a dwelling unit value of only 2 (strong likelihood of being a normal sized rowhouse that was subdivided and not a purpose built apartment that might be larger).
3. For properties that still have no area after #2 because nothing else on their block does either, we calculated median size for whole neighborhood but otherwise remained with same stipulations as in #2.
4. 2 entire neighborhoods were identified where properties still had no area after #3 (Langston Hughes and Darley Park). After consulting with a Neighborhood Development Officer, we used the median for the Pimlico Good Neighbors neighborhood for Langston Hughes, and the median for the 3100 block of Ravenwood Avenue in Four By Four for Darley Park due to comparable housing stock.

Percent of current single family residential dwellings
that will be eligible for conversion to 2 units in R-1 to R-8 zones, by neighborhood



Percent of current single family residential dwellings
that will be eligible for conversion to 3 units in R-1 to R-8 zones, by neighborhood



Percent of current single family residential dwellings
that will be eligible for conversion to 4 units in R-1 to R-8 zones, by neighborhood

