

**Memorandum**

To: Councilor Deb Crossley, Chair, Zoning and Planning Committee  
From: Councilor Lisle Baker  
Subject: #88-20, #30-20, #38-20, and #148-20: Proposed residential zoning ordinance revisions to be discussed on Monday, April 13 at the Committee – clarifying the proposed changes  
Date: April 10, 2020  
Cc: City Council, Barney Heath, Zachery LeMel, Planning Board, John Lojek, Alissa O. Giuliani, and Jonathan Yeo

As the Planning Department's April 3rd memorandum makes clear, there are many proposed changes to our residential zoning which will take time to understand. Also, unlike many past zoning ordinance changes responding to specific City Councilor concerns, this set of proposed revisions appears to represent a global change involving the Planning Department's vision of what Newton zoning should involve. That makes it important for the City Council, as the legislative body for the City, to understand these proposed revisions, and collectively decide if these changes are what we want, or whether the Council prefers something different.

It is therefore very helpful for the Planning Department to have prepared its April 3<sup>rd</sup> memo containing a comparison of the existing ordinance residential provisions with those proposed changes in the form of both maps and tables. (There is small error, however, in that the comparison table at the end of the April 3<sup>rd</sup> memo has old and new lots backwards – in other words the headings need to be reversed.) Also, the location of the existing SR-1, SR-2, and SR- 3 zones on the maps are similar, though not identical, to the proposed R1, R2, and R3 zones, especially for R2 which appears to absorb current R-3. Moreover, the dimensional controls are significantly different, for instance, for SR-1 and R1, as discussed below. Also, the Planning Department April 3<sup>rd</sup> memorandum provides current Floor Area Ratio limits, but does not compare those with the size of the house that can be constructed under those limits, nor the house size limits under the proposed ordinance.

To help understand the differences more easily, Councilor Wright and I have prepared the attached summary of our understanding of some key aspects for the R1 and R2 zones to complement the Planning Department's April 3<sup>rd</sup> memo. As an example, however, of the difference between our current and proposed ordinance, here are some major proposed revisions in moving from SR-1 to R1 for new home construction.

- Floor area ratio has been replaced by house size as a control on bulk. (Total floor area as a function of lot size will itself no longer matter, except as for setbacks, open space, height and other related dimensional controls.)
- The minimum lot size for a new house on a new SR1 lot would be reduced from 25000 to 7600 square feet.
- The minimum lot frontage required in SR1 would be reduced from 140 feet to 80 feet.
- On-site parking would no longer be required, relying on on-street parking year-round.

In addition to potentially increasing development opportunity on vacant lots, would these changes now provide an incentive to tear down older homes on smaller lots, combine them, and construct more expensive homes in their place? It would be unfortunate if the changes proposed would instead incentivize more demolition of older homes.

Here, then, are some comparisons of some of the important dimensional controls in the proposed R1 and R2 zones, including current and proposed, which may help inform the discussion on Monday the 13th at our Zoning and Planning Committee meeting. Thank you.

**Zoning Comparison Chart - Current and proposed dimensional limits  
that say what can be built on house lots  
R1 (includes SR-1 and some SR-2)**

Minimums unless noted	pre 1953		1953+		proposed	Notes
	SR-1	SR-2	SR-1	SR-2	R1	
Lot size sf	15,000	10,000	25,000	15,000	7600	tiny house lot: 6400 sf
Frontage	100'	80'	140'	100'	80'	
Front Setback	25'	25'	40'	30'	25'	
Side Setback	12.5'	7.5'	20'	15'	20'	
Rear Setback	25'	15'	25'	15'	40'	
Max lot coverage	35%	50%	30%	35%	25%	closest translation is the inverse of "usable open space"
max house size by right (and on min SR lot)	4950	4000	6500	4950	6000	In the case of current zoning, the maximum house size that can be constructed on a lot is limited by the usable floor area in proportion to the lot size, or Floor Area Ratio. The estimates assume the minimum lot size: FAR .26 on SR1 25K lot and .33 on 15K lot (pre 1953); FAR .33 on SR2 15K lot and .40 on 10K lot (pre 1953); R1 the house size is limited - the lot size doesn't matter
max house size on 7600 sf lot	3268	3344	3116	3192	6000	SR1 FAR .41 and .43 pre 1953; SR2 FAR .42 and .44 pre 1953
max special permit house size					7500	

**R2 (includes rest of SR-2 and all of SR-3)**

Minimums unless noted	pre 1953		1953+		proposed	Notes
	SR-2	SR-3	SR-2	SR-3	R2	
lot size sf	10,000	7,000	15,000	10,000	5300	tiny house lot: 3900 sf
Frontage	80'	70'	100'	80'	60'	
Front Setback	25'	25'	30'	30'	20'	
Side Setback	7.5'	15'	7.5'	10'	12.5'	
Rear Setback	15'	15'	15'	15'	30'	
Max lot coverage	50%	35%	35%	50%	30%	closest translation is the inverse of "usable open space"
max house size by right (and on min SR lot)	4000	3500	4950	4100	3500	In the case of current zoning, the maximum house size that can be constructed on a lot is limited by the usable floor area in proportion to the lot size, or Floor Area Ratio. The estimates assume the minimum lot size: FAR .33 on SR2 15K lot and .40 on 10K lot (pre 1953); FAR .41 on SR3 10K lot and .50 on 7K lot (pre 1953); R2 the house size is limited - the lot size doesn't matter
max house size on 5300 sf lot	2554	2650	2438	2554	3500	SR2 FAR .46 and .48 pre 1953; SR3 FAR .48 and .50 pre 1953
max special permit house size					6000	