

Staff Report

SMALL LOTS & INCREASING THE DIVERSITY OF HOUSING TYPES

June 23, 2020

BACKGROUND:

One of the City Council's Goals this year, is to "Increase the stock of diverse housing types for a variety of income levels through zoning, including:

- adjusting minimum lot area,
- multiple dwelling units on a lot, and
- accessory dwelling units."

The first task assigned for this goal is an evaluation of minimum lot size standards and multiple buildings on a lot within the City's Zoning Ordinance. This staff report also provides some preliminary data on what other Iowa communities are doing in this regard and a discussion of issues and approaches that could be used in relation to reduced minimum lot sizes. Limited background information regarding multiple buildings on a lot is included in the report. However, a more in-depth analysis of this topic will be included with the future task to evaluate accessory dwelling units.

Minimum lot sizes serve a variety of purposes within subdivision and zoning ordinances. As with most zoning standards, they first and foremost create predictability. Additionally, lot size relate to planning utility sizing in support of the intensity of intended development. The lot size often correlates to the allowed density within the zoning district, helps to create proportions for setbacks and lot coverage that define the look of a development, relates to garage size and design, and addresses the street design in regard to driveway spacing, utility placement, street trees, and on-street parking. As lots become more narrow in width, more so than overall square footage, there are trade-offs for all of these issues. Excessive minimum lot sizes have come under scrutiny as being restrictive and a potential detriment to affordable housing options.

The issue of housing costs and building type variety is a commonly discussed issue within planning and building related fields, including professional organizations such as National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), American Planning Association, and the Urban Land Institute. Numerous reports and studies have been done by these entities and others to identify best practices and options for smaller homes and smaller lots. The focus is commonly on how to increase the production of housing to address median income and lower cost housing opportunities. All of this discussion is within the context of market opportunities and buyer interests to generate more choices within the market. While lot area influences the overall cost of housing, it should not be misconstrued that smaller lots

necessarily lead to lower cost or “affordable” homes automatically. Variables on home size and finishes affect the overall cost of home at a much higher rate than lot size. Staff finds the issues of sales price and lot area do intersect, but it is more directly connected to creating housing variety than ensuring affordable housing.

CURRENT MINIMUM LOT REQUIREMENTS:

Minimum lot area in R-L and FS-RL zoning is based upon a combination of density requirements, minimum area by building types, frontage width, and lot width. All of these factors apply when subdividing land to create new lots. The City has different standards for creating single-family detached and single-family attached housing. Within existing developed areas of the City, lot size standards are not applicable to constructing a new home on an existing lot, meaning a legal nonconforming lot that is smaller or narrower than the current standard can still be built upon in compliance with other zoning standards related to setbacks, parking, and coverage.

The traditional low-density development pattern results in one principal structure situated upon an individual lot with a minimum amount of land area and frontage upon a public street. Two parking spaces are required for a home and are to be provided upon the same lot as the home. The City relies on creation of individual lots for a home to trigger subdivision requirements and improvements needed to support city development, e.g. street improvements, sidewalks, street trees, and utility services for each lot.

Ames’ residential zoning district minimum requirements are rather homogenous for detached single-family units. The City’s zoning standards can be viewed in their entirety online by visiting the [Planning Division website](#). In all of the Ames residential zoning districts (including RL RM, RH, UCRM, S-SMD, FS-RL, and FS-RM) the same standards apply:

- 6,000 SF min. lot size;
- 35’ street frontage and 50’ lot width at building line (S-SMD - 40’)
- 25’ front setback for detached single
- 6’ side setback (one story); 8’ side setback (two story);
- 20’ or 25’ rear setback
- 60% max. lot coverage (RL/FS-RL)
- 2 parking spaces per household unit

Notably, single-family attached housing is a “by-right” allowed use in FS-RL, FS-RM, RM, and RH where lot sizes are reduced. Minimum lot size for single-family attached is 3,500 square feet and it is reduced further for interior units to 1,800 square feet. Creating this option “by-right” in many zoning districts was an attempt by the City in 2000 to create additional development options for housing variety and to meet density goals in lieu of the Village zoning options, especially within the FS zoning districts.

Examples of low-density single-family development are numerous throughout the City. Recent subdivisions, such as Hayden’s Crossing, Scenic Valley, Quarry Estates, Suncrest, are all conventional developments with lot widths exceeding 65 feet and lot

areas well in excess of 8,000 square feet; with a more typical average lot widths exceeding 75 feet and lot area of 10,000+ square feet. Note that a 0.25 acre lot is 10,890 square feet.

In Ames, the only way to offer smaller single-family lots than described above is through F-VR (Village Residential) or F-PRD (Planned Residence District) zoning. F-VR requires a master planning approach with a minimum development area of 40 acres that includes multiple housing options, including a housing type known as “Village Cottages” where there is no minimum lot size defined:

- 24-48’ lot width;
- 0-15’ front build-to line;
- 5’ side setback;
- 8’ rear setback with alley; 24’ without alley; and
- 2 parking spaces.

Although currently available as a zoning option, no recent examples of a Village development have occurred since the development of Somerset. It also appears that no lots in Somerset were developed with the Cottage standard to offer as an example.

Although F-PRD allows for variable lot sizes and setbacks, it is not frequently applied in Ames. A F-PRD requires a minimum of two acres based upon its purpose of providing of significant open space along with clustering of homes or providing for innovative housing types. Within a F-PRD, the developer is allowed maximum flexibility in the design and development of the property. The base density is the controlling factor. With integrated design and 40% open space, along with site amenities and enhanced landscaping, the development exceeds typical base zone development standards. Because of the minimum acreage, F-PRDs are not readily available as an infill housing tool.

Two recent examples of a F-PRD development with smaller lot sizes is the 2019 Genesis Homes 130 Wilder Avenue “Smart Home” project in west Ames and the 2010s project for small lots on Brickman Avenue. There are older examples of Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) that occurred prior to 2000 with variable lot sizes, such as Stone Brook Subdivision with single-family homes along Woodhaven Circle developed in the 1980s.

OTHER CITIES:

City staff reviewed residential zoning options from a sampling of communities across the state. Staff considered minimum lot sizes that are allowed by right and what zoning tools may exist as options for developers. One observation is that most cities have more restrictive minimum lot sizes, meaning larger lot size, for their standard single-family zoning districts than Ames does for its R-L option. Ames has been a leader in supporting minimum densities and smaller average lot sizes since the adoption of the current zoning ordinance. Another observation is that many cities rely on PUDs to more directly influence development design than Ames and the cited zoning examples may or may not be frequently utilized on their own without adding a PUD designation. The addendum to this

report includes a more detailed summary of the related zoning standards beyond lot size for the described cities listed below.

Comparison of Smaller Single-Family Detached Lot Sizes

<i>City</i>	<i>Res. Zoning Type</i>	<i>Minimum Lot Size (sq. ft.)</i>	<i>Lot Widths (ft.)</i>
<i>Ames</i>	All Residential	6,000	50'
<i>Cedar Rapids</i>	Low/Medium	5,000 / 3,600	25'
<i>Iowa City</i>	Medium	5,000	45'
<i>West Des Moines</i>	Low	5,000	40'
<i>Ankeny</i>	Medium	8,000	65'
<i>Waukee</i>	Low	8,000	65'
<i>Des Moines</i>	Medium or Mixed	4,800	40'

Housing options and small lot options specifically have been a discussion topic for decades across the country. Some cities have directly addressed the need for supporting different smaller housing types and lot sizes with changes to zoning standards and or with design guidelines. Some states have even stepped into direct zoning changes at the local level, such as Oregon.

New Urbanism design principles often support smaller housing types through their design and layout approach. The City's Village zoning is one example of using New Urbanism principles borrowed from other development examples, such as the Kentlands. Other cities have addressed housing needs with zoning revisions to address individual lot issues rather than overall development principles, such as Portland and Los Angeles. They have used specific housing prototypes and design standards intended to facilitate more housing construction. Fremont, California relies upon a combination of low-density small lot design guidelines and medium density design guidelines to distinguish between more traditional homes and more innovative and urban style design options on very small lots. Denver is another example of a City creating additional zoning options for home variety, both within base zoning choices and sub-area or master planned areas.

Most of the cities that have taken up the issue of smaller lots or home options focus on the related design issues to ensure construction of a functional and desirable development for the long term. Functionally, narrow lots impact driveway spacing and proportions of a home. One issue that commonly crops up on narrow lots is the issue of the garage percentage of a facade compared to the living areas or having detached or rear loaded garage (from an alley) to maintain a traditional residential appearance. In staff's opinion, this is critically important when lot widths are reduced to 45 feet or less and lot areas are less than 5,000 square feet. The City has many existing lots where a lot is approximately 50 feet wide and the home has a detached garage or alley accessed garage.

Reducing lot standards results in a need to both reduce certain standards, e.g. setbacks, lot coverage, in recognition of having less overall space and to add some standards to address issues of private outdoor living/yard spaces, privacy, parking, house proportions/design, and house orientation. The approach on addressing design issues varies between options for zoning standards, design guidelines, PUDs, form-based standards, and house prototypes or pattern books.

MULTIPLE BUILDING ON A LOT:

Currently, the City does not allow multiple dwellings on an individual lot for one and two-family homes. Prior to 2013, the City did allow for more than one home on a lot when it was a site over one acre. This law was changed in response to development proposals seeking to avoid subdivision and zoning regulations for unanticipated rental housing types. Multiple buildings on a lot are permitted for medium density and high-density zoning districts when built as apartments (three or more attached units in a building).

OPTIONS RELATED TO LOT SIZE:

The focus of this report is on standards that are most relevant to new development that would typically occur within FS-RL zoning or a F-PRD. There are a variety of standards that could be adjusted based upon the City Council defining specific goals for changing standards. Staff supports adjustments to our zoning with consideration of the trade-offs needed to support different development types.

Option 1 - Modify Base Zoning Standards for Lot Area

Lot area and lot width are two related standards in regard to creating smaller home sites. A minor level of change would be reducing standard lot sizes to 5,000 square feet and maintaining the 50-foot lot width requirement. This would provide some additional flexibility without creating new development standards overall. This change would have minimal impact on the design and look of new development. Reducing lot size could allow for some smaller lot splits of larger oversized parcels within the City, but this would be speculative without knowing individual lot and building circumstances. If City Council considers a smaller lot size, staff would recommend considering additional changes related to setbacks, lot coverage, etc. to ensure the resulting standards are workable for the desired home type.

Option 2 - Create Optional Lot Size Variation Option

Another approach to add variation within a larger development is a variation in lot area for a certain percentage of lots in a subdivision. This choice allows for more variability in conventional developments, but likely does not create new housing developments of concentrated developments of small lots and building types. An example of this option would be to allow for up to 20% of the lots in new subdivision below the minimum lot size of 6,000 square feet, minimum development size of five lots. This approach likely would have no impact on existing subdivisions, even if allowed within all zoning districts.

Option 3 - Create Mandatory Lot Size Variation

This approach has an intentional component of trying to create diverse housing opportunities through mandatory standards rather than through optional or flexible standards. Conventional subdivisions typically create standard lot sizes well above 6,000 square feet and incorporate some attached single-family housing as a secondary option. An example of this approach would be to require 10% of lots to not exceed a specific lot size and to have them integrated into the overall subdivision layout. Taking a mandatory mix approach on its own would not allow for development seeking to create a different style or feel with a concentration of smaller lots.

Option 4 - Establish Planned Unit Development Tool

Creating a new Planned Unit Development tool could focus on smaller lot issues as a way to consider case-by-case design issues and provide a greater degree of flexibility than usually afforded by base zoning. This option would be more efficient than the current PRD that is focused on open space in combination with housing type flexibility. The PUD would need to address lot sizes, design expectations, common space, setbacks, and street or private street options. This type of tool would not be intended to increase density, it would only be to modify design standards through a defined plan review process requiring City Council approval.

Option 5 - Establish Housing Prototypes with Form-Based Zoning Standards

This option could be a stand-alone zoning approach or the basis of a design guideline tool related to other zoning changes. The goal is to define desired forms of housing and how they would relate to a street or common space rather than focus on creating lots to control the building types. One example of this is the way design guidelines are applied within the Old Town Historic District. This is a more in-depth approach than just adjusting zoning standards for flexibility, as it is intended to create variety within a defined set of expectations. However, it is not meant to define a singular architectural style as the acceptable housing type.

STAFF COMMENTS:

Staff is in support of creating additional options for detached homes. There is a wide variety of housing types built in the Des Moines Metro area and nationally that have not occurred in Ames. This is likely due to market familiarity as well as structure of our zoning standards that were meant to provide options and variety, but that has not kept up with housing trends. Our zoning standards reliance on Village zoning for larger developments has not created the desired housing variety envisioned within our Land Use Policy Plan.

City Council would need to provide direction to staff on their preferences for changes and the degrees of changes to define next steps. There is wide range of time and work between the Options described above. City Council also could choose to ask for more specific examples and an in-depth review before choosing to proceed.

PUBLIC INPUT

Staff sent an email to our developer contacts list in early June alerting them that City Council would receive a staff report on this issue in relation to their adopted Goals. No comments have been received as a result of that communication. A follow-up email was provided on June 19th reminding them that the issue was on the Council agenda for June 23rd.

ADDENDUM

ADDENDUM

IOWA EXAMPLES

Ankeny

The smallest lot size for single-family detached units is 8000 SF within the R-3 zoning district. However, both R-3A and PUD zoning options provide maximum flexibility and do not regulate minimum lot sizes.

The R-3A District is intended to provide for the orderly development or redevelopment of tracts of land on a unit basis in order to allow a greater flexibility of land use and building locations (than allowed in the conventional R-3 District). No minimum lot and yard requirements apply except that the minimum 30' front yard or suitable screening or buffering shall be provided around the boundaries of the development. The maximum number of dwelling units per acre shall not exceed the maximum allowed in the R-3 District (which is considered a medium density residential district). Density of 5-12 dwelling units per acre is described in the Comprehensive Plan.

Additionally, the planned unit development zone (PUD) allows "greater flexibility and diversity than is normally permitted by conventional single lot development in other zoning districts because of the substantial public advantages of planned development." The developer proposes development standards, including but not limited to, uses, density, floor area ratios, or bulk regulations including open space, lot areas and widths, setbacks, and exceptions or variances from general requirements of zoning and other ordinances. Ankeny allows a PUD "to deviate in certain respects from a literal interpretation of the comprehensive plan." A PUD requires a minimum of two acres.

Cedar Rapids:

Cedar Rapids Zoning Ordinance became effective March 16, 2020. Options for smaller lots exist within numerous zoning districts, including suburban, traditional, and urban residential districts:

The Suburban Residential Low Flex (S-RLF):

- 5000 SF min. lot size;
- 25' lot width at building line;
- 25' front setback;
- 5' side setback;
- 25' rear setback;
- 70% max. lot coverage; and
- 2 parking spaces.

The Suburban Residential Medium Flex (S-RMF), Traditional Residential Single Unit (T-R1), and Traditional Residential Flex (T-RF) districts:

- 3600 SF min. lot size;
- 25'/30' lot width at building line;

- 15' front setback;
- 3' side setback;
- 10' rear setback;
- 70% max. lot coverage; and
- parking subject to urban or general parking requirement.

Both the Urban Neighborhood Residential (U-NR) and Urban Village Residential (U-VR) districts are based upon a Form-Based Code and include a range of unit configurations with no minimum or maximum densities:

- No minimum lot size;
- 18' lot width at building line;
- 15' front build-to line;
- 0' side setback;
- 2' or 15' rear setback;
- No maximum lot coverage; and
- 1 parking space (1 bedroom); 1.25 parking space (2 bedroom); 1.25 +.25 for each bedroom over 2.

Des Moines:

With the City of Des Moines, the majority of zoning districts allow multiple dwellings on a lot (with the exception of larger suburban type dwellings known as House Type 'A' and 'B'.) Des Moines includes one zoning district that allows lot sizes smaller than 6000 sq. ft. (by right), known as the Neighborhood Mix District (NX1). This district includes a mix of single- and smaller-scaled multiple-household uses:

- 4800 SF min. lot size;
- 40' lot width at building line;
- 25' front setback;
- 7' side setback (15' total);
- 30' rear setback;
- 55% max. lot coverage; and
- 1 parking space per household unit.

Iowa City:

Options for smaller lots exist within numerous zoning districts. The Medium Density Single Family Residential Zone (RS-8), High Density Single Family Residential Zone (RS-12) and Neighborhood Stabilization Residential Zone (RNS-12):

- 5000 SF min. lot size;
- 45' lot width at building line;
- 15' front setback;
- 5' side setback;
- 20' rear setback;
- 45% max. lot coverage; and
- 1 parking space for 1 & 2 bedroom units; 2 parking space for units with 3 or more bedrooms, plus 1 additional parking space for each adult occupant beyond 3.

A RS-8 density bonus is available, in conjunction with the provision of certain design characteristics:

- 4000 SF min. lot size;
- 40' lot width at building line;
- 10' front setback; and
- alley access.

A RS-12 density bonus is available, in conjunction with the provision of certain design characteristics:

- 3000 SF min. lot size;
- 30' lot width at building line;
- 10' front setback; and
- alley access.

The planned development overlay zone (OPD) permits flexibility in the use and design of structures and land in situations where conventional development may be inappropriate. It provides flexibility in the design, placement and clustering of buildings; mixture of land uses; use of open space; traffic circulation and parking; and related site and design considerations. It is also a tool for providing an alternative method for redeveloping older residential areas and encouraging infill development. Planned Development Overlay Zone (OPD) is available for neo-traditional, mixed use, Infill or conservation developments. Although a 2-acre minimum is required, this minimum is reduced to one-acre for infill development.

A Form-Based Code (FBC) is utilized within nine zoning districts within Iowa City. These areas include mixed uses and higher density attached units. In a few cases, a detached single-family housing type "cottage homes," is included. The FBC does not stipulate a minimum lot size. FBCs were first adopted in Iowa City in 2016.

Additionally, Iowa City is currently working with Opticos Design Inc to potentially implement "missing middle housing," which includes housing types in between single-family homes and large apartment buildings like duplexes, townhomes and other housing forms that can be integrated into a neighborhood through form-based zoning regulations.

Waukee

The smallest minimum lot area for a single-family detached unit is 8000 sq. ft. within the R-2 zoning district. However, the Planned Development (PD-1) District (an overlay zone) encourages innovation in project design that incorporates open space and other amenities and to ensure compatibility of developments with the surrounding urban environment. The intent is to promote developments that will be advantageous to the City and its urban form by permitting project design that will surpass the quality of development resulting from application of the regulations of conventional zoning districts. A development agreement is required specifying the regulating details. PD-1 requires a minimum of 3 acres.

West Des Moines:

Option 1 – RS-5 zoning allows smaller single-family lots:

- Density range 1.1 to 6 du/acre
- 5000 SF min. lot size;
- 40' lot width at building line;
- 30' front setback;
- 7' side setback;
- 35' rear setback;
- No max. lot coverage; and
- 2 parking spaces.

Option 2 - Multi-family detached units:

2a – Each unit and “footprint lot” may be individually owned within common property (owned and maintained jointly or by an association). Individual footprint lots are not required to meet minimum standard lot area and width requirements.

2b – Multiple detached units are located on a lot that meets the applicable bulk regulations for the zoning district but none of the units are individually owned.