

# **Frequently Asked Questions**

April 2016

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/zoning/pdc-prm-crdamendment/>

## **Abbreviations Used in this Document**

FAR\* - Floor Area Ratio

PDC – Planned Development Commercial District

PRM – Planned Development Residential Mixed Use District

CRD\* – Commercial Revitalization District

CRA\* – Commercial Revitalization Area

CBC\* – Community Business Center

TSA\* – Transit Station Area

Board – Board of Supervisors

\*See definitions on Page 4

### **1. What is the purpose and intent of the PDC and PRM Districts?**

The PDC District, which was created in the early 1970s and predates the current Zoning Ordinance, was established to encourage the innovative and creative design of high density commercial mixed use development and to insure high standards in the layout, design and construction of commercial developments. The PRM District was established in 2001 to accommodate high density residential mixed use developments, particularly around transit station areas and other mixed use centers. Similar to the PDC District, the PRM District is designed to promote high standards in design and layout, to encourage compatibility among uses within the development and integration with adjacent developments. Currently, the maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) in the PDC District is 2.5 and the maximum FAR in the PRM District is 3.0.

### **2. What is Floor Area Ratio, typically referred to as FAR?**

FAR is used to measure the overall intensity of the development and is determined by dividing the gross floor area of all buildings on a lot by the land area of that lot. FAR along with building height, building setbacks, and open space requirements all help define the built form of a development. Many jurisdictions use FAR as the basis for determining the maximum development potential of a particular property.

**3. Why is the maximum allowable FAR proposed to be increased to up to 5.0 in the PDC and PRM Districts when the property is located in a TSA, CBC or CRD? (NOTE: the proposal will include an option for the Board to consider a maximum of up to 5.0 FAR in TSAs and a maximum of up to 4.0 FAR in CBCs and CRDs.)**

The PDC and PRM Districts are the preferred zoning districts to be used when rezoning to achieve the more intensive, mixed use communities set forth in the comprehensive plan. The land development recommendations set forth in the comprehensive plan in certain transit station and revitalization areas would currently permit land development levels higher than the PDC and PRM Districts would permit under the current limits of 2.5 FAR and 3.0 FAR, respectively, so staff is proposing to increase the maximum FAR of these two zoning districts to accommodate those specific areas within the comprehensive plan where more intensive mixed use development envisioned.

**4. Will all developments in the PDC and PRM Districts be eligible for a maximum FAR of up to 5.0?**

No. Only those properties that are to be rezoned to PDC or PRM that are located in either a TSA, CBC or CRD may request an FAR above the 2.5 FAR limit in the PDC District or the 3.0 FAR limit in the PRM District. This maximum FAR would be further limited to only those properties where the comprehensive plan guidelines support more intensive mixed use development. All such rezoning applications will require a public hearing before the Planning Commission and a public hearing before the Board of Supervisors. Nothing guarantees that any development will be approved by the Board or that any development will be approved for the maximum FAR allowed by the zoning district.

**5. How do the density/intensity recommendations of the comprehensive plan relate to the maximum allowable FAR in the Zoning Ordinance for planned developments?**

All planned developments are subject to the provisions of Par. 1 of Sect. 16-101 of the Zoning Ordinance, which states “the planned development shall substantially conform to the adopted comprehensive plan with respect to type, character, intensity of use and public facilities. Planned developments shall not exceed the density or intensity permitted by the adopted comprehensive plan, except as expressly permitted under the applicable density and intensity bonus provisions.” The bonus provisions referenced in this provision relates specifically to any such bonus that is attributable to the provision of affordable housing.

**6. Are the proposed maximum FARs automatically applicable to any property currently zoned PDC or PRM?**

No. Development of additional floor area in accordance with the proposed amendment cannot be achieved until such time as there is an amendment to a previously approved rezoning that would permit the applicant to implement a higher FAR. As with a new rezoning application, an amendment to a previously approved rezoning to increase the approved intensity by adding additional buildings/floor area requires a public hearing before the Planning Commission and a public hearing before the Board of Supervisors.

**7. Does the proposal reduce the minimum required parking for developments in a PDC or PRM District?**

No. The parking rates for all uses remain unchanged by the proposed amendment. The proposal will clarify the existing provisions that allow for a potential parking reduction based on the proximity to alternative transportation opportunities. And, because the comprehensive plan recommendations for these areas envision mixed use communities with residential and non-residential components, the proposal will add residential uses to the existing provisions that allow an applicant to request a parking reduction in a CRD for non-residential uses. In all cases for a residential parking reduction, the request is subject to Board review and approval.

**8. What is the change regarding the inclusion of cellar space in the calculation of gross floor area?**

Under the current provisions of the Zoning Ordinance, any floor area with more than half of its clear height below grade level is considered cellar space. Such cellar space, regardless of how it is used, does not count toward the FAR calculation. However, if cellar space is used for something other than mechanical equipment, uses that are accessory to the operation of the building, loading or unmanned datacenter equipment, then the appropriate amount of parking for the use(s) must be provided. Today, cellar space is essentially “free” FAR and staff believes that going forward such space should be considered in the FAR calculations in the PDC and PRM Districts.

**9. Does the proposed amendment reduce the minimum required open space for the PDC or PRM District?**

No. The current 15% minimum required open space for the PDC District and 20% minimum required landscaped open space for the PRM District are not being modified. However, the proposal will limit the amount of required landscaped open space that can be provided above street level to not more than 50% of the requirement. Currently, there is no limit on this percentage, essentially allowing 100% of the open space to be located on rooftops or otherwise above street level. Additionally, the proposal will direct an applicant to the comprehensive plan to address the design features, dimensions, location and other factors associated with the landscaped open space when there are applicable recommendations for streetscape and urban park standards for the property.

**10. What is “form-based” code?**

Form-based codes are development regulations that consider the contextual relationships among buildings, open space, streetscapes and space which is accessible to the public. Form-based codes put greater emphasis on design details of buildings and land and focus on shaping the type of community that citizens often help to define through the planning process. Development intensity in form-based developments is often described by specifying building height, number of stories, setbacks and other physical characteristics of a buildings or land.

## DEFINITIONS

**FAR – Floor Area Ratio** – Determined by dividing the gross floor area of all buildings on a lot by the area of that lot. (From Zoning Ordinance)

**CRD – Commercial Revitalization District** – A geographically mapped area pertaining to a specific revitalization district set forth in the Zoning Ordinance. The CRDs are Annandale, Bailey’s Crossroads/Seven Corners, McLean, Richmond Highway and Springfield. Such geographic areas are also subject to the specific underlying zoning districts.

**CRA – Commercial Revitalization Area** – A geographically mapped area including portions of the Lake Anne Center in Reston and portions of Merrifield.

**CBC – Community Business Center** – These centers typically are planned for over 1,000,000 sq. ft. of commercial space. Historically older community-serving commercial areas that emerged along major roadways, Community Business Centers are areas where redevelopment should encourage a mix of uses focused around a core area of higher intensity, such as a town center or main street in a pedestrian-oriented setting. Transitions in intensity and compatible land uses should protect surrounding stable residential neighborhoods. (From Comprehensive Plan Glossary)

**TSA – Transit Station Area** – These areas adjacent to Metrorail Stations are directly influenced by the presence of access points to the Metrorail system. Transit station areas promote a land use pattern that supports Metrorail by encouraging a mix of uses in a compact, pedestrian-friendly urban form within walking distance of the rail station. The transit-oriented development (TOD) area may be generally defined as a ¼ mile radius from the station platform with a density and intensity tapering to within a ½ mile radius from the station platform or a 5-10 minute walk. Within the region, Metrorail provides a vital public transportation choice that enhances accessibility and reduces the reliance upon single occupancy vehicle use. Transit Station Area boundaries are strongly influenced by the area's access characteristics and the relationship of the station to surrounding stable neighborhoods. (From Comprehensive Plan Glossary)