



CITY OF HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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October 5, 2026

**TO THE MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA**

SUBJECT: *Consider a request to amend the Zoning Ordinance to reduce the minimum lot width for single-family detached dwellings in R-8*

**EXTRACT FROM THE DRAFT MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING
COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON:** September 9, 2026

Chair Baugh read the request and asked staff to review.

Ms. Soffel said in 2026, the General Assembly of Virginia enacted HB 1212 (<https://lis.virginia.gov/bill-details/20261/HB1212>), which amended the Code of Virginia by adding Section 15.2-2286.2. The new section requires localities with populations of 50,000 or more to adopt and maintain at least one zoning district classification that permits a single-family dwelling on a lot with a minimum lot area not exceeding 3,000 square feet and a minimum lot width not exceeding 30 feet. The amendment became effective on July 1, 2026. If approved, the proposed Zoning Ordinance (ZO) amendment will bring the ZO into compliance with Code of Virginia Section 15.2-2286.2 by having one zoning district classification satisfy the lot area and lot width requirement.

The R-8 district currently requires a minimum lot area of 2,800 square feet, which is below the 3,000-square-foot threshold established by the new state requirement. However, the minimum lot width is 35 feet, which exceeds the maximum width threshold established by the new state requirement. The proposed amendment would amend ZO Section 10-3-59.5, Area and dimensional regulations, to reduce the minimum lot width for a single-family detached dwelling from 35 feet to 30 feet to comply with the new state requirement. All other requirements within ZO Section 10-3-59.5 would remain the same.

Staff recommends approval of the ZO amendment.

Councilmember Dent said again, we do not have to, but we are bound by it.

Chair Baugh said we might as well. If somebody wants to do one at 30 [feet of lot width], we have to approve it. We cannot say it is a violation of the ordinance.

Vice Chair Porter said I am going to ask staff whether this is something you generally support. It is a small change, but it is an important change. I am curious whether you would have any concerns with this change.

Ms. Soffel said there are some concerns with driveways.

Councilmember Dent said I was wondering about that. Does that mean they might not have room for a driveway, or however the layout might work?

Ms. Dang said if they build it where it is 30 feet of lot width, that means there are a lot more driveways serving each of the single-family homes. Correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Russ, but your findings are that this is a lot-width number that is uncommon in the state, if it exists at all.

Mr. Russ said virtually every urban area, for their by-right districts rather than a district you would have to rezone to, has 50- or 60-foot-wide lots as relatively standard. Charlottesville is the only one with something smaller, at 40 feet, and then us. Most urban areas have by-right districts around 50 feet, and then you rezone and address things like driveways in the process.

Vice Chair Porter said I find it interesting that communities with fewer than 50,000 citizens are exempted from this or not included in this change. I do not understand the rationale, and you may not be able to explain it either.

Ms. Dang said I do not either.

Chair Baugh said it captures us because we are more than 50,000. We are right around there, and I have not looked at it lately. Charlottesville and Danville are the two [localities] around our size, but less. Everybody else is either considerably more or considerably less. My sense is that it is driven by more urban jurisdictions. You can make an argument that it would not be the end of the world for Harrisonburg, and 35 feet would probably be okay as well. Please feel free to lobby your local representatives in Richmond to amend this if you think that is appropriate. We have what we have. Particularly in Richmond, I know of some infill projects where they may be 30 feet. They have managed to get some infill in older areas with narrow, townhouse-type structures. Somebody obviously thought it was a good idea.

Vice Chair Porter said fair enough.

Chair Baugh asked if there were any more questions for staff. Hearing none, he asked if there was anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Commissioner Kettler said at a certain point, I wonder how meaningful reducing the minimum lot width, or having a minimum lot width, is for small-lot single-family home developments, because the effective limit there is really side setbacks. Even if you have a side setback of five feet, you have a house that is 20 feet wide, and not much smaller, you can make it narrow at that point. The driveway point is well taken. In the zoning reform process, there will probably need to be more discussion about what functional changes might be needed. I am thinking particularly about the townhouse regulations. In terms of this change, once again, we have to, so it makes very little difference.

Councilmember Dent said especially since R-8 is designed to be higher density, right? Duplexes by right, am I remembering that right?

Ms. Dang said you can apply [for a special use permit] to have townhomes.

Councilmember Dent said townhomes, right. Obviously, the minimum would be wider than that. Are there minimums for a duplex side-by-side or a townhome?

Ms. Dang said minimum lot area dimensions and lot-width dimensions.

Councilmember Dent said this is strictly for single-family, with a minimum of 30 feet?

Ms. Dang said that is correct.

Vice Chair Porter said do we know how many potential infill lots in our community might be affected by this and might make it easier for someone to build? Do we have a sense? I do not know if there is an answer. It is probably a very involved question, but I would be curious to find out whether it actually affects anything.

Mr. Russ said in the R-8 district, there are only a handful of lots in that zoning district right now. Very few are a string of R-8 properties where you would be able to go from five lots to six, or something. In practice, I do not know that there is really anything that gets squeezed out of this.

Councilmember Dent said are there areas zoned R-8? I have only seen it as a spot rezoning if somebody wants a porch or whatever.

Ms. Dang said that is correct. That is how properties become zoned R-8. When we created the R-8 district, we did not, on the City's initiative, preemptively rezone properties R-8. People have had to come through a rezoning process to become R-8.

Vice Chair Porter said can I ask what that looks like in the proposed rewrite? I know that might be getting a little ahead, but what would that zone be called?

Ms. Dang said it would be the Urban Neighborhood District.

Mr. Russ said that would impact more properties. Some are older, nonconforming properties that are already fairly close, and some may be a little wider.

Vice Chair Porter said I am not sure how impactful this ends up being, but I appreciate the mindset of our legislature attempting to make it easier to build in general. Particularly with the accessory dwelling unit change, I appreciate the fact that there is some attempt to simplify the process, make it a little more accessible, and make it easier to build. Even though this is nibbling around the edges, it widens the strike zone ever so slightly. I appreciate it.

Chair Baugh said I cannot help but think this is targeted toward something that does not really apply to us in our current configuration. I go back to places I know of where this has come up in Richmond, where you have older residential and narrow lots with zero setbacks. Somebody wants to do this, and when it is a special use permit item, you get a lot of objection because people have decided they do not want another house in the neighborhood. When you are sitting there thinking they want to build one in there, why not let them? I cannot help but think that those types of things are the driver here. When we ask where our section of old, zero-setback residential is where this would apply, the answer is that we do not have it.

Commissioner Kettler said I agree with you, Vice Chair Porter. In terms of the general direction the General Assembly has taken with respect to some land-use options and increasing housing options, these seem like relatively modest changes, keeping in mind that a wide variety of localities are affected. I think they are modest steps in the right direction.

Vice Chair Porter said that is the thing about being a Dillon Rule state. When they are making these things, they have to apply everywhere. Although, in this case, it is cities that are over 50,000 people.

Councilmember Dent said there was the case where we considered it overreach, involving the proposed legislation that said you must be able to build by-right multifamily in all commercial districts, and whatever variations there were. We said, wait a minute, that would negate what we do in Planning Commission and zoning. In general, we want to preserve local authority. However, I appreciate the State making these efforts to make it easier to build housing.

Chair Baugh said for what it is worth, I just checked. Charlottesville and Danville do not make the cut. It is us, and then after us, it is Lynchburg.

Commissioner Kettler aid Danville’s population has actually decreased considerably over the last 30 years.

Councilmember Dent said and Charlottesville is smaller than us. That was a surprise to me.

Chair Baugh said City limit, probably.

Commissioner Kettler said motion to recommend approval of the Zoning Ordinance amendment as presented by staff.

Vice Chair Porter said second.

Chair Baugh called for a roll call vote.

Commissioner Kettler	Aye
Vice Chair Porter	Aye
Commissioner Jezior	Aye
Councilmember Dent	Aye
Chair Baugh	Aye

The motion to recommend approval of the zoning ordinance amendment passed (5-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on October 13, 2026.

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