

MEMORANDUM

TO: Hampton Planning Commission

FROM: Caroline Butler, AICP
Chief Planner

DATE: January 7, 2010

SUBJECT: Proposed R-4 One-Family Residence District vs. Special Public Interest-Infill Housing District

Following comments and questions at last week's work session and public hearing on the proposed R-4 One Family Residence District, staff thought it would be helpful to explain some of the differences between this district and the Special Public Interest-Infill Housing District. These are two distinctly different zoning categories that are intended to achieve different outcomes, and it is essential that the public understand the differences as the R-4 Residence District goes through the public hearing process.

Zoning was not applied in Hampton until 1960, with the adoption of the City's first Zoning Ordinance that established categories of (among others) residential districts with specific minimum lot sizes and minimum dwelling unit sizes. For example, the R-9 One Family Residence District requires a minimum lot size of 6000 square feet and a minimum dwelling unit size of 1500 square feet.

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Much of Hampton was already developed prior to the adoption of the Zoning Ordinance, and many residential lots (nearly 10,000) were platted that are smaller than the minimum established by the R-9 district, which is the City's smallest single-family zoning category. Typically, these lots would also have smaller dwelling units than required by the R-9 district.

A planning process in Greater Wythe recognized that many of the existing houses were approximately 900-1000 square feet. Using the R-9 criteria as an example, if a property owner wished to build on a vacant lot, the zoning standards would require a 1500 square foot dwelling unit.

Property owners seeking relief from the 1500 square foot dwelling unit requirement would typically appeal to the Board of Zoning Appeals to approve smaller houses. The Greater Wythe Planning Team realized that simply continuing the pattern of these smaller houses would never increase housing sizes or values in the area. However, requiring an increase from 900-1000 square feet to 1500 square feet could also be out of context with the existing development pattern of this established neighborhood.

The Special Public Interest-Infill Housing District was created specifically for Greater Wythe and is designated on a map (attached) in the Zoning Ordinance. The SPI-IH District addresses *only* dwelling unit size. It does not address lot size, setbacks, or lot width.

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Basically, SPI-IH requires a new house to be built at 125% of the average size of houses within a 300 foot radius if those average dwelling unit sizes are 1300 square feet or less. If the average of the surrounding dwelling unit sizes is greater than 1300 square feet, then no relief is recommended. The Board of Zoning Appeals reviews requests for the application of the SPI-IH District with input from the Departments of Planning and Codes Compliance regarding building elevations, floor plans, and landscape plans.

Because Hampton has so many lots that are smaller than the minimum size (6000 square feet) required by the smallest one-family dwelling district (R-9), there had been a practice of developers buying a series of adjacent substandard lots and building a house on each one. To address this, the City amended the Zoning Ordinance to require that any contiguous substandard lots under the same ownership prior to January 12, 1989 would have to be combined prior to the construction of houses. These houses would be required to meet the minimum dwelling unit size for the underlying zoning district, thus preventing what is often referred to as “shot-gun” houses (small, narrow houses on small, narrow lots).

The R-4 District does not supersede the substandard lot provisions of the Zoning Ordinance. A developer cannot assemble a series of contiguous lots that were in common ownership prior to January 12, 1989, rezone them to R-4, and build on them.

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At last week's meetings, comments and questions were raised about "shot-gun" houses and their relevance to the proposed R-4 District. The minimum dwelling unit size in the R-4 District is 1300 square feet, on lot sizes with a minimum of 4000 square feet (3000 square feet with an approved Use Permit). These standards are consistent with an existing zoning district (R-8 Two Family Residence District) that permits single-family houses.

The R-4 District is intended for areas of the City where The Hampton Community Plan (2006, as amended) or adopted master plans recommend the development of a more dense pattern of residential lots such as is found in Hampton's older traditional neighborhoods. It is intended to be applied only when there are contiguous areas of substandard lots of sufficient land area to justify the R-4 District within the context of adopted plan recommendations and the surrounding zoning and development pattern. The R-4 District may also apply to geographic areas within adopted plans which recommend development on lots meeting the R-4 standards and which also are governed by an adopted Pattern Book.

If you have any questions or need additional information on the R-4 District and/or the SPI-IH District, please feel free to contact me. My direct telephone number is 728-5231 and my e-mail address is cbutler@hampton.gov.

