

# **TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION**

## ***Building & Planning Committee***

### **Issue Briefing**

**Topic:** Residence Districts: Lot Width Increase

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**Date:** January 16, 2018

#### **I. Action To Be Considered By The Board:**

Consider for recommendation to the Board of Commissioners authorization to advertise and hold a public hearing on March 21, 2018, and consider for adoption an ordinance amending the minimum lot width requirements in the following Residence Districts: RAA, RA, R1, R2, R3, R4, and R5.

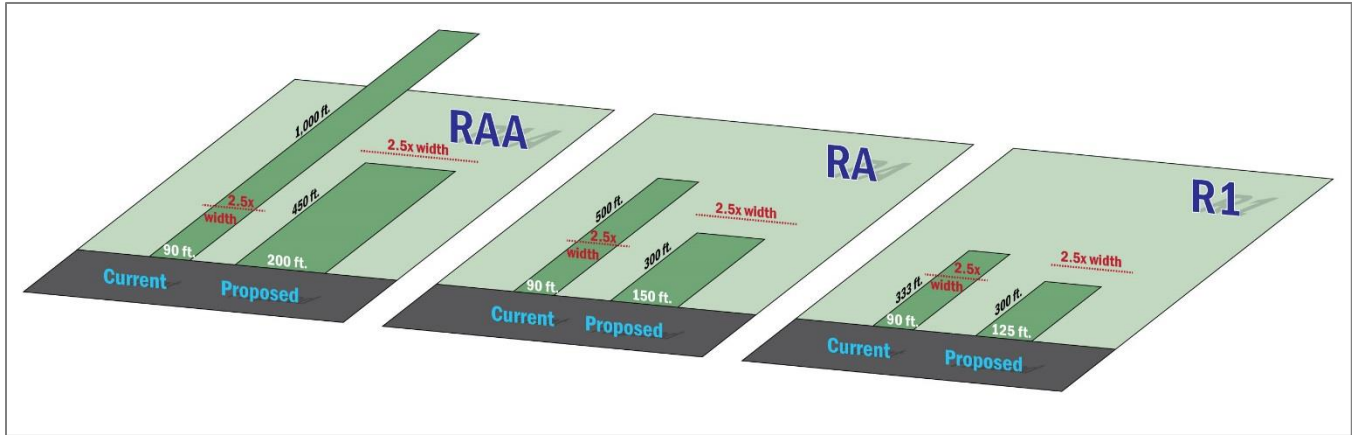
#### **II. Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:**

A public hearing must be authorized by the Board of Commissioners for Zoning Code amendments.

#### **III. Current Policy Or Practice (If Applicable):**

Land development and subdivision within the Township is regulated by both the Subdivision and Land Development Code (SALDO) and the Zoning Code. The SALDO establishes the underlying form and pattern of residential neighborhoods by establishing minimum standards for road width and the creation of lots. Lots are the building blocks of the Township. The Zoning Code defines how a lot may be used and establishes minimum standards to control the bulk, area, and coverage of lots. The two codes work together to promote orderly, efficient, and harmonious development in the Township.

The SALDO requires that a lot may not be created whose depth is greater than 2.5 times its width. However, under the current Zoning Code standards, a lot in the RAA, RA, R1, and R2 Residence Districts, that meets the minimum lot width would violate the lot depth requirement of the Subdivision and Land Development Code to meet the minimum lot area, as illustrated in the graphic on the following page.



For example, the RAA district has a minimum lot width of 90 feet and minimum lot area of 90,000 square feet. If a lot provides the minimum 90-foot lot width, the lot would exceed the 2.5 to 1.0 ratio before meeting the minimum 90,000 square feet lot area. The proposed amendment increases the minimum lot width and promotes consistency between the SALDO and Zoning Code.

#### IV. Other Relevant Background Information:

All zoning districts will receive a comprehensive evaluation as part of the Zoning Code update underway by DPZ, the consulting firm retained by the Township. DPZ is revising the Township's Zoning Code and Land Development Ordinances towards a form based orientation emphasizing the relationship between new development and the established residential fabric rather than promoting lot by lot development under the existing traditional code. The Comprehensive Plan process identified that the Township's land development codes were effective tools when the Township was developing, but the current codes are ineffective at ensuring that new infill development and redevelopment is in harmony with existing conditions.

Several recent subdivision applications in established neighborhoods have incited neighborhood opposition and arguments that the new subdivisions have been out of character with the surrounding community. This concern prompted a review of the zoning standards in the Residence Districts. Staff has concluded that modifying the lot width requirements may limit the number of inappropriate subdivisions thereby maintaining the community character, improve consistency between the Zoning Code and the Subdivision and Land Development Code, and have a minimal impact on existing residents. Generally, an inappropriate subdivision is characterized as a subdivision that is inconsistent with the established neighborhood pattern or results in the loss of natural or historic resources contributing to the character of a neighborhood.

A benefit to increasing the minimum lot width is that there is no impact on a homeowner's ability to modernize or expand their existing home even if the property becomes nonconforming to the lot width provisions.

The tables below illustrate how amended lot width standards will improve consistency between the Zoning Code and the SALDO in the RAA, RA, R1, and R2 Districts.

District	Current Zoning Standard			SALDO	Consistent Standards (Y/N)
	Lot Width	Lot Area	Potential Lot Depth	Max. Conforming Lot Depth*	
RAA	90	90,000	1,000	225	N
RA	90	45,000	500	225	N
R1	90	30,000	333	225	N
R2	80	18,000	225	200	N
R3	70	10,000	143	175	Y
R4	60	6,000	100	150	Y
R5	50	5,000	100	125	Y
District	Proposed Zoning Standard			SALDO	Consistent Standards (Y/N)
	Min. Lot Width	Lot Area	Potential Lot Depth	Max. Conforming Lot Depth*	
RAA	200	90,000	450	500	Y
RA	150	45,000	300	375	Y
R1	125	30,000	240	312.5	Y
R2	95	18,000	189	237.5	Y
R3	75	10,000	133	187.5	Y
R4	65	6,000	92	162.5	Y
R5	55	5,000	91	137.5	Y
*Max. Conforming Lot Depth = Lot width x 2.5 permitted by SALDO					

Modestly increasing the minimum lot width in the R3, R4, and R5 Districts will limit the number of possible subdivisions and help to maintain the existing built pattern of the neighborhood. Staff analyzed the impact of increasing the lot width in the R6, R6A, and R7 Districts and found that the existing lots were generally conforming to the existing Code requirements. Increasing the lot width in these areas could potentially result in new infill development that is larger, and out of scale with the existing pattern, so the existing lot width is not proposed to be amended in the R6, R6A, and R7 Districts.

The proposed amendment is consistent with the following Comprehensive Plan recommendations:

- LR1: Maintain the character of established neighborhoods.
- LR1a: Consider alternatives, including but not limited to increasing the minimum lot width or the minimum lot size to manage further subdivision in the residential districts.

The proposed amendment is also consistent with the following Land Use Objective:

- Preservation and enhancement of single-family neighborhoods by promoting logical modernizations of existing house stock, limiting inappropriate subdivision and discouraging speculative property assembly and redevelopment of affordable neighborhoods

The Comprehensive Plan included a potential residential build out scenario. Under the proposed lot width amendment, the number of new housing units in the RAA-R5 districts could potentially be reduced by

roughly 650 units. The analysis does not include institutional properties or properties over five-acres, because of our limited ability to predict the placement of new roads.

**V. Impact On Township Finances:**

There is no impact on Township finances.

**VI. Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends the Board authorize a public hearing to consider the proposed amendment.