

# **TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION**

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

### **Issue Briefing**

**Topic:** Townhouse Amendment

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**Date:** June 1, 2018

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

Authorization to advertise and hold a public hearing to consider the adoption of an ordinance amending the townhouse requirements in the R7 Residence District in the following ways:

- Increasing the minimum lot area;
- Modifying the buffer requirements;
- Requiring that all units front on a street;
- Amending the maximum height regulations;
- Limiting vehicular access to an alleyway at the rear of the property;
- Prohibiting parking between the front façade and the street; and
- Amending Article XX, Off-street Parking Facilities, to require one additional parking space dedicated to guest parking for every two townhouse units.

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

Amendments to the Zoning Code must be reviewed and approved by the Board of Commissioners.

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

Townhouses are a permitted use in the R7 Residence District. Some recent townhouse developments have either turned their sides to the street or have diminished the pedestrian environment by dominating the street level with a row of frontloaded garages and driveways prompting a request for improved standards.

#### **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. However, the adoption process may take several months. The proposed ordinance addresses immediate concerns regarding townhouse development and advance several recommendations of the Township's Comprehensive Plan.

### Section 1: Townhouse Provisions

Townhouses are permitted in the R7 Residence District. The proposed amendments are intended to achieve better layout and design of any future townhouse development. A summarized list of the amendments is provided below:

- § 155-60.A.(1) Increase the minimum lot size from 2,500 square feet to 4,000 square feet. This decreases the permitted density for townhouses from 17 units/acre to 10 units/acre. The minimum lot size is consistent with the minimum lot size for two-family semi-detached, two-family detached, and apartment houses in the R7 Residence District.
- § 155-60.A.(6) Option to keep the existing buffer requirements or modify the buffer standards to provide meaningful buffers between lower density residential uses and decreased buffer standards when the property abuts either a similar or a nonresidential use. The proposed standards:
- Maintain a 20 feet vegetated area between townhouses and single-family and two-family uses, including a 10 feet landscaped buffer;
  - Reduce the buffer area to 10 feet between townhouses and any other use;
  - Provide the ability to reduce the buffer further by Conditional Use when the property abuts a railroad right-of-way;
- § 155-60.A.(9) Require that all units front on a street. This provision ensures that the development will not turn its back on the street and should result in an improved streetscape consistent with the existing built pattern of the Township.
- § 155-60.B. Decrease the maximum height from 40 feet to 35 feet when a sloped roof is provided or 30 feet for flat-roofed buildings. The decreased height is intended to ensure that new development is more in keeping with the existing form.
- § 155-60.D.(1) Increase the minimum lot size for an individually subdivided lot, where open space is provided from 2,000 square feet to 3,500 square feet. The amendment maintains the 500 square feet differential that is currently provided in the code with the new 4,000 square feet minimum lot size provided under § 155-60.A.(1).
- § 155-60.E. Improve vehicular access standards. Currently access to a townhouse development must be provided by a private road or a common drive. The proposed amendments to vehicular access:
- Require access to be provided by a private rear alley;
  - Restrict front loaded garages;
  - Prohibit parking in front of the building; and
  - Require that all parking be screened from the public right-of-way.
- § 155-60.F. Modify the placement of a townhouse garage to allow the garage to project up to five feet into a landscaped buffer along a railroad right-of-way. Currently a garage is not allowed in a buffer area regardless of the abutting use.

## Section 2: Guest Parking

§ 155-95.                Require guest parking. A guest parking space is required for every two units. Guest parking may include compact stalls. The amendment is intended to address overflow parking into surrounding neighborhoods since many R7 properties are located along Montgomery Avenue where on-street parking is not available.

The proposed amendments are consistent with the following Comprehensive Plan recommendations:

- LR1    Maintain the character of established residential neighborhoods.
- LR2    Preserve stable, developed, higher density neighborhoods from unnecessary, speculative redevelopment and preserve the supply of existing affordable housing.
- LR9    Evaluate parking standards and incentives to ensure that proposed development accommodates parking needs for the new development and does not lead to parking in residential neighborhoods.

The Planning Commission's recommendation from June 4<sup>th</sup> will be forwarded to the Building & Planning Committee.

### **V.                Impact On Township Finances:**

There is no impact on Township finances.

### **VI.               Staff Recommendation:**

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