

Lot Coverage Reform

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What are the concerns about lot coverage?

- Accelerating teardowns of smaller homes, replaced by expensive ones
- Larger impervious surfaces pose greater stormwater management challenges, particularly given more frequent and severe storms
- Clear cutting of mature trees adds to this stormwater problem
- It also poses heat island and other climate effects
- Less root zone protection for mature trees or new plantings
- Impacts on adjacent homes in the neighborhood

What are the current lot coverage limits?

- Range up from 25% for larger R-20 to 45% in smaller R-5 lots
- Add 5% for 60 square foot front porch
- Add another 3% for detached rear garage
- Oversized lots benefit from larger percentage in smaller lot districts
- No accounting for steep slopes as in Ches Bay Ordinance
- Exceptions for some impervious surfaces, including sidewalks and some accessory buildings, patios, and decks
- Compare Town of Vienna (flat 25%)

The problem is not new, but no action til now

- 2014 Stormwater Plan: need for “more comprehensive look”
- 2019 Stormwater Action plan again emphasized need for review
- 2022: majority of County Board members asked staff for study
- Staff initiated no such study
- December 2023 Forestry & Natural Resources Plan approved study
- April 2024 County Board directed staff to study and funded the work
- Staff’s initial focus: 40% tree canopy goal and lot coverage exclusions
- Board/staff work session November 13, 2024: further instructions?

Broad support for studying reforms

- Late County Board Member Erik Gutshall (maxing out was a surprise)
- Fifteen civic associations urging study of the lot coverage issue
- They are reaching out to additional civic associations
- Arlington Tree Action Group
- Online Engagement Summary for Forestry & Natural Resources Plan
- Forestry & Natural Resources Commission
- CivFed Planning & Zoning Committee seeking input
 - Established a subcommittee to look at the issue
 - lotcov.sc.chair@civfed.org

How do height and setbacks limits fit in?

- Lot coverage and height limits are integrally related as “bulk”
- Staff lot coverage review in 2005 noted but did not address height
- Calculation of 35 foot height limit permits much higher structures
 - Height is averaged at four points, front and back
 - Height of gables and certain other roof designs is discounted 50%
- Town of Vienna does not permit such adjustments
- Height blocks out solar access needed for alternative energy sources
- More generous setbacks would increase tree protections and avoid walling off adjacent properties

Where do we go from here?

- After a decade of delay, the study should begin promptly.
- Year by year, week by week, the damage from huge teardowns has been and continues to be irreparable.
- The study should include a comprehensive look at all these issues.
- It should be completed by July 1, 2025, with recommendations for Zoning Ordinance reform based on real analysis of costs and benefits.
- That is over a year after ***the second time*** the County Board asked staff to conduct the study.
- The results should reflect real and substantial public participation.