

LID ELEMENT #3: ZONING BULK AND DIMENSION STANDARDS

OBJECTIVE

Incorporate flexibility for setbacks and heights, allow clustering of buildings, and minimize building footprints as an approach to maintain natural hydrologic functions, native vegetation and green space.

CONSIDERATIONS

For this memorandum, it was assumed that bulk and dimensional standard modifications would only be considered for single family and multi-family residential projects.

RELATED ELEMENTS

Element 1 Minimize Site Disturbance

Element 2 Retain and Plant Native Vegetation

TRADITIONAL SITE DEVELOPMENT TECHNIQUES

The layout of a project is influenced by many factors including the bulk and dimensional standards of the site zoning. A developer will typically maximize developable area based on the maximum and minimum requirements of the zoning such as setbacks, height limits, maximum building coverage, etc. The goal is usually to maximize square footages for commercial development and lot or unit count for residential projects.

“Front yard setbacks can extend driveway length and increase the impervious coverage of the lot. Side yard setbacks and wide frontages increase the total road length and overall impervious coverage.”

CODES AND STANDARDS REVIEWED

Olympia Municipal Code (OMC) Section 18.04.080 and Table 4.04 (residential districts development standards)

OMC 18.05.080 and Table 5.04 (residential and commercial development standards for village zonings)

2014 Comprehensive Plan

Department of Ecology
Low Impact
Development Code
Update and Integration

BENEFITS OF USING LOW IMPACT DESIGN

Modifying zoning bulk and dimensional standards can have a large impact on site layout. For instance, if building height limits are increased, builders could build vertically instead of horizontally, which leads to smaller footprints and could reduce impervious surface coverage on a site. By increasing zoning bulk and dimensional limits (building heights) and decreasing others (building coverage limits, setbacks), site development could be flexibly designed to meet project goals while still providing layouts that reduce the total building footprint and increase clustering. For instance a reduced front setback could reduce driveway lengths and corresponding impervious area. Reduced building footprints provide more

opportunity for natural site hydrology to be preserved and low impact design elements to be implemented. Open spaces can be increased while maintaining development densities.

OLYMPIA CODE ANALYSIS

Bulk and dimensional standards are addressed in the OMC within the design standards for the zoning district types. Each zoning district has development standards for setbacks, building height limits, open space requirements, maximum impervious surface coverage limits, minimum lot dimensions, and other requirements. The current zoning standards are a result of many years of adjustments and consensus building. They help stabilize the real estate market and provide predictable patterns of development.

Olympia’s Comprehensive Plan includes coordinated building heights and view protection goals.

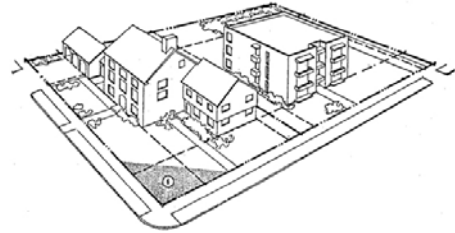
HURDLES TO IMPLEMENTATION

Modifications to the zoning bulk and dimensional standards could present the following challenges:

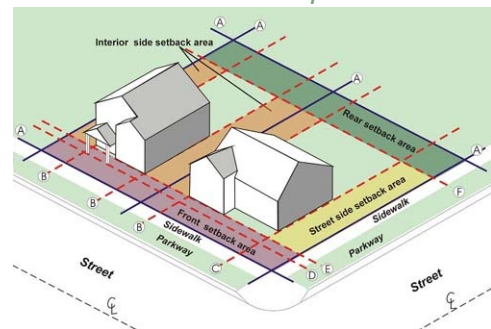
Building Height Increases Don’t Sufficiently Offset Reduced Building Coverage Limits – Reductions in standards such as building coverages can be mitigated by allowing for taller buildings to achieve desired square footages or unit counts. In theory this could be effective, but in practice it may not have widespread application. Increases in building height limits would be applicable for multi-family projects. However, taller buildings are typically more expensive to construct due to requirements for elevators, special building materials, fire exiting and suppression, etc.

Single family residential projects have similar challenges. Two-story buildings are currently the norm for new single family homes in order to meet market targets for square footages, density requirements and the limits of site coverage in the city code. Three-story single family residential construction is not a typical style and may meet consumer resistance.

The current zoning standards are a result of many years of consensus building.



Reduction of front building setbacks for single family residential projects will not likely result in any change in building placement unless maximum setbacks are imposed.



Building Placement (Single Family Projects) – Reduction of front building setbacks for single family residential projects are not likely to result in much change in building placement unless maximum setbacks are imposed. The main drivers of the building layout at the front of a typical single family lot are parking space in the driveway, building floor plans and utility easements. Where alleys are not provided, driveways with a minimum 20-foot length are desirable to accommodate vehicle parking that avoids conflicts with sidewalk use. Many homeowners use their garages for storage or work space, or own more cars than fit in the garage. This results in regular use of the driveway for parking. On-street parking can provide an alternative for homeowners, but parking on individual lots is generally preferred by residents.

Residential lots often have a 10-foot utility easement across the front yard for power, phone, and cable services. In order to provide a homeowner with a front yard that is not entirely encumbered by this easement, additional yard space is desired. Further, the 10-foot easement space can include above ground utility fixtures such as pull boxes and transformers.

Current Code Already Incorporates Some LID Standards– The requirements in OMC 18.04.080 and 18.05.080 and their associated development standards tables already incorporate many of the standards of low impact design. Setbacks are typically 20 feet or less and are as small as zero in certain zoning districts. Building coverage limits are typically 50% or less for residential zones. Further, unlike many other cities, the City of Olympia has maximum development coverage or maximum impervious coverage limits in most zones. These limits both encourage dense development and limit site coverage.

Olympia requires that open space to be provided in certain developments. It also collects impact fees for neighborhood parks and open space.

Current Open Space Requirements	
Residential Low Impact (RLI) zone	Tree tract – approx. 60% of site
Other single-family subdivisions	Tree tract – approx. 10% of site
Chambers Basin R-4 zone	Drainage dispersion tract – 65% of site
Cottage housing	Open space tract – 450 sq. ft. per unit
Manufactured Housing Park	Open space tract – 500 sq. ft. per unit
Multi-family housing	Up to 30% of site depending on zone – must include ‘useable’ space
Environmentally sensitive area	Up to 20% open space may be required in addition to critical areas and buffers
Open space impact fee	Land acquisition funding for Olympia Parks, Arts, and Recreation Department

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Single Family Residential

- Option 1: No Change. Maintain current code limits.
- Option 2: Require a percentage open space to be preserved as native (or at least pervious) for RLI, R4, R4-8 and R6-12 zonings.
- Option 3: Modify clustering options such as for environmentally sensitive area protections (OMC 18.04.080(F) and cottage housing to provide more incentives to use these options.

Multi-Family Residential

- Option 1: No Change. Maintain current code limits.
- Option 2: Increase open space requirement by a percentage for multifamily projects with commensurate reduction in allowed building coverage. An increase in building height limits could also be implemented to offset building coverage reduction impacts.

ANALYSIS

Reducing zoning bulk and dimensional standards can be an effective tool in minimizing the footprint of a development. However, reductions in footprints are only beneficial if accompanied by an increase in pervious soil. Therefore, the options have focused on increasing the perviousness of a site through increases in pervious open space. If only the building coverage limits are reduced there is no guarantee that the site pervious area will be increased without further, additional requirements. Focusing on open space achieves the increased perviousness that is desired.

Single Family Residential Analysis

Option 1 (no change) retains the status quo. The current OMC already has limited front setbacks and restrictive limits on building coverage for residential zones; and options for clustering.

Implementation of Option 2 (require increased open space) would institute increased open space requirements for residential zones that either do not contain them or have only limited application. This will require updates to OMC 18.04.080 and Table 4.04. Open space limits could be modified to require a percentage of open space for RLI, R-4, R4-8 and R6-12 zones. This open space would be in addition to tree tracts, be set aside within a subdivision (not on a per lot basis), and must either be maintained as native vegetation or can be landscaped. This area will be required to remain pervious and uncompacted to allow for infiltration. This area would be set aside as a separate tract or lot with requirements regarding perviousness specified within the recorded plat.



Because this open space is contained in a separate tract with specified requirements, its preservation is more likely to be maintained.

Option 3 (increase clustering through incentives) would require development of an incentive program. Incentives would need to be compelling enough to overcome perceived obstacles to clustering.

Multi-family Analysis

Option 1 (no change) retains the status quo. The current OMC already has limited front setbacks and restrictive limits on building coverage for multi-family residential zones.

Option 2 (increase open space multi-family), would increase open space requirements for multi family zoning districts and reduce building coverage limits. Changes to OMC Section 18.04.080 and Table 4.04 would be needed to incorporate this change. Option 2 would increase site perviousness and provide more area for infiltration. Requirements would be needed to preserve perviousness and infiltrative capabilities of open space areas. Allowing for increased building heights could offset impacts to overall allowed building square footages.

RECOMMENDATION (SINGLE FAMILY)

Staff recommends Option 3. Option 3 would incentivize the use of the clustering option already present in City code. Clustering provides for increased open space, infiltration and preservation of natural vegetation.

Option 1 would not increase pervious area on sites over what is currently allowed. Option 2 reduces the developable area of the site and could create problems meeting density requirements.

RECOMMENDATION (MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL)

Staff recommends Option 1. Current City code already has limitations on zoning bulk and dimension standards for multi-family projects including maximum impervious surface limits of 70-75% and open space requirements of 25-30%.

Option 2 would increase open space requirements for multi-family projects. Density requirements can be tough to achieve with current open space requirements of multi-family districts.

