

New Lot Coverage Restrictions for Single Family Homes

Revised 12/12/05 and probably will be revised again as clarifications emerge.

On November 15th 2005, the County Board adopted new lot coverage restrictions for single-family properties that govern both renovations and new homes. The rules took effect immediately, except for homeowners with building plans already approved or submitted, who can have 56% lot coverage. The new rules apply two types of caps: one for the house footprint and one for overall coverage.

- **House footprint** is the square footage of what rests, directly or indirectly, on the ground, such as: bay-windows with floor space, chimneys, porches, decks 4' or higher above grade, cantilevered decks with horizontal projections that are 4' or more, and covered breezeways connected to the house.
- **Overall coverage** includes the house, driveway, parking pads, and accessory buildings (such as garages) that are two stories tall or that have a footprint of more than 150 square feet.

The County Web site has a tool for calculating allowable overall coverage and house coverage.

http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/CPHD/forums/lotcoverage/pdf/lotcoverage_calculations111705.pdf

HOW THE NEW RULES WORK

The maximum allowable house footprint and overall coverage varies depending on (1) what zoning district the property is; (2) how large the lot is; (3) whether the property is standard, undersized, or oversized when compared to the minimum required lot size for the zoning district; and (4) whether the property qualifies for the coverage bonuses.

- An additional 3% house coverage is allowed for homes with a front porch that is attached to the front elevation and that has an area of at least 60 square feet on the front of the building, exclusive of any wrap-around or side portion.
- An additional 5% overall coverage is allowed for homes with a detached rear garage.

Lot Status. Homeowners should know what zoning district they are in and whether their lot size makes the lot standard, undersize, or oversize—concepts that impact several lot coverage calculations.

LOT STATUS	R-5	R-6	R-8	R-10	R-20
Minimum Required Size	5,000 sq ft	6,000 sq ft	8,000 sq ft	10,000 sq ft	20,000 sq ft
Undersized Lots	<5,000 sq ft	<6,000 sq ft	<8,000 sq ft	<10,000 sq ft	<20,000 sq ft
Standard Lot Range	5,000 – 6,999 sq ft	6,000 – 8,399 sq ft	8,000 – 11,199 sq ft	10,000 – 13,999 sq ft	20,000 – 27,999 sq ft
Oversized Lots Begin At	7,000 sq ft	8,400 sq ft	11,200 sq ft	14,000 sq ft	28,000 sq ft

Standard Lots. To calculate house footprint limits and overall coverage limits, multiply the actual lot size by the appropriate percentage shown in the table. The “House Footprint Limit” indicates what the largest standard size lots might achieve if setback rules do not further limit what can be built.

STANDARD LOTS: Multiply the % by Actual Lot Size to Determine Maximum Coverage					
COVERAGE LIMITS	R-5	R-6	R-8	R-10	R-20
House Footprint %	34%	30%	25%	25%	16%
...with Front Porch	37%	33%	28%	28%	19%
House Footprint Limit	2,380 sq ft	2,520 sq ft	2,800 sq ft	3,500 sq ft	4,480 sq ft
...with Front Porch	2,590 sq ft	2,772 sq ft	3,136 sq ft	3,920 sq ft	5,320 sq ft
Overall Coverage %	45%	40%	35%	32%	25%
...with Porch Bonus	48%	43%	38%	35%	28%
...with Garage Bonus	50%	45%	40%	37%	30%
...with Both Bonuses	53%	48%	43%	40%	33%

Undersize Lots. About 19% of homeowners have undersized lots. The house footprint caps for undersized lots are based on the “Minimum Required Size” for the zoning district rather than actual lot size. However the overall coverage limits are based on actual lot size. If the house exceeds or is near the overall coverage, the larger footprint maximum shown in the table cannot be achieved. Keep in mind that onsite parking for one vehicle is required, and setback rules still apply.

UNDERSIZED LOTS: Use the Minimum Required Size, Not Actual Lot Size; Setbacks Apply					
Use Minimum Required Size for Zoning District	R-5 5,000 sq ft	R-6 6,000 sq ft	R-8 8,000 sq ft	R-10 10,000 sq ft	R-20 20,000 sq ft
House Footprint Can Be	1,700 sq ft	1,800 sq ft	2,000 sq ft	2,500 sq ft	3,200 sq ft
...with Porch Bonus	1,850 sq ft	1,980 sq ft	2,240 sq ft	2,800 sq ft	3,800 sq ft
Overall Coverage Is	Based on actual lot size. May require smaller house footprint than above.				
...with Porch Bonus	48%	43%	38%	35%	28%
...with Garage Bonus	50%	45%	40%	37%	30%
...with Both Bonuses	53%	48%	43%	40%	33%

Oversized Lots. About 12% of Arlington lots are oversized. These lots have 140% of the minimum size required for their zoning district and are subject to the “House Footprint Limit” shown in the table. However, there is no cap for overall coverage, which is calculated based on applying the percentages shown in the table to the actual lot size.

OVERSIZE LOTS: Use the Caps for the House Footprint; Calculate the Overall Coverage					
Oversized Lots Begin At	R-5 7,000 sq ft	R-6 8,400 sq ft	R-8 11,200 sq ft	R-10 14,000 sq ft	R-20 28,000 sq ft
House Footprint Limit	2,380 sq ft	2,520 sq ft	2,800 sq ft	3,500 sq ft	4,480 sq ft
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Nonconforming Properties

About 7% of single-family homes are larger than the new maximum house footprints and about 3% of single-family properties exceed the new overall coverage limits.¹ Many others are close to the new limits. A certified plat indicating current coverage will be required for new additions.

Many homes also do not conform to other zoning rules put into place after they were built, such as setbacks, height, and onsite parking requirements. (The largest number is nonconforming to required setbacks.) Fortunately, when the new coverage rules were adopted, several other rules also were changed to provide relief to nonconforming properties.

Undersized Lots. A rule that constrained expansion of a home on an undersized lot based on the size of the home in 1950 has been eliminated.

Right to Rebuild Nonconforming Structures. Nonconforming homes and accessory structures that are destroyed—not torn down—may be rebuilt to their prior footprint and stories, if rebuilt within 2 years.

Right to Expand Nonconforming Structures. Houses and accessory structures that do not conform to current zoning rules may be expanded, provided the expansion complies with the current rules.

The Civic Federation's Planning & Zoning Committee prepared this summary. Email martha@civfed.org.

¹ Staff analysis of 27,000 single-family homes using 2001 aerial maps – no porch or garage bonuses applied