

Lot Coverage Study Resolution

Arlington County Civic Federation

Planning & Zoning Committee

June 9, 2026

§3.2.5. Coverage

A. One-family dwellings

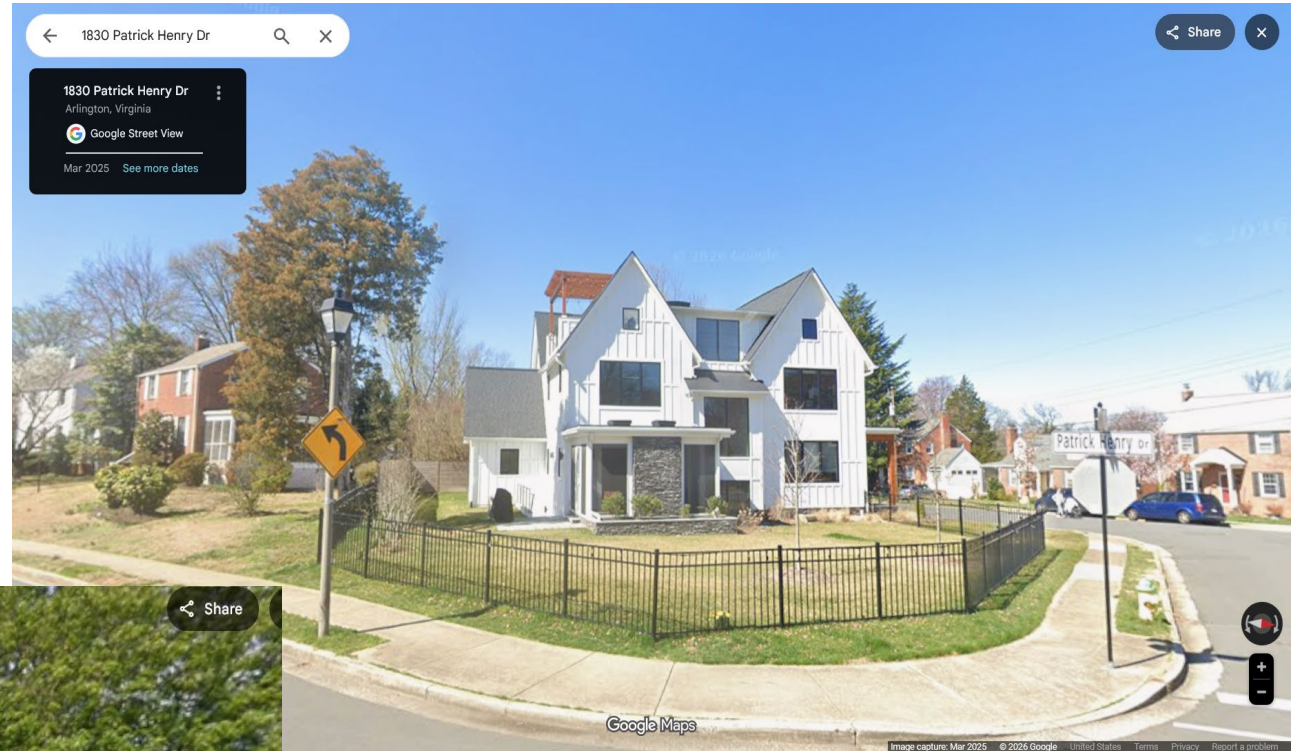
On any one-family dwelling lot in an R, RA, C, and M district, the following shall apply:

MAXIMUM COVERAGE AND CAP

| Categories | R-5 R15-30T | R-6, R2-7, RA, C, M | R-8 | R-10, R-10T | R-20 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|-------|----------------|-------|
| Maximum lot coverage (%) | 45 | 40 | 35 | 32 | 25 |
| Maximum lot coverage of one-family dwelling with porch of at least 60 square feet (exclusive of any wrap-around or side portion) on the front elevation (%) | 48 | 43 | 38 | 35 | 28 |
| Maximum lot coverage with detached garage in the rear yard (%) | 50 | 45 | 40 | 37 | 30 |
| Maximum lot coverage with detached garage in the rear yard and porch of at least 60 square feet (exclusive of any wrap around or side portion) on the front elevation (%) | 53 | 48 | 43 | 40 | 33 |
| Maximum main building footprint coverage (%) | 34 | 30 | 25 | 25 | 16 |
| Maximum main building footprint coverage with front porch (%) | 37 | 33 | 28 | 28 | 19 |
| Maximum main building footprint (sf.) | 2,380 | 2,520 | 2,800 | 3,500 | 4,480 |
| Maximum main building footprint with front porch (sf.) | 2,590 | 2,772 | 3,136 | 3,920 | 5,320 |

- Existing main and accessory buildings or structures that, as of November 15, 2005, are not in conformance with the coverage requirements adopted on November 15, 2005, may be rebuilt within the building footprint and height and stories as they existed on November 15, 2005, if such structures are damaged or destroyed by fire, wind, earthquake, or other force majeure. Such rebuilding shall only be permitted if commenced within two years after such damage or destruction.
- Maximum main building footprint coverage on undersized lots in a zoning district shall be the same square footage as permitted on a standard sized lot (e.g., 6000 square feet in R-6) in the zoning district, subject to all applicable setback requirements.

5678 18th Rd N. becomes 1830 Patrick Henry – WESTOVER - 2022





“Giant White Houses”* Are the Real Problem

- Clear cutting of mature trees on entire lots
- Heat island, CO2, and related climate effects
- Depletion of dwindling stock of smaller, more affordable homes
- Impacts on adjacent homes (the classic reason we have zoning rules)
- Blocking of access to alternative solar energy sources
- Much greater stormwater runoff problems than sidewalks/patios
- Increased electricity and water consumption

How Big Is This Problem?

- 2014 Stormwater Plan: “issue of single family home redevelopment and lot coverage” needs “a more comprehensive look,” forming 60% of increased area
- The late County Board Member Erik Gutshall agreed:
“Home sizes that were once the theoretical maximum are now the *de facto* minimum for new home rebuilds. Arlington needs to initiate the modernization of our zoning ordinance with a frank discussion of just what character do we want in our neighborhoods.” ArlNow, June 24, 2019.
- **125 homes a year** on average are torn down and replaced with homes **more than three times the size of the original house**, for an average price of \$1.7 million.*
- November 2024 staff report trend line
 - **building footprint** is the principal change: from 21% to 34% of the lot in R-6; from 18% to 28% in R-10
 - other impervious surfaces have increased only “slightly.”

Impervious cover trends over time

1900-present day

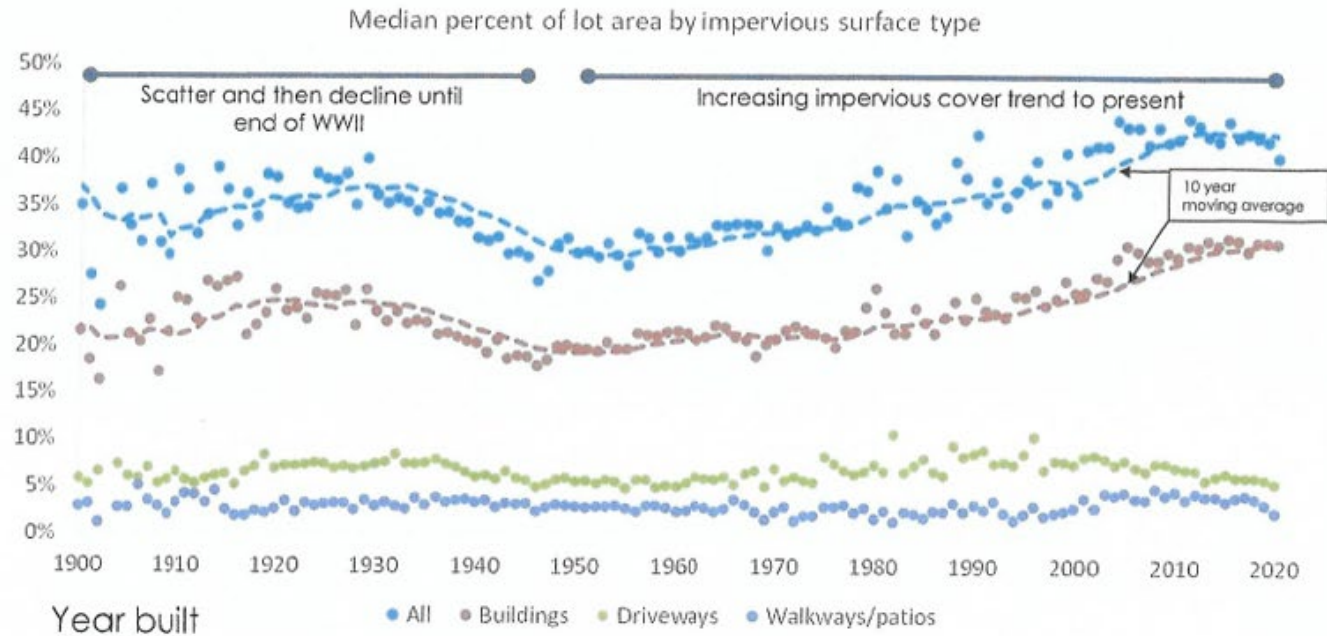
3 main categories:

- Buildings
- Driveways
- Walkways and patios

Total lot impervious area and building footprints have increased over time

For newer homes, most of the lot impervious is from the building footprint

Proportionately less space for driveways and walkways/patios



Why the Current Study Is Inadequate

- In the 2023 Forestry & Natural Resources Plan, the County Board finally directed staff to conduct a lot coverage study.
- 2021 public engagement had confirmed the need to
 - “Discourage or limit development of large homes on small lots”
 - “Increase or strengthen requirements for tree protection”
 - “Place restrictions on single-family home sizes”*
- But in 2025, the Board agreed with staff’s proposal to reverse course.
 - Refused *even to study* building footprint limits
 - Refused *even to study* square foot limits on lot coverage (e.g., oversized lots)
 - Refused *even to study* height limits (or calculation of them)
 - Directed study of whether to *eliminate* lot coverage rules and replace them with “impervious surface” limits
- Changing the subject to “impervious surface” ignores the elephant in the room.
 - accommodates incentive to continue to build (and sell) enormous houses
 - disregards the many zoning problems associated with these enormous redevelopments, as well as the greater stormwater runoff associated with them