

TO: Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission
FROM: Mike Reynolds, AICP | Principal Planner
DATE: September 23, 2025
FILE #: 10-A-25-OA, Agenda Item # 37
SUBJECT: Consideration of Ordinance Amendments to Increase the Building Height Allowance and Building Setbacks in RN-5

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Planning recommends approval of amendments to the City of Knoxville Zoning Code, Article 4.3, Table 4-2, Residential Districts Dimensional Standards, pertaining to building height and setbacks in the RN-5 (General Residential Neighborhood) district, proposed by the City of Knoxville.

**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: September 22, 2025

TO: Amy Brooks

FROM: Bryan Berry
Deputy Director of Plans Review & Inspections

RE: Amendments to City Zoning Code – RN-5 Dimensional Standards for Multifamily

Residential districts transition from low density, single-family scale in the RN-1 district, to high density residential development in the RN-7 district. Requirements in these districts such as lot area, width, setbacks, building height and permitted uses increasingly allow for larger and denser development from RN-1 to RN-7.

The RN-4 district is intended to accommodate, *“single-family, two-family, and townhouse dwelling development along with **low-rise multi-family dwellings**.”* Low-rise multi-family (MF) dwellings in the RN-4 have a maximum height of 45 feet unless adjacent to a single-family dwelling, then 35 feet. The contrast is in the RN-5 district, maximum building height for a MF dwelling drops to 35 feet, then almost doubling to 65 feet in the RN-6 district.

The proposed amendment is to adjust the maximum building height along with corresponding dimensional standards in the RN-5 district. The amendments are as follows:

- Increase the maximum building height for a MF dwelling in the RN-5 zoning district from 35 feet to 55 feet, unless adjacent to a single-family dwelling, then 45 feet.
- The minimum front setback for a MF dwelling 35 feet or less in height is 25 feet or the average of blockface, whichever is less; structures over 35 feet in height have a front setback of 35 feet.
- The minimum interior side setback for a MF dwelling 35 feet or less in height is 12 feet. Structures over 35 feet in height is 12 feet plus one additional foot setback for every two feet of building height over 35 feet, except when adjacent to a single-family dwelling it is one additional foot setback for every one foot of building height over 35 feet.
- Rear setback for a MF dwelling 35 feet or less in height is 25 feet, while structures over 35 feet in height is 30 feet.

Considering the proposed amendments above, how does this impact properties zoned RN-5. The following are a summary of statistics regarding RN-5 zoned properties in the City of Knoxville:

- 975 parcels are zoned RN-5
 - 547 (56 percent) meet the minimum lot area and lot width for multi-family
 - 212 (39 percent) of these abut RN-1 and/or RN-2 zoning districts
 - Six (6) of the 212 are undeveloped (or vacant)

Increased height for multi-family in the RN-5 district would allow density to develop more vertically where appropriate across the city, while changes to increase interior setbacks and limit building height when adjacent to single-family homes will also help to protect existing residences. City staff has worked closely with Planning on the proposed amendments and recommends approval.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bryan Berry". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bryan Berry, AICP
Deputy Director of Plans Review & Inspections

4.3 DIMENSIONAL STANDARDS

- B. All residential lots that are not served by a sanitary sewer system must be a minimum of 20,000 square feet in lot area. If the minimum lot area requirement is greater than 20,000 square feet, such requirement controls.
- C. A pocket neighborhood design is permitted in the RN-4 District per the standards of Section 4.5.

Table 4-2: Residential Districts Dimensional Standards

	EN	RN-1	RN-2	RN-3	RN-4
Bulk					
Minimum Lot Area	22,000 sf	SF: 10,000 sf 2F: 15,000 sf Nonresidential: 20,000 sf	SF: 5,000 sf 2F: 10,000 sf Nonresidential: 10,000 sf	SF: 5,000 sf 2F: 7,500 sf TH: 12,000 sf for 3 du, 3,000 sf each additional du Nonresidential: 10,000 sf	SF: 5,000 sf 2F: 7,000 sf TH: 3,000 sf/du MF: 2,000 sf/du Nonresidential: 10,000 sf
Maximum Lot Area	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	MF: 40,000 sf
Minimum Lot Width	SF: 100' Nonresidential: 100'	75'	50' Nonresidential: 75'	SF, 2F: 50' TH: 20'/du Nonresidential: 75'	SF, 2F: 50' TH: 20'/du MF: 60' Nonresidential: 75'
Maximum Building Height	35'	35'	35'	35'	SF, 2F, TH: 35' MF: 45', unless adjacent to a single-family dwelling, then 35'
Maximum Building Coverage	25%	30%	30%	35% TH & Nonresidential: 50%	35% TH, MF, Nonresidential: 50%
Maximum Impervious Surface	35%	40%	40% Nonresidential: 50%	45% TH & Nonresidential: 60%	45% TH, MF, Nonresidential: 60%
Setbacks					
Minimum Front Setback	+/- 10' of the average of blockface; in	+/- 10' of the average of blockface; in	20', or the average of blockface, whichever is	10' or the average of blockface,	10' or the average of blockface,

	no case less than 40'	no case less than 25'	less; in no case less than 10'	whichever is less	whichever is less
Minimum Interior Side Setback	10% of lot width Nonresidential: 20% of lot width	8' or 15% of lot width, whichever is less; in no case less than 20' combined Nonresidential: 20% of lot width	5' or 15% of lot width, whichever is less; in no case less than 15' combined Nonresidential: 20% of lot width	5' or 15% of lot width, whichever is less; in no case less than 15' combined Nonresidential: 20% of lot width	SF, 2F, TH: 5' or 15% of lot width, whichever is less; in no case less than 15' combined MF: 12' or 15% of lot width, whichever is greater Nonresidential: 20% of lot width
Minimum Corner Side Setback	15% of lot width Nonresidential: 20% of lot width	15' Nonresidential: 25'	12' Nonresidential: 20'	12' Nonresidential: 15'	12' Nonresidential: 15'
Minimum Rear Setback	25'	25'	25'	25'	25'

Table 4-2: Residential Districts Dimensional Standards

	RN-5	RN-6	RN-7
Bulk			
Minimum Lot Area	SF & 2F: 5,000 sf TH: 2,000 sf/du MF: 5,000 sf for 2 du + 1,450 sf per additional du Nonresidential: 10,000 sf	SF & 2F: 5,000 sf TH: 2,000 sf/du MF: 5,000 sf + 950 sf per additional du Nonresidential: 10,000 sf	TH: 2,000 sf/du MF: 700 sf/du Nonresidential: 10,000 sf
Minimum Lot Width	SF & 2F: 50' TH: 20'/du MF: 60'	SF & 2F: 50' TH: 20'/du MF: 60'	TH: 15'/du MF: 80'
Maximum Building Height	SF, 2F, & TH: 35' MF: 55', unless adjacent to a single-family dwelling, then 45'	SF, 2F, & TH: 35' MF: 65'	TH: 35' MF: 65'

Maximum Building Footprint	N/A	N/A	MF: 30,000 sf for individual structures where multiple structures are built on a lot, there must be a 35' minimum separation between structures
Maximum Building Length	N/A	N/A	200'
Maximum Building Coverage	35% TH, MF, Nonresidential: 50%	40% TH, MF, Nonresidential: 50%	50%
Maximum Impervious Surface	45% TH, MF, Nonresidential: 60%	50% TH, MF, Nonresidential: 70%	70%
Setbacks			
Minimum Front Setback	25' or the average of blockface, whichever is less MF: Structures 35' or less in height: 25' or the average of blockface, whichever is less Structures over 35' in height: 35'	Structures 35' or less in height: 25' or the average of blockface, whichever is less Structures over 35' in height: 35' However, when a lot is within 1 mile of the DK District, as measured from the lot line to the closest edge of the DK District, and no parking is located in the front setback, the setback may be reduced to 12 feet	TH: 25' or the average of blockface, whichever is less MF: 35'; if no surface parking is located in the front setback, may be reduced to 25'
Minimum Interior Side Setback	5' or 15% of lot width, whichever is less; in no case less than 15' combined MF & Nonresidential: Structures 35' or less in height: 12' Structures over 35' in height: 12' plus 1' additional setback for every 2' of building height over 35' except	Structures 35' or less in height: 5' or 15% of lot width, whichever is less; in no case less than 15' combined Structures over 35' in height: 12', plus 1' additional setback for every 2 feet of building height over 35'	TH: 5' or 15% of lot width, whichever is less; in no case less than 15' combined MF: 12', plus 1' additional setback for every 2 feet of building height over 35'

	when adjacent to a single-family dwelling is plus 1' additional setback for every 1' of building height over 35'		
Minimum Corner Side Setback	12' MF & Nonresidential: 15'	12' MF & Nonresidential: 15'	15'
Minimum Rear Setback	Structures 35' or less in height: 25' Structures over 35' in height: 30'	Structures 35' or less in height: 25' Structures over 35' in height: 30'	30'

(Ord. No. O-10-2024, § 1, 2-6-24)

RN-5 ZONES

