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Planning Department

INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION

To: Planning Board **Date:** January 19, 2007
From: Kristin K. Alexander, AICP, Assistant Town Planner *KKA*
Subject: Draft Article ZB – Tear Downs & Replacements of Homes on Undersized Lots

Attached is additional research related to draft proposed zoning article “ZB – Tear Downs and Replacements of Homes on Undersized Lots” (Draft Article ZB).

Background

As a result of prior lot and house size research conducted by staff and Planning Board discussions on Draft Zoning Article ZB, the following types of questions have developed: (a) Should there be a maximum size limit on re-built homes on undersized lots? (b) If the answer to Question (a) is “yes,” what size limit should be imposed? (c) What size house would appear too large for its lot?

Staff cannot answer these questions directly, but has tried to assist the Board in pursuing answers if desired. The answer to Question (a) is obviously a policy/judgment call. The answers to Questions (b) and (c) depend on lot size, house size, design/scale/massing, and maybe a few other factors. Since staff cannot research nor do we have control over design/scale/massing, we decided to research these questions by reviewing in greater detail lot size and house size data available through the Assessor’s Department.

Research

Based on the Assessor’s database, a 2000 square foot home is approximately an average size home (and also the midpoint or median of single-family detached home sizes) in Acton. In staffs’ opinion, a 2000 square foot home on a standard Residence 2 (R-2) zoned-lot (20,000 square feet minimum lot size) seems reasonable. A 2000 square foot home on a 20,000 square foot (standard R-2) lot results in a floor area ratio (FAR) of 0.10 or 10% (house size divided by lot size). Therefore, staff chose to use 0.10 FAR as the threshold for determining whether a lot might appear to contain a home too large for its size. The Board can choose to use a different threshold if it wishes.

Results

Attached is a list of all undersized lots containing single-family detached homes in Acton. Staff has highlighted the lots that have a FAR greater than 10% (a large home based on its lot size). To create the list, staff has:

- taken the Acton Assessor's database from 2000 (the most recent database the Planning Department has access to);
- updated the parcel information that showed obvious problems or changes;
- deleted all parcels with non-residential structures;
- deleted all parcels with conforming lot area (so the only parcels remaining have non-conforming lot area);
- highlighted in blue those parcels with a floor area ratio (FAR) greater than 10%.

Out of the 620 undersized lots with homes, 214 of the lots (35%) already have FARs greater 10% (large homes for their lot size as defined by staff). It is especially noticeable in the Village Residential (VR) zoning district.

Next Steps

Roland has not been able to review the research results. He will review the document before the January 23, 2007 Planning Board meeting so he can discuss it with you. In the meantime, please review the data provided, questions posed, and Draft Article ZB for the meeting. If you have any questions or problems with the document, feel free to contact me. Thank you.