

Attachment 1: Transition Height

The below information is excerpted from the staff report for the May 5, 2025, Mayor and Council ZOR and CMA work session.

The Zoning Ordinance Rewrite recommends an updated requirement for height transitions between single-unit residential and higher-intensity uses. The proposal is intended to ensure appropriate transitions between higher-density development and single detached neighborhoods, while balancing policies from the Comprehensive Plan, Town Center Master Plan, and Climate Action Plan regarding intense development around Metro stations, as well as housing production goals.

Under the proposal, any building greater than 50 feet in height within higher-intensity zones would be required to incorporate a height transition along the façade(s) that abut or confront lots¹ zoned for and developed with single-unit residential in lower-intensity zones (Table 1, below). Buildings subject to transition requirements would be required to incorporate one or two building set backs (or “step backs”) along the façade(s) that abut or confront residential (as described above), depending upon the height of the building. A step back is an architectural design feature where a building’s upper floors are recessed from the lower floors, thereby creating a stepped or recessed building profile.

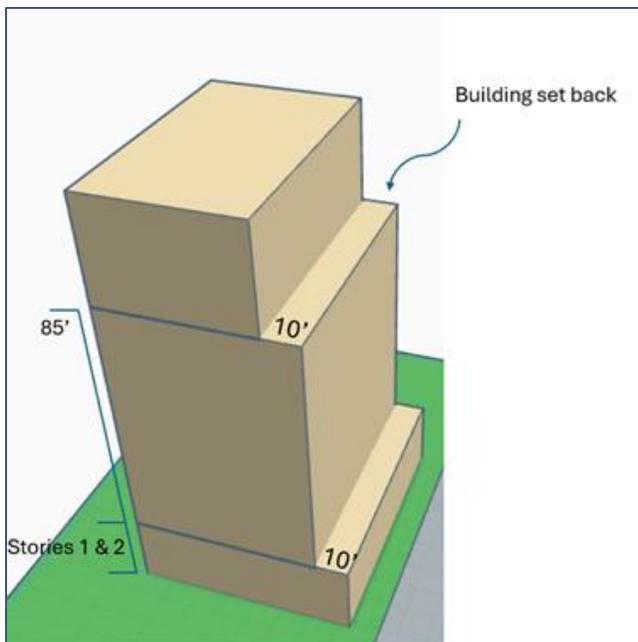


Figure 1. Proposed Building Height Transition Requirements

For buildings exceeding 50 feet tall, a ten-foot step back would be required above the second floor. This step back is intended to correspond to the roofline of smaller nearby structures, reducing the scale of the proposed building while emphasizing its ground-level elements. For buildings that exceeding 85 feet tall, an additional step back would be required at 85 feet to further ease the transition. The step back would apply along the portion of the building facade that abuts or confronts properties as listed in Table 1. Buildings under 50 feet tall would not be required to have the step back, as a height of 50 feet provides a logical transition from the 35- to 45-foot height maximums of the residential zones. The ZOR proposes that height transitions would not apply to lots that confront one another across the metro/CSX right-of-way, MD-355, or I-270, as these rights-of-way serve as significant physical barriers between development.

Table 1. Proposed Application of Height Transitions Requirements

Height Transitions Apply to:	When abutting or confronting properties developed with single-unit, duplex, or townhouse dwellings in the...
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¹ *Abutting* properties are those “having a common point or border,” while *confronting* properties are “properties directly opposite each other, and separated only by public right-of-way” (Sec. 25.03.02).

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[...]

The recommended height transitions requirements would take the place of outdated transition requirements currently existing within the city’s Zoning Ordinance, most notably including:

- Layback slopes (generally, a line extending 30 degrees from grade at the property line of an abutting/confronting residential-zoned lot onto a mixed-use, industrial, or RMD-25 property; Figure 2 Figure 4, below)
- Setbacks that are based on the height of a proposed building (e.g., development within the Mixed-Use Transit District/MXTD must have rear and side setbacks of the normal 25 feet *or the height of the proposed building, whichever is greater* when abutting residential property)

The layback slope and setback existing requirements place onerous restrictions on properties that are intended for dense development, undermining the intent of the city’s adopted plans. Additionally, the layback slope is difficult to understand and interpret – not only for applicants, but also for city staff and members of the public.

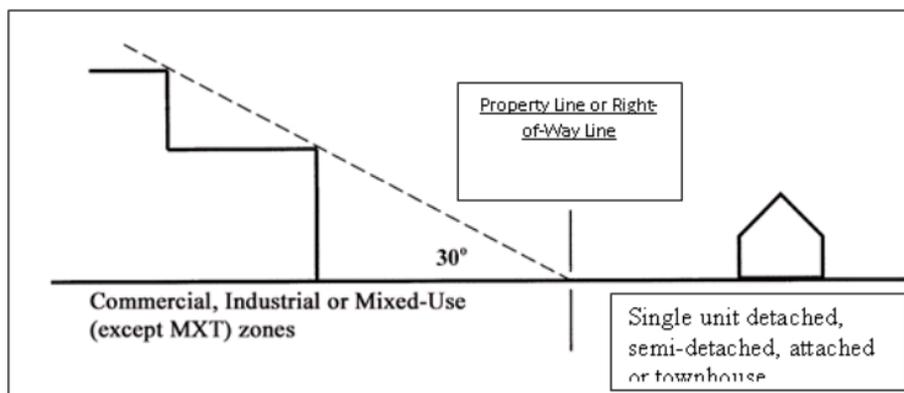


Figure 2. Layback Slope Example (Image 13.1 from the Current Zoning Ordinance)