

Blue Hill Form Based Code

Massing standards and regulatory approaches

I. Introduction

Following text changes to the Blue Hill Form Based Code District in 2018, this memorandum presents additional options for addressing massing considerations across the district, as discussed at that time. LUMO text changes made in the summer of 2018 included modifying recreation space requirements for residential uses. Additional options then identified for future consideration included maximum building footprint, maximum building length, and maximum lot coverage. The changes adopted at the time resulted in a slight increase in ground-level recreation space requirements for residential uses, which equated to an effective decrease in potential lot coverage for residential uses.

This current effort is intended to frame additional options to address building massing. These options include some identified a year ago and others identified from examples elsewhere. In addition to outlining potential regulatory measures, this current effort considers existing conditions in the Blue Hill District in terms of parcel size and parcel configuration, especially for those parcels not yet transformed through redevelopment since the first approval of the Ephesus Fordham Form Based Code. Some of these parcels are smaller than those already redeveloped or with redevelopment approved or underway. Some have challenges associated with floodplain conditions, access, or basic parcel configuration, making redevelopment more challenging. Accordingly, the consideration of additional regulatory measures regarding building massing may be aided by a general discussion of parcel characteristics for the subset of parcels with the most potential or likelihood for redevelopment. Included in these materials is information that categorizes parcels across the district based on size and, in general terms, their prospects for redevelopment.

Importantly, any discussion of redevelopment potential for individual properties, and for the potential impacts of changes in zoning requirements, should be prefaced by stating that zoning requirements are only one of at least three elements needed for redevelopment to occur. Market demand is a second needed element. The third requirement is financial capacity including capital sources and individual parcel owner and developer decisions to act. So, the regulatory framework is a necessary but insufficient mechanism in generating redevelopment.

II. Existing Town standards regarding building massing. Existing standards for building massing are located in the Land Use Management Ordinance and in the Design Guidelines.

a. Requirements in the LUMO include:

- Building height (3, 5 or 7 stories, maximum)
- Outdoor amenity space (six percent)
- Recreation space requirements (residential uses only)
- Building step back (10' above 2nd or 3rd floor) or module variation (6' offset each 80')
- Upper story mass variation (70% of floor plate of 3rd floor, on average; 80% maximum)

b. Elements addressed in the Design Guidelines include:

- Variation in building massing
- Building articulation, including color and material changes, height variation, and step backs in the façade line.

III. Potential additional zoning parameters for building massing

a. Some potential additional standards for building massing, described in more detail below, include:

- Maximum building width
- Maximum building depth
- Maximum building footprint (total square feet)
- Separate requirements for building dimension based on lined or internal buildings, such as parking garages
- Maximum building coverage (percentage)
- Maximum lot width
- Finer grained upper-story footprint maximum percentages

b. Maximum building width:

Maximum building width is often used in infill or transitional settings where compatibility with existing traditional or historic building stock is a goal. Design guidelines often attempt a similar effect by requiring architectural differentiation for buildings exceeding a certain width. Neither of these approaches necessarily requires visual separation between buildings as buildings could be party wall, although separation requirements could be introduced.

c. Maximum building depth:

Maximum building depth sometimes accompanies maximum building width in zoning regulations. Both maximum building depth and maximum building width are important tools in insuring infill development is compatible where the existing neighborhood context is a more traditional fabric of lots and buildings. Maximum building depth would be less uniformly impactful in the Blue Hill District given the widely varied parcel geometries and sizes.

d. Maximum building footprint:

Maximum building footprint has become more frequently used in municipal regulations as retail formats have expanded over the past two decades. It is often used in a suburban context to avoid or constrain the proliferation of large format, single-story retail in a given location, but also is used to provide finer grain urbanism in new or redevelopment settings. For maximum building footprint to be effective in addressing building massing beyond façade articulation, the requirements would need to be accompanied by building separation requirements.

e. Maximum building dimensions for 'internal' or 'lined' buildings:

Some codes differentiate requirements for internal or lined buildings as a way of addressing structured parking in neighborhoods where walkable streets are desired. Such an approach conveys the importance not only of limiting the size of such structures, but also of having liner buildings.

An example incorporating several of these standards:

Zoning District: Main Street Zone (T5-MS) [2 to 7 stories]

- 1) Lined Buildings: 300' width, maximum, with buildings wider than 150' designed to read as a series of buildings no wider than 100' each (defer to Design Guidelines)
- 2) Dimensions for an interior building (of a lined configuration, i.e. parking garages) 230' by 180' maximum
- 3) For standard (non-lined buildings), 380'x 200' maximum main building footprint, with a secondary wing along a side street of 75' width max and 100' depth max.

Zoning District: T5 Main Street Zone (T5-MS) [2 to 5 stories]

- 1) 175'x175' max, secondary wings allowed at 60'x60'

f. Maximum building coverage:

Maximum building coverage for buildings is similar to maximum impervious coverage but with different purposes. Maximum impervious limits are correlated to stormwater management objectives. Maximum building coverage would directly address building footprint as a percentage of the lot, an indirect way to limit building massing. For this measure to be compatible with the objectives of creating walkable streets, standards such as those within the design guidelines would need to be explicitly embraced for unbuilt portions of the lot near the street right-of-way.

g. Maximum lot width:

Maximum lot width is a mechanism for addressing maximum building width, but is more commonly used where large greenfield areas or being developed, or where a regular gridded street network, platted or built, is filling in with developed parcels.

h. Upper-story footprint maximum percentages:

The Blue Hill District already includes a maximum percentage floorplate for upper stories for buildings taller than four stories. Although upper floor percentages may be averaged, allowing for some massing variability, codes elsewhere have incorporated finer granularity to the upper story requirements to achieve diversity in building massing.

An example of upper story maximum percentages

ALLOWED MASSING BY STORY								
Ratio of Each Story in % of ground floor								
STORY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
%	100	100	100	75	50	35	10	N/A

IV. Categorizing parcels potentially affected

With each of the above parameters, impacts may be disproportionate across the range of parcel sizes and parcel configurations in the district. Furthermore, impacts will be varied when coupled with economic and market considerations. Staff has prepared a graphic that begins to categorize parcels across the district and convey some of the key characteristics as follows:

- Small, medium, large parcels
- Environmental constraints, such as floodplains
- Economic/market viability including differential access & visibility
- Possibilities for aggregation of parcels
- Parcels within the District but not currently zoned as such

A subsequent evaluation of the potential regulatory measures should be attuned to these differing characteristics and the respective impacts across the district.

V. Summary

The Blue Hill District, with an underlying history reflected in the parcel patterns, thoroughfare network, infrastructure patterns, and topographical conditions, encompasses certain characteristics more conducive to a few of the potential standards identified above.

The standards which would seem to be more appropriate for the district include some combination of maximum building dimensions including for internal, lined buildings, and finer granularity for upper story footprint percentages.

Maximum building coverage has to be carefully tuned with accompanying standards regarding parking, the design of non-built space, and consideration of widely different parcel sizes in the district. Maximum lot width is more suitable for areas with a more regular or gridded platting pattern. Lastly, regarding upper story footprint percentages, additional differentiation will have a direct impact on building costs, something that should be considered in the further evaluation of options.