



**Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations Rewrite  
Riverdale Park Business Association – Riverdale Park Town Hall  
May 11, 2016**

The purpose of this discussion was to present Clarion Associates' recommendations for the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations rewrite and to discuss the concerns and questions of the group, particularly with regard to how the rewrite pertains to the Riverdale Park Mixed-Use Town Center (M-U-TC) Zone. Public questions and comments are identified by **bold text**. Responses to questions and additional presenter comments are identified by normal text.

**Who is Clarion Associates?**

Clarion Associates are the consultants for the Prince George's County Zoning Rewrite. The firm has experience rewriting and updating the zoning codes for more than 100 jurisdictions across the County. Don Elliot and Craig Richardson are the project managers working directly in Prince George's County. Clarion was selected through a formal Request for Qualifications bid. The Planning Department wanted someone with experience, but also directed them not to bring us an off-the-shelf product. Clarion spent almost a year talking to the community before they put anything to paper. Their goal is to marry best practices with local needs and priorities. Whether the final product happens or not depends on the community and Council reaction.

**Is the mixed-use code for Riverdale Park able to be adapted?**

In general, Clarion recommends that the County avoid creating unique zoning codes for each jurisdiction. The urban parts of the County and our Metro areas have more in common with each other than they have differences. Clarion believes that most of the time you can create zoning categories that are similar and can work in multiple areas. We end up with very complicated, staff-intensive, anti-development ramifications with different, unique codes for every place.

However, Clarion did acknowledge that some communities that are trying to add new development to an existing community fabric may need the proposed Neighborhood Conservation Overlay (NCO) Zone as a way to add a few special provisions to areas that need them. This, emphatically, is not what the M-U-TC is. It's a mini-Zoning Ordinance that just covers Riverdale Park.

**How can the community participate in the development review process?**

The community has been heavily involved in projects such as the Cafritz development. That involvement revolved around the M-U-TC Zone. As proposed by Clarion, all development applications would go into one of two baskets: by-right, or administrative development, and a more extensive discretionary review process. There should be a balance – businesses want certainty, the community wants quality and good standards. But if a developer wants to do something a little different, then the development has to go through a lot of process.



**The whole development situation is very complicated. A business smaller than \$100,000 can't afford to do anything, because there are a lot of fees for things. Could a liaison position be created to serve as a go-between? We couldn't even do a book store with live parking.**

The current Zoning Ordinance is so complicated, even staff doesn't understand it. The new Zoning Ordinance will be better, but will still be complicated. However, a better code with more understandable language will help.

**Having information ahead of time to know what a potential business owner is getting into is perhaps the biggest issue.**

There are hard costs to pay month to month to get a business opened and having to wait for that to happen is a problem. The biggest business frustration is spending a lot of money and not getting anywhere.

**What are your specific roles in the Zoning Rewrite?**

Chad Williams is the Project Manager. Derick Berlage is the Project Facilitator. Overall, the Planning Department is shepherding the project. We have not yet endorsed any recommendations that Clarion Associates have presented. Over the course of the next year, the community needs to get to a place where we say this is better than what we have, Council should approve, or we need to tell the Council no, this is not an improvement.

**One thing I don't understand – if a landlord sells property to another landlord, why does everyone have to get a new Use and Occupancy permit?**

The short answer is this is the law in Prince George's County, but not in a lot of other counties. If you think this should change, make that comment.

**Will this be friendly to Riversdale Mansion?**

**Would the Zoning Ordinance have an impact on commercial areas? What about businesses that have been in operation for a long time?**

If you're continuing as is, it would have no impact, as existing businesses would be "grandfathered" and allowed to continue so long as it was legal at the time the new code is approved. If you sell the property, you may have to bring it up to code.

**Is there anything that can be built-in that can stop speculators from keeping properties empty for long periods of time?**

Not really. As long as buildings are kept up to code and secure, there is very little the County can do.

**How about in D.C. where if a building is vacant, the tax rate increases?**

This is not allowed by Maryland state law.



**The rules should be understandable and similar to what they see in the County, but there should be some local say. There should be uniformity within the whole County.**

If Mount Rainier wants to have codes in such a way that precludes you from adding on, they have small lots so it may make sense. I don't see that as a big issue for Riverdale Park. What is it that Riverdale Park wants? **That's what you want to hear from us, and what we as an association need to address. Zoning is to protect what we have, not discourage new. Layman language rather than legalese helps a lot. We want to see what the M-U-TC looks like compared to the new standards.**