



# *Department of Planning, Zoning, & Environmental Programs*

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## **M E M O R A N D U M**

**TO:** Policy File

**FROM:** Anne Ducey-Ortiz, Planning, Zoning & Environmental Programs Director

**DATE:** March 2021 (Originally dated April 5, 2005, revised February 10, 2010)

**SUBJECT:** Updated Average Lot Width Policy

The Zoning Ordinance defines lot width as the average horizontal distance between side lot lines. Additionally, Section 15-40 of the Subdivision Ordinance requires lots to generally be rectangular in shape and “lots shall not contain peculiarly shaped elongations solely to provide necessary square footage of area which would be unusable for normal purposes.” However, in some cases, and due to how the land can be divided (based on existing conditions), the lot may have irregularly shaped sections.

The Department of Planning and Zoning (previously the Planning Department) has consistently applied a method for calculating lot width based on this broad definition. The lot width calculation uses the area of the lot that meets the minimum lot size and does not have to include areas that are a remnant or elongation resulting from the division or lay of the land. We systematically measure the width of the lot at intervals along the area of the lot which meets the minimum acreage of the zoning district and then divide the total of the width measurements by the number of measurements taken.

We note that there could be many alternative guidelines for calculating the average lot width. However, this practice is in keeping with the past and present practices used in Gloucester and upholds the intent of the County ordinances as shown in the following diagram of a lot in the Beckwith Farms subdivision.

The example below depicts Lot 36 having 10,000 square feet in area, the minimum lot size of the zoning district. In confirming that the lot meets the 100 ft. average lot width requirement at the time of development, the main body of the lot is measured multiple times and the average of these measurements meets the average lot width requirement

of the zoning district. The residual acreage, beyond that required to satisfy the minimum lot size, would not be considered when calculating the average width. **In this method, a lot would not be penalized for additional area that is less than the required lot width provided that the lot in question has an area that meets both the minimum lot size and width requirements.**

This practice would not be used to permit the creation of a flag lot, which is clearly discouraged by the frontage requirement of the Subdivision Ordinance; but, it would apply to lots that contain a taper due to topography or some other circumstance.

This office believes that this provides flexibility for developers while also upholding the requirements of the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances. In addition, this policy provides a method that can be consistently demonstrated without subjectivity in regard to the number of measurements and intervals needed to establish average width.

In reviewing the definition and policy while updating the Zoning Ordinance in 2020, staff looked at various ways of calculating average lot width, such as prescribing the number and location of the measurements for widths. However, staff ultimately recommended keeping the definition as-is to allow for the greatest amount of flexibility.

