

ZONING FROM A TO Z

Residential Districts – Part 4 (Chapter 17-2)

The first installment of this series explained the use of floor area ratio (FAR) as the primary means for differentiating the zoning categories of residential (“R”) districts, while the second reviewed limitations such as height restrictions and setbacks for front, side, and rear yards and some minimal character standards. The third explained additional requirements designed to preserve open space in rear yards.

Thus far, the series has focused on requirements related to “household living” structures. As reviewed in the earlier installments, most of the residential zoning in the Sheffield neighborhood is designated RT4, with a pocket of scattered RS3 lots on the western edge of the neighborhood. Of the types of household living -- detached, elderly, two-flat, townhouse, multi-unit, and single-room occupancy – only detached houses and two-flats are permitted in RT4 districts; only detached houses are permitted in RS3 districts.

Not all structures within residential districts constitute “household living,” however. Other use types allowed in R districts include Group Living situations, certain Public and Civic Uses, and some Commercial uses. Within these categories, what is allowed varies by district.

In RT4 districts, many group living, public and civic uses, and certain commercial uses are permitted as of right. Among others, this includes convents, group domestic violence residences, hospitals, colleges and universities, libraries, day care, parks, fire stations, schools, places of religious assembly, minor utilities, cemeteries, and philanthropic institutions.

A number of other uses require special use approval in an RT4 district. Special use approval involves a case-by-case review procedure to determine whether the use will be compatible with surrounding uses and development patterns. The process requires public notice of the hearing before the Zoning Board of Appeals, which must find that the proposed use in the proposed location meets certain criteria. Examples in an RT4 district are domestic violence shelters, nursing homes, temporary overnight shelters, transitional residences and shelters, lodges or private clubs, community or recreation centers, police stations, major utilities and services, cremating, government-operated health centers, and free-standing wireless communication facilities.

Not allowed is the commercial use described as a Residential Support Service (a use provided primarily to serve the needs of residents in large, multi-unit residences).

Fewer non-“household living” uses are possible in an RS3 district. Not allowed are many of the uses either allowed as of right or with special use approval in an RT4 district, including assisted living facilities, domestic violence shelters, nursing homes, colleges and universities, hospitals, lodges or private clubs, bed and breakfasts, government-operated health centers, and philanthropic institutions. As one might expect, however,

the code permits as of right convents, family community homes, libraries, day care, parks, fire stations, schools, places of religious assembly, minor utilities, and cemeteries in RS3 districts.

In a vast improvement over the 1957 zoning code, the new version contains a simple chart outlining the possible uses for each residential district and whether they are permitted as of right, require special use approval, or are not allowed.

This is the fourth in a series of articles designed to educate the community about the basics of the new zoning code adopted in late 2004. If you would like to learn about a particular topic, contact the Association by calling 773-929-9255 or by sending an e-mail message to sheffieldneighborhoodassociation@hotmail.com; please be as specific as possible when describing your topic or question. Electronic copies of the first three articles also are available by request via the SNA email address.