

What is FAR and why is it important?

Floor area ratio (FAR) is used as a measure of density of the building being developed. The ratio is determined by dividing the total floor space in the building by the total area of the lot on which it will sit. It is best to use square feet for each part of the ratio.

For example, if the proposed building is 10 stories tall and each floor is 30 feet wide by 50 feet deep, then the total floor area is 15,000 sq. ft. If the developer proposes to place that building on a lot that is 50 feet wide by 150 feet deep, then the lot size is 7,500 sq. ft. Dividing 15,000 by 7,500 gives a FAR of 2.0. The building would be able to have 10 feet setback on each side, 50 feet setback on the front and back.

A developer could plan a one-story building that takes up almost the entire lot in one floor, or a multi-story building that rises higher above the grade of the land but has a smaller footprint on the lot to achieve the same FAR or a greater FAR with allowable setbacks.

Another example that the OLC heard at our March meeting was a developer proposing to build a 300+ foot tall multi-family over above grade parking structure with ground level office and restaurant use. The lot is about 154 feet by 200 feet, for 30,800 square feet. The applicant says that the building would have 299,862 square feet. Therefore, he was asking for 10 FAR (actually 9.7). At the allowed 4.5 FAR, he could build 138,600 square feet, or about 46% of what he is asking for.

The FAR can be specified for each type of zoning to limit the amount of density of construction in that zoning area. One advantage of this, in addition to height and lot coverage restrictions, is that FAR correlates well with other considerations, such as total parking, total number of units for residential use, total load on municipal services including streets and traffic, and so on. It has been noted by some experts that the allowable FAR has a major impact on the value of the land. A higher allowable FAR supposedly yields higher land value.

PD 193 SEC. 51P-193.124, MAXIMUM FLOOR AREA RATIO, states the follow:

- The maximum floor area ratio requirements in a planned development subdistrict [*a PDS*] are controlled by the planned development subdistrict regulations. [*This means that the developer specifies the FAR they want in the PDS document which we can support or not and which the CPC and City Council can approve or not.*]
- If the total floor area of residential uses on a lot is equal to or greater than the lot area, the maximum floor area ratio is:
 - 4.5 to 1 in O-2, LC, and HC subdistricts; and
 - 2.5 to 1 in a GR subdistrict.

In order to obtain or achieve a benefit to the neighborhood, such as greater setbacks, enhanced landscaping, or the addition of a public open space, the Oak Lawn Committee might consider supporting increased FAR of 1 or 2 points as a bonus.

Information derived from following:

- Meriam, Dwight (2004). *The Complete Guide to Zoning*. McGraw-Hill. [ISBN 0-07-144379-7](#) (as used on Wikipedia)
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