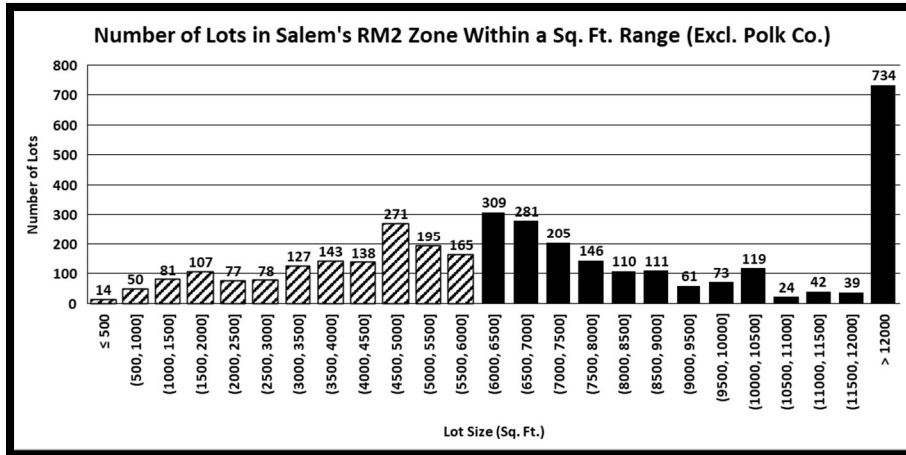


# A Case for Floor Area Ratio Zoning

Benjamin Fryback, City of Salem Planning Commissioner

-Issue-

Owners of smaller RM2 (Residential Multi-Family) zoned lots are not able to construct cost-efficient structures at the same rate as those who own larger lots.



- 1,446 lots (34% of total 4,161 lots) zoned for RM2 are less than 6000 square feet in size. (Excluding Polk Co.)

- RM2 lots smaller than 6,000 sq ft are very similar to RS (single family) lots due to lot size minimums, density maximums and state middle housing law.

Chart 1. A histogram showing the number of lots of various sizes in the RM2 zone. (Data: Marion County, Chart: Myself)

Single family	Min. 1,500 sq. ft.	Applicable to townhouses.
	Min. 6,000 sq. ft.	Applicable to all other single family, except new single family detached dwellings on nonconforming lots of record less than 6,000 square feet in area.
Two family	Min. 4,000 sq. ft.	
Three family	Min. 5,000 sq. ft.	
Residential care	Min. 4,000 sq. ft.	
All other uses	Min. 6,000 sq. ft.	

Table 1. RM2 Zone Lot Size Minimums (City of Salem)



Figure 1. An Image of 330 14th St. SE, Salem. (Photo: Myself)

### Example 1: 330 14th St. SE, Salem

- Built ~1970
- 5,700 sq. ft. lot
- 6,300 sq. ft. floor area, FAR (Floor Area Ratio) of 1.1
- 10 units
- Zoned RM2
- 80 du(dwelling units)/acre
- **Over 2.5x denser than allowed in RM2**
- A triplex is the largest structure allowed today, no different than RS zoning



Figure 2. An image of 949 Park Ave NE, Salem. (Photo: Myself)

### Example 2: 949 Park Ave NE, Salem

- Built 2021
- Located on an 11.8 ac lot
- ~2,500 sq. ft. footprint, could fit on a 4,200 sq. ft. lot w/60% coverage
- ~5,600 sq. ft. floor area, FAR of 1.3 on a 4,200 sq. ft. lot
- 6 units
- Zoned RM2
- Allowed on a large lot, with a total density of 21 du/acre
- **Could not be constructed on a 4,200 sq. ft. lot, at a density of 63 du/acre**
- A duplex is the largest structure that could be built on a 4,200 sq. ft. lot

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## -Possible Solution-

Regulate building size and makeup based on height, minimum density, and a ratio between the lot area and floor area of the structure.

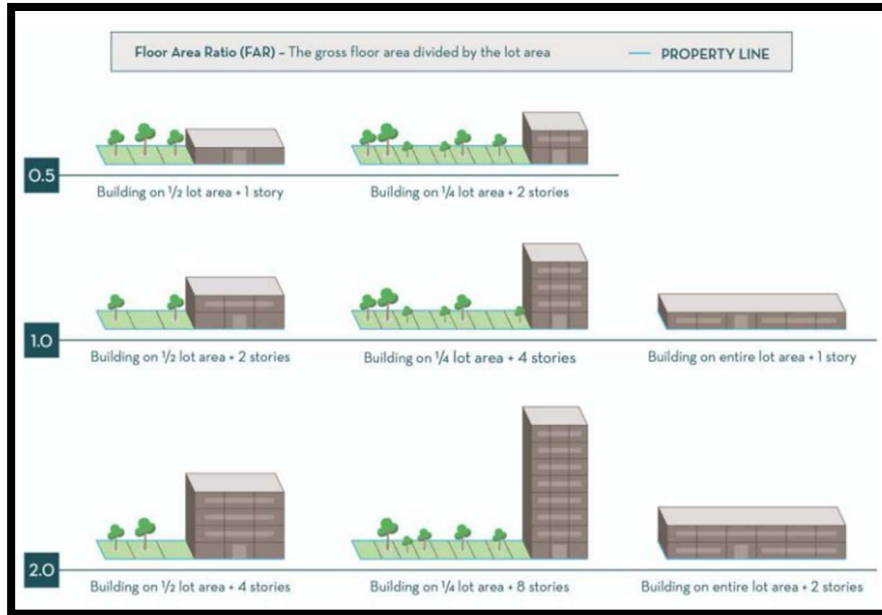


Figure 3. Diagram depicting Floor Area Ratio (Diagram: American Planning Association)

-Allows for owners of smaller lots to build structures that are currently allowed to be constructed on larger lots

-Limits disruption to existing neighborhoods, allowing for more cost-effective structures to be constructed without interrupting the neighborhood fabric

-Similar to how the cities of Portland and Seattle regulate multifamily housing construction.

-Does not add any regulation, existing structures should all be compliant

-Possible to add FAR bonuses and height limit increases based on affordability and proximity to public transit

-Scalable to other residential zones, such as RS, with a lower allowable FAR

-Allows for incremental infill in neighborhoods, with lower impacts to existing infrastructure

-More viable lots results in more business for local builders, and more variety in structure style and type

Chapter 33.120 Multi-Dwelling Zones

Title 33, Planning and Zoning 1/1/25

**Table 120-4**  
**Summary of Development Standards in Multi-Dwelling Zones**

Standard	RM1	RM2	RM3	RM4	RX	RMP
Maximum FAR (See 33.120.210)	FAR of 1 to 1	FAR of 1.5 to 1	FAR of 2 to 1	FAR of 4 to 1 or 3 to 1	FAR of 4 to 1	NA
Maximum Density (See 33.120.212)	none	none	none	none	none	1 unit per 1,500 sq. ft. of site area
Maximum Density with Affordable Housing Bonus (See 33.120.212.C)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1 unit per 1,000 sq. ft. of site area
Minimum Density (See 33.120.213)	1 unit per 2,500 sq. ft. of site area	1 unit per 1,450 sq. ft. of site area	1 unit per 1,000 sq. ft. of site area	1 unit per 1,000 sq. ft. of site area	1 unit per 500 sq. ft. of site area	1 unit per 1,875 sq. ft. of site area
Base Height (See 33.120.215)	35 ft.	45 ft.	65 ft.	75/100 ft.	100 ft.	35 ft.

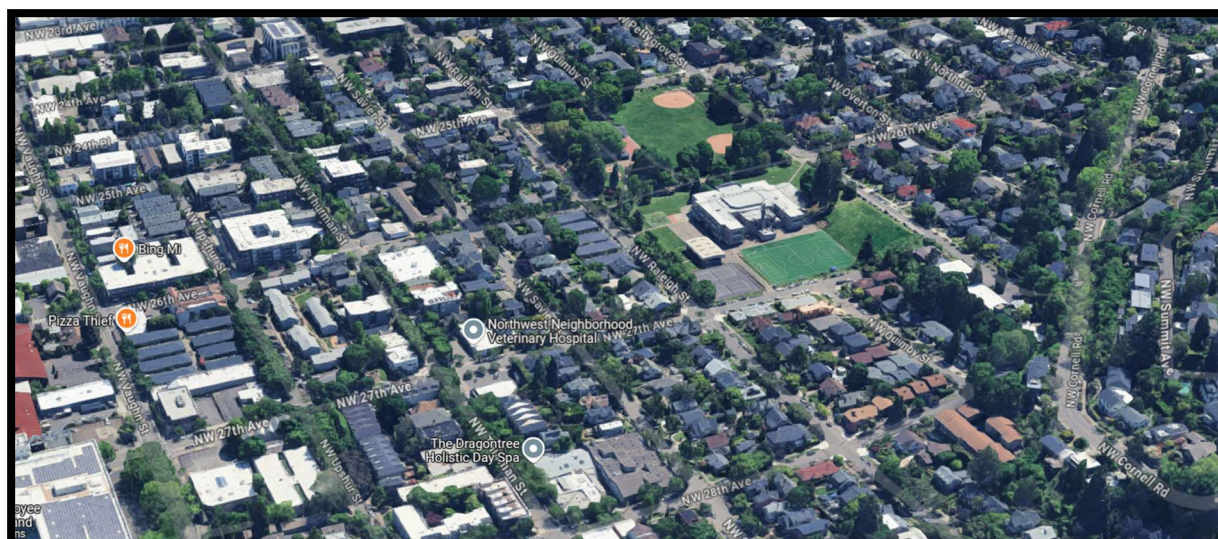


Table 2 (Above). A portion of the City of Portland Development Standards, containing information on Floor Area Ratio Maximums. (City of Portland)

Figure 4 (Left). Northwest Portland is a thriving neighborhood, with many different styles of structures and is home to many people with diverse incomes. (Photo: Google)