

**Zoning Ordinance Amendment Scope:
Columbia Pike Form Based Code
Ground Story Uses Review
February 2021**

Purpose of Study.

In response to current and anticipated commercial market conditions within the redevelopment nodes along Columbia Pike, this study will develop land use recommendations to enhance and sustain commercial market performance by permitting a wider range of ground floor uses in the Commercial and Neighborhoods Form Based Code (FBC). The recommendations will also continue to reinforce implementation of the FBC.

Within this context, an enhanced and sustainable ground story commercial environment can primarily be defined as 1) the attractiveness and functionality of a more diverse range of eligible ground story commercial uses for Columbia Pike area residents, workers and visitors and 2) the positioning of Columbia Pike as a commercial corridor that allows for neighborhood-appropriate uses, business models that reflect the corridor's transition from auto-oriented to walkable, and new trends in commerce. Additionally, an enhanced and sustainable environment relates to improved commercial market performance metrics, such as the economic feasibility of built commercial space and the stability of occupancy levels.

The desired outcomes of this study, relative to this purpose, is thus the consideration of an expansion of eligible ground story commercial uses that:

- Provide for greater development feasibility of desired ground story commercial spaces resulting in accelerated realization of the Form Based Code's vision;
- Reflect the transitional nature of the Columbia Pike commercial nodes in terms of built-form, function, and commercial market momentum;
- Align with the neighborhood-serving market positioning of retail and commerce within the planned, clustered commercial nodes;
- Enhance, not detract from, the Form Based Code's ultimate vision of a walkable, active urban streetscape, when appropriate guidelines are in place;
- Support more active use of the commercial nodes by a variety of users at different times of day and week;
- Unlock pent-up demand for uses that do not currently align within existing zoning categories applied to commercial ground-floor spaces but that provide a unique competitive positioning for Columbia Pike;
- Create a more sustainable and resilient commercial base that is nimble and adaptive to changing trends; and,
- Embrace the unique character and diversity of the Columbia Pike commercial corridor and its nodes.

Zoning Ordinance Amendment Scope:
Columbia Pike Form Based Code
Ground Story Uses Review
February 2021

Background.

Since the Columbia Pike Special Revitalization District Form Based Code (FBC) was implemented in 2003, and the Columbia Pike Neighborhoods Special Revitalization District Form Based Code (N-FBC) in 2012, staff has initiated amendments in response to community concerns and input from advisory boards and commissions in order to clarify the intent of the Codes. The Codes' Regulating Plan is the principal tool for implementing the FBC and N-FBC as it identifies the basic physical placement and characteristics of each building. The FBC and N-FBC, however, also regulate ground story uses with the intent of creating a high level of pedestrian activity adjacent to the public sidewalk, interesting design, and transparency into the building. Currently, Retail, service and commercial, or Public, Civic and Institutional Uses are required on the ground story of Main Street Buildings and are allowed on the Ground Story of Avenue Buildings. A limited set of commercial uses are allowed, but not required, on the ground story of Local Street Buildings.

In December 2015, the County Board amended the FBC's allowable uses in ground stories of mixed-use buildings and amended regulations associated with civic uses and civic buildings. The amendments' purposes were to expand the list of permitted uses and include civic uses as compatible ground story uses. Due to these actions, a relatively wider range of uses can now be approved when the use – either by design of the space or programming – can meet the FBC's intent of creating high level of pedestrian activity adjacent to the public sidewalk, interesting design, and transparency into the building.

With the guidance of County staff and the Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization, real estate and economic development consultants HR&A produced the *Columbia Pike Commercial Market Study* in Fall 2019. The study's goal was to assess conditions of the Columbia Pike retail market and identify market opportunities for enhancing retail along the corridor. The resulting report summarized HR&A's analysis, key findings, and recommendations, which were structured as a tool kit of potential initiatives, policies, or programs for further exploration by Arlington Economic Development (AED) and other County staff.

In December 2019, AED and HR&A presented a summary of existing conditions and recommendations to the County Board. One of the five strategic themes framing the toolkit of recommendations is "Encourage Alternative Uses." Although transformational changes have occurred on some property along the Pike since the FBC adoption in 2003, newly built ground story space has been slow to lease or maintain leases, and the clustering of new redevelopment will take time to spur cohesive and fully functioning mixed use nodes. As the report identifies Columbia Pike as transitioning from auto-oriented suburban corridor to walkable urban corridor, one of the top

Zoning Ordinance Amendment Scope:
Columbia Pike Form Based Code
Ground Story Uses Review
February 2021

three recommendations was to increase use flexibility for ground floor. The report highlights that increased flexibility will allow for more built tenant spaces to be filled and the uniqueness of allowing uses that are scarce throughout the rest of the County will create a competitive advantage. During the December 10, 2019 County Board Work Session with the County Manager, the Board identified this strategy as a priority for County staff to initiate. The study was also included in the Planning Division's FY21 Zoning Ordinance Amendment Work Plan.