

# Multi-Family Residential Development

## Facts to Know



### INTRODUCTION:

In the City of Commerce City, there are two multi-family residential zone districts. They are as follows:

- R-3: Multi-Family Residential District
- R-4: Townhouse Residential District

Each zone district has a unique purpose, and the combination of regulations for a particular zone district are designed to meet that intended purpose. For example, the R-3: Multi-Family Residential District is intended to provide a high-density residential district that allows one or more single-family attached dwellings or multi-family dwellings on a single lot, while the R-4: Townhouse Residential District is intended that this district serve as a transition between single-family residential districts and multi-family residential or commercial districts. The regulations for each zone district contribute to the creation of the intended type of development.

These regulations can generally be broken down into two categories: bulk standards, and design standards.

*Bulk standards* deal with the general form of a building, and determine things like the maximum size and placement of a building on a lot. These regulations typically include the lot size, floor area ratio, open space, height, and setbacks. The purpose of bulk standards is to allow building forms within a particular zone district that are characteristic of the built environment that zone district is intended to create.

*Design standards* deal with the specific architectural details of a building. These regulations typically include exterior materials, garage placement, and location of windows and doors. The purpose of design standards is to ensure that the physical appearance and functional characteristics of a home provide an attractive, safe, compatible, and long-lasting design, and that their design qualities encourage and strengthen the sense of community and neighborhood pride.

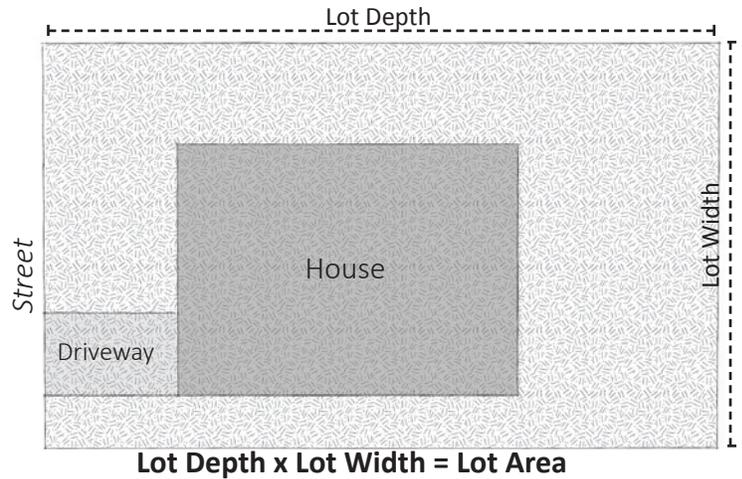
This packet explains what each of the bulk standards means and how to measure it, as well as lists the specific requirements for new development in both of the multi-family residential zone districts.

There are also various residential areas, predominately in the northern part of the city, that are zoned PUD (Planned Unit Development). Each of these PUDs is unique, and may have different standards than those for the regular residential zone districts. Please contact the Planner of the Day to obtain a copy of a PUD zone document for the specific standards which apply in a particular PUD.

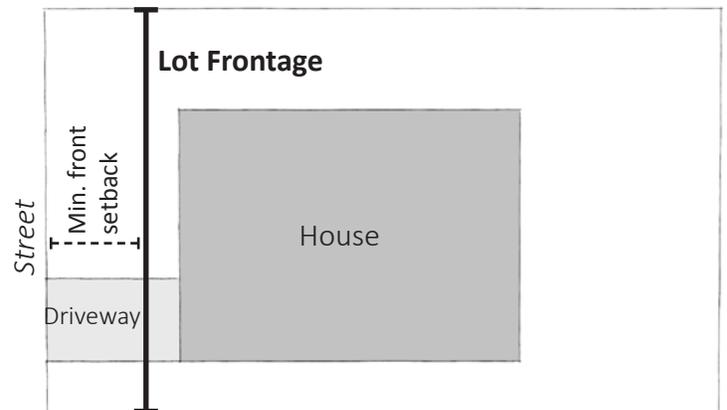
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## BULK STANDARDS:

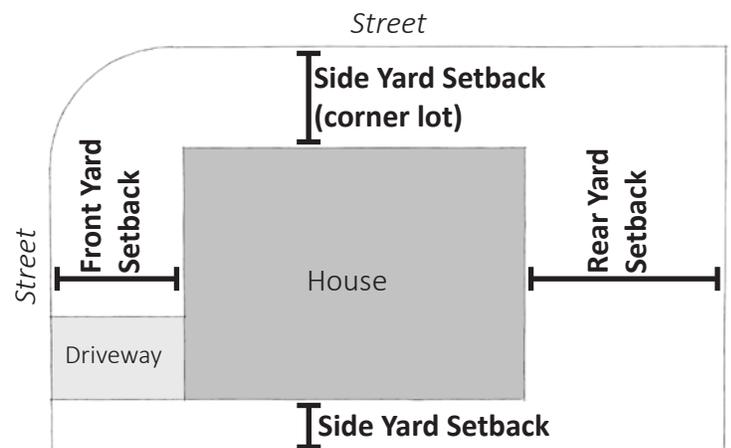
**Lot Area:** The term “lot area” refers to the size of the lot, and is defined as the total square footage within the lot lines of a lot. This information can typically be found in a variety of places, including tax assessment records, subdivision plats, and property deeds. Any new lots to be created through the subdivision process must meet the applicable lot area requirements for the particular zone district in which the property is located. Existing lots which do not meet the lot area requirements may still be allowed to develop so long as the use complies with the underlying zone district and any new structures meet the remaining bulk standards.



**Lot Frontage:** The term “lot frontage” refers to the distance between the side lot lines, as measured along a straight line parallel to the front lot line and located the minimum front setback distance from the front lot line. The front lot line is the one adjacent to the street on which the property has its principal access.



**Setback:** A “setback” is the distance between a lot line and a building or structure. There are setback requirements for all sides of a property, as measured from the front lot line (the side with the primary pedestrian access), the side lot lines, and the rear lot line. These can be measured by drawing a straight line at a right angle from the lot line to the closest projection of the building or structure. Cornices, cupolas, box and bay windows, or similar architectural features are allowed to extend up to one foot into any setback.

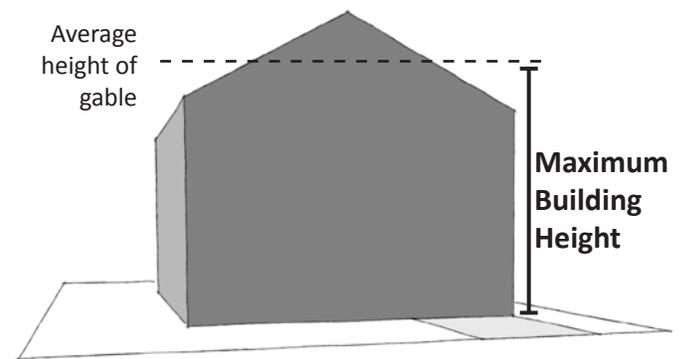
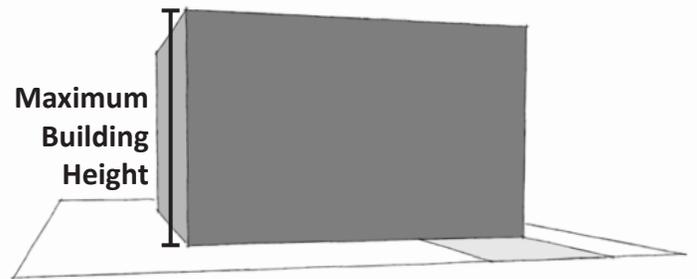


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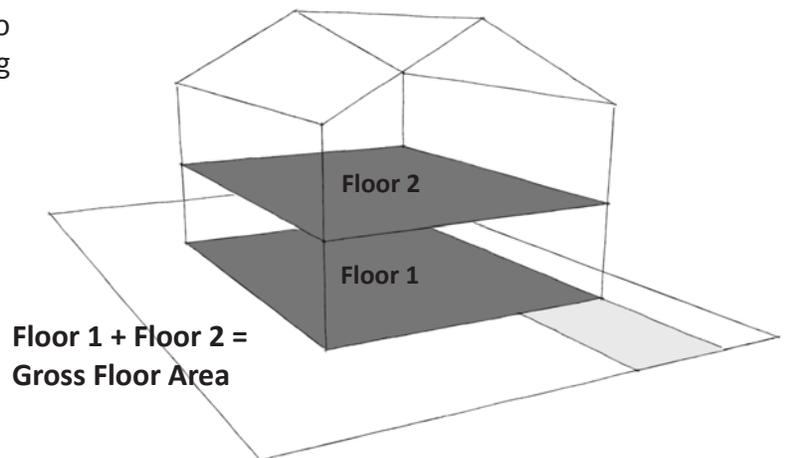
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**Building Height:** Building height is the vertical distance from the highest finished grade adjacent to the building to the highest point of the building, which is determined in one of three ways depending on roof style. For flat roofs, the highest point is considered to be the cap. For pitched roofs, the highest point is considered to be the average height of the highest gable or hip.

Chimneys, cornices without windows, cupolas, domes not used for human occupancy, elevator penthouses, monuments, parapet walls, skylights, spires, steeples, theater scenery lofts, towers, and other similar structures may exceed the maximum permitted height by up to 150%.



**Gross Floor Area:** The term “gross floor area” refers to the total area in square feet of all floors of a building measured from exterior walls.



# FTK: Multi-Family Residential Development

## R-3: MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT:

The purpose of the multi-family residential district is to provide a high-density residential district that allows one or more single-family attached dwellings (duplexes) or multi-family dwellings (apartments/condos) on a single lot. A single duplex on an R-3 lot must meet the R-2 standards shown in the Facts To Know for Single-Family Development. For multiple duplexes or buildings with 3 or more units, these R-3 bulk standards apply. Single-family detached homes are not allowed.

BULK STANDARD	REQUIREMENT
Minimum gross floor area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 0 bedrooms: 400-square feet</li> <li>- 1 bedroom: 550-square feet</li> <li>- 2 bedrooms: 700-square feet</li> <li>- 3 bedrooms: 850-square feet</li> <li>- 4 bedrooms: 1,000-square feet</li> </ul>
Minimum density	6-dwelling units per gross acre
Maximum density	24-dwelling units per gross acre
Minimum lot area	N/A
Maximum lot area	N/A
Minimum lot frontage	100 feet
Minimum front yard setback	20 feet
Maximum front yard setback	N/A
Minimum side yard setback (interior lot)	20 feet
Maximum side yard setback (interior lot)	N/A
Minimum side yard setback (corner lot)	30 feet
Maximum side yard setback (corner lot)	N/A
Minimum side yard setback (corner lot along collector or arterial)	30 feet
Minimum rear yard setback	20 feet
Minimum building height	15 feet
Maximum building height	50 feet
Minimum open space	15 percent of gross lot area. Open space may include common areas, recreational facilities, community gardens, or landscaped areas
Building separation	15 feet

# FTK: Multi-Family Residential Development

## R-4: TOWNHOUSE RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT:

The townhouse residential district (R-4 district) is to be used exclusively for structures with three or more townhouse dwelling units. It is intended that this district serve as a transition between single-family residential districts and multi-family residential or commercial districts. A common wall subdivision may also be allowed to place each townhouse unit on an individual lot.

BULK STANDARD	REQUIREMENT
Minimum gross floor area	1,080-square feet
Minimum density	N/A
Maximum density	N/A
Minimum lot area	2,000-square feet
Maximum lot area	N/A
Minimum lot frontage	20 feet
Minimum front yard setback	10 feet (garages to be set back 20 feet minimum)
Maximum front yard setback	30 feet
Minimum side yard setback (interior lot)	5 feet exterior wall; 0 feet common wall
Maximum side yard setback (interior lot)	N/A
Minimum side yard setback (corner lot)	15 feet
Maximum side yard setback (corner lot)	N/A
Minimum side yard setback (corner lot along collector or arterial)	30 feet
Minimum rear yard setback	20 feet
Minimum building height	15 feet
Maximum building height	35 feet
Minimum open space	15 percent of gross lot area. Open space may include common areas, recreational facilities, community gardens, or landscaped areas
Building separation	N/A

# FTK: Multi-Family Residential Development

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## DESIGN STANDARDS:

The purpose of this section is to provide for a uniform set of standards for the review of new multi-family development as well as additions to existing multi-family developments. These standards are designed to assure that multi-family uses are planned and developed with the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood and provide for some aesthetic variation. The regulations contained herein are designed to protect and promote the public health, welfare, and safety of the citizens.

**Mass and Form:** New building design shall respect the context of adjacent residential and non-residential neighborhoods, including the height, scale, mass, form and character of surrounding development. Building design should incorporate visually heavier and more massive elements at the building base, and lighter elements above the base. All buildings shall be designed to provide complex massing configurations with a variety of different wall planes and roof planes. The façades of town homes shall be articulated to differentiate individual units.

**Building Orientation:** Every front façade with a primary entrance to a dwelling unit(s) shall face the adjacent public street to the maximum extent possible. Every building containing three or more dwelling units shall have at least one building entry or doorway facing each adjacent public street. Primary structures should be located and designed so that residents can easily observe the common open spaces, circulation paths and access points into the development. Multi-family buildings may be oriented to a common use courtyard. When an inner courtyard is proposed, the width of the courtyard providing access to dwelling units should be equal the building height, or a minimum of 20 feet if the building is lower than 20 feet in height.

**Architectural Detail:** All sides of a multi-family building shall display a similar level of quality and architectural interest, and must have a minimum of two differentiated planes to relieve flat, monotonous façades. Façades that exceed 65 feet in length shall have a minimum of three differentiated planes. All differentiation shall be a minimum of 12 inches.

In addition to the requirement that each side have differentiation, every façade facing a public right-of-way must include at least two of the following features:

- (i) A pedestrian entry;
- (ii) A change in vertical or horizontal wall plane not otherwise required by this section;
- (iii) A change in color or material of the wall;
- (iv) A bay window or balcony;
- (v) Detailing the wall with reveals, belt courses, cornices, projections, or other devices;
- (vi) Shuttered windows;
- (vii) Changes in parapet height.

# FTK: Multi-Family Residential Development

**Entrances:** Pedestrian entry to the site from the fronting street should be emphasized through landscaping, special paving, gateways, arbors, and/or other similar features. Covered entrances to each unit should be provided as protection from bad weather and as a transition from indoor to outdoor.

**Parking:** Parking for multi-family dwellings is determined by the following formula: (1.5 spaces per 1 bedroom unit) + (1.75 spaces per 2 bedroom unit) + (2 spaces per 3+ bedroom unit) + 15% of the total as visitor parking. At least 50 percent of required off-street parking should be provided in garages rather than surface lots. Where surface lots or detached garages are used, they must be located behind or between buildings, rather than adjacent to public streets. For attached garages, the garage door openings must be recessed behind the front facade of the building; flush with the building, or protruding but with a second floor that covers most of the garage; or alley loaded. Guest parking should be provided in a location convenient to the building that the parking is intended to serve. Through access drives may be designed to permit on-street parallel parking for guests, provided the design meets city standards.

**Landscaping:** All new multi-family dwellings must adhere to the landscaping standards shown in the table below:

Development Type	Landscape Area	Trees	Shrubs	Material	Turf	Mulch	Tree-Lawn	Additional Requirements
Multi-Family	Entire area	Minimum of 1 deciduous tree and 1 evergreen tree per two units.	Minimum of 6 shrubs per two units; 50% must be deciduous.	Landscape area must contain 75% live plants	Max of 50% of landscape area	Two types required	Yes-spaced 40 feet apart along all property street frontages	Minimum Open Space Requirement. See section 21-4310.

There are also specific landscaping standards for parking lots. The perimeter of all parking areas must be landscaped with at least 1 tree and 5 shrubs for every 30 linear feet along a street, right-of-way, or abutting another property. The width of this buffer is determined by the table below. Perimeter parking area landscaping may be including with other buffer requirements, as applicable.

Abuts a local street	Abuts a collector street or another parking area	Abuts an arterial street
Minimum 5 feet	Minimum 10 feet	Minimum 15 feet

Parking lots with six or more spaces also must be screened from abutting uses and from the street. Screening must consist of a fence, wall, planter, earthen berm, plant material, or a combination of such elements, each of which shall have a minimum height of 36 inches. If the abutting land use is residential, the screening must consist of a wall or fence in combination with plant material. In the interior of parking lots, landscape islands must be placed at least every 15 parking stalls, and must have minimum dimensions of 8 feet by 10 feet. The landscape islands must each have at least 1 tree and 6 shrubs per parking row.

# FTK: Multi-Family Residential Development

**Fencing:** All new residential fences and walls, including those used for screening purposes, must adhere to the fencing standards shown in the table below:

Location	Maximum Height	Minimum Setback from Property Line	Style
Front Yard	42 inches (3.5 feet)	30 inches	Open
Side or Rear Yard	6 feet	0 feet	Open or Screen
Side or Rear Yard along Public Right-of-Way	5 feet	5 feet	Open
Along a Public or Private Open Space or Park	48 inches (4 feet)	0 feet	Open

Acceptable fence and wall materials include wood, brick, stone, masonry, stucco over concrete block, vinyl, wrought iron, aluminum, fiberglass, composite, or chain link. Sheet plastic, sheet metal, and plywood fencing is not allowed. In addition, chain link fencing with inserts, slats, or attached fabric screening material is prohibited.

**Lighting:** All proposals for new exterior lighting systems, as well as any alterations or renovations to existing lighting systems, must submit a photometric plan for review. Key standards include that in no case shall exterior lighting add more than one foot-candle to illumination levels at any point off-site, and that the maximum height of freestanding outdoor light fixtures is 30 feet, unless the development abuts a single-family residential property, in which case the maximum allowed height is 25 feet. Please see the complete lighting standards in Division 7 of Article VII of the Land Development Code.

**Screening Areas of Low Visual Interest:** Mechanical equipment, utility equipment, trash receptacles, and loading docks should be screened from view from public rights-of-way and from adjacent properties to the maximum extent feasible through their placement on the site, architectural design, and landscaping. Screening enclosures for mechanical and utility equipment and for trash receptacles must use at least one of the predominant materials and colors used in the primary structure. Enclosures for trash receptacles must be a minimum of 6 feet in height.

## SOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Interactive Property Lookup Map (What’s My Zoning?): [maps.c3gov.com/propertylookup](https://maps.c3gov.com/propertylookup)
- Land Development Code Article IV (Zoning Districts)
- Land Development Code Article VII (Development and Design Standards)
- Approved Plant List
- Facts to Know for Fences
- Facts to Know for Single-Family Residential Development
- New Residential Submittal Requirements
- Planner of the Day: 303-227-8777 or [cdplanner@c3gov.com](mailto:cdplanner@c3gov.com)
- Building Safety Division: 303-289-3790