



TAP, Inc.



Troy Architectural Program, P.C.

210 River Street
Troy, NY 12180

tel (518) 274-3050
fax (518) 274-3165

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In order to begin addressing a shortcoming in the City of Troy's Zoning Ordinance, we are proposing that the Ordinance be modified to incorporate the definition of an as yet undefined use class, that of a mini-dorm. This definition and its corresponding parameters will help regulate where and how these high-occupancy residences may exist as well as how they relate to the surrounding neighborhoods.

A mini-dorm is a single- or two-family house that is converted into an SRO for students and other unrelated adults. A mini-dorm can also be developed through the conversion of a multi-unit building into a one or two-unit residence. These modified units are able to achieve the greatest number of rentable bedrooms by minimizing the amount of common living space. Bedrooms are then rented out to many more individuals than was previously possible. The increased density of residents and vehicles creates a burden on the surrounding neighborhood.

When a building is converted to a mini-dorm and listed as single- or two-family, there are fire safety and code requirements which are circumvented. For example, fire safety measures such as smoke and fire detection systems and enclosed exits, which would be mandatory in higher density housing, are not required to be provided in one and two-unit buildings. In fact, in mini-dorms life-safety risks may actually be increased because of a greater number of residents occupying the building, locks being installed on bedroom doors, etc.

The Proposal

In order to address this Zoning deficiency, we propose to redefine the term “Rooming House.” It is currently defined in the Zoning Ordinance identically to “Boarding House.” Although it is a defined term it does not appear as an allowed use in any existing zoning district. We, therefore, propose a new and separate definition of Rooming House:

“ROOMING HOUSE -- A dwelling unit occupied by four or more Roomers in which there are provided common facilities for eating and living and in which there are provided such services as are incidental to its use as a residence and distinguished from a Bed and Breakfast, Boarding House, Fraternity, Dormitory, a Single-family dwelling and a Two-family dwelling.”

We believe this use, as well as Boarding House, should be allowed as of right in the Institutional and Highway Commercial Zones only. Parking requirements, lot characteristics, etc. will need to be established.

A definition of Roomer must also be added. We propose the following:

“ROOMER -- A person who lives in a rented room, whether or not they pay rent individually. A group of Roomers is not considered a family in that it is an unrelated group of individuals living together temporarily for convenience.”

As an aside, the State Department does not interpret a dwelling that has locks on the exterior side of bedroom doors as a single-family dwelling. They interpret these high occupancy residences where rooms are rented out individually with shared facilities provided as more akin to a multiple dwelling than a 1- or 2-family.

Goals of this Proposal

- Correct a shortcoming in the current zoning ordinance regarding this type of housing.
- Support and defend the quality of life in the neighborhoods adjacent to institutional campuses such as hospitals/medical facilities, universities/educational facilities, utilities, government facilities, office/business parks, and corrections facilities, that occupy multiple buildings
- Prevent the immediate flood of building conversions which are anticipated when the current moratorium, Ordinance #4, dated February 20, 2008, is scheduled to expire.
- Create a coalition of stakeholders to facilitate further action on the development of the lot characteristics, parking, building height, signage, etc. for this new category of “Rooming House.”
- Serve as “Step 1” in developing a policy toward group, institutional and off-campus student housing.