

Before a custom home design gets too exciting, the lot needs a reality check. Use this checklist to organize the early questions that affect house size, footprint, driveway, patio, porch, pool plans, and stormwater review in DC, Maryland, and Northern Virginia. It is designed for homeowners, not zoning attorneys - so yes, it uses normal words.

Important

This checklist does not replace a zoning determination, civil engineering review, or permit approval. It helps you ask smarter questions before spending money on full design plans.

1. Property Snapshot

Property Address

City / County

Jurisdiction

Zoning Classification

Lot Size (sq. ft.)

Lot Width / Depth

Date Reviewed

Homeowner Name

Reviewer / Company

Project Goal

2. Early Design Goals

☐ Build a new custom home or teardown/rebuild

☐ Build an addition or major renovation

☐ Add or enlarge a garage

☐ Add a covered porch or larger front entry

☐ Add a patio, pool, or outdoor living area

☐ Widen or redesign the driveway

☐ Finish or expand lower-level space

☐ Evaluate lot before buying the property

Notes / must-have features:

Homeowner reminder

Funny but true: the lot does not care how beautiful the Pinterest board is. Coverage, FAR, and stormwater rules still get a vote.

3. Lot Coverage Checklist

Lot coverage usually controls the building footprint - the area of the home and certain structures as viewed from above. Local definitions vary, so confirm what counts before assuming the design fits.

- ☐ Confirmed the zoning classification for this specific property.
- ☐ Found the maximum allowed lot coverage percentage for this zone.
- ☐ Confirmed what the jurisdiction counts as lot coverage.
- ☐ Measured or estimated existing building coverage.
- ☐ Calculated proposed building footprint, including garage and roofed areas where applicable.
- ☐ Checked whether covered porches, garage, decks, or accessory structures count.
- ☐ Compared lot coverage with setbacks and buildable envelope.
- ☐ Considered whether the lot shape, slope, or width limits the usable footprint.

Lot coverage numbers

Limit / Allowed	Existing	Proposed	Result / Concern

Lot coverage calculation / notes:

How to think about it

Simple math: lot size x allowed coverage percentage = maximum allowed coverage. Complicated reality: local definitions decide what counts.

4. Local Office / Professional Follow-Up

County / City Office Contacted	Contact Name	Response / Date

Questions to ask:

5. FAR Checklist

FAR means Floor Area Ratio. It limits the total building floor area compared to the lot size. FAR does not apply the same way everywhere, so verify whether it affects your property.

- ☐ Confirmed whether FAR applies to this property or zoning district.
- ☐ Found the FAR limit or confirmed that another standard controls instead.
- ☐ Confirmed what counts toward floor area under local rules.
- ☐ Checked whether basement, attic, garage, or accessory space counts.
- ☐ Estimated total proposed floor area for all levels that count.
- ☐ Estimated existing floor area, if reviewing an addition or rebuild.
- ☐ Considered whether design may need to go wider, taller, smaller, or reconfigured.

FAR numbers

Limit / Allowed	Existing	Proposed	Result / Concern

FAR calculation / notes:

Homeowner translation

Lot coverage controls how much land the house can cover. FAR controls how much total floor area may be allowed. In some places, both matter.

6. FAR Questions to Confirm

- ☐ Does this jurisdiction use FAR for this type of residential project?
- ☐ What levels, rooms, garages, basements, or attic spaces count toward FAR?
- ☐ Are there overlays, special districts, or neighborhood rules that change the calculation?

Follow-up notes:

7. Impervious Surface Checklist

Impervious surface is the area where rainwater cannot easily soak into the ground. This often includes roofs, driveways, patios, walkways, pool decks, and other hard surfaces.

- ☐ Measured or estimated existing roof area.
- ☐ Included driveway, walkways, patios, and hardscape areas.
- ☐ Checked future pool, pool deck, sport court, or large patio plans.
- ☐ Confirmed whether the jurisdiction has an impervious surface or yard coverage limit.
- ☐ Asked whether stormwater management will be required.
- ☐ Reviewed drainage direction so runoff does not create neighbor or basement issues.
- ☐ Asked whether permeable pavers or other solutions may help.
- ☐ Checked tree protection, stream buffers, floodplain, or environmental overlays.

Impervious surface numbers

Limit / Allowed	Existing	Proposed	Result / Concern

Impervious surface calculation / stormwater notes:

Rain gets a vote

A design may fit lot coverage but still create stormwater issues once the roof, driveway, patio, walkways, and pool deck are added.

8. Drainage / Stormwater Follow-Up

Civil Engineer Contacted	Stormwater Trigger?	Follow-Up Date

Drainage concerns:

9. Who Should Homeowners Contact?

- ☐ Local custom home builder: A DMV builder can help spot practical buildability issues before full design.
- ☐ Civil engineer: Needed for grading, stormwater, drainage, driveway, site plan, and utilities.
- ☐ Zoning professional / land use consultant: Helpful for zoning, setbacks, lot coverage, FAR, overlays, and variances.
- ☐ Local permitting or zoning office: Confirms jurisdiction-specific rules, but usually will not design the solution.

Builder / Consultant

Civil Engineer

Zoning Contact

Permitting Office

Phone / Email

Follow-Up Date

10. Next-Step Decision

- ☐ Lot appears ready for early design, subject to professional confirmation.
- ☐ Talk to Iron Gate or another local builder before design continues.
- ☐ Civil engineer should review stormwater, grading, drainage, or driveway items.
- ☐ Zoning question needs confirmation before spending on full plans.
- ☐ Potential red flag: pause before purchase, demo, or major design spending.

Biggest concerns / next steps:

How Iron Gate can help

Iron Gate Development helps DMV homeowners review buildability questions early - before a design goes too far. We can help you understand what to check, which professionals to involve, and what may affect the size, layout, budget, and timeline of your custom home.

11. Related Reads

Can I Build on This Lot? How to Check Buildability Before You Buy

</blog/can-i-build-on-this-lot>

Setback Requirements & Buildable Envelope

</blog/setback-requirements-buildable-envelope-dmv>

Zoning Classification: Why Your Lot's Zoning Controls What You Can Build

</blog/zoning-classification-buildable-lot-dmv>

Utility Access: Can Your DMV Lot Support the Home You Want to Build?

</blog/utility-access-buildable-lot-dmv>

12. Additional Notes

Open questions, reminders, or items to send to your builder / civil engineer:

How Iron Gate can help

Iron Gate Development can help homeowners in DC, Maryland, and Northern Virginia review early buildability questions, identify red flags, and coordinate the right next steps before a custom home design gets too far.

Check the lot before you design the home.

Visit www.irongateusa.com or use LotIQ at lotiq.irongateusa.com for early buildability review.