



AGENDA ITEM EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agenda Item number: 3c

Title:

Discussion regarding Design Guidelines and Standards for Traditional Residential Districts

Presenter:

Russell Colby

Meeting: Planning & Development Committee

Date: October 9, 2017

Proposed Cost: N/A

Budgeted Amount: N/A

Not Budgeted:

Executive Summary (if not budgeted please explain):

Background

Single-family residential zoning districts in the City are divided between two types: RT- Traditional Districts (areas primarily constructed before World War II) and RS- Suburban Districts (constructed later). RT-zoned neighborhoods are characterized by smaller, narrow lots and detached or less prominent garages.

When the City was rewriting the Zoning Ordinance in 2006, the trend of teardown and infill development was beginning, and the decision was made to write zoning requirements tailored to the older neighborhoods. New regulations for building size, height, setbacks and garage location were created based upon data from existing neighborhoods.

At that time, there was also a discussion regarding exterior architectural design. A decision was made not to regulate architectural design in RT neighborhoods, but rather create a staff-level advisory process (“Residential Architectural Consultation” or RAC) to share comments with building permit applicants on how plans could be revised to be more compatible with older neighborhoods. This advisory process was in effect from 2006 to 2015.

In 2015, staff and Plan Commission reviewed the buildings that had been constructed under the staff RAC review, and concluded that the process had been somewhat effective, but could be improved by creating specific Standards and Guidelines. Standards and Guidelines would provide clearer direction to permit applicants and City staff conducting the review.

Standards and Guideline for the RT districts were added to the Zoning Ordinance in 2015. The Standards and Guidelines do not require specific architectural styles or exterior building materials; rather they are written to encourage incorporation of design features that are found in traditional neighborhoods, addressing items such as appearance of a garage, front door location, distribution of windows, and use of consistent siding materials and trim on all elevations. The code includes many “Guidelines” which are more advisory in nature, and only a few “Standards”, which are binding requirements that must be complied with.

Recent appeal regarding property on S. 3rd St.

The Plan Commission recently reviewed an appeal to the staff interpretation of the Design Standards and Guidelines as applied to a house being constructed out of metal shipping containers on S. 3rd St. Staff identified the plans submitted for building permit did not comply with a standard that requires “360 degree architecture”, which requires buildings to have a consistent appearance when viewed from all sides. This Standard is intended to prevent a building with a front elevation that greatly differs from the side and rear elevations. The Plan Commission affirmed the staff interpretation, and the permit applicant was required to modify the plans to comply with the Standard as directed by staff prior to the building permit being issued.

Plan Commission Discussion

In response to the issues raised during the appeal, including comments received from residents of the neighborhood, the Plan Commission asked staff to schedule a discussion regarding the RT Design Standards and Guidelines. Two main discussion points were identified:

- The Standards and Guidelines do not regulate architectural style, but they require design elements that

are characteristic of traditional building styles, which creates conflicts in the review of a building with a modern architectural design.

- The Standards and Guidelines do not require that buildings be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood in terms of style, building form, roof type, materials, etc. Rather, these items are listed as “Guidelines” which are advisory and meant to be applied with flexibility.

The Plan Commission discussed this topic on 8/22/17. Minutes are attached. The consensus of the Plan Commission was as follows:

- **The Standard and Guidelines should be rewritten to require traditional building styles (form, roof type, materials, etc.) as a baseline.**
 - If staff reviews a permit application and finds that the plans conform to all of the requirements, then the permit can be issued administratively, without any further review by a Commission.
- **Buildings that do not meet the baseline standards (for example, different architectural styles, flat roofs, non-standard building materials, etc.) would need to be reviewed and approved by the Plan Commission:**
 - The review process would require a permit applicant to submit supplemental information in support of their proposal, including an explanation of how the plans meet the intent of the Design Standards/Guidelines and a rendering or streetscape view showing how the building would appear within the context of the neighborhood.
 - The Plan Commission would function like an architectural review board, and could negotiate with the applicant to improve the design or make it more compatible with the neighborhood.
 - Neighboring property owners would receive a letter from the City notifying them that plans for a house would be reviewed at a meeting. (This would be a letter only, not a public hearing notice.)
 - The Plan Commission felt this process would not be seen as onerous because a permit applicant has the option of simply following the Standards/Guidelines and bypassing any Commission review.

Staff Perspective on Plan Commission proposal

Staff sees potential benefits to this type of process that could extend to other code regulations and other zoning districts. Currently, the Zoning Ordinance includes specific numerical requirements for building and landscape design with little flexibility for design alternatives. Staff devotes a significant amount of effort assisting developers on meeting these requirements, which often do not greatly improve the quality of a project. The type of Design Review process proposed by the Plan Commission would give applicants a simpler option to request a Commission-level design review for unique projects, without needing to request a deviation be granted through a PUD, which is a lengthy and burdensome process.

Note that the City has two Commissions with expertise in the areas of architectural review- the Plan Commission and the Historic Preservation Commission. Both could conduct this type of review. Staff sees a benefit to having the Plan Commission with this review authority, because the design review may overlap into other areas of zoning regulation that the Plan Commission is more familiar with, such as landscape requirements.

Attachments (please list):

From Chapter 17.06 of the Zoning Ordinance, “Design Review Standards and Guidelines”
Plan Commission minutes from 8/22/17
Letters/comments from residents

Recommendation/Suggested Action (briefly explain):

Any change to the code would require filing of an application for General Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance. This process would require a public hearing before Plan Commission, followed by P&D Committee review and City Council vote on an ordinance amendment.

Provide direction to Staff:

1. Direct staff to file a General Amendment based on the Plan Commission recommendation.
2. Direct staff to research other alternative scenarios for a Design Review process, and return before the Committee for further discussion.
3. Leave the code as is (no further action).

17.06.010 – How to use this chapter

1. Standards and Guidelines

The Standards and Guidelines of this Chapter shall apply to applications for Building Permits and Site Development Permits as provided in Section 17.04.230 (Design Review). The Standards and Guidelines of this Chapter shall also apply to applications for Special Uses (Section 17.04.330) and Planned Unit Developments (Sections 17.04.400, et seq.).

The provisions of this Chapter include “Standards” and “Guidelines”, both of which must be addressed in order to obtain Design Review approval. “Standards” are specific requirements that must be met. A Standard typically offers little flexibility unless options are provided within the Standard itself. A Standard may establish requirements not otherwise contained in this Title, or may refer to other requirements more fully set forth elsewhere in this Title or the St. Charles Municipal Code. “Guidelines” are descriptions of design characteristics intended to be applied with flexibility. Where a proposed design does not precisely follow the guideline, it may still be acceptable if the applicant can show how it meets the intent for that group of standards and guidelines and the purpose and intent of this Title, in particular Section 17.04.230.

2. Applicability of Building Design and Material Standards to Existing Buildings

Existing buildings that do not comply with the building design or building materials standards of this Chapter shall comply with the following standards:

1. Building alterations or additions constructed primarily at the side or rear of a building may be constructed with the same design and materials as the remainder of the building, provided an addition does not exceed 50% of the gross floor area of the existing building.
2. Any building additions to, or reconstruction of, street-facing building elevations shall comply with this Chapter to the extent practical to achieve a cohesive architectural design for the building. The Director of Community Development may grant exceptions where an applicant can demonstrate that conformance would be incongruous with the architecture of the building or would be impractical to construct (for example, re-facing a building façade with masonry material where no foundation exists to support the masonry).

[\(2011-Z-1](#) [1]: § 3 and 4)

DESIGN STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

For single and two-family dwellings in the RT-1, RT-2, RT-3, RT-4, and CBD-2 only.

A. Site Layout and Context

Intent: To ensure building placement is compatible with neighboring properties and reflects the development pattern of the surrounding neighborhood.

Standards:

1. Buildings facades shall be oriented to the street. Front facades should squarely face the street and should not be set at an angle. However if adjacent homes are set at an angle the new home may be similarly sited.
2. Site grading shall be consistent with that of adjacent properties. The slope and elevation of the property shall not be altered in such a manner that results in an artificial change of grade.
3. The amount of front or exterior side yard covered by driveways shall be limited per Section 17.24.070.Z

Guidelines:

1. Setbacks (front, side, rear) should generally follow the averages for the block on which the new house is located. Front and exterior side yard setbacks may be reduced based on averaging of existing principal building setbacks along the street frontage of a block- See Table 17.12-2 for setback requirements.
2. Building and site layout should be compatible with existing topography and vegetation. Preservation of existing trees, particularly older growth trees, is recommended.
3. The coverage of driveways and parking areas in the front and exterior side yards should be minimized to the greatest extent possible.

B. Garages

Intent: To reduce the appearance and prominence of garages in order to maintain a pedestrian friendly streetscape.

Standards:

1. Garages shall meet the provisions of Section 17.22.020 Accessory Buildings and Structures, including but not limited to: requirement to provide access from a public alley; limitations on garage door width; and requirements to set back street-facing attached garages from the remainder of the building.
2. Detached garages shall be consistent with the architectural style of the house. Use of similar window styles, exterior materials, and trim detailing is required.

Guidelines:

1. Detached or rear-loaded garages are recommended. A Building Coverage bonus shall be provided where a detached garage or an attached garage accessed via an alley is provided. See Table 17.12-2.
2. Street-facing doors on attached garages should incorporate glass panel windows.
3. The use of individual bay doors (single stall) is preferred over double-wide doors, particularly for street-facing attached garages. Stepped back, separate garage doors should also be considered to further soften the impact of a street-facing attached garage.

C. Massing and Proportion

Intent: To reduce the appearance of mass and to encourage new houses to match the scale of the existing neighborhood.

Standards:

1. Buildings shall comply with the Bulk Requirements provided in Table 17.12-2 (including setbacks, building coverage, and building height).

Guidelines:

1. Scale, proportions, and height, should be compatible with adjacent homes and with the general characteristics of homes in the surrounding neighborhood. For example, effort should be made to limit the height, or reduce the appearance of height, of a two-story house constructed among single-story houses.
2. Simple building forms and shapes are encouraged.
3. The following methods may be incorporated to reduce the apparent mass of a home:
 - a. Step back portions of the home. For example, set the second story back a number of feet from the first story or add an unenclosed porch on the first story.
 - b. Use dormers to break up roof mass, if consistent with the architectural style of the home.
 - c. Incorporate horizontal design detailing to visually break up flat walls. Examples include wide skirt boards, mid-section trim between stories, frieze boards along roof eaves, partial or complete gable returns, or a change in siding or masonry patterns or materials.

D. Roofs

Intent: To encourage roofs and rooflines that add character and interest to a home, while blending with the roof forms found throughout the existing neighborhood.

Guidelines:

1. The form, pitch, and scale of roofs should be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.
2. Roof form, pitch, and scale should match the architectural style of the house.
3. Simple gabled and hipped roof forms are preferred.
4. Eaves that extend a sufficient distance to create shadow lines are encouraged if appropriate for the architecture of the structure.
5. The roof of the garage and other accessory structures should mimic the roof of the house in both form and pitch.
6. Mansard and flat roofs should be used only if appropriate for the architectural style of the house.

E. Architectural Details

Intent: To promote architectural interest and design that complements the traditional building styles found in older neighborhoods.

Standards:

1. “360 degree architecture” is required, meaning that facades must be designed to be viewed from all directions. At a minimum, the same window types and similar trim detailing to the front elevation must be used on the side and rear elevations.

Guidelines:

1. Use of masonry should be consistent on all façades. Use of masonry on the front façade only is discouraged.
2. The use of exterior trim detailing is recommended. In addition to window casing, such detailing includes: wide vertical corner boards, skirt boards, frieze boards, and mid-section trim.
3. The limited use of decorative elements such as gable trusses, exposed rafters, arched doors and windows, quoins, pediments, etc. is encouraged, provided such elements do not overwhelm or clutter the home’s appearance and are appropriate for the architectural style of the home.
4. All window openings should be articulated by window casing of at least four (4) inches if the primary wall material is siding.

5. Shutters should only be utilized where appropriate for the architectural style of the building. If shutters are used, they should exactly match the window size.
6. Chimneys should be masonry when located on a street-facing elevation.

F. Windows, Doors, and Entrances

Intent: To promote an inviting presence that contributes to the pedestrian friendly character of the neighborhood.

Guidelines:

1. The home's primary entrance should be located at the front of the house, facing the street.
2. The front entry should be the predominate feature on the front elevation. Multi-story entry features should be used only when architecturally appropriate.
3. Open, full-width front or wrap-around porches are recommended to emphasize the front entrance. Porches should be at least six (6) to eight (8) feet in depth and constructed in a manner so as to be fully functional. Porch detailing should be consistent with the architecture of the house.
4. Unenclosed Porches are permitted to encroach up to eight (8) feet into the front, exterior side or rear yards. Unenclosed porches are not included in the calculation of Building Coverage. For the definition of an Unenclosed Porch vs. Enclosed Porch and Building Coverage, see Ch. 17.30. For information on permitted yard encroachments, see Section 17.22.030.
5. Windows should be incorporated on all elevations.
6. Window openings and panes should be similarly proportioned throughout.
7. Windows should be placed in a manner that creates a balanced elevation on all sides of the house.
8. Double-hung or casement windows are preferred. The use of fixed and large, undivided pane windows should be limited.
9. The use of window muntins (divides) should be consistent for all windows.
10. The style of windows and doors (particularly the front door) should complement the architectural style of the house.
11. In addition to window casing, design elements such as window muntins (divides), window sills, and head trim, should be incorporated if such details are appropriate for the architectural style of the house.

G. Additions and Exterior Alterations

Intent: To ensure additions and exterior alterations are complementary to the existing home and blend with the neighborhood.

Standards:

1. Additions and exterior alterations shall abide by the applicable standards and guidelines in Section 17.06.060 A-F.

Guidelines:

1. Additions should match the scale and mass of the original structure.
2. Additions and exterior alterations should match the existing house in exterior materials, color, architectural style and detailing, window proportion and type, and roof form, pitch, and color.

**MINUTES
CITY OF ST. CHARLES, IL
PLAN COMMISSION
TUESDAY, AUGUST 22, 2017**

Members Present: Chairman Todd Wallace
Tim Kessler
Jeff Funke
James Holderfield
Tom Pretz
Peter Vargulich
Laura Macklin-Purdy
David Pietryla
Tom Schuetz

Also Present: Russell Colby, Planning Division Manager
Ellen Johnson, Planner

1. Call to order

Chairman Wallace called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Vice Chairman Kessler called the roll. A quorum was present.

3. Election of Officers.

Motion was made by Mr. Pretz and seconded by Ms. Purdy to elect Todd Wallace as Chairman and Tim Kessler as Vice-Chairman. Motion carried by a unanimous voice vote.

4. Discussion regarding Design Standards and Guidelines for the RT Traditional Residential Districts

Mr. Colby presented background information about the purpose of the Design Standards and Guidelines applicable to the RT Traditional Residential Districts, why the Design Standards and Guidelines were adopted, and what they do and do not require.

Commissioners were asked to provide feedback on the following questions posed by staff:

1. Should architectural style be regulated by the Design Standards and Guidelines?
2. Should the Design Standards and Guidelines stipulate allowable and/or prohibited architectural elements or building materials?
3. What review and approval process should be followed?

Several Commissioners agreed the Design Standards and Guidelines should not regulate architectural style or overly control design; this would prohibit creativity. Mr. Kessler noted that leaving the Standards/Guidelines more open-ended was the intent of the Residential Architectural Consultation

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process adopted in 2006 and the current Design Standards and Guidelines adopted in 2015. He felt zoning standards such as bulk and setback requirements are what make a structure fit the neighborhood.

Mr. Pretz felt that homes in the RT Districts should incorporate features to blend with the neighborhood; not requiring that does a disservice to the neighborhood and neighboring property owners. Exact style should not be dictated, but new homes should not stick out.

Jackie and Diane Stopka, residents, were present. They felt that more Standards are needed so that new structures are required to fit the general feel of the neighborhood. For example, pitched roofs should be required and certain materials should be prohibited. They felt that the Guidelines are not effective because they cannot be enforced.

Commissioners discussed whether certain building materials should be listed as permitted or prohibited. Some thought it would be difficult to do so and could stifle creativity. It was suggested that a materials list could be added as a Guideline instead of a Standard.

Mr. Funke suggested forming an architectural review committee made up of architects, similar to what exists in Arlington Heights. The committee would be charged with reviewing new development in the RT Districts. Mr. Pretz suggested the Historic Commission could take on this duty. Mr. Kessler felt design review is under the purview of the Plan Commission.

In terms of the review and approval process, Mr. Kessler supported the second option presented by Mr. Colby: Administrative review and approval with an option to request a Commission-level review under certain circumstances. Other Commissioners agreed with this option and discussed that if staff determines a proposed design does not meet certain Design Guidelines and the applicant believes they are still meeting the intent of the applicable section, they could present their design and rationale before the Plan Commission. The Plan Commission would then interpret whether the intent of the section is being met.

Mr. Colby estimated that in a given year, 10 to 15 new houses are constructed in the RT districts, so the Commission may review some portion of this number. Mr. Vargulich noted an applicant would still have the ability to bypass the Plan Commission review if they follow all of the Standards and Guidelines.

Mr. Funke said a street elevation drawing showing the proposed structure next to neighboring homes should be required for the design review to analyze how the building looks in the context of the neighborhood.

Mr. Colby noted the code would need to be changed to create a new process and each section of the design review chapter would need to be reviewed to determine how the existing Standards and Guidelines would apply under the new review process. There may be other changes needed.

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Commissioners felt neighboring property owners should be notified by mail when a design review interpretation is scheduled to come before the Plan Commission; however a public hearing should not be required.

Mr. Colby said the comments from the Plan Commission will be shared with the Planning & Development Committee at their meeting in October. The Committee will need to direct staff on whether to file a General Amendment application to amend the code. The proposed amendment text would then come before the Plan Commission for a public hearing and recommendation.

- 5. Additional Business from Plan Commission Members or Staff**
- 6. Weekly Development Report**
- 7. Meeting Announcements**
 - a. Plan Commission
 - Tuesday, September 5, 2017 at 7:00pm Century Station Training Room
 - Tuesday, September 19, 2017 at 7:00pm Council Chambers
 - Tuesday, October 3, 2017 at 7:00pm Council Chambers
 - b. Planning & Development Committee
 - Monday, September 11, 2017 at 7:00pm Council Chambers
 - Monday, October 9, 2017 at 7:00pm Council Chambers
- 8. Public Comment**
- 9. Adjournment at 8:34 p.m.**

From: bryan <bryanw92@hotmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, September 30, 2017 1:19 PM
To: Colby, Russell; Johnson, Ellen
Subject: Planning & Development Committee

Hi Russell,

I would like my concerns about the 'container house' located at 828 S 3rd Street passed along to the Planning & Development Committee for the October 9th Meeting.

I would like the Committee to consider incorporating a binding standard or code for the exterior design features of houses being built in more traditional neighborhoods so that we do not have 'container houses' or non-conventional houses being built in traditional neighborhoods that consist primarily of historical houses from the late 1800's and early 1900's. While I can appreciate the creativity and design behind the 'container house', it is completely out of character with the other houses located in the neighborhood. In my opinion, it will not add to the charm and character of the neighborhood. There is debate amongst the neighbors on whether or not it will impact the property values of houses located nearby in a negative manner or not. I don't know the answer to this, but I suppose time will tell.

I do believe that there are places for non-conventional houses like this in St. Charles, but not in traditional neighborhoods where it is obviously out of character like the 'container house'.

Thank you,

Bryan Wirball