

**MINUTES
CITY OF ST. CHARLES, IL
PLAN COMMISSION
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2015**

Members Present: Vice Chair Tim Kessler
Brian Doyle
Steve Gaugel
James Holderfield
Laura Macklin-Purdy (7:02)
Tom Pretz
Tom Schuetz

Members Absent: Chairman Todd Wallace
Sue Amatangelo

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

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Vice Chair Kessler.

2. Roll Call

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

3. Presentation of minutes of the January 20, 2015 meeting.

Motion was made by Mr. Holderfield, seconded by Mr. Doyle and unanimously passed by voice vote to accept the minutes of the January 20, 2015 meeting.

4. Staff Presentation and discussion regarding residential teardowns and infill development

Mr. Colby began the presentation with information comparing the pre-2006 zoning regulations to the current zoning regulations. He discussed the fact that the old zoning ordinance did not reflect historical development patterns, resulting in teardowns and infill that did not fit into the older neighborhoods. The current zoning ordinance standards encourage compatible building forms in the RT Traditional Residential Zoning Districts. Standards are now based on survey data from the older neighborhoods.

Vice Chair Kessler asked if the new provisions of the 2006 ordinance were put in place specifically to address the teardown and infill issue. Mr. Colby said yes, from the perspective of zoning standards, setbacks, and bulk regulations.

Mr. Doyle asked for confirmation that the provisions such as prohibiting “snout houses” and the Residential Architectural Consultation do not apply to the RS districts. Mr. Colby confirmed.

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Mr. Gaugel asked if the zoning ordinance was changed to address or to encourage redevelopment. Mr. Colby said both; under the previous zoning ordinance the lot size requirement did not allow many of the older undeveloped lots to be built on. It was recognized there would be more investment in the older neighborhoods as a result of the zoning ordinance changes because these lots would become buildable.

Ms. Johnson continued the presentation by covering infill and teardown trends in RT districts since the 2006 zoning ordinance was adopted. She explained the current staff-level advisory design review process and the impact of staff's advisory comments on the design of the new homes constructed in RT districts. She covered the Comprehensive Plan recommendations related to design compatibility of new homes in older neighborhoods.

Ms. Macklin-Purdy asked if it would be considered a teardown if almost the entire structure was demolished except a few walls. Mr. Colby said if there are not enough walls standing for it to be considered a structure, then it has essentially been demolished.

Mr. Doyle asked about historic districts and whether they are subject to the advisory design review process. Ms. Johnson said homes located in the historic district are subject to review and approval by the Historic Preservation Commission.

Vice Chair Kessler asked if any new homes were built in the historic district during the subject time period (2006-2014). Mr. Colby said he was not sure and that staff did not include that data because those areas are subject to the Certificate of Appropriateness process, which takes the place of the staff review process.

Mr. Pretz said the Historic Preservation Commission has one teardown to discuss on the upcoming agenda, but that is the only one he remembers since his time on the Commission.

Vice Chair Kessler asked why staff only provided comments for 16 of the 24 new homes. Ms. Johnson said they did not have any comments to provide to improve the design.

Upon completing the presentation, Ms. Johnson asked for feedback on whether it would be appropriate to adopt mandatory design standards and guidelines, or whether the current advisory-only process should continue. Mr. Colby added that standards and guidelines could be adopted, but still be advisory. This would allow for a consistent basis for making comments and allow the City to be up front on the things staff will be looking for.

Vice Chair Kessler asked how this could be done without stifling creativity.

Mr. Holderfield said the current building code and zoning standards are specifications, not design elements. It would not be appropriate to try to mandate what the design should be. He gave the example of Frank Lloyd Wright's homes in Oak Park and the fact that they did not match the houses next door. He said the St. Charles Municipal Building designed by Zook was unlike the other buildings downtown. He expressed support for continuing the current advisory only practice.

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Mr. Pretz noted that today only 2% of residential designs are created by architects. Most are designed by developers or builders.

Vice Chair Kessler said most buildings are designed by designers and stamped by architects. Perhaps an architect or engineer's stamp could be required.

Mr. Scheutz said we do not want to stifle creativity; design review should be advisory only. Most of the new homes look great.

Mr. Holderfield said if building code qualifications are met, that should be enough. We should not mandate design because it is our opinion.

Vice Chair Kessler said the zoning ordinance and building codes are in place. If someone has a plan that meets these requirements, what is to stop them from building in one of the RT districts, as opposed to the other zoning districts?

Mr. Pretz said mandatory standards and guidelines would stifle creativity. Whatever zoning rules we have in place are more than adequate. He said he is supportive of having another set of eyes take a look at the design and make recommendations. There should be some acknowledgement by the applicant saying that they have received and understand the comments. He suggested adding a process for a secondary review.

Mr. Scheutz asked why the standards and guidelines would apply only to the RT districts. Mr. Colby explained that teardown and infill development is occurring in the RT districts. It is not as common in the newer areas.

Mr. Doyle said a guidelines document could be advisory, not compulsory. It is good practice for staff to have a document to regularize feedback to builders. It gives staff a resource to provide, which would be a service to builders. Although he agreed that creativity should not be stifled, he referenced the Comprehensive Plan and noted the language surrounding character and preserving the charm of the community is addressing design and style.

Mr. Kessler said that language is troubling and that every generation says they want to preserve what has come before them.

Mr. Doyle said the Comprehensive Plan has been approved and at a minimum supports a design and pattern book, even if it is advisory. He said there may be broad consensus that certain concrete, objective elements are poor design and have a negative impact on the character or social space of a community. These elements can be made compulsory.

Vice Chair Kessler said the zoning ordinance controls what can be built. Maybe adjusting the zoning ordinance for the RT districts can solve the same issue without being design centric.

Mr. Pretz suggested staff continue providing recommendations, with an additional advisory review discussion, perhaps by the Historic Preservation Commission.

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Mr. Gaugel asked if it is consistent who is making the comments. Mr. Colby said it has varied over time, because there have been different staff members. He said it would be helpful to have a standardized list so that review comments are consistent and expectations are clear for the applicant.

Mr. Gaugel said a design and pattern book would be fine, as long as it remains advisory. He asked about what other communities that have experienced a large number of teardowns have done in terms of design regulations.

Mr. Colby said many communities do not provide any design related comments.

Mr. Gaugel said all of the new homes presented in the report are attractive and add to the character of the neighborhood, rather than detract from it. He noted a preponderance of the comments are about windows. He suggested clearly defining the expectations for windows in the design and pattern book.

Vice Chair Kessler asked Commissioners whether they think staff should create a design guideline book.

Mr. Holderfield suggested a committee made up of architects and other experts to create design guidelines for new residential dwellings. The guidelines need to be advisory only and amendable over time.

Mr. Doyle expressed support for the guidelines as an advisory document, but said that certain elements may come out in the process of creating the guidelines that we may want to add to the zoning regulations.

Ms. Macklin-Purdy said a guidelines book is a great idea. It can be used to guide design at the forefront instead of after the fact. It should be advisory only.

Mr. Gaugel and Mr. Scheutz also expressed support for the book, as long as it is non-binding.

Mr. Pretz said he is in favor of the book but noted that different neighborhoods have different character, even among the RT districts. Certain guidelines will not be appropriate for every neighborhood.

Mr. Kessler agreed the guidelines need to be general.

Mr. Colby said staff will put together a draft of the document and go through it with the Commission. We can discuss whether some items should be regulated and not advisory; it does not have to be an all or nothing approach.

5. Meeting Announcements

- a. Plan Commission
Tuesday, February 17, 2015 – meeting cancelled

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Tuesday, March 3, 2015 at 7:00pm Council Chambers
Tuesday, March 17, 2015 at 7:00pm Council Chambers

b. **Planning & Development Committee**

Monday, February 9, 2015 at 7:00pm Council Chambers

Tuesday, February 17, 2015 at 7:05pm Council Chambers – Special Meeting

Monday, March 9, 2015 at 7:00 pm Council Chambers

6. Additional Business from Plan Commission Members, Staff, or Citizens.

7. Adjournment at 8:10 p.m.