



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: FEBRUARY 1, 2011

ITEM NUMBER:

SUBJECT: BUILDING PERMIT REQUIREMENTS FOR MASONRY WALLS

DATE: JANUARY 19, 2011

FROM: DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

PRESENTATION BY: KHANH NGUYEN, CBO, BUILDING OFFICIAL

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: KHANH NGUYEN (714) 754-5277

RECOMMENDATION:

Direct staff to draft an ordinance to require building permits for masonry walls greater than three feet in height.

BACKGROUND:

Mayor Pro Tem Righheimer requested City Council review of building permit requirements for masonry walls. Since 2003, the City has not required a building permit for walls that are six feet or less in height. The City has never required a building permit for a wooden fence that is six feet or less in height. This is consistent with the current California Building Code. Regardless of whether a building permit is required, zoning requirements (in respect to height and location) still apply. There has been concern expressed that fences/walls are being constructed that do not comply with zoning standards, because a building permit is not required.

Since 1979, the Uniform Building Code has exempted walls/fences not over 6 feet high and retaining walls not over 4 feet high from building permit requirements. The State Code recognizes that these structures are not hazardous to the public.

In September 2010, Council adopted the 2010 California Residential and Building Codes, as being applicable to Costa Mesa. It would be necessary to adopt an ordinance if Council wishes to require permits for fences and/or masonry walls that are six feet or less in height.

ANALYSIS:

Staff is recommending that building permits only be required for masonry (e.g., stucco, block or brick) walls and not for fences. The City has never required a building permit for fences, and if a fence is constructed inconsistent with zoning standards, the necessary correction is more easily made than for a masonry wall.

Staff estimates that the average cost for a masonry wall permit will be \$350, and typically staff will be able to issue the permit "over the counter". The property owner or contractor will be required to submit a site plan (showing location and height) and construction specifications. We currently have standard specifications for six-foot high block walls that can be used for the permit issuance. For masonry walls being proposed on property lines, staff is not recommending that a lot line survey or signatures from adjacent neighbors be required for permit issuance. These requirements add substantial cost and time to the homeowners.

FISCAL REVIEW:

A detailed analysis will be provided if Council wishes to consider an ordinance. There should not be an impact to the City budget as the building permit fees will cover the cost of permit issuance and inspection services.

LEGAL REVIEW:

Legal review is not required at this time.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

1. Direct staff to amend the adopted California Residential and Building Codes, as applicable to the City of Costa Mesa, requiring permits for masonry walls over 3 feet in height.
2. Receive and file.

CONCLUSION:

Building permit requirements for masonry walls that are greater than 3 feet in height will ensure that the walls are constructed in conformance with all applicable building and zoning code requirements.


KHANH NGUYEN, CBO
Building Official


KIMBERLY BRANDT, AICP
Development Services Director

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