



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: DECEMBER 3, 2013

ITEM NUMBER:

SUBJECT: AMENDMENT TO 2005 RESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

DATE: NOVEMBER 18, 2013

FROM: PLANNING DIVISION/DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

PRESENTATION BY: MINOO ASHABI, PRINCIPAL PLANNER

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DESCRIPTION

Amend the Residential Design Guidelines to reflect the following revisions:

- Apply the average second floor side yard setback of 10 feet to new two-story residential structures over 2,700 square feet in area;
- Revise the second floor to first floor ratio from 80 percent to 100 percent.

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt resolution amending the Residential Design Guidelines in Attachment 3.

BACKGROUND

The Costa Mesa Residential Guidelines were initially adopted in 2001 in response to the goals and policies of the City's General Plan Community Design Element. The guidelines work in concert with the City's Zoning Code to promote quality and compatible design. The guidelines have been revised in 2003 and 2005 allowing more flexibility in the review process and second story additions for existing structures with less than 10 feet side yard setback.

The guidelines recommend an average side yard setback of ten feet for second floors and an 80 percent second floor to first floor ratio. These guidelines were intended to encourage off-sets in elevations and to discourage boxy structures. Currently, single family structures that do not meet these recommendations are subject to approval of a minor design review by the Zoning Administrator. If the project involves more than one unit, the deviations from the design guidelines are considered as part of the design review and subject to approval by the Planning Commission.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on this subject on October 28, 2013. During the public comment period, a letter in opposition of the amendment was submitted

(Attachment 2) to the Planning Commission and at the hearing, Bob Colgan, a representative of RSI Developer (a precision home builder group with multiple projects in Costa Mesa) requested that staff's proposed threshold of 2,500 square feet be increased to capture most of their models that range in size from 1,600 square feet to 3,000 square feet. He indicated that RSI has improved the boxy appearance and architecture of their products by adding articulation on all sides. Their focus is on replacement housing for single family projects and keeping the entitlement process to a minimum is a great advantage to their clients since the homes are typically constructed in less than 3 months. The Planning Commission adopted Resolution No. PC13-28 recommending that the City Council amends the guidelines as follows:

- Apply the average second floor side yard setback of 10 feet to new two-story residential structures over 2,700 square feet in area;
- Revise the second floor to first floor ratio from 80 percent to 100 percent.

The Planning Commission also recommended that the City Council consider another approach in limiting site coverage by revising the current maximum lot coverage of 60 percent to 50 percent for larger homes. This would allow for adequate setbacks and prevent mansionization in single family residential neighborhoods. Any change to the maximum lot coverage is a development standard in the zoning code and would require a zoning code amendment.

Average Second Floor Setback

Since 2011, this deviation has been requested for single family homes as well as multiple unit projects for a total of eighteen projects (four additional projects pending). None have been denied by the Zoning Administrator or the Planning Commission. The developers and project applicants indicate that an off-set in the elevation design is costly and not feasible for smaller homes, where the footprint of the second floor is stacked on the first floor for better floor plans and adequate size bedrooms. In addition, most average lot widths do not allow for extensive side yard setbacks without compromising the floor plans. These deviations are granted when the applicant can submit an alternative design with off-setting side windows for privacy and provide additional architectural accents to reduce the boxy appearance of the homes. The Minor Design Review process typically takes about an average of six weeks and is subject to a public notice. Revising the guidelines will streamline a six-week entitlement process; the abutting neighbors will still be notified as with any two-story construction.

It should be noted that the current guidelines allow second story additions to utilize the same footprint and setback as the first floor on the side, if the existing structure has a five-foot minimum setback on the first floor. This revision will allow new and additions to be subject to the same guidelines.

Second Floor to First Floor Ratio

Since 2011, this deviation has been requested for single family homes as well as multiple unit projects for a total of seven projects. The average second floor to first floor ratio for most homes range from 70 to over 90 percent, and it has been challenging to get compliance with this recommendation. The 100 percent ratio will allow for larger second

floors and upper level bedrooms. The footprint of the front or rear porch will not be included in the first floor; however, balconies are included in the area of second floor. This revision will not allow cantilevers on the second floor living spaces or balconies that typically contribute to top heavy structures. The provisions for elevation treatment would be remaining.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

The revision has been reviewed for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the CEQA guidelines, and the City's environmental procedures, and has been found to be exempt pursuant to Section 15061 (b) (3) (general rule) of the CEQA Guidelines, in that it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the proposed amendment to the Residential Design Guidelines will have a significant effect on the environment.

LEGAL REVIEW

The City Attorney's office has approved the attached resolutions as to form.

CONCLUSION

The Planning Commission recommended revising the Residential Design Guidelines to exempt residential units of less than 2,700 square feet from the recommended average side yard setback and to allow an increase in the second floor footprint of up to 100 percent of first floor. This would be a typical three to four-bedroom house with stacked two stories to maximize the use of the lot and provide a more livable second floor plan.

The recommended revisions to residential guidelines will be consistent with the goals and policies of the General Plan Community Design Element in that excellence in architectural design and prevailing character of the neighborhood will be recommended and applicable to review of two-story structures. The flexibility in average second floor setback and second floor to first floor ratio will be applicable to average size homes and will streamline the entitlement process for single unit projects.

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Economic and Development Services
Director

Attachments:

1. [City Council Resolution](#)
2. [Planning Commission Resolution 13-28](#)
3. [Submitted Letter](#)
4. [Current Guidelines – red marked](#)

cc: Economic & Development Director
Deputy City Attorney
City Engineer
Transportation Svs. Mgr.
Fire Protection Analyst

Staff (4)
File (2)

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