



City of Huntington Beach Planning Commission

STAFF REPORT

TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Neighborhood Compatibility Committee of the Planning Commission
DATE: December 9, 2008
SUBJECT: **NEIGHBORHOOD COMPATIBILITY COMMITTEE - FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**
LOCATION: Citywide – Residential Low (RL) Density Districts

JS GHF

STATEMENT OF ISSUE:

Huntington Beach is experiencing controversy over the size, mass, and bulk of expanded and rebuilt houses because neighbors consider the houses to be incompatible with their neighborhood's character. The City Council considered limiting floor area ratios (FAR) in low density residential neighborhoods, but concluded that this action would be ineffective. The Council then directed the staff to recommend design changes in the City codes, but took no action on recommendations presented at a study session. This controversy has persisted, which prompted the Planning Commission to form a Neighborhood Compatibility Committee to further examine this issue and make recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION:

Motion to approve the following Minute Action and forward to the City Council:

“Direct staff to prepare and process the necessary amendments to the Huntington Beach Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance and Design Guidelines to incorporate the recommendations by the Planning Commission Neighborhood Compatibility Committee”

ALTERNATIVE ACTION(S):

The Planning Commission may take alternative actions such as:

- A. “Direct the committee to continue to evaluate the issues and return with revised recommendations at a later date.”
- B. “Do not forward the recommended Minute Action.”

ANALYSIS:

The rebuilding or expansion of an existing single family residence can result in a structure that appears massive, out of scale, and incompatible with surrounding homes. The finished project can cast shadows on adjacent houses and yards, have windows looking into private areas of neighboring houses, and have architectural features unlike those of surrounding homes. Neighbors have expressed that their property values are adversely affected by the rebuilt home.

The Committee examined neighborhood compatibility efforts in other cities, including Rancho Palos Verdes, Menlo Park, Fountain Valley, Solana Beach, and Los Angeles, California and Aspen, Colorado. Most used design guidelines, height caps, and floor area ratio limits to control size, mass, and bulk of rebuilt or expanded houses. Two cities, Los Angeles and Fountain Valley, codified incentives in their code for increasing FAR if homeowner used design elements that lessened mass and bulk of the finished structure.

Based on these other cities efforts, the Committee considered three approaches to ensuring neighborhood compatibility of expanded or rebuilt houses:

1. Limit Floor Area Ratios (FAR) – options include strict FAR limits and base FAR plus incremental bonuses if certain designs are used.
2. Design Review – City staff or the Design Review Board reviews the plans if a minimum percentage of existing structure is demolished or added onto.
3. Ordinances to Control Mass and Bulk – add to the zoning and subdivision ordinance design elements to control a house's size, mass, and bulk.

The first approach was rejected because FAR limits are politically controversial and previous attempts to limit FAR in the City have failed. The second was found to add new processes to the City's entitlement process and necessitate extensive revisions of the Urban Design Guidelines. The Committee opted for the third approach and developed a list of potential design elements for the City's codes that are shown in Table 1.

The City's staff reviewed the recommended design elements and found that most are already in the General Plan, Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance, or Urban Design Guidelines. However, the Guidelines exempt projects that involve three or fewer single family residences. The Committee also found that the Infill Lot Ordinance is triggered only if more than 50 % of a structure is demolished but is silent about sizeable additions that do not require such demolition.

Neighborhood Compatibility Committee Recommendations

1. Add to the Urban Design Guidelines those elements in Table 1 that are not presently in the Guidelines.
2. Revise the Infill Lot Ordinance to include projects where the square footage of a single family residence is increased by more than 50%.
3. Exclude from the above described Urban Design Guidelines exemption projects that are subject to the Infill Lot Ordinance.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Table 1 – Planning Commission Neighborhood Compatibility Committee: Design Recommendations
2. Draft Minute Action memo dated December 10, 2008

**Table 1: Planning Commission
Neighborhood Compatibility Committee
Design Recommendations**

Recommendation	GP	HBZSO	UDG	Origin
2nd story setbacks	√		√	GP: LU.9.1.2(a); UDG: Ch 2-D.2.d
3rd story setbacks	√	√	√	GP: LU.9.1.2(a); HBZSO: 210.06 (M); UDG: Ch.2-D.2.d
Limiting Ratio of 2nd to 1st story				Not Addressed
Limiting ratio of 3rd stories to first floor				Not Addressed
Wall articulation	√	√	√	GP: LU.9.1.2(a); HBZSO: 230.22; UDG: Ch.2-D.2.c & Ch.2-D.2.e
2nd and 3rd story window offsets	√	√	√	HBZSO: 230.22 & 210.06 (M) UDG: Ch.2-D.2.e & Ch.2-D.2.e
Varying roof lines and pitches		√	√	HBZSO: 230.22 & 210.06 (M) UDG: Ch.2-D.2.c, Ch.2-D.2.g, & Ch.2-F.3.c
Daylight plane standards				
Average setbacks	√		√	GP: LU.9.1.2(a) UDG: Ch.2-D.2.e
Maximum height dependent upon roof slope		√		HBZSO: 210.06 (M)
3-story house up to 30 ft. height				HBZSO: 210.06 (M)
Raising lot coverage, but including garage and accessory structures				Not Addressed
2nd and 3rd story window offsets	√	√	√	<i>See No. 6</i>
Pedestrian scale front porches			√	UDG: Ch.2-D.1.f & Ch.2-D.2.e
Clerestory windows or translucent glass to interrupt direct sight lines to neighbor's windows and livable outdoor spaces		√		HBZSO: 230.22
Landscaping features to provide buffer or screening between properties	√			<i>Only applicable for Residential development adjacent to Industrial and Commercial districts.</i>
Recess or enclose 2nd story balconies and deck on three sides		√		HBZSO: 210.06 (M) - 3rd floor only
Solid or translucent materials, or walls, as balcony or deck railings		√		HBZSO: 210.06 (L)
Expand requirements of residential infill ordinance				TBD

GP = General Plan; **HBZSO** = Huntington Beach Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance; **UDG** = Huntington Beach Urban Design Guidelines.



CITY OF HUNTINGTON BEACH
PLANNING COMMISSION COMMUNICATION

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members
VIA: Fred Wilson, City Administrator
FROM: Tom Livengood, Chair Planning Commission
SUBJECT: **PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTE ACTION –
NEIGHBORHOOD COMPATIBILITY COMMITTEE
RECOMMENDATIONS**

DATE: December 10, 2008

DRAFT

At the Planning Commission meeting of December 9, 2008, the Planning Commission approved the Neighborhood Compatibility Committee's report with findings and recommendations (see attached). The following minute action was proposed by the Neighborhood Compatibility Committee and was approved by a unanimous vote to be forwarded to the City Council (6-0).

MINUTE ACTION:

“Direct staff to prepare and process the necessary amendments to the Huntington Beach Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance and Design Guidelines to incorporate the recommendations by the Planning Commission Neighborhood Compatibility Committee”

The Planning Commission requests the City Council consider their minute action at their earliest convenience.

ATTACHMENT: Staff Report dated 12/09/08

c: Planning Commission
Scott Hess, Director of Planning