



## Huntington Beach Planning Commission

2000 MAIN STREET

CALIFORNIA 92648

**TO:** Huntington Beach Planning Commission

**FROM:** Commissioner John Scandura *LW for JS*  
*Neighborhood Compatibility Sub-Committee of the  
Huntington Beach Planning Commission*

**SUBJECT:** Neighborhood Compatibility Sub-Committee Findings and Recommendations

**DATE:** November 12, 2008

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The Neighborhood Compatibility Sub-Committee respectfully submits the attached Findings and Recommendations for consideration at the Planning Commission's November 12, 2008 Study Session. The report is based on Sub-Committee meetings and research since August, 2008. The Committee members, consisting of Commissioners Dwyer, Shaw, and Scandura, thank the Planning Commission for the opportunity to submit this report.

SS #D-1

**HUNTINGTON BEACH PLANNING COMMISSION  
NEIGHBORHOOD COMPATIBILITY COMMITTEE  
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
November 4, 2008**

Background

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.

Problem

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.

Findings

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.

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

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>GP</b>	<b>HBZSO</b>	<b>UDG</b>	<b>Origin</b>
2nd story setbacks	√		√	<b>GP:</b> LU.9.1.2(a); <b>UDG:</b> Ch 2-D.2.d
3rd story setbacks	√	√	√	<b>GP:</b> LU.9.1.2(a); <b>HBZSO:</b> 210.06 (M); <b>UDG:</b> 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	√	√	√	<b>GP:</b> LU.9.1.2(a); <b>HBZSO:</b> 230.22; <b>UDG:</b> Ch.2-D.2.c & Ch.2-D.2.e
2nd and 3rd story window offsets	√	√	√	<b>HBZSO:</b> 230.22 & 210.06 (M) <b>UDG:</b> Ch.2-D.2.e & Ch.2-D.2.e
Varying roof lines and pitches		√	√	<b>HBZSO:</b> 230.22 & 210.06 (M) <b>UDG:</b> Ch.2-D.2.c, Ch.2-D.2.g, & Ch.2-F.3.c
Daylight plane standards				
Average setbacks	√		√	<b>GP:</b> LU.9.1.2(a) <b>UDG:</b> Ch.2-D.2.e
Maximum height dependent upon roof slope		√		<b>HBZSO:</b> 210.06 (M)
3-story house up to 30 ft. height				<b>HBZSO:</b> 210.06 (M)
Raising lot coverage, but including garage and accessory structures				Not Addressed
2nd and 3rd story window offsets	√	√	√	See No. 6
Pedestrian scale front porches			√	<b>UDG:</b> 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		√		<b>HBZSO:</b> 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		√		<b>HBZSO:</b> 210.06 (M) - 3rd floor only
Solid or translucent materials, or walls, as balcony or deck railings		√		<b>HBZSO:</b> 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.