

# **ATTACHMENT 8**

## **Planning Commission Considerations**

## **Central Area Single Family Development Standards**

### **Planning Commission Considerations**

- Floor Area
- Development Incentives and Basements
- Covered Parking

### **Floor Area**

Direction was provided to staff at the initial City Council /Planning Commission Liaison meeting in October, 2012, that proposed code amendments should not reduce the total floor area permitted on single family properties in the Central Area. This direction was confirmed with a Study Session report to the City Council in August 2013 (Attachment 7 to the Agenda Report). The consultant's "Guiding Design Principle #3" in the Recommendation Report memorializes this direction as part of the framework for the community's discussion of these issues. As directed, the code amendments as proposed would not reduce the maximum floor area permitted on any Central Area property.

It is noted that the maximum floor area currently allowed in Beverly Hills is higher than adjacent cities. For example, West Hollywood allows a floor area ratio (FAR) of .5 on single family lots, or 50%. On a 6,000 square foot lot this means a 3,000 square foot house can be built. Beverly Hills, on the other hand, allows a maximum floor area of 40% (.4) plus 1,500 square feet. For a 6,000 square foot lot (typical for many areas south of Santa Monica Boulevard), 1,500 square feet is 25% of the lot, or .25. This .25 FAR added to the allowed .4 FAR results in a total FAR of .65 which would allow a 3,900 square foot house on a 6,000 square foot lot.

The City's standard for maximum floor area is the same north and south of Santa Monica Boulevard even though typical lot sizes vary substantially between the north and south. For a lot size of 14,400 square feet (more typical in the north), 1,500 square feet is a little over ten percent of the lot area or .1 FAR, resulting in a total floor area of .1 plus .4 or .5 – a figure that is more consistent with adjacent communities.

It is further noted that although planning commissioners expressed concern that Beverly Hills may allow greater maximum floor area than may be desirable, particularly on smaller lots, a majority of the Planning Commission ultimately concluded that reducing floor area at this time would likely not have the desired effect of reducing the perception of bulk and mass of new houses. This conclusion stems from the City's experience that property owners push allowed floor area to the front of their properties to maximize private space in private backyard areas.

### **Incentives vs. Standards**

#### **Basements**

The Planning Commission encouraged the City's consultant for this project to look at ways to use incentives to encourage design that is compatible with existing neighborhoods, along with proposing changes to the City's development standards that could be required for new projects.

The consultant identified two ways to incentivize design that may be appropriate for Beverly Hills:

1. Relate the modulation standards to the ability to maximize basement floor area

The City currently does not count basement area in the calculation of allowed floor area. Concern has been expressed that large basements are contributing to the intensification of single-family lots, often resulting in greater parking needs. The consultant proposed using basement area (a desired feature) as an incentive by linking the ability to build the maximum basement area to meeting certain modulation standards. This could be referred to as incentivizing the basement.

2. Link the modulation standards to the ability of property owners to apply for a staff-level review rather than a Commission-level review

Currently, R-1 projects that meet certain criteria may be reviewed at staff level which is generally faster and less costly than a commission hearing process. The consultant proposed creating additional opportunities for applicants to receive staff level review if certain bulk and mass criteria are met.

Ultimately the Planning Commission decided not to recommend either of these incentives. With regard to the first proposed incentive, the Planning Commission determined it did not wish to limit design flexibility and decided not to support the consultant's recommendations regarding front façade modulation, limiting the size of second floors, and encroachment into required setbacks for architectural projections and porte cocheres.

With regard to the second incentive regarding expediting permits, the Planning Commission heard concern from the Design Review Commission that new homes may need to go through a design review process not based solely on meeting certain modulation standards. To provide context: the City's original design review ordinance contained one additional review process that granted a staff level approval for single family projects based on a project's incorporation of certain design features. This review process was deemed unsuccessful as it resulted in substandard designs and it was subsequently removed from the ordinance. Additionally, the Planning Commission expressed concern that incentives based on offering an applicant the opportunity to achieve the maximum basement area or a staff-level rather than Commission-level design review, may not be enough of an inducement to convince applicants to create better and more compatible design.

### **Covered Parking**

Since the Planning Commission decided not to include modulation standards as part of the package of amendments, there was no longer an incentive to which to tie basement size. The Planning Commission subsequently explored tying basement size to the provision of covered parking. After discussion, a majority of the Planning Commissioners decided that covered parking should not be required in the Central Area because property owners are likely to use that space for storage or uses other than parking cars, resulting in more lot coverage with little benefit. The Commission ultimately decided to address concerns about inadequate parking through the extension of the required side setback south of Santa Monica Boulevard and by requiring additional parking spaces (see "Parking Standards" discussion in the Agenda Report).