

Slot Home Evaluation & Text Amendment Task Force
Summary – Meeting 3 – Thursday March 16, 2017

Meeting Objectives:

- Finalize problem statement and criteria based on public open house feedback
- Discuss, and begin to evaluate the zoning tools that can be used to effectively address the problem statement

Task Force Members in Attendance: Nathan Adams, Dave Berton, Enrico Cacciorini, Scott Chomiak, Jane Crisler, Don Elliot, Christine Franck, Sarah Kaplan, Maggie Miller, Ty Mumford, Councilman Wayne New, Heather Noyes, **Not in Attendance:** Anne Cox, Anna Cawrse, Councilman Rafael Espinoza, Melissa Rummel **CPD Staff:** Analiese Hock, Abe Barge, Jeff Brasel, **Observers:** Amanda Sandoval [Council Aide, District 1]; Josh Rogers, Robert Schmitt

I. Public Meeting and Public Input

Staff provided an overview of the public comments received at the Public Open House on March 8, 2017. Open house comments generally expressed concerns over a loss of neighborhood identity and character through the development of slot homes that do not positively engage the public realm, respect the existing mass and scale, and negatively impact the traditional street character and adjacent properties. Full summary has been provided to task force members and is posted to website at

www.denvergov.org/slothomes

The task force offered these observations on the public meeting and the summary of public comment:

- We haven't heard from those that live in slot homes and may want to hear from them
- The privacy concerns are not particular to slot homes. If the same land were developed as an apartment building, the apartment units would have windows on the side of the building facing adjacent homes (though not doors facing adjacent homes with people coming in and out)
- Participants seemed to prefer orderly facades with materials and color palates that matched the existing neighborhood
- There were many positive reactions to the photographs of buildings with setbacks and landscaping; these created a more pedestrian-friendly street and sidewalk edge
- It isn't always clear whether the public concerns are about density generally or about slot homes in particular
- As a follow up to the meeting, a task force member requested that staff find ways to integrate this effort with public works

Staff offered a one-sentence version of the problem and project as a way of summarizing the problem statement and the criteria. The task force noted that the sentence didn't speak to the garden court moratorium and the question about whether garden courts are an appropriate form in some districts.

II. Problem Statement

The task force concluded its discussion of the problem statement, considering public comment, and suggested these changes:

- The problem statement needs a clear reference to the impact on commercial streets from buildings that are exclusively residential (The staff noted that this is captured in the neighborhood design section)
- Blueprint Denver reference – the statements needs a brief clarification that “area of change” doesn't mean just any change, it means that the change needs to be considered in light of the zoning context, neighborhood plans, and neighbors' expectations
- Add reference in the problem statement to the idea that Desired Future Condition is expressed in the intent statements, in neighborhood plans, in neighborhood transportation plans and in the link

between those plans and development proposals; (The next phase of the process will examine zoning standards to create better alignment with the zoning code intent statements)

- Vehicle-oriented design – this is not simply a problem because people don’t want to look at these elements – it is more important to focus the problem statement on pedestrian safety, on the pedestrians’ experiencing the street as something that that is safe, active, drawing them along the street, and that this is about make the public and semi-private spaces welcoming and active; emphasize walkability
- Emphasize solar access in the section on impacts on neighbor

The task force discussed two topics that will require additional reflection, and not simply an edit to the problem statement:

1. Might there be unintended, negative consequence that stems from the pattern of subdivision in the slot homes?
 - Could there be some future complication or problem in redeveloping these sites?
 - Is the pattern of ownership and the absence of HOA’s going to create a problem for near-term operation and maintenance and for redevelopment that wouldn’t otherwise exist and that doesn’t exist for other parcel arrangements (condominiums, traditional duplexes, etc.)?
 - Is there a negative, unintended impact on the city or on the slot home owners from the parcel configuration, from the ownership arrangement and from the absence of a condominium organization or HOA for shared responsibilities?
2. The idea that these units are more attainable than a duplex or a single-family house on the same site (assuming the same land costs) --- The question of attainability could be part of the evaluation of the new code changes rather than the problem statement – Would the proposed code changes significantly impacting attainability (the ability of homebuyers who are in the market to purchase the home)?

At this point in the task force deliberation, the group will turn away from the problem statement and begin moving toward potential changes to the zoning code.

III. Staff Presentation - Zoning Tools to Address Slot Homes

Staff provided an overview of zoning tools in the Denver Zoning Code that could be used to address the problem statement. Many of the tools presented do not currently apply to the forms in which slot homes are commonly built. (See Chapter 3.0 Tools to Address Slot Homes of the Strategy Report)

IV. Break-Out Sessions

The task force worked in 4 groups, reviewing the tools and looking for those that have the potential to improve 1). Neighborhood Design, 2). Public Realm Engagement, 3). Vehicle-Oriented Design and Impacts to Neighbors and 4). Mass and Scale. Each group discussed the advantages/disadvantages of each tool and identified those tools with the greatest potential to address the problem statement.

1. Neighborhood Design
 - Upper-story setback is a tool that can make the building more readable from the street. It also would enable active uses such as a rooftop deck to be located at the front of the building which is more appropriate.
 - Transparency is good when tied to active use requirements.
 - Encouraging entrances located on the side of the property to be more pronounced (with entry features) will create a more readable building.

- Promoting/requiring front porches is a more effective way to engage the public realm than the existing active-use requirement in a residential only building.

2. Public Realm Engagement

- Street Level Active uses are important, especially when tied to transparency standards.
- Active use standards need to be relevant to the use and the context.
- It is important to use incentives to encourage a greater setback; create an incentive for developers to set the buildings back and engage the public realm.

3. Vehicle-Oriented Design & Impacts to Neighbors

- Active use requirements are a good way to prohibit vehicular uses at the front of the building.
- Zero-foot setbacks are a disadvantage and affect privacy.
- Minimum parking standards do not have a significant impact on vehicle-oriented design.
- Building heights and upper-story setback can help with solar access and can reduce the perceived height of the building from the street.
- The upper story setback could also promote activity at the 2nd story, however it can reduce living space for the front unit.
- Explore ways to remove the dog house but still provide rooftop access

4. Mass and Scale

- Transparency standards should be reviewed more to manipulate apparent size of building facade.
- Explore a slight building height reduction to make more compatible without reducing number of stories.
- Upper story setback is important in being able to create buildings that keep in scale with lower rise buildings
- Bulk plane would be a good tool to help with mass and scale
- Block sensitive setback is a good tool to improve mass and scale
- Zone lot standards-biggest impact. Looking at other allowable forms on other lots and sizes
Building coverage standards-medium level tool that would impact mass and scale, but this is a topic for to community members. Coverage of the lot is too much.

V. Upcoming Meeting

The next task force meeting will take place on Wednesday, April 12, 2017 2:00-5:00 at the Webb Building (201 W Colfax) on the second floor, room 2.I.1.

VI. Small Group Summaries

The following is a summary of the comments received on the tools reviewed to address the problem statement. The tools are generally listed in order of effectiveness as ranked by the groups.

- - - High Impact tools to address problem statement - - -

1. Primary Street Setback Standards:

Advantages:

- Open house participants felt that more setbacks were (almost) always good
- Can create the space for pedestrian entry features
- Can enable for landscaping

Disadvantages:

- Setbacks can make it more difficult for the architecture to engage the public realm; generally, this small group's members don't support mandatory setbacks unless they are required for neighborhood context (i.e. structures on at least one side of the lot have them)

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Perhaps require a minimal (5-10 ft) setback if utilities are going to be located on the front of the building or if the applicant is using any of the alternatives to transparency or access.
- Incentivize a larger than 5-ft setback to allow porches

2. Pedestrian Access Standards and Alternatives

Advantages:

- When each unit is required to have a street-facing entrance in the row house form, it goes a long way to engage the street.
- Improves activity and public realm.
- A "door" relates to the street level active use.
- Real doors that people walk through to get in and out of the house enhances the public realm and enjoyment.

Disadvantages:

- Cost

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Enable for pedestrian entries to "express" themselves with canopies or other features that could encroach into the setback.
- Relate to Active Use Standards

3. Transparency

Advantages:

- When located adjacent to a truly active use, it can engage the public realm
- Can contribute to façade design and massing of the building to feel human scale

Disadvantages:

- When no active use is required, it results on windows on garages. Hard to ensure that the standard leads to activation. Hard to avoid the misuse (windows into garages does not work)

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Change code to allow for windows placed at 5' high to count towards transparency. This might incentivize more windows on residential uses such as bedrooms.
- Relate the standard to the parking location.

4. Street Level Active Use Standards

Advantages:

- Promotes activity between building and the sidewalk/street. Could prohibit access to street (*comments might not fully understand standard as described*).
- Relates to pedestrian access and can help to engage the public realm when ties to pedestrian access.

Disadvantages:

- Poor tool for this type of housing, which can visually turn its street ends into something more engaging, but forcing a different use into the space seems difficult.
- It's a joke that stairwell and utility closets can count toward the active use standard
- Residential privacy concerns at a zero setback
- Forces the front unit to have a tandem garage (not always a bad thing however).

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- With current understanding, not interested in further exploring tool.
- Should be strengthened in MS and MX zone districts.

- In MU districts, this standard does not make sense, enabling/encouraging for porches is much more effective in creating an “active” space.
- May not make sense in districts with a greater setback.
- Revise the list of uses.
- Incentive program to get projects that engage the public realm.

5. Upper Story Setback/Setback

Advantages:

- A potential compromise between requiring the zoning max heights and the “overlooking”/backyard privacy issue. Third floor users would not always have a direct view into the back yard.
- This is among the best tools – having a deck on the front on the second or third story would put eyes on the street and force the building back at the second floor.
- Helps with solar access
- Reduces the height as viewed from the street.
- Could allow for upper story street facing porches.
- Buffers rooftop activity and visibility.

Disadvantages:

- Tends to erode development potential to protect a scale of development on nearby lots that is inconsistent with the intended character reflected in the zoning district.
- Reduces living space and creates a less viable product when there is ground level parking.
- Steppedbacks may lead to roof decks in those areas, which could be worse (in terms of noise and activity) than just viewing a backyard from inside.

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Look at this as a potentially useful tool and see if it needs to be refined.
- Steppedbacks should align with the active use dimensions.
- Allow for roof decks in this area, then the activity is focused to the front of the building where it belongs.

6. Building Height:

Advantages:

- Most powerful tool to address the “looking over into my backyard” problem. Requiring a greater setback for building elements that pierce the height limit would help

Disadvantages:

- Weakening the current tools tends to protect a scale (low-rise) that is not called for in the zoning district – probably counterproductive

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Maybe consider context more specifically in Areas of Stability.
- Reduce the maximum allowable height in 2-story districts.
- One thing that could be addressed here is that the floor-to-floor heights of many new buildings are greater than those of the historic buildings, so the building is even more massive because of floor heights; if you want less massive buildings, reduce allowable floor heights

7. Building Height Exceptions:

Advantages:

- May respond to the neighborhood context better in transitioning neighborhood.

Disadvantages:

- Currently allow for doghouse which increases mass and scale of building

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Currently guard rails around the rooftop decks cannot encroach, desire to allow for as a height encroachment. Maybe don’t need to enable for penthouse.
- The doghouse should be stepped back regardless of if it exceeds the maximum height

8. Setback Encroachments:

Advantages:

- If we are going to allow for side entries, they should look like side entries and have canopies or other distinguishing entry features. Enables for front porches.

Disadvantages:

- Gas meters

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Enable for entry features to encroach into front and side setbacks. Get the gas meters out of the front.

9. Landscaping Standards:

- Should include streetscape standards.

10. Zone Lot Standards:

Advantages:

- This can significantly change the mass of the buildings

Disadvantages:

- There may be resistance from developers, builders

Potential Revisions/Applications:

11. Building Coverage:

Advantages:

- Would directly address the massing problem

Disadvantages:

- Lowering building coverage tends to push towards more driveways and walkways along the edges and center of the development – and wide driveways in the center is part of the problem.

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Might not be a good solution

12. Bulk Plane:

Advantages:

- This could help match new buildings to existing character.
- Solar access

Disadvantages:

- If you have upper story setbacks, you don't need bulk plane
- Confusing and hard to understand.
- Often leads to strange outcomes on sloped lots.
- Could deter some from developing multi-family projects

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Stay with discussing revisions to the setbacks – no need to double dip with another similar tool or confuse folks by having both in play.

13. Parking Location, Layout, Access and Circulation:

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

- Restricts design, especially on a small lot

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Leave as is – parking under the units is logical if the visible auto-oriented-ness of the access when viewed from the street can be addressed. Parking along the alley is visually much better, but won't provide enough parking to make most larger sites usable. Restrict parking location based on lot depth, though parking restrictions for only the street-facing unit could address street-level active use standards, transparency, and pedestrian access standards and alternatives.

14. Perimeter Surface Parking Lot and Landscaping Standards:

Advantages:

- If the parking access drive was better buffered from the street through dense landscaping, the auto orientation would be significantly reduced

Disadvantages:

- Making these very strict may significantly discourage further slot home development of any kind

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Worth exploring along with suggestions above – maybe not allow the parking access to come close to the street frontage and then require the gap to be densely landscaped (although that may create safety/no “eyes-on-the-street” issues that could be worse than the problem.
- Set a range of width that is more than a “slot” but significantly reduces the “wide expanse of asphalt visible from the street” problem – narrower than most of the ones we have viewed. Or
- Require that the central parking access not extend to within 20 or 30 feet of the front property line, so that what is viewed from the street is more like a landscaped inset or setback, which may mean that the front units do not have parking available beneath the unit.

15. Block Sensitive Setback

Advantages:

- This gives a real change from the worst cases we saw – by placing the building back from the street at the historic distance, we avoid some of the buildings that are so massive and out of scale

Disadvantages:

- Potential Revisions/Applications: Remove from MU districts, setbacks should be calibrated to meet existing and future context.

16. Build to Standards:

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

Potential Revisions/Applications:

- Don't include the areas in the setbacks to count against the build to

17. Minimum Parking Standards & Exceptions:

Advantages:

- Reduces on-street parking impacts

Disadvantages:

- Promotes façade design with limited articulation and detail where garage is located.

Potential Revisions/Applications:

18. Other Tools to Consider:

- Offer an incentive --- give a more expedited review timing IF design recommendations are adopted
- Design standards can prove that big buildings can be great – for many of the examples we've seen, they feel massive and out-of-scale because they are so poorly designed
- Make a different set of rules for the unit that is on the street
- Change the code to define which forms are allowed in each zoning context or zone district, more importantly, which are no longer allowed; this would allow us to prevent all-residential buildings in main street or commercial zones, etc. – this will have the greatest impact on eliminating buildings that have inappropriate mass and scale