



Meeting Notes

May 11, 2022

Call to Order

Recording started by Tamara Fou.

Sonny Garza, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

Welcome by Co-Chairs

Mr. Sonny Garza, Co-Chair, took the roll and presented the speaker rules. 16 committee members were present during roll call. There were 98 participants.

Director's Report: Margaret Wallace Brown, Director, Planning & Development Department welcomed everyone to the meeting and mentioned the following:

- The Planning & Development Department is working closely with the Public Works Department on this initiative. We are not doing this work in a vacuum.
- Beyond interdepartmental meetings and discussions, department directors host monthly meetings between departments where development coordination throughout the City is discussed.

Meeting Agenda: Suvidha Bandi introduced the agenda items for the rest of the meeting.

- Recommendations for Narrow Lots
- Recommendations for Courtyard Style Developments
- Homework Activity & Next Meeting
- Public Comments

Self Guided Tour Response Summary:

Suvidha Bandi: We received 35 responses. Feedback included:

- Buildings are too close, parking on street, nice to walk or bike, front doors to the street look good, lack of continuous driveways makes the street available for public parking
- Continuous driveways interrupting sidewalk, cars blocking sidewalk, no on-street parking, other uses of the road had to use driving lanes, no sidewalks, no guest parking, no backyards, streets too narrow, no green space, hard to maneuver cars in shared driveways, visibility at corners, keep cars off the street

What We've Accomplished So Far:

Suvidha Bandi: We've worked on:

- Buffering for residential buildings, screening and lighting
- Multi-unit residential on unrestricted lots with no deed restrictions
- Garage apartments or secondary dwelling units where deed restrictions allow
- Reduced parking for smaller units and market-based parking in proximity to other transit modes

Recommendations for Narrow Lots

Suvidha Bandi: We're revising narrow-lot development standards improve pedestrian safety, drainage, and preserve on-street parking for neighborhoods. The primary goals are to:

- Encourage alley access and shared driveways for single family restricted (SFR) lots

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- Reduce the number of driveways to improve safety and preserve on-street parking
 - Reduce the impact to stormwater detention in the public right-of-way (ROW)

Preliminary ideas for narrow-lot development standards considered the following. **Graphics highlighting preliminary ideas.** See recording.

- Flag lots
- Shared driveways
- Alley access

Proposed recommendations for narrow-lot development standards include general provisions and additional provisions. **Graphics, flowcharts and lists highlighting proposed narrow-lot development standards.** See recording or refer to the “draft proposed recommendations for housing topics” document.

Recommendations for Narrow Lots Questions? Comments?:

Peter Freedman: I want to run through a scenario and see what the development would look like. On a 50’ wide/100’ deep lot mid-block, with choice limited to front-loading, would you have to use a common driveway for two 25’ lot subdivisions?

Suvidha Bandi: Yes, a common driveway approach. One driveway serves both lots from the right-of-way, not necessarily through the property. The idea is to continue to use the same driveway curb cut as the original lot, up to 24’ wide at the ROW line (no minimum yet). The driveway could flare wider within the property.

Peter Freedman: Is there enough room on either side of the driveway to park on-street?

Suvidha Bandi: There is room for one spot in between similarly-situated lots, but not contained within the frontage of a single 50’ lot. However, the driveway approach could be placed off-center to maintain one on-street space within the property frontage.

Curtis Davis: Thanks for the presentation. I like the flowchart. It would be nice to have a few example scenarios to walk through the flowchart with. There is an option to treat this information like architects treat parametric design – applying these parameters to a set of conditions would generate a pattern or set of options for layout. This could show how proposals would have minimal impacts on parking within communities.

Margaret Wallace Brown: I would like to speak to both comments. Peter mentioned side-by-side narrow lots. To maximize on-street parking more, we’re incentivizing flag lots on narrow lots as opposed to side-by-side division.

Mike Dishberger: I would like to make some of the terminology changes. On general standards, “15,000 SF or less” instead of “smaller than 15,000 SF,” and “greater than 10,000 SF.” Your drawing showed a 20’ driveway, which could go up to 24’ - we can make 24’ curb cuts work for common drive. Why a 4’ curb instead of a 2’ curb? Remove the parking signs and rocks barring guest parking along the street. I’m confused about alleys: can we only require use of the alley if it’s a City-maintained alley that is already improved and accepted by Public Works? I would like some more clarity on this.

Suvidha Bandi: Point noted about 10,000 SF and 15,000 SF. Related to alleys, if the property is adjacent to an alley, they must use it, unless the property is mid-block and along an unimproved alley. We want to encourage alley access especially on corner properties (including for unimproved alleys, where a corner property can improve that first portion).

Margaret Wallace Brown: Yes, this is what we're referring to about collaborating with Public Works. We understand that people want to use alleys. We're working closely with the Office of the City Engineer to establish alley standards so that everyone has more certainty going forward.

Neal Dikeman: Walk me through this flowchart again. What's current? What's changed? What is if/then?

Suvidha Bandi: Current rules are the left side of the chart – existing lots can choose current rules *or* general provisions only with common drives.

Neal Dikeman: If I do a common drive on an existing lot, I can use the "general provisions?"

Suvidha Bandi: Yes. If you have an alley, you must use alley or shared driveway off alley. If you don't have an alley, follow the right side of the chart.

Neal Dikeman: What about super narrow lots? Below 40' wide?

Suvidha Bandi: For future subdivided lots 40' and narrower, the idea is to use common drives to avoid sidewalk interruptions.

Sonny Garza: The goal is to provide more clarity. We are working with Public Works to provide standards and predictability.

Mike Dishberger: We need to have a builder on these conversations with Public Works.

Peter Freedman: Earlier there was a discussion of reduced setbacks as an added incentive for alley-loading?

Suvidha Bandi: Yes – you can reduce the building line as low as 0' to 5' provided adequate room in the ROW is available for sidewalks and utilities.

Peter Freedman: If you're on a corner lot, would those reduced setbacks apply there?

Suvidha Bandi: It depends on the street type. Major thoroughfares will retain the 25' BL. Local or collector streets will have the opportunity for reductions along both by following the other guidelines; at a local/collector corner lot we encourage access from the local street.

Sonny Garza: Hearing no objections, we have consensus on this item.

Recommendations for Courtyard Style Developments:

Tammi Williamson: Proposed recommendations for courtyard style development standards include general provisions and performance standards. **Graphics and lists highlighting proposed courtyard style development standards.** See recording or refer to the “draft proposed recommendations for housing topics” document.

At least one shared courtyard is required with lot frontage and minimum size performance standards. However, there is flexibility to allow for design variations. **Graphics highlighting examples of different courtyard designs.** See recording.

There is no maximum density limit for courtyard style developments. However, performance standards include a 30’ (or 2.5 stories) maximum building height. **Graphics modeling how a building height maximum would be measured.** See recording.

These provisions and performance standards were tested on typical Houston sites under the following conditions. **Graphics modeling potential courtyard style development site plans on typical Houston sites.** See recording.

- Mid-block site with no rear alley (100’x100’ and 100’x150’ sites)
- Mid-block site with a rear alley (100’x100’ and 100’x150’ sites)
- Corner site with no rear alley (100’x100’ and 100’x150’ sites)
- Corner site with a rear alley (100’x100’ and 100’x150’ sites)

Recommendations for Courtyard Style Developments Questions? Comments?:

Neal Dikeman: I think I like this. Essentially, it’s permitting the creation of fee-simple lots without access to a road frontage, and minimum lot size is gone?

Tammi Williamson: Yes. It’s performance-based – those lots instead need frontage along a courtyard common area instead of a road.

Neal Dikeman: The courtyard is the main governing tool? No more density limit?

Tammi Williamson: Yes, and it doesn’t have to be one courtyard space either – they just each must meet the minimum size (480 sf), and at least half of the lots must front onto courtyard space. Courtyard area per lot, parking, and height become the limiting factors.

Neal Dikeman: I think this creates an interesting, new flexible tool.

Mike Dishberger: I like the concept too. For non-alley courtyards, could Public Works allow a 2’ in-turn to avoid a zig zag in the driveway? Can you add “or” for the semi-active design features list to clarify that not *all* are required? Can we allow head in parking along the street?

Megan Sigler: I like this concept too. For conveyance of land (and managing parking spaces) would this require an HOA, or would they be tied to an individual lot?

Tammi Williamson: You could do either parking under a unit (on one legal lot, for those adjacent to a parking area) or it would be consolidated into a common lot with an HOA.

Megan Sigler: Do builders have an opinion on which would be more successful?

Mike Dishberger: Assigning the parking per lot and putting it in the HOA documents.

Megan Sigler: Peter Freedman, what is your take?

Peter Freedman: The only issue we've seen is how close the parking is to the individual property. I love these types of designs. I do have one question – are these showing a public alley?

Tammi Williamson: It's public, but it could be either if the applicant wanted to propose a new private alley.

Peter Freedman: Is the pervious pavement shown to offset stormwater IDM requirements, or just for better drainage?

Tammi Williamson: Permeable parking drives are a way to offset the IDM coverage threshold.

Peter Freedman: Is this full or partial – is 1 SF of permeable pavement equal to 1 SF of permeable surface for calculations?

Suvidha Bandi: It is not 1:1 – there's a separate calculation in the IDM which is what will be used.

Matthew Camp: I also really like the design options. What is the height flexibility for flood prone areas – could the number of stories be used in lieu of feet?

Kathy Payton: There's some of the inner-city challenges we have in keeping down confusion – we would want to see opportunities that involve assigned parking, as opposed to using an HOA to manage it in common.

Curtis Davis: I have a recommendation – it may be useful to have a community meeting with other builders as well as residents for a discussion of prototypical developments in this style.

Sonny Garza: Curtis, I volunteer you to head up that meeting! Hearing no objections, we have consensus on this item.

Homework:

Lynn Henson: Visit Let's letstalkhouston.org/livable-places to:

- Read the "draft proposed recommendations for housing topics" document
- Provide input via a short survey

Next Meeting: June 7th

Public Comment:

Joyce Owens: I have concerns about shared driveways related to new plan and profile drawings for Public Works's review. Requiring these adds about 4 months to permitting timeline and increases the budget – consider if these reviews should be required for drives outside the city ROW. Shared driveways also aren't the best for all locations given HOA requirements. The 15,000 SF requirement for detention – I'm frustrated by the requirement to provide detention even after paying impact fees and selling individual lots as front-loaders. There are also issues with standing water/mosquitoes from detention ponds.

Debbie Moran: I developed Softlighthouston.com. I was told by the Museum Park Super Neighborhood Committee that Livable Places is looking at regulations. Are they related to lighting? I'm worried about light trespass and other issues.

Sonny Garza: That's not under the purview of this committee. We're only looking at lighting as related to structured parking here.

Debbie Moran: The State of Texas forbids the regulation of building-mounted lights outside of an HOA structure or Dark Sky status cities.

Mike Shelton: Will the committee address help for individuals (for ADUs and garage apartments) or just for developers as part of this initiative?

Sonny Garza: We're changing ordinances to help the City, not particularly individuals or developers. We have neighborhood groups and developers in the process to help guide these recommendations.

Mike Shelton: We should focus on trying to help someone build an ADU easier instead of just maximizing density. We should focus on things like 12' driveways, sidewalks, third parking spots, limits on second meters and kitchens, etc.

Suvidha Bandi: I want to confirm what Co-chair said. I hear your concerns. We already discussed ADUs and made recommendations related to reduced parking requirements. Please email me to connect and share info.

George Frey: I liked the flowcharts and graphics. I would like to repeat what has been said in previous sessions. There are some good examples of front-loaders (they're not all bad). The 19' garage building line solves issues and allows front loaders to be much more social. I'm surprised by providing relief for visibility triangles – it seems to conflict with Vision Zero. There are problems with redevelopment lacking green space and parking seen in Cottage Grove and Shady Acres. Consider the larger planning implications.

Traci Gahn: I have a couple of comments from a pedestrian perspective. Consider a "safety zone" around schools. Current design guidelines lack guidance on the distance between the sidewalk and fencing/landscaping.

Specificity may be helpful to prevent encroachment. Related to parking on both sides of street, consider signage and other guidance for streets without curbs to prevent parking on sidewalks.

Mike Young: My company does street-facing homes, courtyards, affordable housing, etc. I'm concerned about unintended consequences of the proposal to eliminate front loaders on 15,000 Sf and greater properties. Having a ban restricts site layout flexibility, potentially impacting density/cost. Perhaps a percentage-of-units limit to front loaders instead of a prohibition would be better. Which areas of Houston does this apply to? Also, there are security concerns in some parts of town related to street-facing homes and on-street parking.

Scott Burrer: I have three questions/comments. This allows up to 35 units/acre – is this even possible or being done today? Second, front loaders aren't really a parking problem. It seems like they improve options for homeowners more than shared driveway developments. Finally, what is being done to consider affordability? Limiting options could limit the ability to provide affordable housing.

Meeting adjourned at 4:46 p.m.