

CITY COUNCIL REPORT  
Public

DATE: April 20, 2015

TO: Mayor and Councilmembers

FROM: Mark Landsiedel, Dan Folke AICP, Roger E. Eastman AICP,

CC: Jeff Meilbeck, Josh Copley, Jerene Watson, Leadership Team

SUBJECT: **RESPONSE TO COUNCILOR ORAVITS'S REQUEST FOR  
INFORMATION REGARDING THE CITY'S REGULATIONS  
REQUIRING BUILDINGS TO BE PLACED CLOSE TO THE STREET**

This CCR is in response to a request from Councilor Oravits made at the April 7, 2015 City Council meeting for information regarding the City's regulations requiring buildings to be placed close to the street with parking areas to the side or behind the building.

**DISCUSSION**

The concept of building-forward design in site planning has been in place in Flagstaff for a long time. While not explicitly stated as such, the *Growth Management Guide 2000* adopted by the Flagstaff City Council in April 1987 actively promoted such concepts as mixed use activity centers in which building-forward site planning is an integral component, and it discouraged the creation of strip commercial development which is synonymous with sprawl and vehicle-dominated design with parking areas as the dominant form along a street. These principles were also discussed in the *Flagstaff 2020: A Vision for Our Community* document, preparation of which started in late-1995 and which was completed some years later. This document also set goals and actions for mixed-use development in activity centers, encouraged Traditional Neighborhood Design, and referred to the New Urbanism as a development principle. These terms all imply the notion of creating more urban and suburban environments that are more human in scale, through such techniques as placing buildings close to the street to enable a rich pedestrian environment.

The former 2001 Flagstaff Regional Plan specifically included the principles of Traditional Neighborhood Development. More refined goals and policies supported this development type, which for example, included the following attribute: "8. The neighborhood places its buildings close to the street, so that streets and squares are spatially defined as 'outdoor rooms'. This creates a strong sense of the neighborhood's centers and streets as places, and of the neighborhood itself as a place."

In September 2001 the City's design review standards and guidelines were adopted into the Land Development Code thereby fulfilling one of the goals of the then 2001 Regional Plan. These standards (Chapter 16, Design Review Guidelines) reinforced in many ways the need for building designs to reflect the traditions of Flagstaff, including for example, buildings being "pedestrian friendly", the use of colors and materials unique to the area, as well as building forms reflecting the design traditions of the community, which in the oldest parts of the city, include buildings built to the edge of the public right-of-way.

Some standards from Chapter 16 (Design Review Guidelines) of the former LDC that require building-forward design, and therefore, parking areas to the rear or the side of a building, include:

- Page 29: Most parking shall be located in the interior of the block. A minimum of 60% of the required parking shall be located in the interior of the block.
- Page 29: Building fronts shall be located at the sidewalk edges, when feasible.
- Page 38: Organize the public edges of a site to provide visual interest to pedestrians.
  - Locate a building at the sidewalk edge and incorporate display windows or other architectural features to provide interest. (See *Building Design Guidelines pages 53-62.*) Another option is to provide a landscape feature.
  - If locating a building at the walkway edge is not feasible, use a planting strip, site wall or similar landscape feature to define the "building wall."
- Page 38: Locate a building entry at the sidewalk edge when feasible.
  - Multifamily uses also should have some building entrances oriented to the street, but may be set back farther where a larger yard or landscaped area is planned.
- Page 47: Locating all or most of a parking lot to the side or behind a building, rather than in front, will reduce the visual impact of the parking lot.

After the 2011 Zoning Code was adopted in November 2011, staff realized that some of the design standards from the former LDC were not included in the final adopted Zoning Code, including some of those listed above. What was included in the Zoning Code is pasted below;

**Section 10-30.60.050 Parking Lots, Driveways, and Service Areas:** Subsection A.3 states as follows: "To the maximum extent feasible, parking lots shall be completely or mostly located to the side or behind rather than in front to reduce the visual impact of the parking lot."

This provision specifically requires that to the maximum extent feasible, parking lots shall be completely or mostly located to the side or behind rather than in front of the building to reduce the visual impact of the parking lot. Stated another way, this provision means that buildings should be brought forward to the street frontage as much as possible so that parking areas may be located behind or to the side of the buildings. This principle has been consistently and successfully applied to many new development projects within the City of Flagstaff, including for example;

- The Dunkin Donuts/Jimmy Johns restaurant development on the northeast corner of South Milton Road and Riordan Road;
- Flagstaff Aquaplex;
- Summit Surgery Center on Forest Avenue and Turquoise Drive;
- First State Bank on South Woodlands Village Boulevard;
- Walgreens on East Route 66 east of Fourth Street;
- Tractor Supply on the corner of East Route 66 and Arrowhead Drive;
- And, many others.

Consistent with staff's uniform application of this important design principle in Flagstaff as expressed in the former and current Regional Plan and LDC, staff is proposing that clearer language should be included in the Zoning Code in support of the principle of building--forward site design. There are many reasons why this is important including:

- Continuance of a design tradition in Flagstaff;
- Using buildings placed closer to the street to create a more inviting and pedestrian friendly environment that is also safer for pedestrians;
- Helping businesses be more successful by increasing visibility from passing traffic; and
- Better defining the public realm (the public street and private frontage) to make a more convivial space where pedestrians are more likely to spend time, interact with each other, etc.

These amendments, as well as others to the Zoning Code, will be presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission before the Council's summer recess, and will be discussed by the Council in late summer/early fall 2015.

#### RECOMMENDATION / CONCLUSION

This report is for information only.