

14-0656



Sharon Dickinson <sharon.dickinson@lacity.org>

PLUM Committee Review of Baseline Mansionization Ordinance

1 message

John Mackel <john@mackel.net>
To: Sharon.Dickinson@lacity.org

Tue, Sep 6, 2016 at 9:25 PM

Hello,

This new zoning proposal swings the pendulum too far the other way. Ultimately it will harm the ability of the city to provide new housing stock that fits the demand of new families and modern extended families. Areas impacted in this manner will grow stale because the housing stock, which in many cases is eighty years old or more, will cause those neighborhoods to decline.

As a practical matter, according to the architects, real estate brokers and developers I have recently interviewed, the new proposal will make it highly unlikely that the vast majority of lots under 10,000 square feet subject to the proposed zoning would see new development. Larger lots would still be large enough for a developer to build a large enough house so that it would make economic sense. This is because a new home built on a lot over 10,000 square feet would be large enough to include the amenities that new home buyers currently demand.

Thus far, I am not aware of panels of architects, real estate brokers and/or developers having been asked to weigh in on this proposed zoning code like there were in past amendments. The "open houses" fail to meet this function of really delving into these issues in detailed methodical fashion. Also, past "open houses" have been failures at adequately advising the public of all of the proposed changes. For instance, at the last presentation of the Planning Department at the Imam on Motor Ave., there planning staff repeatedly stated that the build-able square footage would remain the same as the prior baseline, except the bonuses were being terminated. This is not the case because there is a tiered reduction depending on lot size. Also, half of the garage space and all of covered porches and balconies are now included. Without the bonus and counting these reductions, a typical new house on a 7,500 square foot lot would be substantially smaller and unlikely to fit the modern amenities that buyers would like and the number of bedrooms new buyer want.

Homeowners who find themselves in a situation where they need to significantly expand their home to accommodate extended family, especially the larger spaces required by someone wheelchair bound, may no longer be able to accomplish this. And relegating the existing housing stock to antiquated building designs may adversely impact its ability to serve an aging population who deserve ADA compliant designs. Many of these older houses are simply not ADA remodel friendly.

In my opinion, the main problem with some McMansions is that they are just ugly and cheap. In places like Cheviot Hills, most new homes were built with nice quality and design. However, there are a few glaring exceptions that folks dwell on. Unfortunately, elsewhere in the city, such as mid-city, there have been many really ugly new boxes thrown up. However, this ordinance will not stop that. If the developer is bound and determined to build a cheap, ugly box they will still do that, it will just be smaller. And worse, it definitely won't have any balconies or covered porches to beautify the front because they now count against square footage.

Bottom line, there will be economic impacts that should be quantified and discussed before this is passed. The majority of homeowners under the proposed zoning would lose some equity and property value due to such restrictions because the majority of the lots will no longer have development potential to meet modern architectural demands. Already developers have passed on lots in Cheviot Hills due to the Interim Control Ordinance which isn't even as strict as the proposed Baseline Mansionization Ordinance. A noticeable reduction in the sale price for "lot value" properties has already begun to occur in Cheviot Hills. Slowing down some of the development in the area is fine, but stopping it on all lots under 10,000 square feet may have unforeseen, unintended economic and physical repercussions to these neighborhoods.

Many mature Westside neighborhoods such as Cheviot Hills remain vibrant because of the willingness of buyers to eventually replace the aging housing stock with new homes. Sure the older homes can continue to be used, although their maintenance becomes gradually more expensive as they deteriorate and compromises often occur as a result of these increased maintenance expenses. However, even with retrofits, the older homes will never come close to the quality of construction required by modern earthquake standards. Also, it is extremely hard to make them anywhere near as energy efficient as new homes. Additionally many of the older homes cannot be fitted for solar panels because of

their high and often multi-pitched roof designs, while most of the new ones either have panels or are designed for them. So having a certain number of new homes built in neighborhoods means that new buyers will continue to find the area attractive for many years to come and keep housing values up over the long term.

If I could think of a way to address McMansions with zoning, I would be suggesting it. But zoning really isn't the way to address McMansions. Home Owner's Associations that have Architectural Review Committees can deal with this but most homeowners in Cheviot Hills will freely admit that they have appreciated the freedom from those types of restrictions and that has created the areas charm and diversity.

There are two glaring zoning failures contained in this proposal. First as previously mentioned, covered porches and balconies in the front of houses should be generously encouraged, not discouraged as this zoning proposal does. Covered porches and balconies on the front of houses provide character and design elements. The proposed zoning almost guarantees ugly slab-front houses. Second, the proposed zoning will encourage houses to be built with even smaller backyards by reducing the buildable area on the second story. The twenty-five foot rear-yard setback will become the default backyard. This is even smaller than the backyards of most of the McMansions I have observed.

Finally, if a severely restrictive ordinance as proposed goes forward, there should be recognition in the proposed new ordinance that McMansionization has gone on now for decades in some areas of West Los Angeles. The glacially slow city reaction to this issue over the years and the ineffectiveness of the McMansion Ordinance allowed almost entire blocks to become McMansionized. In such instances, the remaining lots in those blocks should be allowed to be built to the same standards as the neighboring homes. This should not be left to the vagaries and almost guaranteed inconsistencies of the zoning variance application process for hardship exemptions. Infill between existing McMansions should be a matter of right. Failure to recognize this in the ordinance will only generate needless zoning variance applications and potential litigation when obvious hardship exemptions are rejected at the request of the hypocritical neighboring McMansion owners.

Homes between existing McMansions are now functionally obsolete in that their designs now fail to compensate for the substantially different designs of the McMansions on either side. Their privacy is usually invaded in ways that cannot be compensated for with hedges or walls that will provide any meaningful relief. Their rear zero-lot-line garages are usually inches from a retaining wall, fence or newly planted hedge, so they cannot be properly painted or maintained in the future. In a bazaar twist, often today the cries for McMansion ordinances in Cheviot Hills are the loudest from those hypocrites who already live in large two-story houses but who do not want their own views blocked or privacy impinged. Oddly, they stand to benefit the most from a strict McMansion ordinance because the continued strong demand for such large houses will drive the price for their home up dramatically once the supply is curtailed by such an ordinance. In any event, any new zoning ordinance should provide a carve-out for infill between existing McMansions that is of right.

Best regards,

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ICO

1 message

14-0656

Jacob Hausman <jacob@therfcgroup.com>
To: Sharon.Dickinson@lacity.org

Wed, Sep 7, 2016 at 7:35 AM

Please don't Shrink our homes!

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