

# Development Code Advisory Committee

## May 21, 2014 Meeting Minutes

### A. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. in the Planning & Development Services (PDS) Conference Room.

### B. Roll Call

**Members present:** Brent Baker, Brian Cave, Chuck Glace, Keith Hickman, Jeff Seiler, David Sour, and Bo Spencer

**Staff present:** PDS Director Brad Wiseman, Assistant City Manager Laurie Hadley, City Attorney Steve Sheets, Planning Manager Susan Brennan, Senior Planner Brad Dushkin, and Planning Technician Kerstin Harding

**Also present:** Planning & Zoning Commissioners Hollis Bone, Rene Flores, and Larry Yawn

### C. Welcome

PDS Director Brad Wiseman welcomed the Committee members and others present, thanking them for volunteering their time.

### D. Overview of Round Rock development code & project timeline

Mr. Wiseman explained that the City has decided to consolidate all its regulations relating to land development (subdivision, zoning, site and building design, landscaping, tree protection, signs, etc.) into a single Development Code. Consolidating development-related regulations into a single document is more user-friendly, as everything is in one place, eliminates duplication and conflicts between ordinances, and allows for more consistent interpretation.

The Development Code will be adopted as a new, third part to the Code of Ordinances, with an anticipated adoption in mid-2015. The process of seamlessly consolidating development-related ordinances requires creating a consistent set of definitions; reconciling inconsistencies, conflicts and gray areas; and also presents an opportunity to amend policy to improve development processes.

### E. Purpose of the Committee

The purpose of the Development Code Advisory Committee is to provide high-level input from the professional community's perspective, focusing particularly on several broad policy questions. This input will help guide staff decisions regarding new policy and will be presented to the Planning & Zoning Commission and City Council during the adoption process. The Committee is not required to reach consensus about these issues, and where there are differences of opinion, all sides will be presented. The meeting minutes will be posted online on a webpage dedicated to the Development Code.

### F. Discussion regarding any development issues in Round Rock

Mr. Wiseman asked the Committee members and staff to introduce themselves, and asked if the members had any development-related comments they would like to make before it moved on to specific topics. Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

- Mr. Sour said that he felt the City and staff were living up to the Development Philosophy.
- Mr. Cave said that he would like to see tighter design standards in downtown neighborhoods respecting the historic character, to strengthen its defining characteristics.
- Mr. Baker said that he liked the changes the City has made to the landscape ordinance and sign processes in recent years, which he felt had become more flexible and made more sense.
- Mr. Hickman said that his concern was that any changes to the development code keep the development process simple enough to not inhibit economic development.
- Mr. Glace said that his construction company had found the City pretty easy to work with, but that the more concise and consistent the regulations and standard are, the better.
- Mr. Spencer found it frustrating that the City had adopted standards for denser development downtown without upgrading the infrastructure to support it. He advocated for the City to be able to be more flexible with development by upgrading infrastructure in tandem with individual projects, and the developer would also assist in upgrading infrastructure as a trade-off. He hoped that any changes to the code would be supported by the city's actions, rather than relying entirely on private investment.
- Mr. Seiler said that his experience with the outlet mall project has given him experience on both sides, private and public, and he hoped to share some of the things he had learned from the experience.

## **G. Policy Discussion**

### **Townhouse Developments**

Senior Planner Brad Dushkin introduced the first policy topic for discussion: the Townhouse (TH) zoning district. The current ordinance permits multiple buildings on a single lot, creating a development similar to a multifamily complex, but does not have the requirements for guest parking and amenities that are required in the Multifamily zoning districts, opening the possibility for development that does not meet the intent of the Code. Staff and the Planning & Zoning Commission (P&Z) believe that the TH district should require some guest parking and amenities based on the number of units. He asked the Committee for their opinions.

- Mr. Cave asked whether this question applied to townhomes in other zoning districts or PUDs as well. Mr. Dushkin replied that it does, and most townhomes are built as PUDs that are largely based on standards in the TH district. The downtown Mixed-Use districts have a separate set of standards and are not part of this discussion.
- Mr. Wiseman noted the Council has adopted the goal of increasing the variety of housing types available in Round Rock.
- Mr. Hickman asked how the City defines a townhome. Ms. Brennan explained that each townhome unit must have its own front door, and may share common walls with other units, but that units may not be stacked vertically. Mr. Cave said that he thought that rear parking was a key characteristic of townhomes – the front might have street parking, but driveways and garages are in the back. Mr. Spencer suggested that this could be addressed through lot width – lots under a certain width could not have front parking. He described it as reintroducing alleys, but without the impenetrable privacy fences.

- Ms. Brennan and Mr. Dushkin also noted that the units may be fee simple on separate lots, or have a condo arrangement with multiple units per lot, but fee simple lots must front on a public street.
- Mr. Wiseman asked if it was excessive to require two garage-enclosed parking spaces for townhomes, as they often serve a different market segment than single-family homes. He asked the Committee's opinion on the "bowling alley" effect of many townhome alleys lined with garages. Mr. Sour noted that he lived in a condo where there were many young adults who had large parties. Mr. Hickman recalled a home he'd had with an alley that was entirely flanked with garages that dangerously impeded visibility. Mr. Hickman asked if the city had standards for alleys, and staff said that they would check.
- Mr. Hickman asked about whether there is a masonry requirement for townhomes. Mr. Dushkin replied that the code required 100% masonry, which also includes fiber cement siding. The requirement is mostly for durability. Mr. Hickman was concerned that the requirement limited design possibilities, and that not everybody wants 100% masonry finishes. He said that several of his clients are sick of white limestone because it's been so overdone. Mr. Dushkin noted that there is an option for the zoning director to approve other materials as part of an innovative design, and Mr. Wiseman said that a few had recently been approved.
- Mr. Cave noted that his real estate firm had many customers from out of state seeking to buy rental units, and asked if the city could limit the number of rentals. Mr. Wiseman replied that that was not within the City's power.
- Staff asked the Committee for examples of good or bad townhome developments that they could research. Mr. Baker suggested the parking arrangement for Highland Park in Pflugerville, and Mayfield Ranch as an example of townhomes in the form of substandard single-family. Mr. Hickman suggested an example in the Woodlands that is not 100% masonry and is aesthetically pleasing. Ms. Brennan suggested a project with a good guest parking arrangement in Avery Ranch called Ingleside.

### **Single Family Landscaping Standards**

Mr. Dushkin explained that the City was considering adopting a landscaping ordinance for single-family homes, primarily for water conservation. Most cities similar to Round Rock have such ordinances. He noted that the Home Builders Association was also in the process of creating a model ordinance. These standards would only apply to new construction.

Staff consulted the City Water Conservation Coordinator, and recommends that such an ordinance include requirements for drought-tolerant grass (allow St. Augustine only in shady areas), a maximum turfgrass area, a minimum soil depth with a minimum of organic matter, and perhaps a few trees. The Planning & Zoning Commission had recommended that staff explore further and propose options. He asked the Committee for their thoughts.

- Mr. Baker and Mr. Seiler thought that specifying a range of plant and turf species would be a good idea, since many contractors use whatever is cheapest, such as St. Augustine. Mr. Baker mentioned the water wise guides and a series of sample landscape plans produced by the City of Austin. He also noted that some HOAs/deed restrictions/CCAs require water-intensive plantings.
- Mr. Spencer said that he greatly appreciated the City's willingness to allow builders to post bond for landscaping during the drought, rather than requiring plantings that they would not be allowed to water.
- Mr. Baker and Mr. Spencer mentioned that Georgetown's new landscape ordinance mandates at least 9" of topsoil. They felt that it was a good idea, but that 9" was excessive (suggesting 2-3"

for sod and up to 4” for seed). Mr. Spencer said that there also needs to be a definition of what qualifies as topsoil. They also agreed with the ordinance’s maximum turf area, and suggested there should also be a minimum for trees. Mr. Hickman disagreed with the idea of a maximum turfgrass area, noting that families with young children often want a large area of turf for them to play on.

### **Compatibility Buffers**

Mr. Dushkin briefed the Committee on an issue that had arisen regarding the compatibility buffer requirement in the Zoning ordinance. The buffer is required where a more intense use is developed adjacent to Single-family or Two-family zoned districts. The buffer consists of a masonry wall/fence, landscaped area, and increased building setback on the property adjacent to the single- or two-family area.

He outlined two examples where the requirement didn’t seem to be necessary. The first example was a case in which a single- or two-family zoned property was a park instead of a residence, and requiring a landscape buffer next to a park seemed unnecessary. Staff proposes to create an exception for cases in which a single- or two-family zoned property has a non-residential use.

The second example was a commercial property with a creek and elevation change on the side abutting a large single-family lot. In similar cases where existing site conditions such as trees, creeks, or an elevation change already serve as a buffer, staff proposes allowing the developer to appeal to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) for relief. This would require notification to neighboring property owners and allow them to address the Board during a public hearing. The Planning & Zoning Commission concurs with the staff recommendations. Mr. Dushkin asked the Committee for their thoughts.

- Mr. Hickman questioned what would happen if the use changed, or if a large single family lot were subdivided and homes put closer to the non-residential property.
- Mr. Baker noted that he’d encountered this situation with a project in Belton, and they’d decided with the neighbor to have a vegetative buffer but not wall. He and Mr. Hickman expressed openness to allowing an appeal to the ZBA, but did not comment on allowing a blanket exception for properties abutting single- or two-family zoned properties with non-residential uses.
- Mr. Hickman noted that it wouldn’t be so much of an issue if open space were always zoned with the Open Space district.

### **Office Zoning District**

Mr. Dushkin explained that there had been recent projects for multi-story office buildings that had to use PUD or C-1 zoning because the Office (OF) has a height limit of two stories. Using these other zoning districts also opens up a range of uses not permitted in the OF district that may be inappropriate, and the reason the property was originally zoned OF instead of C-1. Staff proposes allowing buildings up to 5 stories in the OF zoning district, with the conditions that the property is over a certain size and is not adjacent to a Single-Family zoning district.

- Mr. Hickman and Mr. Spencer felt that a distinction needs to be made regarding the height of the building versus the number of stories. The term “stories” means different things to different people (and in different developments), so it would be wise to say something along the lines of “x stories but not greater than y feet.”
- The Committee was agreeable that the OF district should be able to accommodate taller buildings where not adjacent to single family development.

## **H. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 4:40 p.m.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Kerstin Harding  
Planning Technician**