

BRIEFING NOTES

NAME OF GROUP:	PLANNING COMMISSION
DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF MEETING:	Wednesday, October 7, 2009, 11:45 a.m. Room 113, County-City Building, 555 S. 10 th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska
MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Michael Cornelius, Dick Esseks, Leirion Gaylor Baird, Roger Larson, Jeanelle Lust, Jim Partington, Lynn Sunderman and Tommy Taylor. Wendy Francis absent.
OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Peter Katt of Baylor Evnen; Marvin Krout, Steve Henrichsen, David Cary, Brian Will, Christy Eichorn, Tom Cajka, Brandon Garrett and Michele Abendroth of the Planning Department; other interested parties.
STATED PURPOSE OF MEETING:	“Work in Progress” report on legislation to allow dwellings on smaller lots in the R-3 district

The meeting was called to order at 11:45 a.m.

Christy Eichorn stated that the purpose of today’s meeting is to talk about small lots. Currently this is not scheduled for public hearing. Christy has been working on proposing language for small lots since last April and the Planning Department has been working on the concept of smaller lots for several years.

Eichorn stated that the biggest differences between a small lot and a regular sized R-3 residential lot is the reduction in the sizes of the front and rear yards as well as the lot area. The intent of allowing small lots is to provide an alternative to housing types that are currently allowed in the R-3 zoning district. Planning decided to focus the small lot effort in the R-3 zoning district because this is the district most proliferated by Community Unit Plans or CUPs today. Community Unit Plans are special permits that allow lots to be platted smaller than what is allowed in the zoning district.

The Planning Department worked with a small group of builders from the Homebuilders Association of Lincoln to develop an alternative to allowing small lots without going thru the community unit plan (CUP) process. The group discussed ways to add additional parking and greater aesthetic value to the small lots while maintaining affordability.

Eichorn stated there are conditions that will be associated with platting smaller lots. The conditions are as follows: Condition #1: Prior to platting, all the proposed lots must be on a block face that has no existing dwelling units or all the block face is under common ownership. Condition #2: There must be at least 22 contiguous feet of uninterrupted curb space abutting each lot. The distance is measured along the face of the curb from the edge of the curb return to the lot line. Condition #3: Garages facing and taking access from a street must have a minimum setback of 20 feet from the lot line. Condition #4. A garage door facing the street shall not occupy more than 40% of the width of the building facade, except that the garage door may occupy up to 60% of the width of the building facade if there is living area or a covered balcony above the majority of the garage. Notwithstanding the above, detached garages which are not considered a part of and are primarily located to the side of or behind the main structure

are exempt from this requirement. Condition #5. The principal street facade of each dwelling shall have at least one door. Condition #6. The principal street facade of each building shall also have a minimum of one window per story oriented to the street. If the dwelling unit is two stories in height, both required windows may be located on the second floor. The minimum glazed area of a window shall be five square feet.

Eichorn stated that staff worked with the builders from the HBAL group to come up with a model for small lots that would not hinder most types of small lot dwelling units that are being built.

Eichorn provided photos / examples of existing units on small lots would and would not meet the conditions above.

Larson inquired as to the purpose of the proposed small lots language. Eichorn stated that it is to encourage alternatives to large lots, to provide affordable housing and encourage density as well as to allow room for creativity and alternatives in Lincoln's housing market.

Esseks asked about the importance of a door facing the street. Eichorn stated that it is visually safer in the sense that it shows the connection between the people in the home and the people on the street.

Cornelius asked if they anticipate fewer applications for CUPs. Eichorn stated that the hope is that there will be fewer special permits that ask for deviations from the zoning ordinance.

Krout stated that this is in part a way to streamline the building permit process.

Larson asked about the approximate square footage of a home on a small lot. Eichorn stated it depended on how the builder utilized the space.

Taylor asked if this encourages growth in the inner part of the City. Krout stated that staff is going to look closely at the older part of the City during the upcoming Comp Plan review process. There are limited opportunities, but they want to identify those opportunities. Any solution will be infill and redevelopment, but he believes the City's growth will be at the edges of the City.

Larson asked if there will be some design standards so that all the units don't look alike. Eichorn stated that the conditions don't prohibit the units from looking alike.

Esseks asked if you would be able to have a 2-car garage considering the width dimensions. Eichorn stated that a 2-car garage on any lot smaller than 40 feet wide would require rear access.

Gaylor Baird asked if there are incentives for builders to put the garage in the back. Eichorn stated that there are not incentives, but it depends on how many units a developer wants to put on a block face. Krout stated that it may be an encouragement for builders to be able to get more units on a block.

Taylor asked if it would be more cost effective to have the garage on the front as opposed to an alley with a rear access garage. Krout stated that it may be more expensive, but each project is different and the developer will need to make that decision.

Larson stated that he feels there should be some design standards and asked if that is possible. Krout stated that it is possible but they are trying to make the rules very simple. Design standards often become too hard to enforce and often requires a review board. Eichorn stated that they looked at the Neighborhood Design Standards and there wasn't anything in them that said the units must be different.

Cornelius asked if there is any literature showing that relocating the garage to the rear is more neighborhood friendly. Krout stated that he will research that question and provide some literature.

Esseks asked about any potential problems that could develop due to this type of design. He is worried that most of these properties will be rental properties and will not be maintained. He believes we should look at potential problems and try to deal with them now. Krout stated that we try to deal with appearance, safety and parking issues.

Partington stated that as people age, they may want a home all on one level. Krout stated that there are also older people who may be looking to downsize. The market will make that determination.

Sunderman stated that he appreciates the efforts of staff in developing these guidelines.

Krout asked if the Commissioners feel they should proceed with these conditions.

Taylor stated that it may be useful to know how many homes are owner occupied vs. rental properties. Krout stated that there may be a way to map that information.

Gaylor Baird asked staff if they could investigate our benchmark cities regarding the design standards.

Esseks stated that it would be nice to know what type of homes are likely to be successful in terms of being well-maintained, but not necessarily owner occupied.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Michele Abendroth
Planning Department