

## **Thursday evening, July 20, 2017 at City Hall attending City Council meeting**

### **D-4 Ordinance 286-H To Modify Residential Development Standards**

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The room was filling up slowly yet surely, a lot of new faces to be seen. City Chamber hall was buzzing with conversations between neighbors, and with exchanges between folks from various neighborhoods. Solidarity was on the agenda, strategic moves were suggested between parties.

The Public Readings of city ordinances were to start at 6PM, yet they were preceded by a crucial presentation of city administration mayoral executive staff relative to the city sewer issue and the \$326 million invoice that came with it. The chief presenter was a tad tense yet very efficient and respectful of the City Council [CC] body - quite a demarcation with his predecessor Mike Connors who wasn't known to be in friendly terms with our state Sunshine law spirit. Some questions were asked by several Council Members [CM], answers were provided. Finally this came to a resolution and the CC voted to approve that costly agenda item.

Then the 2nd reading of the Land Development Regulation - LDR - residential new ordinance started, item D-4. Just then we learned of a Sunshine issue arising due to CM Gerdes whom, from what I understood, went outside the sunshine, approaching staff in an effort to remove NS-1 and NS-2 from the ordinance title [which would have postponed the vote from proceeding as we learned last week]. So to cure this improper move, the remedy was to bring it to the sunshine, which CM Kennedy did. Resolved.

Elizabeth Abernethy, city zoning manager made an abbreviated presentation [compared to her 7-13-17 report] and added additional 0.44 bonus points (0.35 design + 0.09 for environmental friendly items) reachable by developers and builders. Here more details: (0.35) for designs in line w/Preservation guidelines; (0.02) for planting a couple of 14-16 ft trees, (0.05) for LEED certification, and (0.02) for Solar Ready. Bones thrown to parties.

Public comments followed through. The room was filling up. Contrary to what was expected, not many developers or realtors were present. And some of the builders or realtors, e.g. Don Strobel & Julia Brazier, spoke in favor of a low FAR and preserving the character of our historic neighborhoods' architecture. In fact, city hall was filled with mainly neighbors of Old North East, Kenwood, Crescent Lake, UpTown, etc. All in favor of lower FAR, even lower than 0.40, all mentioning their issue with the unbridled construction of out-of-scale structures detrimentally impacting the character & human fabric of their respective traditional neighborhoods & quality of life. And contrary to the stereotype usually associated with folks opposing high FAR, many speakers were young, in their 20's and 30's.

The first developer who spoke asked that garage construction be exempt from FAR regulation. Which in fact would have added 0.05 to the FAR as Ms. Abernethy later answered a CM question about how much FAR does a garage average? The builder who followed him spiced his comment w/fear mongering about 'car-ports' that would spring up everywhere if garage construction become prohibitive to builders who yearn for more bucks for their square footage built. Julia Frazier, a realtor herself debunked that one when she said that this gentleman must not be aware that car-port erection is illegal in St Petersburg.

Jeff Danner, former CM, of Kenwood, gave a powerful and compelling presentation for historic preservation and a lower FAR than 0.60. He mentioned how the building formula used to be 'Buy Low – Sell High' – has now been changed to 'Buy Small, Bulldoze It, Triple square footage & Sell for Profit.' And he ended his comments with the edifying fact that, some years ago, the city made regulations to obtain historic designation very very difficult. Mixing this with such a high FAR – where do you think this is going to end up?

I'd like to suggest folks take the time to access the city recorded 7-20-17 meeting archive and listen to the speakers – it was powerful. The views expressed by residents, was a testament to the tight fabric that unite neighbors and neighborhoods that care for Preservation of our respective little paradises.

The last speaker was a hoot of wisdom! Promoting the valid notion that if we were to give developers 'bonuses' we should also envision and consider giving them 'minuses' [the room loved this!]. Demolish historic homes: -minus points, lacking permeable surface: -minus points, disregarding the architectural character of a traditional neighborhood, more - minus points.

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Finally, speakers were done and the City Council came to a vote.

Initially, CM Gerdes [District 1, NS-2] took long time posturing at length trying to hide his out-of-the-sunshine maneuver that happened between the two CC meetings. I hope people were not fooled by it, but they might be if they haven't paid attention at what he was truly trying to do behind sunshine – and they might now think the man is a champion of preservation (how he attempted to describe himself) while last week he was its biggest foe trying to obstruct the process during the CC meeting. He must be part of the magic he alleged to protect when he spoke about Historic neighborhoods, having re-invented himself in less than 7 days; he must own a magic wand – abracadabra! ;-)

Proposal was brought by CM Kennedy and NS-1 was removed from FAR regulations. Voted & approved [all yes, except CM Nurse].

Then CM Jim Kennedy, [District 2/NS-1] after hearing a quasi-unanimity from the numerous neighbors who showed up that night in favor of an even lower FAR than 0.40 + 0.20 for their traditional neighborhoods, suggested & tested the water among his colleagues for a 0.35 base instead of 0.40 for NT-2 & NT-3 or 0.40 base yet w/lesser bonus of 0.1; for a possible FAR of 0.50 (instead of 0.60).

Sadly, CM Rice [District 4/NT-3] & CM Foster [District 8/NT-2], who heard all the same neighbors, didn't bite on that offer served to them on a sterling platter, neither did CM Nurse [District 6/NT-1 & NT-3], yet to his defense, his district encompasses more NT-1 than NT-3 zoning.

My perspective on that lack of political long-term vision and courage from these CMs was in part due to following a misguided lead of a few compared to the majority, i.e. adhering to the position endorsed & promoted by the Neighborhood Review Committee [NRC] which disregarded the grassroots vocal & collective desire in this matter.

And the CC also accepted 'as is' Ms. Abernethy words alluding to some illusive fear of court battles when she advanced that a FAR of 0.40 + 0.20 was considered to be a good legal base to defend – and she added: "We'll evaluate as we go, see what happens and come back in six months or a year."

That's all folks!

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