

**Honorable Chairman and Members of the  
Hermosa Beach Planning Commission**

**Regular Meeting of  
May 16, 2006**

**Subject:** Text Amendment 06-1 – Exceptions for R-1 Small Lots

INITIATED BY THE CITY COUNCIL

**Recommendation:**

To recommend amendment to the R-1 small lot exception standards to:

1. Allow the required front yard to contribute to the opens space requirement; and
2. Increase lot coverage from 65% to 70%.

**Background:**

On April 25, 2006, the City Council directed staff to prepare a Text Amendment to address small lot exceptions to the standards of the R-1 zone, and initiated an amendment to increase lot coverage and allow the front yard to contribute to the open space requirement. The matter was referred to the Planning Commission for report and recommendation.

The City Council previously directed staff to review the current residential development standards for small lots in the City and recommend changes in order to reduce the number of Variance applications related to such lots. This report outlines possible changes to achieve the City Council's objective.

**Analysis**

Section 17.08.030 of the Zoning Ordinance provides exceptions to the R-1 development standards for small lots<sup>1</sup>. Small lots are defined as lots that are 2100 square feet or less, and the Commission on a case-by-case basis may also include lots within 10% (i.e. up to 2,310 square feet). The small lots are largely concentrated in the Shakespeare Tract (between 30<sup>th</sup> Street and Longfellow Avenue west of Valley Drive. There are approximately 150 lots zoned R-1 located in the Shakespeare tract with lot dimensions of 30'x 70' feet. 60 of the 150 lots are on "walk-streets" (i.e. only access for alley), while the remainder (89 lots) front on a vehicular street but also have alley access. Additionally, there are approximately 140 other smaller parcels of less than 2100 square feet, of which about 70 are "half-lots" located throughout the City. Also there are approximately another 150 smaller parcels that fall within the 10% range (i.e. between 2100 and 2310 square feet), which are located in various areas throughout the City. Therefore, a total of approximately 440 properties that may qualify as "small lots" in the City.

A small lot exception for open space in the R-1 zone was added to the code in 1988 and amended in 1997 to deal with the hardship of building on small lots. The exception allows a break on the open space requirement for lots of 2,100 square feet or less in the R-1 zone. Though the exception provides some relief, additional changes may be necessary to accommodate development of larger homes with conventional floor plans on smaller lots.

**Conventional vs. Non-conventional Floor Plans:**

Many property owners prefer conventional floor plans with the main living area (living room/den, kitchen) on the ground floor and bedrooms above. The living room or den may then

be directly connected with the yard space. The maximum size home on a typical 2,100 square foot small lot where the garage is loaded on the alley (i.e. lots located on a walk street, or lots on vehicular streets where garages are loaded off the alley) with a conventional floor plan is approximately 1,860 square feet. Since the garage, turning areas, and open space also have to be on the ground floor this type of plan only allows for a little over 612 square feet in the kitchen/living/dining area on the first floor. In order to slightly increase potential floor area and to provide for a more substantial living/kitchen/dining area, another option is to locate the main living area on the second floor with bedrooms below. The maximum size home on a small lot with this type of “non-conventional” floor plan is approximately 1,920 square feet. . Many homeowners are now also opting to construct partial or full basements to accommodate a three level plan that require significant excavation and shoring in order to add floor area, with homes on these projects containing as much as 2,600 square feet.

For lots where the owner chooses to load the garage on a vehicular street rather than an alley it is possible to build a slightly larger conventional home (approximately 2,000 square feet), since the rear yard along the alley can count towards required open space, since it is not being used for a driveway to access a garage. Unfortunately, using the street for access may cause a reduction in the limited amount of on-street parking available in small lot neighborhoods.

Staff has summarized the type and frequency of Variance requests for small lots on the attached table. The summary table shows that most Variances were requested for front, side and rear yards, lot coverage and open space. Most of the Variances have been requested in conjunction with additions and remodels.

Based upon the frequency of Variance requests, and in consideration of what standards can be changed with minimum impact on neighborhood character, staff recommends consideration of amending the following development standards for the R-1 zone:

- **Allow front yard to count toward open space:** *This would increase potential floor area by 180 square feet per floor, for as much as 360 square feet, and make a conventional floor plan more feasible (allowing to increase by 180 square feet on the ground floor). This is similar to the current exception on the Strand “through” lots, which allow the Strand frontage to be considered towards open space. With this change there will no longer be any benefit with respect to open space and square footage by choosing to load the garage from a street rather than an alley.*
- **Increase lot coverage:** *An increase to 70 % will increase the potential floor area only on the second floor (since the garage and turning area requirements in combination with setback requirements allow the ground floor to cover 62% maximum). It potentially would add 105 square feet to the second floor area for a typical 30’ x 70’ lot. This increased lot coverage is necessary for projects to take full advantage of the additional square footage that will be allowed by the change in open space requirements noted above. This additional floor area allows enough room for an additional bedroom, or larger master suite on the second floor with a conventional floor plan, or may allow the addition of a den or family room with a non-conventional floor plan.*

Also staff recommends that the current practice of allowing excess yard areas on small lots to be counted towards open space be codified (as long as the yard dimension plus the excess yard area totals at least 7-feet).

Staff does not recommend reducing the already small side and rear setback requirements because of the direct impact upon neighboring homes and the potential conflict with minimum property line clearance requirements of the Building Code. Nor is it recommended that garage or parking related standards be amended.

In summary, staff believes these recommendations may provide the additional footage demanded by most homeowners either remodeling or constructing new homes, and should reduce the need for Variances. The amendment should also increase the desirability of conventional floor plans on walk streets where the front yard open space directly connects to the open area available in the encroachment area. Also, these changes may provide enough additional footage so owners do not feel compelled to construct full basements. For those lots fronting on vehicular streets these amendments will reduce the current benefit gained by loading garages on the vehicular street, so owners will be encouraged to continue to use the alley for garage access, and preserve on-street parking.

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Senior Planner

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Sol Blumenfeld, Director  
Community Development Department

Attachments:

1. Table Summarizing Variances on Small lots
2. Exhibits

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<sup>1</sup> The R-1 standards are the following:

- 25-foot height limit
- Two standard parking spaces plus one guest (for alley garages typically 20 X 20 garage, with 9-foot garage setback to allow guest parking in parallel and 19-foot turning radius. For street fronting garages 17X20 garage with 17-foot setback required.)
- 65% maximum lot coverage
- 10% front setback maximum 10-feet required (typically 7 feet)
- 10% side setback (typically 3 feet)
- 3-foot rear setback (1-foot on second floor)
- 400 square feet of open space (10X10 dimension with 300 square feet on grade) in addition to required front and side yards.

The open space exception for small lots is as follows:

- 300 square feet of open space, with 60% (180 square feet) adjacent to main living area) minimum 7X 7 dimensions and all can be required on decks. Excess yard areas that meet minimum 7-foot dimension to property line allowed to count as open space (per Commission direction).