

#D-116 RESIDENTIAL BUILDING HEIGHT

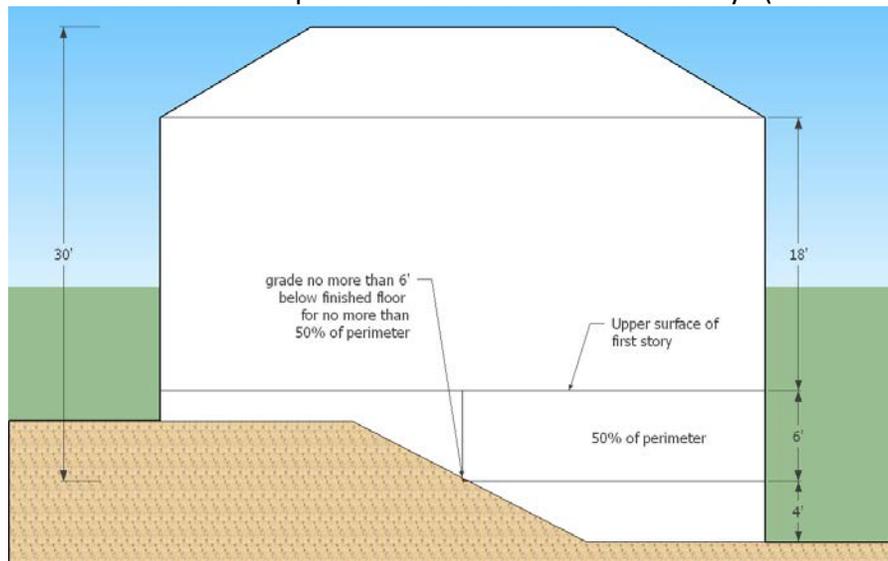
General Description

A recent Administrative Code Interpretation determined that building height in residential zones is regulated by applying a maximum wall plate height (24') and by limiting the number of stories (maximum of two). The previous method of regulating height, limiting the vertical distance from the average grade to the average height of the tallest roof surface, proved to contradict the intent of Title IV, specifically residential design standards. Consistent with the former height limitation, the current limitations are applied uniformly among the City's eight residential zones (RC, R-1, R-4, R-6, R-8, R-10, R-14, and RMF). This staff report reviews the Administrative Code Interpretation and addresses the notion of varying height limitations among zones.

Assessment of Existing Code

The Administrative Code Interpretation (CI-73) implemented a revised method of limiting height that is intended, in part, to prevent residential buildings from having massing that is uncharacteristic or undesired within the zone. Limiting wall plate height ensures that houses with flat or shallow roofs have relatively equal massing to those with more steeply pitched roofs. The allowed vertical projection of six feet from the wall plate for pitched roofs incentivizes adherence to the City's residential design standards for roofs, as opposed to applicants seeking modifications to those standards in order to have flat roofs.

In addition to limiting wall plate height, CI-73 established a limit of two stories per house. The limit on the number of stories is intended to ensure that a majority of the structure's foundation is covered by earth if the topography of the lot is conducive to creating a daylight basement or tucked garage under the first finished floor. This is achieved because a floor can be disqualified as a "story" based on its definition "...If the finished floor level directly above a usable or unused under-floor space is more than six feet (6') above grade for more than fifty percent (50%) of the total perimeter or is more than twelve feet (12') above grade at any point, such usable or unused under-floor space shall be considered as a story" (see illustration below).



Proposed Amendments to Code

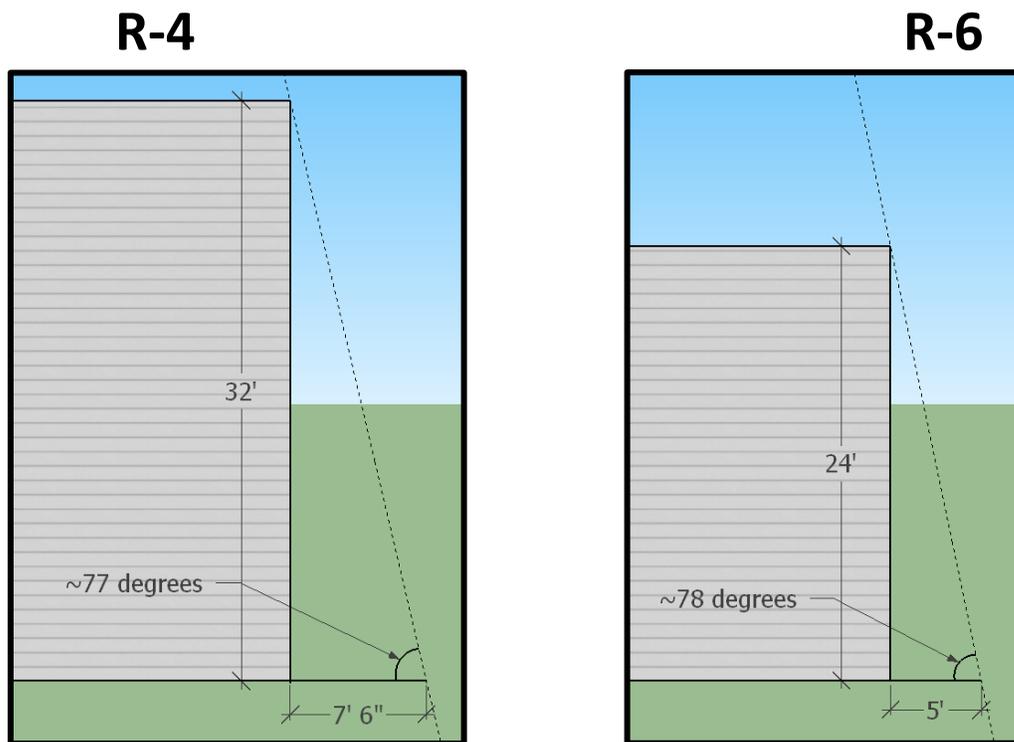
Based on public comment received in response to CI-73, staff considered increasing height allowances in some zones. In order to justify the idea, staff first attempted to delineate zones that might be suitable for increased heights. The designation of the RC, R-1, and R-4 zones by the Comprehensive Plan as Residential Low Density establishes a clear distinction based on governing policies cited in the Land Use Element. Policy L-15 states, in part, “[p]lace lands...intended to provide transition to the rural area, or those appropriate for larger lot housing within the Residential Low Density land use designation to allow for a range of lifestyles.” This is in contrast to the Residential Medium Density designation policy (L-16) that aims to create “compact, urban development.”

Differentiating the zones based on minimum dimensional requirements and buildable area constraints for lots is more difficult than the clear policy distinction between the Low and Medium Density designations. Dimensional requirements for lots include minimum area, depth, and width. Buildable area constraints include minimum setbacks coupled with maximum building coverage. Dimensional requirements and buildable area constraints are correlated and intended to provide a range of housing sizes that are appropriately spaced to foster the desired character of the built environment. The dimensional requirements and buildable area constraints for the RC and R-1 zones are drastically different than those of other residential zones. However, distinguishing the R-4 zone from higher-density zones is more challenging because a pattern of requirements and constraints is apparent among the R-4 through R-8 zones (see below). Therefore, increases in allowed height should be justified by the differing land use policies.

	R-4	R-6	R-8
Minimum Lot Size	9,000 sq. ft.	7,000 sq. ft.	5,000 sq. ft.
Minimum Lot Width	70 ft.	60 ft.	50 ft.
Minimum Lot Depth	100 ft.	90 ft.	80 ft.
Minimum Front Yard	30 ft.	25 ft.	20 ft.
Minimum Side Yard	Combined 20 ft. with not less than 7.5 ft. on either side.	Combined 15 ft. with not less than 5 ft. on either side.	5 ft.

Staff concluded that any increased height afforded to the RC, R-1, and R-4 zones should be the minimum to provide for three stories. Because there is seemingly little difference between the R-4 and R-6 zones, with respect to the development standards cited above, staff sought to

propose a maximum wall plate height that would result in an innocuous difference. Because building setbacks, particularly side setbacks, have significant influence on perceived height as seen from a public street or adjoining property, an increase in height for the R-4 zone should be proportionate to the side setback and allowed height of the R-6 zone. In other words, the R-4 side setback and maximum wall plate height should be proportionate to that of the R-6 zone. As illustrated below, the allowed wall plate height in the R-6 zone and the minimum side setback creates a $\sim 78^\circ$ angle at the property line. Allowing a wall plate height of 32 feet in the R-4 zone (as well as RC and R-1) would provide enough height for three stories, and would result in a similar angle at the property line ($\sim 77^\circ$).



Finally, consideration was given to the RMF zone for townhouse development. Because lots for townhouse development are typically small and narrow, additional height is necessary in order to provide an amount of floor area that is commensurate with a single-family house in the R-10 or R-14 zone. Staff propose to allow three stories, and a maximum wall plate height of 32 feet for townhouse development in the RMF, as well as development in the RC, R-1, and R-4 zones.

Impact Analysis

Effect on rate of growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Plan

There will likely be no effect on the rate of growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Plan.

Effect on the City's capacity to provide adequate public facilities

There will likely be no effect on the City's capacity to provide adequate public facilities.

Effect on the rate of population and employment growth

There will likely be no effect on the rate of population and employment growth.

Whether Plan objectives are being met as specified or remain valid and desirable

Objectives of the Plan are being met, specifically that of Policy L-49: Address privacy and quality of life for existing residents by considering scale and context in infill project design.

Effect on general land values or housing costs

There will likely be no effect on general land values or housing costs.

Whether capital improvements or expenditures are being made or completed as expected

N/A

Consistency with GMA, the Plan, and Countywide Planning Policies

The proposed revisions are consistent with the GMA, the Plan, and the Countywide Planning Policies.

Effect on other considerations

N/A

Staff Recommendation

Amend Renton Municipal Code as described to increase the number of allowed stories and the maximum wall plate height to three and 32 feet respectively, in the RC, R-1, and R-4 zones as well as the RMF zone for townhouse development.

Implementation Requirements

Adopt an ordinance amending 4-2-110.A, Development Standards for Residential Zoning Designations (Primary and Attached Accessory Structures).