Department of Community and Economic Development
Planning Division

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY/CODE INTERPRETATION

MUNICIPAL CODE SECTIONS: RMC 4-7-150 and RMC 4-2-110

REFERENCE: N/A

SUBJECT: Alley loaded lots.

BACKGROUND: Alleys are an important aspect of design that help to minimize the influence automobiles have on a community and they become increasingly important as density increases. They also contribute to improved public safety by eliminating conflicts for pedestrians where driveways cross over sidewalks. Therefore, the City's code requires alleys for residential projects that are built at higher densities and this requirement is consistent with the residential design standards where the number of requirements increases as density increases.

However, there are multiple problems that have been identified in the application and interpretation of the code section relating to alley access. The code states that "alleys are the preferred street pattern" and that "prior to approval of a plat without alley access, it shall be determined through an evaluation of alley layout that the use of alley(s) is not feasible". This language is not clear to applicants regarding whether or not their project will be required to have alleys or not. The section should be written to clearly state when alleys are required and when they may not be required due to special conditions.

Further, the code states that the evaluation is not required for properties in the Residential Low Density (RLD) land use designation, but then makes a distinction amongst the zones that are within the Residential Low Density (RLD) land use designation. It does not require that alleys be considered in the RC or R-1 zone, but outlines conditions under which alleys may be required in the R-4 zone. In practice, this provision has not been invoked by the Department. To be consistent, the Code should be amended to not require alleys in any of the zones within the RLD land use designation.

This results in the Department implementing the standard requiring the demonstration of the feasibility of alleys in the R-8, R-10, and R-14 zones. For these higher density residential zones, implementing this requirement is appropriate and consistent. However, in addition to the requests to provide clarity about when alleys are required, there have been requests to provide a reasonable and balanced approach in the R-8 zone in particular. Many applicants believe that consumers desire larger

front loaded lots than what is prescribed in the R-8 zone. The code should be amended to balance the public benefit of alleys in higher density areas with the expressed concerns of applicants while preserving the intent of the code to have alleys at higher densities such as the R-8 density. This can be accomplished by allowing projects that do not maximize the density of the zone and that build at a reduced density of R-6 within the R-8 zone, to build without alleys. By not maximizing the density allowed by the zone, the intensity of the requirements that are intended to mitigate the impacts of density can reasonably be reduced. This is consistent with the purpose and intent (4-2-020) of the R-8-zone, to allow for a "range of four (4) to eight (8) dwelling units per net acre" and the City's practice of requiring escalated design requirements as density increases.

JUSTIFICATION: The City has made considerable effort over the last few years towards ensuring the code is clear and concise. The subsection regarding alley access as it is currently written is not clear. Amending the subsection to explicitly identify where alleys are required, when they are required, and what some exceptions may be, is appropriate given the City's intent of providing predictability for applicants. And although the R-4 zone allows for higher density than the RC and R-1 zones, there would be clearer consistency for staff and applicants if the RLD designation were uniform. Additionally, at the R-4 density, there is more room on a developable lot to mitigate for the impacts of garages on the quality of development. At higher densities, with smaller lot sizes, it is far less practicable to adequately allow for front loaded garages while facilitating the development of a quality neighborhood. The City also consistently works to ensure that policies and the code provide a reasonable and balanced approach to development. Allowing for greater flexibility within the R-8 zone by allowing those who are willing to build at R-6 density to build without alleys is consistent with code requiring increased design standards as density increases, as well as the purpose to provide for a range of densities within the R-8 zone.

DECISION: Amend the Code as shown below. In the interim, the existing Code shall be interpreted to effectuate the intent of existing code in the manner described above, which also will be clarified by the future amendments.

ADMINISTRATOR APPROVAL:

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C. E. "Chip" Vincent

DATE: October 3, 2013

APPEAL PROCESS: To appeal this determination, a written appeal--accompanied by the required filing fee--must be filed with the City's Hearing Examiner (1055 South Grady Way, Renton, WA 98057, 425-430-6515) no more than 14 days from the date of this decision. Your submittal should explain the basis for the appeal. Section 4-8-110 of the Renton Municipal Code provides further information on the appeal process.

CODE AMENDMENTS NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT DETERMINATIONS:

RMC 4-7-150.E.**5. Alley Access:** Alley access is the preferred street pattern for all new residential development, except ~~for properties~~ in the Residential Low Density land use designation~~. The Residential Low Density land use designation includes the~~ (RC, R-1, and R-4 zones). ~~Prior to approval of a plat without alley access, it shall be determined~~ ~~through an evaluation of alley layout~~ All new development in an area that has existing alleys shall take access off the alley. New development in areas without existing alleys shall utilize alley access on interior lots. If it can be demonstrated through an evaluation that the use of alley(s) is not ~~feasible~~ practical, the use of alleys may not be required.~~.~~ Any or all of the following factors may apply and should be considered in evaluating whether the use of alleys is not practical:

a. Size: the new development is a short plat.
b. Topography: the topography of the site proposed for development is not conducive for an alley configuration.
c. Environmental Impacts: the use of alleys would have more of a negative impact on the environment than a street pattern without alleys.

~~Within the R-4 zone, alley access may be required based on one or more of the following criteria:~~

~~a. Minimum lot widths are reduced; or~~
~~b. An increase in density is allowed; or~~
~~c. Alley(s) are present in the surrounding area; or~~
~~d. If significant trees and/or vegetation are preserved; or~~
~~e. The clustering of homes is allowed; or~~
~~f. If site characteristics allow for the effective use of alley(s).~~

4-2-110A DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR RESIDENTIAL ZONING DESIGNATIONS (PRIMARY AND ATTACHED ACCESSORY STRUCTURES)

Maximum Net Density[2, 14, 15]	
R-8	8 dwelling units per 1 net acre, except that the maximum shall be 6 dwelling units per net acre when alleys are not part of the street configuration.

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