

# Memo



Department of Planning & Housing

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Steve Osguthorpe, Planning & Housing Director

**DATE:** September 3, 2009

**SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR ZONING TEXT REFERRAL CONCERNING DRIVEWAY WIDTHS & MECHANICAL SCREENING REQUIREMENTS**

## Driveway Widths

The Ames *Municipal Code*, Section 29.406(10) regulates driveway widths.

**29.406(10) Driveways.** Driveways for all parking facilities must be a minimum of 12 feet wide for one-way traffic and 20 feet wide for 2-way traffic. Driveways may not exceed 30 feet in width. Driveways must be designed to minimize curb cuts.

This regulation makes no accommodations for different types of uses, types of traffic, or the type of street to which the driveway provides access. The City has adopted Statewide Urban Design and Specifications (SUDAS), which provides driveway design criteria and dimensions. These criteria and dimensions are arranged in a matrix that accounts for street type (arterial, collector, local street) and land usage type (residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural). These standards differentiate between, for example, a residential driveway on a local street and a major commercial shopping center on an arterial street. This differentiation provides better regulation of drive access and reduces the needs for zoning variances for some uses.

While SUDAS offers some guidance for drive access control, there may be additional options that staff would like to explore to address any zoning concerns (e.g., providing adequate landscaping).

**Staff from Planning and Housing and from Public Works have discussed this and request that this issue be referred for a possible zoning ordinance text amendment.**

## Mechanical Screening Requirements

The *Municipal Code* regulates the screening of mechanical equipment, as follows:

### **Section 29.408(4)**

**Mechanical Units.** For all uses, except for single-family and two-family dwellings, all mechanical units located on the ground, such as cooling or heating equipment, pumps or generators shall be substantially screened from the street and any abutting residential properties by a partially sight obscuring fence and/or shrubs. Such fence and or shrubs shall be at least six

inches higher than the height of the mechanical equipment. All mechanical equipment mounted on roofs, or on the walls of buildings, shall be completely screened from the ground level of any abutting residential zoned lot and substantially screened from all other adjacent properties at any level, with materials that are consistent with the architectural materials used on the exterior of the building.

**Section 29.1112(7)(b).** [Pertaining to the Southwest Gateway Overlay District]

Locate and screen such mechanical equipment so it is not visible from adjoining properties or public streets or sidewalks and to minimize acoustic impacts of this equipment in these areas

There may be practical difficulties in strictly complying with the above requirements due to topographic considerations (such as an elevated highway) or multi-storied buildings, which would facilitate a view looking down on the mechanical units. Staff assumes that the intent was to regulate views of mechanical units as seen from the ground level, or as seen within reasonable distance from the site. **Staff is therefore requesting that this item be referred for additional analysis and potential code amendments to address the practical difficulties sometimes encountered by these regulations.**