

ITEM #:	<u>35</u>
DATE:	<u>07-08-25</u>
DEPT:	<u>P&amp;H</u>

### **COUNCIL ACTION FORM**

**SUBJECT:**            **ZONING TEXT AMENDMENTS FOR DRIVEWAY DIMENSIONS AND SPACING AND A NEW PAVING EXCEPTION FOR LONG DRIVEWAYS**

**BACKGROUND:**

City Council reviewed a presentation from the Ames Home Builders Association (AHBA) at the April 22 Council meeting concerning their interests in expanding driveway options for single-family homes. Staff also provided an overview of the original goals of the 2023 overhaul of front yard parking and driveway standards, which included:

- Creating flexibility for homeowners to add “flared” side yard parking on site
- Redefining driveway minimum and maximum dimensions to provide clarity and consistency for all single-family properties
- Ensuring management of driveway curb cuts to minimize pedestrian conflicts and support on-street parking and safety
- Ensuring on site driveway paving area compatibility within existing neighborhoods
- Allowing existing front yard paving, regardless of permitting, to be legally pre-existing paving as of January 1, 2023

After two years of working with the 2023 regulations, the AHBA believes that wider driveway options will provide more convenience to homebuyers. **City Council authorized the AHBA to apply for changes to standards for driveway widths and spacing of second driveways.**

**Separate from the original referral, a property owner and their contractor commented during the driveway standards discussion to the Planning and Zoning Commission about their interest in creating a paving exception for long driveways. The Commission recommended that Council consider creating such an exception with the changes to other driveway standards.**

**This report addresses approval of a draft ordinance (Attachment A) on first reading that allows for increases the driveway's maximum widths and reduces the second driveway separation standards as currently agreed to between the staff and AHBA.**

**Additionally, this report includes discussion about whether to create an ordinance for a long driveway paving exception for approval at a future meeting.**

### **DRIVEWAY DIMENSION ORDINANCE**

The Addendum includes a general overview of paving and driveway standards along with a driveway configuration diagram and other examples to assist in review of the proposed

changes.

The City's driveway standards require driveway paving to lead to a parking space and to be proportional to the width of the garage or uncovered parking space. With this requirement in mind, the City has maximum width limitations for driveway approaches measured at a property line and curb line.

The current relevant dimensions are below as follows:

- Maximum driveway approach/curb cut widths measured at the sidewalk/or right-of-way line if no sidewalk.
  - 1-car garage: 12-foot maximum (+ curb line flares of 3-5 feet required)
  - 2-car garage: 20-foot maximum (+ curb line flares of 3-5 feet required)
  - 3-car garage: 24-foot maximum (+ curb line flares of 3-5 feet required)
- Limit second curb cuts to when a property has at least 150 feet of frontage.

**Summary of proposed standards:**

1. Remove reference to garage size as setting the maximum widths.
2. Measure width at the curb line rather than property line because of the variable flare widths.
3. Increase the maximum width of a driveway, if it corresponds to the garage width, to 34 feet, inclusive of curb flares. This allows for a straight line width of 28 feet maximum with 3-foot flares, and 24 feet maximum with 5-foot flares. *(This does not change the O-SFC limit of 12 feet in the front yard).*
4. Reduce driveway separation distances from 150 feet of frontage to 100 feet of lot frontage.
5. Second driveways are required to meet spacing requirements along the street of at least 34 feet between driveways. Driveway width are limited to 12 feet plus flares.

**The proposed change does not alter the on-site width limitations of a driveway, but it does create a larger maximum width at the property line which in many cases will allow for more straight in driveways with less angled taper for wider garages. For example a 22-foot wide two-car garage home will still be limited to 22 feet of driveway width plus flares, it cannot be expanded to the maximum of 28 feet plus flares because it would not be proportional to the width of the garage. Additional side yard paving with a taper can still be added as is currently allowed.**

Planning and Traffic Engineering staff reviewed proposals from the AHBA and determined that the changes identified above are consistent with SUDAS for maximum and minimum safety requirements. With the these changes the onsite driveway configurations and allowance for side yard flared parking with a taper are unchanged.

During the preliminary discussions of these changes in April with City Council, staff noted that there are a wide range of driveway regulations of widths. Some communities have a maximum of 24 feet as we do, while others permit wider driveways similar to this proposal or have no specific standard.

The Planning and Zoning Commission voted 6-0 on June 16th to support the new driveway dimensions. No one from the public spoke at the meeting. Notice was published in the newspaper and posted on the Planning website for Development Projects and Legal Notices.

### **LONG DRIVEWAY EXCEPTION REQUEST**

The P&Z Commission received a letter regarding driveway paving exceptions for their consideration with driveway standards on June 16. The original letter is attached as Attachment B. In essence the homeowner is constructing a new home on large wooded lot off of Oakwood with a driveway length exceeding 1100 feet. The home has a rock driveway for construction and fire access and the owner desires to not have to pave the entire driveway to conform to the City's front yard parking and driveway paving standards. Paving of the approach connecting to the road would still be required if the overall paving was not required.

Staff believes this is an unusual circumstance for Ames with a 1000-foot plus length driveway, but there are some legacy properties annexed to the City and some properties not in modern subdivisions with longer driveways off of former county roads or that may traverse hills and go through woods that could be hundreds of feet in length. Most homes in Ames have driveways of less than 50 feet in length on-site because new subdivision homes are most commonly built at front setback distances of 20-30 feet.

The City has a paving requirement in order to delineate appropriate areas for vehicle parking and maneuvering, control dust and noise, potentially reduce or control runoff and erosion, and to manage sidewalk crossings and connections to streets to avoid track out and rock debris.

**The Council did not directly initiate a text amendment regarding this issue so at this time it is the P&Z's recommendation to include an exception with the driveway ordinance amendments.** The P&Z voted to support an exception for driveways exceeding 300 feet with a requirement to pave the connection to the street. No other guidance or standards were discussed by the Commission other than the location of the owners property and the length the driveway in this instance.

**If City Council is interested in creating a paving exception, it could either add it to the Zoning Board of Adjustment special exceptions as a Minor Area Modification application for case by case review or it could adopt an administrative exception process that staff approves.** Staff is not recommending a specific exception, but has outlined below an approach that could be used to formulate a paving exception ordinance for approval at a future meeting.

*Exception -Residential long driveway. A substitute surface material of rock may be approved by the Planning and Housing director for all or part of a long driveway, after consultation with the Municipal Engineer and Fire Inspector, if:*

1. *The single family dwelling driveway length exceeds 300 feet from the right-of-way to the*

*dwelling;*

- 2. The site has unique characteristics of a rural, agricultural, or wooded setting;*
- 3. The driveway width is minimum required for access (12-16 feet);*
- 4. The driveway approach is paved to the specifications of SUDAS and the first 50 feet of the driveway is paved on site.*
- 5. A site that already has a paved driveway is not exempt from the paved driveway standard and cannot be widened or otherwise modified with rock or other noncompliant surface materials.*

#### **ALTERNATIVES:**

1. Approve the following:
  - a. First reading of an ordinance for changes to Driveway Dimensions and Spacing (Attachment A).
  - b. Direct the City Attorney to draft an ordinance for a paving exception for long driveways to be approved by staff/Zoning Board of Adjustment.
2. Modify the text of proposed Driveway Dimensions and Spacing ordinance and approve on first reading, and/or modify the proposed text for a driveway paving exception to be put on a future agenda.
3. Approve only the Driveway Dimensions and Spacing Ordinance and take no action on the driveway paving exception.
4. Refer this item to staff for further information.
5. Deny the proposed driveway changes.

#### **CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

In 2023, the City Council made major updates to front yard parking and driveway standards. The changes were a balance of increasing owner flexibility to provide more on-site parking and managing the street right-of-way for safety and on-street parking needs. These changes have taken time to learn and adapt to within the building community after years of minimal oversight of driveway permits. The proposed changes are the maximum that City staff believes meet the interest of the AHBA and still attain Council's original 2023 goals for the updated driveway standards. **Therefore, the City Manager recommends the City Council adopt Alternative #1a for approval of the ordinance.**

**Uniquely, the Council must also determine whether to proceed with requested long driveway paving exceptions as described in Alternative #1b. Council will need to direct staff regarding whether to draft an ordinance based upon text in this report, and if so, then whether to have it go as an exception through ZBA for approval or for staff review only.**

#### **ATTACHMENT(S):**

[Attachment A Ordinance Driveway Dimensions.PDF](#)  
[Addendum Driveway Dimensions.docx](#)  
[Long Driveway Exception Request Letter to P&Z.pdf](#)