

Staff Report

S-SMD ZONING DISTRICT TEXT AMENDMENT REQUEST FOR SETBACKS AND DESIGN REQUIREMENTS

August 12, 2025

BACKGROUND:

On May 27, 2025, the City Council referred to staff a zoning text amendment request from Jim Gregory and Joan Stein, residents of 129 Washington Avenue (Attachment A). Mr. Gregory is the owner. Mr. Gregory and Ms. Stein are seeking to demolish the existing house and construct a new, expanded home. The property is at the northwest corner of Washington Avenue and S. 2nd Street. The lot is 60 by 170 feet.

Mr. Gregory's property is zoned Special Purpose - South Lincoln Sub Area Mixed-Use District (S-SMD). This district was created in 2003, when the neighborhood was rezoned from Highway Oriented Commercial (HOC), Residential High Density (RH), and Special Purpose - Government/Airport (S-GA). The S-SMD zoning district allows for single-family homes, medium density apartments, and commercial uses. The unique zoning district implements specific design requirements intended to make newer, larger buildings compatible with older homes in the area.

Staff has had discussions with the owner about the property and the zoning standards. House design concepts from the applicant are included as attachments. The proposed concept could be built within the current zoning standards with only minor adjustments to the design and there would be no loss of usable square footage. Approval of a new house could occur with or without use of the 20% alternative design flexibility allowed within the Code. Despite these comments from staff, Mr. Gregory has requested text amendments to fit the the design of house depicted in the attachments so no modifications would be required.

Mr. Gregory desires the following changes for setbacks, roof design, and façade lengths:

1. Adding a line in Table 29.1003(3) allowing for street side yard setbacks to be 15 feet (in lieu of two front yards with with 25 feet of setback for all street frontages).
2. Changing Sec. 29.402(4) (in conjunction with #1) to add S-SMD to the list of exempted zoning districts that are not required to provide the same minimum front yard and street side yard setbacks.
3. Changing the 40-foot primary and secondary façade maximum to 48 feet.
4. Removing the requirement that roofs have at least one or more gable end sections, or at least two or more dormers, facing a street.

Although not addressed in the letter, an additional change to the depth or length standard of a recessed facade with a secondary facade would need to be changed from 8 feet to 4 feet to allow for the home design that is attached.

SETBACK CHANGES:

The front building setback (along Washington Avenue) in S-SMD is 25 feet (Table 29.1003(3)). (There are porch and eave projection exceptions.) The street side setback (along S. 2nd Street) is not stated in the table, but it defaults to a corner lot standard to provide the same front setback on all streets (Sec. 29.402(4)).

The 25-foot minimum front setback is a convention in residential zoning districts in Ames and in cities nationwide. A number of residential districts in Ames, including Residential Low Density (RL), Residential Medium Density (RM), and Urban Core Residential Medium Density (UCRM) have the same front yard setback requirement, but have 15-foot minimum setbacks for side yards abutting public rights-of-way. Notably, the S-SMD district requires reduced setbacks along S. 3rd Street of 10-15 feet to implement a neighborhood plan to intensify development along the collector street.

The house design is centered upon the 60 foot wide lot. There is 29 feet of building envelope available under the current standards. The house concept is 28 feet wide.

The owner wants to build the home in the center of the lot with essentially 16-foot setbacks on each side compared to the code requirements for 25 feet along 2nd Street and 6 feet from the interior north property line.

BUILDING FORM CHANGES:

S-SMD (Table 29.1003(3)) contains requirements for building form intended to replicate the massing and design of historic homes in the area, including for facade width and roofs.

Width: "Width of a primary facade shall be no greater than 40 ft. Width of the secondary facade(s) closest to the street shall be no greater than 40 ft."

The owner would like to enclose one of the recessed porches as a three-season porch to have a longer facade.

"Recessed facades must be set back at least 8 feet from the primary or secondary facade. A primary facade or secondary facade is permitted but must be separated from other primary or secondary facades along that building face by a recessed facade of at least 24 ft. in length."

The current design of the building (Attachment B) has a recessed component that is set back 8 feet in part (the rear porch) but only 4 feet for the remainder (the garage).

Roofs: "All buildings shall have gable roofs, with a minimum roof pitch of 6:12 rise to run.

All buildings shall have roofs with at least one or more gable end sections, or at least two or more dormers, facing a street. These features match those of older existing homes in the area."

Mr. Gregory has a gabled end facing Washington, but he would also be required to add two dormers to the roof design along 2nd Street. These could be located anywhere along the roof.

OPTIONS:

1. Accept an application by Mr. Gregory for text amendments to S-SMD consistent with the description in this report. These changes will modify for all development in the district:
 - a. the setbacks,
 - b. the building form width requirements, and
 - c. the roof requirement.
2. Accept an application by Mr. Gregory for text amendments to S-SMD consistent with the description in this report, but only for single and two-family homes for:
 - a. the setbacks,
 - b. the building form width requirement, and
 - c. the roof requirement.
3. Direct staff to create a text amendment for a new Exception for a Minor Area Modification process to allow for minor deviations from the S-SMD requirements by Zoning Board of Adjustment approval.
4. Take no action on the request.
5. Defer action to a future Redirection Area Sub-Area Plan.

STAFF COMMENTS:

The S-SMD zoning district was created as part of an implementation of an area plan for the neighborhood. The unique requirements for the district are intended to help protect existing residential development while allowing for a gentle transition to a more dense and mixed-use neighborhood.

The area is designated as a Redirection Area within Ames Plan 2040 and planned for an update of the overall sub-area plan of the neighborhood some time in the future. However, a sub-area plan is not a prioritized project at this time and the scope of review and standards has not been discussed.

The building form requirements are intended to mimic the historic building form of the area. The intent was to prevent buildings from having massing that overwhelms the existing character. The setbacks are larger for corner lots assuming larger buildings would be built. The roof requirements are also intended to reference the historic residential character of the neighborhood. Solar panels are allowed regardless of the roof design features, but two dormers would be required per the requirements. Two dormers does not materially changes the ability to have solar with the proposed home concept and does break up the long roof surface of the structure

From staff's review of the current standards and the attached home design concept there is not a compelling problem with the existing standards that preclude development of homes in this area. The proposed changes are preferences for different

standards that may or may not be significant to the area.

City Council did not prioritize this area in the P&H workplan for review and a new sub-area plan at its last update earlier this year. If City Council allows for a text amendment process to proceed, it would need to identify if any outreach is needed beyond public hearing notification to all the property owners of the pending change. If outreach and engagement by staff is desired by the City Council, prioritizing such a process would be needed.

ATTACHMENT(S):

[Attachment A - Text Amendment Request.pdf](#)

[Attachment B - Proposed Site Plan.pdf](#)

[Attachment C - Building Drawings.pdf](#)