

## STAFF REPORT

### ZONING ORDINANCE TEXT AMENDMENT RELATED TO THE DEFINITION AND SCREENING OF MECHANICAL UNITS

OCTOBER 21, 2009

Mechanical units are defined in Section 29.201(116) as “a climate control device and/or a piece of hardware used for the delivery or measurement of utilities.” The zoning ordinance generally requires the screening of mechanical units. However, screening requirements are called out in various sections of the zoning code, with slight to significant differences in the requirements. For example, screening requirements in the General Development Standards - which apply to all zones - regulates mechanical units seen from ground level. However, standards in the Convenience Commercial Node (CVCN) District and also in the Gateway Overlay Districts regulate mechanical units seen from adjoining properties or streets at any level. Having these standards called out separately in these different zoning districts results in both redundancy and inconsistency among standards.

The application and enforcement of these standards has not been consistent, perhaps because of the inconsistencies in code language, and perhaps because of practical difficulties in applying existing standards. For example, the requirement to screen mechanical units as seen from any abutting property is difficult because neither the applicant nor City staff can verify if a unit is seen from, say, an upper-floor balcony of a private living unit. Moreover, the combination of both topography and distance may result in overlooking the visibility of a unit that technically is visible, but which may be less noticeable in the larger panoramic view of an area. Additionally, some things may have been overlooked due to uncertainty over the definition of a mechanical unit.

Staff is therefore requesting the Commission’s input on whether existing standards should be amended. This will require discussion on the intent and purpose of screening requirements, and a review of how the standards have been applied. Staff will present pictures of various projects and how screening of mechanical units have been handled. Staff would like the Commission’s input on the effectiveness of existing codes, and the degree to which mechanical units should be screened. Staff will then share that input with the City Council for its additional input, and then draft amendments that reflect the Commission and Council sentiments on this issue.

To facilitate this discussion, existing code language pertaining to mechanical units is provided below:

#### **Section 29.201(116) (From the Definition Section)**

(116) **Mechanical Unit** means a climate control device and/or a piece of hardware used for the delivery or measurement of utilities.

**Section 29.408(4) (General Development Standards - Applicable City-wide)**

(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 completely 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 residentially 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 29.807(5) (Pertaining to the CVCN District)**

- (5) Mechanical Equipment.
- (a) Comply with the standards of this section for all:
    - (i) cooling or heating equipment,
    - (ii) pumps
    - (iii) generators
    - (iv) communications equipment
    - (v) utility cabinets
    - (vi) others such mechanical equipment
  - (b) 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.
  - (c) Screening shall be integral and consistent with the overall design of the building and the landscape. At a minimum, screening materials shall meet the L3 or F2 standards set forth in Section 29.403.
    - (i) shall include materials of the same type, quality and color as the principal materials of the building or landscape, and
    - (ii) at the time of installation, shall be at least six inches higher than the height of the mechanical equipment.

**Section 29.1107(5) (Pertaining to the Southeast Entryway Gateway Overlay District):**

(5) Design Standard. The following guidelines involve exterior building materials, minimum roof slopes, entrances and signs.

. . .

- (g) Garbage Collection areas and Mechanical Units shall be screened pursuant to Section 29.408(3) and (4) of this ordinance except that:
  - (i) Trash receptacles for use by customers are exempt.
  - (ii) All mechanical equipment shall be completely screened from the ground level of any adjacent property with architectural materials that are consistent with those used on the primary building.

(h) Electrical and utility meters shall be located on the rear façade or on a non-street facing side façade provided they are located behind the centerline of the side of the building.

**Section 29.1109(10)(g) (Pertaining to the O-GNE Northeast Entryway Gateway Overlay District)**

(g) Locate drive-through windows, menu boards, mechanical equipment, and associated stacking lanes to minimize impacts on other areas of the development site, as well as impacts on adjacent properties. Such site features are to be integrated with the building design and screened from off-site property.

**Section 29.1112(7) (Pertaining to the Southwest Gateway Overlay District)**

(7) Mechanical Equipment

(a) Comply with the standards of this section for all

- (i) cooling or heating equipment
- (ii) pumps
- (iii) generators
- (iv) communications equipment
- (v) private utility cabinets
- (vi) meters
- (vii) others such mechanical equipment

(b) 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.

(c) Screening shall be integral and consistent with the overall design of the building and the landscape. At a minimum, screening materials shall meet the L3 or F2 standards set forth in Section 29.403.

(i) shall include materials of the same type, quality and color as the principal materials of the building or landscape, and

(ii) at the time of installation, shall be at least six inches higher than the height of the mechanical equipment.