

COMMISSION ACTION FORM

**SUBJECT: ZONING ORDINANCE TEXT AMENDMENT PERTAINING TO GARAGE PARKING MAXIMUMS FOR SINGLE AND TWO FAMILY DWELLINGS**

**BACKGROUND:**

This issue pertains to proposed amendments to residential garage regulations. The amendments were initiated by staff for purposes of clarifying existing language, and for providing greater flexibility in achieving what staff assumes to be the intent of existing language.

**Section 29.408(7)** of the Ames *Municipal Code* outlines the zoning regulations for the size of garages and accessory buildings (subject text in bold):

. . .

a. Detached garages and accessory buildings in the rear yard shall not occupy more than 25% of the rear yard.

b. The maximum gross floor area shall not exceed 900 square feet for a detached garage or accessory building/structure to a Single Family Dwelling or Institutional Use, or 1,200 square feet for accessory uses to a Two Family Dwelling. (Ord. No. 3595, 10-24-00; Ord. No. 3861, 11-22-05)

**c. In any Agricultural or Residential district the number of parking spaces within a detached or attached garage shall not exceed 3 for a Single Family Dwelling or 2 per dwelling unit for a Two Family Dwelling.**

The three (3) parking stall maximum has been in the *Municipal Code* since at least 1966. The original intent or purpose for that specific standard is unclear from available records and files. However, a limitation on garage size is not an uncommon regulation. It is often adopted as a means of minimizing the visual dominance of garages in single family neighborhoods as the sizes of residential garages have become increasingly larger over the past decade. This is likely the reason the City of Ames adopted more stringent standards for garages in Somerset and also in the Single Family Conservation Overlay. Specifically, the Somerset regulations require that the garage be no closer to the street than the rest of the facade. The Single Family Conservation Overlay regulations require that the garage be set back at least 18 feet from the rest of the facade.

**Interpretation and Enforcement.** The Inspection Division has found that the interpretation and enforcement of the garage parking stall limit in the Zoning Code has been problematic and inconsistent because garages can have other uses besides the parking of motor vehicles. Parking stalls are often built larger than the minimum stall

dimensions to accommodate storage or workshop space. The current code language allows a property owner to build an unlimited number of **separate garages**, as long as each individual garage has **no more than three parking spaces inside**. This is not a common approach, but there are a few examples where a builder placed one attached garage on the front of the house, and one on the side or rear of the house. Alternatively, builders may install an interior barrier such as a fire wall to separate one garage area from another. In this manner, they technically meet the separate garage requirement. For those that simply want space within the garage for other uses, some may rely upon half-walls or even paint striping to designate the expanded area of the garage for non-parking uses. Most builders, however, choose to limit the size of garages to three parking stalls and there has been little opposition to this existing standard.

The existing standard is effective at minimizing the visual dominance of garages. However, it limits the ability to have more than three parking stalls in a garage even if the enlarged garage were not visually obvious from the street. For example, a garage with tandem parking would result in a deeper garage, but would not increase the visual façade width of the garage. Staff, therefore, proposes language that would limit the number of garage doors rather than the number of garage parking bays. Staff believes this would achieve the aesthetic intent of the existing standard, but would provide more flexibility to the builder in meeting market demands for larger garages. The proposal further clarifies the standard as being for the entire property, not each individual garage being regulated separately. The following amendments are therefore proposed:

In any Agricultural or Residential district the ~~cumulative garage door width number of parking spaces within a detached or attached~~ shall not exceed three (3) equivalent widths for a Single Family Dwelling or two (2) equivalent widths per dwelling unit for a Two Family Dwelling. An equivalent width shall mean nine (9) feet. Doors less than eight feet in width, such as for lawn and garden equipment, are exempt.

Re-written without strikethroughs and underlines:

In any Agricultural or Residential district the cumulative garage door width shall not exceed three (3) equivalent widths for a Single Family Dwelling or two (2) equivalent widths per dwelling unit for a Two Family Dwelling. An equivalent width shall mean nine (9) feet. Doors less than eight feet in width, such as for lawn and garden equipment, are exempt.

The above language would exempt garage doors less than 8 feet in width. This would facilitate the use of smaller roll-up doors for workshop access, or for smaller equipment storage such as golf carts or lawn and garden equipment. These would be allowed in addition to standard garage doors, and could be used on either attached storage areas, or on detached outbuildings.

There may be a small number of non-conformities created with this amendment. Those cases would be where separate garages add up to more than three equivalent door

widths total. Those cases would be “grandfathered” in as legal nonconforming structures/uses, requiring no action by the owner or the city to rectify or document.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

1. The Planning and Zoning Commission can recommend that the City Council revise the standard as noted above to regulate garage sizes based upon the number of garage doors rather than the number of parking spaces within the garage.
2. The Planning and Zoning Commission can recommend that the City Council revise the standard according to its own determinations and conclusions.
3. The Planning and Zoning Commission can recommend that the City Council not amend this section of the *Municipal Code* in any way, thereby maintaining the status quo.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

It is the staff's recommendation that the Planning and Zoning Commission act in accordance with Alternative #1, which is to recommend that the City Council revise the standard as described above to regulate garage sizes based upon the number of garage doors rather than the number of parking spaces within the garage.