

**MINUTES
CITY OF AMES
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION**

Date: August 4, 2010	* Kori Heuss, Chairperson	2011
	Jeff Johnson	2011
Call to Order: 7:00 p.m.	Debra Lee	2012
	Chuck Jons	2012
Place: Ames City Hall	Elizabeth Beck, Vice-Chairperson	2012
Council Chambers	Norman Cloud	2013
	Mark Stenberg	2013
Adjournment: 8:16 p.m.		
	*Absent	

MAJOR TOPICS DISCUSSED:

1. Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment Related to Outdoor Lighting Code
 2. Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment Related to Screening of Mechanical Units
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CALL TO ORDER: Elizabeth Beck, Vice-Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

MOTION: (JONS/CLOUD) to approve the Agenda for the meeting of August 4, 2010.

MOTION PASSED: 6-0

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JULY 21, 2010:

MOTION: (CLOUD/STENBERG) to approve the Minutes of the meeting of July 21, 2010.

MOTION PASSED: 6-0

PUBLIC FORUM: There were no public comments.

Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment Related to Outdoor Lighting Code

Charlie Kuester, planner, gave an overview of two proposed text amendments to the outdoor lighting code. One change is to amend the code to allow no more than 5 percent of total lumens to fall within the 10 degree below horizontal to horizontal plane. This is the 80-degree to 90-degree range that is the industry standard for glare zone, bringing our regulatory requirement into alignment with the industry standard. It also removes any opportunity for error in extrapolating lighting information in the 15 degree glare zone and would remove any ambiguity as to whether a fixture meets the standards.

The other change is to allow an applicant to either supply the requested information at the time of site plan submittal or to note on the plan that the information will be submitted to the Planning and Housing Department prior to installation.

The proposed amendments respond to customer and staff concerns about the unavailability of information to determine compliance with the outdoor lighting ordinance. The amendment will require the submittal of information that is readily available from the manufacturer or vendor of lighting fixtures. The current practice relies on extrapolation of data that sometimes is imprecise.

The amendment also allows the customer an option when submitting a site plan application. The customer can submit the necessary lighting information with the application or can note on the plan that no lighting will be installed unless approved later. This allows the customer to determine the actual lighting fixtures at a later date and require staff to evaluate them prior to installation. Staff recommends that the Planning and Zoning Commission recommend that the City Council adopt the changes as proposed.

A brief question and answer period occurred between the Commission and staff to clarify the proposed amendments.

Chuck Jons applauded staff for their effort to streamline things to make it easier for the developers.

MOTION: (JONS/CLOUD) to accept Alternative #1, which states:

The Planning and Zoning Commission recommends that the City Council adopt the amendments related to the outdoor light code as proposed.

MOTION PASSED: 6-0

Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment Related to Screening of Mechanical Units

Steve Osguthorpe, director, gave an overview of the proposed text amendment related to screening of mechanical units. In October 2009, staff requested both the Commission's and City Council's input on whether existing standards should be amended, and presented pictures of various projects and how screening of mechanical units have been handled. The Commission commented on the need to address aesthetic clutter but acknowledged that the level of importance in addressing this varies depending on location. The Commission also suggested that regulation of mechanical unit screening be based on what is seen from the ground level, and what is seen from the public right-of-way. Ultimately, however, the Commission determined that there is no need to change the current code, and that the current code should be enforced as written.

The City Council considered the same information as presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission, and also considered the Commission's input. Council comments focused on the visibility of units at the pedestrian and vehicle level, and the need to consider the aesthetics of screening when buildings are being proposed, i.e., that thought about how air condition units and meters are going to look should be considered at the initial building design stage. The Council then directed staff to request input from the development community on this issue.

Staff discussed the current issues, and shared some ideas on how to address current issues, with the developers at the quarterly meeting in April. Staff invited the developers to respond to those ideas and to share their own ideas on how screening of mechanical units should be regulated. There was not much feedback at that time, so staff prepared draft language based upon the ideas shared at that meeting and e-mailed them to local developers for review and comment. To date, we have received no comments on the draft amendments.

The proposed amendments provide needed clarity on screening requirements, particularly in allowable methods for screening based upon the zoning district the units are located in. They provide easily defined vistas from which mechanical units should be screened to avoid questions on whether distant viewing of units is subject to the regulations, and they eliminate redundant and sometimes conflicting regulations. Staff believes that these changes would be in keeping with the intent of existing regulations, but would provide more reasonable and more easily defined provisions for their application. Staff recommends that the Planning and Zoning Commission recommend that the City Council adopt the changes as proposed.

Chuck Jons asked if it was the old or new Council that provided input on the proposed amendments. Mr. Osguthorpe replied that it was the old Council.

Mr. Jons asked if staff has received any complaints about the present ordinance. Mr. Osguthorpe said we haven't received many complaints, but the administration process has been challenging. Discussion then ensued about the enforcement process.

Discussion occurred between Mr. Jons and Mr. Osguthorpe about the suggestion from staff that the proposed amendments could address aesthetic clutter. Mr. Jons mentioned that there are some aesthetically displeasing situations around the community, and it is his opinion that what we are dealing with here is rather subtle.

Norman Cloud said he believes people have been making a good faith effort to try to screen their equipment; it is just hard to sometimes administer what "substantially screened" means and changing it. He said he doesn't see this as a big deal, and likes that the language has shrunk a great deal in size for this section.

Mr. Osguthorpe said this amendment eliminates a lot of duplicity. He said staff tried to condense it into one section except for those things that are unique to a particular zone.

Jeff Johnson asked about the developers' comments for this topic when it was brought to them in April.

Mr. Osguthorpe explained that it was a casual dialogue with him sharing possible ways for addressing this issue. He mentioned that he shared changing the word "substantially" to "completely", which was one area where at least one developer has been consistent about asking that we be more specific. He said he did not get a "yes this is it" or "this is not it" kind of dialogue; it was more of a back and forth discussion.

Discussion occurred between staff and the Commission pertaining to the ground level point of reference for visibility of roof mount units.

Mr. Jons stated that he thinks the existing code should remain as it is because he doesn't believe it is a big enough issue.

Mr. Osguthorpe explained that this is currently an administrative problem for staff, which is then a problem for our customers. He said we are not looking to make anything more stringent or to create problems; we are looking to address what we already see as problems in our code to see if there is a more practical way to achieve whatever the intent is.

Mr. Johnson said this should have been presented to the Commission as a clean up to the code instead of as an aesthetic issue. He stated that he now sees this as a clean up to the code, and has a responsibility to do what he can to help staff clean up the ambiguity and making it less judgmental and subjective, and more objective.

Mark Stenberg said he agrees that it would be good to have something more definitive to work with. He suggested possible language of 75% screened, consisting of the entire width and height, and seen perpendicular from the building within the lot lines. He further suggested that staff also look at the language that material is required to be the same type, quality, and color as the principle building materials because it could be an additional expense to the developers.

Mr. Osguthorpe offered to bring this item back to the Commission with some options to address the screening percentage, and look at the language pertaining to screening materials being of the same type, quality, and color as the principal materials of the exterior of the building. He said he will also invite the development community to come before the Commission to share their thoughts on this subject.

MOTION: (STENBERG/JOHNSON) to accept Alternative #4, which states:

The Planning and Zoning Commission referred this back to staff for additional analysis.

MOTION PASSED: 6-0

COMMISSION COMMENTS: Discussion occurred about the *Municipal Code* updates that are provided to the Commission as paper copies on a quarterly basis. Chuck Jons and Jeff Johnson inquired about an alternative way of providing this information to them.

STAFF COMMENTS: Staff reviewed the tentative agenda for the meeting of August 18, 2010.

With no further business coming before the Commission, the Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Elizabeth Beck, Vice-Chairperson
Planning & Zoning Commission

Cindy L. Hollar, Recording Secretary
Department of Planning & Housing

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