

## **Memorandum**

**Date:** November 15, 2010

**To:** Plan Commission

**From:** Matt Tucker, Zoning Administrator

**Re:** Building height measurement

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### **Introduction**

Staff met with Zoning Board of Appeals members to discuss building height measurement. ZBA member expressed the following concerns:

- A 35' tall average building height is very tall from a bulk perspective,
- Measuring height as an "average height" allows peak heights much taller than 35', and is not a true representation of building height.
- Measuring height from the front elevation/façade does not provide consideration to other elevations/sides of building.
- There are very few examples of houses approaching a 35' tall building height in the City. Recent examples of tall buildings have in fact measured significantly below the 35' tall building height.
- Buildings are four-sided. Neighboring properties view buildings from a variety of perspectives beyond the "front view" and measurement of heights should be from all sides
- Unusual topographical situations, such as steep slopes that result in taller measurements, could be addressed by variance.
- If a lot steps down, a structure could step down with the lot change and still be developed in a typical and functional fashion.
- Taller buildings with tall roofs create opportunity to cast long shadows on neighboring properties, which impacts quality of life.

### **Current Ordinance**

The current ordinance allows an average building height of 35'. Accessory buildings built in required yards may be 15' tall to the midpoint. The height is measured from the front elevation, to the midpoint of a sloped roof.

Staff has no recollection of specific houses that approached this height, however, there have been several recent examples of buildings that were considered tall buildings, which have been built which measured significantly lower than the 35' height.

Typical floor heights, Floor to floor heights:

- 3-4' basement exposure,
- 10' first story,
- 9' second story

- Areas above 2nd floor underneath 8:12 slope for human habitation, need 7' ceiling height which can be provided using gables or dormers.

4+9+10= 23 plus the needed 7' headroom height (including insulation and roof, adds 1'-2') = 35'±

**Staff recommend the following:**

- Building height be measured as an absolute height of 35'.
  - Eliminate average measurement tool, Grade should be measured from approved grade at site, pre-construction or alteration.
  - Measure of height should be established from all building facades.
  - Continue to allow 2-story maximum (loft exemption still ok if underneath 35' height).
  - Continue to allow areas above 2nd floor underneath 8:12 slope for human habitation.
  - Current measurement of height works for accessory buildings, with an exception being where sides or rear elevations become exposed. Accessory buildings may need a taller height allowance, or an averaging principle to address slope changes around the building.
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