

MEMORANDUM

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT



January 26, 2024

TO: Mayor Robert Simison and the Meridian City Council
CC: Caleb Hood, Deputy Director Community Development

FROM: Brian McClure, Comprehensive Associate Planner
RE: Mixed Use – Ground Floor Building Restrictions

At the January 9th, 2024 City Council hearing for the Comprehensive Plan text amendment (H-2023-0057), there were several questions regarding building footprint areas, building height, and guidelines or standards as they related to single-family homes adjacent to mixed use areas. Some Councilpersons requested that Planning staff take another look at text additions to better address building height transitions (in addition to further public outreach).

Context and Recap

Planning staff and the Planning & Zoning Commission recommended the maximum structure footage restriction, adopted in the 2019 Comprehensive Plan, Mixed Use Neighborhood and Community future land use designations, be removed. This was after a number of comments by design and design related professionals questioned the value and suggested the requirement be removed. Because the cap is arbitrary, does not reflect for example, grocery stores trending both smaller and larger, and disallowed some other essential services desired within some mixed use areas solely due to their size, staff proposed removal in the Staff Report. Further, the restriction simply did not work as intended and was circumvented by “bonuses” allowed through the provision of additional civic spaces, or by requesting changes to the Future Land Use Map. The value has been contentious less due to the building footprint restriction, and more due to the orientation, location, height, and general operations of proposed projects. In the staff analysis of Commission Recommendations, it was noted that height would be a better transition restriction. Therefore, general language was proposed that Staff felt to be more in-line with design principles and policies at the Citywide, Comprehensive Plan level.

Commission Recommendation

The text in the original Staff Report and Commission Recommendation include the following addition in lieu of the building footprint restriction,

Proposed Text (Holistic Design [New section]):

Non-residential buildings should transition to and compliment adjacent residential buildings in mass and form, and include safe and meaningful mitigation for operational impacts such as loading docks, storage, and outdoor equipment.

Removed Text (MU – Neighborhood):

~~*Unless a structure contains a mix of both residential and office, or residential and commercial land uses, maximum building size should be limited to a 20,000 square-foot building footprint. For the development of public school sites, the maximum building size does not apply.*~~

Removed Text (MU – Community):

~~*Unless a structure contains a mix of both residential and office, or residential and commercial land uses, maximum building size should be limited to a 30,000 square-foot building footprint. For community grocery stores, the maximum building size should be limited to a 60,000 square-foot building footprint. For the development of public school sites, the maximum building size does not apply.*~~

Related Policies

The following adopted and unmodified Comprehensive Plan policies support the proposed text:

- 2.02.02F, Ensure that new development within existing residential neighborhoods is cohesive and complementary in design and construction.
- 3.07.01A, Require all new development to create a site design compatible with surrounding uses through buffering, screening, transitional densities, and other best site design practices.
- 5.01.02E, Support and protect the identity of existing residential neighborhoods.

Alternatives

Planning staff are hesitant to provide additional, formal recommendations on this topic with the Planning and Zoning Commission having already recommended the change to the City Council without any expressed concern. Additionally, staff have apprehension with increased specificity in the actual text of the Comprehensive Plan, and that City Code and the general design review process is silent on setbacks relative to building height (only general landscape buffers).

However, the following outlined options may be helpful in discussion by the City Council in discussion of this subject. None of the outlined options following would be additional text within the Mixed Use section, but in the policy areas or Glossary of Terms. If Council wants additional Mixed Use text, that would need to be directed to staff.

Option 1

Approve Comprehensive Plan text amendment as recommended by the Planning and Zoning Commission, and with the support of existing adopted policies.

Option 2

Consider an additional supplemental Comprehensive Plan policy more specific to the relationship of tall buildings and existing single-family neighborhoods. For example,

3.07.01F, Within mixed use developments abutting single-family residential neighborhoods, new adjacent commercial buildings are expected provide additional building setbacks that are considerate of the disparity between residential rooflines and of taller commercial building parapets (or roof line in conditions with pitched roofs). Additional setbacks would be in addition to required landscape buffers, not include utility, delivery, or service areas, and have the goal of preserving view sheds and privacy.

Note: The term “neighborhood” is used intentionally as the purpose of this language is not to protect older single-family homes in transitioning areas or where redevelopment is expected.

Option 3

Create a new definition in Appendix A: Glossary of Terms, for transitions as it relates to residential and commercial buildings.

Building Transitions, Commercial: The building transition metric of commercial buildings in mixed use designated areas, that abut existing single-family residential neighborhoods, should include an additional setback distance from the property line. The intent is to consider and mitigate nuisance impacts from the service side of most buildings, but also to preserve view sheds and the privacy of existing stakeholders. The setback distance generally reflects 30-feet for each floor height disparity greater than one floor (i.e. commercial buildings two or more stories taller). This additional setback distance would exclude linear areas such as drive aisles that only primarily provide utility, service, or delivery access.

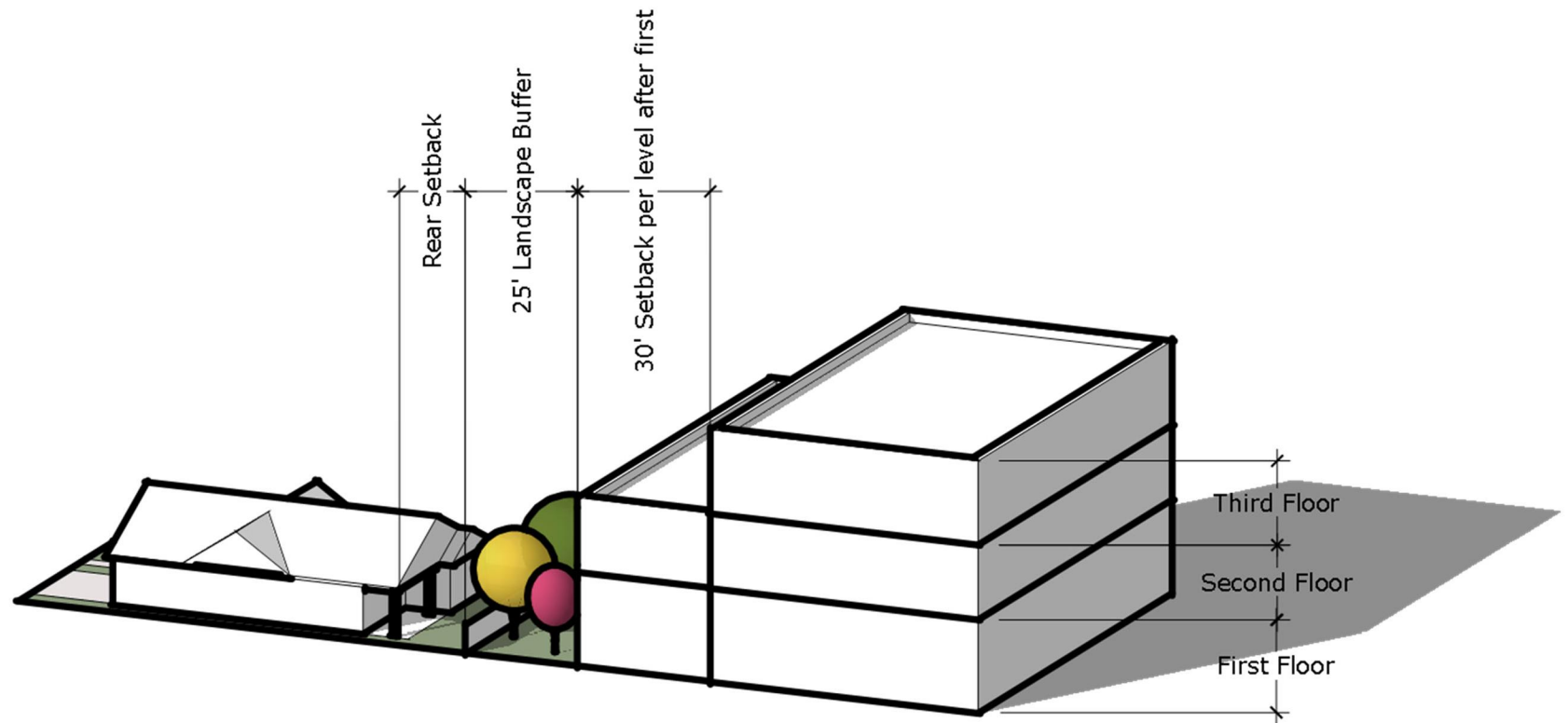
Note: The term “neighborhood” is used intentionally as the purpose of this language is not to protect older single-family homes in transitioning areas or where redevelopment is expected. See Attachment 1 for examples of this text.

The origination and some of the specificity in this text originates from draft work on the Architectural Standards Manual in 2015 by staff and an Architectural Committee. There was some concern by City Council with unintended consequences; what was interpreted by Staff as retaining flexibility through entitlement, and additional setbacks did not make it to the final version.

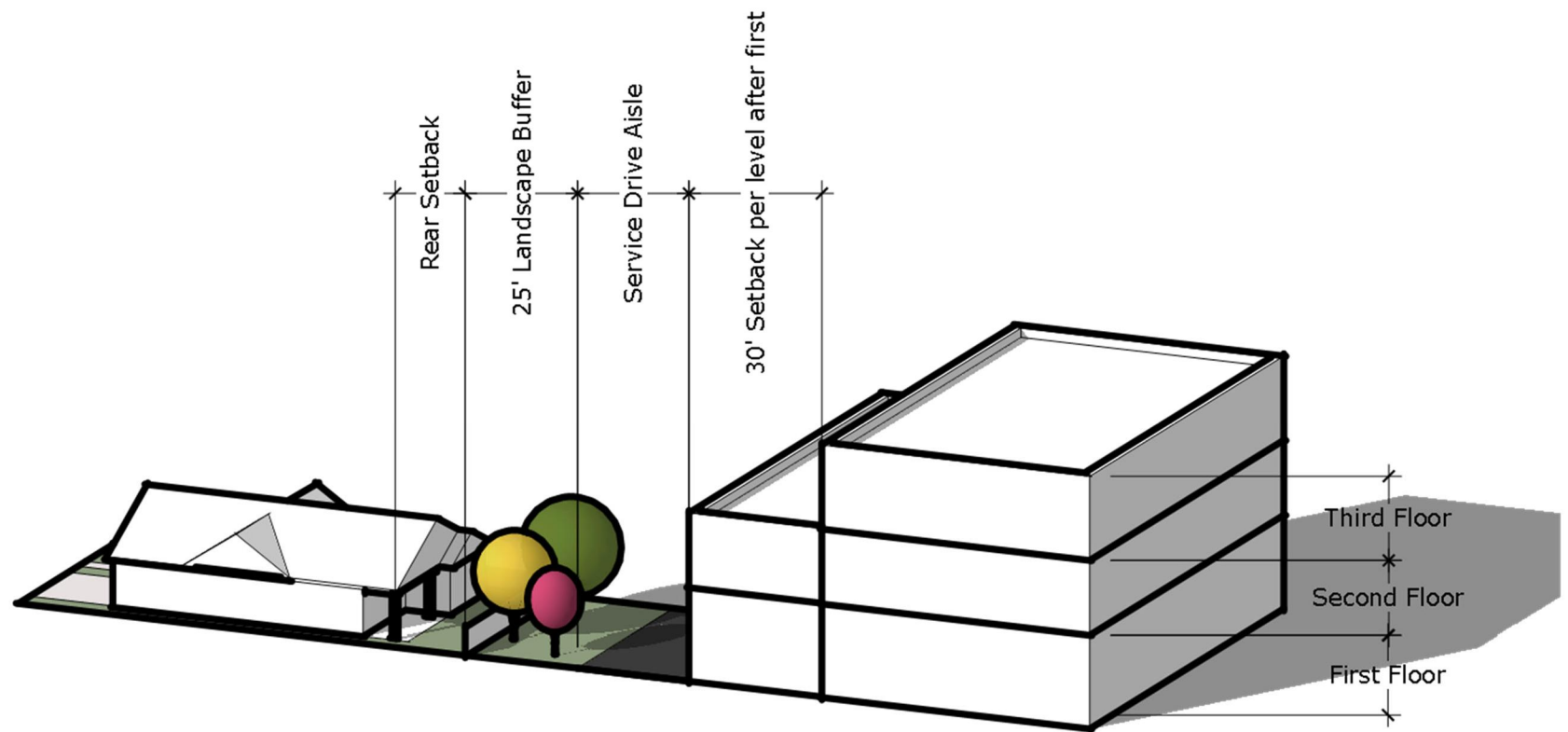
Option 4

Consider a combination or variation of Options 1, 2, or 3, and request staff review of Unified Development Code design standards as it relates to site design, building locations, and the relationship between single-family homes and commercial developments in or adjacent to mixed use areas. See Attachment 1 for examples.

Attachment 1



Note: Drive aisles that primarily provide utility, service, or delivery access would not be allowed within the additional setback (i.e. the buildings would be further away in these instances).



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