

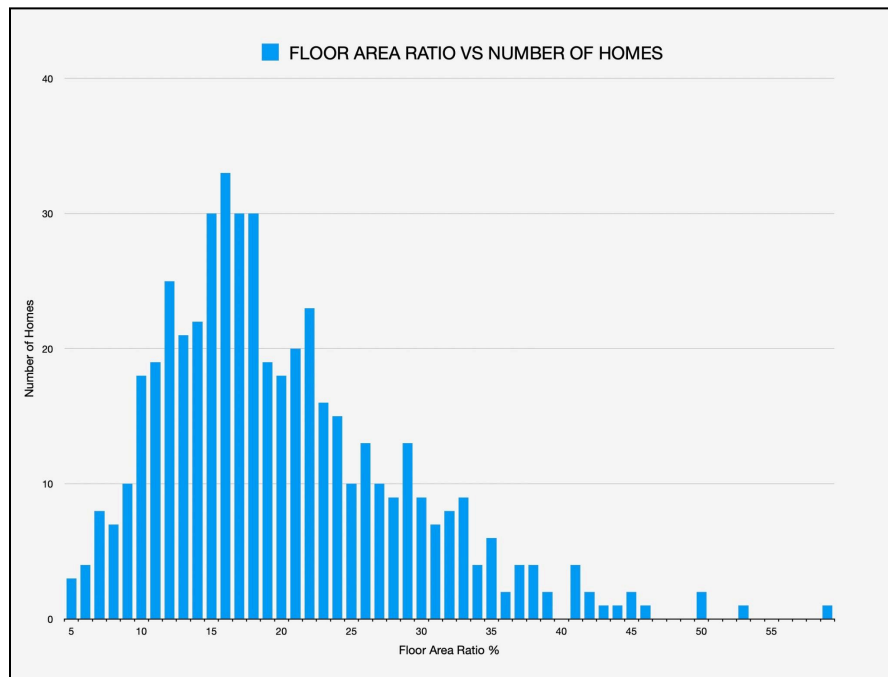
CRCRC SUMMARY OF BUILDING HEIGHT STUDY

Strike Force survey (2021) asked the question, *what do you dislike most about RW and what would you like to see for the future*. A high percentage of responses indicated a negative view towards some overly large or tall homes, particularly when compared to lot size. (See PDF)

Emails and public comment (2023) accumulated regarding new homes under construction that were maximizing height rules to build taller homes, impacting immediate neighbors' quality of life, and a sense among some that the pleasing character of the neighborhood was starting to change. A number of residents also called for a cautious, conservative approach, including those that said "do nothing".

FAR

We took a data-driven approach initially, looking at TCAD to determine FAR, which was notably imprecise, but gave us a general overview. We recognized that lot size in RW is variable, so choosing a percentage, say 40%, was going to unfairly impact some of the smaller lots on Pickwick and Gentry, for example. In order to keep things simple, we didn't feel that creating different rules for different lot sizes was going to be well-received. We were very cautious about use of FAR, keeping in mind the drainage manual and tree ordinance should mitigate some of the concerns, but were yet to be fully assessed.



The response to CRCRC Survey Q6 regarding use of FAR was evenly split, with many residents preferring to use alternate tools to control building size - like height measurement and tenting.

BUILDING HEIGHT

We took inventory of the existing built context in RW, including homes under construction and in-permitting. A high percentage of older and newer homes are single-story, which feel the most impact of much larger homes built along the setbacks, also taking into consideration upslope and downslope relationships.

We noted a pattern of older homes building with the slope, or “terracing”, often locating garages, carports or basements on the lower slope and out of view. More recent homes of varying sizes and styles were also using the slope to build a broad main floor, with a second story above on the upper slope, and a lower story (or third level) on the lower slope. At the same time, there was an uptick in large foundations on sloping lots, up to 10ft., with an additional 35ft. directly above.

The current rules for determining reference datum have caused some confusion, with many residents not realizing that any home can add back the grade change below the highest grade, up to 10ft., yielding a home higher than 35ft. A number of new builds incorrectly used either the entire lot or buildable area to determine grade change, in tandem with the 5ft. radius beyond the building footprint. However, due to the size of many new homes, the building footprint is already starting to match the buildable area.

The objective of the current rules was to provide relief for steeply sloping lots with an additional 10ft. of building height, starting at the lowest grade, when the area under the building footprint has 10ft. grade change. Ideally, this limits the additional height to the lower portion, assuming a lot is uniformly sloping. In the case of lots that may have a small knoll and the rest is gently sloping, the impacts are more notable, thus the “gaming” that many referenced.

In April 2023, we held an early public workshop with 12 posters covering every topic, with graphics, history, options, and feedback to date, hoping to solicit additional feedback and conversations from the public. We presented our findings and analysis graphically in May 2023.

Our interpretation of community input before the survey went out was a reluctance to change the max building height. We also heard before and after the survey to “enforce the rules”. Since the rules say building height maximum is 35ft., we first considered how to enforce 35ft. under our current rules, which on a very basic level meant no portion of the building can exceed 35ft., including on steeply sloping lots - which we observed had been the case until very recently. There were a few exceptions of homes built between 1985-1990, that appear to have a 45ft facade when measured to the ridgeline of a sloping roof.

We noted that 35ft. max height cannot be enforced when the reference datum is set by use of average grade or average of major building corners. It is no different from our current rules that allows additional height below the reference datum, yet we still included each of these options in our survey to see how the community felt in October 2023.

SURVEY

In Q4, we asked the community what they thought of three different options for measuring building height. There has been a lot of discussion about the interpretation of these responses with regard to the percentage of people that selected Option 3. We noted in April 2024, that 75 people wrote some version of “Option 3” in their comments, which amounted to 27% of the people that responded “yes” to Q3 (consider alternate building height measurements): 8% choose Option 1; 9% choose Option 2. We didn’t parse the comments and make assumptions about what people meant that didn’t select an option, yet the comments people included help clarify their answers, or lack of selection. For instance, someone that selected Option 1 commented: **Scenario #1, but step the height with each step in the foundation.** This almost sounds like “terracing”, or “parallel plane”, or “nothing above 35ft”. Based on the comments, it was also clear people did not view this process as “voting”, they were participating in a survey of ideas, the sum of which was our job to find consensus.

Additional comments when “Option 3” was not specifically noted or tallied:

- **Simplify - forget the slope issues. If someone is going to cut a giant flat lot - Max height should be 35 ft from the final buildable surface.**
- **Any of the three scenarios would be preferred to the current RW code.**
- **Would think you can use different calc based on the direction of the slope and the impact a tall facade has on neighboring lots. Especially if facade faces side or backyard of a neighbor.**
- **I believe if we incorporate a sky plane or step back above the 2nd floor (or when 25' above the average existing grade) we might be less intimidated by a 3rd floor.**
- **Height limit from natural existing grade**
- **Whichever forces new houses to more closely “match”**
- **I think 35 feet is too high. I think the maximum height should be limited to 2 stories. Consider using multiple scenarios, but only allow the final height calculation to be based on the most restrictive scenario.**
- **I think there should be a maximum wall height of less than 35' regardless of slope which will require people to build homes into the contour of their lot.**
- **Use the KISS method - simple is better. Look at other surrounding communities to see what works.**
- **Why not do it like the city of austin...the McMansion ordinance... if you wanna go above and beyond you go petition... this is ridiculous. Every builder rolls over RW codes... we have all these problems... put the hammer down**
- **I suggest the method that produces the shortest overall structure**
- **Because of the slopes in the neighborhood, I'd go with a standard height above existing grade (and or a maximum height above the highest existing grade. I think the idea is not to have buildings with imposing heights vs. neighbors. If the land is at X height, having a building Y height above that, seems to make sense to me**
- **I think the option of the parallel lines from existing grade seems most reasonable.**
- **at no point higher than 35' including the foundation**
- **This is confusing to my mind. An example is the house on Riley and Rollingwood. It is too tall.**

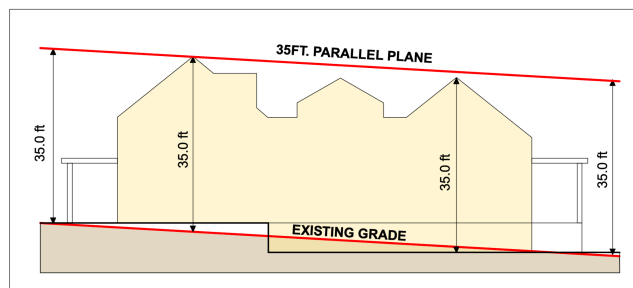
- These examples are **confusing** and I think difficult for the average lay person to understand. I do agree that building heights should be adjusted within reason on sloped lots.
- It's too easy to build a home that's 45' above existing grade if the grade at a single corner of the home is 10' above the minimum grade.
- Already new builds are too inconsistent with one another in size and style which **diminishes the beauty** of Rollingwood
- If it were up to me, I would be open to having alternate ways of measuring building height that at its core ensures that the primary intent of why we have a height limit on house builds is achieved (e.g. safety, **to not obscure things, minimize impact to surrounding areas**, etc.)...
- **Foundations should be considered** in overall height. A 10ft foundation that looks completely out of context and looms over all neighboring homes.
- When you walk by a house and it feels **imposing from the street**, it's too tall. Look at the new house on park hills with 3-4 balconies.
- **Take foundation height into question** as well as the added dirt to raise the yard that increases the height.

PARALLEL PLANE

In our research of other cities of similar size, topography, economics, and adjacency to a larger city, we started to see use of “parallel plane”. Even initially we didn’t fully understand how it was implemented. Effectively, it puts an air-space cap on the buildable area (using existing grade as the reference datum) so neighbors who are expecting new construction next door would never see anything higher than 35ft. above existing grade.

We started looking at house plans in RW with a 35ft. “pole” that we ran along the perimeter of the home. We found a high percentage of homes, (old/new, small/large, steeply sloping/flat, modern/traditional) were built within this framework. As architects, we immediately recognized this as a standard method of design when respecting context, scale, and topography. It wasn’t that “parallel plane” was first created and homes began to conform, but rather homes were built instinctively under that method without complaint, until newer homes began to impact neighbors and views. So by the same process of working backwards, planners found a framework that simply codified existing best practices which did not impact neighbors.

At this point we felt we had a solution that could work for all lots, given that 35ft is a generous umbrella under which to build. Council asked us to define a special exception for any outliers.

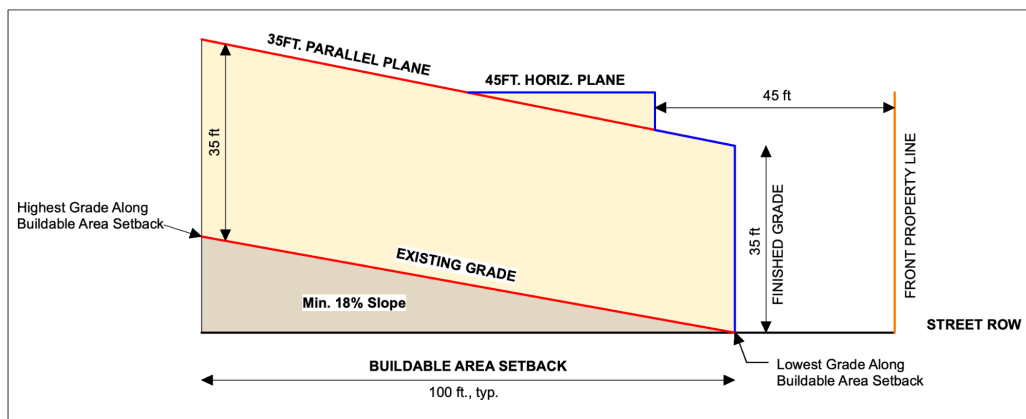
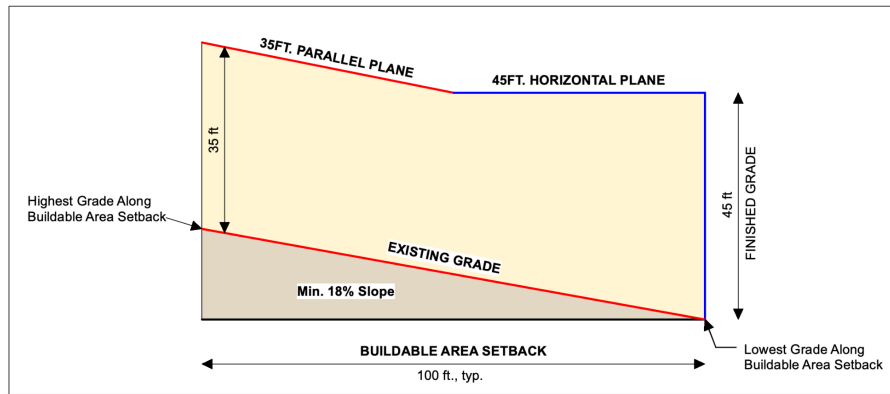


We took the opportunity to again reexamine our current code, as well as dig into our recommendations further. Since current code uses topo height(ft) to determine a reference datum, which doesn't always indicate a steeply sloping lot, we considered using maximum slope(%), measuring rise over run of the entire buildable area, to more accurately represent the true character of the property. From there we looked at other cities to find a % that was often used to distinguish “steeply sloping” in their codes, which we found to be between anywhere from 15-25%.

In order to compare, we made the following assumptions:

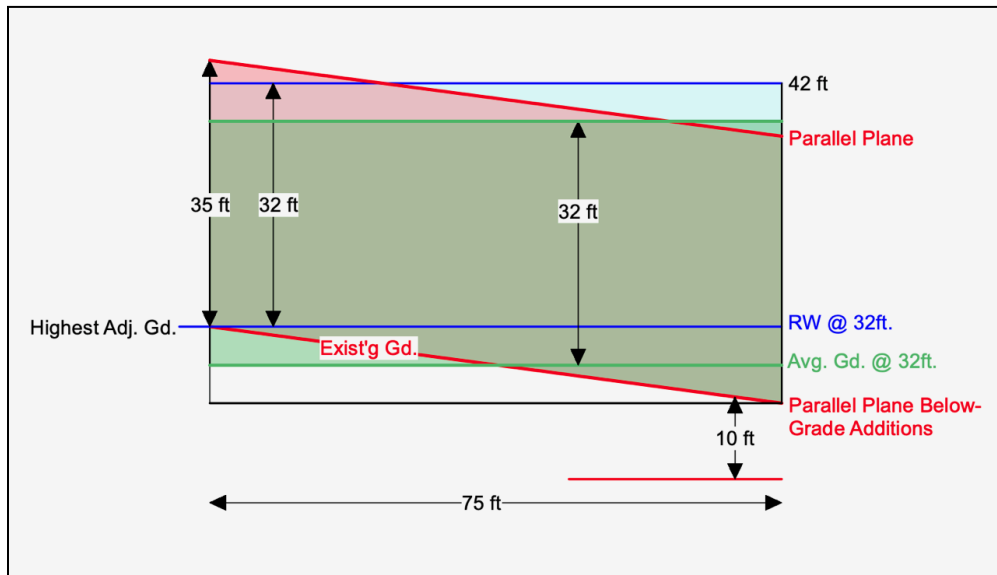
1. average lots in RW are roughly 100' x 150', assume about 75'-100' of buildable area along the setbacks;
2. by observation, a number of RW properties with 10' of slope do not appear “steep”, which is roughly 13% slope (10/75).
3. 20% was the most common number in use, which is equivalent to about 15' of change. We rounded down to 18% to be more lenient, which is about 13.5'.

We presented this option in our next meeting with the following graphics:



The public response in that meeting was to quickly reject these options entirely.

A few people throughout the process have been very vocal about their concerns for non-conformance and people not being able to build their current homes if the rules were to change. Therefore, lowering the max height was a non-starter, as a very high percentage of RW homes would then be “non-conforming”. However, these same few have ironically suggested lowering building height as a solution, using either our current code (RW in blue) or Average Grade (green), rather than Parallel Plane (red). Parallel Plane is the only method that lops off the top of intentionally tall structures, but allows the same amount of height when building below existing grade when not facing the front, and does not create “non-conformance”. Parallel Plane also limits flat roof structures from looming, providing more leniency for sloping roofs.



TENTING

The graphic above does not address tenting recommendations, which have not changed since being presented to council in April 2024. The dimensions are consistent with Austin, while attempting to simplify their rules, and are consistent with many new builds in RW. The survey indicated tenting was an acceptable tool to mitigate impacts along the setbacks, without necessarily changing the setback dimensions themselves. Another recommendation from recent public input is to keep 35ft. maximum along the setbacks - we do not recommend this approach.

