

SOUTH JORDAN CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: MARCH 25, 2025

FILE OVERVIEW

Item Name	Residential Front Yard Fencing and Park Strip Landscape Code Text Amendments
Applicant Address	11201 S Alisa Meadow Dr. South Jordan, UT 84095
File Number	PLZTA202400233
Applicant	Thomas & Rebekah Wiandt
Staff Author	Joe Moss, Long Range Planner

ITEM SUMMARY

The applicant is requesting two amendments to the Code:

- 1- Ordinance 2025-05 would allow for front yard fences on neighborhood streets and modify fencing development standards to allow for additional height for gates and pillars or posts. Staff is not in favor of all changes to front yard fence development standards that are included in the applicant's request shown in Exhibit A, and is recommending approval of an alternative amendment shown as Exhibit 1. The alternative still would allow for front yard fences, but at lower heights than proposed by the applicant.
- 2- Ordinance 2025-08 would amend the landscape requirements to reduce required live plant coverage in park strips from 50% to 25% and modify how that calculation is measured to include tree canopies. Staff is recommending denial.

TIMELINE

- **November 25, 2024** the applicant submitted a complete text amendment application to Staff for review. City Staff worked with the applicant to modify the proposed amendments for clarity prior to scheduling the item for a hearing date.

REPORT ANALYSIS

The applicant has requested to modify two sections of the Code. The applicant's request to modify the front yard fencing standards is contained in Ordinance 2025-05 and the request to modify park strip landscape requirements are contained in Ordinance 2025-08. The proposed changes for each ordinance are evaluated below.

Ordinance 2025-05, Residential Front Yard Fencing

Overview: The applicant has requested to modify residential fencing code in [§17.40.020.H.4](#) to allow front yard fences on neighborhood streets, which are currently prohibited. They are also proposing amendments to current standards for height and column spacing. Staff has proposed an alternative amendment that would still allow front yard fencing, but with additional clarification on location, materials, and revised height limits. The applicant's request is shown in Exhibit A and the Staff drafted alternative is shown in Exhibit 1. The following analysis compares both proposed amendments to existing Code requirements:

Location:

- *Current Code:* Front yard fences are only permitted for lots that front collector or arterial streets. On neighborhood streets only side yard fencing is permitted in front yards. Fences are required to comply with clear vision area requirements in [§16.04.200.J](#) to prohibit blocking critical sight lines.
- *Exhibit A:* Allows fences along the "...front lot line to the right-of-way line or sidewalk of a neighborhood street". It would maintain the current clear vision area requirements.
- *Exhibit 1:* Permits fencing in "a front yard, side yard, or along a front or side property line." It would maintain the current clear vision area requirements and in addition it prohibits fencing from being located between the sidewalk and the street. It also makes reference to [§12.04.070](#) which prohibits obstructions in the right-of-way and sidewalk.

Analysis: South Jordan's current ordinance is unique in prohibiting front yard fences on neighborhood streets, as most area municipalities do permit low height front yard fences. A front yard fence can be an attractive and positive visual element in a residential streetscape when designed in an inviting and fitting way. The proposed amendment in Exhibit 1 allows a fence to be built further into a front yard, not only along a right of way or sidewalk, while also making it clear that sidewalks and the right-of-way are not allowed to be fenced. These

clarifications add more flexibility for residents as to where fences should be placed, while preserving publicly accessible spaces.

Materials:

- *Current Code:* Front yard fences may be constructed of decorative wrought iron, simulated wrought iron, vinyl pickets, masonry, or solid vinyl. It also permits brick pillars.
- *Exhibit A:* Does not modify existing materials requirements.
- *Exhibit 1:* Permits all existing allowed materials with the addition of wood pickets, wood post and rail, and vinyl post and rail. It also clarifies that all allowed fencing materials may be used with or without masonry pillars.

Analysis: Exhibit 1 would expand available materials options than currently allowed or would be allowed under the applicant's proposal in Exhibit A. The inclusion of wood pickets and post and rail style fencing would be in keeping with the residential and sometimes rural character of South Jordan's diverse neighborhoods.

Height: Diagrams relating to this section can be found in Attachment A.

- *Current Code:* Open style fencing that is "nonobscuring" such as wrought iron can be up to four feet (4') in height. Solid fencing is limited to three feet (3'). Gate height is not mentioned in the current code, and thus would be limited to the same as the fence panel. Posts and pillars may only extend four inches (4") above the fence panel.
- *Exhibit A:* Keeps the existing height limits (4' for open style, and 3' for solid) with the following modifications:
 - Gates may be up to six feet (6') if nonvisually obscuring or four feet (4') if solid.
 - Posts and pillars may extend up to two feet (2') beyond the fence panel or gate. This would permit a total maximum height for pillars of eight feet (8') if associated with a six feet (6') tall open style gate.
 - The proposed amendment clarifies that lighting, finials and adornments are included in the height measurement.
- *Exhibit 1:* Keeps the existing height limits (four feet (4') for open style, and three feet (3') for solid) with the following modifications:
 - Posts and pillars and gates may extend up to one foot (1') beyond the fence panel. This would permit a total maximum height for projections of five feet (5') if associated with a four feet (4') tall open style fence.
 - The proposed amendment clarifies that lighting, finials and adornments are included in the height measurement.

Analysis: The current limit of four inches (4") above the fence panel can prohibit many finials, lighting, and post caps that can add functionality and aesthetic value. Both proposed amendments clarify that finials, lighting and adornments are included in

height measurements. Exhibit 1 would increase the allowed projection height above the fence panel by nine inches (9") and would be in scale with lower fence heights that are characteristic for front yards. Gates would be an allowed projection. The applicant's proposal in Exhibit A would allow for gates up to six feet (6') if open style, and their associated pillars up to eight feet (8'). Fences in these heights are not currently permitted for front yards and are typically only utilized in taller screening and privacy fences. Staff's research in surrounding cities found that front yard fences are typically limited to four feet (4') on residential neighborhood streets.

Post and Pillar Spacing:

- *Current Code:* Requires brick pillars are spaced no closer than ten feet (10') apart.
- *Exhibit A:* Reduces the minimum separation to eight feet (8').
- *Exhibit 1:* Reduces the minimum separation to eight feet (8'). It allows gate posts or pillars to be exempt from minimum spacing requirements.

Analysis: Standard fencing materials generally come in eight foot (8') lengths, but are not commonly found in ten foot (10') lengths. Reducing the spacing requirement to eight feet (8') would accommodate material availability and does not have any anticipated negative impacts. An exception for gate posts is practical since most gates are less than eight feet (8') in width.

Ordinance 2025-08 Park Strip Landscape Requirements

Overview: The applicant is proposing modifications to the outdoor landscaping requirements in [§16.30.040](#) as follows:

- *Current Code:* Requires that all front and side yards, including park strips, incorporate a minimum of fifty percent (50%) of the required landscape area with live plant material unless a conditional use permit is approved. Park strips wider than five feet (5') are also required to plant street trees at a maximum spacing of least fifty feet. Tree canopies do not count toward the live plant material coverage since the measurement is taken at the ground plane.
- *The proposed amendment:* Reduces the amount of live plant coverage required in park strips to a minimum of twenty-five percent (25%) and removes the requirement that live plant coverage is measured at the ground plane in order to allow tree canopies to be included in this requirement.

Analysis: The original requirement of 50% live plant coverage was created in 2021 with guidance from Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District to enable more water wise landscapes. While any plant would require more water than a non-living landscape, the use of water saving native and drought tolerant plantings can provide beneficial plant coverage at a fraction of traditional landscapes. The current ordinance's requirement for a minimum

of 50% live plant material covering the ground plane has several positive impacts including urban heat island reduction, increased drainage capabilities, and aesthetic value to ensure the landscape fits the region and climate. The proposed amendment would reduce the required vegetation cover by half, which would minimize these benefits.

The proposed amendment allows tree canopies to count toward the minimum live plant coverage. This could result in a scenario where trees could largely meet the minimum planting requirement resulting in few live plantings at ground level. Street trees are required in park strips, so the overall effect of the proposed amendment would likely result in an overall reduction of required live plant cover on the ground by more than 25%.

The proposed amendment removes the specification of where live plant coverage is measured. This ambiguity could lead to administrative difficulties calculating this requirement.

Related items: The applicant previously received a conditional use permit ([PLCUP202200214](#)) on March 28, 2023 for reduced live plant coverage in the front yard landscaping with the following condition: *“Based on a detriment identified during the discussion, the adjoining park strip will be brought up to city code, or receive the proper approval/variance from city staff on their park strip plan; whether in connection with their fencing variance application, or through other means.”* In order for this permit to remain in compliance with this condition, the park strip landscape would need to be in conformance with city code. If the landscape code was amended, the conditional use permit would remain valid as long as the park strip is in conformance with new code requirements.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION

General Plan Conformance

Ordinance 2025-05, Residential Front Yard Fencing

The ordinance as proposed by the applicant in Exhibit A is not entirely in conformance with the following goals and strategies from the general plan, however Exhibit 1 is in conformance with the following:

- LIVE GOAL 4: Maintain existing and well-maintained single-family residential neighborhoods
- GROW GOAL 4: Develop and maintain a pattern of residential land uses that provides for a variety of densities and types and maintains the high standards of existing development

Ordinance 2025-08 Park Strip Landscape Requirements

The proposed ordinance is not in conformance with the following goals and strategies from the general plan:

- LIVE GOAL 4: Maintain existing and well-maintained single-family residential neighborhoods
- GROW GOAL 4: Develop and maintain a pattern of residential land uses that provides for a variety of densities and types and maintains the high standards of existing development
- GrG3.4. Help minimize the urban heat island effect by encouraging lighter color building materials for roof-tops, parking lots, roadways, pathways, planting trees that provide shade, etc.
 - GrG5.3. Implement rain gardens and other storm water collection and retention systems
 - GrG5.4. Continue to develop and implement Low Impact Development (LID) standards to improve soil permeability and to avoid costly storm drainage systems

Strategic Priorities Conformance:

Ordinance 2025-05, Residential Front Yard Fencing

The ordinance as proposed by the applicant in Exhibit A is not entirely in conformance the following directives from the Strategic Direction, however Exhibit 1 is in conformance with the following Strategic Direction:

- BRE-1. Develops effective, well-balanced, and consistently applied ordinances and policies
- BRE-2. Implements ordinances and policies that encourage quality community growth and development

Ordinance 2025-08 Park Strip Landscape Requirements

The proposed ordinance is not in conformance with the following directives from the Strategic Direction:

- BRE-1. Develops effective, well-balanced, and consistently applied ordinances and policies
- BRE-2. Implements ordinances and policies that encourage quality community growth and development
- SG- 2. Creates and supports environmentally sustainable programs including water conservation, recycling, energy conservation, and air quality improvement to ensure the financial well-being and long-term sustainability of the community

Findings:

Ordinance 2025-05, Residential Front Yard Fencing

The following table details front yard fencing requirements in the existing Code, the applicant's proposed text (Exhibit A), and Staff's recommended alternative (Exhibit 1).

Requirement	Current Code	Exhibit A	Exhibit 1
Location	Only allowed in front yards along collector and arterial roads (Side fences allowed)	Allows front yard fences in any front yard along ROW line or along sidewalk	Allows in front yard, prohibits between sidewalk and road.
Fence Height	3' max for solid fences 4' for open fences	3' max for solid fences 4' for open fences	3' max for solid fences 4' for open fences
Gate Height	3' max for solid fences 4' for open fences	4' max for solid fences 6' for open fences	Gate may project an additional 12" above fence panel (5' max)
Post/ Pillar Height	4" above fence panel (4'4" max)	24" above gate or fence panel (8' max)	12" above fence panel (5' max)
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• decorative wrought iron• simulated wrought iron• vinyl pickets• masonry• solid vinyl• masonry pillars	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• decorative wrought iron• simulated wrought iron• vinyl pickets• masonry• solid vinyl• masonry pillars	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• decorative wrought iron• simulated wrought iron• vinyl pickets• masonry• solid vinyl• masonry pillars• wood pickets• wood post and rail• vinyl post and rail
Pillar Spacing	10' minimum	8' minimum	8' minimum, gate pillars exempt

In addition to the requirements in the summary table the following are included in the proposed amendments:

- Both proposed amendments maintain current requirements for clear view areas.
- Both proposed amendments clarify that objects affixed to pillars such as lighting, adornments, and finials are included in the maximum height measurement.

Ordinance 2025-08 Park Strip Landscape Requirements

- The proposed amendment would reduce the requirement for living plant material in all park strips from 50% to 25%.
- The proposed amendment would allow tree canopies to be included in the live plant material coverage calculation and remove a specification that live plant coverage is measured at the ground plane in order to include tree canopies.

Conclusions:

Ordinance 2025-05, Residential Front Yard Fencing

- The proposed amendment shown in Exhibit A is not in conformance with the General Plan and the City's Strategic Priorities.
- The proposed amendment shown in Exhibit 1 is in conformance with the General Plan and the City's Strategic Priorities.

Ordinance 2025-08 Park Strip Landscape Requirements

- The proposed amendment is not in conformance with the General Plan and the City's Strategic Priorities.

Planning Staff Recommendation:

Ordinance 2025-05, Residential Front Yard Fencing

Staff is in support of the following modifications to the current Zoning Code:

- *Allowing front yard fencing on neighborhood streets.* Many neighboring cities allow front yard fencing, and it is also permitted in areas of South Jordan such as Daybreak and homes located on arterial and collector streets. Staff is in support of permitting all homes to have a front yard fence, but acknowledges that these should be done within design and development standards to ensure high quality neighborhoods.
- *Reducing minimum column spacing.* Reducing the minimum spacing to 8' from 10' in would accommodate standard fence panel sizes and staff is in support of this modification.

Staff is not in support of the following modifications as requested by the applicant:

- *Additional height for gates.* A maximum of six feet (6'). This is an increase beyond what is currently allowed in South Jordan and surrounding communities. Staff is of the opinion that this increase would create less inviting neighborhoods. Staff's proposed alternative would keep gates to a maximum of four feet (4').
- *Additional post and pillar height.* Both the applicant and Staff proposed amendments include a clarification that lighting, finials, or other adornments are included in the

overall height measurement. In order to account for this, Staff is comfortable with an increase from 4" to 12", however the applicant is proposing an increase of 24" which would allow pillars up to 8' in height if associated with a 6' gate. Staff is of the opinion that this is not a reasonable height for residential front yards since 8' fencing is typically only permitted as a screening device.

In addition to the applicant's proposed changes, staff is in favor of additional clarifications to materials and location of fencing that are included in Exhibit 1.

Staff recommends approval of the ordinance as shown in Exhibit 1 based on the report analysis, findings, and conclusions listed above.

Ordinance 2025-08 Park Strip Landscape Requirements

The existing landscape standards were created in 2021 in conjunction with recommendations from the Jordan Valley Water Conservation District. The requirement that live vegetation cover a minimum of 50% of the park strip is intended to allow for water-wise landscaping while still providing live plantings that reduce urban heat island effects and contribute to landscaping aesthetics that fit the local area. Staff is not in support of the request to modify this requirement.

The proposed amendment also modifies how live plant material is measured to include tree canopies in the calculation. This would significantly reduce planting requirements for park strips since street trees are typically required in addition to plant coverage at the ground plane. Staff is not in support of this request since it reduces existing standards and creates additional difficulty in administering the Code due to an increased complexity and lack of clarity about how and where the plant coverage should be measured.

Staff recommends denial of the proposed amendment based on the report analysis, findings, and conclusions above.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION

Required Action:

Recommendation for City Council

Scope of Decision:

This is a legislative item that will be decided by the City Council. The decision should consider prior adopted policies, especially the General Plan.

Standard of Approval:

Utah Code [§ 10-9a-102](#) grants the City Council a general land use authority to enact regulations that it considers necessary or appropriate for the use and development of land in the City. (See Utah Code [§ 10-9a-501](#) et seq.)

Motion Ready:

I move that the Planning Commission recommends that the City Council approves:

1. Ordinance 2025-05, Residential Zones Front Yard Fencing Text Amendment, as shown in Exhibit 1;

And denies:

1. Ordinance 2025-08, Park Strip Landscaping Amendment.

Alternatives:

1. Recommend approval of the application.
2. Recommend approval with conditions.
3. Schedule the application for a recommendation at some future date.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

1. Ordinance 2025-05
 - a. Exhibit A, Residential Zones Front Yard Fencing Text Amendment
 - b. Exhibit 1, Residential Zones Front Yard Fencing Text Amendment
2. Attachment A, Fence Height Diagrams
3. Ordinance 2025-08
 - a. Exhibit A, Park Strip Landscaping Text Amendment