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CASE: Executive Summary for Townhome/Townhouse Development Regulations

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BACKGROUND

This memorandum is intended to serve as a summary to describe the proposed revisions to Article 7 (Base Zoning Districts) as they relate to minimum standards for townhome development. (Note that the NC Building Code designates them as “townhouses”.) The CDO defines a townhome (or townhouse) as “A single-family dwelling unit constructed in a series, group or row of attached units separated by property lines and with a yard on at least two sides. (Source: North Carolina State Building Code, Vol. 1, § 201.2 and Vol. VII, § 202).

The nature of townhome development, coupled with our zoning regulations, pose several challenges related to administration. These include:

- Closely spaced prominent driveways which lead to safety concerns on front load units;
- Lack of front yards and landscaping;
- Difficulty in provision of public services such as trash and garbage collection;
- Smaller lot sizes which, which coupled with driveway location, lead to utility conflicts; and
- Inability to provide enough space for healthy street trees due to the above factors.

In terms of development styles, townhomes are typically either developed as “front-load” or “rear-load” units. Front-load units have their driveways and/or garages from a major street at the front of the homes whereas rear-load units take access off of an alley or a common parking area.

The City initially proposed an ordinance amendment to require all townhomes to be served by a rear alley. After further examination it was determined that the North Carolina General Statutes’ prohibition of the regulation of the location of garage doors would preclude this requirement.

The staff has examined a way to alleviate the above issues related to front-load units. The proposed amendment retains the majority of the previously proposed design language that applies to alley loaded units and proposes new standards for front-load units.

The amendment changes Section 10.3.1 to clarify that minimum driveway coverage requirements are also applicable to front load townhouse units. The existing 30% maximum coverage for front yard driveways is proposed to be increased to 40% and the amendment specifies that all minimum technical standards must be met (such as driveway spacing, utility separation and street trees). Townhouse units that utilize a 20 -foot wide driveway (two car widths) are allowed to exceed the 40% requirement if all other technical standards as discussed above, are met. Note that the increase from 30% to 40% is also applicable for single family detached units, and not just townhomes.

Section 7.7.4 is proposed to be amended to add a section for front-load townhomes that refers to the revised Section 10.3.1. This section reiterates that all technical standards must be met and refers to the Technical Standards Manual (TSM) for specifics.

The previously developed design requirements for rear load units are proposed to remain when those units are developed.

SUMMARY

Main features of the proposed revisions to Section 7.7.4 include:

- All attached homes are required to front on a public or private street, or an open space such as a town square
- Two off-street parking spaces are required per unit and may be provided within a garage. In lieu of providing parking on the individual parcel, part or all of the required parking may be provided on-street or within a common parking area. Additional parking (for visitors) is required at the rate of one space per two units and may also be provided on-street or within a common parking area. Visitor parking is not required for front-load units with the wider two-car driveways.
- Alleys are to be constructed to a minimum width of twelve (12) feet for one-way traffic and sixteen (16) feet for two-way traffic.
- Minimum setbacks for rear-load units are ten (10) feet from all streets. Setbacks from the alley to the garage are also a minimum of ten (10) feet. Groups of structures are proposed to be a minimum of fifteen (15) feet apart.
- Rear-load units are required to provide off-street parking along one side of the main street. Curb extensions are required on the street to provide adequate room for street trees.
- Duplex and triplex projects, which have shared driveways and are on existing lots of record, as of the date of adoption of the ordinance, are exempt from these requirements.

These changes are intended to provide clear guidance relative to new townhome development and to ultimately achieve safer and more efficient design. The changes are also intended to help the City achieve safe and simpler provision of public services/utilities and to provide for the establishment of a desirable street tree canopy.