

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Building Code Task Force for New Construction Meeting January 27, 2021

The Building Code Task Force for New Construction met in formal session Wednesday, January 27, 2021, at 2:00 p.m. in the Alcazar Room at City Hall. The meeting was called to order by John Valdes, Chairperson and the following were present:

1. Roll Call: John Valdes, Commissioner-Chair
Sarah Ryan
Robin Moore
Jon Benoit
Les Thomas
Irene Arriola
John Wooldridge

Absent: Rob Matthews, excused

City Staff: David Birchim, Director, Planning & Building Department
Reuben Franklin, Director, Public Works
Buddy Schauland, Building Official
Jenny Wolfe, Historic Preservation Officer
Denise May, City Attorney
Candice Seymour, Recording Secretary

2. General Public hearings for Items Not on the Agenda

(None)

3. Discussion and Recommendation on the use of Lot Grading Plans for Infill Residential Development

Mr. Birchim gave a brief overview of the subject and items for the Board to consider including:

- Spot surveys to encourage lot grading plans
- Utilizing a similar system to St. Johns County to make the process uniform for contractors
- Limiting fill on property
- Concerns with raised garages

The Task Force discussed:

- Fill limitations that would not prohibit a monolithic slab, but would encourage stem wall or pier construction in low-lying areas
- 40% of insurance companies unwilling to insure open off-grade construction
- FEMA garage requirements for vents
- Limiting impervious surfaces
- Support for utilizing the county grading plan criteria
- Infill property requirements
- Limiting fill to 6-10 inches from crown of road
- Researching what financial impacts elevating the garage may have
- Ways to educate homeowners on the importance of a lower elevation garage

- Requiring a grading plan for infill construction in areas that did not have a master drainage plan
- Concern for the cost of additional surveys for a grading plan
- Necessity for requirements that allowed for some flexibility, variance, or appeal processes
- Possibility of applying a driveway slope minimums/maximums
- Necessity of devoting more resources to storm water issues utilizing low-impact development techniques such as swales
- Promoting additional adaptive ideas and incentives such as taller structures with smaller footprints to allow for more pervious surface area
- Clarification that the crown of the road may change if there were no impacts to the surrounding properties, though most road elevations were maintained
- Consideration for water management of water sheeting off roofs rather than relying on swales and other shared water management techniques
- Fill concerns varied by neighborhood
- Per FEMA, garages below freeboard could only be used for parking of vehicles and storage and required vents
- Grading plans could be required for building additions and accessory features of existing homes such as pools, patios, or detached structures
- Possibility of requiring lot grading plans only for projects that exceed an impervious square footage threshold
- Impervious surface ratio requirements which would require Comprehensive Plan amendments
- Site grading plan requirements would be easiest solution to implement by staff
- Encouraging or requiring impervious materials for driveways, walkways, or patios
- Consideration of vegetation and how well they absorb water
- Concerns with the damming effects of infill construction and associated legal concerns which has caused the county to reconsider its site plan requirements
- Suggestion to require a lot grading plan with spot elevations rather than a topographical survey to help minimize costs and simplicity of approval
- Desire to have accurate site plan elevations
- Minimum threshold for additional square footage with recommendation of around 200 square feet

Mr. Birchim stated he would draft ordinance language based on the task force's discussion and bring it back for review before presenting it to the City Commission. He added that he would determine whether the public works department could review and inspect a grading plan not done by a surveyor or engineer.

Continued discussion included whether the City would be liable for incorrect data submitted by an applicant.

4. Discussion of Possible Incentives for Property Owners to Use Building Construction Techniques Which Do Not Require Land Filling

Discussion included the following subjects:

- Incentives of additional square footage if utilizing crawl-space pier construction
- The need for incentives to encourage participation
- Incentives for maintaining stormwater on property such as relief from stormwater fees

- Small non-conforming lots had limited incentives to build on piers
- Pier construction would not always solve impermeable surface problems
- Conditions to qualify for extra lot coverages could include:
 - Pier construction with no slab underneath
 - Semi-permeable paving techniques
 - Landscaping requirements
- Homeowners not educated enough to consider flood elevation and pier construction
- Ways to educate homebuyers and promote the benefits Florida-friendly building
- Breaks on fees or taxes and more effective incentives
- Stormwater credits for lots considered sustainable
- Lot coverage incentive should not affect the overall impervious surface requirements of a property
- Pier construction did not always mitigate issues brought on by regular rain events

Mr. Birchim advised that he would bring a summary of the prior discussion to the upcoming meeting which was scheduled for Thursday, February 4, 2021 at 9:00a.m.

6. Adjournment

Having no further business, Commissioner Valdes adjourned the meeting at 3:58 P.M.¹

Mr. Birchim reviewed potential criteria for receiving an additional square footage incentive including:

- Mandatory pier construction with no slab under the house
- Impervious or semi-pervious driveway material
- Shade tree(s)
- Cistern on site
- 5-foot greenspace around the perimeter of the property
- Maximum total impervious surface threshold on the lot
- Gutters/water management from the roof

Public Comments

The Board heard comments from the following members of the public:

- Charles Pappas

5. Closing Remarks

Final discussion included:

- Consideration of ADA needs for residential homes as the trend towards lifting homes increased

¹ Transcribed by Candice Seymour