

CITY OF PULLMAN

Public Works and Planning Departments

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MEMORANDUM

TO:

Pullman Planning Commission

FROM:

Pete Dickinson, Planning Director

FOR:

Meeting of January 26, 2011

SUBJECT:

Request to Initiate Zoning Code Amendment

Garage Design Standards

DATE:

January 19, 2011

Chris Clark, a realtor with Windermere Real Estate in Pullman, has approached the planning department with a request to initiate a zoning code revision regarding the garage design standards for residential districts. This memorandum describes his request, and supplies background information pertinent to the matter.

The garage design standards were established by the city in November of 2003 as part of a series of zoning code amendments produced to implement the 1999 Pullman Comprehensive Plan. Acting on citizen complaints, as well as observations by both planning staff and Planning Commission members, the city adopted the garage design standards to de-emphasize the presence of garages when viewing a property from the street. These design standards, set forth in Subsection 17.75.080(8), are as follows:

Garages and Carports. In addition to the other development standards contained in this Chapter, the standards below shall apply to garages and carports in all residential districts.

(a) Minimum Required Yards. All garages and carports which have the main entrance perpendicular to a street shall have a minimum yard of twenty (20) feet adjacent to that street. Garages and carports for which the main entrance is not perpendicular to the street from which access is gained shall have a driveway at least twenty (20) feet in length from the edge of the main entrance of the garage or carport to the edge of the property line abutting the street from which access is obtained.

- (b) <u>Design</u>. All garages and carports, be they attached to or detached from the principal building(s) on a lot, shall be designed to meet at least one of the following criteria:
 - (i) the setback for the garage or carport from an adjacent street is equal to or greater than some other part of the façade;
 - (ii) the garage or carport is limited to no more than sixty (60) percent of the width of the façade on which the vehicular entrance to the garage or carport is located;
 - (iii) the floor level of the garage or carport is four (4) feet or more below the grade of the street from which access is gained at the driveway to said garage or carport;
 - (iv) the vehicular entrance to the garage or carport is placed at more than a forty-five (45) degree angle to a lot line abutting an adjacent street; or,
 - (v) an architectural feature(s), such as a bedroom-size window, pedestrian door, or balcony, is installed in a garage wall facing an adjacent street or said architectural feature is installed on a wall or dormer located directly above the vehicular entrance to the garage or carport and within ten (10) horizontal feet of the vehicular entrance to the garage or carport.

As used in this Paragraph, "adjacent street" means a street that abuts a lot line of the lot on which the garage or carport is located.

As part of his real estate activities, Mr. Clark is currently marketing homes built by Copper Basin Construction in the Whispering Hills subdivisions near Old Wawawai Road on Sunnyside Hill. Several of the lots in these subdivisions are smaller parcels with lot widths between 55 and 60 feet. Mr. Clark has found that there is a market for single family homes with three-car garages on these smaller parcels, but he indicates that Copper Basin is encountering difficulty designing such homes in a manner that complies with the garage design criteria cited above. For example, on a narrower lot, it is a challenge to design the front façade of the structure so that the three-car garage is limited to no more than 60 percent of the width of the façade [the criterion specified above in Subparagraph 17.75.080(8)(b)(ii)].

Memorandum to Planning Commission January 19, 2011 Page 3

To assist in visualizing its challenges, Copper Basin provided several drawings for review. These drawings are explained below.

- Attachment "A" shows a house and garage that would comply with the design standards because the garage consumes only 55 percent of the front façade, but the overall structure is too wide (at 60 feet, 2 inches) to fit on the smaller lots established in the Whispering Hills subdivisions
- Attachment "B" depicts a structure that would fit on the narrower Whispering Hills lots, but the building does not comply with the design standards because: a) the garage consumes 68 percent of the front façade; b) the setback for the house is greater than the garage; c) there is no architectural feature (such as a door or window) in the garage wall or in a wall directly above the garage and within 10 horizontal feet of the garage wall; d) the garage faces the street (as opposed to having a side entry); and e) the elevation of the garage and the street are the same
- Attachment "C" presents a structure that would fit on the narrower lots and would conform to the design criteria; even though the garage consumes 68 percent of the front façade, it complies with code because a portion of the house has the same setback as the garage, and there are windows installed in the garage entrance wall; in presenting this alternative to planning staff, Mr. Clark stated that, although this design does comply with the regulations, he perceived this structure to be unattractive

Given the difficulties associated with placing a compliant structure on the narrower lots of the Whispering Hills subdivisions, Mr. Clark is requesting that the criterion cited in Subparagraph 17.75.080(8)(b)(ii) be modified to allow garages to consume a maximum of 65 percent of the front façade (in contrast to the existing 60 percent figure).

Planning staff recognizes that the garage standards can be confining, especially for homes on smaller lots. However, planning staff is opposed to changing the regulations for several reasons. First, from staff's perspective, the garage design criteria as written have been effective in meeting the objective of reducing the prominence of garages on residential properties. Second, the 60 percent figure at issue was originally based on successful regulations used by other cities, and while this figure may have been somewhat arbitrary when placed in the draft 2003 zoning code revisions, it was thoroughly reviewed in a public vetting process prior to the adoption of said revisions. Third, the code offers several reasonable ways to meet the garage design standards. As indicated above, if an architect must design a home with a garage that takes up more than 60 percent of the width of the front façade due to the narrowness of a lot, he/she can design the structure so that a portion of the house is built at the same setback as the

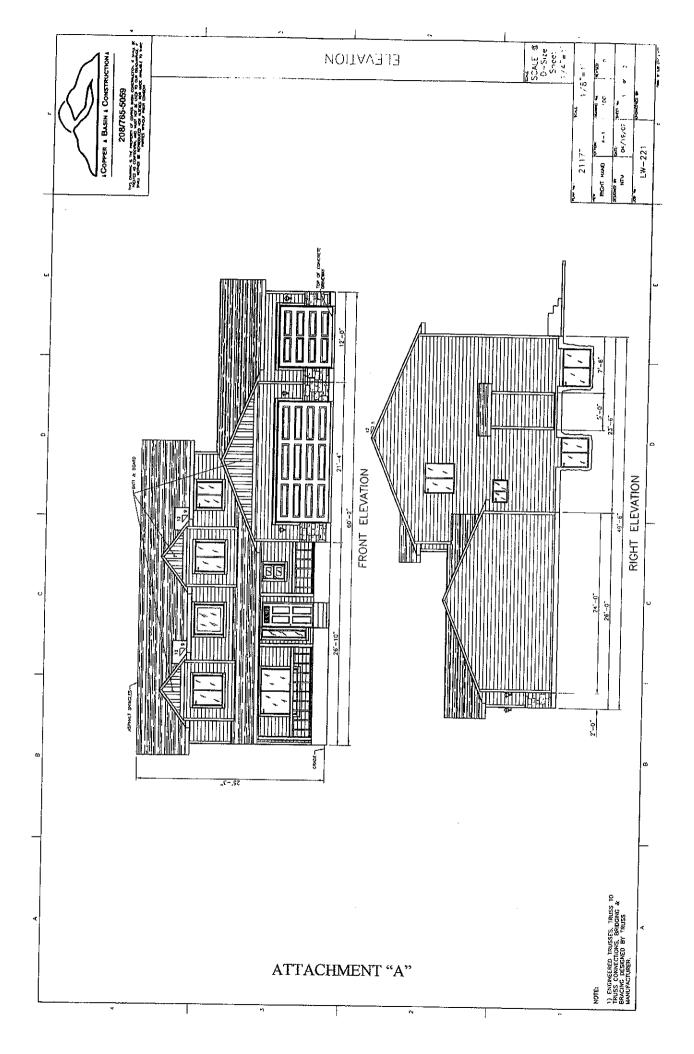
Memorandum to Planning Commission January 19, 2011 Page 4

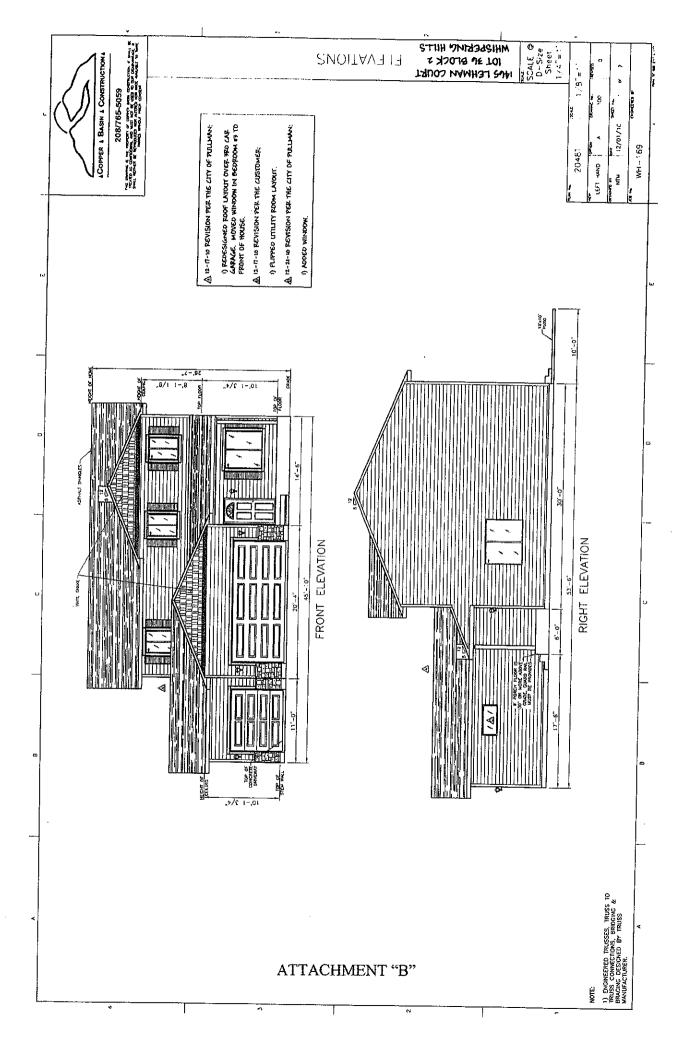
garage, or design it so that a window is installed in a wall above the garage. Staff agrees that the structure depicted in Attachment "C" is unattractive, but staff believes there are plenty of opportunities to use the existing regulations to design aesthetically pleasing houses with three-car garages on narrow lots. For instance, rather than installing windows in a tall garage wall as shown in the drawing marked as Attachment "C," one could meet the design standards in a much more attractive fashion by placing the window(s) in a second story wall or dormer that is set back a bit from the garage wall, as shown in the photograph of a Pullman house below.

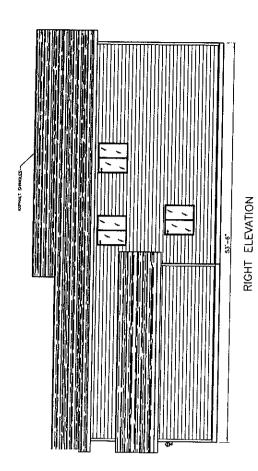


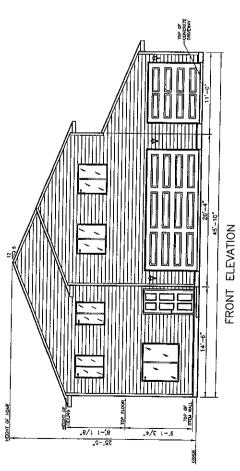
According to Zoning Code Section 17.175.030(4), amendments to the text of the zoning code may only be initiated by the planning director, the Planning Commission, or the City Council. The Commission is requested to review this matter and make a determination as to whether or not to begin the text amendment process. If the Commission decides in the affirmative, the process involves a public hearing before the Commission and final review/action by the City Council.

Attachments









ATTACHMENT "C"