

**City of Culver City, California
Agenda Item Report**

Meeting Date: 06/08/2015		Item Number: <u>A-1</u>	
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM: (1) Discussion of the Subject of Large Single Family Developments (“Mansionization”) in the City and (2) Direction to the City Manager Related Thereto.			
Contact Person/Dept.: Sol Blumenfeld / Thomas Gorham / Planning		Phone Number: 310-253-5700 310-253-5727	
Fiscal Impact: Yes ☐ No ☒		General Fund: Yes ☐ No ☐	
Public Hearing: ☐		Action Item: ☒ Attachments: ☒	
Commission Action Required: Yes ☐ No ☒		Date: _____	
Public Notification: (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas: (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas – City Council (06/03/15); Ongoing Topics – Planning and Zoning “Mansionization” (06/03/15); (PUBLISH) Culver City News (05/28/15 and 06/04/15); (POST) City’s Public Notification Web Page (05/22/15)			
Department Approval: Sol Blumenfeld (06/02/15)		City Attorney Approval: Carol Schwab (by H. Baker) (06/03/15)	
Chief Financial Officer Approval: Jeff Muir (06/04/15)		City Manager Approval: John Nachbar: (06/04/15)	
<u>RECOMMENDATION:</u> Staff recommends the City Council: (1) receive a report regarding large single family development in the City (commonly called “Mansionization”); and (2) direct the City Manager as deemed appropriate. <u>BACKGROUND:</u> The City Council has received complaints regarding the size and design of new large single family developments in the City and has directed staff to provide background information, analysis, and recommendations regarding potential development regulations. <u>DISCUSSION:</u> What is Mansionization? Mansionization is typically defined as the practice of replacing older, smaller homes with the largest home permitted under the City’s Zoning Code that is much larger than surrounding dwellings and which, because of its size, changes the scale and character of a neighborhood. Many also refer to these larger homes as “McMansions.” However this term is more typically applied to very large lot suburban subdivisions where all the homes have the same building style and appear			

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to be “mass produced”. The issue of Mansionization is not new in Culver City or throughout the nation, and has surfaced previously as a land use issue since the late 1990’s.

Various Definitions of a “Mansion”

Establishing the best way to regulate how big a house can be built on a standard lot involves a myriad of conflicting values related to land use planning. Defining how big is “too big” and inappropriate for a particular neighborhood is not always clear. Land use planning professionals may see the issue as one of the proper relationship of the building size to the lot size given the surrounding neighborhood. Architects may see it as the relationship of the building design to the design of surrounding buildings in the neighborhood. For example, a building that is perceived to be poorly designed without appropriate massing, setbacks, and articulation may be understood to be out of scale and inappropriate with the neighborhood by an architect. In fact, from an architectural perspective, the issue may be less about simply reducing the amount of allowable building area on a lot and more about producing a building with an appropriate design. Local residents may perceive “too big” simply as the building size disparity relative to their own homes and believe that it results from speculative investment by developers. The issue of home building size is confounded by the sentiment by some residents that their home represents a major life investment and that the size of their home should not be dictated by the decisions of others who want to be the arbiters of design or taste. For some, a home is their largest single financial asset and they do not want it negatively impacted by adjacent development nor subject to such restrictive development standards that it negatively impacts the value of their property. Given these divergence of opinions, it is not easy to craft home building size regulations that meet everyone’s needs or can satisfy everyone’s concerns.

Single Family Home Construction Data in Culver City

Consistent with national construction cycles, there has been increased home building activity in Culver City over the last few years. Building Division records indicate that there were a total of 48 new single family residential building permits issued for the calendar years from 2000 to 2010 (between 4-5 homes per year). During the time period from 2010 to May 2015 there were 30 new single family residential building permits issued (approximately 6 homes per year). So there has been an increase in single family construction. As a reference point for building size, some of the homes permitted during this period were greater than 3,000 sq. ft. and some were less than 3,000 sq. ft. While there is no absolute size that has been identified as a “mansion”, some recognize a 3,000 sq. ft. building on 5,000 sq. ft. standard city lot to be a larger sized home.

Some Culver City residential neighborhoods have had more large single family construction than others. The attached map shows the locations of new single family homes and additions to existing single family homes which result in a house

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of 3,000 sq. ft. or greater which have been permitted over the last three years. (Please see Attachment No. 1). The Park East (Carlson Park) neighborhood has had 10 new larger homes permitted, the Blanco/Culver Crest neighborhood has had six new larger homes permitted, and the Studio Village neighborhood has had three new larger homes permitted. This compares with other residential neighborhoods in the City which have had one new, larger home permitted during the same period. It is important to note that some of the additions were only a few hundred square feet and were made to already large homes. (Please see Attachment No. 2)

Single Family Construction: 3,000 sq. ft. or Greater/ 5,000 sq. ft. or Greater Lots

The attached table provides a summary of single family building permits for homes of 3,000 sq. ft. or greater on 5,000 sq. ft. or greater lots during last three years. (Please see Attachment No. 2) A total of 26 building permits were issued. Approximately one-third of the permits were issued for completely new construction and two-thirds were for additions. The larger homes permitted during this three-year period have ranged in size from slightly more than 3,000 sq. ft. to over 4,600 sq. ft., and the lot sizes have ranged from 5,000 to 58,056 sq. ft.. The largest lots are found in the hillsides, and most of these lots contain significant amounts of steeply sloped area which is not readily developable. Of these larger lots, approximately 36% of the houses are 3,500 sq. ft. or greater, and approximately 7% are 4,000 sq. ft. or greater. Almost two thirds of the houses were less than 3,500 sq. ft. Given the large disparity of lot sizes, it is understandable that building coverage (the ratio between housing size and lot size) ranges significantly (from 19% to over 75%) within this group of single family housing projects. In general, most of the larger housing projects permitted over the last three years range from 3,000 sq. ft. to 4,000 sq. ft.

The architectural design of the projects within this group of single family homes also ranges significantly, from various forms of "Spanish" to traditional Cape Cod, Craftsman, and Modern. Some of the most significant changes to the prevailing characteristics of a neighborhood created by the newer developments were related to the architectural style of the new buildings. (Please see Attachment No. 3 – Photo Survey)

Methods of Regulating Single Family Residential Building Size in Culver City

Title 17, Zoning, of the Culver City Municipal Code (Zoning Code) currently provides the following:

- The Minimum and Maximum Dwelling Size: (maximum 1,500 sq. ft. plus 40% of the net lot area for parcels less than 8,000 sq. ft.; and 60% of the net lot area for parcels equal to or greater than 8,000 sq. ft. not including garages and non-habitable space) - which results in a maximum 3,500 sq. ft. house on a typical 5,000 sq. ft. lot.
- Setbacks: Front 20 feet, Side 4 feet, Rear 10 feet

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- Open Space: Minimum area uncovered by structures (including accessory buildings and garages allowed up to 800 sq. ft. maximum); and
- Building Height: 2 stories or 30 feet

If the City Council would like to address the concerns expressed by the community regarding the size and/or design of new single family home construction and/or additions it may want to consider the following:

1. Reduce Maximum Dwelling Size (the absolute maximum permitted square footage under the Zoning Code).
2. Establish Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and restrict it to not greater than a specified amount. FAR is the amount of building square footage relative to the lot size. Under the current zoning code standards a maximum 3,500 sq.ft. house on a 5,000 sq. ft. lot equates to an FAR of .70. The FAR goes down as the lot sizes increase. For example, on a 6,000 sq. ft. lot, the maximum dwelling size is 3,900 sq. ft. which equates to a FAR of .65. On a 7,000 sq. ft. lot the maximum dwelling size is 4,300 sq. ft. which equates to an FAR of .61. On an 8,000, sq. ft. lot the maximum dwelling size is 4,800 sq. ft. which equates to a .60 FAR.
3. Establish a Cubic Building Footage Ratio – the ratio of cubic building area (length x height x depth) divided by the lot size.
4. Restrict the Construction of Additional Floors by establishing an allowable second floor area as a percent of the first floor area.
5. Reduce Building Coverage to vary with lot size.
6. Establish More Restrictive Building Design Standards (to reduce building mass, create building articulation and building step backs, and neighborhood compatibility) similar to the Multi-Family Design Guidelines which address prevailing setback, lot coverage, and height of structures on an individual block and contain guidelines to address building location, privacy, parking, landscape and open space, building façade treatment and building massing and scale.
7. Require Discretionary Approval for Single Family Dwellings above a certain Gross Floor Area threshold.

The City Council also has the option of considering a moratorium on the issuance of building permits to construct or alter single family dwellings in excess of a particular size, while the Planning Division further studies possible amendments (such as the above) to the Zoning Code to address this issue. Both the City Council and the public inquired about such an option at a previous meeting. Government Code Section 65858 provides that an urgency ordinance may be adopted without prior public notice or public hearing by a four-fifths vote of the legislative body upon a finding that the action is required to protect the public safety, health and welfare. Such ordinance shall have no further force and effect 45 days from the date of its adoption. However, after notice and a public hearing, such ordinance may be extended for a period of ten months and 15 days, and subsequently extended for an additional 12 months. Not more than two extensions may be adopted. Culver City

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Charter Section 614, provides additional authority for the City Council to adopt an ordinance as an urgency measure for preserving the public peace, health or safety by a four-fifths vote.

If the City Council is interested in considering this option, staff will return at a future meeting date with a proposed moratorium for consideration.

Survey of Surrounding City Regulations on "Mansionization:"

Staff has looked at the development regulations for single-family homes in the cities of Los Angeles, Santa Monica, West Hollywood, Manhattan Beach, and Beverly Hills. Similar to Culver City, all of the surveyed cities contain minimum setback requirements which range from 15-20 feet for front setbacks; 10-15 feet for rear setbacks; and 3-5 feet for side setbacks. Maximum building heights ranged from 26-33 feet. In regards to maximum allowable building size, three of the cities had an FAR limit including Manhattan Beach (.70 for lots up to 4,800 sq.ft. and .65 for lots greater than 4,800 sq. ft.); Los Angeles (.50 for lots up to 7,500 sq.ft. and .45 for lots greater than 7,500 sq.ft.); and West Hollywood (.50 for all lots). Beverly Hills uses the same dwelling unit size standards as Culver City: 1,500 sq.ft. plus 40% of the lot area.

The cities of Beverly Hills and West Hollywood have design standards including building massing and modulation, upper floor step backs, and second floor/first floor proportionality requirements.

The City of Los Angeles also has some incentives to allow for a 20% increase in the maximum dwelling size if the project uses one of the following methods: green building methods, front façade step backs, or reducing the upper floor area to 75% of the lower floor area. However, Los Angeles has proposed revising the rules to eliminate "counterproductive provisions" that allowed builders to develop boxy buildings and has adopted a moratorium on certain construction of single family dwellings during this interim period.

Other Considerations

- Should new development standards and/or design requirements be absolute or vary with lot size?
- Should smaller lots only be allowed to build smaller buildings or should the allowable building area vary?
- What should the threshold be for mansionization regulations?
- Should the same standards apply for building additions and entirely new buildings?
- How can the regulations be developed so that they are not entirely subjective?

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FISCAL ANALYSIS:

If the City Council determines that it would like to proceed with additional design or development standards for larger single family development and or a moratorium for such new development, property values within neighborhoods may be decreased. The amount of the decrease is difficult to determine because those purchasing residential property to live in may base their decision on more than financial factors alone. Decisions are often influenced by personal preferences such as the quality of schools, fire/police/city services, parks, amenities, walkability, etc.

If additional design or development standards are pursued, some projects in the “pipeline” may be held up or abandoned if they do not comport with proposed new regulations which will have some financial impacts. Further, the City’s permit fees are based upon permit valuations. If the level of permitting is reduced as a result of reduced construction activity or the valuations for permits are reduced due to smaller projects it may result in reduced permit fees.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Map of Impacted Neighborhoods.
2. Summary Table of Housing Size and Lot Size
3. Photo Survey of Properties in Summary Table
4. Examples of Ways to Regulate Building Size and Massing

MOTION:

That the City Council:

1. Receive and discuss a report regarding large single family development in the City (“Mansionization”); and
2. Direct the City Manager as deemed appropriate.