

ATTACHMENT 3

C L A R I O N

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Memorandum

To: J.B. Culpepper, Planning Director
From: Roger Waldon, Clarion Associates
Date: June 4, 2007
Re: Proposed Neighborhood Conservation District for the Mason Farm / Whitehead Circle Neighborhood

This memorandum offers comments on how typical dwelling units would or would not comply with a proposed new regulation for the Mason Farm / Whitehead Circle Neighborhood Conservation District that would regulate floor area. These comments have been prepared in response to discussions at the Town Council's May 14, 2007 Public Hearing.

There were multiple comments at the Public Hearing regarding this proposed new regulation. The regulation would read as follows:

"An application for a Zoning Compliance Permit must be accompanied by a floor plan sealed by a licensed architect that certifies that the total amount of space used as bedrooms is not equal to or in excess of the total square footage of common areas in the dwelling. A second sealed drawing would verify that the floor plans submitted for the Zoning Compliance Permit application match the construction prior to Town issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy. Definition for common space: any portion of a dwelling that is not a bedroom or bathroom. A Zoning Compliance Permit is required in the case of interior renovations of homes in the neighborhood."

Following is further explanation and examination of how this approach would work.

This proposed regulation is designed to help minimize the creation of dwelling units configured to be used for living arrangements other than single-family dwellings. The idea for this regulation had its origin in neighborhood discussions and concerns about rooms in dwelling units being rented he rent-by-the-room (dwellings occupied by multiple independent individuals who are not functioning as a single household). Preservation of the single-family character of this area is one of the objectives of this initiative. The residents believe, and we agree, that a house that is broken up into a series of spaces that each could be lived in with relative independence invites that type of use. Alternatively, a house that has a significant amount of floor are devoted to common space is more likely to be used by a household (however configured), and less likely to be used for by-the-room rentals.

The residents have suggested that a house that has more space devoted to bedrooms than is devoted to all other household uses is the type of configuration most likely to be rented to multiple independent individuals.

We believe that this approach, when combined with the other proposed provisions of this district, would help tilt the balance in favor of single-family occupancy. As a test to see if the specific numbers proposed here make sense and are workable, we examined plans for two single family homes of types that are common in Chapel Hill. The first is a basic home with approximately 1,590 square feet, with relatively simple design. This template is currently being used for single-family home construction in Chapel Hill. The second set of plans is for an existing custom-built 4,250 square foot home in the Mason Farm / Whitehead Circle neighborhood that is more complex in design and more typical of an existing home this neighborhood.

Plan 1: This is a three-bedroom, two-bath house with kitchen, living room, dining room and utility room. Given the relative simplicity of the design, it is possible to approximate the bedroom/common space relatively easily. The estimated numbers for this plan come out as 690 square feet within the three bedrooms, leaving 900 square feet devoted to everything else. The bedroom/common space ration is accordingly less than 1.0, coming out at .77.

Plan 2: This plan, with multiple non-standard spaces, takes longer for making an estimate. Room configurations were of mixed type, and we needed to make determinations regarding whether or not a room would be considered to be a bedroom for purposes of the calculation. Four bedrooms were labeled on the plan, and there was a fifth room labeled, "study." However, since the "study" had the characteristics of a bedroom, and could easily be used as a bedroom, we considered it as a bedroom for these calculations. In this case, we estimated that approximately 1,450 square feet of the total dwelling size of 4,250 was devoted to bedrooms, resulting in a bedroom/common space ratio of .52.

Clearly the first plan comes closer to the 1.0 ratio, as one might expect. To further test the usefulness of this approach, we took the first plan and assumed two hypothetical variations: Version 1A added a bedroom to the house by expanding the size of the house. Version 1B converted interior common space into a bedroom, leaving the overall size of the house unchanged. In version 1A, the bedroom/common space ratio came out to be .95. In version 1B, the ratio came out as 1.18. We believe that this exercise helps demonstrate the usefulness of the approach: This regulation would not prohibit someone from adding a bedroom to this house; but it would prohibit the owner from converting common space to an extra bedroom, the type of phenomenon that encourages occupancy by other than a single-family household.

In summary: We continue to recommend that this approach be included in the Mason Farm / Whitehead Circle Neighborhood Conservation District, and believe it would serve to help achieve neighborhood objectives.