

City of Owosso
Summary of Ordinances Proposals
Frequently Asked Questions
 March 26, 2013

This document will help explain what the proposed fence and design standards ordinances will and will not do. If you choose not to read through the whole explanation, at least review the following quick facts:

This ordinance will NOT control or regulate what color any existing or new home can be painted or sided!

This ordinance does NOT add any provisions that will regulate hedges, decorative grasses, trees, etc. in back yards!

Overview

The purpose of this FAQ is to inform property owners, residents, and the general public about proposed changes to the zoning ordinance (residential and commercial design standards). We believe that an informed public that is comfortable addressing their local government is in the best interest of the community. Believe me when I say that, as volunteers and staff, we would rather face these concerns head on now and make changes than to have this issue explode some time in the future.

The planning commission hopes that this document is shared and questioned in such a way that the commission is able to obtain meaningful input from the public. The explanations below are intended to be brief in nature and to give the reader a sense of the changes. Please review the entire text of the changes or consult with city staff for complete information using the contact and/or link below.

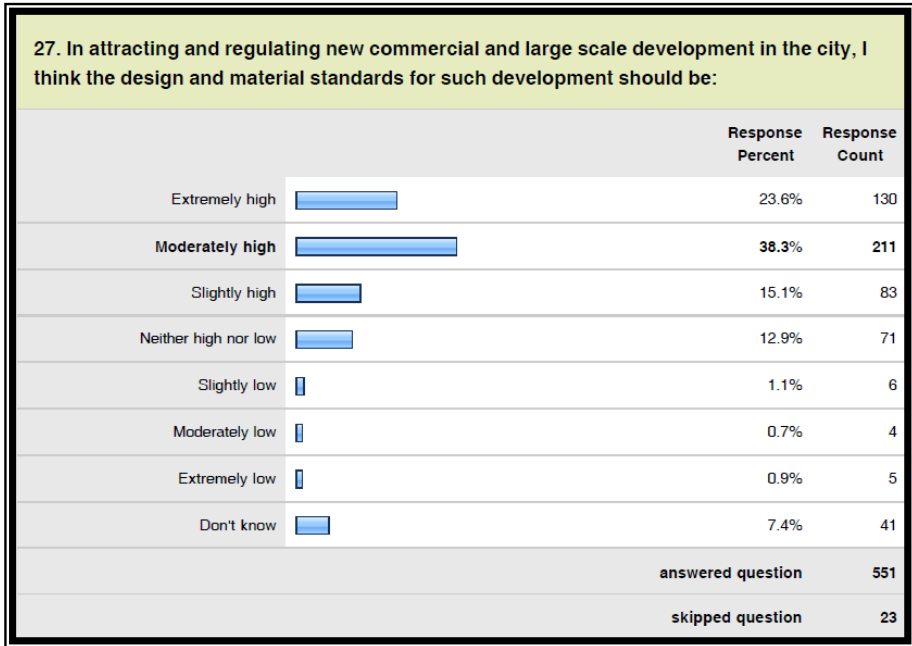
Why is the planning commission doing this in the first place?

The short answer is that the housing stock and condition of commercial structures are identified as struggling and could use big improvement and change.

In the fall of 2011, a large community survey was done to learn more about concerns expressed at public meetings. The results were used in shaping the community master plan.

The following responses were instrumental in guiding the planning commission on these issues:

23. Which, if any, is the most serious problem in the city of Owosso as a whole?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Vacant lots	6.4%	28
Poorly maintained infrastructure such as streets, parks, storm sewer, etc.	28.6%	126
Condition of houses	40.2%	177
Crime/vandalism	16.6%	73
None	8.2%	36
Other (please specify)		133
answered question		440
skipped question		134



Owosso has its share of problems related to housing and commercial corridors, and the motivation for the planning commission is simple. They are attempting to take neighborhoods that are very old and very diverse in their housing stock, and make them places where families and individuals will have a high quality of life in the future.

They are attempting to ensure that reinvestment in our commercial areas is of a quality and functionality that will be viable for decades and not detract from nearby residential areas.

Because housing in Owosso is often very old, there are a lot of features that deter families and individuals from buying them or staying in them. These include small lots, fewer garages, limited storage, outdated bathrooms, old electrical wiring, etc. Because the market for housing has changed in recent decades, such homes are not for everyone, and some people choose to live where they can have more space, fewer neighbors, and more modern features.

If housing in Owosso is to be desirable and retain its value, change needs to occur. The commission believes that when people buy a house in the city, they are also investing themselves in the neighborhood. They also believe they have a responsibility to protect property values, parks, housing conditions, and other features. As you can see from the survey results, respondents feel that the condition of homes and commercial structures are very important to the future.

The planning commission recognizes that they have a responsibility to the entire community and must take an array of opinions into account. While most people may agree with a statement like, “we want to improve our neighborhood,” there can be a lot of dispute related to HOW such change comes about. This brings us to where we are today.

The commission is attempting to protect neighborhoods by ensuring that new residential construction is not ‘grossly dissimilar’ from the existing neighborhood. They want to avoid changes that will negate values. They also want to increase the value and function of the big commercial corridors in the city.

Take a look at what is being proposed. Believe it or not, the commission does want to hear from you on these issues!

What is being proposed?

1. There is an update to the fence regulations to simplify some of the neighbor and public concerns related to vision obstructions of roads, driveways, and sidewalks. There are also new limits on materials (limiting the ability to construct fences out of “junk” and “scrap building materials”).

There is no such provision to limit the height of hedges, decorative grasses, trees, etc. in back yards!

2. There are proposed provisions to screen mechanical (AC) units from public view where possible on new COMMERCIAL projects. There was an issue recently in which a commercial building near residences put very large AC units on the front of the roof, and this caused a lot of discord in the neighborhood. The owner worked this out voluntarily, but the commission believes this can be avoided with a few simple and reasonable considerations.
3. Future commercial structures adjacent to the state highways (M-21, M52, & M-71) would be expected to meet specific design and material requirements. Such requirements include provisions to limit (not outlaw) pre-fabricated steel panels and EFIS, as well as provisions to ensure large buildings have highly visible customer entrances. Neon, metallic, and florescent colors are proposed to be restricted for such properties. There are also considerations for placement of sidewalks and building entrances to the street.
4. The biggest change is to residential design standards. Again, **THIS IS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION ONLY**, with the primary purpose being to “prevent grossly dissimilar dwellings which would adversely affect the value and character of dwellings in the surrounding area.” Specific conditions include the provision of 100 square feet of storage (basement, shed, or closet space), the provision for a garage, the provision of two entrances for safety reasons, and the consideration of setbacks and size. *Note that these provisions are all being reconsidered at this time. In no foreseeable instance would the color of a home be regulated.*

Will I be required to make changes to my home or follow these rules for maintenance, updates, or typical changes?

The short answer is no. The ordinance is intended to only regulate future homes and future commercial buildings. Existing homes do not need to comply with any provisions of this ordinance and shall not be required or asked to change any home features.

Please note that in the event of a fire or other happening that results in reconstruction or a massive addition, such construction is always subject to modern building and zoning codes (electrical, mechanical, plumbing, building setbacks, etc.). Any structure that is hazardous or a nuisance is also subject to enforcement under existing codes (we are talking about serious maintenance issues here, such as a mold infested vacant structure).

This will not limit or in any way control the color an existing or new home is painted!

Where do I get more information?

The ordinances are posted on the city’s webpage at www.ci.owosso.mi.us under the “minutes and agendas” tab. Look for the most recent meeting packet link under the heading “planning commission.”

The link below will take you directly to the current version, just be mindful that the link to future versions will be different:

http://www.ci.owosso.mi.us/Portals/0/Files/Minutes-Agendas/1_PC%20Packet%202013-03-25.pdf

Besides attending a meeting, the best way to get information or to convey comments or concerns is to call Adam directly at 989.725.0544.

How will the process proceed, and how can I get involved?

The planning commission is expected to have another public workshop at their regular meeting in April. This will be on Monday, April 22, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. in the city council chambers. The atmosphere is generally pretty informal and most people find the commission to be very responsive.

If the planning commission feels the ordinances are ready for approval at this meeting or a future meeting, they will make a recommendation to the city council to approve them. After that occurs, there will be a public hearing in front of the city council to deliberate on approving the ordinance. If the city council approves the ordinances with or without changes, the ordinances will become law.

To get involved, you can attend a planning commission meeting, contact city staff directly, or use other traditionally accepted means of comment (letter, email, etc.). A call directly to staff is the best way to both learn about the proposals while simultaneously giving feedback. The staff member responsible for assisting the commission with this process is:

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