



September 8, 2020

City of Pasadena Planning Commission
Attn: Tess Molinar
Hale Building
175 N. Garfield Ave., 2nd Floor
Pasadena, CA 91101

Re: Single Family Residential Development Standards (Mansionization)

Dear Members of the Planning Commission:

Pasadena Heritage is encouraged to see that the Planning Commission is poised to address the inadequacies in our Zoning Code pertaining to our single family neighborhoods, and commend staff for putting together some cogent proposals. We have been working with different neighborhood groups and staff now for years to identify the issues and some of the weak points in the development standards. In the past decade or so, there have been far too many houses that were either flipped or turned into McMansions at the detriment to Pasadena's neighborhoods. We hope these changes will prevent that from occurring in the future.

After reviewing the staff report and being reminded of all the history of discussion on this topic, we support some of the recommendations, suggest changes to others and request study of additional protections.

We support the following recommendations as proposed by City Staff:

- Design regulation of ADUs, including overall appearance and roof pitch
- Prohibitions on plain concrete and architectural foam as exterior materials
- Top plate limitations at 10'
- Window regulations to ensure privacy

These changes will address some of the more egregious design issues that have caused such outrage in the past. The regulations on ADUs and materials are commonsense solutions. We were initially ambivalent on the top plate recommendation, but the Staff Report makes a reasonable case. The proposed height limitations help to reduce bulk and height of new buildings or additions, and create some standardization to help tie neighborhoods together.

The biggest disappointment for us in reviewing the recommendations is the relative lack of specific ways to address Neighborhood Compatibility. Only the size of a new or remodeled house is addressed in the recommendations - and the 35% increase seems reasonable - but

nothing else is suggested to make new construction fit into existing neighborhood context. Our other major concern is with the public's ability to learn about and see what is being proposed. In our opinion, without a public hearing process, neighbors and others will have no way of knowing what is going to be built and what it will look like. We believe that the entire submission packet, including plans, should be made available online for neighbors to evaluate.

We believe that new houses or houses with major additions should be required to respect the neighborhood surrounding them, without requiring a specific style or design. We also understand that clear direction was given to staff from the Planning and Design Commissions to avoid discretionary review where possible, but this keeps the public out of the process and without a way for neighbors to know what is being proposed to be built beside them. We strongly urge again studying how a project can be required to demonstrate neighborhood compatibility. For example:

Proponent must study and submit an analysis of common features within the study radius (roof lines, height, building modulation, front porches, retaining walls, exterior materials, fenestration, driveway placement, etc.). Of the identified common neighborhood features, proponent must identify a majority of features that the new house will exemplify (percentage to be determined) and show how that will be done.

One way for applicants to evaluate these elements would be through a simple Neighborhood Compatibility Checklist, which would be created by the City. This Checklist could be modeled after the Climate Action Plan Consistency Checklist required for CEQA projects in Pasadena, and offer points for design compatibility. In addition, this checklist would be made part of the public record, and would be an easy way for neighbors without construction or design backgrounds to understand how the project would be in keeping with the neighborhood.

Finally, we do believe that the Design Commission, and not a Hearing Officer, is best suited to review projects that rise to the threshold of "mansionization." The creation of a mansion in a block of single family homes affects property values and quality of life for others, either positively or negatively. Design review can be limited to one meeting, with a level of detail somewhere between what is expected for Consolidated Design and Final Design Review. Commissioners would review layout, exterior, and finishes in one meeting, and could approve, deny or ask the applicant to make further changes. Projects that exceed the Neighborhood Compatibility floor area would undergo automatic review. Projects could also be called up by the Design Commission for failing to address the Neighborhood Consistency Checklist we proposed, or could be appealed by neighbors or neighborhood groups. There are several massive homes in Pasadena that could have been improved dramatically by a Design Commission review. We can accept that ministerial review is adequate for small projects or a new house that meets all of the proposed ordinance provisions including a clear demonstration of neighborhood compatibility, but there should be clear direction of when and how Design review could be instituted when needed.

Pasadena Heritage thanks the Commission and Staff for accepting our input on this very important item. We hope our suggestions can be taken into consideration. We invite you to reach out to us if you have any questions about what we have suggested today.

Sincerely,



Susan N. Mossman
Executive Director



Andrew Salimian
Preservation Director

cc: David Reyes, Director of Planning & Community Development
Martin Potter, Planner