MEMORANDUM

To: John Wesley AICP, Planning Director
From: Gordon Sheffield AICP CNUa, Zoning Administrator
Date: November 17, 2016
Subject: Zoning Administrator Interpretation

Zoning Ordinance §11-5-3.E.1 – Garage Frontage and Location, and the Definition of ‘Primary Wall’

Zoning Ordinance §11-5-3.E details several requirements related to the constructed building form of single residence buildings. Item 1 of this Subsection E specifies requirements related to the location of the garage or carport relative to the remainder of the house, and in particular, specifies form-based setback requirements for garages or carports in the event the carport’s/garage’s front entry is parallel to the adjacent street.

The building form requirement for front entry garages when the door is parallel to the adjacent street specifies that the garage entry façade must be placed a minimum of 3-ft behind the ‘primary wall facing the street’ of the residence. Side entry garages (those garages typically constructed when the garage door façade is perpendicular to the adjacent street) are excepted from this 3-ft setback requirement, principally because the building elevation directly facing the street in these circumstances is not a garage door. During the development of the Zoning Ordinance Update (which took place between 2006 and 2011), it was determined that a garage door is an architectural feature that should be deemphasized in the front facing portions of a single residence building.

Therefore, the question becomes: With regard to §11-5-3.E.1, what parts of a single residence building are to be considered when determining what is the primary wall facing the street?

Some guidance may be found in the purpose and intent of the requirement, which is to assist in activating the overall neighborhood and subdivision design by bringing the ‘livable’ or more active portions of individual residences forward, in front of the ‘inactive’ garage space, and closer to the publicly accessible areas of a neighborhood. Doing this assists in encouraging interaction between adjacent residents. It encourages less isolation-oriented neighborhood designs in which the inactive parts of a residence effectively wall off and create physical separations between neighboring properties. Rather, placing the active portions of a residence closer to the more open and public areas of a subdivision, the street, sidewalk, and recreation spaces, provides one less physical hurdle between neighbors.

In addition, the requirement is intended to set a minimum design threshold and standard for single residence buildings. By placing the garage door further back than the primary wall when the garage door faces forward, it deemphasizes the primacy of the garage door from the public view in the design of the single residence, and reinforces the idea that the public view of the active components of a residence are important.

Therefore, given the two issue purpose of this building form standard, any of the following may be used when determining what is considered a ‘primary wall facing the street’:

1) Any front facing wall of the enclosed livable areas of a residence;
2) The street-side facing wall of a side-loaded garage; or
3) The imaginary line formed by front posts linked to a roof of a front porch, front patio, side-loaded front carport, or by the street side posts of a porte cochere that extends toward a street from a residence.