

Memo

To: City Council
From: Bryan Myrkle, Community Development Director
Date: April 7, 2017
Re: Zoning Ordinance revision – corner lots

Over the past few years, the City has had trouble administering requests for new buildings and building additions on residential corner lots.

Front yard setbacks are not well-defined for corner lots, and the drawings included in the code lead to an interpretation that is very restrictive for homeowners, especially those who own homes on small, non-conforming lots in the older parts of town.

The drawings seem to indicate that a corner lot essentially has two front yards – each yard facing a street – and front yards have a 25-foot setback requirement. This is very confining and does not provide many options for improvements to smaller lots. This is also not mirrored in the ordinance language.

I have researched the zoning codes for many nearby communities and found several different approaches to this issue. There are a few codes that are as restrictive as our interpretation of the drawings in Charlotte's code, but most are not. The three standard approaches seem to be:

- Corner lots have two front yards.
- The yard corresponding to the street address is the front yard.
- Homeowners may designate which street-facing yard should be the front.

Using the street address as a guide can be helpful for some corner lots. However, in the older part of the city, the street address may have been assigned at the time the house was built and subsequent developments (especially the location of driveways and garages added later) make using the street address impractical.

The approach that provides the greatest leeway for homeowners, while maintaining a required front yard is option 3. I am proposing ordinance language that would allow front yards on corner lots to be designated and established by the homeowner. This is based on language being used now in the City of St. Johns. Allowing the homeowner to designate a front yards is a good approach, because homeowners often have the best understanding of their property and how it relates to the surrounding neighborhood.

I have added a sentence that would restrict homeowners to making this determination only once, so that they or future homeowners cannot re-designate a front yard each time they want to do a project.

I am requesting the City Council approve the first reading of this ordinance and set a public hearing for discussion at the May Planning Commission meeting.

If you have any questions about this, please feel free to contact me.