

Proposed Amendments to the Jersey City Master Plan

Revised Draft Prepared: October 18, 2006

Material indicated by strikethrough ~~like this~~ is existing material that is intended to be deleted.

Material indicated by bold italic *like this* is new material that is intended to be enacted.

SECTION II: LAND USE PLAN

RESIDENTIAL

Residential land use districts consist of one-and two-family housing, multi-family attached housing (4 stories or less), multi-family mid-rise housing and multi-family high-rise housing. Residential uses are primarily located in the inner core of the City as well as residential enclaves along the Hudson River/Upper New York Bay and Hackensack River waterfronts. Due to the City's developed housing stock, land use districts are defined by housing unit type.

One- and Two-Family Housing District

Existing Conditions

Jersey City contains areas of one-and two-family housing in every neighborhood. It is the largest and most prevalent land use in the City. One-and two-family housing is predominant in the Heights, Greenville and West Side. There is also a significant presence in Bergen/Lafayette and to a lesser extent in Journal Square and Downtown. One- and two-family housing has net densities of up to 35 units per acre and is characterized by existing one- and two-family structures of 35 feet or less.

The typical Jersey City house is located on a 2,500 square foot lot that is 25 feet wide by 100 feet deep. The primary exception is Greenville, which has larger lots with a total area of 3,000 square feet and more and West Side which have lots up to 5,000 square feet in size. Front yard setbacks vary widely from neighborhood to neighborhood. Some areas have front yard setbacks as small as 5 feet; others provide front yards with depths of 25 feet or more.

Parking is a significant issue in Jersey City's one- and two-family housing districts. The compact lot sizes, closely spaced houses and small yards make it difficult to accommodate automobiles and preserve the attractive urban streetscape that exists in many residential neighborhoods. Residents typically utilize a combination of on-street and off-street parking depending upon the type and age of the house as well as the neighborhood. Older homes, many of which predate the zoning ordinance and the automobile age, often lack off-street parking or utilize a shared

driveway with parking in rear yard garages. This is the established pattern in most residential neighborhoods in the City.

Problems arise when residents convert the front yard into a parking area and create additional curb cuts, negatively affecting the streetscape and reducing on-street parking. The problems caused by parking are most acute with new residential development, especially two-family houses. Market demand places a premium on off-street parking and results in incompatible in-fill residential development. This type of development is characterized by excessive building setbacks, large garage doors which dominate the front façade, wide curb cuts that reduce on-street parking and front yards that are paved over for driveways and parking. As a consequence, the streetscape and character of existing residential neighborhoods are adversely affected and on-street parking is eliminated. In addition, the proliferation of curb cuts results in the loss of on-street parking for the other residents along the street.

Historically, pedestrian oriented neighborhood commercial uses have coexisted with one and two family housing in residential neighborhoods throughout the City. These neighborhood commercial uses are scattered throughout these neighborhoods are also clustered in small pockets. Many of these commercial uses have thrived for years and have provided a convenient and accessible service to the immediate residential neighborhood. Those neighborhood commercial uses which are viable will continue to remain and have the status of a pre-existing non-conforming use. There is a growing trend towards conversion of commercial store fronts to residential units. Although conversions create residential units from non-conforming commercial space they often trigger use, density and parking variances. It is recommended that if the conversion results in a one for one replacement of a commercial unit for a residential unit, variances are not created for use, density and parking. Further, design standards should also be created which address the interrelationship between the conversion to the building and the surrounding area.

Existing Zoning

Jersey City's zoning regulations include two one and two family housing districts. Jersey City's R-1 zoning permits detached one- and two-family housing on small lots, creating a "cheek by jowl" pattern, in keeping with its urban character. The maximum permitted building height is 3 stories and 35 feet, theoretically allowing homes with up to 4,800 square feet of total building area.

The R-2 zone permits a mix of housing types including detached one- and two-family units, rowhouses/townhouses and garden apartments at a maximum height of 4 stories or 40 feet. Illegal conversion of one- and two-family homes to multi-family use is a widespread problem. It is

most common for new 3 story houses, which are often converted into multi-family units with three or more apartments, soon after initial occupancy

Jersey City's current zoning regulations permit retail sales and services on the ground floor of residential buildings on major streets as a conditional use in the R-2 residential district. It is recommended that retail sales and services be eliminated as a conditional use since these areas are in close proximity to neighborhood commercial districts. As a result, the existing neighborhood commercial districts will be strengthened and the residential character of the neighborhood will be reinforced. It is acknowledged, however, that viable pre-existing neighborhood uses will most likely remain.

Purpose of District

The purpose of the one- and two-family housing district is to accommodate existing housing and encourage compatible in-fill development with one- and two-family homes that preserve the streetscape, utilize on-street parking where the frontages are narrow and maintain the low-rise character of the area. An intended consequence of this designation is preserving the integrity of residential neighborhoods, limiting non-residential uses to appropriate areas, increasing the availability of community resources and reinforcing the viability of existing neighborhood commercial districts.

Issues

1. Preserving of the streetscape and character of the one- and two-family housing district. This includes minimizing curb cuts, preservation of street trees and retention of "green" areas in the front yard.
2. Encouraging compatible in-fill residential development including the preservation of prevailing building setbacks, prevailing building height and on-street parking.
3. Preventing and eliminating the conversion of one- and two-family houses into multi-family housing with three or more apartments.
4. Addressing the need for off-street parking and preserving the availability of on-street parking.

Recommendations

1. Provide design guidelines to promote the development of high quality and compatible one- and two-family housing residential uses.

2. Create a separate One and Two-Family Housing District with a Minimum lot size of 4,000 square feet and a minimum lot width of forty (40) feet on streets in the West Side and Greenville where such lots are common.

~~2-~~ 3. Provide for a “prevailing height” standard and where none exists, limit the permitted height in the one- and two-family housing district to 2.5 stories to reduce the potential for conversion of detached one- and two-family houses to multi-family housing with three or more apartments.

~~3-~~ 4. Provide for a prevailing setback standard.

~~4-~~ 5. Prepare alternative parking requirements for residential uses and seek an exemption from the State Residential Site Improvement Standards. The parking requirements should discourage off-street parking on narrow infill lots in the one- and two-family housing district to preserve the streetscape and promote the use of on-street parking. Where appropriate, the use of alleys and shaded driveways should be encouraged.

~~5-~~ 6. Regulate the width of driveways and garages integrated into the front façade to preserve front yard green space and enhance the appearance of one- and two-family houses. The suggested width is a maximum of 10 feet for the driveway and 12 feet for the garage.

~~6-~~ 7. Limit the number and width of curb cuts serving one- and two-family housing to preserve on-street parking, street trees and the streetscape and tighten requirements to obtain such cuts

~~7-~~ 8. Eliminate garden apartments and medium-rise apartments as permitted uses in the one- and two-family housing district.

~~8-~~ 9 Eliminate retail sales and services as a conditional use.