



**CITY OF SAINT PAUL**  
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**DATE:** March 3, 2016  
**TO:** Neighborhood Planning Committee  
**FROM:** Mike Richardson, City Planner  
**SUBJECT:** Ward 3 Residential Design Standards – Sidewall Articulation

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The purpose of this memo is to inform the Committee of forthcoming analysis and potential recommendations to amend recent zoning code amendments related to sidewall articulation and ask for input as staff proceeds.

### **Background**

On September 2, 2015, amendments to the zoning code went into effect that modified some residential dimensional and design standards in Districts 14 and 15. One of the goals was to have impactful zoning that didn't result in a high number of variance requests, especially those that are frequently granted.

From the amendments that were adopted, sidewall articulation has emerged as one that warrants review based on the number of variance requests submitted, input from the District Councils, and decision history from the Board of Zoning Appeals. With few exceptions, the District Councils have supported variance requests from applicants. District Council staff has expressed concern to planning staff and the Ward 3 office regarding the applicability of the articulation requirement. The code language is as follows:

*Sec. 66.234. - Sidewall articulation.*

*For R1—R4 residential districts in planning districts 14 and 15, excluding property with local heritage preservation site or district designation, sidewall articulation is required for building faces that exceed thirty-five (35) feet in length. Articulation shall be in the form of a structural projection of at least one (1) foot in depth and six (6) feet in length, and must extend from grade to the eave.*

The intent of the language is to avoid the monotonous appearance of long, unbroken building facades that have become more common in the area and introduce additional sideyard space on lots with long structures. Staff feels that the intent is valid based on the process that led to the amendments and conversations with stakeholders since the code took effect. However, staff also acknowledges that additional action may be required to make the code more enforceable and less restrictive for

homeowners, while still maintaining the original intent. Potential changes include: increasing the minimum wall length that requires articulation; requiring only one side to be articulated; making accommodations or exceptions for existing structures or foundations; accounting for changes in story height along the sidewall; adjusting internal review processes/communication; or some combination of these.

As part of the adoption process for the 2015 amendments, the Planning Commission requested a report from staff after one year to summarize the impact of the amendments. However, based on cases and outcomes that have gone through the application process, staff felt that it was appropriate and timely to examine this aspect of the amendments earlier.

### **Next Steps**

Staff will present at the Highland Community Development Committee meeting on March 15, and the Macalester-Groveland Housing and Land Use Committee meeting on March 23. The purpose is to make the District Councils aware that the city is considering changes and to ask for their input.

In partnership with DSI, staff will analyze cases that have involved sidewall articulation decisions to determine the effect of potential changes as listed above. Staff will report back to the Neighborhood Committee after the community meetings and once the analysis has been conducted.

cc: Zoning Administrator  
Ward 3 Office  
Ward 4 Office