



April, 3, 2013

To: Planning and Building Division
Code Enforcement
Design Review Board
Planning Commission

From: Richard Mitchell, Planning and Building Services Director

By: Kieron Slaughter, Associate Planner

Subject: Zoning Interpretation – Residential Landscaping Requirements

Section 15.04.810.032 General Requirements in the Zoning Ordinance specify that “all required yards and setbacks shall be landscaped with live plant material. Decorative landscape features such as brick, stone, art, fountains and ponds may be used within the landscaped area, provided such materials present an attractive setting consistent with the intent of the landscaping requirements”.

The Zoning Administrator has made the following Zoning Interpretations:

The intent of the Landscaping Section is to create an aesthetically pleasing environment. However, the section does not specify the amount of landscaping required in the front yard. Staff has witnessed instances where entire front yards have been paved and all live plant material removed. On June 5, 2001, the City Council adopted a resolution encouraging compatible design and adopting the City of Portland’s “Base Zone Design Standards” (see Attachment 1). These standards require that residential properties incorporate the best features of traditional design, have a visual connection to the street, de-emphasizing accommodations, and increase the safety and livability of the neighborhood.

Excessive paved yard areas create a “heat island” effect that raises the ambient temperatures. Impervious surfaces increase storm water runoff without filtration that increases pollution in the San Francisco Bay. The Base Zone Design Requirements stipulate that the length of a garage wall facing the street may be up to 50 percent of the total length of the façade. As a result, the paved driveway width should not exceed this percentage. Paving is also appropriate for pedestrian pathways and walkways on the property.

All areas within the front yard setback, with the exception of vehicular driveways and pedestrian walkways must be landscaped. Front yards that are completely paved and void of landscaping are not in compliance with the development standards or with Section 15.04.810.030 of the Zoning Ordinance.



Richard Mitchell
Planning and Building Service Director

Attachment 1: City Council Resolution encouraging compatible design.