

I chaired the committee that fronted the development of the proposed changes to the current DOD. It was very frustrating to sit and listen last night, unable to address the questions of those who are concerned about the proposals being made.

The process is flawed. It is human nature, despite the very public and protracted process that has gone into these proposals, that some people will not have been involved until now. Yet, with it in the city's hands, the process does not allow those who know the proposals to address concerns being raised until it goes before the Planning Commission.

I have lived in Hillcrest most of my life. I was totally oblivious to the Last DOD. I can well imagine that had social media been then as it is now, and someone had used it, as they have in this instance, to exaggerate and misrepresent what was being done, I might have been at a meeting asking the questions that some asked last night. Perhaps we would not have the current DOD. Almost everyone agrees that would be a shame.

So I urge people to slow down and think about a few things. First, this has been over a five-year process, and yes, we reviewed every building variance going back years, and every member of the committee personally visited each location. We reviewed the teardown rate and how close we might be to losing the historic district. And, of course, we considered the economic impact. The whole point of this is to preserve the desirability of the community, which is what fundamentally drives property values, not how many square feet you can put on a lot.

Restrictions on development are central to creating desirability and hence value. The most valuable land is often that which is most regulated. It is the reason bills of assurance exist. Yes, building streets and running utilities are part of what makes it possible for a developer to turn two thousand dollars an acre land into two hundred thousand dollar fractional acre lots, but it is the bill of assurance that defines the community and provides assurance that finally turns cow pasture into residential land people are willing to pay for. A DOD is just a bill of assurance that overlays the city's base zoning restrictions. The whole purpose of which is to preserve what makes a given area desirable.

Unless it has a DOD, every residential area in the city has the same basic set of building restrictions, but they don't have the same property values. Hillcrest homes currently sell for an average of \$190 a square foot. Ask yourself why that is when others are half that. Ask yourself, has the current DOD damaged or improved the desirability of the community? Then ask, is it possible it could be made better.

Everyone on the committee owns property in Hillcrest. Everyone on the board that unanimously approved this application owns property in Hillcrest, and almost no

one who has been following this process is against it. A few, using social media, have stirred much concern among those who have not been following the process with misinformation and promoted erroneous concepts like any change in the footprint of a home on a lot must mean a reduction in value. It just is not so and can be quite the opposite.

The proposed changes are actually quite modest. They are nips and tucks in the existing DOD intended to encourage people to remodel rather than tear down and to discourage out-of-scale development that adversely impacts the home of others who live nearby. The whole point is to preserve the architectural character of the community, which is a large part of why people want to live in Hillcrest. It is also to preserve the diversity of the community, which is also part of why people will pay \$190 a foot to live here. It is good to see babies and children out on our sidewalks, possible because of the many bungalows that make for affordable starter homes.

Once they live here, most people don't want to leave. I and my neighbor across the street, among those in the concerned crowd last night, both bought our current homes many years ago when they needed some care and attention and have remodeled them several times since. That is what makes Hillcrest values.

Proposal 1 increases the side yard setback from 20% to 28% of the lot width. For a typical 50-foot lot, a 20% setback equates to just 5 feet of open space on either side of the lot. Most cottages and bungalows in Hillcrest are 32 feet wide and have a driveway on one side of the house. When houses are built 40 feet wide (setback to setback), they appear out of place relative to the more narrow original houses. As properties are redeveloped, the additional 8% setback (4 feet) will help maintain the typical spacing between houses and, thus, the character and apparent scale of the street. For lots larger than 62.5 feet wide, the required side setback is limited to 17.5 feet.

Let's turn to the two floor-to-area ratio provisions (Proposals 2 and 3) that those who are stirring the pot are using as handles for panic. The main difference here is the proposal has two FAR provisions instead of one. The reason for this is to encourage remodeling over teardowns so as to save the frontal elevation of existing homes. For a single-story structure, there is no change in the existing FAR. For a two-story, it is reduced from 50% to 45%, but attics and basements are no longer considered part of the square footage of the house as they are in the current DOD. Why not? Because if you are saving the existing elevation, it should not matter how the space is configured under the existing roof line.

The second FAR is for teardowns which we want to discourage for the reason stated. Again there is no change in the single-story limit from the existing FAR. The two-story is reduced to 40%, but even here, basements (side hill lots) are not considered because they don't impact the mass of the structure.

So the scale of housing is not hugely altered in these proposals. What is being done is to favor the retention of scale as seen from the street, the cadence (house space, house), and thus the character of the neighborhood by favoring remodeling over teardowns, in hopes this may also help save the historic district. A two-story house on the typical 50' X 140' Hillcrest lot can still be built to 2800 square feet. The typical house on these lots now is in the 1200 to 1500 sq. feet range. The proposal thus allows for doubling house sizes on these smallest of lots.

Preserving the architectural character of the community will help preserve Hillcrest's character and hence its desirability and hence its value – inside and outside of the historic district. Losing the historic district will certainly impact values adversely inside and outside the district, as it is one of the anchors of value for the entire community.

I will add that a neighborhood of only large homes is at risk in the longer term. Young people are having smaller families. They are becoming more environmentally conscious, and the cost of maintaining heated and cooled space is and will continue to rise. The average new house size peaked in 2015 at just under 2700 sq. ft. and has been falling ever since. It is now less than 2300 sq. ft., Far below what the proposed FAR would allow on the smallest lots. Bigger lots can build bigger homes, just as now.

Everyone is entitled to have and express their opinion about the desirability of these proposed changes. All I ask is not to let a few, using inaccurate and alarmist social media hyperbole, stampede you into rejecting years of well-meaning, conscientious work put in by your neighbors in an effort to save what we all value in Hillcrest.

- Bruce McMath