

April 19, 2023

City of Boise
Attn: Planning and Zoning Commission
150 N Capitol Blvd
Boise, ID 83702



Dear Planning and Zoning Commissioners,

The North End Neighborhood Association (NENA) has conducted a review of the Adoption Draft of the City's Modern Zoning Code. We'd like to thank City staff, especially Deanna Dupuy, for attending our March neighborhood meeting. That support enabled us to carefully walk through the code and ask important technical questions.

NENA's current position remains consistent with the Board's comments in our last letter (dated December 23, 2022). In a similar manner, we would like to highlight areas of concern and offer suggested solutions.

NEIGHBORHOOD NOTICING IS A PRIMARY CONCERN. As drafted, the onus for notification shifts to neighborhood associations. We are volunteer organizations, oftentimes with limited resources. This approach creates the potential for residents to hold neighborhood associations accountable for receiving information. That isn't responsible or feasible. Our solutions include: Re-introduce neighborhood notifications for clearly defined project types. Not all development should require noticing, but we suggest Change-in-Use applications when use transitions from major categories (e.g., residential to retail, residential to office), as well as residential projects that will exceed the previous density by more than 200%.

Place the onus of notification for these projects on the applicant. This can reside in an additional application fee to cover mailed notices handled by the City, or require proof of notification with the submittal.

Continue investing in the Community Development Tracker. It is an excellent resource, and it should be sustained.

SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT. As NENA has discussed the new residential dimensional standards, we've opted to do so mostly without a historic overlay lens. Not all of the North End is within the overlay and this creates parity with other neighborhoods. In our last letter, we encouraged holding single-family detached homes to the same dimensional standards as dwellings with higher densities. The Adoption Draft appears to go in the opposite direction by broadly removing lot coverage requirements.

We believe there is an appropriate scale for development within compact neighborhoods like the North End, and the concern is less about the number of dwellings within a development, but the size itself. Thanks to illustrative buildout examples from other NAs, it's clear that very large

residential developments will be allowed via the Adoption Draft. For example, duplexes could see individual units exceeding 4,000sf in size. Our suggested solution: Introduce a floor area ratio (not lot coverage) for R1-C lots. Floor area will control the overall massing of a structure whereas lot coverage does not. We believe that a 0.6 - 0.7 FAR for R1-C lots, with garage and basement space exempted, replicates a desirable massing and form found throughout our neighborhood. An example: 0.7:1 FAR on a 6,000 square foot lot would allow a 4,200 square foot structure. If additional space is desired, the code would then naturally incentivize less visibly obtrusive below-grade space. It matters much less to NENA if that 4,200 square foot structure is occupied by a single-family home or a fourplex.

ADAPTIVE REUSE SHOULD BE INCENTIVIZED. The preservation of existing homes is a worthy goal, for both historical context and sustainability. The adaptive reuse of an existing home should unlock flexibility for the remainder of the site, not hinder it. For example, the Adoption Draft makes it difficult to have separate detached structures on a parcel when the existing dwelling is preserved due to blanket dimensional and use-specific standards. Our suggested solution:

Relax use-specific or dimensional standards when an existing structure is adaptively reused. For example, a stringent requirement for street-facing front doors should not make or break creative infill development. If a FAR model is applied, the overall development of the property will also be naturally controlled, and could be divided between more than one structure.

INVEST RESOURCES INTO 'CITIZEN GUIDES.' As mentioned in Part 2 of this letter, a thorough understanding of this code was only possible due to citizens volunteering their time to illustrate the suggested changes. The City of Boise should invest adequate resources to ensure the code is communicated effectively this way.

5. **CONDUCT NEW SURVEYS FOR THE HISTORIC OVERLAYS.** The City's existing historic inventories are between 30 and 50 years old. Best practice states that these inventories should be redone every 10 to 15 years to update and expand the protection afforded by the historic districts. Previous inventories disqualified all homes built after the 1940s as being "too new" to be considered historic. A new survey would consider any home built before 1973 to be eligible, so many of the homes currently listed as "non-contributing" are, in fact, contributing to the current historic district but are in danger of being lost because they do not have "contributing status."

A new survey would address this issue, as well as update the status for many homes that have been altered over the years. Hundreds of homes built between the 1940s and 1973 (including all of our mid-century modern homes) are currently unprotected by the historic guidelines that exist to preserve them. Additionally, the City regularly relies on this data to make determinations about the appropriateness of changes, additions, demolitions and infill. Relying on inaccurate information can have a significant and potentially devastating consequence for applicants, the character and integrity of a neighborhood and the city as a whole. It's crucial that Boise conduct new historic surveys for all the historic districts to provide appropriate protection for our historic structures.

Ultimately, NENA appreciates the City's effort on the Modern Zoning Code, and believes it creates a framework for successful community development into the future. The improvements we've suggested are not major departures from the current draft, but ways to earn public trust, encourage compatible but innovative design, and still allow neighborhoods to evolve responsibly as Boise grows. NENA has always been a neighborhood with housing diversity, and we're eager to keep that intact.

Sincerely,

The North End Neighborhood Association Board of Directors

Erik Hagen, President