

Should larger “McMansions” be allowed in our neighborhood?

[September 2020] The City Planning Department is currently updating the West Los Angeles Community Plan and has made public a package of draft concepts, which includes proposals to allow increased density, building size and changes of use (rezoning). They seek community input in response to these draft concepts. An outline of the Community Plan Update draft concepts, with links to the relevant documents and maps is available on our website: <https://wssmhoa.org/west-la-community-plan-updates/>.

One of the draft concepts would permit significantly larger houses to be built on the single-family streets in part of our area that the Planners refer to as Rancho Park. WSSM believes that the most significant outcome of this change would be an increase in the size of new-construction spec houses built in our area.

What are the current rules?

Our single-family streets are zoned R1-1, under which the maximum allowed floor area of a new-construction or remodeled single-family home is 45% of lot size. In addition, any house with an attached front garage is granted an extra floor area allowance of 200 square feet.

R1-1 zoning is not unique to our area - in fact, it applies to almost all single-family properties in the City of LA.

The photo to the right shows a new home currently under construction in our area and it is a good example of how large a house can be built under R1-1 rules. With the attached front-facing garage, it has a total floor area of 3,235 square feet. That’s a pretty big house!



This large house conforms to our current R1-1 zoning rules

What is the proposed size change?

The Planning Department is considering an increase in allowable square footage from 45% of lot size to as much as 55% of lot size. They call this the “Low Residential: Scale” concept, which is somewhat confusing, because the proposal would actually allow larger single-family homes, which many would consider to be out-of-scale with the majority of homes – and small lots – in our area. Developers or homeowners wanting to build a very large project may welcome this change. But for their neighbors, the proposed size increase could mean living next door to an even larger, more imposing structure than the one shown in the photo above.

House-size FACTS

A 2019 WSSM study of single-family homes in our area found that:

- 20% of homes are still the original size. Average floor area of these is 22% of lot size (1,395 square feet).
- 80% of homes have been enlarged. Average floor area of these is 35% of lot size (2,231 square feet).
- Almost without exception, homes permitted in the study area over past five years that have maxed-out the allowed floor area are new-construction, speculative houses.

In other words, our current R1-1 zoning allows homeowners to build significant additions – even in the cases of homes that have already been enlarged. And on lots where the main house maxes-out the allowed floor area, still more additional square footage is allowed for the construction of an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU).

Our take on the proposal to allow larger houses

The WSSM board believes that the 45%-of-lot-size floor area limit in our current R1-1 zoning rules is a good compromise. It provides some protection from overscale development, while allowing homeowners plenty of scope to enlarge their homes. And R1-1 zoning has certainly not prevented developers from building profitable projects in our area. The spec home in the image to the right has a total floor area of 3,237 square feet and is being built right now under R1-1 zoning rules.

We believe our R1-1 zoning should remain intact and we strongly **OPPOSE** any zoning change that would allow larger homes to be built in the WSSM area.



We believe houses any larger than this would be too big for our small lots... what do YOU think?

Should our area get an “RG” zoning designation?

The rear-garage-and-driveway configuration is characteristic of our single-family streets. In fact, a WSSM study has shown that 89% of single-family homes in our area have a rear garage. The only exceptions are new-construction spec houses and hillside lots, where a front garage has been cut into the ground at street level. Driveways create an important buffer, providing space and light between homes, especially in cases where one or both neighbors has a two-story house. Front-facing attached garages eliminate the driveway buffer between homes, and can also result in reduced parkway area, loss of street trees and reduced curbside parking. In a recent public meeting, Planning Department staff offered us the option of adding an “RG” or rear garage designation to our zoning. The RG designation would require that driveways and rear garages be retained.

We love the idea of preserving the characteristic rear-garage configuration of our single-family streets and **SUPPORT** the RG designation for the entire WSSM area. Please note that:

- RG designation would not be applied retrospectively to properties that already have front garages.
- The RG designation option is separate from the conversation about allowed house size.
- The RG designation could include an exception for hillside homes.
- RG designation would not prevent you from converting your rear garage to an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU).

Be a part of the decision-making process!

The “Low Residential: Scale” concept for our area is not a done deal. The Planners want to hear from us about whether or not larger houses should be allowed. They also want our feedback on the separate question of the “RG” designation for our neighborhood. We urge you to be a part of the decision-making process by contacting the Planning Department with answers to the following questions and/or any other comments you may have:

- Should the zoning rules for Rancho Park be changed to allow larger single-family homes, or should our current R1-1 zoning remain in effect?
- Should an “RG” designation be added to zoning in our area, to preserve rear garages and driveways, or should the recent trend of new spec houses with attached, front-facing garages be allowed to continue?

Send emails to: City Planner Naomi Guth, naomi.guth@lacity.org

With cc’s to: CD5 Senior Planning Deputy Daniel Skolnick, daniel.skolnick@lacity.org
WSSM Land-Use Chair Steve Rogers, srogers@wssmhoa.org

IMPORTANT: You must mention “West LA Community Plan Update, Low Residential: Scale Concept” in the subject line of your email and be sure to include your name and street address with your comments.

THE DEADLINE FOR COMMENTS IS OCTOBER 15, 2020