



CITY OF CARSON

PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

NEW BUSINESS DISCUSSION: September 9, 2008
SUBJECT: Workshop regarding garage conversions
APPLICANT: City of Carson
REQUEST: Discuss and consider the legalization of garage conversions
PROPERTIES INVOLVED: Citywide

COMMISSION ACTION

Concurred with staff
 Did not concur with staff
 Other

COMMISSIONERS' VOTE

AYE	NO		AYE	NO	
		Faletogo – Chairperson			Saenz
		Cannon			Verrett
		Graber			

I. **Introduction**

On August 12, 2008, at the last Planning Commission meeting, Commissioner Saenz requested bringing an item to the Planning Commission to discuss and consider the legalization of garage conversions. The Planning Commission moved to direct staff to research the issue for discussion at their next meeting on September 9, 2008.

II. **Background**

Homes in the city of Carson were first constructed at the turn of the century with the first neighborhoods established the 1930s and 1940s. According to the General Plan Housing Element, 10 percent of the homes were built prior to 1949; 20 percent were built in the 1950s; and 40 percent were built in the 1960s. In total, approximately 85 percent of the homes were built prior to the city's Zoning Code becoming effective in 1977. Thus, most homes were built based on the requirements of the County of Los Angeles.

The use of vehicles became much more prevalent in the 1940s following World War II. As such, the County adopted a number of ordinances to address the growing popularity of the automobile. Table 1 summarizes the parking requirements for single-family homes under the County.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF COUNTY PARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

DATE	REQUIREMENT
Nov. 10, 1943	One open space per unit (Ord. No. 4292)
Jan. 13, 1950	Min. 144 s.f. required (Ord. No. 5447)
June 22, 1956	One covered space per unit (Ord. No. 6942)
Nov. 15, 1957	Require driveway to be 3-inches thick and made of macadam (Ord. No. 7239)
June 27, 1958	Space to have a minimum width of 8 ft. (Ord. No. 7349)
Sept. 14, 1962	Two covered parking spaces required (Ord. No. 8264)

On October 3, 1977, the city adopted the current Zoning Ordinance based mostly on the County's standards. The Zoning Ordinance includes a provision under Section 9162.21 requiring all new single-family homes on lots 50 feet wide or greater to provide a two-car garage in which the interior area measures no less than 20 feet by 20 feet. As a result, many garages for single-family homes built prior to 1977 became legal nonconforming. However, under Section 9182.41(F), legal nonconforming parking spaces, including garages and carports, are "allowed to continue indefinitely,



except that an addition to a dwelling may be made without making the parking conforming provided the number of dwelling units is not increased and the addition does not occupy the only available space on the lot which could be used to meet the parking requirement.”

The Planning Division reviews approximately 50 over-the-counter development proposals per month, many of which are additions to single-family homes. As part of the review, staff ensures that a two-car garage is provided. For those homes that are legal nonconforming, staff ensures that an area on the property is available to accommodate a future two-car garage and driveway if possible. It is staff's opinion that the current requirement is adequate to address impacts to a neighborhood resulting from a larger home. Plans that do not provide a two-car garage or a location for a future two-car garage are usually revised to meet the requirement.

III. Analysis

Residential Property Report

On July 1, 1999, Ordinance No. 99-1555 went into effect requiring that a Residential Property Report (RPR) be obtained by a seller prior to the sale, exchange, or transfer of a residential property. The purpose of the RPR is to protect both the buyer and seller from engaging in the transfer of a home with illegal structures or nonconforming construction. The RPR requires an inspection that must be performed by the Building and Safety Division prior to the transfer of property. If violations are identified, they must be corrected as part of the RPR process. Since its inception in 1999, the RPR program has identified 523 garage-related violations, which include garage conversions.

Garage Conversions

Many of the violations identified in an RPR include the conversion of a garage into living area. Staff has numerous concerns with garage conversions because of the impacts to health, safety, and welfare. These concerns are described below:

Planning Issues

- Front Yard Setback – Garages must be located a minimum 25 feet from the front lot line. A garage conversion would require a new garage to be constructed within the front yard setback.
- Side Yard Setback – Attached garages typically must be five (5) feet from the side property line for interior lots. A garage conversion often restricts access to a future two-car garage which could be constructed in the rear of a property.
- Rear Yard Setback – The rear yard setback for a habitable structure is 15 feet, but a setback of five (5) feet is permitted if 50 percent of the rear yard remains open. Detached garages may be constructed one (1) inch or three (3) feet from the rear property line. Thus, a garage located in the rear yard that is converted into livable area would most likely violate the five-foot requirement.
- Attached/Detached Garage – Attached garages must meet the setback requirements discussed above. However, since a garage is considered non-



habitable, detached garages may be constructed one inch or three feet from the side and rear property lines if located more than 60 feet from the front property line. The conversion of a garage would most likely violate the setback requirements for a habitable building.

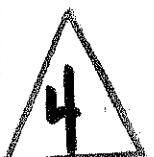
- Circulation – The minimum driveway width for a garage is 12 feet. However, a two-car garage located in the front of a property typically has a 16-foot wide driveway. Converting a garage into living space would not allow proper vehicular circulation for a new garage unless a property has an alley in the back or is a corner lot.
- Lack of Parking – Garage conversions eliminate onsite parking which leads to residents parking their vehicles on the public street. This narrows the public street which causes safety issues and lowers the quality of life for residents in the neighborhood. Staff has observed this to be a problem in several neighborhoods including Scottsdale and the Presidential Tract.
- Overcrowding – Garage conversions encourage overcrowding which reduces the quality of life for neighbors due to increased noise, cars, and foot traffic. Single-family neighborhoods were meant to sustain one family per home.
- Multiple Garage Conversions – A proliferation of garage conversions in a single neighborhood would further intensify overcrowding and reduce the quality of life.

Building and Safety Issues

- Structural Material – Many existing garages have thin floor slabs, minimal foundations, and exposed framing that is typically not suitable for livable areas.
- Insulation – Garages are not intended to be habitable areas and thus are not typically insulated. Furthermore, many are not designed with sufficient dimensions to install necessary insulation.
- Electrical Wiring – Garages typically have exposed wiring not suitable for livable areas.
- Light and Ventilation – Livable area requires a minimum amount of light and ventilation. Although some garages have windows, those located along a property line may not.

Ordinance Amendment

For the reasons discussed above, staff does not recommend that an ordinance amendment to allow for garage conversions be implemented. The CMC does permit the reduction in the number of parking spaces for mixed-use and affordable housing projects. However, given the design and layout of most single-family neighborhoods, most residents are reliant upon their vehicles for commuting and staff does not see a foreseeable decrease in the amount of vehicles owned by single-family homeowners.



IV. Recommendation


That the Planning Commission:

- CONSIDER and DISCUSS the information provided for in this workshop; and
- RECEIVE and FILE.


V. Exhibits

None.

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Approved by:


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