

Shape Our Fremont

Where Fremont residents can learn about shaping proposed housing developments...

Neighbors Limit Mega Mansions

When a developer tore down a modest one-story house and replaced it with a much larger two-story house that towered over the surrounding homes, a group of determined residents decided to fight back to preserve the community character of their area.

After more than a year of discussions and meetings between residents and the Fremont Planning Department, the Planning Commission and City Council unanimously approved Designated Neighborhood status for the entire Mission Palms development, which is generally bounded by Washington Boulevard, Palm Avenue, Olive Avenue, and Gallegos Avenue.

As a key part of the new status, all future home construction and expansion throughout the development will be subject to several new restrictions, including lowered building heights and reduced second-story floor areas.

Designated Neighborhoods

Mission Palms joins Glenmoor Gardens and Mission Ranch as officially approved designated neighborhoods in Fremont. Each has specific restrictions on the size of homes in order to preserve the overall look, feel, and character of the area. The restrictions vary, but the intent is the same -- to protect the features that made the neighborhood a desirable place to live.

Community character is an important part of the Fremont General Plan, which includes an entire chapter on the importance of creating and preserving the character of various areas in the city. Placing restrictions on the size, shape, and architecture of homes in a neighborhood as it evolves over the years is an important component of community character.

For example, Glenmoor Gardens in the Centerville Area is noted for its low, single-story homes. To protect those features, residents got the city to approve the area as a designated neighborhood in 2010. One of the restrictions was that new two-story homes or second-story additions to existing homes are prohibited. The building heights and roof slopes were also limited to maintain a low profile that blends with the other homes.

Mission Ranch in the Mission San Jose Area was also made a designated neighborhood in 2010. The principal concern of residents was to ensure that the size and mass of any second stories should be significantly smaller than the first stories. When the residents of nearby Mission Palms considered restrictions for their development, they made them similar to those of Mission Ranch. In both neighborhoods, the primary goal was to prevent construction of very large second stories that are out of character with the rest of the area.

Standards That Fit

Designated neighborhood status gives residents the ability to tailor Fremont's Residential District Development Standards to better fit their area. For example, here are the details of two standards that tailored to fit specific needs of specific designated neighborhoods:

Heights. The maximum building height in all single-family residential neighborhoods is 30 feet, which applies to both one- and two-story houses. That height is measured to the mid-point of the roof, not the peak, so the actual height can be somewhat greater. In all three designated neighborhoods, the

maximum height of a one-story house is limited to 17 feet, and of a two-story house (where permitted) is 27 feet. Those heights are measured to the actual roof peak and result in much a lower visual impact on adjacent houses.

Floor Areas. This is where residents can potentially limit mega mansions. The current standards for all single-family residential neighborhoods allow a two-story house to have a total floor area (including the garage) up to 64 percent of the lot area. That can result in a very large house that is often out of proportion to the adjacent houses. In the Mission Palms neighborhood, the residents decided to limit the total floor area of two-story houses to a maximum of 35 percent of the lot area. One-story houses would be limited to a maximum of 40 percent of the lot area, which provides an incentive for homeowners to expand horizontally, rather than vertically.

Other Standards

Fremont recently approved new standards to minimize privacy impacts relating to second-story additions and new two-story home construction in single-family residential neighborhoods throughout the entire city. The privacy standards include design rules (required) and design guidelines (recommended) regarding the size and placement of doors, windows, balconies, decks, and landscaping. These standards are now in effect.

Standards affecting solar panels are under review. As Fremont moves to become a more energy-sustainable city, there is a need to consider how the shadow from two-story houses would affect roof-mounted solar panels on neighboring one-story houses, and what "solar rights" residents have. Considering the cost of solar panel installation, this can be an important economic issue.

To learn more about specific residential developments and issues throughout Fremont, go to [**www.ShapeOurFremont.com**](http://www.ShapeOurFremont.com)