

Building Heights... A **LOOMING** Concern

The long standing issue of measuring “building height” has resurfaced as a result of a homeowner who recently built a large house where he raised the grade, causing a “looming” effect on the adjacent property. As such, County of Fairfax Board of Supervisors recently tasked County staff to address this apparent “looming” problem in the County by revisiting and redefining the methodology for measuring building heights.

Revised Methodology for Measuring Building Height

County staff with the assistance of the Residential Compatibility Committee has prepared draft regulations identifying methodologies that would allow the construction of larger houses adjacent to smaller existing houses without creating a looming effect. These draft regulations, which will affect all lots including subdivision and infill lots, were prepared and presented to the County Board of Supervisors outlining the following two main methods:

❶ The method of measuring building height would still remain the same, but an additional criteria using bulk plane would effectively limit building height.

❷ The County would impose this new regulation that calls for a bulk plane limitation on the side yards of all (infill or new subdivisions) single family detached houses. The bulk plane angle varies based on different zoning categories. The bulk plane is computed from a



5' elevated location from the side property lines. This 5' elevated location is a point from the average grade along the side lot lines between the front and the back of the house. This average grade is the lower of either the existing or proposed grade. The photo above shows an angle of 30 degrees from the average existing grade. Under the proposed regulations a significant portion of the house would be cut off.

Continued on back...

Civil Engineers

Land Planners

Environmental Scientists

Wetland Specialists

Landscape Architects

Land Surveyors

Archaeologists

The Impact On The Building Industry

This measurement from existing grade will have a significant impact on the building design. There may be many cases where there is a natural stream or steep grade on the side of the lot and the builder needs to create a building pad. This may cause severe limitations in the design of the roof line and/or footprint. It is important to once again recognize that these new regulations will have a significant impact on the development of all lots and not just infill development.

What's Next?

These recommendations along with grandfathering considerations were included in the draft regulations, which are scheduled to go to public hearing this October. Paciulli, Simmons & Associates is planning to submit examples of where these changes in regulation would be of a considerable impact on a homeowner and/or developer.

Pete Rigby, Jr., PE - Residential Compatibility Committee Member

Peter J. Rigby, Jr., PE, Partner at Paciulli, Simmons & Associates, has over 28 years of multi-discipline experience in engineering and project management for private and public sector clients. Pete is a member of the Residential Compatibility Committee. He has been a Northern Virginia Building Industry Association (NVBIA) member for over 24 years and a strong advocate for the building industry. Pete is a NVBIA Board of Director, Life Council Member and currently supports the Fairfax Chapter, the Green Building Council and the Urban Chapter. He is also an Engineers and Surveyors Institute (ESI) Board of Director and actively involved with the Tysons Task Force, State Technical Advisory Committee for VAHB, Coalition for Smart Growth, LID/BMP Handbook revisions, American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC), Design Build Institute of America (DBIA), National Association of Industrial and Office Properties (NAIOP), and Society of American Military Engineers (SAME).



To learn more about how our firm can assist you in preparing preliminary grading plans to ascertain the impacts to your project or for a CD copy of staff presentations, meeting notes, and sample illustrations, contact Pete Rigby at 703.934.0900 or by email at prigby@psaltd.com.

A LOOMING CONCERN

Fairfax County revisits and redefines the methodology for measuring building heights.

Paciulli, Simmons & Associates

11212 Waples Mill Road

Suite 100

Fairfax, Virginia 22030

Tel: 703.934.0900

Fax: 703.934.9787

Imonahan@psaltd.com

www.psaltd.com

PSA for you