PC Case 22-05 – Ordinance Amendment Regarding Off-Street Loading and Unloading Regulations – City of West St. Paul

BACKGROUND:

Presently the zoning ordinance reads, “Loading berths shall not occupy the front yard or a side yard adjacent to a street”. However, after some review and discussions with an industrial property owner, City Staff has elected to revisit this language and recommends an amendment that would allow more flexibility for some industrial properties while still maintaining the intent of the code.

The attached ordinance alters the code in order to allow loading berths/docks to be in the front yard in industrial districts, as long as said yard does not sit adjacent to a property of a different zoning district (such as commercial or residential). City Staff believes the intent of the current language was to lessen the visibility of loading docks from the street and/or adjacent properties. However, loading docks and larger scale vehicles are much more common in industrial areas and therefore, City Staff does not believe allowing the loading docks in the front yard (not abutting a different zoning district) to be detrimental to the views of the adjacent properties.

Visual Example:

- Lot 1 – Zoned Residential
- Lot 2 – Zoned Industrial
  - Front yard is the eastern property line,
  - Lot 2 could not have a loading dock in the front yard
  - Lot 2 could have a loading dock in the side yard facing the street (south)
- Lot 4 – Zoned Industrial
  - Front yard is the northern property line,
  - Lot 4 could have a loading dock in the front yard
  - Lot 4 could not have a loading dock in the side yard facing the street (east)
CURRENT ENVIRONMENT:
In addition to offering the industrial properties a little more flexibility, this amendment would also help to better align with the current environment of the I1 – Light Industrial zoning district as many properties currently have a loading dock in the front yard or in the side yard adjacent to the street (see image below).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:
Staff recommends the Planning Commission hold a public hearing and make a recommendation on the proposed ordinance amendment.

ATTACHMENTS:
Staff Presentation
Redlined Ordinance

TIMELINE:
March 15: Planning Commission (Public Hearing)
March 28: City Council First Reading
April 11: City Council Final Reading
City Council –
March 28th, 2022

Ordinance Amendment –
Off-Street Loading and Unloading
Regulations (Loading Docks)
Amendment

Off-Street Loading and Unloading Regulations

Current City Code Language – Loading Berths/Docks

- Does not allow loading berths/docks to be in the front yard or side yard adjacent to a street.
  - Applies to all zoning districts.

Proposed Change

- Allows loading berths/docks in the front yard and side yard adjacent to a street if:
  - The subject property is zoned industrial, and
  - The front/side yard does not face a different zoning district.
Amendment
Off-Street Loading and Unloading Regulations

Examples

• Lot 1 – Zoned Residential
• Lot 2 – Zoned Industrial
  • Front Yard = East property line
  • Lot 2 would **not** be able to have a loading dock in the front yard
  • Lot 2 **could** have a dock in the side yard (south) facing the street

• Lot 3 – Zoned Residential
• Lot 4 – Zoned Industrial
  • Front Yard = North property line
  • Lot 4 **could** have a loading dock in the front yard
  • Lot 4 **could not** have a loading dock in the side yard (east) facing the street
Amendment

Why Make the Change?

Meetings and discussion with an industrial property owner

• What is the intent of the code? Who is it helping to protect?
  • Proposed change protects the value and visual aesthetics of adjacent, non-industrial, properties while allowing added flexibility to the industrial properties.

• This will also help to align the code with the current environment of the I1 district.
  • The image to the right shows I1 properties that have a dock in the front or side yards.
The Planning Commission reviewed the proposed ordinance at their March 15th, 2022 meeting, and discussed the following items,

- Required setbacks and screening when an industrial use is adjacent to other uses to ensure sufficient separation and buffering
- Commonality of loading docks that are currently in the front and/or side yard adjacent to a street

Ultimately, the Commission voted 8 - 0 to recommend approval of the amendment as written and recommended by City Staff.
Amendment
Staff Recommendation

City Staff is requesting that the City Council review the proposed ordinance amendment and approve of the first reading.