

MUSCATINE CITY COUNCIL IN-DEPTH MEETING Thursday, March 13, 2025

Brad Bark, Mayor

Don Lampe, 1st Ward

Jeff Osborne, 2nd Ward

Peggy Gordon, 3rd Ward

Nadine Brockert, 4th Ward

John Jindrich, 5th Ward

Angie Lewis, At Large

Matt Conard, At Large

Matt Mardesen, City Administrator

Cinda Hilger, City Clerk

Brent Hinders, City Attorney

City Council meetings are held at 6:00 pm on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month, In-depth sessions on the 2nd Thursday of each month. All meetings are available for review on the City of Muscatine YouTube page.

AGENDA

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. ROLL CALL

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

4. COUNCIL DISCUSSION ITEMS

- A. Presentation on TIF Request from Carver Pump
- B. Discussion on an Amendment to City Building Code that would remove the need for the submission of engineered plans for post framed buildings that are less 1,440 sq. ft. in size
- C. Discussion Amendment to City Code to Promote Residential Infill by Relaxing Side-yard Setback Requirements for Certain Preexisting Very Narrow Residential Parcels. For qualifying parcels, this amendment would reduce the side-yard setback as needed to maintain a minimum buildable width of 20 feet, provided that the side-yard setback is not reduced to less than 5 feet.

5. MAYOR AND COUNCIL REPORTS

6. ADJOURNMENT



City of Muscatine

ITEM NUMBER

IN-DEPTH ITEM - CITY COUNCIL

DATE: 3/13/2025

STAFF

Andrew Fangman, Assistant Community Development Director

SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

Presentation on TIF Request from Carver Pump

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

ATTACHMENTS



City of Muscatine

ITEM NUMBER

IN-DEPTH ITEM - CITY COUNCIL

DATE: 3/13/2025

STAFF

Andrew Fangman, Assistant Community Development Director

SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

Discussion on an Amendment to City Building Code that would remove the need for the submission of engineered plans for post framed buildings that are less 1,440 sq. ft. in size

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Existing building code lack specific provisions for directly approving post-frame buildings. Therefore, post-frame construction typically requires approval as an alternate method. This ensures safety and durability. For post frame buildings exceeding 1,000 square feet, plans must be signed off by an engineer.

The Construction Appeals and Advisory Board recommends approving an amendment that would exempt post-frame buildings under 1,440 square feet from the requirement of submitting engineered plans.

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

Should, as recommended by the Construction Appeal and Advisory Board, an amendment to the City Building Code that would remove the need for the submission of engineered plans for post framed building that are less 1,440 sq. ft. in size?

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

Post-frame buildings are a type of structure that uses large, vertical posts, that are embedded in the ground or anchored to concrete piers, as the primary support structure for the roof and walls. This construction method differs significantly from traditional stick-framed structures which are constructed on continuous foundations. This approach to construction is known for being economical and easy to assemble quickly, making it popular for detached garages and other storage type uses.

While adopted building codes allow for post-frame buildings, they lack specific, prescriptive provisions unlike those for more traditional construction methods. Prescriptive provisions

outline exact requirements for materials, dimensions, and construction methods to ensure compliance with performance requirements (e.g., strength, stability, fire resistance). When a building code lacks prescriptive provisions for a construction type, it's classified as an "alternate method of construction." In such cases, the building design must demonstrate compliance with performance requirements through engineering calculations and analysis, when the size and scope of a post frame building exceeds any one the following criteria:

- It is no larger than 1000 sq. feet in floor area, and
- has posts spaced no more than 8 feet on center, and
- has a sidewall height of 12 feet or less

Currently, obtaining a building permit for any post-frame building exceeding these criteria requires plans signed off by an engineer to ensure compliance with all applicable performance provisions. The requirement for engineered plans can add significant cost to constructing such a post-frame building.

The Construction Appeal Advisory Board and City Staff are recommending that City Code be amended to increase the allowed floor area to 1,440 square feet, requiring engineered plans, provided the post spacing does not exceed 8 feet on center and the sidewall height remains below 12 feet.

Zoning regulations establish a maximum size limit of 1,440 square feet for garages and accessory buildings on residential parcels less than 20,000 square feet (approximately ½ acre). Raising the maximum size for post-frame buildings that can be built without engineering to match this limit would mean that nearly all allowable detached residential garages and accessory buildings could be constructed as post-frame structures without the submission of engineered plans. Maintaining requirements for such non-engineered post-frame structures, such as a maximum post spacing of 8 feet on center and a sidewall height of 12 feet, ensures that these structures remain relatively low-risk and low-hazard.

Attached is the code language that if inserted a section, would make this change.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Post Frame Building Amendment Text

8-1-4(E)

E. Post Frame Buildings

Post frame buildings satisfying all of the following requirements are exempt from the engineering certification of plans:

1. Floor area of 1,440 square feet or less.
2. Eave height of 12 feet or less.
3. Post spacing of 8 feet or less

8-10-2(F)

F. Post Frame Buildings

Post frame buildings satisfying all of the following requirements are exempt from the engineering certification of plans:

1. Floor area of 1,440 square feet or less.
2. Eave height of 12 feet or less.
3. Post spacing of 8 feet or less



City of Muscatine

ITEM NUMBER

IN-DEPTH ITEM - CITY COUNCIL

DATE: 3/13/2025

STAFF

Andrew Fangman, Assistant Community Development Director

SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

Discussion Amendment to City Code to Promote Residential Infill by Relaxing Side-yard Setback Requirements for Certain Preexisting Very Narrow Residential Parcels. For qualifying parcels, this amendment would reduce the side-yard setback as needed to maintain a minimum buildable width of 20 feet, provided that the side-yard setback is not reduced to less than 5 feet.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This proposed amendment addresses the challenge of redeveloping Muscatine's numerous narrow, pre-zoning residential lots, particularly those 30-feet wide, which hinder infill development due to restrictive side-yard setback requirements. To facilitate the construction of functional, economical homes on these lots, the proposed amendment would allow for reduced side-yard setbacks, ensuring a minimum buildable width of 20 feet while maintaining a minimum 5-foot setback for fire safety. This change aims to streamline infill development, support initiatives like the Muscatine Center for Social Action's housing project and the city's pattern book initiative, and revitalize older neighborhoods by enabling the construction of new, appropriately sized homes on existing narrow parcels without requiring individual variances.

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

Should, as recommended by the Planning and Zoning Commission, an amendment to City Code with the goal of promoting residential infill by relaxing side-yard setback requirements for certain preexisting very narrow residential parcels be brought forward for Council action?

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

For qualifying parcels, this amendment would reduce the side-yard setback as needed to maintain a minimum buildable width of 20 feet, provided that the side-yard setback is not reduced to less than 5 feet.

For a new home to be constructed, the parcel upon which it is constructed must meet the minimum parcel size and lot frontage requirements established for the zoning district which it

is located in. Any newly created residential parcel must also comply with these standards.

Muscatine adopted its first zoning ordinance in 1957. Prior to this there were no minimum lot size, or frontage requirements for new home construction or land subdivision. Approximately 59% of housing units in Muscatine were built before 1960. This means a majority of homes and the parcels that they are located on predate the implementation of any minimum lot size, frontage, or setback regulations.

Consequently, a significant number of residentially zoned parcels do not meet one or more of the, parcel size, or frontage requirements of their respective zoning districts. Over 32% of residentially zoned parcels do not meet the minimum parcel size requirements of their zoning districts, likely due to their creation before the establishment of zoning in Muscatine.

Existing zoning regulations allow for the continued residential use and potential redevelopment of parcels with existing lot size and frontage deficiencies. Section 10-26-4(A) of the City Code permits uses allowed in a zoning district, even if the parcel does not meet minimum lot size or frontage requirements. However, the manner in which setback requirements are applied makes it difficult to redevelop existing, but extremely narrow, residential parcels.

When Muscatine was originally platted, lots were typically 60 feet by 140 feet. This practice continued in numerous subdivisions and additions during Muscatine's early years. During this period of rapid growth, it was common for these 60-foot lots to be split in half, creating 30-foot-wide lots with residences built on each. As there were no regulations prohibiting this practice, hundreds of these very narrow residential parcels can be found throughout older parts of Muscatine.

Over time, many of these very narrow residential parcels have become vacant due to the destruction or demolition of the existing dwellings. These parcels are ideally located for infill development. Constructing new homes on these parcels would revitalize surrounding neighborhoods, create much-needed new housing stock cost-effectively, and require no additional investment in public infrastructure.

The smallest and most typical setback requirement among residential zoning districts is six feet. On a 30-foot-wide parcel, this results in a building envelope of only 18 feet in width. This dramatically decreases the viability and likelihood of desired residential infill development occurring on such narrow parcels.



Muscatine Center for Social Action (MCSA), has received a neighborhood revitalization grant from the Iowa Finance Authority to build six single-family owner-occupied homes on infill sites in an area centered along Mulberry

Avenue between Jefferson School and 5th Street. Three of these six homes are being developed on parcels that are 30' by 140'. The first of these new homes is currently under constructed at 409 E. 6th Street. The homes being constructed here and on the other two 30-foot-wide lots share the same design, with a width of just under 20 feet. To accommodate this design, a variance was required to reduce the side yard setbacks from 6 feet to 5 feet.

Creating a functional, attractive, and economical home design on a parcel only 30 feet wide presented a significant design challenge. The extra two feet of building width, enabled by the minor reduction in side yard setbacks through these variances, was crucial for creating a functional, attractive, and economical home design.

The opportunities and challenges of infill development on 30-foot-wide parcels extend beyond the three parcels involved in the ongoing MCSA project. Currently, at least two dozen vacant residential parcels with a width of approximately 30 feet exist. Four of these are vacant City-owned surplus parcels. Additional such parcels are likely to become vacant over time. Therefore, any successful strategy for infill development must include the redevelopment of a significant number of these narrow lots.

To promote additional infill development, the City of Muscatine is currently collaborating with an architectural firm to create a pattern book of building plans. This book will include three sets of shovel-ready, complete building plans that any community member can freely use. Recognizing the opportunities and design challenges presented by the large number of very narrow infill parcels, one of the three plan sets will be for a three-bedroom, two-bathroom house that can be built on a 30-foot-wide lot.

Similar to the MCSA projects, the pattern book design for a home on a 30-foot-wide lot will likely have a width of nearly 20 feet. Under current zoning regulations, constructing such a structure on a 30-foot-wide parcel would require a variance to reduce side yard setbacks to 5 feet. It is counterproductive to require someone seeking to construct a structure according to plans produced by the City, in furtherance of a broader community objective, to first obtain a variance.

A better approach would to make a change to City Code that allow for the desired type of infill development by right. To that end City Staff proposes that following be added as Section 10-26-2(K)

“K. Where a parcel which existed as of January 1, 2025 and has less area or frontage than herein required in the district in which it is located, a new single-family residence may nevertheless be constructed on such a parcel provided that:

1. A single-family residence is a permitted use in zoning district in which the parcel is located.

2. Side-yard setbacks are maintained, except the buildable width cannot be reduced to less than 20 feet, except that there shall be a side yard setback five feet shall be maintained.”

Adding this section would maximize flexibility in redeveloping existing very narrow residential parcels without substantially altering the overall zoning regulations.

The proposed amendment does not allow for the reduction of side yard setbacks to less than five feet. This is because the adopted building code requires that any exterior wall constructed within five feet of a property line must be constructed as a one-hour fire-rated wall. To achieve this rating, specific fire-resistant materials must be used, and the number of openings (windows and doors) is limited. These restrictions make it both uneconomical and a design challenge to construct closer than five feet to a property line, particularly for the type of single-family home infill development this proposed amendment aims to promote.

On February 11, 2025, the Planning and Zoning Commission voted unanimously to recommend the adoption of this code change.

ATTACHMENTS
