

The Westridge Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Plan

Westridge
Neighborhood
Association



Westridge Road Neighborhood Conservation Overlay

Credits and Acknowledgements:

The Westridge Neighborhood Conservation Overlay (NCO) Plan marks Greensboro's first NCO Plan and is the result of many hours of hard work by the Westridge Neighborhood and members of the Greensboro community. Over the course of approximately one year staff, members of the neighborhood and residents of Greensboro worked to determine the challenges facing the Westridge Neighborhood as well as the significant character defining elements that have shaped the neighborhood for over fifty years and contribute to its uniqueness in Greensboro. The plan, achieved through months of listening, revisions, and compromise, represents a vision that allows for future growth and development of the area that respects its existing character.

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A special thanks to Ron Wilson and the Starmount Company for help in researching the history of Westridge and its development.

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Introduction

The following information provides support and background information for the establishment of a Neighborhood Conservation Overlay (NCO) for the Westridge Neighborhood. This report establishes a context for amending existing zoning standards and creating new ones through an overlay district to facilitate compatible development or redevelopment. It suggests proposed boundaries and documents existing conditions of the area.

Greensboro's enabling ordinance for NCOs requires that a plan and development guidelines accompany any request for the creation of an NCO. Contained within this plan are: a statement of purpose and intent, description of the area boundary, relevant history, a physical description of the area, land use and zoning analysis, and a review of the Westridge NCO planning process.

Purpose & Intent of the Westridge NCO

The Westridge Neighborhood Association (WNA) believes that the establishment of a neighborhood conservation overlay is essential to preserving the integrity of their unique neighborhood. These features, long recognized as unique to the Westridge area, are large lots, substantial setbacks, and significant tree coverage.

The purpose of the Westridge NCO is to protect the uniqueness of Westridge Neighborhood by requiring any new construction and development to conform to the existing distinctive characteristics of the Westridge Neighborhood.

Applicability

All properties located within the Westridge Neighborhood Conservation Overlay must adhere to the development standards contained within the Westridge NCO Plan. When development, redevelopment or infill occurs, such projects are subject to the standards described in this document as well as those standards defined by the underlying zoning. Where the overlay standards are in conflict with the underlying zoning, the overlay standards take precedence.

The review process for new development will remain as outlined in the City Code; however, exterior elevations must accompany any submittal. Review procedures for new construction or additions will be handled through a standard staff level review. For specific information regarding application and approval procedures in Greensboro, consult the Greensboro Unified Development Ordinance or the Greensboro Planning Department.

Physical Characteristics

The major development phase for the Westridge Neighborhood occurred between 1936 and 1955. It is characterized broadly by large lots, generous setbacks, dense tree coverage and a single family residential development pattern. The neighborhood displays a wide variety of architectural styles and various physical characteristics. While lots and houses vary in respect to the make up of the neighborhood, the majority of homes comprise delicate transitions from house to house creating an overall cohesive appearance to the neighborhood.



Above: Two examples of homes in the Westridge Neighborhood

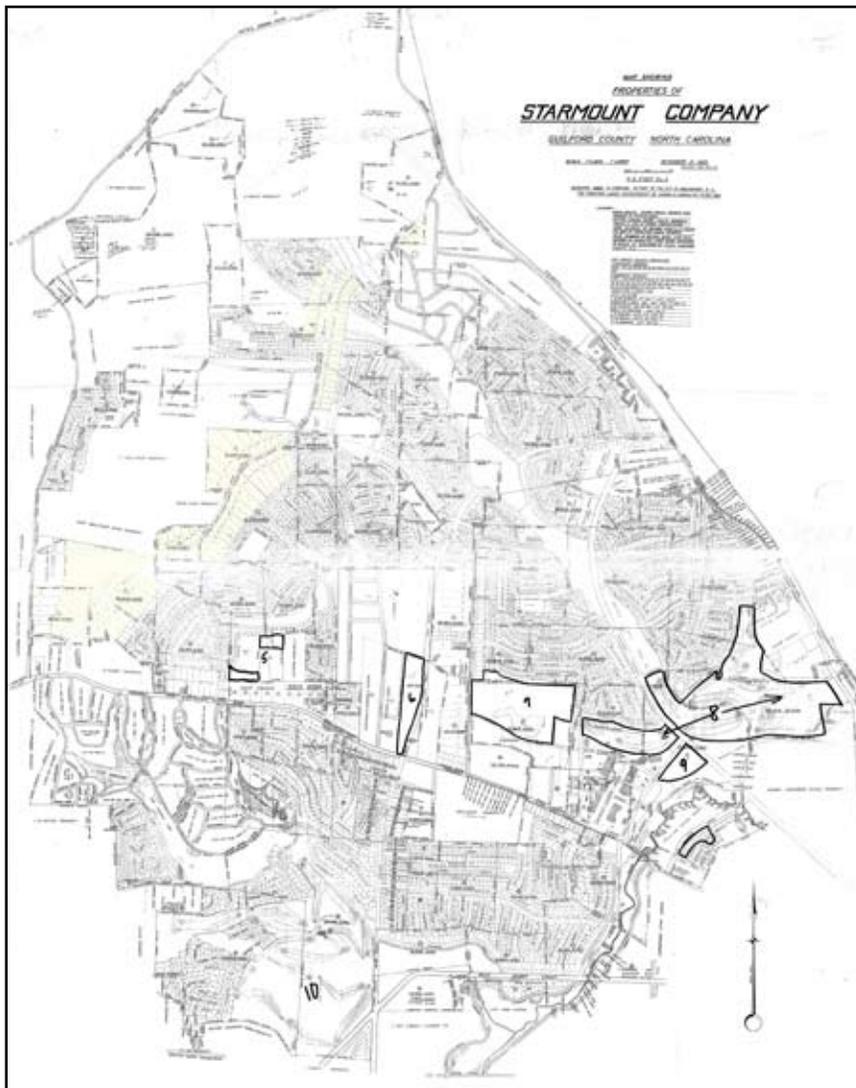
Most homes are situated on large lots, set back a considerable distance from the road and are oriented to Westridge Road. These characteristics define the area as a uniquely linear neighborhood. It is not uncommon for homes to be set back from Westridge Road a distance of 100' or more. Because of these large setbacks, homes have the ability to landscape their front yards in a variety of ways that help to define the character of the street. The majority of homes in the neighborhood fall into three categories of landscaping: 1) overall dense undisturbed land in which front yards appear similar to a forest, 2) dense undisturbed land fronting along Westridge Road which acts as a somewhat shallow buffer for formally landscaped lawns, and 3) formally landscaped front yards with a combination of canopy, understory and ornamental trees. These categories of landscaping have allowed for the growth of an established tree canopy and significant amounts of undisturbed land. In the viewshed from Westridge Road, the dense tree coverage often times obscures the views of the homes and creates the feeling of being in an “urban forest.”



Above: Examples of dense tree canopies and landscaping in the Westridge Neighborhood

History

The Westridge Neighborhood was originally developed by the Starmount Company as a portion of “Friendly Acres.” Friendly Acres comprised a large portion of the Starmount holdings in Northwest Greensboro. Initially acquired by The Scales Property Company, the land area comprised what is now Starmount Forest and Country Club, Friendly Acres, Guilford Hills, Garden Homes, Forest Valley, Green Valley Office Park, Green Valley, Westwood, Hamilton Lakes, Hamilton Forest and Starmount Farms. Although the Scales Company was unsuccessful in developing the land and declared bankruptcy, the land was subsequently acquired by the Cone family and sold to Blanche Sternberger-Benjamin in 1929. Sternberger-Benjamin and her husband, Edward Benjamin, began the Starmount Company, a paraphrasing of the English translation for Sternberger, meaning star of the mountain, to sell their newly acquired land in the northwest portion of the Greensboro.



Left: Original map of the Starmount Company's holdings in Northwest Greensboro. The Westridge Road area is highlighted in yellow.

History (continued)

As expected, residential property sold slowly in the midst of the Great Depression. In order to help spur sales and cater to the growing Jewish community in Greensboro, Starmount undertook building the Starmount Country Club in 1936. After completion of the country club, sales in the area sold at a rapid pace. Planned for a variety of types of communities, the original Scales property was carved into residential areas catering to both modest homeowners and the very wealthy. Much of Friendly Acres, with large, deep lots was advertised as a place where “boys could grow up strong and tanned by the wind and sun,” horses could roam and one could be part of a refined country lifestyle.

The majority of the parcels were sold by 1946 to a variety of purchasers for nominal sums of approximately \$500-\$1000. The Starmount Company did not sell land developed with homes, but rather parcels that were prepped for development with water, sewer and roads already installed. These “raw” parcels were then sold to individuals with deed restrictions. Below is a synopsis of the common restrictions placed on Westridge parcels:

- o Property used for residential purposes only
- o Standards for subdivision including minimum lot sizes and either a) minimum lot widths or b) minimum lot frontages for the newly created lots
- o Minimum square footage (commonly around 1000 sq.ft.) for principal dwellings or minimum construction costs for principal dwellings (commonly around \$4,000-\$5,000)
- o All design work approved by the Starmount Company
- o Minimum front yard setbacks (commonly 100-125 feet from property lines)
- o The holding of easements for rights-of-way by the Starmount Company
- o Orientation of the main building toward Westridge Road
- o Limits on fencing and creation of new roadways through existing parcels

These restrictions were envisioned to frame the initial development of the area and they eventually expired.

The development patterns on Westridge Road have changed little since the 1950s and 1960s. Where additions to original houses have occurred, most have been to the rear of the house, leaving the viewshed from Westridge Road intact. Two exceptions to this pattern have been in the introduction of two cul-de-sacs on Westridge Road. Developed in the 1980s and in the early 2000s, these cul-de-sacs mark a drastic visual change in the integrity of the neighborhood through the loss of tree canopy, front yard setbacks, and orientation of homes inward to the cul-de-sacs.

Existing Conditions

Zoning & Land Use- Description

All properties located within the Westridge Neighborhood Conservation Overlay are zoned RS-15. The RS-15, Residential Single-family District is primarily intended to accommodate moderate density single-family detached dwellings in developments where public water and sewer service is required. The overall gross density in RS-15 will typically be 2.5 units per acre or less. All properties contained within the boundary conform to the permitted land uses for RS-15.

Dimensional Requirements:

<i>Minimum Lot Size (sq.ft.)</i>	15,000
<i>Minimum Lot Width (ft.)</i>	
<i>-Interior Lot</i>	80
<i>-Corner Lot</i>	90
<i>Minimum Street Frontage (b)</i>	45 feet
<i>Minimum Street Setback (a)</i>	
<i>Minor Thoroughfare</i>	40 feet from the property line or 75 feet from the street centerline, whichever is greater
<i>Minimum Interior Setback</i>	
<i>-Side (c)</i>	10
<i>-Rear</i>	30
<i>Maximum Height (ft.) (d)</i>	50
<i>Maximum Building Coverage (% of lot)</i>	30

(a) Setbacks from right-of-way line or property line/setback from street centerline, whichever is greater. Setbacks along private streets shall be the same as along local streets. Setbacks may be reduced in accordance with Section 30-4-7.2.

(b) Does not apply to lots on the circular portion of a cul-de-sac.

(c) Zero side setbacks may be allowed in accordance with Section

(d) No more than three (3) full or partial stories entirely above grade.

Notes:

1) On a corner lot of record with a width of at least forty (40) feet, the side street setback may be reduced, if necessary, to yield a buildable width equal to sixty percent (60%) of the lot width. However, the side street setback shall not be reduced to less than twenty (20) feet from a major thoroughfare right-of-way line.

2) For any lot of record with a depth of at least seventy-five (75) feet, the street setback and the rear setback may be reduced, if necessary, to yield a buildable depth equal to forty percent (40%) of the lot depth. The rear setback shall be reduced first, but not below fifteen (15) feet. However, the front street setback shall not be reduced to less than forty (40) feet from a major thoroughfare right-of-way line.

Existing Conditions (continued)

Zoning & Land Use- Incompatibilities & Inconsistencies

The 130+ properties located within the Westridge NCO boundary mark a physical divergence from their zoning dimensional standards. The following is a description of the incompatibilities and inconsistencies between the physical development and existing zoning dimensional standards:

Lot size- The average Westridge lot is 1.19 acres whereas RS-15 zoning requires a minimum lot size of 15,000 sq.ft. (approx. 1/3 acre). While 1.19 acres represents an average, the lots in the boundary range in size from approximately 1/3 acre to 3+ acres. Five lots within the boundary measure 1/2 acre or less. Thirty-eight lots in the boundary measure 3/4 acre or less. Sixty lots in the boundary measure 1 acre or less. While there is a wide variety in lot sizes throughout the neighborhood, many lots appear to be similar in size from the street because the majority of the land area is located to the rear of the house. The variety in lot size presents a challenge to creating a uniform standard in which every lot adheres to the same guidelines in terms of lot size.



Lot width- The minimum lot width in Westridge averages 145 feet, while RS-15 zoning requires a minimum of only 80 feet. The narrowest lot in the neighborhood measures 90 feet with some of the widest lots measuring 330+ feet. Although there is a significant dissimilarity in lot widths many of homes have similar widths in respect to their immediate neighbors. It is rare to find a lot width of 300+ feet immediately adjacent to a 90 foot lot, but instead there is a gradual transition from the smaller lots to the larger ones.

Existing Conditions (continued)

Zoning & Land Use- Incompatibilities & Inconsistencies (continued)

Street setback- One of the major defining characteristics of the neighborhood is the distance of the principal building from Westridge Road. RS-15 standards require a minimum setback of 40 feet from the property line or 75 feet from the centerline of Westridge Road, whichever is greater. The average Westridge lot has a 145 foot setback from the property line and a 151 foot setback from the centerline. The lots vary from a 36 foot setback at the property line to 400+ feet from the property line. Although there exists such a significant disparity in setbacks, most lots vary only slightly from their immediate neighbors and the transition from 36 foot to 400 for setbacks occurs gradually throughout this linear neighborhood. Again, the variety in setbacks offers a challenge to create a uniform standards in which every lot adheres to the same guidelines in terms of lot size.

Interior Setback- Many of the principal buildings in the Westridge boundary are located at a significant distance from each other, but in no regular pattern. RS-15 standards require a minimum side setback of 10 feet from the property line. The existing buildings establish a range of side setbacks from 6 feet to 195 feet, as most development predates Greensboro's current Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). While some buildings are located close to side property lines, adjacent neighbors typically compensate for the closeness by situating their houses a significant distance from that property line. This pattern allows buildings to be located closer to side property lines, but distanced from each other.



Because of the inconsistencies between existing RS-15 zoning standards and the established development patterns, the properties contained within the Westridge boundary could utilize an NCO to amend their current zoning standards. Amending the existing standards, along with the creation of new standards would allow new construction to reflect the established patterns of the neighborhood.

Left: Map illustrating the wide range of front yard and side yard setbacks contained within the Westridge Road NCO boundary.

Westridge Neighborhood and the NCO Planning Process

The Westridge Neighborhood Association initiated a request to begin the NCO planning process in July, 2007. Meeting with the neighborhood steering committee, staff reviewed the neighborhood's goals for pursuing an NCO, initial boundaries, elements to be included in development guidelines, and the scope of the NCO planning process. Following the receipt of a petition to begin the planning process, staff reviewed the petition and application for accuracy, completeness and eligibility. Westridge neighborhood was found to be eligible (55% property owner support via petition) and officially began the NCO planning process in August, 2007.



Using the suggestions from the steering committee as a starting point for the neighborhood discussion, the neighborhood held their first public meeting in September, 2007. Staff and steering committee reviewed the concept of an NCO, described neighborhood characteristics, and presented the elements the steering committee felt should be included in the development guidelines. The elements proffered for consideration were: orientation of buildings to Westridge, maintaining existing tree presence and canopy in the front yard, front yard setbacks, lot widths, lot size, and location of garages. Following the presentation, participants broke into small groups, facilitated by City staff, and provided feedback on the development guidelines elements.

Based on feedback acquired from the small group discussions and the steering committee, staff began drafting options for the development guidelines. In order to address the variety of concerns from the neighborhood, staff offered alternate options to achieve their stated goals. After refinement, staff presented the development guidelines options to the neighborhood at their second public meeting.

The second public meeting offered an opportunity for the neighborhood to react to tangible possibilities for the Westridge NCO. Options for development guidelines were presented by City Staff and then voted on by property owners present at the meeting. The elements property owners voted on were: 1) Addressing the distance of the principal structure from Westridge Road and how that distance should be determined, 2) Addressing the distance of principal structures from each other and how that should be determined, 3) Orientation to Westridge Road, 4) Level of tree preservation and what triggers preservation, 5) Placement of new garages, and 6) Prohibition of new flag lots.



Westridge Neighborhood and the NCO Planning Process (continued)

Based on the outcome of the votes, staff created a draft of the development guidelines which were presented at the third public meeting held in December, 2007. Two topics arose through group which remained unresolved until the final draft of the plan: the regulation of future flag lots within the boundary and tree preservation behind houses. In order to garner input from the greatest amount of property owners possible, every property owner in the boundary was mailed a copy of the draft plan, an explanation of the unresolved issues and a pre-stamped, pre-addressed postcard card to relay preferences for the unresolved flag lot and back yard tree preservation issues.

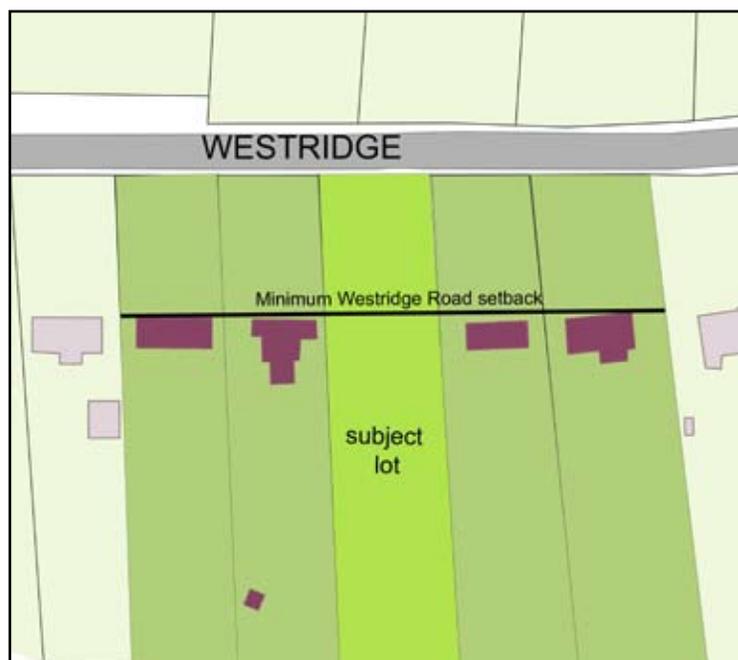
Development Standards

I. Setbacks

A. Minimum Westridge Road Setback

The minimum Westridge Road setback for a principal building shall be no less than the minimum Westridge Road setback of the two principal buildings on either side of the subject lot with frontage along the same street. The four lots used to determine the minimum setback shall be immediately adjacent to the subject lot, located within the same block and have frontage on Westridge Road. However, if one principal building setback is so small as to be significantly different than the other existing setbacks it shall be omitted in determining the minimum Westridge Road setback.

This provision does not apply to corner lots created prior to the effective date of this ordinance.

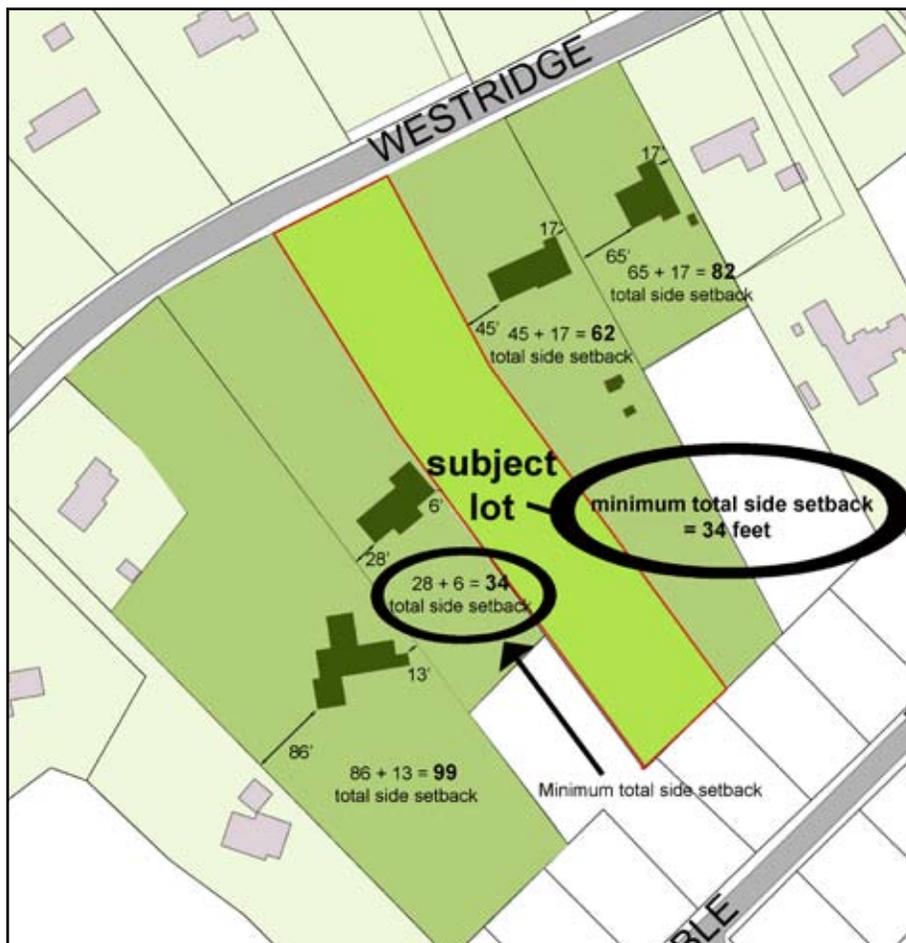


I. Setbacks

B. Prevailing Side Setback

The side setbacks to be observed by a principal building within the Westridge Road NCO boundary shall be determined by the minimum total side setback observed by the principal building on the two lots on either side of the subject lot, located within the same block and having frontage on Westridge Road. The total side setback can be allocated in any proportion to either side, but at no time shall any side setback be less than 10 feet on either side.

This provision does not apply to corner lots.



II. Orientation

- A. For all lots that have frontage on Westridge Road, the principal building must be oriented to Westridge Road.



House oriented to Westridge Road.

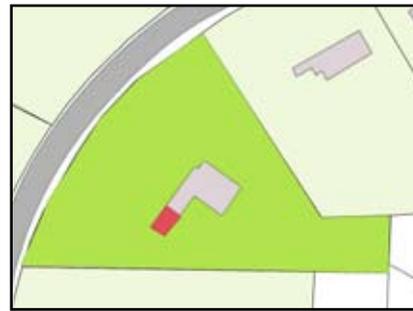


House not oriented to Westridge Road.

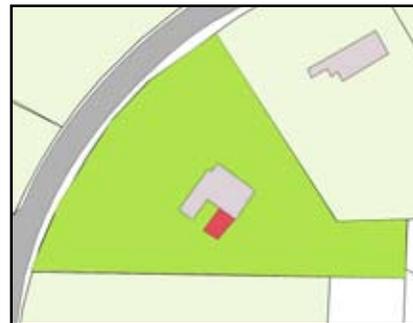
III. Attached Garage Placement

- A. The placement of new, attached garages must be located at or behind the building line of principal building. Where topography or unique site features deem this impossible, alternative approaches will be considered and reviewed to the satisfaction of the Planning Director.

Correct placement of new attached garage



Correct placement of new attached garage



Incorrect placement of new attached garage



IV. Tree Preservation

Required Tree Preservation

A. Tree preservation applies to all of the following:

1. New construction and additions to existing dwelling that exceed 25% of the existing building's footprint.
2. For conventional lots: the area between Westridge Road and the principal building; For flag lots: front yard setback.
3. Existing trees 4" DBH (Diameter At Breast Height) and greater.

B. Requirements

1. A development plan shall be submitted to the Planning Department at the time of application for a building permit and prior to any construction.
2. The plan shall include a tree survey that identifies each tree, 4" DBH or greater growing in the area between Westridge Road and the principal building. The CRZ (critical root zone area) of each tree shall be shown to scale (CRZ = 1 linear foot for every inch of DBH). The plan shall identify and label the trees to be preserved.
3. 60 % of the existing trees and their critical root zone shall be preserved.
 - a. Reforestation Option: When site conditions or extraordinary circumstances prevent the preservation of the required trees, then the applicant can submit a tree preservation plan that includes the removal and reforestation of up to 50 % of the required trees. Such a plan must be approved by City Staff.

A. Tree Preservation



If the subject lot above contains 6 trees, then new development would require the preservation of 60% (4) of those trees.



The subject lot illustrated above preserved 60% of the existing trees compared to the original lot at left.

B. 3. a. Reforestation Option



The subject lot contains 6 trees. Tree preservation requires saving 4 (60%) of those trees.



If it is impossible to save all 4 trees, then 50% (2) of the required tree preservation may be removed and reforested. Reforested trees are shown in red.

Appendix

References

The following cities helped to inform the creation of this plan

Dallas, TX

Raleigh, NC

Chapel Hill, NC

Nashville, TN

Knoxville, TN

San Antonio, TX

Bellingham, WA

Nanaimo, BC, Canada