

SELVN suggests new ordinances to the Mayor's Zoning Code Reform Commission

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SPECIAL TO INSIDE

The South East Lake View Neighbors (SELVN) suggested to the Mayor's Zoning Code Reform Commission three new ordinances that will help preserve existing commercial business areas and could change the way developers and real estate brokers do business in Chicago. The suggestions were made at SELVN's Aug. 12 monthly meeting.

The Mayor's Zoning Code Reform Commission, established in 2000, has held meetings throughout the city raising questions with residents and businesses about how Chicago's 1957 zoning code should be changed to meet today's building standards. Since the public meetings held in 2001, the Commission has proposed recommendations for zoning reform and recently issued

an interim report of zoning changes.

Gary Gray, vice president of SELVN, said that SELVN's zoning recommendations were to prevent future situations similar to the noise complaints made by residents of the Dakota condominiums against the Circuit night club on North Halsted Street. SELVN wants to preserve the commercial areas in Lake View.

"SELVN has been concerned for years about the density issue and developers building large residential structures and the other problems that go along with big buildings," said Gray. "The basic concept is that we feel that adding residential units in business districts is counterproductive for businesses — like what's happening on N. Halsted St."

First, SELVN recommends that all developers, zoning attorneys, and zoning architects be licensed or required to register with the city before they can receive permits to build.

Second, there should be fees or penalties set for developers, attorneys or zoning architects not following zoning codes or zoning interpretations.

Third, they want the establishment of a new business district that provides a variation for residential units on the ground floor, and a maximum height of 45 feet or less with no variance.

In addition to their own recommendations, SELVN strongly supports 12 of the Commission's recommendations:

- They support replacing the bulk control formulas FAR (floor area ratio) used in some residential districts with building heights, setbacks and coverage limits. FAR is the method used for measuring the density of downtown development. A building can have a maximum FAR

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of 16, 12 or 7—meaning that buildings can contain a floor area equal to 16, 12 or 7 times the size of the underlying lot area. Existing maximum building heights should be retained. An R-4 maximum height is 38 feet; R-5 is 45 feet; and there are no height limits on R-1, R-3 and R-6.

- Consolidate high rise districts R-6-R-8 into R-6 districts. All R-7 and R-8 districts will be changed to R-6. R-6 regulations will remain the same.

- Protect pedestrian-oriented streets through appropriate standards. A new zoning district will be created. Buildings in these districts,

usually 2 or 3 stories, are built up to the sidewalk.

- Create new zoning districts R-3.5 and R-4.5, which would have characteristics between R-3 and R-4 and R-4 and R-5 respectively. The Commission believes there is too much of a jump between R-3 and R-4, and between R-4 and R-5.

- Increase current 1:1 parking requirements. The Commission has recommended that the 1:1 parking places be retained for multi-unit residential buildings with the parking ratio increasing to 1.5 spaces for units with more than two bedrooms.

- Maintain the current parking exemption for small businesses that are less than 4,000 square feet, but require on-site parking for larger businesses. Currently, the first 4,000 feet are exempt from required off-street parking. For larger business, parking ratios are 2 to 2.5 spaces for each 1,000 square feet of floor area.

- Create a separate zoning district for parks, open spaces and cemeteries. This district would protect open space areas.

- Reduce the maximum allowable size of signage by up to 75 percent.

- Limit the height of freestanding signs to no more than 35 feet.

- Prohibit electronic message boards within 100 feet of residential areas.

- Ban brightly illuminated video display boards.

- Remove the regulations that encourage high-rise buildings in areas where mid-rise development would be more compatible.

SELVN will be presenting their suggestions to the Zoning Commission this week.

For a copy of the Mayor's Zoning Code Reform Commission's report, log

onto: www.cityofchicago.org/mayor/zoning. A copy of the current zoning map and an explanation of zoning code can be accessed at www.cityofchicago.org/Zoning/ordinance.