

The McMansion effort was undertaken in 2006 to place limits on the bulk of single family homes. At the time, SF3 regulations permitted a building up to 35' tall, 5' from each side lot line with no limit to bulk, with the only limitations curtailing the size of the structure being impervious cover.

The City Council appointed a Task Force and after several months of intense work the McMansion Regulations were developed. These were adopted in June of 2006 with an implementation date of October 1, 2006. This time lag allowed illustrations to be developed for the code and also allowed the opportunity for the city to train its permit review staff. Since the regulations represented new concepts (FAR and TENT) to the residential permit parameters, the Council included a mandate that the code would be revisited in 6 months and also that a commission would be established to provide relief from regulations due to unintended consequences of the code as well as to accommodate unique development situations. The RDCC was established with 9 members and with the requirement that 5 of those members be design professionals, consistent with the intent to provide an allowance for projects that exhibited exemplary design.

During the first few months the RDCC heard up to 10 cases per meeting and considered various issues as the design community grappled with the new regulations, as these new rules sometimes clashed with existing building configurations. The year following, the task force reconvened to revisit and remedy aspects of the new code which for one reason or another were deemed onerous to comply with on the one hand, or in need of clarification on the other. A very productive process ensued, combining the short but intense experience of the RDCC with staff experience and public input. After a few more weeks of deliberation, the task force recommended various, mostly minor, changes to the ordinance to close already apparent loopholes and to alleviate issues that were seen arising most often. This set of tweaks was approved by the City Council and the rockiest aspects of the new code were made much more workable. This set of changes along with the design industry's growing familiarity with these new regulations resulted in a major reduction in the number of cases and requests for relief from the new code.

At this point the current caseload has dropped significantly, which we feel, given the fortunate economic circumstances in Austin, indicates two things: 1) that the revisions made in 2008 alleviated any undue hardship from the rules in general and 2) that the design community has become familiar with the compliance requirements of the regulations.

We believe that the code is fully functioning, and subject to some minor revisions that we might recommend in concert with city staff, should be left intact as a part of the LDC revisions currently being undertaken. Looking back at some of the buildings that triggered this effort in 2006, to lose this initiative and the public effort involved in making this part of the code a reality would be a sad reversal of the effort and progress made to stabilize the character of Austin's central city neighborhoods. The city staff can likely also attest to the fact that the McMansion regulations are reasonably well-understood and an accepted component protecting Austin's uniquely livable and highly desirable central city neighborhoods. This achievement is a success and has gone far to preserve these irreplaceable enclaves in our rapidly growing metro area.

As the LDC revision effort progresses, we at the RDCC will endeavor to identify specific items that we believe need to be reworked and will convey those to the LDC team.