

NEW BUSINESS: CODE AMENDMENT INITIATION REVIEW SHEET

Amendment: Initiate an amendment to Title 25 of the City Code regarding the definition of mirrored glass.

Description: The code amendment request stemmed from discussions concerning a variance to the Waterfront Overlay Combining District section 25-2-721(E)(1) pertaining to the prohibition of mirrored glass or glare producing glass surface building materials for the 70 Rainey Street project. The Committee recommended that the Planning Commission grant the variance.

During discussions amongst themselves and with the applicant’s architect, engineer, and attorneys, the Committee members discussed the suitability of the current “mirrored glass” definition of “...glass with a reflectivity index greater than 20 percent.” The current definition dates from the mid/late 1980s and does not reflect changes in best practices and advances in building materials technology.

Code Amendment and Stakeholder Engagement Process

At the August 22, 2018 meeting where the Small Area Joint Committee made the recommendation to initiate a code amendment to address the “mirrored glass” definition, they recommended that the following issues should be considered:

- Building efficiency standards
- Best practices
- Quality of life
- Safety
- Existing conditions in Austin.

Due to the highly technical nature of the proposed code amendment, staff was planning to have a stakeholder engagement process to solicit input from architects and other subject matter experts. Should this proposed amendment move forward, staff intends to reach out to AIA Austin as a starting point in that process. Additionally, at the November 27, 2018 Planning Commission meeting, during discussions regarding this proposed code amendment, members of the Commission suggested that the Design Commission should be included in the discussions. Staff will incorporate this recommendation into the stakeholder engagement process.

Codes and Ordinances Joint Committee Questions

At the September 19, 2018 Codes and Ordinances Joint Committee meeting, Commissioners had two questions regarding the proposed code amendment. Following the initial Planning Commission meeting where this item was postponed, Commissioners supplied several other questions.

Q1. How will the proposed change interact/impact the pedestrian-level reflectivity described in Subchapter E?

A: The Subchapter E requirements for building glazing (i.e. glass) do not mention mirrored glass (see response to Q2 below). In Subchapter E, 3.2.2. Glazing and Facade Relief on Building

Facades (E), speaks that at least one-half of the total area of all glazing on facades that face the principal street shall have a Visible Transmittance (VT) of 0.6 or higher. The higher the VT number, the clearer the glass.

Q2. Where else in the code is mirrored glass referenced?

A: A search of the online Land Development Code produced three unique references to mirrored glass:

1. § 25-2-1126 - BUILDING MATERIALS (this code section is part of the Hill Country Roadway section of the Land Development Code)
 - (B) A person may not construct a building that has *mirrored glass* with a reflectance of more than 20 percent.

2. § 25-2-721 - WATERFRONT OVERLAY (WO) COMBINING DISTRICT REGULATIONS.
 - (E) This subsection provides design standards for buildings.
 - (1) Exterior *mirrored glass* and glare producing *glass* surface building materials are prohibited.

3. § 25-1-21 - DEFINITIONS.
 - (67) *MIRRORED GLASS* means *glass* with a reflectivity index greater than 20 percent.

Q3. What are the impacted areas? Will HCRO (Hill Country Roadway Ordinance) and the UNO (University Neighborhood Overlay) change also?

A: It would only affect areas covered by the Hill Country Roadway Ordinance and the Waterfront Overlay and no other part of the city.

Q4. Which or how many buildings downtown currently contain “mirrored glass” in excess of the definition?

A: Should the Planning Commission give the authorization to advance this code amendment, this could be researched. At the moment, the methodology for this research is not known.

Q5. How is reflectivity calculated? Is it based on just the existence of it on a building or as a percentage of the whole or calculated as an average whole?

A: Based on the discussions regarding the variance request form 70 Rainey Street is that it is calculated as a percentage of the whole. The 70 Rainey project came to the SAPJC to request a variance to the 20%. According to the attorney for the development company, when the reflectivity was calculated for the project, it was in the 32%-35% range.

Q6. What would be best practice based upon what other cities do?

A: This type of research would be conducted as part of a code amendment process.

Q7. Has the deflection of the heat from the mirroring been a problem in our city?

A: Anecdotally, I am aware of the M Bank building in Downtown (and possibly an associated parking structure) built in the 1980s that was clad in highly-reflective gold glass which caused

significant glare and heat issues. It was reclad in the early 1990s. I spoke with Greg Guernsey and he said the code was changed to not allow a repeat of that instance.

Proposed Language: TBD

Background: Initiation recommended by Codes and Ordinances Joint Committee on September 19, 2018.

Staff Recommendation: NA

Board and Commission Actions:

Council Action:

Ordinance Number: NA

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