

# Bryan Planning and Zoning creates subcommittees to look into building setbacks, city parking

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The Bryan Planning and Zoning Commission heard presentations and created a pair of new subcommittees Thursday to address the city's side setback standards and potential changes to the off-street parking requirements for multi-family developments.

The city's current setback standards call for 7.5 feet between adjacent structures, which, including overhangs, guarantees at least 12 feet between them. But the Bryan City Council recently approved a housing development with 5-foot setbacks. The reduced setbacks allow more units to be developed, but the city safety officials say the denser construction is less safe.

Bryan adopted a 7.5-foot setback in 1998 to match College Station's standards, and, since then, there have been five residential subdivisions granted conditional permits for 5-foot setbacks: Cottage Grove, Briar Meadows, Autumn Lake, Siena and the new Edgewater development.

At the city council meeting last week, Chris Peterson, who represented the Edgewater subdivision's applicant, said the 5-foot setbacks were standard in major metro areas across the state.

The Planning and Zoning presentation found that to be true, but also learned that many of the metros required an additional fire resistance rating for anything that projects into those 5-foot setbacks, such as the overhang of the roof. Many of those metros require a one-hour fire-resistance rating, and fire-resistant material is more expensive.

There is a portion of the International Residential Code pertaining to the building standards of exterior walls of dwellings, but Bryan and College Station have adopted a local amendment to eliminate that section of the IRC.

"Now you've allowed structures closer to the property line, and you don't have the extra protection of the one-hour rating," said Bryan Planning Administrator Martin Zimmermann.

Bryan Fire Marshal Marc McFeron showed commissioners pictures of a fire at the Oakwood Townhomes in 2011 that jumped about 25 feet and spread to other structures. He urged the commissioners to keep in mind the firefighters who will have to navigate through the space left between buildings.

"They have to have room to set up their ladders, they have to have room to work," McFeron said. "It's very important to maintain some of these distances for these guys to be able to operate and do their jobs well."

P&Z Chairman Michael Beckendorf called for a subcommittee to be formed to look into the issue further.

Commissioners have voiced concerns in the past about whether there is a parking problem in Bryan, so they also heard a presentation regarding off-street parking requirements for multi-family developments.

The current requirements for single-family homes are two parking spaces for one-to-two bedroom dwellings, three spaces for three-to-four bedroom dwellings and four spaces for dwellings with five or more bedrooms. Apartments, condominiums, duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes require one parking space per bedroom, and there are no specified requirements for townhouses. The city is currently using the single-family standards for townhomes.

Bryan requires one space per bedroom for multi-family developments. College Station requires 1.5 spaces per bedroom for one and two bedroom apartments, and one space per bedroom for three or more bedroom apartments.

Beckendorf said only requiring one parking spot per bedroom is going to cause issues, especially for a town with student renters who often have guests. He created a subcommittee to look into the issue further.