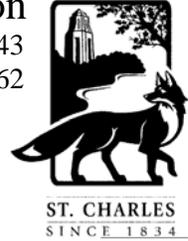


	<b>PLAN COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>			
	<b>Project Title/ Address:</b>	General Amendment (City of St. Charles) Half-Story Definition and Regulations		
	<b>City Staff:</b>	Russell Colby, Planner		
<b>Please check appropriate box (x)</b>				
	<b>PUBLIC HEARING 5/3/11</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>MEETING</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>APPLICATIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION:</b>				
General Amendment				
<b>ATTACHMENTS AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS</b>				
General Amendment Application				
Staff Memo				
Photos				
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:</b>				
<p>Staff has filed an application to amend the definition and requirements for one-and-one-half story buildings in single-family residential districts.</p> <p>The Plan Commission held a public hearing on 4/19/11 and continued the hearing to tonight.</p> <p>Based on Plan Commission comments, staff has drafted text of the amendment for feedback and a recommendation. See the Staff Report.</p>				
<b>RECOMMENDATION / SUGGESTED ACTION</b> <i>(briefly explain):</i>				
<p>Conduct and close the continued public hearing.</p> <p>Staff is recommending approval of the General Amendment as presented.</p>				
<i>For office use only:</i>		<i>Agenda Item Number:</i>		

Community Development  
Planning Division

Phone: (630) 377-4443

Fax: (630) 377-4062



**STAFF REPORT**

**TO:** Chairman Todd Wallace  
and Plan Commission Members

**FROM:** Russell Colby, Planner

**RE:** General Amendments To Title 17 (Zoning Ordinance)  
Requirements for One-and-one-half story buildings in Residential Districts

**DATE:** April 29, 2011

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**I. GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Project Name:** General Amendment – One-and-one-half story Residential Buildings

**Applicant:** City of St. Charles, Community Development Dept., Planning Division

**Requested Action/Recommendation:**

Conduct and close the public hearing.

Review the options proposed by Staff and make a recommendation.

**II. BACKGROUND**

**2006 Zoning Ordinance & RT districts**

The 2006 Zoning Ordinance created new single-family residential zoning districts tailored to fit existing development patterns in the City. The “RT” Traditional Residential Districts were designed to fit the pattern of pre-World War II neighborhoods surrounding the downtown area.

A significant goal of the new Zoning Ordinance was control of the size or mass of new single-family homes built in the RT neighborhoods. In the early 2000s, a number of homes in the RT districts had been torn down and replaced with newer, much larger homes that were considered to be out of character and scale with the older neighborhoods.

### **“Building Coverage” Regulation**

To help regulate the overall size of new houses and additions in the RT districts, a new “Building Coverage” standard was adopted. This standard effectively limits the overall footprint of roofed-over structures on a lot to a percentage of the total lot area.

The Building Coverage standards were set based on research of existing neighborhoods. The standards are as follows:

- For structures less than 1.5 stories, 30% of the lot area
- For structures over 1.5 stories, 25% of the lot area
- (Additionally, “bonuses” of additional square footage are offered for detached or alley-accessed garages and open front porches.)



### **Two-Tiered standard for Building Coverage (1.5 vs. 2 story)**

A two-tiered system of Building Coverage percentages was created to encourage 1 and 1.5 story houses. One and 1.5 story houses are allowed a larger building footprint and reduced side-yard setbacks.

The two-tiered system was adopted in favor of 1 and 1.5 story buildings for the following reasons:

- Shorter buildings and buildings that appear to be less massive are usually more compatible with older neighborhoods, where building footprints are typically small compared to today’s building standards
- The typical 1 or 1.5 story building has architectural design features that are common in older neighborhoods, such as lower, sloping roof forms and window and shed dormers. These roof forms reduce the visual size of the structure by breaking up the apparent mass of the building
- Shorter buildings can be closer to side-yards without having a negative impact, because they usually do not have a full two-story wall abutting a neighboring property

### III. ANALYSIS

#### **Current Definition for “Half Story”**

Although there was consensus that a 1.5 story residential building should be encouraged in the RT districts, there was no detailed analysis of how to define a “half story” in technical terms for administering the ordinance.

The 2006 Zoning Ordinance carried forward the definition of a “Half Story” from the 1960 ordinance. The definition from the 1960 ordinance had not been frequently referenced or applied.

The current definition:

***Story.** That portion of a building included between the surface of a floor and the surface of the floor next above, or if there is no floor above, the space between the floor and the ceiling or roof above it. A basement shall be counted as a story for the purposes of this Title; a cellar shall not be counted as a story, but shall be included in any calculation of gross floor area if it otherwise meets the applicable criteria.*

***Story, Half.** A space under a sloping roof which has the line of intersection of roof decking and wall not more than three (3) feet above the top floor level and, in which space, not more than sixty percent (60%) of the floor area is completed for principal or accessory use.*

(Note: Maximum Building Height to the high roof peak, in number of feet, is regulated separately regardless of whether the structure is 1.5 or 2 story.)

Staff was recently approached regarding an interpretation of the Half-Story definition. Attached to this Memo is a diagram showing a simple graphical interpretation of the Half-Story definition. Staff researched requirements in nearby communities and found the City’s definition is similar to other communities.

#### **Issues with the Current Definition of “Half Story”**

- The definition is confusing to interpret for users of the ordinance and difficult to apply to a set of complex building plans
- The definition regulates the internal finished area of the building, which may have no relation to the outside visual “mass” of the building. The definition does not provide appropriate limits on the overall mass of the building.
- The definition prevents the addition of usable gable projections and window and shed dormers in sloping roofs, which are a characteristic feature of older neighborhoods

Staff proposes that the Half-Story definition be rewritten to regulate only the exterior “mass” of the structure, with no regulation of the interior spaces.

#### **IV. PLAN COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING**

The Plan Commission held a public hearing on April 19, 2011. At the hearing, the Commission provided feedback based on a number of example house forms as to whether each appeared to be a 1.5 vs. a 2-story, and explained why.

General Comments:

- 1.5-story houses meeting the current definition look like 1-story houses
- “Cape Cod” and “Bungalow” style houses appear to be 2-story when the dormers are substantial (i.e. when it looks like there is a full second story to the house)
- 1.5 story houses should appear to be shorter than a 2 story, even if they are not

Suggestions regarding regulations for 1.5 story houses:

- Limit the level of the lower roof line (eave height)
- Limit the amount or size of dormers across the roof
- Consider a limitation on the overall height and/or roof pitch
- Regulate usable square footage of the second floor in relation to the first floor

#### **V. AMENDMENT PROPOSAL:**

Based on the feedback, Staff is proposing a definition that regulates only the visual “mass” of the structure, without providing specific numerical restrictions that could inhibit creativity or prescribe a specific form for a house.

Elements included in the definition for a Half-Story:

- Roof/eave height (or the height where the roof “begins”)
  - The roof line (i.e. the intersection of the walls and roof) must start at no higher than 3 feet above the floor level of the half-story (Same as the existing regulation)
- Projections (window dormers, shed dormers, gable projections, cross-gable projections)
  - Projections out from the roof line will be limited to 50% of the horizontal dimension of the roof, measured along a line at 3 ft. above the floor

Both Regulations will be based upon the roofline of the house with the longest ridgeline. This will generally be the largest roof mass on the house, although a more complex house design may include multiple rooflines.

What is not proposed to be regulated in the definition for Half-Story:

- A numerical standard for eave/roof height for 1.5 story houses (i.e. a specific height dimension of the roof line above grade)
  - This standard would lead to greater uniformity and inhibit creativity in architectural design
- A numerical limit on overall height for 1.5 story houses (reduce maximum allowable roof peak height)

- A practical standard would reduce the overall roof height by 4 to 5 feet. This limited reduction would encourage shallower roof pitches and would not necessarily reduce the visual mass of the structure. In addition, the minimal difference in roof peak may not be apparent from the street if the house has the same overall “mass”.
- Limiting the roof to a certain pitch (such as no more than 12:12 or a 1 to 1 pitch)
  - Older neighborhoods have a variety of roof pitches, including some very steep roof pitches that are characteristic of certain house styles. This limitation would again would prescribe a certain look and inhibit creativity.

Text of the proposed amendment is attached as an Exhibit to this Staff Report.

## **VI. REQUESTED ACTION/RECOMMENDATION:**

Conduct and close the public hearing. Staff recommends approval of the General Amendment as presented.

### **Exhibits**

Findings of Fact  
Amendment Text  
Diagrams

**FINDINGS OF FACT**  
**GENERAL AMENDMENT**

1. The consistency of the proposed amendment with the City’s Comprehensive Plan.

**Not applicable. The Comprehensive Plan does not directly address establishment of height/bulk regulations for residential districts.**

2. The consistency of the proposed amendment with the intent and general regulations of this Title.

**The amendment is consistent with the existing Zoning Ordinance standard for one and one-half story houses and will allow additional flexibility for projections, such as window or shed dormers. The definition will allow for house forms that are consistent with the existing neighborhoods and allow for a variety of architectural styles, which is an important characteristic of the RT districts.**

3. Whether the proposed amendment corrects an error or omission, adds clarification to existing requirements, is more workable than the existing text, or reflects a change in policy.

**The proposed changes will create a more workable regulation for one and one-half story houses. The existing regulation is restrictive and would not permit what is commonly considered to be a one and one-half story house. Additionally, the existing definition for half-story regulated the interior finished area, which has no direct relation to outside visual mass. The new definition will regulate only the exterior mass.**

4. The extent to which the proposed amendment would be in the public interest and would not serve solely the interest of the applicant.

**The amendment has been proposed by the City and is in the public interest.**

5. The extent to which the proposed amendment creates nonconformities.

**The amendment will not create nonconformities but rather may eliminate existing nonconformities.**

6. The implications of the proposed amendment on all similarly zoned property in the City.

**The amendment will be applied equally to all residential zoning districts.**

## **AMENDMENT TEXT**

### **Existing Text**

**Basement.** A portion of a building located partly underground, where four (4) feet or more of its clear floor-to-ceiling height is above the average grade of the adjoining ground.

**Story.** That portion of a building included between the surface of a floor and the surface of the floor next above, or if there is no floor above, the space between the floor and the ceiling or roof above it. A basement shall be counted as a story for the purposes of this Title; a cellar shall not be counted as a story, but shall be included in any calculation of gross floor area if it otherwise meets the applicable criteria.

**Story, Half.** A space under a sloping roof which has the line of intersection of roof decking and wall not more than three (3) feet above the top floor level and, in which space, not more than sixty percent (60%) of the floor area is completed for principal or accessory use.

### **Proposed Text**

**Basement.** (Unchanged)

**Story.** (Unchanged)

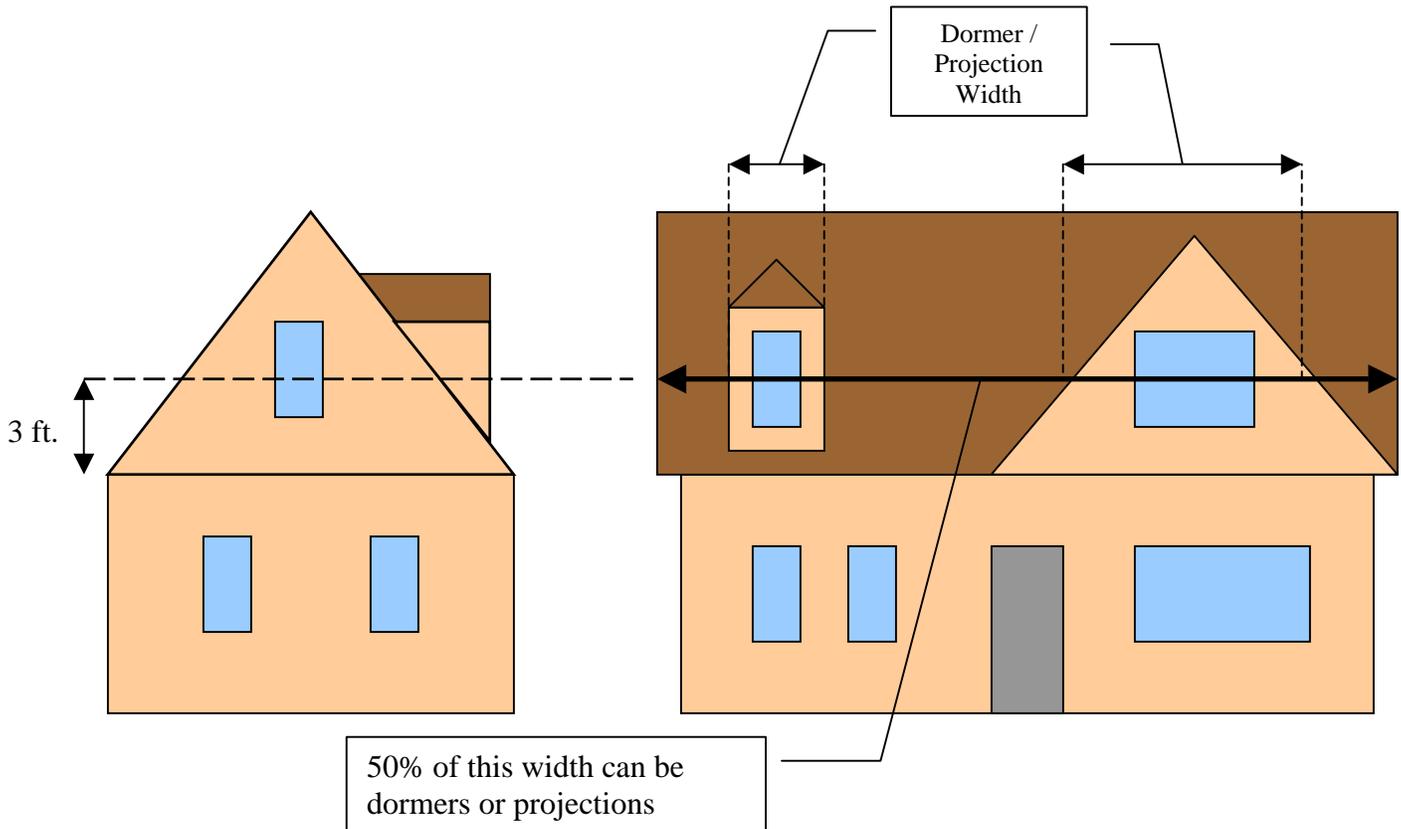
**Story, Half:** A partial story located above a full story and underneath a sloping roof, where the roof planes forming the longest roof ridgeline of the structure intersect two opposite exterior walls at a height of no more than 3 ft. above the floor level, and window dormers or other projections out from this roof plane do not exceed more than 50% of the horizontal length of the roof, measured along both opposite roof planes at 3 ft. above the floor level or higher.

## Proposed Regulation of Roof Projections

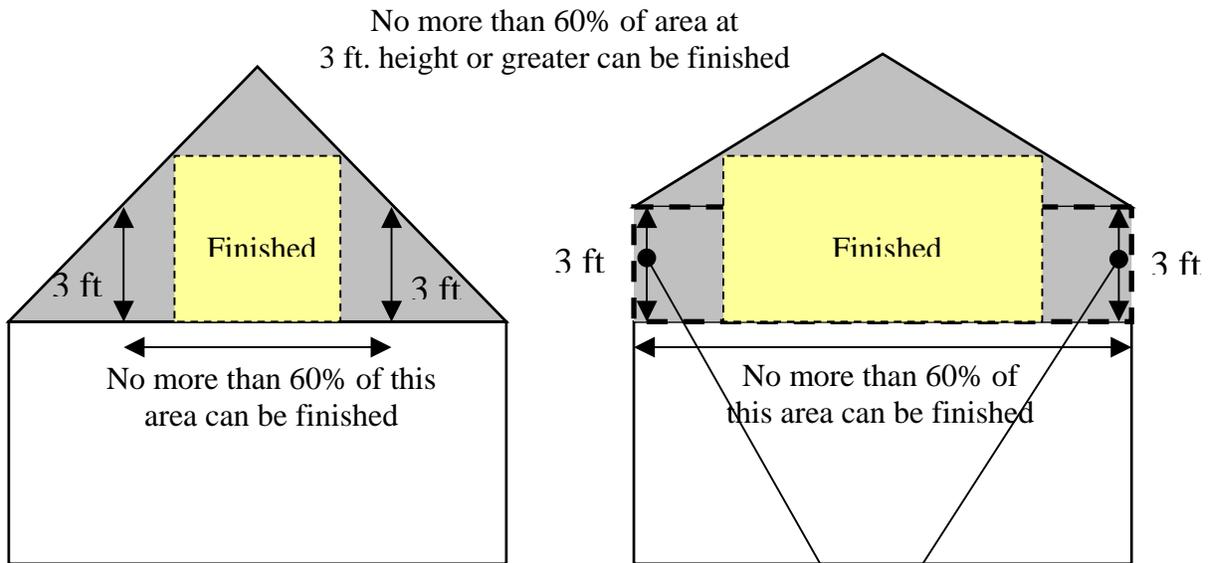
Window Dormers, Shed Dormers, Gable Projections

Side Elevation View

Front Elevation View

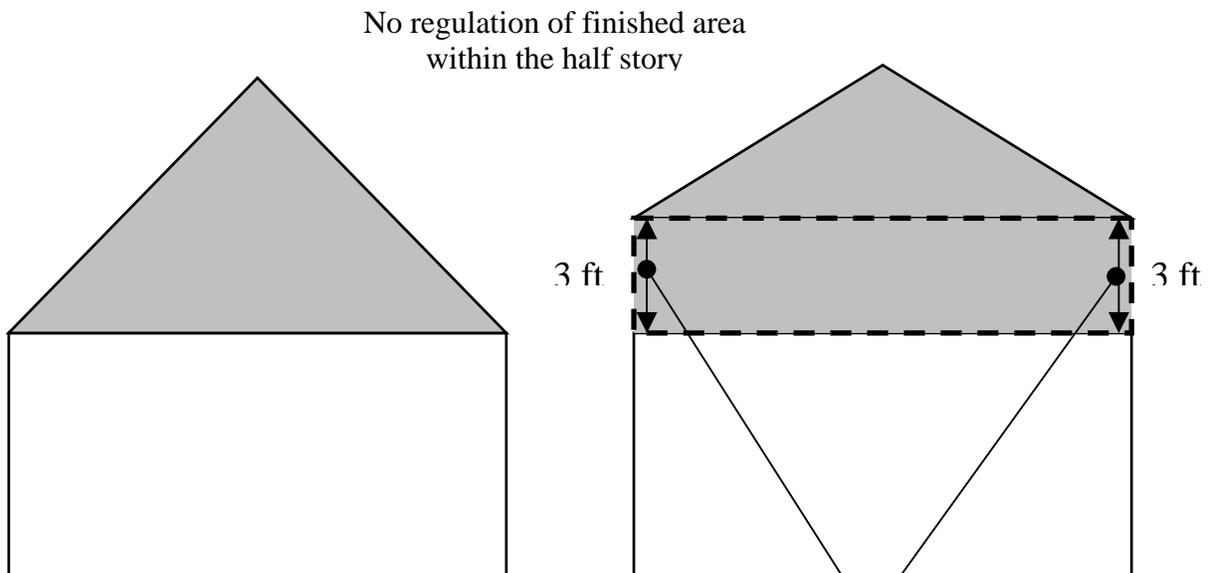


### Existing Definition –Cross Section View



Wall height above 1<sup>st</sup> floor cannot exceed 3ft.  
(Roof must intersect wall at 3 ft. or lower)

### Proposed Definition – Cross Section View



Wall height above 1<sup>st</sup> floor cannot exceed 3 ft.  
(Roof must intersect wall at 3 ft. or lower)