

St. Paul takes closer look at regulating new infill housing, renovation projects

BY JANE MCCLURE

The St. Paul City Council is currently working to establish permanent guidelines for new infill housing and larger home additions and renovations. Interim measures are already in place in St. Paul while the city's Planning Commission studies the issue. Permanent guidelines could be adopted by the end of the year.

Work on establishing the guidelines began last summer, according to Amy Filice of the city's Department of Planning and Economic Development. A committee of the Planning Commission is already discussing the draft recommendations. Both the commission and City Council will schedule public hearings on the guidelines before they are adopted.

Since January, St. Paul city officials have required that all single-family homes and duplexes undergo a city site plan review for new construction and major additions. Previously, all that was required was a building permit if no variances were needed.

The requirement for a site plan review went into effect after the city got complaints about a manufactured home that was placed sideways on a 40-foot lot on the North End.

"It's extremely difficult to regulate good design and legislate out bad design," Filice said.

Several design ideas are currently being discussed, according to city planner Luis Periera. They include prohibiting blank or windowless walls from facing a public street, restricting driveway widths, limiting the amount of pavement that can be laid in a front yard, and regulating the percentage of window



This infill home at 1265 Stanford Ave. has been noted for its design, but may not have met new proposed city standards. PHOTO BY ANNE BRANDIUD

and door openings on the front, sides and rear of a dwelling.

Garages would also be regulated to discourage having them from being built in front of homes. There would also be guidelines for landscaping, building materials, and building heights and setbacks.

The new guidelines would likely have prohibited some recently built dwellings, including the house at 1265 Stanford Ave. in the Macalester-Groveland neighborhood. The house was built on a vacant lot a couple of years ago. Its modern design lacks the percentage of front door and window space the city would require for new homes. Even so, the house, which was featured on a re-

cent city home tour, has won kudos for its design.

In the Merriam Park, Macalester-Groveland and Highland Park neighborhoods, new or expanded houses have been criticized in recent years for being too large for their lots. Some residents have asked St. Paul to do what other cities have done and pass regulations governing the so-called "McMansions." They say the larger houses dwarf their adjacent structures, block light, air and views, and cause water runoff problems.

Several neighborhood organizations in St. Paul have already come out in support of the site plan review requirement and pending guidelines.



New energy-efficient windows, lighting and a refurbished tin ceiling are featured in this interior view near the main entrance of Castle Building & Remodeling's new Snelling Avenue studio.

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materials, like Cambria, are used not only because of their aesthetics, but because they come from quarries in Wisconsin and Minnesota, which cuts down on fuel costs. Old cabinets can be moved to the basement or garage for use as storage, which keeps them out of landfills.

Still, some sustainable approaches to

remodeling may not work in an older home. Radiant or in-floor heating is considerably more efficient than baseboard heating or forced air. However, the sub-floors in older homes usually have to be lowered to accommodate the tubing under the floorboards. And forced-air radiant heat needs a pump to work, another expense on top of a challenging process to begin with, Jaydan said.

Jaydan sometimes struggles, just like her clients, in determining whether a product that is advertised as green actually is. A case in point is bamboo, a fast-growing renewable wood that is considered sustainable. However, most bamboo comes from China and has to be transported a long distance. That places flooring options that can be found closer to home in a more favorable light.

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