

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Building Code Task Force for New Construction Meeting January 13, 2021

The Building Code Task Force for New Construction met in formal session Wednesday, January 13, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. in the Alcazar Room at City Hall. The meeting was called to order by John Valdes, Commissioner-Chair and the following were present:

1. Roll Call: John Valdes, Commissioner-Chair
Sarah Ryan
Rob Matthews
Robin Moore
Jon Benoit
Les Thomas
Irene Arriola
John Wooldridge

Absent: Rick Gonzales, excused

City Staff: David Birchim, Director, Planning & Building Department
Jenny Wolfe, Historic Preservation Officer
Jessica Beach, Chief Resilience Officer/Stormwater Engineer
Buddy Schauland, Building Official
Shelley Clayton, Permits Coordinator
Denise May, City Attorney
Candice Seymour, Recording Secretary

2. General Public hearings for Items Not on the Agenda

(None)

3. Introduction to the Project

Mr. Birchim gave an overview of the project and the intent of the Task Force.

4. Presentation of Goal #1 – “Protecting older homes from the flooding impacts of new homes that are required to be constructed at higher elevations.”

John Valdes introduced the subject noting concern for monolithic slab construction in relation to stormwater with a preference for stem-wall or pier construction in historic neighborhoods such as Davis Shores and Lincolville.

The Task Force introduced themselves and discussed the following topics:

- Concern that off-grade construction may be more difficult to insure
- Recommending that homeowners build garages at-grade with flood-vents
- Separate lot grading inspections
- Managing water so it wouldn't affect neighboring properties
- The need for a maximum percentage of impervious area and utilization of porous materials for driveways, patios, etc.
- Necessity of environmentally sustainable solutions
- Maintaining the historic core of neighborhoods
- Loss of pervious surface

- Monolithic slab-on-mound as the most problematic method of construction which should be discouraged
- Ways to incentivize stem-wall or pier construction as they were more expensive than a monolithic slab
- Encouraging stormwater management through additional plans review and inspections
- The effect of grading on stormwater movement and encouraging shallow slopes
- Areas where the elevation could allow for a monolithic slab with little to no negative impact
- Lower grade under pier foundation houses due to accumulation of dirt in the surrounding lot over time
- Preference for water to percolate on property with other options to drain stormwater into swales and towards the street or river, or into cisterns
- Mandating a drainage or grading plan including possible gutters, grading, and swales during the plans review process
- Purchasing low-lying properties for neighborhood water-retention
- The burden of requiring fully engineered drainage plans on both property owners and city staff
- Altering the City's Flood Mitigation Code to prohibit fill that would negatively impact the floodplain

5. Discussion of Goal #1, Questions for City Staff and Possible Code Amendments to Address Goal #1

Buddy Schauland, Building Official, reviewed the process to require certain building strategies such as gutters as an amendment through the Florida Building Commission. He noted it was easier to update the Floodplain Code or Land Development Regulations rather than the Building Code.

Discussion continued regarding water management options for residential property owners and the concerns and difficulties regarding approving, inspecting, and enforcing water management requirements.

Jessica Beach spoke regarding the effects of residential water management on existing stormwater infrastructure, maintenance of existing infrastructure, and the potential for future improvements. She mentioned existing credit reductions for commercial developments that met State regulations and the potential for similar credits for residential construction. She fielded questions from task force members regarding existing water collection systems around the City, current and future upgrading projects, and recent stormwater events.

Continued discussion included the following topics:

- Future stormwater storage to help mitigate overwhelmed systems
- Compromise between existing stormwater plan review and a fully engineered plan could be requiring as-built surveys to illustrate drainage management
- Costs associated with requiring pre/post survey and grading plan reviews and inspections and ways to simplify the process
- Redirecting water directly into existing City stormwater systems with possible impact fees incurred for maintenance and/or improvement
- Need for a maintenance plan regardless of water retention method
- Small steps to mitigate water runoff by encouraging percolation, limiting the amount of impervious surface, and utilizing trees for additional water absorption

- Creating codes that clearly state the objective of preventing stormwater runoff onto neighboring properties

6. Closing Remarks

John Valdes observed hesitancy by the members to suggest no longer allowing slab-on-grade construction. He advised that the Task Force should look at ways to mitigate water movement and help increase capacity of stormwater systems without causing undue burden to property owners or city staff. He also noted the importance of educating the public regarding stormwater retention issues and mitigation options by appealing to the desire of property owners to be good neighbors.

Public comment was opened; however, there was no response.

Final discussion items from Task Force members included:

- Incentivizing stormwater retention through additional lot coverage allowance
- Limiting impervious surfaces on residential lots
- Enforcement concerns
- Concerns associated with raised garages and ways to encourage property owners to build garages at existing grade
- Next meeting would include discussion regarding incentivizing stormwater retention
- Effects of sea level rise on storm flooding
- The streets as water retention areas and concerns for locations below flood level

Irene Arriola offered to return to the next meeting with insurance impacts and home value comparisons in relation to lot coverage.

7. Adjournment

Having no further business, Commissioner Valdes adjourned the meeting at 11:01 A.M.¹

¹ Transcribed by Candice Seymour