

Norridge looks to revamp, simplify zoning

BY KEVIN BEESE | Contributor May 21, 2013 4:38PM



Brian Gaseor, Norridge's building department director and village engineer, said it is important to get residents' input on what needs to be address in the zoning revamp. | Sun-Times Media File Photo ,

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NORRIDGE — Lowering lot-size requirements and lessening the number of zoning districts are among changes being proposed for the village's zoning ordinance.

But the most welcomed change could be making the village document much more readable for residents and other interested parties. References to old business terms like "haberdashery" and outdated development terms like "court" and "drive-in," as well as legalese and jargon, will be stripped from the document to make it a much more user-friendly tool.

"We are looking to simplify the language of the ordinance," Jake Seid, associate planner with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, said at a meeting Monday night of the Norridge Zoning Board.

The planning agency is helping the village revise its zoning ordinance as well as its comprehensive plan. "We want to get rid of the jargon and legalese. We want to make it easier to navigate."

Seid said more tables, charts and illustrations will help in simplifying the document.

Members of the village's Zoning Board of Appeals agreed that steps need to be taken to make the document more readable.

"It needs to be less complicated," board member Wayne Jarosz said. "We need to make it easier for people to see what they can and can't do (zoning-wise)."

"We need to eliminate some things that cause a lot of confusion," panel member Janice Magnuson said. "We have words still in there like 'boarding houses' and 'haberdasheries.'"

"A lot of residents are not native English speakers," Magnuson added. "We need to restructure the ordinance for them."

Jarosz said the existing ordinance is "a nightmare for us" as zoning officials, let alone residents or business owners looking at the code for specifics about their property or a zoning-change proposal.

Seid said the proposed changes will make the document more user-friendly for everyone.

Residents could be asked as soon as July for their input about zoning issues and what they would like addressed in the revised zoning ordinance.

Brian Gaseor, village building department director and village engineer, said it is important to get residents' input on what needs to be addressed in the zoning revamp.

"We need to have people in and there could be 50 people lined up to comment," Gaseor said. "We need to know what they would like to see (in the ordinance), what they would like to see changed, and we would take down notes ... It will give us an idea of what they are thinking about."

No specific dates for public input were discussed when the Zoning Board addressed the ordinance Monday night, but Gaseor thought hearings on the issue could begin as early as July.

"That would allow to get village opinion," before getting too far in the zoning ordinance revamp, Jarosz said.

Magnuson hoped the public input meeting would be an "appreciative inquiry," where people talk far more about what they like about existing zoning or proposed zoning changes than about negatives with the proposal or the existing zoning rules.

In specific proposals, the metropolitan planning agency is looking at slicing the village's current 14 zoning districts down to eight. Seid said some of the existing zoning districts are very close to each other in terms of parking, density and other issues and can be combined.

Kristin Ihnchak, senior planner with the agency, said certain businesses can be grouped together under "personal services establishments" rather than as permitted uses under various zoning districts.

Proposed zoning changes would also lower the required square footage for residences in the village from 7,500 square feet to 4,500 square feet. Seid that 84 percent of the village's homes do not meet the 7,500-square-foot threshold.

He said the change would bring more of the village into compliance with zoning.

Seid added that if the change was made only 5 percent of lots in the village would be eligible for subdividing, stemming fears that more people would look to subdivide their lots under the proposed change.