

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC MEETING COMMENTS

In August and September 2011 the City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning conducted a series of meetings with various stakeholders throughout the City of Los Angeles in order to obtain comments and discuss issues related to the development of retaining walls. The intent of these meetings was to allow for early public input prior to the drafting of a proposal, and help staff identify concerns. This input will influence the scope of work for the Retaining Wall Ordinance. These efforts will ultimately result in proposed Code Amendments affecting retaining wall development in the City.

This document provides a summary of the public comments received from those individuals who attended these meetings and are not necessarily those of the Department of City Planning. Comments/questions have been compiled, summarized, and sorted by major topics and subtopics. *(Note: Some comments are repeated since they fall into more than one category).* These comments will be used in order to develop a list of objectives that will be the basis of a draft Retaining Wall Ordinance.

We understand there are individuals that were not able to attend the meetings held throughout August and September, so **we are leaving the early comment period open until Friday, October 14, 2011**. If you feel that something has been left off, or if you would like to propose any additional issues/comments please send an email to david.olivo@lacity.org (email preferred), or a letter to:

David Olivo
Department of City Planning
200 N. Spring St., Room 701
Los Angeles, CA 90012

We must receive your input by that deadline in order to ensure that enough progress is made to meet our timeline. Keep in mind that there will be other opportunities to submit comments in the near future in the subsequent meetings during the Public Hearing/Approval process.

DEFINITION

HEIGHT

- Wall height should be measured from what is visible/exposed
- Height regulations shouldn't be lower; otherwise, it would cause people to bend the rules
- Relationship between height and slope should exist
- Relationship between height and lot size should exist
- Excessive height problems have been indirectly addressed through the Baseline Hillside Ordinance (BHO)
- Height should be capped - people can still file for variances
- Grading division requires freeboard (portion of the wall at top not retaining earth); this complicates wall height measurements and definition
- Should not include footing when measuring height
- If the wall is not straight or does not have a uniform height throughout, possibly use an average to measure
- If there is a cumulative height limit, walls 40 feet or more apart from each other should be excluded

NUMBER

- Current maximum limit of two walls is arbitrary given new grading limits from BHO
- If the limit is removed, there would be less worry about defining angles, traversing, etc.
- Relationship between number and lot size should exist
- Curves or angles in a wall should not be counted as another wall

LENGTH

- Surface area (length x height) as basis of measurement for size of wall
- Distance between each additional wall should be related to length of walls involved
- Relationship between length and lot size should exist
- Wall shouldn't exceed surface area of main structure

HORIZONTAL DISTANCE BETWEEN WALLS

- There is no room for plants to grow properly in a 3 foot minimum separation; the plants can ruin the foundation

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The more distance between walls, the more complicated it is to engineer them
The current 36 inch minimum separation is normal, not a problem because no one wants to plant a tree there anyway due to problems with roots, trunks, etc.; shrubs are better in an area like that
Current regulation does say “*minimum*”
Current regulation exists because of how walls are built; there is usually one row of caissons that engineers use for retaining walls, adding more distance means adding more caissons which means more construction, materials, money, etc.

GARDEN WALLS

They need to be clearly/consistently defined throughout the various city codes
Any wall 4 feet or less in height should be considered a garden wall

MEASUREMENT

Wall height should be measured from what is visible/exposed
If we measure what is visible, we then need to define the word “visible”
If the wall is on one plane, it should be counted as one wall
Retaining walls as part of a house or guest house on a multi acre lot should be counted/measured separately
Natural grade vs. finished grade needs to be considered
If the wall is not straight or does not have a uniform height throughout, possibly use an average to measure

GRAPHICS

Current graphics in zoning code need to be fixed; they are not accurate
Graphics need to be included, especially for this kind of ordinance

OTHER

We have to be specific in how we define walls because hillside lots are different than flat lots
There should be a difference between walls that are part of the house and free standing walls

EXEMPTIONS FROM ORDINANCE

Remedial walls
Driveway walls

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- Walls that make up underground basement walls on a flat lot
- Walls lower than grade
- Garden walls
- Portion of wall above the actual retaining wall (a.k.a., freeboard) that is required
- If there is a cumulative height limit, walls 40 feet or more apart from each other should be excluded

LANDSCAPING/AESTHETICS

REGULATION

- Landscaping regulations need to be enforced
- What is visible from public right of way vs. what is not visible
- These regulations can be more general compared to height or number
- Implementing landscaping regulations can be seen as just going short of telling someone to mow their lawn
- There should be incentives for building crib walls
- Make planters between walls mandatory
- City wants nice looking walls but they don't allow engineers/architects to get creative with different kinds of walls
- Tie-backs should be allowed
- Can old walls have new landscaping regulations put on them?
- City won't allow walls with soil as high as the wall because of erosion problems
- Do we consider appearance from the public right of way? or private property views?

LANDSCAPE

- Can ruin foundation if not given enough room
- Proper landscaping can help with slope failure
- Walls that provide better landscaping need to be allowed if good looking walls are what the City wants
- Living walls/crib walls/Loffelstein walls should be allowed
- Be careful with living wall requirements because they can start out living but end up dead
- Breaking up length by adding a tree, for example, every 50 or 60 feet could be a good requirement

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Vertical gardens should be allowed

AESTHETICS

Aesthetics must be addressed in this ordinance

“Earth tone” walls should be encouraged

The walls should slant into the earth

Concentrate on aesthetics to make walls look better, maybe then people won't have problems with them

MISCELLANEOUS

There should be no exception from height requirements

Input from neighbors should be required

Developer should be required to provide rendering of the wall and get it approved by the Land Use Committee of that neighborhood council; maybe if area is over so many square feet, a rendering is required

Use incentives when possible; you can build a longer wall if you build it shorter in height for example

“Retaining walls” in hillside areas needs to be expanded to be a city-wide ordinance

The real problem is when hillsides are destroyed with grading, not with retaining walls

The way the 2005 ordinance was written did not give what the city really wanted: terracing

The 15 foot setback in back of house is governing

Most problems are in up-slope lots

Noise and duration of noise during construction are issues for neighbors; current ordinance causes this problem because it forces people to connect walls to each other to pass the number limit

Most available land is now in hillsides so we need to get more creative/flexible

Abandoned development is a big problem in regards to retaining walls; walls are built and dwellings never constructed

Multi-family needs to be included in this ordinance

There should be guidelines rather than an ordinance

This ordinance should be more consumer-oriented

There should be a “menu” style of variances to make the process easier for those who want modifications

What if a commercial zone abuts residential – will the commercial property be subject to a new ordinance?

Location of walls should consider wildlife