

MAYOR'S NEWLETTER

APRIL 2009

Tough Decisions

Most of the issues that City Council deals with are relatively simple ones with very little controversy. Everyone wants reliable water and sewer service and regular trash pick-up. We want to feel safe in our homes and have emergency services – fire, ambulance and police -- immediately available when needed. The tougher decisions are whether trash is picked up one or two days a week and whether it is picked up at your back door or the curb. Most residents want to feel safe and secure in an area with little crime, therefore, we want the police to enforce law and order in our City.

There is at least one issue before City Council, however, that is not so easy. It involves a change in the City's zoning code with regards to parking large recreational vehicles and boats in side or back yards that can be seen from the street. This issue is not black or white, and there are two distinct and logical arguments.

For the ten years that I have served in city government, I have heard residents complain about the unsightliness of large campers, boats and other vehicles parked in driveways or yards. The argument is that these vehicles detract from the overall appearance of the neighborhood, diminishing the property value of all houses in the Jersey Village. Residents have addressed City Council at almost every council meeting since I began my term as mayor to complain about these and other aesthetic issues in the City.

Based on these continuous complaints, the Planning and Zoning Commission went to work on this issue. They collected data, surveyed the neighborhood and toured other subdivisions that do have codes prohibiting these vehicles. Members of the Commission talked to many residents and realtors about the issue, held public hearings and finally, after months of work, submitted to City Council a proposed zoning change.

The verbiage of the change is as follows:

Section 1. *Section 14-88(a)(6) of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Jersey Village, Texas*

is amended to provide as follows:

“(6) Recreational vehicles (manufactured or home-made) including, but not limited to, motor homes, mini-motor homes, travel trailers, 5th wheel trailers, camping trailers, boat trailers, other trailers used for recreational purposes only, truck campers, all terrain vehicles, all types of watercraft including boats (motorized or propelled by any other means), shall not be parked or stored in a front or side yard in zoning districts A, C, or C-2 ,except for a temporary period of time not exceeding seven (7) days within any a 30-day period. A recreational vehicle shall not be parked or stored in a rear yard in zoning districts A, C or C-2 unless such vehicle is screened from public view by a solid wood or opaque fence. Nothing in this ordinance is intended to preclude the construction of a properly permitted building that will enclose and screen recreational vehicles. The effective date of this ordinance shall be Oct. 1, 2009.”

Section 2. *Section 14-88(a) of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Jersey Village, Texas is*

amended by adding subpart (27) to provide as follows:

“(27) No sleeping quarters other than those within a permanent residential structure, hotel or motel shall be used for longer than seven (7) days within a 30-day period; provided that a

recreational vehicle or portable building may be used for temporary housing and sleeping quarters by a person whose residence is uninhabitable as a result of flood, fire or environmental conditions if parked on a paved surface on a private property and with appropriate sewer and electrical connections. No person shall occupy a recreational vehicle or portable building for temporary housing and sleeping quarters without first receiving a permit for such use from the building official. The building official shall issue a permit if the conditions set forth herein are met. The permit shall be valid for the period of time necessary to restore the residence to habitability, as determined by the building official, but not to exceed 120 days. Any extension to such permit will require approval of the building official and director of public works.”

The other side of this issue is that numerous residents have made decisions to purchase those trailers and vehicles because they knew the City Code allowed them. Jersey Village codes have never prevented residents from having these vehicles parked at their homes within sight of passing neighbors. Some citizens have told me they specifically moved to Jersey Village because there were no such restrictions. Most new subdivisions in our area and the newly built sections in Jersey Village do not allow unrestricted vehicle storage.

City Council now must vote on this ordinance. If it is passed, the changes to the City’s zoning code will immediately affect about 75 residents, requiring them to park their vehicles somewhere else or build a garage or barrier to keep them from being seen from the street. Obviously, those residents and others who want to be able to park boats, campers, etc. in that manner do not think this ordinance change is a good idea for the City. These citizens attended the last council meeting to voice their concerns and opinions.

The decision on this recommended ordinance change is not easy an easy one for City Council, and I understand that. This item will be on the agenda at the next meeting, and I encourage and welcome citizens’ comments concerning the proposed zoning change. City Council should not be making decisions in a vacuum, and democracy works best when those affected get involved and participate in the discussion about the issues.

If you have an opinion on this proposed change in the zoning ordinance, please attend the meeting on April 20. I trust that Council will make a decision that is in the best interests of the majority of the residents living in Jersey Village. I do not expect that everyone will agree with the decision, whatever it is, but it will be made after careful consideration of citizen input. Make sure that your voice is heard.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Samuel W. Hambley". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.