

## **ZONING FROM A TO Z**

### **Business and Commercial Districts (Chapter 17-3) – Part II**

As explained in “Business and Commercial Districts Part I” in the March/April 2007 issue of this newsletter, the three business (“B”) and three commercial (“C”) districts are further differentiated based upon bulk and density standards, that is, on the basis of floor area ratio (FAR) standards and minimum lot area (MLA) requirements for residential units. Recall that residential districts are similarly differentiated based upon FAR and MLA. Just as in residential districts, however, the zoning code imposes other significant limitations on structures in B and C districts. Chief among these are requirements relating to ground floor space, height standards, and setbacks.

*Ground Floor Space.* In most B and C districts, all commercial floor space provided on the ground floor of a multi-floor building, other than space devoted to off-street parking, must have a minimum floor-to-floor height of 13 feet. In addition, the commercial floor space must meet minimum floor area requirements. On lots with frontage of less than 50 feet, the floor area must be at least 800 square feet or 25% of the lot area, whichever is greater. On lots with frontage of 50 feet, the floor area must be at least 20% of the lot area. Strip centers are subject to separate standards.

*Height Standard.* In recent history, the Chicago zoning code did not impose height limitations on the business and commercial structures found in areas like Sheffield. But as in residential areas, the city was faced with ever-taller new construction and consequently enacted height limitations in certain B and C districts. These were incorporated into the new code.

Maximum height limits in B and C districts vary by building type and width of lot frontage. For example, most B districts in Sheffield are designated “-2”. In a “-2” district, if the building does not have ground floor space that meets the requirements described above, the maximum height is 45 feet. Otherwise, on lots with frontage of 25 feet or less (the width of a standard city lot), the maximum height is 47 feet. On lots with frontage of more than 25 feet, the maximum height is 50 feet.

Building height is the vertical distance from grade to the highest point of the underside of the top floor’s ceiling joist on a building with a flat roof. On a building with a gable, hip, mansard or gambrel roof, the building height is the vertical distance from grade to the mean height level between the eaves and the ridge of the roof. (Grade is the curb level adjacent to the front property line or the mean level of the finished lot, whichever is higher.) In one of the improvements over the former version of the code, the new version provides illustrations of this measurement.

*Setbacks.*

*Front.* No front setback is required in B or C districts unless the lot abuts R-zoned lot frontage on the same street. In that case, the front setback must be at least 50% of the front yard on the abutting R-zoned lot; if the lot is vacant, the setback is calculated on the basis of the lot’s required front setback.

*Rear.* For floors containing dwelling units, the minimum setback is 30 feet.

For floors without dwelling units, if the rear property line abuts a side property line of R-zoned property, the rear setback must be at least the minimum setback required for the side of a residential building on the abutting lot. If the rear property abuts a rear property line of R-zoned property, the minimum setback is 16 feet; however, the setback may begin 15 feet or one story above grade, whichever is lower.

*Side.* No side setbacks are required unless the property abuts R-zoned property. In that case, the setback is that required for residential use on the abutting lot.

A more complicated formula applies if the B or C property is a reversed corner lot. (A reversed corner lot is a corner lot, the street side of which is substantially a continuation of the front property line of the first lot to its rear.)

This is the seventh in a series of articles designed to educate the community about the basics of the new zoning code adopted in late 2004. The first five installments focused on residential districts. If you would like to learn about a particular topic, contact the Association by calling 773-929-9255 or by sending an e-mail message to [sheffieldneighborhoodassociation@hotmail.com](mailto:sheffieldneighborhoodassociation@hotmail.com); please be as specific as possible when describing your topic or question. Electronic copies of previous installments also are available by request via the SNA email address.