

Houston's towering decision likely today

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The Houston City Council will likely vote today to require future high-rises of 100 or more dwellings to comply with traffic impact analyses, if they cause residential density to double and will be located on two-way, two-lane streets.

If passed, the guidelines will bar the issuing of building permits or the approval of development or subdivision plats until the adjustments specified by the builder-hired licensed engineer are agreed to by the director of Public Works and Engineering.

The fast-tracked amendment to Chapter 45 of the Code of Ordinances was delayed by council Oct. 31 so three members could offer additional criteria.

While the ordinance as distributed said it does not affect such things as "lot dimensions, lot coverage or building size," the proposal singles out both high-rises and construction on sites of 8 acres or more.

"This is long overdue in a number of our neighborhoods," said Councilwoman Anne Clutterbuck, who represents District C where the impetus for the new restrictions — a high-rise at the corner of Bissonnet and Ashby streets — is proposed.

VOTE ON CODE AMENDMENT

■ **What:** Public comments and a City Council vote on the Houston code amendment to limit density along two-way, two-lane streets.

■ **When:** Public session, 9:30 a.m. today

■ **Where:** Houston City Council Chambers, 901 Bagby St.

DECISION

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That project is currently planned as 23 stories tall, including 210 apartments, 10,000 square feet of office space and a full-service restaurant.

Additionally, the ordinance would deny the builder access to public right of way, including preliminary work such as the making of curb, until an analysis is submitted. Preliminary sewer work, such as that done at 1717 Bissonnet St., was not specifically mentioned in the ordinance.

Listed as adverse effects to be considered in the analyses were a "substantial" increase in traffic on area streets based on vehicle trips and volume-to-capacity ratio and an increase in hazards such as dangerous curves or intersections.

Calling the high-rise project "the last straw," Clutterbuck told council members she would offer an amendment tying increased density to the number of parking spaces required by the off-street parking ordinance.

Another amendment from Councilman Adrian Garcia asked that the traffic analysis also consider overflow and cut-through traffic in surrounding neighborhoods.

In accepting a completed traffic impact analysis, the ordinance said the director of Public Works must consider proposed entrances and exits, the nature of nearby traffic control and proximity to intersections,

mass transit, churches and schools.

Prior to delaying the vote on the ordinance, the City Council voted to endorse the Regency Park housing project at Beltway 8 and the Gulf Freeway, causing Councilwoman Addie Wiseman to question the council's consistency.

Wiseman said the Regency developers had not notified neighbors or the school district as required by law, but "this body gives its blessing."

She said the Bissonnet developers had followed the city guidelines, but council chose to expediate an ordinance to block their project.

"There is so much inconsistency at this table, I don't know where to begin," she said.