

Shape Our Fremont

Where Fremont residents can learn about shaping proposed housing developments...

When is an Acre Not an Acre?

No, it's not a riddle. It's one of the many questions that come up when developers present plans for new housing projects in Fremont. The answers can determine how the developments look, feel, and fit with the surrounding neighborhood.

The meaning of terms commonly used in housing developments depends on who writes the definitions. In some cases, the definitions aren't what most people would expect. Here are some examples:

Net Acres. Not all land is suitable for building. Net acres is defined as the remaining area of a parcel of land after you exclude certain portions because they can't be built on -- waterways, steep slopes, and things like that. The definition of net acres is used to calculate the density, which is the number of dwelling units per net acre -- the more net acres you have, the more dwellings you can build. Currently, the definition excludes streets because that land can't be used to build dwellings. However, under a proposed amendment to the Fremont Municipal Code, the city wants to include new streets in the net acres figure, thus increasing the number of dwellings that can be built on the property.

Front Doors. The front door of a dwelling is the public entryway and traditionally faces the street. However, many new townhouse developments place the front doors at the back away from the street, thus making visitors and delivery people walk around the end of the townhouses and along a walkway to reach the doors.

Garages. All dwellings are required to have a certain number of parking spaces for the occupants' vehicles, but the spaces don't have to be in garages. Some parking can be outside in covered carports or designated spaces, or on private dwelling driveways. One current proposal for a high-rise residential tower includes a garage with an automated mechanical stacker that inserts and retrieves vehicles in multi-level racks.

Open Spaces. Multi-family housing developments are required to have common open spaces for the residents to use and enjoy, but that doesn't mean the spaces have to be in locations that are particularly usable or enjoyable. In some townhouse developments, tot lots are tucked into back corners next to railroad tracks, and picnic areas are on the edge of parking lots. In high-rise developments, open spaces don't have to be outdoors. They can be indoor gymnasiums.

Stories. It used to be that one-story dwellings had one story, and two-story dwellings had two stories. However, several variations in definitions are now being used. Some two-story dwellings are being submitted for approval as being "one story in character" or "basically one story," meaning they have only small second stories. Some three-story dwellings are touted as having "two-story elements," meaning one end of the third story is cut off. Three-story dwellings built on hillsides are sometimes claimed to be "two story when viewed from the street" because the third story is stepped down the hill at the rear.

Townhouses. Traditional townhouses are built in long rows with little or no space between them. They are sometimes called row houses. The City of Fremont is proposing to create a new definition for a “detached townhouse” as being a separate townhouse-style dwelling unit on its own lot adjacent to similar units. The result will be rows of tall, narrow, standalone townhouses on very small lots -- like rows of dominoes stacked on end.

Trees. And finally, when is a tree not a tree? In Fremont, a tree isn't a tree that's worth saving unless it's on the city's list of native and landmark trees -- and then only if it doesn't interfere with the development plans. Any other tree on the property will probably get cut down, no matter how large and beautiful it is.

**For more information about specific residential developments, go to:
www.ShapeOurFremont.com**