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# Town of Palm Beach

## Prototype Design Guidelines



## Final Report

### 2000

Prepared by Urban Design Studio & Duncan Associates

## Section One: Preface

A. INTRODUCTION .....	2
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## Section Two: Background and Purpose

A. BACKGROUND .....	3
B. PURPOSE .....	4
C. PROTOTYPE STREETS .....	4
1. Mediterranean Road .....	5
2. North Ocean Boulevard .....	5
3. Seaspray Avenue .....	5
4. Jamaica Lane .....	5
D. TOWN CHARACTER .....	6
E. TRENDS .....	7
F. TECHNIQUES OF OTHER JURISDICTIONS .....	10

## Section Three: Study

A. APPROACH .....	12
B. RESEARCH .....	12
C. R-B ZONING DISTRICT .....	13
1. Lot Coverage .....	15
2. Cubic Content .....	16
3. Building Angle of Vision .....	17
4. Building Height .....	18
5. Building Height Plane .....	19
D. PROPERTY RIGHTS .....	20

## Section Four: Existing Conditions and Recommendations

A. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS .....	22
1. Retain the R-B Zoning District .....	22
a. Dimensional Requirements .....	22
b. Common Policies .....	22
2. Adopt Overlay Zoning Districts .....	22
a. General .....	22
b. Purpose Overlay Districts .....	23
c. Implementation of R-B Zoning District Study .....	23
3. Initiate Review of Additional Streets .....	25
4. Change Flood Elevations .....	26
5. Balconies .....	26
6. Infill .....	26
7. Design Incentives .....	27

# Table of Contents

---

B.	SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS .....	29
1.	Recommendation Matrix .....	30
2.	Mediterranean Road .....	33
3.	North Ocean Boulevard .....	57
4.	Seaspray Avenue .....	73
5.	Jamaica Lane .....	91
C.	OVERALL CONCLUSIONS .....	112

## Section Five: Appendix

A.	APPENDIX “A” Resident Survey .....	114
B.	APPENDIX “B” Conformance with R-B Zoning District Requirements ..	117

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# Section One

## Preface

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---

## A. INTRODUCTION

The Town of Palm Beach retained the services of Urban Design Studio and Duncan and Associates to develop prototype design guidelines for the R-B(Low Density) Single Family Residential Zoning District. The R-B zoning district is one of the Town's most widely utilized zoning categories, comprising virtually all of the north end of Palm Beach, an extensive area in the middle portion of the Town and some portions south of Worth Avenue.



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# Section Two

## Background and Purpose



# Background and Purpose

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## **A. BACKGROUND**

This study was prompted by the Town's continuing concern about the adverse affect development trends could have on the character of the Town. The development trends include demolition of existing dwellings, consolidation of contiguous lots, and the construction of new homes or additions to existing homes that are much larger than, and inconsistent with, the existing neighborhood scale and character. Development trends of this nature are considered by many residents to adversely affect the character of streets and neighborhoods within the R-B zoning district.

## **B. PURPOSE**

The R-B zoning district study has several principal purposes. The first purpose of the study is to determine the nature of residential construction that has occurred on four selected streets. These four streets represent a variety of differing circumstances: neighborhood character, period of construction, size and height of dwelling units, lot sizes, lot coverage, and compliance with setbacks. Compilation of this data has involved extensive field surveys, review of Town construction records, and research of Town and other property records.

The second purpose of the study is to determine the impact of the current R-B zoning district regulations on these individual streets.

The third, and quite critical purpose of the study is to meet with residents to identify their concerns, issues, and attitudes surrounding this complex issue, with a special focus on mass (volume), bulk (size), and scale (details) of buildings.

The fourth purpose is to identify zoning techniques, or other mechanisms, to allow redevelopment or expansion of existing dwellings in a manner that is generally consistent with the overall character of the individual streets and neighborhoods.

The fifth purpose is to identify a means or process to consider zoning changes for other streets located in the R-B zoning district.

## **C. PROTOTYPE STREETS**

Four streets were selected by the Town for use in this study. The streets were chosen because each represents a distinct development pattern that has occurred over a period of time. The reasons are summarized as follows:

## Section One: Preface

A. INTRODUCTION .....	2
-----------------------	---

## Section Two: Background & Purpose

A. BACKGROUND .....	3
B. PURPOSE .....	4
C. PROTOTYPE STREETS .....	4
1. Mediterranean Road .....	5
2. North Ocean Boulevard .....	5
3. Seaspray Avenue .....	5
4. Jamaica Lane .....	5
D. TOWN CHARACTER .....	6
E. TRENDS .....	7
F. TECHNIQUES OF OTHER JURISDICTIONS .....	10

## Section Three: Study

A. APPROACH .....	12
B. RESEARCH .....	12
C. R-B ZONING DISTRICT .....	13
1. Lot Coverage .....	15
2. Cubic Content .....	16
3. Building Angle of Vision .....	17
4. Building Height .....	18
5. Building Height Plane .....	19
D. PROPERTY RIGHTS .....	20

## Section Four: Existing Conditions & Recommendations

A. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS .....	22
1. Retain the R-B Zoning District .....	22
a. Dimensional Requirements .....	22
b. Common Policies .....	22
2. Adopt Overlay Zoning Districts .....	22
a. General .....	22
b. Purpose Overlay Districts .....	23
c. Implementation of R-B Zoning District Study .....	23
3. Initiate Review of Additional Streets .....	25
4. Change Flood Elevations .....	26
5. Balconies .....	26
6. Infill .....	26
7. Design Incentives .....	27



# Table of Contents

---

B.	SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS .....	29
1.	Recommendation Matrix .....	30
2.	Mediterranean Road .....	33
3.	North Ocean Boulevard .....	57
4.	Seaspray Avenue .....	75
5.	Jamaica Lane .....	93
C.	OVERALL CONCLUSIONS .....	116

## Section Five: Appendix

A.	APPENDIX “A” Resident Survey .....	118
B.	APPENDIX “B” Conformance with R-B Zoning District Requirements ..	121

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# Section One

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# Section Two

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# Background and Purpose

## 1. MEDITERRANEAN ROAD

Mediterranean Road is the most northerly and the shortest of the four streets selected. Despite its shorter length, the road reflects a number of clearly defined characteristics:

- Interior lot sizes that are well below the 10,000 square foot minimum lot size established by the R-B zoning district.
- Generally low grade elevations that affect adjacent properties when housing replacement occurs.
- Overall one story character of existing buildings.
- Segmentation of a relatively short street into three separate blocks.

## 2. NORTH OCEAN BOULEVARD

The portion of North Ocean Boulevard selected for the study is located between Queen's Lane and Onondaga Avenue. This segment of the roadway contains a number of unique characteristics:

- Dwellings on the west side of the road with an unobstructed view of the Atlantic Ocean.
- Grade elevations, created by the sand dune on which the dwellings are constructed, are much higher than the surrounding streets.
- Unique relationship with the westerly adjacent dwellings because of this grade elevation.
- Dwellings that generally are larger than those found on adjacent westerly lots.
- Lot sizes that generally are larger than those found on adjacent westerly lots.

## 3. SEASPRAY AVENUE

Seaspray Avenue represents a street with distinct character, including the following:

- Presence of a large number of dwellings that may be eligible for landmark status.
- Urban nature of the street, including a greater width and the presence of parkways, sidewalks, and designated on-street parking.
- Predominately two story dwellings with human scale proportions.
- Existing dwellings with setbacks, size, height, and lot coverage characteristics that exceed current standards of the R-B zoning district.
- Interior lot sizes that are well below the 10,000 square foot minimum lot size established by the R-B zoning district.

## 4. JAMAICA LANE

Jamaica Lane contains the longest uninterrupted block of any street included in the study.

Other interesting characteristics of the street include the following:

- Mixed single and two story dwellings, with no predominant pattern.
- Recent construction of larger homes on the western portion of the street.
- Ongoing concern regarding new construction of two story dwellings located in the mid-block portion of the street.
- Lots that generally are consistent with requirements of the R-B zoning district.

# Background and Purpose

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## **D. TOWN CHARACTER**

One of the Town's unique features is its physical design pattern which includes many traditional elements such as:

- a grid system of public streets;
- major east-west and north-south arterials and collectors;
- central business districts;
- community serving commercial, retail, and office zoning districts;
- major, identifiable public and semi-public buildings;
- unique residential neighborhoods; and
- a wide variety of architectural styles and dwelling sizes.

This physical design pattern and variety of neighborhoods is one of the major factors creating the overall community fabric and character of the Town of Palm Beach.



# Background and Purpose

## E. TRENDS

A recent nationwide trend has been toward building larger houses. In many cases these large new homes are being constructed in new subdivisions where they are surrounded by homes of similar size. In older neighborhoods, however, when existing homes are replaced with new homes that are larger or disproportionate to neighboring homes resident concerns regarding compatibility have become common. This phenomenon has been referred to as the “monster home” syndrome and is occurring in the Town of Palm Beach and nationwide.

Vulnerability to this syndrome occurs when the following conditions exist:

- The existing neighborhood has an established pattern of development.
- The desirability of a neighborhood or its location attracts a demand to build prestige oriented housing (Manalapan, Palm Beach, etc.)
- Existing homes are significantly smaller than allowed under the zoning code.
- Existing homes are obsolete in today’s market place.
- Market demand is strong and land availability is limited (in Florida: coastal neighborhoods.)
- Land value exceeds the existing house value.

All of these conditions exist in the Town of Palm Beach. The demand for housing or residential land in the Town continues to grow, while the supply of land remains constant. This is compounded by the consumer preference for larger dwellings, as many of the existing dwellings are not considered of adequate size by many of today’s buyers. The interplay of the factors listed above is further compounded by a separate, but related phenomenon in the Town: the imbalance between value assigned to land and value assigned to structures. In most cases based on the housing stock, the high land value has dwarfed the value of the structure on the land. This encourages demolition of existing structures to reconstruct homes more comparable to the land value.

Previous studies have started to look at some of the development trends facing the Town of Palm Beach. This study will focus on the interrelationship of mass, bulk, and scale of a building. Methods in the form of zoning regulations, design guidelines, and incentives will be developed to address desired characteristics of the selected streets and the Town as a whole.

The illustrations on the following pages utilize the pattern book studies prepared by Urban Design Associates and graphically portray the importance and interconnectedness of mass, bulk, and scale and how any one of these elements could enhance or destroy the existing character.

# Background and Purpose



## Existing Character

Existing neighborhood patterns are characterized by houses exhibiting a variety of architectural styles, appropriate proportions, details and use of materials. Larger houses are usually articulated as a series of volumes which are in scale with smaller houses on the block. Architectural elements such as windows, balconies and doors as well as entry designs exhibit human scale proportions that comfortably fit on the street.



## Development Trends

Existing neighborhoods are threatened by new building trends characterized by mega mansions that are often twice the size of the neighboring houses. Building forms tend to be boxy with little or no transition between first and second stories. Overstated second story elements such as windows and entry features destroy the human scale relationships that once existed between residents, buildings and the streetscape.



# Background and Purpose



## Oversized Entries Added

Renovations to existing buildings that incorporate architectural features such as two story building entries can significantly change the character of existing neighborhoods. The illustration above modifies the previous illustration entitled “Existing Character” by only adding two story entry features.



## Oversized Entries Removed

Limiting new construction by requiring a more human scale to building entries can guide new development in a manner consistent with existing neighborhood character. The illustration above modifies the previous illustration entitled “Development Trends” by eliminating two story entry features.

# Background and Purpose

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## F. TECHNIQUES OF OTHER JURISDICTIONS

The approaches considered or adopted by other jurisdictions facing the “monster home” issue are varied. An extensive review of other zoning codes and zoning techniques has identified a number of techniques (listed below):

- use of floor area ratios to limit gross floor area;
- use of building height limits to reduce overall height, number of stories, and bulk or shape of a building;
- use of a mandatory or discretionary design review to encourage or require use of certain architectural styles, materials, colors, and similar design elements;
- use of special permits or similar techniques to require review of requests to demolish existing structures;
- use of a FER (front elevation ratio) to limit the amount of structure that can occur along a front setback line;
- consideration of architectural standards, such as a design manual;
- use of incentives, bonus points, and/or penalties;
- use of the common characteristics of existing dwellings, such as setbacks, building heights, or lot coverage, to define property development regulations for specific areas

In a number of jurisdictions, detailed mandatory architectural and design standards have been considered as part of an approach to addressing this issue. However, adoption of such regulations has occurred only in limited areas. Such design standards have been adopted primarily in jurisdictions which contain identifiable residential areas possessing historic, architectural, or other significance.

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# Section Three

## Study

## A. APPROACH

The original nature of the study was zoning oriented, rather than design oriented. The consultants were asked to consider regulatory concepts and techniques that could be utilized by the Town. However, during the course of the project, the importance of certain design concepts were recognized, and the study's scope was expanded. The design concepts included herein result from variety of sources: the various meetings held with residents and property owners, research, field observations, and personal knowledge and experience of the consultants.

As a result of expanding the scope of study, a limited number of design-related techniques have been identified as having a major impact on how mass, bulk, and scale are perceived. These techniques have been included as recommendations for consideration by the Town.

For the purpose of this report, three basic terms are utilized: mass, bulk, and scale. These terms may have different meanings for different individuals. As used in this report, the following is a short definition of each term:

**Mass** means the volume of a building in cubic feet. In the Town's current regulatory framework, mass equates to the cubic content ration (CCR) of a structure.

**Bulk** means the shape of a building, including such elements as height, setbacks, stepbacks, and lot coverage, which affect the relationship of a structure to its neighbors.

**Scale** means details such as placement of garage doors, size of entries, and size of windows, which affect the human scale of a building and how the building visually relates to residents and abutting properties.

## B. RESEARCH

Recommendations of this study are the result of extensive research by the consultants. Information was obtained from a large number of communities, organizations, and related professional resources. In addition to local sources, communities in New England, suburban Chicago, front range Colorado, and California were surveyed. These areas have addressed the issue, conducted their own research, and adopted their own ordinances.

Locally, extensive research on the study area's existing dwellings was conducted utilizing Town, County, and other data sources. Town building records were reviewed, as was information from the County Property Appraiser's office. Aerial photographs, subdivision plats, and engineering records were utilized to gain as much knowledge as possible about both older dwellings and dwellings that have been recently constructed.

In addition to the review of records, extensive field surveys of the four streets were conducted. The surveys included gathering information about public and private landscaping; the streetscape, including street characteristics and overall street context; architectural styles; location of dwellings on lots; lot dimensions; types of improvements that have been constructed; relationships between different dwellings; overall building height; setbacks; and conformance or nonconformance with existing R-B zoning district regulations. The field surveys also identified the relationships between blocks of the same street, and between interior lots and lots located at both ends of the three east-

west streets. As a result of this research, different development patterns on different streets were identified and quantified. See the Town of Palm Beach Design Guideline Supplement for a detailed breakdown on a lot by lot basis.

One of the most important aspects of the research was a series of meetings with residents and other parties interested in this issue. A total of seven (7) meetings were held:

- one joint meeting held for residents of the four streets;
- four separate meetings held with residents of the individual streets;
- one meeting with the development industry; and
- one meeting with representatives of the Zoning Commission, Architectural Commission, and Landmarks Commission.

In addition, a number of meetings with individuals identified by the staff were held, as were a number of meetings with Town Staff.

A total of approximately 75 people attended the seven meetings. Generally, discussion and expression of concerns was open, candid, and enlightening. A number of themes were of interest to many in attendance:

- maintaining the character and uniqueness of the Town and its neighborhoods;
- protecting the individual characteristics of each of the four streets;
- protecting property values;
- recognizing that change will occur but reacting to change in a manner that protects neighborhood character and fabric;
- protecting the rights of all property owners;
- adopting policies that would protect against new or expanded dwellings inconsistent with overall neighborhood context;
- minimizing the impact of minimum flood elevations on existing properties;
- utilizing historic preservation as a tool to protect neighborhoods; and
- adopting design requirements, such as a pattern book, for achieving greater consistency between old and new structures.

An informal survey also was distributed to residents at the meeting and a follow up survey was sent to each resident of the four street study; fifty-eight responses were received. The results of the survey are included in Appendix “B”.

## **C. R-B ZONING DISTRICT**

The Town’s R-B zoning district can be considered both a conventional and an unconventional zoning district. It is conventional in that it utilizes a standard zoning content and approach. The zoning district regulations, including such common requirements as permitted and special exception uses, lot width, building height, lot coverage, and open space, are applied uniformly throughout the R-B district. In this respect, the ordinance is similar to those in many other cities. Codes of this nature often are not sensitive to existing structures or to the unique character of an area or neighborhood.



# Study

However, the district also is somewhat unconventional. The Town has incrementally amended the R-B district to include a number of unique regulatory techniques not typically included within a standard residential zoning district. Among these techniques are requirements that use variable lot coverage, setback, and landscaped open space requirements based on lot size; three principal methods for measuring height, a cubic content ratio to limit mass and bulk, and an angle of vision technique to limit the perception of mass from the street.

The following pages illustrate through definitions, examples, charts and graphics, the application of these key techniques for limiting mass and bulk of a structure.

By definition, the R-B zoning district requires all dwellings to conform to the same set of requirements, yet structures existing when the zoning designation was created are grandfathered from this conformity requirement. Consequently, the “one size fits all” zoning approach creates numerous nonconforming structures. A summary of conformity and nonconformity of dwellings on the various streets within the R-B zoning district appears as Appendix “C”. Examples of significant percentages of nonconformities created by the requirements within the R-B zoning district are listed below:

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Street</i>	<i>% of Structures Nonconforming</i>
<i>Minimum Lot Size</i>	<i>Seaspray Avenue</i>	<i>71%</i>
<i>Cubic Content Ratio</i>	<i>N. Ocean Blvd.</i>	<i>61%</i>
<i>Lot Coverage</i>	<i>Seaspray Avenue</i>	<i>39%</i>
<i>Side Setback</i>	<i>Seaspray Avenue</i> <i>Mediterranean Rd.</i>	<i>68%</i> <i>64%</i>

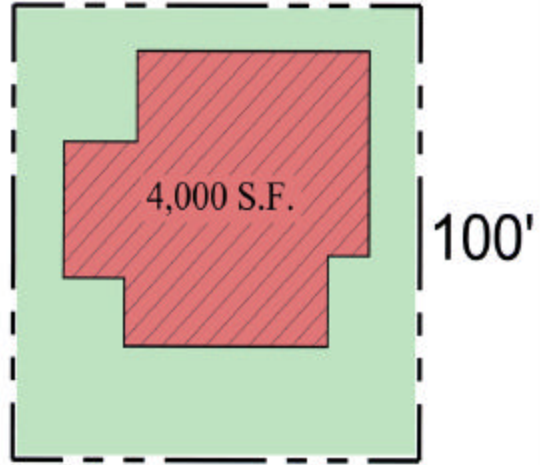
*Source: Property Appraiser’s Maps, Town Records, and Field Observations.*

## 1. LOT COVERAGE

Lot coverage is the area or “footprint” that a building occupies on the ground plane. The R-B zoning district provides an incentive for one story structures by increasing the lot coverage ratio for single story structures and decreasing the ratio for two story structures. Usually expressed as a percentage, lot coverage can be determined by:

$$\frac{\text{building footprint (Sq. Ft.)}}{\text{lot size (Sq. Ft.)}} = X \%$$

Separate accessory structures are included in the lot coverage calculation.

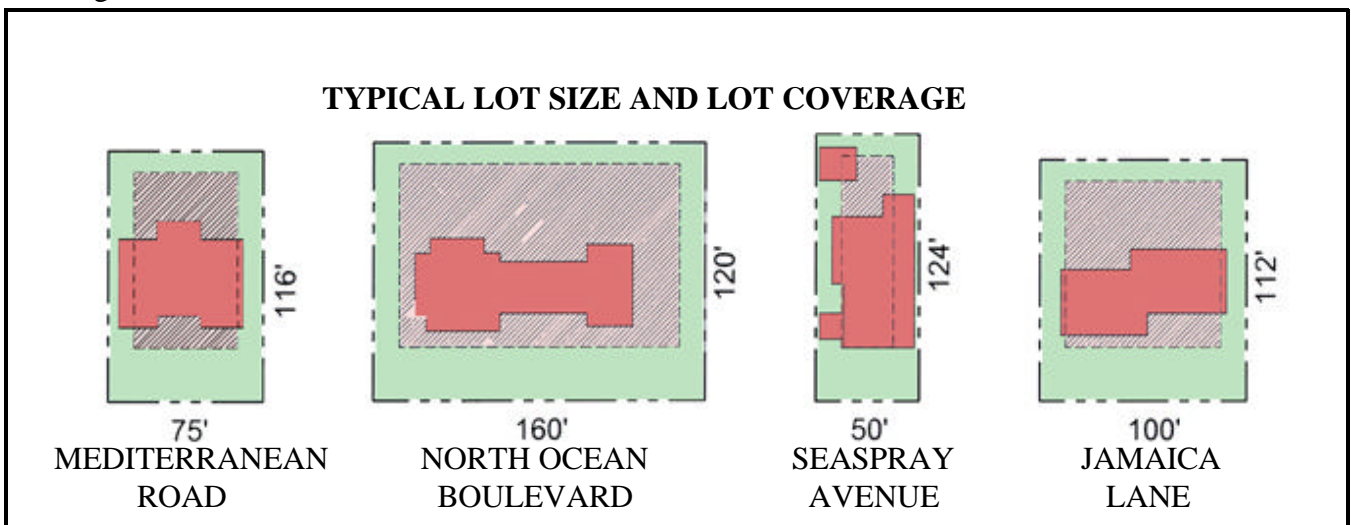


**EXAMPLE:**  
 $\frac{4,000 \text{ Sq. Ft.}}{10,000} = 40\% \text{ LOT COVERAGE}$

The Town of Palm Beach currently allows different lot coverages depending on the number of stories and lot size thresholds. (See chart)

Property Development Regulation	Lot Size Less Than 20,000 Square Feet	Lot Size 20,000 to 59,999 Square Feet	Lot Size 60,000 Square Feet or Greater
Maximum Lot Coverage	1 Story: 40% 2 Story: 30%	1 Story: 30% 2 Story: 25%	1 Story: 30% 2 Story: 25%

The reduction in lot coverage for a two story building results in a decrease in the permitted first floor building area.



- Required yard area
- Building envelope based on setbacks
- Actual building foot print

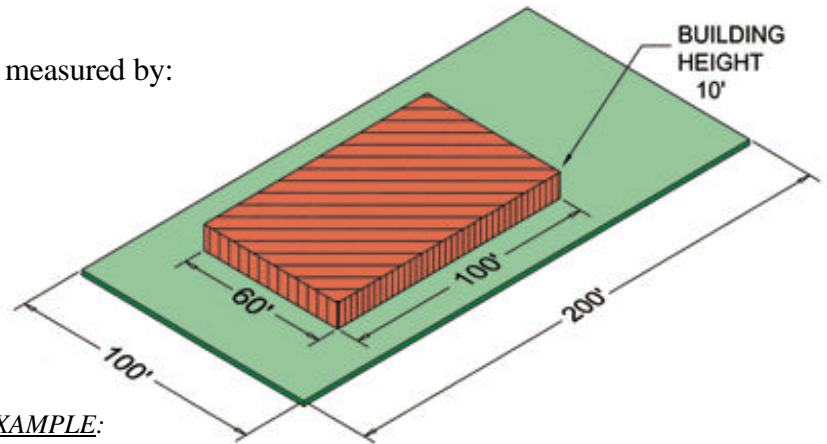
# Study

## 2. CUBIC CONTENT

Cubic Content is the volume of a building measured by:  
*width x depth x building height*

### CUBIC CONTENT RATIO

Cubic Content Ratio is a measurement used to express the relationship between the cubic content of a building and the gross area of the lot.



*width x depth x building height*  
*gross area of the lot*

EXAMPLE:

$$\frac{60' \text{ WIDTH} \times 100' \text{ DEPTH} \times 10' \text{ BUILDING HEIGHT}}{100' \times 200' \text{ LOT}} = \frac{60,000}{20,000} = 3.0 \text{ CCR}$$

A Cubic Content Ratio (CCR) is a good technique to control the mass or volume of a building in relation to the lot on which it is located.

### SLIDING SCALE CUBIC CONTENT RATIO

A sliding scale cubic content ratio is a CCR with a predetermined base which is adjusted according to lot size.

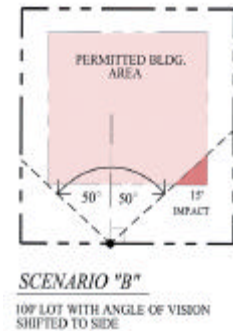
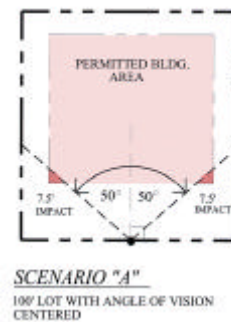
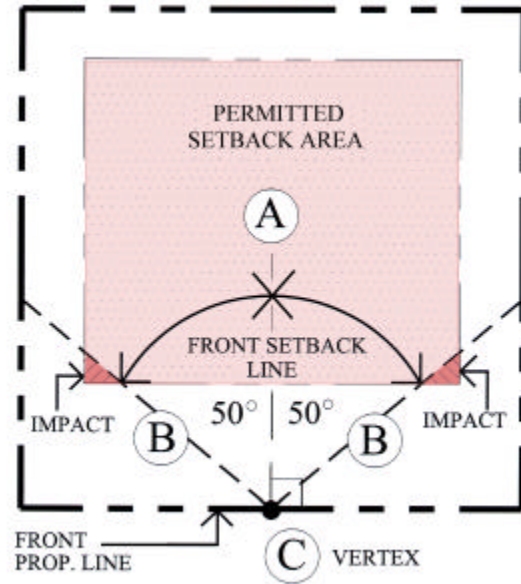
Recently the town has refined the CCR technique as an even more definitive tool. For lots less than 60,000 square feet in size, the Town has introduced the “sliding scale” technique for regulating the cubic content of a structure. The sliding scale addresses the issue of lot size, and this approach generally allows a higher CCR on a smaller lot with gradually decreasing CCR for lots as they become larger. The sliding scale helps to maintain comparable volumes for structures, even if lot sizes vary. This technique works as follows:

For lots less than 10,000 square feet, maximum allowable CCR shall be calculated as follows: <i>4.0 BASE CCR +</i> <i>[(10,000 - lot size) ÷ 10,000]</i>	<u>Example: Lot size 8,000 SF</u> $4.0 + [(10,000 - 8,000) \div 10,000] =$ $4.0 + (2,000 \div 10,000) =$ $4.0 + .2 = 4.2 \text{ CCR}$
For lots between 10,000 and 60,000 square feet, the maximum allowable CCR shall be calculated as follows: <i>3.5 BASE CCR +</i> <i>[(60,000 - lot size) ÷ 50,000] x .5]</i>	<u>Example: Lot size 30,000 SF</u> $3.5 + [(60,000 - 30,000) \div 50,000] \times .5]$ $3.5 + [(30,000 \div 50,000) \times .5]$ $3.5 + [(.6) \times .5]$ $3.5 + .3 = 3.8 \text{ CCR}$
For lots greater than 60,000 square feet, the maximum allowable CCR shall be 3.5	<u>Examples:</u> <i>Lot size 70,000 = 3.5 CCR</i> <i>Lot size 100,000 = 3.5 CCR</i>

### 3. BUILDING ANGLE OF VISION

The building angle of vision bulk regulation is used to manage the bulk of a building at or near the front setback line. The wider the house, the more it will have to be setback. This technique helps to reduce the shape of the building as it is perceived from the street. The application of this technique is illustrated by graphics on the right and is described below:

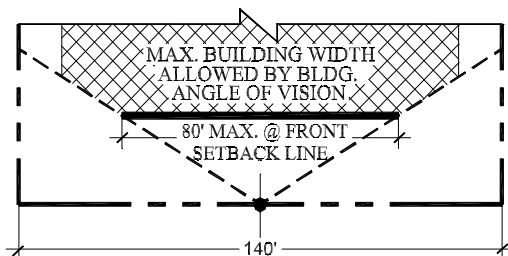
- A. Create a line perpendicular to the front yard property line. (See A)
- B. Create two (2) 50 degree angles on either side of the line extending from the intersection of the front property line and the perpendicular line. (See B)
- C. The vertex of the angle can slide anywhere along the front property line to establish / identify any areas of impact where a structure cannot be built. (See C)
- D. For lots exceeding 100' in width, the base angles of vision (50 degrees on either side) shall both be increased by two (2) degrees for each ten (10) feet of increased lot width up to a maximum of 140' wide.



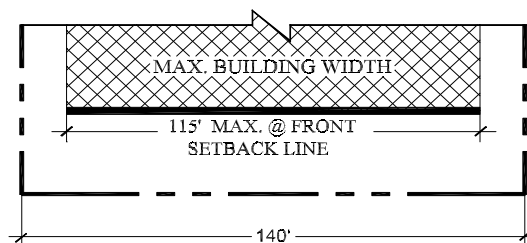
### MAXIMUM BUILDING WIDTH COMPARISON AT FRONT SETBACK LINE

Lot Width	Increase in Angle	New Angle	Max. Width With Angle	Max. Width Without Angle
100'	+0 base	100	~60'	75'
110'	+2 each	104	~64'	85'
120'	+4 each	108	-	95'
130'	+6 each	112	-	105'
140'	+8 each max	116	~80'	115'

\*Based on standard 12.5' side setbacks.



With building angle of vision



Without building angle of vision

## 4. BUILDING HEIGHT

The Town provides both a **maximum** building height and an **overall** building height. The maximum building height essentially is based upon the ceiling height for flat roofs or the bottom of the top chord for pitched roofs. The overall building height recognizes both flat roofs and pitched roofs as well. The maximum building height represents a common restriction on all buildings. The overall building height encourages the use of architectural treatments that can enhance overall design and appearance.

### MAXIMUM BUILDING HEIGHT

**Pitched Roof:** Measure from the top of the floor slab to the intersection of the exterior wall and bottom of the top chord.

**Flat Roof:** Measure from the top of the floor slab to the intersection of the exterior wall and ceiling.

**Building Height:** Measured from a point not to exceed 18" above crown of road unless the street is low in elevation.

One Story = 14' maximum

Two Story = 22' maximum

### MAXIMUM OVERALL HEIGHT

Measurement from the top of the floor slab to the highest point of the roof.

Pitched Roof: building height + 8' maximum

Flat Roof: building height + 3' maximum

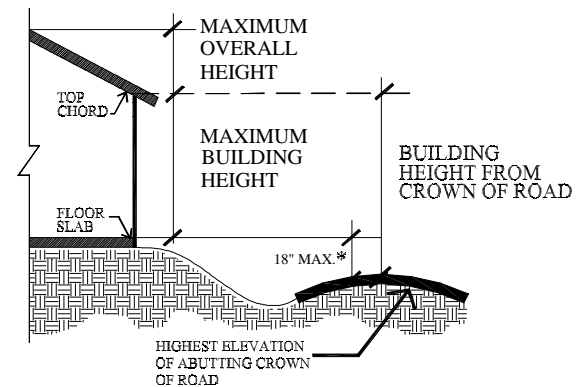
### BUILDING HEIGHT FROM CROWN OF ROAD

Measurement of the vertical distance from the highest elevation of the abutting crown of the road to the maximum building height.

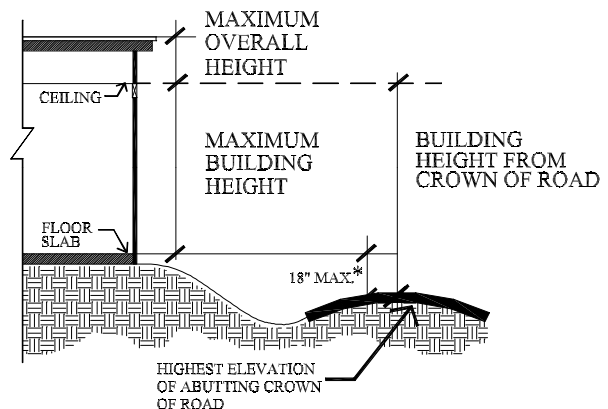
One Story = 18' maximum

Two Story = 26' maximum

### PITCHED ROOF



### FLAT ROOF



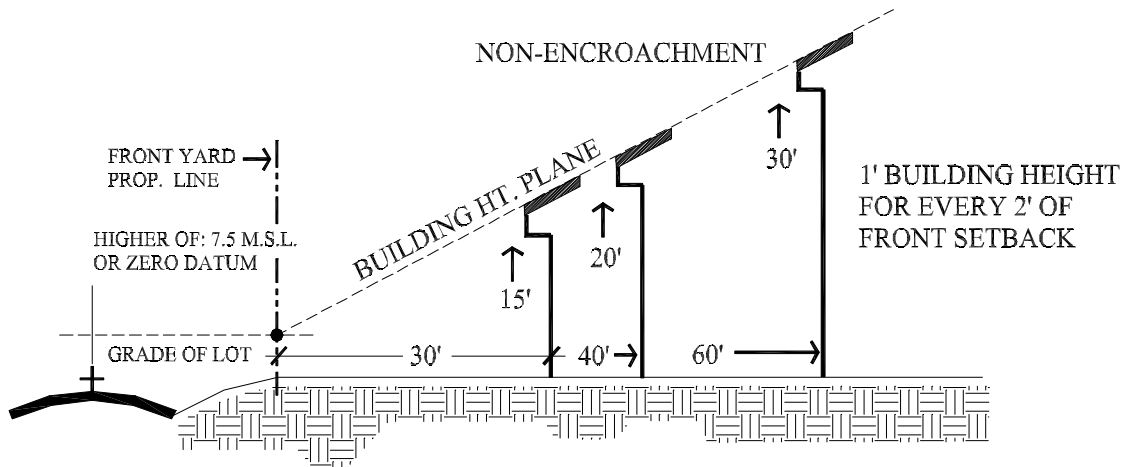
\* Grade elevation changes may not exceed 18 inches except to comply with min. flood elevation or 18 inches above crown of road as part of approved drainage plan.

## 5. BUILDING HEIGHT PLANE

The building height plane technique helps set back the overall height of a building from the front property line. The higher the building the more setback is required.

The building height plane is extended at an inclined angle from the intersection of the front yard property line and the zero datum grade for a lot, or seven and one half feet mean sea level, whichever is higher.

In the R-B zoning district, this technique is only used on lots of 20,000 square feet or more which have a lot depth of at least 150', this requires a two foot front setback for each one foot of building height.



## **D. PROPERTY RIGHTS**

Any recommendation to amend the R-B zoning district must recognize state laws which protect property rights. Principal among such laws is Florida’s “Bert J. Harris, Jr., Private Property Rights Protection Act.” The law addresses local government actions that may create an “inordinate burden” that restricts or limits the use of real property. The law was adopted in 1995 and provides a means for a property owner to appeal the action of a local government which may restrict development rights. Among other items, the law applies to all zoning code amendments approved after the law was adopted by the state legislature.

The use of a comprehensive approach to address community character, zoning and property rights issues provides a rational, fair and appropriate basis for establishing or amending land development regulations. Thorough and objective research, which documents existing conditions and the impacts of existing regulations, provides a rational basis for changes to a zoning code. Research and studies of this nature can be of significant assistance to the Town if zoning changes based on this or similar studies require justification. The recommendations in this study attempt to provide significant flexibility and often grant relief from existing regulations in order to achieve a preferred community character. None of the recommendations are prescriptive or require a specific design. The recommendations provide a range of techniques that can be utilized to maintain neighborhood compatibility and harmony.