



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Design Review Committee  
**FROM:** Eric Berg, AICP, Senior Planner  
**THROUGH:** Kevin Whaley, AICP, Director of Planning  
**DATE:** May 2, 2025  
**RE:** Proposed Westlyn Planned Unit Development

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### *Design Review Committee Role*

The Plainfield Zoning Ordinance calls for the Design Review Committee (DRC) to review Planned Unit Developments (PUD) prior to Plan Commission review and recommendation and the ultimate decision of the Town Council. There are two primary reasons:

- Provide technical insight into the regulations. As the first public step in the ordinance adoption, the knowledge and experience brought forward by the DRC in the crafting of the regulations is invaluable. It also provides the DRC a knowledge base when final detailed plans are brought to the DRC.
- When the PUD has innovative elements or combinations of uses that have not been brought together in a unified development before, the DRC can provide practical insight and experience to how these can have risks and concerns mitigated while maximizing benefit. In this PUD, there are no particularly innovative elements as this is a traditional subdivision achievable through the existing zoning classifications.

Staff has identified discussion where the DRC's input would be particularly helpful, some are areas of Staff concern, others are related to design, some are general philosophical issues.

### *The PUD Ordinance*

One thing that is should be readily apparent to the Committee is that this is a longer document than the traditional Planned Unit Development. This is because, instead of referencing back to the existing Plainfield Zoning Ordinance, the applicant was asked to include the pertinent sections of the current zoning ordinance that were deemed necessary and to include the changes that were deemed appropriate. If the PUD is approved, this will make future administration easier for several reasons:

- The current ordinance has been amended many times over the last several years to change it from a 600+ page document nearing its 4<sup>th</sup> decade of use to a roughly 200-page document that presents information more clearly and reflects more of the current best practices. There are still revisions to the document that need to be enacted, and this document does not reflect those changes.
- As a practical example, one of the first Planned Unit Developments, Saratoga, refers to Hendricks County standards that are no longer in place, as well as Hendricks County and Plainfield zoning classifications that are no longer in place. This has resulted in the need for

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Interpretations based upon information that was either no longer available or unable to be determined whether the chronologically appropriate version of the zoning ordinance was consulted.

**Discussion Topics: Dimensional Standards**

1. **Front yard setback.** The applicant is seeking a 20-foot front setback. Staff has explained that this has been problematic in several subdivisions as vehicles end up blocking parts of the public rights-of-way, particularly the sidewalks. This creates complaints for the Police Department, Development Services Staff, Town Manager, and Council members.

The applicant’s response is that this will be handled by the Home Owners Association. However, in these problematic subdivisions, *it is often the Home Owners Association that passes these complaints on to us after they are unwilling/unable to resolve the complaint.*

Development Services does not have the power to ticket these violators. While the Plainfield Police Department can issue tickets, the question of whether it is the most efficient use of Police resources to ticket drivers for non-moving violations that could be more easily solved by the applicant adjusting their setback is valid.

Staff recommendations:

- a. While a 30-foot setback is the requirement for the zoning districts within the Plainfield Zoning Ordinance, a 25-foot setback is supportable as a test case to determine whether similar issues arise from a lesser setback. It is a logical, rational, and reasonable compromise between an applicant-requested standard that has been problematic and the existing requirement.
  - b. An even shorter setback is possible with alley loaded housing product. The lack of driveways accessing the through street *could* allow for much narrower streets and create a much better aesthetic quality for the development.
2. **Minimum garage area.** When adopting the Residential Design Guidelines, the Plan Commission intended for vehicles, lawn/garden equipment, recreational equipment, and similar items to be contained within the garage. Reducing the size of the garages increases the chances of these items being stored outside.

Staff recommendation: The Plan Commission chose 484 square feet for a practical reason. Decreasing the standard while simultaneously decreasing the setback is potentially problematic. The Residential Design Guideline standard should be retained.

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3. **Garage door width ratio.** It is interesting that as the applicant seeks the garages to be smaller in size, the ratio of the door to the front of the home is increasing. Instead of choosing to increase the garage door dominance of the front façade, the applicant could instead use an alley-loaded product, but they have chosen not to do so.

Additionally, there appears to be a provision that allows the homes in Areas A and B with two car garages to increase from 40% to 41%. (See Article 2.3 and Exhibit 2.1.1.a.iii below)

2.3 **DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS.** The following development standards shall apply to the development of the District:

Area	Area A	Area B	Area C	Area D
Maximum Number of Residential Units	78	106	116	200
Minimum Lot Area (sf)	12,000	8,450	7,800	7,150
Minimum Lot Width	80'	65'	60'	55'
Lot Frontage at ROW	40'	30'	30'	30'
Maximum Lot Coverage	50%	60%	60%	60%
Maximum Building Height, Primary Building	40'	40'	40'	40'
Minimum Front Yard Setback <sup>2</sup>	Var. 25'-29' <sup>4</sup>	Var. 20'-24' <sup>4</sup>	Var. 20'-24' <sup>4</sup>	Var. 20'-24' <sup>4</sup>
Minimum Side Yard Setback <sup>2</sup>	7.5'/5' <sup>7</sup>	7.5'	5'	5'
Minimum Rear Yard Setback <sup>2</sup>	15'	15'	15'	15'
Minimum Living Space per Dwelling (sf)	2,000	1,500	2,000	1,500
Minimum Roof Pitch <sup>1</sup>	5/12	5/12	5/12	5/12
Maximum Structure Height, Accessory Structure	20'	20'	20'	20'
Minimum Garage Area including storage (sf) <sup>5</sup>	480	415	430	415
Garage Door Width Ratio to length of front façade (two-car garage) <sup>6</sup>	40%	40%	46%	46%
Garage Door Width Ratio to length of front façade (three-car garage) <sup>6</sup>	45%	48%	50%	N/A <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Secondary, accent, and/or other roof planes shall have a minimum roof pitch of 3/12.

<sup>2</sup>Drainage and utility easements may be co-located wholly or partially within front, side and rear yard setbacks.

<sup>3</sup>Three-car garages not allowed in Area D.

<sup>4</sup>Front Setbacks in Area A shall be staggered ranging from 25'-29', with minimum offsets on adjacent lots of 1'. Front Setbacks in Areas B-D shall be staggered ranging from 20'-24' with minimum offsets on adjacent lots of 1'.

<sup>5</sup>Minimum Garage Area must be calculated based on interior dimensions of the ground level. It cannot include attic space and must be exclusive of areas set aside for HVAC, water heaters, and the like.

<sup>6</sup>The percentage is determined by dividing the garage door width by the overall width of the house, regardless of articulation and specifically including any offset planes.

<sup>7</sup>Minimum Side Yard Setbacks for homes with side-loaded garages shall be 5'; all other homes shall require a 7.5' Side Yard Setback.

**EXHIBIT C**

**Design Guidelines**

**Section 1 – Design Guidelines**

1. Basic Standard

*The builder(s) and/or developer(s) shall be allowed to follow the Design Guidelines and Design Features as listed below.*

2. Design Guidelines and Design Features

The following guidelines will be employed to create variety and interest in all elevations of a home.

- a. Except for single-family dwellings with side load garages which shall be exempt from the requirements of this Section, all single-family dwellings shall have a minimum two-car attached garage and shall comply with one of the following guidelines:
  - i. A front porch that extends forward of the two-car garage bay by a minimum of six (6) feet.
  - ii. A front porch which is a minimum of eighty (80) square feet in area.
  - iii. Garage as Percent of Façade: **Garage doors shall not comprise more than forty-one (41%)** percent of the linear length of the ground floor of a single-family dwelling’s street-facing façade. The percentage is determined by dividing the garage door width by the overall width of the house, regardless of articulation and specifically including any offset planes.

Staff recommendation:

- a. Allow none of the homes to exceed 40% garage door width ratio for two and three car garages; or,
- b. Either change 41% to 40% for subsection iii or exempt the two car garages in Area A and B from the ability to increase size by 1%; and,
- c. Increase the number of required guidelines to 2.

**4. Minimum dwelling size.** Minimum dwelling size is a metric for which communities have faced criticism from the public and builders’ associations, particularly as it pertains to attainable housing.

The criticism is not unwarranted, as requiring a larger house does not necessarily guarantee a “better” house, but often a more expensive one. Based upon Town of Plainfield building permit data, an increase of 500 square feet raises the construction cost between \$75,000 to \$100,000. As anyone who has financed a house in the last few years understands, that cost is not insignificant. Staff has asked that the developer consider eliminating the minimum dwelling size provision.

In this case, the applicant controls all the buildable lots and, either by their actions or the sale of lots to building partners, can control the products available for construction, so a minimum dwelling size could limit future product types for builder and customers.

This is a topic with which the Staff has not had a much conversation with the Plan Commission or Town Council. Understandably, the applicant would feel more comfortable with having the direction of the Commission and/or Council prior to committing on this issue as there is a concern that it could influence a vote in a negative manner for their petition.

Staff recommendation: Seeking guidance from the Design Review Committee, Plan Commission, and Town Council.

**Discussion Topics: Signage**

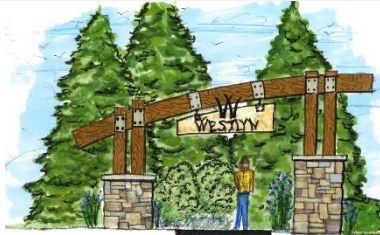
**1. Permanent Ground Sign(s).** The ordinance allows for a 6-foot overall height and 48 square feet of sign area.

While Staff did not measure the “typical” sign (*below left*), it is representative of a common design used across the Indianapolis metropolitan area in both size, material, and composition. The applicant has provided a rough sketch of what they propose for an entry sign (*below center*). While it is similarly not quantitatively scaled, unless the figure under the sign is an action figure, it is likely taller than the ordinance permits. The sign does bear some design and schematic similarities to the Forest Creek entrance monument (*below right*) to the east of the proposed subdivision.

Examples of subdivision entry signs (not to scale)



Typical subdivision entry sign



Draft proposed



Forest Creek Sign





For a few years, the Ordinance had provisions for “Augmented Ground Signs” that allowed for signs that showed architectural compatibility, created a signature monument that enhanced the identity of the development, created a feature wall, or were non-panel signs. Although initially supportive, sign companies were not able to convince their clients that it would be cost-effective.

Staff recommendation: While there are still details to be provided, there is a potential for a unique, well-crafted entrance monument that should be encouraged to be explored.

**2. Temporary Signs.** The applicant has put together a temporary sign package that is beyond what is allowed under the ordinance.

They argue that they will be unfamiliar to their potential customers and will need such signage. However, every business is unfamiliar to their customers at one time or another and is not permitted such a vast amount and variety of temporary signs.

<p>Banner Poles</p> <p>24 at 16 square feet each (including Drees)</p>		<p>Only in GC: General Commercial and REL: Religious (Gonfalons)</p>
<p>4 x 8 (at each entrance)</p>		<p>Not permitted.</p> <p>Additionally, the location shown appears to be within the right-of-way, making it a prohibited sign</p>

<p>Lot Signs Two signs 4.17 sf and 17.81 square feet</p>		<p>One sign Maximum 6 feet in height, 6 square feet <b>Request exceeds by one sign and 15.98 square feet</b></p>
<p>Lot sign 1 sign 4.5 square feet</p>		<p>Permitted as only sign on lot.</p>
<p>Lot Signs Two signs 5.89 sf and 3.30 square feet</p>		<p>One sign Maximum 6 feet in height, 6 square feet <b>Request exceeds by one sign and 3.19 square feet</b></p>
<p>Brand Standard Size</p>		<p>One sign. Maximum 6 feet in height, 6 square feet <b>Request exceeds by 22.0 square feet</b></p>

The *Reed v. Town of Gilbert (2015)* U.S. Supreme Court decision necessitated a large-scale revision to zoning ordinances nationwide. The case centered on the Town of Gilbert (*Arizona*) having differing regulations for temporary signs that were based upon the content of that sign type. For instance, political speech was regulated differently from commercial and non-commercial speech. Clyde Reed, the pastor of a small church, was forced to follow different temporary sign regulations than other types of free speech.

Reed sued and appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court and the Court determined that the ordinance “singles out signs bearing a particular message” and “reiterated the long-standing principle that a content-based regulation is valid only a compelling state interest and is narrowly tailored to achieve that interest.” (*Virginia Municipal League’s Reed v. Gilbert update*). While there was a majority opinion, there were also three separate concurring opinions filed.

The Town Attorney and his firm reviewed the Town’s sign regulations to ascertain changes that would be needed to reduce the chance that the Town would run afoul of the decision and risk litigation. The decision to modify regulations to be based upon zoning classification, sign height, size, number, spacing, and construction were put forth and approved by the Town Council.

The Town's sign regulations for residential temporary signages are as follows:

Excerpt From Table 7.3.J:

- Type of sign: Ground Sign
- Maximum Sign Surface Area: 6 square feet
- Maximum Height: 6 feet

From Article 7.3.J

1. Number of *Signs*
  - a. General. Two (2) *Temporary Signs* shall be permitted per *Lot*. However, no more than one (1) *Ground Sign* shall be permitted per *Street Frontage* of a *Lot* and temporary ground signs must not be within one hundred (100) feet of each other.
  - b. *Sidewalk Sign*. One (1) *Sidewalk Sign* is permitted per business use on a property.
2. Minimum *Setback From Proposed Right-of-Way. Temporary Signs*:
  - a. May not interfere with a Vision Clearance Area as specified in Article 4.14; and,
  - b. Must be set back from the *Proposed Right-of-Way* a distance equivalent to the height above grade.

Staff recommendation: The Town's temporary sign regulations are designed to apply to all residential signs in a content-neutral manner while being duly respectful of the First Amendment. There is no reason that the Town's temporary sign regulations should be replaced by the ones proposed in this PUD.