



# Staff Report

PLANNING DIVISION

DEPARTMENT of COMMUNITY and NEIGHBORHOODS

**To:** Salt Lake City Planning Commission  
**From:** Madison Blodgett, Associate Planner, [madison.blodgett@slcgov.com](mailto:madison.blodgett@slcgov.com), 801-535-7749  
**Date:** May 10, 2023  
**Re:** PLNPCM2023-00054, Sight Distance Triangle Text Amendment

## Zoning Text Amendment

**PROPERTY ADDRESS:** Citywide  
**MASTER PLAN:** [Plan Salt Lake](#)  
**ZONING DISTRICT:** All Zoning Districts

### REQUEST:

Mayor Erin Mendenhall has initiated a petition to amend the zoning ordinance regulations regarding the sight distance triangle, which is the area providing visual clearance at street, alleys and driveways intersections. The proposed changes will affect sections 21A.40.120, regulations for fences, walls and hedges, 21A.36.020 and 21A.40.050 to apply visual clearance standards to buildings, and 21A.62.040 to update the definition of sight distance triangle. Related provisions of Title 21A, Zoning may also be amended as part of this petition.

### RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the information and findings listed in the staff report, it is the Planning Staff's opinion that the proposal meets the applicable standards of approval and therefore recommends that the Planning Commission forward a recommendation to City Council to approve the proposed text amendment.

### ATTACHMENTS:

- A. [ATTACHMENT A: Proposed Code](#)
- B. [ATTACHMENT B: Zoning Text Amendment Standards](#)
- C. [ATTACHMENT C: Public Process & Comments](#)
- D. [ATTACHMENT D: City Department Review Comments](#)

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The sight distance triangle identifies areas at intersections of streets and driveways and driveways and sidewalks where views of approaching traffic should not be obstructed. These clear zones are intended to provide enough sight and distance for a driver to identify risks and stop safely, which increases safety for pedestrians and other modes of transportation.

According to the definitions chapter [21A.62](#) of the zoning ordinance, sight distance triangles are measured as a triangular area formed by a diagonal line connecting two points. Currently the

definition in the code establishes a distance of 30' for corner lots and at the intersection of street and large truck driveways, and distance of 10' for passenger vehicle and light truck driveways crossing a sidewalk. The image below shows how these areas are measured on a site plan.

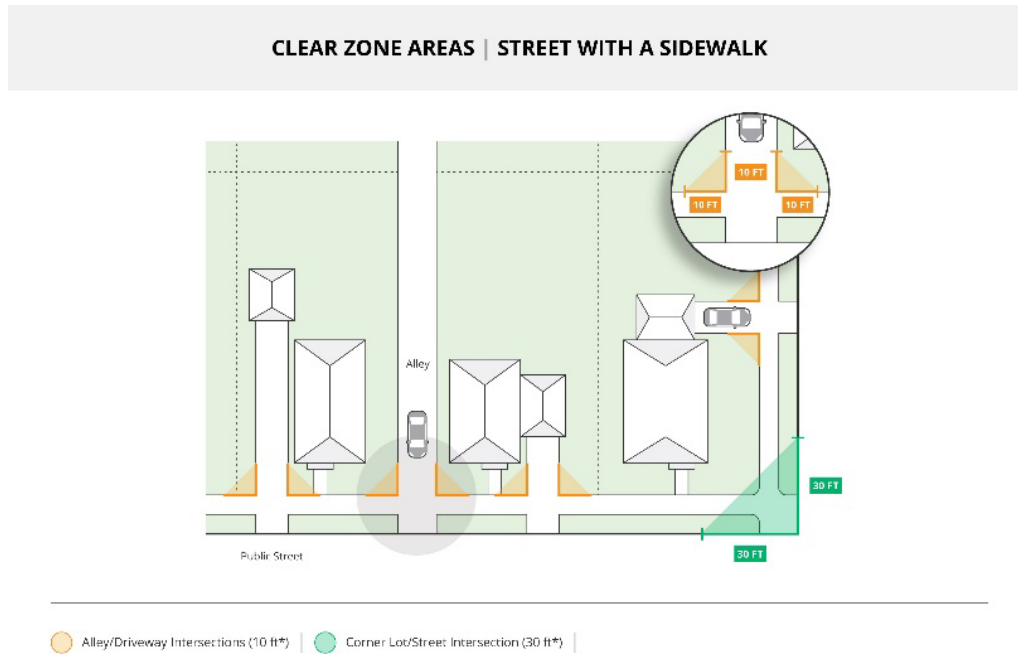


Figure 1: Illustration of how the sight distance triangle is applied in a residential area

The code is silent about intersections of alleys and sidewalks and alleys and streets. Alleys intersecting with sidewalks and streets operate in a similar manner as driveways, and therefore presents similar risks to oncoming pedestrian, vehicular, or bike traffic. The proposed amendment modifies the sight distance triangle to include alleys in the standards.

In addition to amending the definition, the proposed amendment will add standards to apply the sight distance triangle regulations to buildings and all other structures not included in fence regulations. While the purpose of the sight distance triangle is to define an area which vision obstruction are prohibited, the term is only used in section [21A.40.120](#), regulations to fences, walls and hedges. Because no reference is made in other parts of the code, other structures, including buildings, are currently allowed to encroach on the sight distance triangle areas. This creates inconsistent application of the clear zone standards and open doors to hazardous conditions at intersections. Staff is proposing to correct this issue by adding a standard in both [21A.36.020](#), for the sight distance triangle to apply to principal buildings, and [21A.40.050](#), for it to apply to accessory structures.



Figure 2: Example of a building encroaching on the sight distance triangle area

Other minor changes are being proposed to resolve inconsistencies in the code. These changes are related to street safety and the application of standards. It generally includes clarifying language to fence regulations and adds driveway distance requirements from a street intersection to all zoning districts. The proposed amendment is intended to help achieve the purpose of the sight distance triangle and the zoning ordinance. All the proposed changes are included in [Attachment A](#).

## APPROVAL PROCESS AND COMMISSION AUTHORITY

The proposal is for a zoning text amendment. The Planning Commission may make a recommendation to the City Council on this type of proposal per [21A.50.050.A](#). The Planning Commission may make modifications to the proposed amendments, direct staff to make recommendations, or forward a recommendation to the City Council. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission forward a positive recommendation to the City Council to adopt the proposed text amendment.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The key considerations listed below were identified through the analysis of the project:

1. Adding new language & clarifying existing language
2. Impact on noncomplying fences and structures
3. How the proposal helps implement city goals and policies identified in Plan Salt Lake

### Consideration 1: Adding New Language & Clarifying Existing Language

The proposal adds language in two sections of the zoning ordinance to ensure a consistent application of clear vision zones. Recent enforcement cases have found that the code is silent regarding alleys in reference to the sight distance triangle. Because alleys function in similar ways to driveways, the amendment would add language to include the intersection of alleys with sidewalks and streets to the sight distance triangle definition. This addition would restrict the height of structures in the sight distance triangle areas to allow clear vision of oncoming traffic.

Additionally, the amendment would include language to restrict other structures, including principal and accessory buildings, in the sight distance triangle. Currently, the clear zone areas apply only to the height of fences, walls and hedges. It does not include other structures, including buildings, which can encroach in the sight distance triangle areas. The purpose of the sight distance triangle is to define clear zone areas at intersections where obstructions are prohibited. Fences, walls and hedges are not the only structures that create potential risks when located in these areas. Buildings located in the clear zone areas could create even more hazardous conditions than fences when obstructing vision of oncoming traffic. The amendment to include all structures will add consistency in how the requirement is applied and will expand measures to ensure safety where transportation conflicts may occur.

The proposal also includes minor changes to the language in [21A.44.060](#) and [21A.40.120](#) to clarify recently adopted amendments and ensure application as intended. The changes include: expanding the standards for the location of driveways in proximity to street intersections to apply to all zoning districts, correcting code references, and clarifying fence standards. All proposed changes are included in [Attachment A](#).

This proposal does not impact landscaping and the location of street and private trees. Hedges are considered fences for zoning purposes and are subject to the proposed amendments. The height of other plants within the sight distance triangle is being addressed in a separate text amendment and will be consistent with the existing standards and proposed amendment.

### Consideration 2: Noncomplying Fences and Structures

The changes will not impact the continued use of legally existing structures including legally existing fences, buildings, and driveways. [Chapter 21A.38](#) establishes the standards regulating the alteration, expansion, and replacement of noncomplying structures. The intent of Chapter 21A.38 is to allow continued use of legal noncomplying structures, while at the same time protecting existing complying development within the community.

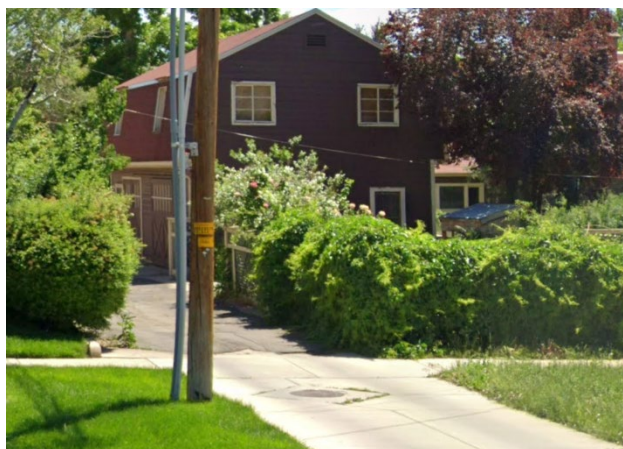


Figure 3: Example of a noncomplying fence and hedge

Legally existing noncomplying structures are permitted to remain and permitted to be altered, expanded and, in some cases, replaced entirely. Any legally existing fence or structure that encroaches on the sight distance triangle at the intersection of an alley and street would be permitted to remain and its continued use would not be impacted by this proposal. Driveways located closer to a street intersection than the proposed amendment would be allowed to continue and to be repaired.

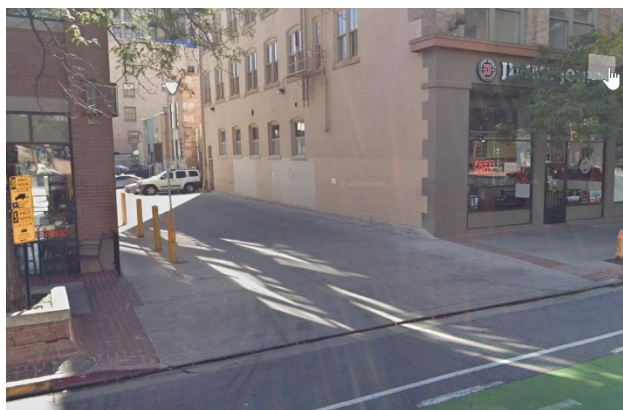


Figure 4: Example of a noncomplying building

Modifications to noncomplying structures may also be approved under the provision of Chapter 21A.38 but are limited to those that do not increase the degree of noncompliance. If such structure is voluntarily destroyed or removed, a new structure would be required to comply with current standards.

### **Consideration 3: How the proposal helps implements city goals and policies identified in Plan Salt Lake**

The guiding principle in Plan Salt Lake for transportation and mobility is “*a transportation and mobility network that is safe, accessible, reliable, affordable, and sustainable, providing real choices and connecting people with places.*” One of the goals to accomplish this mission is to decrease pedestrian, bike, and auto accidents. The purpose of the sight distance triangle is to improve safety by defining clear zone areas at intersections of streets, alleys, sidewalks and driveways and regulating the height of potential obstructions in these areas. This amendment adds language to include alley intersections and structures other than fences in the sight distance triangle requirements. By adding language to include all potential intersections for all modes of transportation and all structures, the requirement will be applied consistently within the city and ultimately reduce the potential for pedestrian, bike, and vehicular conflicts and accidents.

This amendment supports transportation and mobility initiatives in the master plan, namely initiative 5: “*Make walking and cycling viable, safe, and convenient transportation options in all areas of the City.*” Transportation options are only viable and used when people feel safe utilizing them. As discussed above, reducing the risk for accidents at intersections will create a safer environment for people to walk and bike while ensuring drivers have clear vision of oncoming traffic.

Moreover, the proposal is in line with guiding principle 1 of Plan Salt Lake, which is “*Neighborhoods that provide a safe environment, opportunity for social interaction, and services needed for the*

*wellbeing of the community therein.*” It is specifically in line with initiative 3 to “*create a safe and convenient place for people to carry out their daily lives.*” Transportation is an essential part of everyday life, and the purpose of this proposal is to increase safety for all modes of transportation at all points of potential conflict.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The proposed ordinance amendments have been reviewed against the Zoning Amendment consideration criteria in [Attachment B](#). The proposed amendment adds consistency and clarity to the ordinance and aims to improve safety for all modes of transportation. The proposed amendment also furthers the purpose of the city’s policies and goals, including those in the applicable master plans. The recommended text changes were routed to other City departments and divisions and Transportation supports the proposal. No other comment was received. Due to these considerations, **staff is recommending that the Commission forward a favorable recommendation on this request to the City Council.**

## NEXT STEPS

The Planning Commission can provide a positive or negative recommendation for the proposal and can request that changes be made to the proposal. The recommendation and any requested changes will be sent to the City Council, who will hold a briefing and additional public hearing on the proposed changes. The City Council may make modifications to the proposal and approve or decline to approve the proposed changes.

If ultimately approved by the City Council, the changes would be incorporated into the City Zoning code and development would be required to follow the new regulations.



# ATTACHMENT A: Proposed Code

## **21A.36.020: CONFORMANCE WITH LOT AND BULK CONTROLS:**

D. Notwithstanding any other provision of this Code, all structures shall comply with the Sight Distance Triangle Requirements as defined and illustrated in Chapter 21A.62 of this title. The planning director, in consulting with the transportation director, may approve alternative design solutions that result in similar visual clearance and effectively mitigate safety concerns.

## **21A.40.050: GENERAL YARD, BULK AND HEIGHT LIMITATIONS:**

D. Notwithstanding any other provision of this Code, all structures shall comply with the Sight Distance Triangle Requirements as defined and illustrated in Chapter 21A.62 of this title. The planning director, in consulting with the transportation director, may approve alternative design solutions that result in similar visual clearance and effectively mitigate safety concerns.

## **21A.44.060.A.6: DRIVEWAY AND ACCESS:**

c. Driveway Standards: All driveways shall comply with the following standards:

(1) ~~Driveway Location in Residential Zoning: With the exception of legal shared driveways, driveways shall be at least twenty feet (20') from street corner property lines and Driveways shall be at least five feet (5') from any public utility infrastructure such as power poles, fire hydrants, and water meters. Except for entrance and exit driveways leading to approved parking areas, no curb cuts or driveways are permitted.~~

(2) Distance from street corners: Driveways for Single and Two-Family Dwellings shall be located at least twenty feet (20') from street corner property lines. Driveways for all other uses shall be at least fifty feet (50') from street corner property lines. When the width of the lot is less than the required distance, the Transportation Director may approve modifications no greater than the minimum necessary to accommodate the driveway.

## **21A.40.120: REGULATION OF FENCES, WALLS AND HEDGES**

E. Height Restrictions and Gates:

1. Fences, walls, and hedges shall comply with the following regulations based on the following zoning districts:

a. Residential Zoning Districts:

(1) Except as permitted in subsection 21A.24.010.P and ~~21A.12.E.4~~ 21A.40.120.E.4 of this code a fence, wall or hedge located between the front property line and front building line of the facade of the principal structure that contains the primary entrance shall not exceed four (4) feet in height.

(2) A fence, wall, or hedge located at or behind the primary facade of the principal structure shall not exceed 6 feet in height.

(3) ~~On developed properties Where~~ where there is no existing principal structure, the height of a fence, wall, or hedge shall not exceed four (4) feet in a front yard area or six (6) feet in the rear or side yard areas.

b. Nonresidential Zoning Districts:

(1) A fence, wall, or hedge located between the front property line and the primary facade of the principal structure shall not exceed four (4) feet in height.

(2) A fence, wall or hedge located at or behind the primary facade of the principal structure shall not exceed six (6) feet in height.

(3) On developed properties where there is no existing principal structure on, the height of a fence, wall, or hedge shall not exceed four (4) feet in a front yard area or six (6) feet in the rear or side yard areas.

~~(3) Notwithstanding~~ (4) Notwithstanding Subsection ~~21A.40.120.1.b.(1)~~ 21A.40.120.E.1.b.(1), in the M-2 and EI zoning districts fences, walls, or hedges may be up to six (6) feet in height if when located between the front property line and the front yard setback line.

~~(4) (5)~~ If there is no minimum front yard setback in the underlying zoning district, a fence, wall, or hedge of a maximum six (6) feet in height may be placed no closer than ten (10) feet from the property line.

~~(5) (6)~~ Outdoor storage, when permitted in the zoning district, shall be located behind the primary facade of the principal structure and shall be screened with a solid wall or fence and shall comply with the requirements in Section 5.60.120. Outdoor storage in the M-1 and M-2 districts are also subject to the provisions of 21A28.010.B.3.

3. Vacant Lots. Notwithstanding 21A.24.010.P.10.d, fencing to secure vacant or undeveloped lots may be up to six (6) feet in height, provided the fence is not closer than five (5) feet to a public sidewalk and is no less than eighty percent (80%) transparent. Once the property is developed, the fence will be required to comply with the height restrictions of this Title.

5. Vision Clearance and Safety. Notwithstanding any other provision of this Code, a fence, wall, or hedge shall comply with the Sight Distance Triangle Requirements of this Section.

a. Corner Lots; Sight Distance Triangle: No solid fence, wall or hedge shall be erected to a height in excess of three (3) feet if the fence, wall or hedge is located within the sight distance triangle extending thirty (30) feet either side of the intersection of the respective street curb lines, or edge lines of roadway where curbing is not provided as noted in section 21A.62.050, illustration I of this title.

~~— b. Corner Side, Side, Rear Yards; Sight Distance Triangle: Fences, walls or hedges may be erected in any required corner side yard (extending to a point in line with the front facade of the principal structure for residential zoning districts and up to any required front yard setback line for all other zoning districts), required side yard or required rear yard to a height not to exceed six (6) feet. The zoning administrator may require either increased fence setback or lower fence height along corner side yards to provide adequate line of sight for driveways and alleys.~~

~~e. b.~~ Intersection of Street and Driveway; Intersection of Alley or Driveway and Sidewalk; Sight Distance Triangle: Solid fences, walls and hedges shall not exceed thirty (30) inches in height within the sight distance triangle as defined in section 21A.62.050, illustration I of this title.

~~d. c.~~ Sight Distance Triangle And See Through Fences: Within the area defined as a sight distance triangle, see through fences that are at least fifty percent (50%) open shall be allowed to a height of four (4) feet.

e. d. Alternative Design Solutions. To provide adequate line of sight for driveways and alleys, the zoning administrator, in consulting with the development review team, may require alternative design solutions, including, but not restricted to, requiring increased fence setback and/or lower fence height, to mitigate safety concerns created by the location of buildings, grade change or other preexisting conditions.

7. Gates. No gate, whether crossing a driveway, walkway, or part of a fence, shall be erected to a height in excess of the standards outlined in this subsection E. To regulate the location of gates and their impact on vehicular staging within the public right of way, passenger vehicles shall require a minimum seventeen (17) foot six (6) inch setback from back edge of sidewalk, or property line when a sidewalk is not provided, and large truck driveways shall require a one hundred (100) foot setback from back edge of sidewalk, or property line. This requirement does not apply to gates abutting alleys. All gates are to swing inward to the property or be a roll gate that does not impact the staging area.

## **21A.62.040: DEFINITIONS OF TERMS**

SIGHT DISTANCE TRIANGLE: A triangular area formed by a diagonal line connecting two (2) points when measured as follows:

A. For corner lots: Extending thirty feet (30') from the intersecting line of each street face of curb, or edge of roadway where curbing is not provided. ~~Proposals in commercial and industrial districts which have a minimum front or corner side yard setback requirement, that seem to allow encroachment into the sight distance triangle, shall be reviewed through the site plan review process by the city's development review team.~~

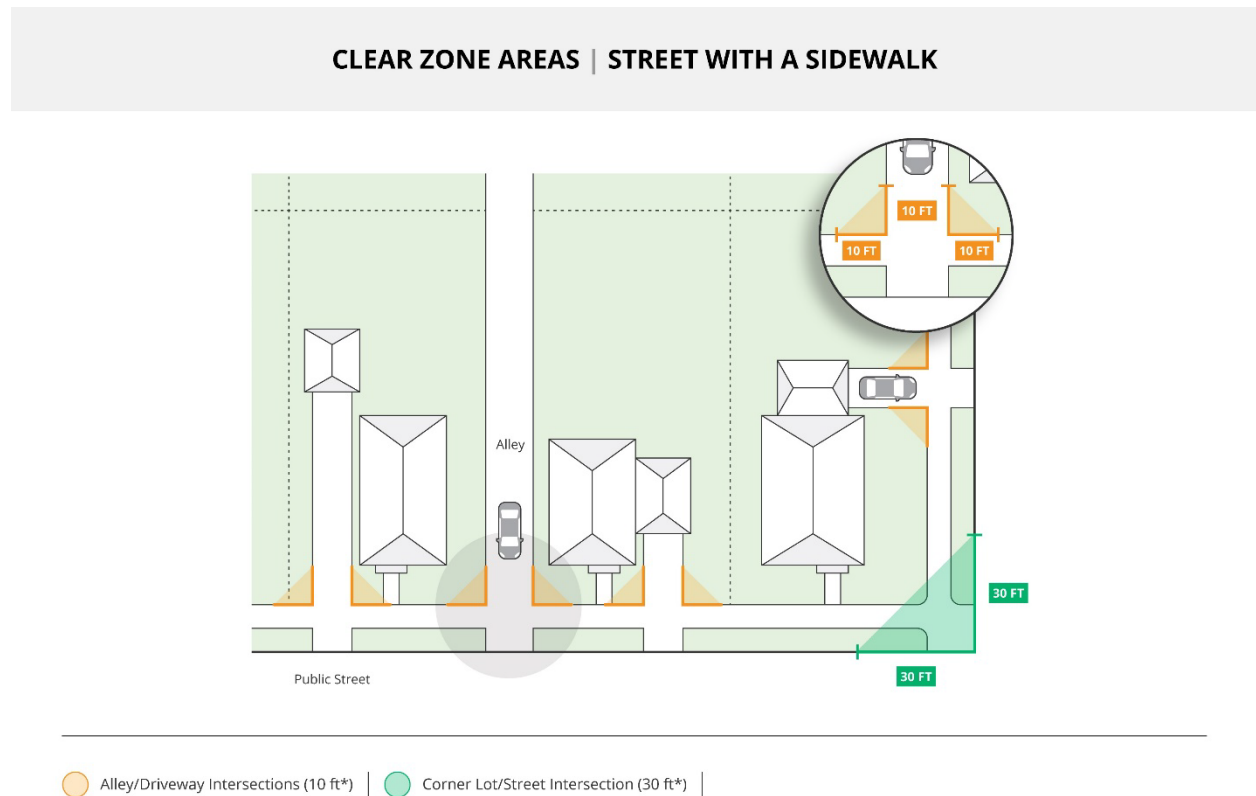
B. For intersections of street or large truck and driveways or alleys: Extending ~~thirty feet (30')~~ ten feet (10') from each intersecting edge of the driveway or alley and ~~street face of curb line~~, or edge of roadway where curbing is not provided.

C. For alley or passenger vehicle and light truck driveways crossing a sidewalk: Extending ten feet (10') from each intersecting edge of the alley or driveway and back edge of the sidewalk.

The purpose of the sight distance triangle is to define an area in which vision obstructions are prohibited. (See illustration in section [21A.62.050](#) of this chapter.)

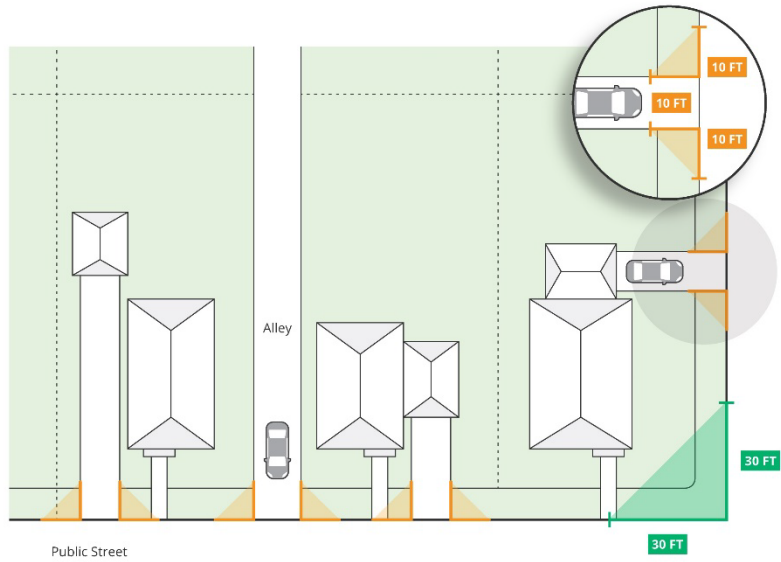
## 21A.62.050: Illustrations Of Selected Definitions

### Illustration I: Sight Distance Triangle



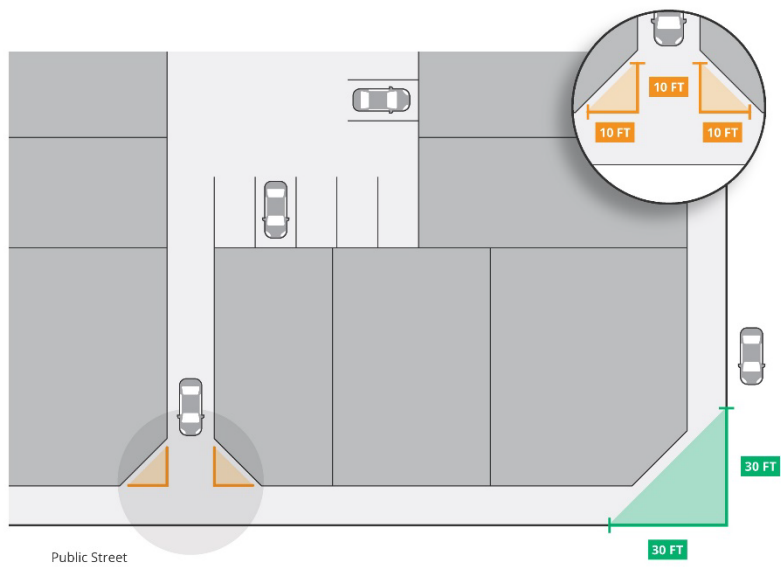


## CLEAR ZONE AREAS | STREET WITHOUT A SIDEWALK



○ Alley/Driveway Intersections (10 ft\*) | ● Corner Lot/Street Intersection (30 ft\*) |

## CLEAR ZONE AREAS | EXAMPLE OF CITY BLOCK WITH BUILDINGS



○ Alley/Driveway Intersections (10 ft\*) | ● Corner Lot/Street Intersection (30 ft\*) |

# ATTACHMENT B: Zoning Text Amendment Standards

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## ZONING TEXT AMENDMENTS

**21A.50.050:** A decision to amend the text of this title or the zoning map by general amendment is a matter committed to the legislative discretion of the city council and is not controlled by any one standard. In making a decision concerning a proposed text amendment, the City Council should consider the following:

**1. Whether a proposed text amendment is consistent with the purposes, goals, objectives, and policies of the city as stated through its various adopted planning documents.**

Plan Salt Lake

As discussed in Consideration 3, Plan Salt Lake aims to decrease pedestrian, bike, and auto accidents and make walking and cycling viable, safe, and convenient in all areas of the city. The purpose of the sight distance triangle is to promote safety with all modes of transportation by regulating obstructions at potential intersections of traffic. The proposed text amendment would clarify and expand the application of such requirement to ultimately help implement these city goals. These changes support the city's master plan because it promotes safe crossings around intersections and minimizes conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians.

By including alleys in the sight distance triangle definition and applying the requirement to all structures, obstructions within clear zones become consistently restricted throughout the city. This is especially important in residential areas and other pedestrian friendly locations, such as the city's business districts, where buildings can be built closer to the sidewalk and walking is often more frequent and encouraged. The amendment would prevent buildings from creating hazardous conditions and support a more walkable and bikeable environment in the city.

**2. Whether a proposed text amendment furthers the specific purpose statements of the zoning ordinance.**

[21A.02.030 Zoning Ordinance Purpose and Intent](#)

One of the purposes of the Zoning Ordinance is to promote safety for the inhabitants of Salt Lake City. Updating the sight distance triangle regulations and definitions clarifies the applicability of the requirement and expands height restrictions to similar or more dangerous situations. The proposal to include language to address alley intersections and other structures besides fences, walls, and hedges will further safety throughout the city as intended by the zoning code.

[21A.40.120](#) The purpose of regulations of fences, walls and hedges is as follows:

*Fences, walls and hedges serve properties by providing privacy and security, defining private space and enhancing the design of individual sites. Fences also affect the public by impacting the visual image of the streetscape and the overall character of neighborhoods. The purpose of these regulations is to achieve a balance between the private concerns for privacy and site design and the public concerns for enhancement of the community appearance, and to ensure the provision of adequate light, air and public safety.*

As previously discussed, the proposed text amendment will further the intent of public safety by increasing safety at alley intersections and preventing buildings from blocking view of oncoming traffic. The proposal still supports privacy as the fence height restriction only applies to the defined areas of the sight distance triangle. Fences not in the sight distance triangle area are permitted up to the full height permitted by the code.

#### 21A.50.010 Zoning Amendments Purpose Statement

*The purpose of this chapter is to provide standards and procedures for making amendments to the text of this title and to the zoning map. This amendment process is not intended to relieve particular hardships nor to confer special privileges or rights upon any person, but only to make adjustments necessary in light of changed conditions or changes in public policy.*

The proposed amendment will adjust zoning standards after situations observed through enforcement cases identified gaps and inconsistencies in the application of the code, specifically in regard to sight distance triangle regulations. These changes will benefit the general public and are not intended to relieve the hardship of any particular individual.

### **3. Whether a proposed text amendment is consistent with the purposes and provisions of any applicable overlay zoning districts which may impose additional standards.**

The proposal is consistent with the overlay districts and will not adversely impact any zoning district.

### **4. The extent to which a proposed text amendment implements best current, professional practices of urban planning and design.**

The best regulations are those that are clear and understandable to those who administer and those who are required to adhere to them. The proposed text amendment clarifies where the regulations apply to and adds consistency by adding language to include alleys and all structures. Alleys operate similar to driveways; therefore, the sight distance triangle regulations should apply similarly to these intersections to ensure visibility of oncoming traffic remains unobstructed. Likewise, other permitted structures besides fences, walls and hedges can also obstruct visibility and create hazardous conditions at intersections. Because buildings are typically larger and do not provide any level of transparency, they should be included in sight distance triangle regulations. The proposal is consistent with best practices in transportation, urban design and zoning as it incorporates walkability and safety goals.

# ATTACHMENT C: Public Process & Comments

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## Public Notice, Meetings, Comments

The following is a list of public meetings that have been held, and other public input opportunities, related to the proposed project since the applications were submitted:

- February 15, 2023—As a courtesy, a 45-day required notice was sent to all city’s recognized community organizations. No formal comments have been submitted at the point of publishing.
- March 20, 2023 – Presented the proposal to the Sugar House Community Council. The overall response was in support of the amendment.
- February 15, 2023 – April 1, 2023 – The project was posted to the Online Open House webpage.

Notice of the public hearing for the proposal included:

- April 28, 2023
  - Notice was posted in the newspapers
  - Notice was sent to recipients of listserve
  - Public notice posted on City and State websites

## Public Input:

Staff did not receive public input on this amendment. Any comments received after the publishing of this staff report will be forwarded to the Planning Commission for consideration.