

PRESERVATION CHICAGO

4410 N. Ravenswood Avenue, Chicago, IL 60640

Phone: 773.334.8800 Fax: 773.334.8803

www.preservationchicago.org

info@preservationchicago.org

RZ -Renovation Zoning

*A draft proposal to amend the
Chicago Zoning Ordinance to provide incentives for the
renovation of Chicago's existing housing stock*

Revised – December 1, 2010

A New Zoning Classification

Preservation Chicago proposes a new zoning classification, which we call **Renovation Zoning (RZ)**. The intent of this new classification is to encourage the preservation and renovation of existing housing in neighborhoods that value their existing buildings but do not meet the higher standards necessary to qualify as a designated Historic Landmark District.

The proposed ordinance would work in this manner: In areas of the city where the Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning has officially determined that Landmarking is not an option, residents could instead opt for **Renovation Zoning**.

The key concept of **Renovation Zoning** is that it would actually be two zoning classifications rolled into one. One set of rules would apply only to existing buildings slated for renovation and another set of rules would apply only to buildings slated for demolition and new construction.

The zoning benefits within **Renovation Zoning** would be considered “as of right”, which means they would require no special permission or bureaucratic involvement, other than the normal building permit application process.

To illustrate the concept, let's take a situation in a typical Chicago neighborhood, which may be undergoing speculative redevelopment pressure through tear-downs. The block in question is made up of mostly 1 ½ and two-story buildings situated on lots 25 feet wide by 125 feet deep. However, it is zoned RT-4, which allows three story buildings. The ability to build buildings considerably larger than the existing housing stock provides

a de facto “demolition incentive” and it is the catalyst that encourages more demolitions and larger development.

Today, under the current law, that community has the option of downzoning to RT-3.5 or even RS-3. Unfortunately, the problem that presently exists without **Renovation Zoning** is that if a community downzones in order to control rampant and uncontrolled real estate speculation, owners who want to add additions to their homes may be restricted from doing so because their homes would now be classified as too large to add any additional square footage.

However, if **Renovation Zoning** were enacted, it would allow owners to opt into the larger FAR (Floor Area Ratio) of the next highest zoning classification, as of right. If Renovation Zoning existed, this community could rezone to RS-3**RZ**, which would allow them to add on to their existing homes without asking for any special permission or having to go through any additional time consuming bureaucracy.

But, if a home were demolished to make way for new construction, the smaller FAR associated with RS-3 would be enforced. The more restrictive FAR for new construction would discourage speculative development through demolition. The positive effect would be that the FAR bonus would encourage renovation of the existing housing stock by both developers and homesteaders. It would also cut down on the amount of debris going to landfills as a bonus.

Overly burdensome restrictions on homesteaders should be mitigated through balanced, logical and thoughtful application of the ordinance. Homesteaders who take advantage of the FAR bonus should be required to orient their additions to the rear of the property, with the exception of dormers as long as they are no higher than the existing ridge. Perhaps one-story homes and cottages would have built-in rear yard setback relief in order to avoid unsightly second floor additions. Each community would have to evaluate the character of their housing stock and develop uniform guidelines to help direct future development.

It has become evident that our neighborhoods need more planning tools than currently exist to help guide orderly development. Logical, simple, and uniformly enforced rules preserve the character of our neighborhoods, ensure development predictability, and ultimately protect our property values. A community remains healthy when owners invest, improve, and maintain their properties. But they will only do so if they are confident that their investment will be protected from unregulated, unpredictable, and incompatible development.

The City of Chicago has an obligation and a duty to provide the necessary planning tools that allow neighborhoods to expand without being destroyed.