

**Falcon Heights Planning Commission  
Workshop on Front Porches – August, 23, 2011  
Highlights of the informal discussion**

**Brief staff presentation**

- Majority of homes in Falcon Heights were constructed in an era when front porches were not a popular architectural feature on houses
- Staff photos of neighborhood streetscapes in Falcon Heights, with and without sidewalks, and examples of front porches/entries/covered stoops that do exist, plus houses without these features
- Many homes in the city do have porches of various sizes, from entry portico/covered stoop type structures to full width open porches – influenced by styles of when they were built.
- Many homes do not have any kind of shelter at front door. Every year one or more homeowners inquire about adding this kind of feature.
- City code does not now specifically allow a covered stoop or porch like structure as an encroachment into the required front yard.
  - Some houses are back far enough to fit it in an entry
  - Most houses would require a variance because they are already up to the setback line.
- Concern in past that porches would be screened and then enclosed, narrowing streetscape, possibly becoming storage for “junk”, unsightly, etc.
- Revisiting this issue is in Council goals for 2011-2012, requesting Planning Commission to consider whether some amendment to code would be appropriate

**Discussion highlights**

- Purpose and uses of front porch and porch-like structures
  - Shelter from weather at home entry – reasonable need in our climate
  - Outdoor seating area for residents of home – reasonable and “nice idea” but would people really use it?
  - More social connection in neighborhood – also a positive idea – more porches might encourage this.
    - People who do have front porches in FH are not using them this way now. Present generation has tradition of more “private” outdoor space in back yard.
    - Comfortable tradition in other parts of the country but not Twin Cities (at least since 1950s?), never in Falcon Heights (architecture)
  - Enclosed as extension of home’s indoor space – even storage (like older St. Paul neighborhoods)

- Chair articulated three “levels” of encroachment, shaping additional discussion
  - Front entry shelter, covered stoop, portico (“level 1”)
  - Front entry extended to some potential outdoor living space, seating (“level 2”)
    - Wider but not necessarily deeper than simple covered stoop
  - Full “traditional” front porch, possibly enclosed (“level 3”)
  - Mentioned in passing: closed vestibule “air lock” entry, as seen on some older homes – did not come into discussion
- Informal consensus of Commissioners present
  - Commissioners all comfortable with “level 1” but not “level 3”
  - Willing to consider something “in between” (level 1 to 2) if kept open (no screening or walls)
    - What about mosquitoes?
  - Would need specific limits in code
  - Continue discussion toward specifics of possible change – one more workshop
  - Staff to find examples from other cities.
  - Staff and/or liaison report back to Council