

MEMORANDUM

Date: February 2, 2016

From: Richard J. Schulte, Chairperson, Northfield Planning Commission

To: Scott Tempel, City Planner, City of Northfield

Subject: Item 7, Interior Lighting on Property Line, on the Planning Commission's List of Outstanding LDC Items, last revised 1/22/2016.

Action Requested: Will you please undertake a review of the existing Land Development Code (LDC) to determine if there is a way to amend the regulations in the Northfield Code to address an actual, experienced problem with interior lighting from commercial buildings. The light can spill-over, at night, through large windows or glass walls, into nearby residential neighborhoods. After reviewing the existing Code, and best practices adopted in other cities, please make a recommendation to the Planning Commission to (a) revise the LDC; or, (b) remove Item 7 from our List of Outstanding LDC Items. *(I further suggest that Item 7 should be re-titled to say "Interior Lighting Spill-over Beyond Property Lines.")*

Background: To my memory, Item 7, Interior Light Spill-over Beyond Property Lines, was added to the List of Outstanding LDC Items about three years back. This matter was reported as an actual problem by a residential property owner. The reporter said that interior light energy from a glass-walled college building was spilling beyond the building property line at night, and illuminating a Northfield neighborhood for a block or more to the south of the building. The reporter expressed the view that the spill-over light represents offensive, night time, light pollution that was or could impact residents' enjoyment of their own property and the night skies, and also interfere with sleep patterns and the interior tranquility of peoples' homes.

The existing LDC does contain regulations that seek to constrain the spill-over of exterior lighting installed on poles or the exterior surfaces of buildings on commercial properties. I believe, however, that the current LDC is silent on mitigating the effects of interior lighting spilling through glass building walls onto surrounding properties owned by others.

Architects appear to be making increased use of glass walls in buildings for improved aesthetics, to bring the “outside environment” into buildings, and to make better use of sunlight for interior lighting and heating. See the upgrade to the Northfield Library, for example. This step, however, would seem to create a new design challenge; i.e., to keep interior lighting, in the night time hours, from spilling out of the buildings and across property lines onto neighboring properties.

The question, for the Planning Commission, is whether we should seek to amend the Land Use Code to influence decisions on interior lighting design for buildings with big windows or large glass walls. If the Planning Commission does not take up this challenge, or if the Commission has no authority in this matter, who is responsible for writing regulations to manage spill-over from interior lighting onto surfaces where the Commission has regulations to control spill-over from exterior lighting? An additional question may be: If the Planning Commission seeks to write a regulation affecting the design of interior lighting on glass-walled buildings, what agency can enforce such a regulation in the building design stage; or, in the post construction stage when the building is occupied and operating at night?

Potential Recommendations to the Northfield Planning Commission:

My first goal here is to develop an answer for the citizen who believes the Planning Commission has both the authority and the responsibility to address spill-over of interior lighting energy across property lines. My second goal is to develop proposed regulations if that is a potentially useful activity. My third goal is to clear Item 7 from our active task list.

In this vein, I anticipate that your recommendations will allow the Commission to discuss and (1) propose several minor amendments to the LDC for interior lighting design; or, (2) close out Item 7 because the Commission has no authority in this area; or, (3) close out Item 7 because the City has no effective means to enforce any interior lighting, spill-over regulation that might be written by the Commission.

Timing

I would like to have your recommendations on this matter presented to and acted on by the Planning Commission before the end of April.

Regards, Richard J. Schulte