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Little interest sparked for joining panel

• City having tough time attracting residents to serve on panel to review proposed changes to fence, hedge and wall ordinance.

By Mark R. Madler, The Leader

DOWNTOWN BURBANK -- Citing too little input, the city has extended for a second time the deadline for residents to apply for a panel to review proposed changes to the ordinance governing heights of fences, hedges and walls.

Fewer than 10 people have applied to take part on the blue ribbon panel since applications started being accepted in October.

"With this type of issue, we definitely want more folks than that," Assistant City Manager Mike Flad said.

Flad expects that the weak response to the committee will be discussed by the City Council at a meeting in early January when the fence ordinance is on the agenda.

Residents now have until Jan. 31 to apply through the city clerk's office to be on the panel.

The council is considering revising the ordinance to raise the height of frontyard fences from 3 feet to 4 feet; sideyard fences from 3 feet to 6 feet; prohibit new fences to be made of chain link; and allow arbors and pergolas.

Residents packed the council chambers in August for a meeting when the revised ordinance was presented and discussed.

The decision to create the panel grew from the interest of the residents.

Councilwoman Marsha Ramos acknowledged that the issue is so contentious that residents may not want to serve on the panel while Councilman Todd Campbell contends the idea of the panel is nice in theory but probably isn't going anywhere.

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As an architect and Realtor, Rancho District resident Michael Scandiffio said he is uniquely qualified to serve on the panel.

An informal survey he has done on his own of fences, hedges and walls in the city is probably more than the staff members themselves have done, said Scandiffio, who has lived in Burbank for nearly 20 years.

"They are used to screen heavy traffic, driveways and houses along alleys," Scandiffio said. "You only have to ride down streets with side yards and see why people need these things."

The council agreed that change to the ordinance is necessary but what the new standards should be, the process to allow for variations and enforcement remains up in the air.

Councilman Dave Golonski backs raising the maximum fence height to 4 feet and suggested that the blue ribbon panel can then work out criteria for homeowners seeking to go above that height.

"The council has already is willing to grandfather all existing fences provided there isn't a safety issue," Golonski said.

Enforcement of the current ordinance is done only when the city receives a complaint, said License and Code services administrator Terre Hirsch.

Scandiffio was cited as having a hedge that was a safety hazard because it blocked the view of drivers backing out of a neighboring driveway.

The complaint against him was an example of "selected enforcement" and he is applying for a variance for his hedge, Scandiffio said.

"There are violations all over the city yet they are zeroing in on me because it is a public safety issue," Scandiffio said.

What the city needs is a moratorium on enforcement until the ordinance is revised, Scandiffio said.

Golonski, however, said a suspension of enforcing the ordinance would be bad policy.

"The reason for a fence ordinance is for safety issues," Golonski said.

"If you aren't going to enforce it for safety you're putting the city in a bad situation."

QUESTION

Why do you think the city is getting sparse interest in its blue ribbon fence ordinance panel? E-mail your responses to burbankleader @latimes.com; mail them to the Burbank Leader, 111 W. Wilson Ave., Glendale, CA 91203. Please spell your name and include your address and phone number for verification purposes only.

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