

Bill 2021-784 (Renew Arlington Overlay service garage windows)

White Paper – bill with sill height amendment

Objective: Provide design consistency in the Renew Arlington Overlay area while accommodating the specialized use and internal layout requirements of auto service repair facilities.

Background: The Renew Arlington Overlay area, which is organized around the commercial corridors of University Blvd. North, Arlington Road and Merrill Road, contains many commercial structures that need either updating, maintenance or in some cases demolition and rebuilding. As one of the design requirements, the Overlay prohibits “open bay doors and other similar large doors providing access to work areas and storage areas” from opening toward or directly facing either University Blvd. North, Arlington Road or Merrill Road within those Character Areas, or facing a directly accessed roadway within a Catalyst Character Area.

John’s Automotive is the first permit applicant, but an example for many to follow, that is facing the restrictions in the Overlay for “commercial areas” as applied to service garages. John’s Automotive is meeting the intent of the Overlay by demolishing their existing substandard structure and building a new facility in the layout and location required by the Overlay. However, in meeting the requirement of “no open bays facing Arlington Road” the wall opposite the open bays will be facing Arlington Road. This is the wall commonly used by mechanics to store their tools and equipment used in the car repairs.

The challenge is that the Overlay requires “new commercial and mixed-use buildings” to have large display windows on the ground floor, and those windows must cover a minimum of 40% of the building’s linear frontage (i.e. a building 100’ long would need 40’ of windows) and these windows must have a sill height (the bottom of the window) of no greater than 3’ from the floor inside the building. By requiring auto service and repair garages to meet this requirement, the efficiency of the “back wall” is severely reduced, security of the interior is compromised, and would create the situation of the equipment being stacked in front of the window anyway.

How 2021-784 meets the objective: Relaxing the requirement for window placement from 40% of the linear frontage of the building to 20% of the linear frontage, and revising the requirement for the windows to be a maximum of 3’ from the floor to being a maximum of 5’ from the floor, provides the flexibility of design needed to meet the Overlay requirement to orient buildings so that no open bay doors providing access to work areas are facing the major roads contained in the Over, but it still provides some design consistency in that the wall facing the major roads will contain windows rather than be just a blank wall.