



City of San Marino

Staff Report

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TO: Chairs and Members of the Planning Commission

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DATE: April 23, 2025

**SUBJECT: DISCUSSION REGARDING PROPOSED POLICY UPDATES
TO THE CITY'S WINDOW REPLACEMENT PROCEDURES
AND PRE-APPROVED WINDOW MATERIAL LIST**

STRATEGIC PLAN CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Attractive, Complementary Business District;
Beautiful, Preserved, Single-Family Neighborhoods;
Efficient, Responsive, and Effective City Services;
Engaged and Connected Residents;
Fiscally Responsible and Transparent City Government

BACKGROUND

The City Council adopted the original Window Replacement Procedures and Pre-Approved Window Material List on September 4, 2010, with Ordinance No. O-10-1243, provided as Attachment 1. The procedures have remained the same since its adoption, but the list of pre-approved materials has been updated periodically to modify or expand the pre-approved aluminum-clad wood window manufacturers and product list.

Resolution No. PCR 10-04, provided as Attachment 2, cited the need to expedite the permitting process for window replacements, thereby creating the Window Replacement Procedures and allowing the Design Review Committee (DRC) and Planning Commission to concentrate on other design review issues. Staff has received feedback from residents and applicants who are frustrated with the restrictions and confusion of the window replacement procedures that prompt many projects to be reviewed by the DRC.

Accordingly, the City Council directed staff in 2023 to evaluate the City's Window Replacement Procedures and Pre-Approved Window Material List.

DISCUSSION

STRATEGY

Staff suggests separating the window policy discussion into the following phases:

1. **Phase I (First Meeting):** (1) Establish the goal(s) of updating the Window Replacement Procedures and pose preliminary questions and concerns to staff. (2) Begin addressing staff's list of questions and scenarios below and provide direction to staff. Staff aims to address as many of the listed points as possible while balancing the need to run a time-efficient meeting. As such, staff recommends continuing the discussion to a future Planning Commission meeting midway.
2. **Phase II (Future Meeting):** Continue addressing staff's list of policy questions at the next available Planning Commission meeting. Staff aims to prepare a revised draft Window Replacement Procedures document with suggested changes for further review.
3. **Phase III (As Needed):** Modify the updated Window Replacement Procedures document based on the direction provided by the Planning Commission.

Staff has prepared a list of questions, issues, and scenarios (below) that staff has encountered consistently. Staff is requesting clarifications or determinations from the Planning Commission for each point listed below. Not all questions need to be addressed equally. Any direction provided will aid staff in preparing the revised draft Window Replacement Procedures document.

GOALS

The purpose of this discussion is to focus solely on clarifying and modifying the policies embedded within the existing Window Replacement Procedures and Pre-Approved Window Material List ("WRP") document, which is provided as Attachment 3. A discussion on updating the list of pre-approved window materials will be scheduled for a future Planning Commission agenda.

Staff reviews window replacement projects on a case-by-case basis, which is not proposed to change. Rather, staff recommends updating the WRP with the overall goals of providing more options to property owners, reducing

uncertainty with clearer terms, and ultimately enhancing the efficiency of staff's review without creating an overly-complex process. Currently, the WRP are inefficient due to limited options, undefined terms or unaddressed scenarios which frustrates members of the public when staff determines that a project requires DRC approval.

ADMINISTRATIVE DESIGN REVIEW

SMMC § 23.15.04.1 (A)(3) authorizes staff to conduct an Administrative Design Review ("Admin. Design Review" or "ADR") for "minor window modifications." Administrative design review projects are not subject to a public hearing or neighborhood notification; however, similar to the DRC and Planning Commission, staff must make the design review findings set forth in SMMC § 23.15.09 to approve an ADR project. The following are a few examples of "minor window modifications" that can be approved with an ADR application:

1. "One or two" window changes visible from the street that do not include a whole-house window replacement or replacement of all windows visible from the street, but generally involve like-for-like changes.
2. Modifications to windows that may pose privacy concerns. For example, a new window on the side or rear and second-story of a residence that may provide a line of sight onto a neighboring property.
3. Changes to window divided lights pattern that does not significantly alter overall design and utilize a pre-approved product or material.

Generally, window projects referred to the DRC include:

1. Proposals which alter the appearance of the structure as viewed from the street;
2. Proposals that do not qualify for WRP or ADR; or
3. Any window and door replacement project forwarded by the Community Development Director to the DRC.

Staff will prepare a refined applicability list defining which projects qualify for either the WRP or Administrative Design Review at a future meeting.

POLICY QUESTIONS

The following is a list of questions, issues, and scenarios staff encounters when reviewing window replacement proposals for compliance with the Window Replacement Procedures ("WRP"), or otherwise determining when a project requires Administrative Design Review ("ADR") or DRC approval:

1. The WRP does not address its applicability within each zone. It is unclear whether the WRP should apply only to residences within the R-1 zone, or throughout the entire City.
 - a. **Question:** Should commercial and/or mixed-use zones follow the WRP?
 - b. **Question:** Should commercial properties be provided more flexibility with selecting window manufacturers and products that are not pre-approved without DRC approval?
 - c. **Question:** Should the Historic and Cultural zone, which includes The Huntington Library and Southwestern Academy, follow the WRP?
 - d. **Considerations:** The applicability of the WRP across all zones would provide uniformity in regulation; however, it is difficult to anticipate potential issues that could arise with future mixed-use or multi-family developments, such as in the RM1, RIH, MU1, MU2 zones.
 - e. **Suggestion:** Adopt a policy requiring commercial-style windows to follow the WRP, but not the Pre-Approved Window Material List. Residential-style windows would follow both the WRP and pre-approved list.
2. What is considered a “special window”? Usually, leaded or stained-glass windows are categorized as special windows.
 - a. **Question:** Can a leaded glass window be replaced with the same design but a different material? For example: a single, steel leaded-glass window that is proposed to be replaced with an aluminum-clad window with a matching diamond-shaped glass design.
 - b. **Considerations:** Leaving this term undefined generates uncertainty for applicants but allows staff to exercise its judgement when reviewing for special windows.
 - c. **Suggestion:** Provide a non-exhaustive list of examples of special windows.
3. The WRP does not address aluminum windows, which often do not have sills, casing, or trim around them. Current practice is to require DRC approval to replace a home’s original, often thin-framed aluminum windows for a different material, even if the design, size, and operation are not generally changing.
 - a. **Question:** Is DRC approval required when pre-existing aluminum windows are proposed to be replaced?

- b. **Question:** Can applicants select a pre-approved wood or aluminum-clad wood window product to replace aluminum windows without the need for DRC approval?
 - c. **Considerations:** The replacement of aluminum windows will generally result in a minor change in the appearance or design, as a typical aluminum window has a thinner profile. Any new window, such as wood or aluminum-clad wood, will generally have a thicker sash and be more slightly more noticeable from the street.
- 4. In what instances are Fibrex windows appropriate for window replacement projects? The Fibrex material is a blend of 40% wood fiber and 60% thermoplastic polymer.
 - a. **Question:** Is Fibrex an appropriate replacement for wood or aluminum-clad wood windows?
 - b. **Question:** Is Fibrex an appropriate replacement for pre-existing vinyl windows?
- 5. The WRP does not address vinyl windows. Current practice is to require DRC approval to replace vinyl windows.
 - a. **Question:** Should staff have the ability to review and approve the replacement of pre-existing vinyl windows with a pre-approved window material? If so, under what circumstances?
 - b. **Considerations:** Addressing situations where pre-existing vinyl windows are proposed to be replaced with a pre-approved product will provide homeowners with an option that does not require DRC approval; some vinyl windows do not have a sill, casing, or surrounding trim, so it might be more appropriate to require Administrative Design Review or DRC approval.
- 6. Steel windows must be replaced like-for-like in material, for which there is only one pre-approved manufacturer: Torrance Steel. Residents often cite the cost burden of replacing steel windows with the pre-approved Torrance Steel products, and request to switch from steel to aluminum-clad windows. Current practice is to require DRC approval in such cases.
 - a. **Question:** Can staff approve a change in window material from steel to aluminum clad (another "metal" material) window without DRC approval?
 - b. **Question:** Can staff approve a change in window material from steel to a non-metal, pre-approved product (i.e. Fibrex or wood) without DRC approval?

- c. **Considerations:** Limiting residents to one manufacturer can be cost-prohibitive; however, there is usually a change in the appearance of the structure when steel windows are replaced with a non-steel product since steel windows have a thinner sash, muntins, etc.
- 7. The WRP states that aluminum-clad windows cannot be field-painted. Painting windows might inadvertently void the manufacturer warranty; however, it's not clear if this policy decision was also based on a design preference. Pursuant to SMMC § 23.15.04 (L), projects that are not in accordance with the WRP require DRC approval, so painting aluminum-clad wood windows would require DRC approval.
 - a. **Question:** Can property owners paint existing aluminum-clad wood windows without DRC approval?
 - b. **Question:** If so, should certain paint styles be regulated? For example, metallic finishes are prohibited.
 - c. **Considerations:** Allowing the painting of aluminum-clad windows would provide flexibility to property owners, but could void the manufacturer's warranty. A property owner could choose to accept this risk.
 - d. **Considerations:** Staff allows wood windows to be painted.
- 8. Applicants commonly request the removal of muntins on windows and doors facing the rear yard that are not visible from public view.
 - a. **Question:** Should staff allow the removal/deletion or reduction of muntins/grids when the windows and doors are facing the rear and/or not visible from public view?
 - b. **Considerations:** Such changes might not impact neighborhood compatibility, but raise concerns about compatibility with the structure itself, which is a consideration for window changeouts requiring Administrative Design Review or DRC approval. If the WRP are meant to be like-for-like changes, allowing a change in muntins could create an inconsistency in review requirements.
- 9. Some residences are improved with an inconsistent mix of window materials, such as mix of wood, steel, and/or vinyl. The applicant will propose to replace them with aluminum-clad wood windows that are like-for-like in the design, size, and operation, but not the material, of the existing windows. It's not clear which material staff should approve in such instances where there is an inconsistent mix.

- a. **Question:** Can staff approve a change that proposes to use one material to provide a consistent look? For example, if 75% of a structure's windows are wood, and the remaining 25% are steel windows that are not "special windows", can the applicant replace with wood windows throughout (100% of) the structure? Conversely, can staff approve a change to all steel windows (100%) if the majority of windows are not steel? If there a specific threshold that should apply?
10. Page 4 of the WRP (Notes) states that sills "should" be installed to match the dimensions and design of the original window sill. Should this language be revised to require sills to remain or be replaced to match the existing?
- a. **Question:** Is it appropriate for property owners to remove and/or change sills on new windows without DRC approval?
 - b. **Question:** Should this language be revised to require sills to remain for projects qualifying under the WRP?
 - c. **Considerations:** The like-for-like replacement of a sill can be accomplished with an Administrative Design Review application.
11. Page 4 of the WRP (Notes) states that side and rear doors "may" be the same material and manufacturer as the approved windows. As an interim policy, staff has determined that doors with glazing must be selected from the pre-approved window materials list. This includes sliding doors and doors with any glass/glazing elements that function similar to a window or allow light into the structure. The WRP does not make clear whether the intent is to regulate the design, size, dimensions, and/or material of exterior doors, whether or not the doors are visible from the street.
- a. **Question:** Should the WRP clearly state that all exterior doors with glazing must be selected from the pre-approved window materials list, or can any material be selected?
 - b. **Question:** Should staff review for consistency in design, size, operation, and material of exterior doors, even those that are not visible from public view?
 - c. **Question:** Can any material, such as vinyl or fiberglass, be approved for exterior doors?
 - d. **Considerations:** Leaving the policy for door replacements unaddressed will not help accomplish staff's goal of providing a clear and consistent policy, and may lead to inefficiency. Allowing any manufacturer, product and/or material would create a

streamlined process for door approvals; however, the streamlined change could lead to an inconsistent look on the structure.

- e. **Suggestion:** Formalize the interim policy but provide flexibility for doors that are not visible from public view. For example, a fiberglass door on a detached garage not visible from public view could be allowed.

12. The manufacturers found on the pre-approved window material list update their product offerings over time. The marketing for some pre-approved products have changed without a compromise to the design or quality of the product. For example, JELD-WEN Sitaline EX windows are now JELD-WEN Sitaline, Fibrex Series 1 windows are now called Acclaim, and the Pella Architect Series is now rebranded as the Reserve Series.

- a. **Question:** Can staff approve the use of rebranded pre-approved products if staff can verify the quality and design of the product offerings have not been compromised?
- b. **Question:** Some manufacturer representatives claim that window products sold at home improvement stores (i.e. Home Depot, Lowe's, etc.) are identical to the pre-approved window materials with different names or identification numbers. For example, Andersen 100 Series Fibrex windows are the same as the Renewal by Andersen Fibrex Acclaim (formerly Series 1) windows. Is this product considered "preapproved" and exchangeable with Renewal by Andersen windows?
- c. **Consideration:** Approving such changes allows staff more flexibility, especially when product availability becomes an issue.

13. The WRP does not provide direction for existing privacy glass, such as frosted or obscured glass, on existing windows. Typically, windows are improved with frosted or obscured glass to address privacy concerns between neighbors, and may have resulted from projects requiring design review in the past, which are not always reflected in a property's permit history.

- a. **Question:** Should the WRP require existing privacy glass to remain or be replaced like-for-like?
- b. **Considerations:** The replacement of privacy glass with standard (non-privacy) glazing can inadvertently impact privacy between neighbors.

14. What materials are considered interchangeable? For example, staff allows the replacement of wood windows with aluminum-clad wood or

Fibrex windows, so long as there is one consistent material being used and the design, size, and operation are like-for-like. It's not clear in which cases staff should approve a change in material or refer the project to the DRC. Staff has prepared a matrix that could outline when a change in material is appropriate. Staff is requesting a determination from the Planning Commission on which material changes are appropriate.

Existing Window Material	Proposed Window Material Change	Qualifies for staff-level approval?
Wood	Aluminum-clad wood, Fibrex	Yes
Wood	Steel	No (?)
Aluminum-clad wood	Wood	Yes
Aluminum-clad wood	Steel, Fibrex	No (?)
Steel	Wood, Aluminum-clad wood, Fibrex	No, unless there are existing aluminum-clad/wood windows on the residence.
Fibrex	Wood, Aluminum-clad wood	Yes
Fibrex	Steel	No
Aluminum	Any pre-approved product and material	Determination required.
Vinyl	Any pre-approved product and material	Determination required.
Fiberglass	Any pre-approved product and material	Determination required.

15. The WRP does not address windows on sunrooms, enclosed patios and other enclosed structures. For example, sunrooms and enclosed patios are typically improved with floor-to-ceiling aluminum windows. It is not clear if such structures are exempt from the WRP when homeowners want to replace their windows.
 - a. **Question:** Should sunrooms, enclosed patios, and similar structures be exempt from meeting the WRP?
 - b. **Considerations:** The updated WRP document will specify that the Community Development Director can forward projects with unique circumstances to the DRC. However, staff prefers to clarify the requirements for sunrooms and enclosed patios and structures.

ANTICIPATED CHANGES

At minimum, staff anticipates updating the WRP document with the following changes:

1. Distinguish between the WRP and ADR, or when DRC approval is required.
2. Providing a clearer checklist outlining the requirements for submittal.
3. Renaming the "Notes" on page 4 of the WRP as Standard Conditions of Approval, and adding/revising conditions as deemed necessary.
4. Adding an FAQ page to address common questions, issues, and concerns.
5. Providing an improved window schedule template for applicants to use.
6. Addressing requirements for tempered glass, energy efficiency, and other California Building Code requirements, similar to egress windows.
7. Clarifying that the window material is also reviewed. The WRP requires like-for-like replacement in the design, size, and operation of windows. The use of a consistent window material is not clearly addressed in the WRP. San Marino Municipal Code (SMMC) § 23.15.16 states that all applications for building permits which do not fall within the categories requiring design review shall be approved by staff if it is found that the colors and materials are consistent and match the existing building. Staff proposes updating the WRP to set a clear expectation that a consistency in window material is also required.

The updated WRP will also include a more complete, revised applicability list which outlines what projects qualify for the WRP or ADR, or require DRC approval.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission review and discuss potential updates to the regulations found in the City's Window Replacement Procedures and Pre-Approved Window Material List, and provide direction to staff accordingly; and continue this agenda item to the regular Planning Commission meeting of April 23, 2025, for further discussion.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Ordinance No. O-10-1243
2. Planning Commission Resolution No. PCR 10-04
3. Existing Window Replacement Procedures and Pre-Approved Window Material List (Revised 2019)