

Parking in Front Yards Outlawed

On May 27, the Tuscaloosa City Council voted to update the city's zoning ordinance to prohibit parking in front lawns in R1 and R2 residential neighborhoods. The vote was five to two, with Bill Tinker (District 7) and Bobby Howard (District 1) voting against the ordinance.

The vote was the culmination of efforts by various neighborhood advocates across the city. Although the general purpose of the ordinance is to "promote the public health, safety and welfare," those who advocated for the measure did so in search of a tool to address nuisance properties, maintain standards of living, and protect property values in residential neighborhoods fighting decline. Our understanding—which may be flawed—is that the ordinance will only be enforced when complaints are received about a violator.

Here is the core language in the updated City Code: "The parking of a motor vehicle or a trailer in or upon a front yard of premises zoned R-1 and R-2, except in driveways, is prohibited."

In other words, if you want to play it safe, park in your driveway—not in your front yard. If you live on a corner, don't park in the yard between your house and street on either side of the house that faces a street. To make a complaint about a violator, call 311 or the Tuscaloosa Police Department at 349-2121. Do not call 911, which is intended for emergency situations only.

So, what if more vehicles 'live' at your house than comfortably fit in the driveway? Your best alternative is to park on the side or in back of the house. That's just fine and dandy and shouldn't bother anyone at all, as long as you've got the space (and assuming you don't live on a corner where the 'side yard' also faces the street).

Alternatively, you can expand your driveway within certain limits. However, the ordinance has beefed-up guidelines for the construction of driveways in R-1 and R-2 neighborhoods, and these should be borne in mind:

"Driveways shall be surfaced with an asphaltic or cement binder pavement so as to provide a durable and dustless surface. Crushed stone driveways shall be permitted on private property where a crushed stone, gravel or dirt driveway existed on the effective date of this ordinance, provided that the owner obtains a driveway permit from the Office of the City Engineer."

Also (paraphrasing here), driveways need to be graded and drained, and designed to provide safe access to and from the street.

In addition, "Further paving of the front yard for parking not in conformity with this section is expressly prohibited. ... [and] Driveways shall not exceed a maximum width of 20 feet and shall not occupy more than 40% of the defined front yard," subject to certain exceptions.

For more information about these exceptions and other implications of the new rules, call the City at their all-purpose 311 information line, and your call should be directed to the proper person.