

**AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PLANNING OFFICIALS**  
**1313 EAST 60th STREET — CHICAGO 37, ILLINOIS**

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**REGULATING STORAGE OF MAJOR RECREATIONAL EQUIPMENT**

Amount and variety of major recreational equipment spirals upward as more families reach higher income levels, as mass production lowers prices, and as vacation and retirement patterns allow more time for active recreation. Growing distances to suitable recreational areas and limited-access highways facilitating fast movement with more and more complex (and complete) equipment add to the trend.

The outlook is for fantastic increase. Young families will boom, will be better off than young families have ever been before, and will produce a bumper crop of outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Retirement drops below the traditional 65-year mark as the number of retirees increases, meaning that more retirees (also in better financial condition than ever in the past) will be more active. The work week shortens, the weekend lengthens, and it is increasingly customary to throw in the extra day to make a four-day span when a holiday falls on Thursday or Tuesday or a three-day vacation when it falls on Saturday or Sunday. The power boat has become a status symbol, and travel trailers and similar devices move in the same direction. Many families have both.

Urbia spreads to suburbia and becomes megalopolis, and within megalopolis parks and recreational areas appealing to the camper or boater become crowded, less desirable. The long road calls, if it is swift, and the wilderness is out there for "roughing it" -- with a certain civilized minimum of creature comforts, of course. The bedroll, the pack, the tent, the canoe satisfy a diminishing hardy portion of the upcoming crop. For the burgeoning many, recreational boating demands craft from 14 feet up in length with motors capable of speeds which alarm without quite creating a supersonic boom. "Camping" requires portable housing often as big as the sod shanties of the pioneers, with self-contained flush toilets, hot showers, mechanical refrigerators, kitchen sinks, and TV is considered essential by numerous owners.

As of early 1967, the Travel Trailer Division of the Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association estimated that there were 1,245,000 vehicles for recreational housing in use, including 625,000 travel trailers, 360,000 pickup campers (units riding piggyback on trucks or automobiles), 220,000 camping trailers (largely fold-out tents mounted compactly on low trailers), motorized homes

(converted trucks or busses or custom-built units) and miscellaneous, including a cross-breed between the travel trailer and the houseboat which should appeal to the poor who can't afford both a boat and a trailer -- as many who are only moderately affluent now do. Total sales of such units reached 323,500 in 1966, with 107,580 travel trailers, 85,000 pickup coaches and 67,220 camping trailers. In 1961, only 40,500 travel trailers, 29,000 pickup coaches, and 18,000 camping trailers were sold.<sup>1</sup>

On the boating front, figures are harder to come by. There are boats and boats, some homemade from used lumber and some factory-built from fiberglass, a material admirably designed for the indolent and careless and hence encouraging more boat ownership. But in 1964, there were 6,564,000 outboard motors in use, with average horsepower 30.3 (as against 2,811,000 in 1950, with average horsepower 6.9). In 1964, 270,000 boats were sold (131,000 in 1950). In 1964, 145,000 boat trailers were sold (18,000 in 1950).<sup>2</sup> More people are boating, more boats are being hauled, and boats are bigger.

### STORAGE ON RESIDENTIAL PREMISES

Boats or recreational housing not in use (which is most of the time) must be stored somewhere. There is mounting public concern about regulation of storage, with mounting insistence by fast-growing numbers of recreationists that they shall not be regulated unreasonably in a manner which impedes convenience and enjoyment. Here are some of the problems and some tentative answers which are grounded in identifiable public purposes of regulation and related to roughly equivalent controls on other matters. As a starting point, a reasonably inclusive definition may be helpful:

Major recreational equipment, as defined for purposes of these regulations, includes travel trailers, pickup campers or coaches, motorized dwellings, tent trailers, boats and boat trailers, and the like, and cases or boxes used for transporting recreational equipment, whether occupied by such equipment or not.<sup>3</sup>

Storage regulations probably belong in the zoning ordinance, since they will vary from district to district. A simple form, adequate for most jurisdictions is as follows:

Parking, storage or use of major recreational equipment: No major recreational equipment shall be parked or stored on any lot in a residential district except in a garage or car port or behind the nearest portion of a building to a street, provided however that such equipment may be parked anywhere on residential premises for not to exceed 24 hours during loading or unloading. No such equipment shall be used for living, sleeping, or housekeeping purposes

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<sup>1</sup>The Travel Trailer Owner -- Who He Is, and the Recreational Vehicle Market, Travel Trailer Division, Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association, 20 N. Wacker Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60606, May 1966.

<sup>2</sup>"Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1965," p. 209.

<sup>3</sup>"The Ark at the Front Door," Florida Planning and Development, April 1965, p.5.

when parked or stored on a residential lot, or in any location not approved for such use.<sup>3</sup>

This takes care of storage between buildings and streets in residential districts, allows short-term parking in such yards while loading or unloading, and prohibits occupancy on the premises or in other non-approved locations. (As an alternate to occupancy, to permit use in the same manner as a guest house, see "Occupancy," p. 5.) If more elaborate regulations appear necessary, here are some considerations:

### **Elements in Regulation**

As an equitable basis for regulation and a point of beginning, consider maximum size of a passenger automobile. Anything below critical elements in automobile dimensions might well be permitted to park anywhere on the lot an automobile can park -- except in yards adjacent to streets, where rows of even small power boats might have an adverse effect on general neighborhood appearance. Height appears to be the most important factor. A long, low boat will not generally be objectionable, but even a short houseboat or travel trailer eight or nine feet high may create complications. Somewhere there must be a reasonable breakpoint between "acceptable" and "too high" to guide regulation on storage in certain areas.

The VW bus, whether or not equipped as a camper, stands about six feet high. It would be allowed to park anywhere in a side or rear yard that any other passenger automobile could park. This provides a guide, but some allowance might be made for boat windshields and other minor items extending above six feet, working out like this:

Storage in required side or rear yards. Any major recreational equipment less than six feet in height above the ground may be stored in any required side or rear yard except when such yard is adjacent to a street. In addition to the general six foot height permitted, minor portions of such equipment not exceeding three square feet in vertical cross-section as viewed perpendicular to the adjacent lot line shall be permitted.

(It is assumed here that zoning follows the modern practice of making both the side and rear yards true yards, rather than the obsolete approach of separating the stable from the house by allowing accessory buildings, but not the principal building, in a rear yard which is not a yard except for fringes specified in complex language.)

The provision above may be adequate. But where district regulations allow fences, walls, or hedges over six feet high in or along the edges of required side or rear yards, and if such visual barriers are established and maintained, there is no reason why the major recreational equipment should not be allowed to go as high as the screening. If it fits local regulatory practice on fences, walls, and hedges, consider adding the following:

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

Where a fence, wall, or hedge over six feet in height, but not exceeding the maximum height permitted in the district, is placed and maintained in such a manner as to screen portions of major recreational equipment above the height limits established in the preceding paragraph from view across side and/or rear lot lines within 10 feet of the nearest portion of the major recreational equipment, permissible height of such equipment shall be increased to the height of the fence, wall, or hedge, with minor portions as above such height.

To the extent that light, air and view are concerned, the potential fence, wall or hedge establishes public intent with respect to protection of adjoining property. What lies behind the fence, wall or hedge (extended beyond the mere length of the equipment as a concession to aesthetics) should be controlled by considerations applying to the lot itself, as indicated below.

Spacing. -- Many ordinances set minimums for spacing between buildings on the same lot. Principal purposes are to avoid narrow separations likely to collect trash, create fire or health hazards, impede light and air, impede fire-fighting, or encourage the spread of fire. Enough of these reasons are valid with respect to major recreational equipment above the minimum size limit suggested to justify the same spacing requirements. Thus:

Major recreational equipment six feet or more in average height above the ground shall be governed as to spacing with respect to buildings on the lot as though it were a building.

For smaller equipment, easily movable, such spacing requirements should not apply.

Lot Coverage. -- Modern ordinances restrict the proportion of the lot which may be covered by all buildings. Purposes are to provide open space on the lot, and to encourage provision of green space and area for percolation of water. Major recreational equipment of substantial size does in fact reduce the amount and effectiveness of open space. Controls to prevent abuses might be worded as follows:

Major recreational equipment six feet or more in average height above the ground shall be included on the same basis as buildings for regulation of lot coverage by all buildings, with area covered computed on the basis of the largest horizontal area covered by such equipment.

If both spacing and lot coverage are to be regulated, the provisions might be combined.

Occupancy. -- For flat prohibition, the simple short-form regulation on page 2 will do. In many jurisdictions, guest houses are permitted as accessory uses, with limitations to prevent long-term occupancy. Where this is done, it would be equitable to permit similar use of major recreational equipment designed for temporary housing, either with the same limitations as for guest houses or with language along the following lines.

No major recreational equipment intended for portable temporary housing shall be used for living, sleeping, or housekeeping purposes when parked or stored on a residential lot, or in any other location not approved for such use, provided however that such equipment may be used for the housing of guests of occupants of the principal residence if (a) occupancy shall not exceed \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive days and (b) no charge is made for such occupancy.

Enclosure. -- There should be no objection to storage of major recreational equipment in carports, garages, or special buildings, but it seems unreasonable to require such enclosure. If an ordinance permits accessory buildings in certain portions of the lot, why should outdoor storage of major recreational equipment (intended for outdoor use, and therefore weather resistant) be barred in the same locations? The equipment rarely reaches the dimensions of allowable accessory buildings. To require a special building which must be larger than the equipment housed does not diminish interference with light and air or occupancy of lot area or accomplish any other appropriate public purpose.

Sometimes proponents of enclosure assume that conventional carports or garages will serve, and that no special difficulty will result from the requirement. This literally does not fit the facts. Houseboats, "floats" (motorized barges, sometimes screened and roofed), and travel trailers run up to eight feet in width, creating difficulties with entrances designed only for automobiles. And height is a major problem, with requirements running as high as nine and one-half feet for clearance of vents on some travel trailers and houseboats on running gear.

Derelicts. -- In the nature of things, major recreational equipment in private ownership is used equipment and becomes more so. Just as outdoor storage of junk automobiles should be prohibited on residential premises, boats, travel trailers, and other major recreational equipment should be barred when no longer functional. Detailed language covering this point would be difficult to frame, but the following gives some leverage for administrative action.

No major recreational equipment shall be stored out of doors on residential premises unless it is in condition for safe and effective performance of the function for which it is intended or can be made so at a cost not exceeding the value of the equipment in its existing state. In no case shall any such equipment be so stored for a period of more than six months if not in condition for safe and efficient performance of the function for which it is intended.

That sets general ground rules. A junker which would cost more to fix than it is worth may not be stored out of doors on residential property. A unit needing repairs to make it functional, and worth repairing, may not be stored for more than six months.

## OFF-PREMISE STORAGE

Some people won't be able to store major equipment at their homes because of inadequate access to permissible on-premise storage areas or for other reasons. Some won't want to park such equipment on the lot except when they are about to use it. In many areas, climatic and vacation patterns will lead substantial numbers to seek off-premise storage during seasons when equipment will not be actively used.

Commercial and group storage, now in its infancy, will gain momentum in the years ahead as ownership of such equipment booms. Permutations run off in all directions, including facilities accessory to dealerships, marinas, and parks for portable vacation housing; dead storage (involving no maintenance and repair facilities or only a bare minimum of "mothballing" and "demothballing" services) on open lots, in open shelters or in completely enclosed buildings; and combined storage and maintenance and repair operations. "Maintenance and repair" will sometimes be minor, but sometimes will take on the character of automobile body shops or boat yards. And storage of all kinds involves the danger of creeping junkyardism.

Sorting things out, there are areas where commercial storage, including a broad range of maintenance and repair operations and even salvage and junk operations should be permissible with a minimum of special regulation. At the other end of the scale, there are areas where even dead storage with minimum servicing will require careful and sometimes specialized control, and of course areas where any kind of group storage is out of place.

Industrial Districts. -- In conventional industrial districts, there should be no objection to commercial storage of major recreational equipment. In industrial districts prohibiting or limiting salvage and junking operations, similar prohibition of limits should clearly apply to recreational equipment. Where accumulation of junkers, for on-site processing or not, is to be barred, regulatory language along the lines suggested for storage on residential premises can be used, adapted by eliminating the residential reference and substituting "industrial" and perhaps by increasing the term during which nonfunctional equipment may be stored to nine months or a year.

Heavy Commercial Districts. -- As a reasonable rule of thumb, storage of equipment which also involves major maintenance and repair services (welding, body or frame straightening, refinishing, and the like) should be restricted to districts in which similar services are permitted for automotive vehicles, and subject to the same kind of specific limitations or performance standards on the manner in which major repair is conducted. Anti-junk provisions should certainly be inserted here unless no such safeguards are provided for other uses (and if they are not, the solution to the problem of equity is to prohibit storage and processing of junkers, automotive or otherwise).

Light Commercial Districts. -- Where it is logical to permit dealers' lots for storage or display of new and used major recreational equipment, commercial storage would also be appropriate. In either case, specified types of maintenance and repair might be permitted as accessory uses, perhaps with the requirement that such operations must be conducted within completely enclosed

buildings. Again there is need for regulations limiting accumulation of obsolete units. As a guide to appropriate district classification, sale of new and used automobiles might serve generally, with a further breakdown possible according to size of the recreational equipment involved. (Here it would be possible to use the same breakpoint on height as for storage in required yards, allowing equipment under six feet in height to be stored in some areas from which higher equipment would be excluded, but this refinement probably isn't necessary and would lead to complications on utility of the arrangement. The man with a boat and a travel trailer couldn't store both at the same location.)

As Special Exceptions in Highly Restricted Areas. -- In the most highly restricted commercial areas, and in transitional districts between residential and other zones, there may be justification for use of special exception techniques, allowing for consideration of the individual site. Here, general standards should of course be established, but special conditions and safeguards could be added as appropriate to the particular case. Considerations involved here would include:

(a) Location. The site should have access to a major street without creating traffic on portions of minor streets in residential neighborhoods. As a practical matter (probably not included in regulations) it should be as near as practicable to the "market area" it is intended to serve, since convenience of location will encourage use of the group facility instead of on-premise parking at residences. Location should minimize potential adverse effects on adjoining residential property, or should be adapted to screening to prevent such adverse effects.

(b) Use limitations. In these most restricted locations, it is probable that only dead storage and service reasonably necessary for preparing for storage or bringing units out of storage should be permitted. Repairs allowable should be restricted to those of a minor and emergency nature only -- repair of tires, running lights and electrical systems, and so forth -- and might be required to be in completely enclosed buildings or on portions of the lot remote from sensitive neighbors. "Mothballing" (or vice versa) suggests reasonable need for approved facilities for emptying and flushing holding tanks, filling or emptying water tanks, inflating tires, and similar operations. Usually sales of bottled gas, special gasoline for stoves and lanterns, fuel oil, and similar specialized convenience goods should be prohibited in these highly restricted facilities, partly because they tend to expand into other fields and partly because they are not essential to getting the unit on the road safely.

(c) Size of tract. Here any general rule would be too general, but there are some considerations which might be helpful in setting local minimums, if they are felt to be essential. Unless commercial storage is accessory to some other business, it is going to have to return a profit by rendering at least a minimum level of services with at least a minimum level of improvements. Depending on the local scale of charges (\$5 per month? \$10? \$15?), the cost of the installation (land, fencing, screening, utilities, buildings, lighting, facilities for emptying holding tanks, and so on) and the cost of operation (operator, guard service, miscellaneous operating expenses) how many spaces will be required to give a reasonable chance for success? How much room will they take, allowing for required perimeter yards, spacing between units, accessways, and service areas? That should set the minimum for an independent operation. For commercial storage as accessory to another use, other factors come into play, but the independent storage operation clearly can't be successful on a postage-stamp lot.

(d) Design. Here, review will be concerned primarily with entrances and exits, which should allow for safe ingress and egress for equipment and hauling vehicles, with location of service areas, with internal road layout and spacing between stored units, and with perimeter yards and screening. Spacing between individual units should be sufficient to give at least minimum protection against fire, and substantial open space in the form of roads or otherwise or firewalls should protect against spread of fire from one group of units to another. (As a detail related to design, avoid screening regulations which require that visibility be blocked at access points. Use visibility triangles.)

(e) Required yards. Adjacent to residential districts, yards might well be required to conform to corresponding residential minimums. Such yards should not be used as important internal circulation routes, unless there is substantial screening between the roadway and the residential boundary. Elsewhere, yards should of course conform to general requirements for the district in which the facility is located, and perimeter yards, required or other, have the advantage of making surveillance easier. Often roadways can be located in such yards to avoid wasted space and allow for convenient circulation.

(f) Fencing and screening. Complete fencing with locked or guarded gates should usually be required except in locations or under management assuring security. Recreational equipment in dead storage is attractive to children and also to the light-fingered. As to screening, it should normally be required where property adjoins land which is in residential use and may be appropriate in other locations, depending on the character of the environment. Where fencing and/or screening are to be used, there should be stipulations as to general types and maintenance.

(g) Lighting. In many cases, lighting will be an important element in security, as well as a convenience for owners of equipment arriving or leaving after dark. The principal regulatory concern here will normally be protection of adjacent residential property from glare. Ordinance language should require that all lights illuminating the premises shall be so located, directed, and shielded that no source of illumination is visible at any residential property line, and might well specify shielding to protect residential property against automobile headlights.

(h) Signs. An identification sign will be necessary under most circumstances, and if the facility is to be operated after dark illumination of the sign should be permissible. Obviously there is no reason for allowing unlimited number, size, or character of signs, particularly in highly restricted areas. One double-faced sign perpendicular to the street or highway at the principal entrance, or two single-faced signs, one on each side of the entrance, should be adequate, and 24-30 square feet of sign surface area should be enough.

(i) Operation. The recreational enthusiast is often an early riser prone to joyful outcries, and may return late, tired, and careless of the noise involved in returning to normalcy. Where the storage facility is close to residences, a certain lack of sympathy may develop unless steps are taken to control operations on the storage lot. Several courses are open, depending on the circumstances of the case. In conditions attached to the special exception, management can be admonished to keep it quiet or have it shut down. The entire lot can be limited as to hours of access. (This is likely to result in a compromise which doesn't satisfy everybody, but 7 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. would probably suit the neighbors.) As a more practical solution, hours of access to the portion of the lot nearest to residential property could be limited more severely, say 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., leaving a more distant section for activity earlier or later.

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