

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: DECEMBER 6, 2017

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: MATT MELKERSON, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR, T&ES

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM #5 – Commercial Parking Standards Study Recommendations

ISSUE: The Parking Standards Task Force has developed recommendations to update the current parking requirements for commercial uses, including office, hotel, retail, and restaurant. These recommendations will be reviewed by the Planning Commission and City Council as a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Transportation Commission hold a public hearing and endorse the approval of Task Force’s recommendations.

BACKGROUND: The commercial parking standards in the City’s Zoning Ordinance were last comprehensively updated in the 1960’s. Since that time, opportunities for alternate modes of travel have increased and single-occupancy auto travel and per household car ownership has decreased. At the same time, shifts toward tele-working, ridesharing, online shopping, and preferences for smaller, neighborhood serving retail and restaurants have changed parking demand at many commercial sites. In addition, the negative impacts of requiring parking for small businesses in terms of high relative costs and delayed openings has become better known. Consistent with these trends, over the last five years, 40% of the commercial cases reviewed by City Council have requested and been approved to reduce their parking ratios.

In 2013, the City Council directed staff to study citywide parking standards in the Zoning Ordinance and to propose revised parking standards as appropriate. The study was divided into phases, with the first phase addressing multi-family parking requirements. This phase was completed in 2015 with an update to the Zoning Ordinance for this use. The second phase of the project has focused on commercial parking standards, specifically office, hotel, retail, and restaurant uses, and has been underway since February 2017. Similar to the multifamily residential review, this phase has included a review of parking demand at different commercial sites across the City and a discussion of recommendations by the Parking Standards Task Force.

DISCUSSION:

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to assess the current parking demand for commercial uses, parking data was collected at 60 sites across the City. Surveys were conducted during the typical peak period for the use (e.g. office sites were surveyed during the day, during the middle of the week, when employees are

typically at work) to count the number of spaces provided in a lot or garage and count the number of vehicles that were parked. From this information, the parking demand for each use was determined and compared against the existing parking requirements. Fifty-nine of the 60 sites were parked at a lower rate during their highest-demand times than currently required by the Zoning Ordinance, suggesting that the current parking requirements require more parking than currently needed. On average, the parking occupancy was 61% and only 6 of the parking lots or garages were full (i.e. occupancy higher than 85%). The detailed survey data for each site is included in Attachment 1.

More detailed surveys were conducted at 21 of the sites to collect specific information about how people traveled to the site. Surveyors were stationed at each site to ask people how they came to the site, and if they drove, whether they parked on-site or on-street. Some of the key findings from this survey include:

- Ridesharing (Uber, Lyft, taxi) was the highest travel mode for hotels representing 32% of the trips.
- Only 20% of the hotel trips were made by driving and parking. For those that parked at a hotel, 92% indicated they parked on-site.
- Walking was a large share of the trips made for restaurants (48%) and retail (29%). This mirrors national trends of people preferring neighborhood-serving retail.
- For retail and restaurant trips that were made by driving and parking, a significant portion preferred to park on-street (restaurant – 59%, retail – 44%), despite off-street parking being available. This indicates that when spill-over parking impacts are an issue for residents, requiring off-street parking may not be the best solution.
- For office trips, the majority of people who drove (85%) indicated they parked on-site or in other off-street parking.

In addition to the survey data, the Task Force also reviewed parking requirements that have been approved in recent small area plans, the resulting parking requirements for commercial developments that were approved for parking reductions, and parking requirements in other jurisdictions. This information is summarized in the charts included in Attachment 2.

Recommendation

At their last meeting on November 29, 2017, the Task Force finalized their recommendations for the project, which are summarized in Attachment 2 and discussed below.

Enhanced Transit Area Map

Create a map designating areas currently with or planned for enhanced transit that will have lower parking requirements. In general, the enhanced transit area includes a ½ mile buffer from existing and future Metro Stations, Transitways, and King Street Trolley stops. The proposed map is included in Attachment 3.

Minimum and Maximum Parking Requirements

The parking requirement for each land use included in the study will include a minimum and maximum requirement. The parking requirement can be satisfied by providing parking within the minimum-maximum range. Requests to provide less parking than the minimum and more parking than the maximum can be considered through a special use permit, just as currently done with requests to provide less parking.

Parking Requirements by Land Use

Attachment 3 summarizes the specific minimum and maximum parking requirements for each land use within and outside the Enhanced Transit Area. The Task Force considered the survey data, small area plan requirements, approved parking reductions, other jurisdictions, and existing City policies and plans in setting these figures. Attachment 2 provides charts for each land use that summarizes how the proposed requirements compare to the survey data and other background information.

In reviewing the retail parking requirement, the Task Force recommends consolidating other retail-like uses into this parking requirement, such as daycares, personal services, and private commercial schools. By having the same parking requirement for these uses, this allows more flexibility within individual tenant spaces without requirements for additional parking or parking reduction SUPs. The full list of uses to be included in the retail category is included in Attachment 3.

Parking Exemption

Recognizing that uses that require a small amount of parking likely would not have a significant impact in the overall parking conditions of a neighborhood, any non-residential uses that have a parking requirement of 2 spaces or less would be exempt from providing parking. This exemption is an option available to a business, but if they chose to provide parking, they could do so within the maximum range for the use.

Parking Exemption for Existing Buildings

Considering the difficulty of providing new parking for existing buildings and the desire to see these buildings occupied and improved rather than vacant, the Task Force recommends exempting new uses in existing buildings that were previously occupied by a similar or more intense use from the parking requirements if additional parking would be required. Staff is working with the Attorney's Office to develop specific criteria for how this exemption could be applied.

Shared Parking

To encourage and allow uses to share parking, implement a process that applies a variation of the Urban Land Institute's shared parking model to determine parking requirements for multiple uses. Parking could be shared between uses on the same lot or within 1,000 feet of the parking facility, measured as the crow flies. The Task Force recognized that this distance is comparable to ¼ mile walkable route (i.e. using sidewalks and crossing at intersections), which has been consistently referenced as a reasonable distance for people to walk, in particular employees.

Public Engagement

The commercial parking standards study was officially kicked-off and introduced to the public in February with the *Right-Sizing Commercial Parking* event with guest speaker Todd Litman. Mr. Litman is the founder of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute and a well-known transportation and parking expert. At the event, Mr. Litman discussed commercial parking trends and parking management solutions, and offered some points for consideration in the City's review of commercial parking standards.

The Parking Standards Task Force has been the primary avenue for public feedback. This Task Force is comprised of 8 residents and 3 members of the development community and was tasked

with reviewing the data collected, considering potential recommendations, and supporting outreach efforts by reporting back to the groups they represent. The Task Force has met monthly since March for a total of 9 meetings. Each of these meetings has been advertised and open to the public, with meeting materials and presentation posted online. In addition, each meeting has included a public comment portion on the agenda to allow the general public an opportunity to speak at the meeting and provide feedback on the Task Force discussion.

Staff has also been providing updates about the study and draft recommendations to several different stakeholder groups. The following table provides a summary of the meetings staff has attended. Staff also provided an update to the City Council on October 24th. Additionally, an open house was held November 1st to provide another opportunity for the public to review the data that was collected and consider and provide feedback on the draft recommendations.

Organization/Board/Commission	Meeting Date
NAIOP	July 18
Transportation Commission	September 20
Chamber of Commerce	October 3
Planning Commission	October 3
Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee	October 9
NAIOP	October 10
Environmental Policy Commission	October 16
Alexandria Business Associations	October 19
Traffic and Parking Board	October 23
Federation of Civic Associations	October 25
Chamber of Commerce	November 7
Planning Commission	November 9
Restaurant Association	November 10

Next Steps

The Task Force recommendations will be considered by the Directors of Planning and Zoning and Transportation and Environmental Services for inclusion in the text amendment to update the parking section of the Zoning Ordinance. The text amendment is scheduled to be reviewed the Planning Commission and City Council at public hearings in January. If approved by the City Council, the new requirements would take effect the following month.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 – Survey Data

Attachment 2 – Proposed Parking Requirements and Comparison to Survey Data and Other Background Information

Attachment 3 – Task Force Recommendations