

ORDINANCE AMENDMENT REVIEW SHEET

AMENDMENT: C20-2012-013

DESCRIPTION: Modify minimum parking requirements in the CBD and DMU districts.

BACKGROUND: On April 26, 2012, City Council passed a resolution directing staff to develop an ordinance to reduce or eliminate minimum parking space requirements in the Central Business District and Downtown Mixed Use District.

CURRENT REGULATIONS: Under Sec. 25-6-591, the following regulations are currently in effect for parking in the CBD and DMU districts:

- No parking is required for historic buildings or any existing buildings in a historic district.
- No parking is required for any use of less than 6,000 square feet in a structure that existed on April 7, 1997.
- Residential uses must provide 60 percent of the normal parking requirement.
- All other uses must provide a minimum of 20 percent of the normal requirement.
- There is a maximum parking limit of 60 percent of the normal requirement, unless all parking spaces are contained in a parking structure or the Land Use Commission approves additional spaces through off-site accessory parking.
- Parking for the disabled is required based on the total number of motor vehicle spaces provided.
- Parking for bicycles is required based on the total number of motor vehicles required.
- Off-street loading for certain uses is required at a different rate from uses outside the CBD and DMU districts.

ALTERNATIVES: Several options for addressing Council's directive were examined, including:

- All minimum parking requirements for CBD and DMU could be eliminated, leaving only the maximum parking limit of 60% of the normal requirement for surface parking.
- All minimum parking requirements for CBD could be eliminated, and the minimum parking requirement for DMU could be maintained or reduced.
- Different parking requirements could be established for different geographic areas of downtown, instead of for different zoning districts.
- Minimum parking requirements for certain uses (e.g., residential) could be reduced or eliminated, while minimum requirements for other uses could be retained.
- Adopt a fee in lieu of providing parking spaces, with revenue to be used for constructing public parking facilities or fund an electronic wayfinding system.
- Require that parking be sold or leased separately from floor space.

The first option, eliminating all minimum parking requirements but leaving the maximum parking limit, was considered to be the most responsive to Council's request and the easiest to implement and is recommended by the staff.

ISSUES: Staff research has found that reducing or eliminating minimum parking requirements in the downtown area may have the following consequences:

- Lower development costs and possibly lower tenant costs, especially for housing, since developers can build more leasable floor area and less parking.

- Greater use of transit, bicycling, and pedestrian modes of travel since development can be more compact.
- Development of more pedestrian-friendly land uses.
- Increased cost for the use of existing parking spaces due to reduced growth in supply.
- Possible spillover of on-street parking by downtown visitors or employees into adjacent residential areas.
- Increased traffic congestion in some areas as drivers search for available spaces.
- Increased pressure on the public or private sector to provide parking garages.
- Less parking available for people with disabilities.

However, elimination of parking requirements will not necessarily result in less overall parking downtown, because most lenders will likely require that a minimal amount of parking be provided for new commercial and residential projects as a condition of approving the loan.

Off-street loading was not specifically addressed by the Council resolution but has been an issue for recent developments downtown. Loading requirements for some uses appear to exceed the actual demand and have required some projects to seek variances.

Stakeholder comment on the amendment has been favorable. Comments were also made that even if parking requirements were eliminated, a downtown business may still have to obtain Planning Commission approval in order to provide off-site accessory parking for employees and customers. Staff agrees that this process should be simplified and recommends that off-site accessory parking in the downtown area be a permitted use instead of a conditional use.

DEPARTMENTAL COMMENTS:

- If motor vehicle parking requirements are reduced or eliminated, requirements for bicycle parking and parking for the disabled should be maintained. A separate ordinance amendment is currently in process to modify bicycle parking requirements and should be coordinated with this amendment.
- Spillover effects of on-street parking into residential neighborhoods can be addressed through residential permit parking. Most single-family neighborhoods near downtown already have residential permit parking programs in place.
- Traffic congestion could be reduced by better wayfinding devices which would direct drivers to available parking. There are plans to implement such a program in downtown Austin in 2013.
- Loading space requirements for larger uses could be addressed by requiring the developer to submit documentation of loading needs for approval by the Director.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

- Amend Sec. 25-6-591 to eliminate the requirement for motor vehicle parking in the CBD and DMU districts except for parking for the disabled.
- Require bicycle parking to be provided in CBD and DMU at the same rate as for uses outside CBD and DMU zoning.
- Modify off-street loading regulations in 25-6-592 to clarify existing requirements and to reduce the number of loading spaces required. Allow the Director the discretion to require the developer of a project larger than 200,000 square feet to document the need for additional loading spaces.
- Amend Sec. 25-2-491 to make off-site accessory parking a permitted use instead of a conditional use in the CBD and DMU zoning districts.

BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- The amendment is consistent with the objectives of encouraging a more walkable downtown, promoting the use of alternative transportation modes, and reducing the cost of housing.
- Making off-site accessory parking a permitted use in CBD and DMU districts will simplify the permitting process.

BOARD AND COMMISSION ACTION: Recommended by the Downtown Commission on October 17, 2012. Recommended by the Urban Transportation Commission on December 11, 2012. Recommended by the Planning Commission on February 12, 2013, with the suggestion that the amendment be re-evaluated after two years.

CITY COUNCIL ACTION:

ORDINANCE READINGS:

1st

2nd

3rd

ORDINANCE NUMBER:

ASSIGNED STAFF: George Zapalac, 974-2725