

## **Topic: Downtown Parking Flexibility**

**July 10, 2017 City Council Study Session**

**(Excerpted and Updated from April 19, 2017 Commission Study Session)**

During the June 26, 2017 Council Study Session, Downtown parking was identified as one of the topics that warranted further review. Councilmember Wallace noted that information provided to the Planning Commission on topics identified by the Council for further review, would provide a good foundation for its consideration of the Planning Commission recommendation. Materials prepared for the Planning Commission discussion of the parking topic have been excerpted from the April 19, 2017 Planning Commission packet, and updated to reflect its final recommendation, to support City Council review.

### **PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDED CODE REFERENCE:**

H. Director's Authority to Require Parking Exceeding Maximum.

In Downtown, the Director may require the installation of more than the maximum number of parking stalls, for other than office uses, if the Director determines that:

1. Such additional parking is necessary to meet the parking demand for a specified use; and
2. Shared or off-site parking is not available or adequate to meet demand; and
3. Any required Transportation Management Program will remain effective.

*Recommended LUC 20.25A.080 (retains existing authority in the LUC for Director to require the applicant to exceed maximum parking ratios).*

### **COMPARISON TO BELRED PARKING FLEXIBILITY:**

The Planning Commission recommended that the City Council retain current language in the Downtown code which allows the Director to require increased parking ratios in some situations, but does not allow the Director to decrease the parking ratio. The Planning Commission considered amendments that would have aligned the Downtown Parking provisions with those adopted in BelRed, but concluded that any changes to the parking requirements application in Downtown should wait until after a comprehensive parking study is completed. The Planning Commission was concerned that giving the Director discretion to reduce the parking requirement could result in people driving around looking for a parking space and this could cause traffic congestion.

The parking provisions in the BelRed code provide the Director with the authority to increase or decrease the parking requirement based on a parking study or other supporting documentation. It has been in effect since 2009. A flexible approach to the provision of parking was one of the subjects identified for consideration as part of the Downtown Code Update. Many stakeholders were supportive of the flexibility provided by the BelRed code and requested the Planning Commission align the Downtown Code Update with the BelRed provisions that had been

previously adopted. However, based on concerns raised by stakeholders regarding parking in Old Bellevue, the Planning Commission was persuaded that it would be appropriate to complete a comprehensive parking study before any changes were made to the Downtown code.

### **Parking Flexibility Considered by the Planning Commission in the Public Hearing Draft:**

#### **H. Director's Authority to Modify Required Parking.**

Through approval of an administrative departure pursuant to LUC 20.25A.030.D.1, the Director may modify the minimum or maximum parking ratio for any use in LUC 20.25A.080.B as follows:

1. The modified parking ratio is supported by a parking demand analysis provided by the applicant, including but not limited to:
  - a. Documentation supplied by the applicant regarding actual parking demand for the proposed use; or
  - b. Evidence in available planning and technical studies relating to the proposed use; or
  - c. Required parking for the proposed use as determined by other compatible jurisdictions.
2. Periodic Review. The Director may require periodic review of the proposed review of the reduced parking supply to ensure the terms of the approval are being met.
3. Assurance Device. The Director may require an assurance device pursuant to LUC 20.40.490 to ensure compliance with the requirements and intent of subsection F.1 of this section.
4. Shared or off-site parking is not available or adequate to meet demand.
5. Any required Transportation Management Program will remain effective. LUC 20.25D.120.

*Amendments to LUC 20.25A.080 (considered, but not recommended).*

### **DISCUSSION:**

The Downtown Code provides parking ratios for a selected number of uses. For those uses not listed, there is no specified minimum or maximum ratio. Rather, the City requires the applicant to provide a parking demand analysis for "unspecified uses" such as hotels. Since the City requires a design review in every Downtown development, parking will be reviewed in every Downtown project. In the case of an unspecified use, staff will review a parking study to determine how much parking should be provided. Reviewing parking studies to determine the appropriate amount of parking is not a new process. In the new Downtown Code, the Planning Commission did not provide the discretion to the Director to reduce the parking ratios because they thought it could result in traffic congestion.

Parking is a high cost element in urban development, today estimated at \$25-35,000 per stall for above-ground structured parking and \$50-70,000 per stall for underground parking. Cities enact parking requirements to ensure that new development has adequate parking to meet demand. Similarly, developers and their financiers also have an interest in ensuring that enough parking is provided to result in successful projects. Given the high cost of building parking, city parking

regulations can potentially drive up lease rates and impact such issues as affordable housing, particularly if the required parking ratios exceed market demand. The Planning Commission considered whether additional flexibility is warranted to avoid burdening development with higher than needed parking costs, by way of allowing departures from prescriptive standards where supported by credible technical analysis.

The other alternative considered by the Planning Commission, but not recommended, was intended to offer the same flexibility in Downtown as currently exists today in BelRed. The language included in the Downtown Livability Public Hearing draft is provided above. The BelRed alignment alternative would give the Director discretion to reduce or increase parking requirements based on actual parking demand, evidence provided in planning and technical studies, or required parking for the proposed use as used by a comparable jurisdiction.

There is a growing need for flexibility in the parking requirements to address changes in the market. In the past few years there have been inquiries for increased parking as more office workers occupy the same 1,000 square feet that the parking ratios are based on. On the other hand, more developers are using reduced parking ratios on residential projects in transit-rich Bellevue. Looking at 42 market-rate residential projects in Downtown between 1987 and 2015, 12 were built at a parking ratio of just over 1.0 stall per unit. There appears to be a growing trend for projects to come in at the low end of what is required. Of the eight apartment projects that came online in Bellevue from 2010-2015, two were at the minimum, and the average for all of the projects was only 1.15 stalls per unit. However, other current trends will reduce the need for Downtown parking such as light rail, affordable housing, transportation demand management practices, and residents who choose not to own cars.