



Memorandum

To: Board of Zoning Appeals
From: Matthew Glassman, Chair of the Planning Commission *mg*
Meeting Dates: March 11, 2026
Re: Recommendation for Modifications of Requirements related to parking
Bear Branch Tavern – 133 Maple Avenue E

Summary:

The Planning Commission reviewed a request from Bear Branch Tavern for a modification of site plan requirements related to parking at its March 11, 2026, meeting.

Bear Branch Tavern currently operates with 249 seats (159 indoor seats and 90 outdoor patio seats). A 2018 Modification of Requirements approved by Town Council allows the restaurant to operate with up to 300 seats, despite the reduced number of available parking spaces to dedicate for this use on site.

The applicant is now proposing to create a private dining space in the basement of the restaurant, which would add 88 additional seats. If fully utilized, the restaurant would have a total capacity of 337 seats. Because the existing parking modification caps restaurant seating at 300 seats, the applicant requested an amendment to allow up to 337 seats. To address the additional parking demand associated with the additional seats, the applicant proposed offering valet parking on-site during private dining events.

Following discussion, the Planning Commission recommended approval of the request without requiring valet parking, but with a time restriction limiting the additional seating to after 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and all day on weekends, when the office tenants in the building are generally not operating.

Background:

Bear Branch Tavern is located within the Vienna Professional Center, a multi-tenant office building constructed in 1983. The site contains 103 parking spaces that serve both the restaurant and other office tenants within the building.

Under the Town Code, restaurants require one parking space per four seats. The current site parking supply would normally support approximately 412 restaurant seats if all spaces were dedicated solely to the restaurant. However, because the parking lot also serves office tenants within the building, the 2018 approval required a Modification of Requirements to allow the restaurant to operate with up to 300 seats.

The 2018 staff report supporting that approval noted that office and restaurant uses typically have different peak parking periods, with offices operating primarily during weekday daytime hours and restaurants operating primarily during evenings and weekends. The report also included business hours for the other tenants in the building, which generally close by 5:00 p.m., and example customer activity data from another restaurant operated by the applicant showing that the majority of customers arrive after 5:00 p.m.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to construct a private dining space in the basement of the restaurant. The space would contain 88 seats, which could be reserved for private dining events or large group dining. If fully utilized, the total restaurant seating capacity would increase from 249 seats to 337 seats.

Because the current parking modification limits restaurant seating to 300 seats, the applicant requested an amendment to increase the approved seating limit.

To address the additional parking demand associated with the increased seating capacity, the applicant proposed offering valet parking on-site, allowing up to 11 additional vehicles to be accommodated in the rear portion of the parking lot during events.

Key Discussion Points:

The Planning Commission discussion focused on several key topics.

- **Parking Demand and Existing Conditions**

Several Commissioners noted that the parking lot serving the restaurant is often heavily utilized during evening hours. Commissioners discussed whether the proposed valet parking operation would improve parking efficiency or potentially introduce additional circulation conflicts within the parking lot.

- **Valet Parking Operations**

Commissioners expressed concerns about the practical operation of the proposed valet system, including the ability to move vehicles within the constrained rear portion of the parking lot, potential conflicts with trash service and circulation areas, and whether stacked valet parking could make it difficult for vehicles to exit the lot. Some Commissioners expressed the view that the proposed valet arrangement could introduce additional operational challenges within the site.

- **Shared Parking Context**

The Commission also discussed the rationale behind the original 2018 parking modification, which recognized that office uses within the building primarily operate during daytime hours while restaurant demand occurs largely in the evening. Several Commissioners noted that the building contains 103 parking spaces, and that during evenings and weekends many of the office spaces are not occupied.

- **Request for Additional Data**

Commissioner Noble requested additional information regarding the hourly utilization of

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the existing parking lot to better understand how frequently the parking supply reaches capacity during restaurant operating hours.

Planning Commission Recommendation

After discussion, the Planning Commission recommended that Town Council approve the requested amendment to the previously approved parking modification.

The Commission’s recommendation allows the restaurant seating capacity to increase from 300 seats to 337 seats, but only after 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and all day on Saturdays and Sundays.

The Commission did not recommend requiring the proposed valet parking operation, determining that the time limitation would more directly address the overlap between restaurant and office parking demand.

The Commission considered the following motion:

“I move to recommend that the Town Council approve a Modification of Requirements to Section 18-531 to amend the previously approved parking modification to accommodate an increase in restaurant seating from 300 to 337 seats after 5 pm Monday through Friday, and all day Saturday and Sunday, for Bear Branch Tavern, located at 133 Maple Avenue East (Tax Map Parcels 0384 54 0100 and 0100A).”

Motion: Commissioner Plowgian
2nd: Commissioner Chakrapani
Roll Call Vote: 5-1

Matthew Glassman, Chair	Aye
Douglas Noble, Vice Chair	Nay
Keith Aimone	Aye
Deepa Chakrapani	Aye
Stephen Kenney	Aye
David Miller	absent
Jessica Plowgian	Aye

Closing

The Planning Commission respectfully submits this recommendation for Town Council’s consideration.