


MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Town Council

From: Jessica Plowgian, Chair of the Planning Commission 

Date: April 11, 2024

Re: Planning Commission Comments on Parking Study

OVERVIEW

On January 10, 2024, the Planning Commission requested that it receive a presentation on the parking study initiated by Town Council in February 2022. On January 24, 2024, the consultant, Nelson Nygaard, presented its draft presentation and recommendations to the Planning Commission. We requested additional data and suggested changes to the draft report and recommendations. The consultant and Staff revised the presentation to reflect additional data from peer jurisdictions, examples of the effect of recommended parking ratios on existing properties, as well as other clarifications. Nelson Nygaard presented this revised report and recommendations to the Planning Commission on March 13, 2024.

COMMENTS

The Planning Commission would like to share our thoughts on several of the proposals raised in the *Parking Recommendations and Implementation Plan* for your consideration as you review the consultant's presentation.¹

1. Section 4, Recommended Strategies**High Priority Strategies**

- a) **Update Zoning Ordinance to Allow Adjustments to Site Parking:** Planning Commissioners are interested in this approach adopted by Fairfax County, which would allow us to address unanticipated adverse off-site impacts from parking adjustments. However, Fairfax County only recently adopted this provision and the consultant is not aware of any instance in which the county has exercised this authority. We recommend further analysis of the use of this type of provision by Fairfax County or other jurisdictions before proceeding with a similar measure in the Town.
- b) **Update Zoning Ordinance to Allow for Increased Density or Reduced Parking:** Commissioners have mixed opinions on whether to decrease parking requirements. Several commissioners support modest decreases in requirements

¹ Planning Commissioners also suggested that the consultant revise its presentation to clarify which proposals have been adopted in the newly adopted Zoning Code, include footnote references to code or other planning documents from the referenced peer jurisdictions, and to provide further justifications for the recommendations.

consistent with peer jurisdictions, while others have concerns about reducing any parking given our current growth. It was noted that some of the peer jurisdictions cited (such as Loudon and Montgomery County), are much larger geographically than the Town. We may benefit from evaluating peer jurisdictions outside of Northern Virginia. It is also important to remember that the uses in these buildings will change over time. There was also discussion about “right-sizing” parking supply requirements to the parking demand observed as part of the field data collected in the *Existing Conditions Report* supporting the study.

- c) Incorporation of a New Shopping Center Off-Street Parking Requirement: While this may be a useful categorization for parking requirements, the code provision would need to address situations in which other buildings are in the parking lot of a Shopping Center (such as the PNC Bank located in the Giant shopping center parking lot). There was also unresolved discussion regarding the break point (in gross floor area square footage) for this requirement, e.g., is 100,000 sq. ft. the appropriate value).
- d) Ensure Supportive Parking Design: Commissioners are very supportive of the consultant’s proposals to adopt code provisions directly addressing the design of parking facilities to enhance the pedestrian environment, bicycle circulation, and to minimize future curb-cuts and driveway connections directly onto Maple Avenue. There are current reference publications to support development of Town policies in this regard.
- e) Shared Parking: Business-to-Business and Public-Private shared parking may be a useful option for the Town. We discussed the types of incentives, such as insurance, the Town could offer to businesses to facilitate such arrangements. We would like to see examples of these arrangements in other jurisdictions. We believe further analysis should be done to determine whether shared parking agreements could address the specific parking shortages identified by the parking study and which parking lots may be best suited to off-hours use by neighboring businesses. We note that these agreements can be limited in value as they would need to be renegotiated when a tenant and/or owner of one of the businesses changes.

Long-Term Strategies

- a) Create a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Program: Several Commissioners have concerns about whether the proposal to require TDM plans for new downtown development would work well in Vienna. This type of program can be effective for employees in denser commercial/office land use areas, but may not be as effective for the types of retail businesses we have in Town. No specific examples were provided as to how this has been implemented elsewhere focusing on retail customers. In addition, many of the small businesses in Town may not be able to bear this cost.

- b) Provide an Option for In-Lieu Fees: Some Commissioners are wary of in-lieu fees and the difficulties in managing the use of such funds, especially in consideration of escalating costs of the items for which the funds may be used in the future. The Town would need to identify a very specific timeline and use for such funds.

2. Section 5: Action Plan

Planning Commissioners suggest modifications to the consultant's recommended priority of certain recommendations. We believe the following strategies, which are identified as Long-Term Strategies in the report, should instead be addressed as soon as possible:

- a) Provide adequate and accessible ADA Parking: Several Commissioners want to see this as a high priority item, especially given the shortage of on-street ADA parking spaces highlighted in the study.
- b) Improve and expand bicycle parking repair facilities.
- c) Prioritize pedestrian crossing safety (noting that this has been discussed in the Town's *Pedestrian Master Plan* and the *Maple Avenue Transportation and Land Use Study*).

Each of these strategies was either identified by the consultant as being low-cost or identified as a top priority during the consultant's public engagement activities.

3. Other Matters

A Planning Commissioner raised the possibility of temporarily utilizing parking lots on land that is awaiting redevelopment or otherwise unused. The code would need to be amended to permit this as a temporary permitted use. This may merit consideration, especially considering the existence of numerous properties on Maple Avenue that have remained unutilized for extended periods of time.

PC ACTION

The Planning Commission made a motion to approve this letter, as amended per our discussions, to the Town Council.

Motion: Douglas Noble

2nd: Keith Aimone

Roll Call Vote:

Jessica Plowgian, Chair - Aye

Matthew Glassman, Vice Chairman - Aye

Keith Aimone - Aye

Deepa Chakrapani - Aye

Stephen Kenney - Aye

David Miller - Aye

Douglas Noble - Aye