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MEMORANDUM

Date: July 2, 2025

SENT VIA EMAIL

To: City of Wauwatosa, WI
Tamara Szudy, Planning and Zoning Manager
Plan Commission

From: Houseal Lavigne Associates
Jackie Berg, AICP, Practice Lead
Kari Papelbon, AICP, CFM, Senior Planner
Nicole Campbell, AICP, Planner II

Re: Targeted Zoning Code Update – Non-Residential Parking Requirements

This memo reviews the City's current non-residential parking requirements and evaluates potential changes that better align with the Tosa Tomorrow 2045 Comprehensive Plan, desired development patterns, trends, and parking best practices. Within this memo are three potential approaches to updating the non-residential parking requirements. Each option varies in terms of flexibility, predictability, and how much parking is ultimately provided. The three options include:

Option 1: Eliminate Minimum Parking Requirements. Remove all off-street minimum parking requirements for non-residential uses, allowing the market and context of the site and use to guide the amount of parking provided.

Option 2: Eliminate Minimums and Introduce Maximums. Remove minimum parking requirements and establish parking maximums to avoid overbuilt parking lots.

Option 3: Right-Size Minimums and Introduce Maximums. Update and reduce existing parking minimums to better reflect actual demand while also introducing parking maximums to discourage excessive parking.

PLANNING

DESIGN

DEVELOPMENT

Existing Requirements

The current parking standards for non-residential uses include minimum off-street parking requirements. The code includes some progressive elements, such as the allowance for shared parking between two or more non-residential uses with different peak parking demand periods and reduced minimums in the Neighborhood/Village Trade (C-1) district to support the walkable, mixed-use character of the area.

However, many of the current minimum parking space requirements exceed best practices and may result in more spaces than are actually needed. For example, the minimum space requirements for restaurants, offices, and retail uses are higher than typical usage patterns, especially in walkable or mixed-use contexts. In some areas, this leads to large surface lots that are underused and take up space that could be better used for additional development, outdoor gathering areas, or other active uses that contribute to a more vibrant streetscape. These standards can increase development costs and reduce flexibility and efficiency in how land is used. They also create more pavement, which increases stormwater runoff and the need for costly drainage infrastructure. Modernizing parking standards can help make better use of land, reduce development barriers, and support more efficient, people-focused places.

Parking Options

Option 1: Eliminate Parking Requirements

Removing all minimum off-street parking requirements for non-residential uses allows property owners and developers to determine how much parking to provide based on their specific needs, business models, and site context. This approach increases flexibility for new development and creates opportunities for infill, especially in older buildings or constrained sites where meeting the current parking minimums is not feasible. In many cases, a desirable business may not be able to occupy an existing space solely because it cannot meet the parking requirement, even if the user is able to provide data showing that the actual demand is lower than the requirements. Eliminating the mandate helps open underused properties for reuse, allows existing parking areas to be repurposed, and supports more efficient and adaptable land use. The City would no longer mandate a specific number of spaces but could regulate the design of parking areas by including standards for location, access, landscaping, buffering, lighting, and stormwater management.

While removing parking requirements can improve land efficiency, support multi-modal transportation, and make development more feasible, some developments may provide insufficient off-street parking, which could lead to spillover into surrounding areas. This would primarily impact areas that are more auto-oriented or where on-street parking is limited. Additionally, overnight on-street parking is not currently allowed, which reduces the flexibility for overflow parking. Without appropriate controls, the City may have limited tools to prevent spillover parking. Regardless of zoning standards, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) parking requirements would still apply to ensure accessible spaces are provided where parking is offered.

Option 2: Eliminate Minimums and Establish Maximums

This option also removes minimum parking requirements but introduces maximum limits to prevent oversized parking lots. It allows flexibility for developers to determine how much parking is needed while helping to avoid the negative impacts of overparking, such as reduced walkability, increased heat island effects, and inefficient use of land. Businesses can still include on-site parking based on their needs, provided they stay within the maximum limit. To account for unique site conditions or business models, this option would also establish clear criteria for staff to approve parking above the maximum when justified. However, without minimums, insufficient off-street parking is still a possibility. As with Option 1, ADA parking standards would continue to apply where parking is provided.

Option 3: Right-Size Minimums and Introduce Maximums

Rather than eliminating minimums entirely, this option updates and reduces existing minimum parking standards to better reflect actual demand and modern development patterns. It also introduces maximums to discourage overparking, similar to Option 2. This approach aims to maintain predictability and offer flexibility through staff-approved, context sensitive adjustments. Adjustments could be allowed for developments in walkable areas, near transit, with shared parking agreements, or within proximity to on-street parking. Modifications to requirements could also be requested with documentation that demonstrates unique needs based on business type, operating model, or site conditions. However, this approach may still carry some of the rigidity of a traditional parking code and require added staff review to administer adjustments and modifications.