



City of Harrisonburg, Virginia
Department of Planning & Community Development

409 South Main Street
Harrisonburg, Virginia 22801
(540) 432-7700 / FAX (540) 432-7777
www.harrisonburgva.gov/community-development

Building Inspections
Engineering
Planning & Zoning

November 1, 2018

**TO THE MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA**

SUBJECT: Public hearing to consider a request from Tim Reamer of Cottonwood Commercial to modify Section 10-3-25 (17), which specifies that retail stores, sales rooms and similar mercantile establishments that are 10,000 square feet or less in gross floor area are to provide one parking space for each 200 square feet of gross floor area and if over 10,000 square feet in gross floor area are to provide one parking space for each 250 square feet of gross floor area. The modification of Section 10-3-25 (17) and the addition of a new subsection within Section 10-3-25 would require retail sales of furniture and/or appliances to provide two parking spaces, plus one parking space for each 1,000 square feet of gross floor area.

**EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
HELD ON: October 10, 2018**

Chair Way read the request and asked staff to review.

Mrs. Banks said article G of the Zoning Ordinance – Off-Street Vehicle and Bicycle Parking, Section 10-3-25 (17) addresses parking for retail stores, sales rooms and similar mercantile establishments. This subsection is as follows:

Retail stores, sales rooms and similar mercantile establishments: If ten thousand (10,000) square feet or less of gross floor area, one (1) parking space for each two hundred (200) square feet of gross floor area; if over ten thousand (10,000) square feet of gross floor area, one (1) parking space for each two hundred and fifty (250) square feet of gross floor area.

When calculating parking for a retail store, sales room, or mercantile establishment use staff takes the total gross floor area of the entire building to include show room floors, warehouse area, office area, hallways, and restrooms, and divides by 200, or 250 depending the total square footage. All totals are rounded up to the nearest whole number. This number is the total number of parking spaces that are required for the use. This same method is used, total gross floor area, when calculating parking for enclosed shopping malls or multi-tenant strip malls when all the proposed uses within the mall are not determined.

The applicant is requesting to amend Section 10-3-25 (17) by proposing the following language:

Retail stores, sales rooms and similar mercantile establishments (***applicable where no other specific retail standard is set forth***): If ten thousand (10,000) square feet or less of gross floor area, one (1) parking space for each two hundred (200) square feet of gross floor area; if over ten thousand (10,000) square feet of gross floor area, one (1) parking space for each two hundred and fifty (250) square feet of gross floor area.

The applicant also proposes new subsection (18) which reads as follows:

(18) Retail of furniture and/or appliances: Two (2) parking spaces, plus one (1) parking space per each one thousand (1,000) square feet of gross floor area of the establishment.

Before I go any further I just want to explain that currently listed within Section 10-3-25 are 26 subsections regarding parking. As proposed by the applicant this would create a new subsection (18) and then the remaining nine would have to be renumbered (19) through (27). Staff generally adds the new subsections on at the bottom of the list to avoid having to re-number. Therefore, after discussing among staff and checking with the applicant as well, we are proposing to change that to subsection (27) so that we do not have to re-number the remaining subsections.

Mrs. Banks continued, the applicant's letter states that because there is no differentiation between the various types of sales, a user with a high parking demand, grocery stores or convenience item sales, requires the same amount of parking as lower demand uses, such as furniture and appliance sales. Furthermore, furniture and appliance sales have especially low parking demand when viewed as a ratio to floor space, partially due to the amount of area required to display their stock, and partially due to the high price point at which their stock sells and the infrequency between user purchases. The letter also points out that creating excessive parking is a burden on the user/developer, as well as the City and its citizens because it:

- Incentivizes driving over public transportation, bicycling, and walking, which leads to unnecessary congestion on our roadways and creation of pollutants
- Creates an inefficiency of urban parcel development, which leads to lower realized taxation and urban sprawl
- Reduces available green space and increases stormwater runoff/stream pollutants
- Increases the "heat island effect" created by the City, which has harmful environmental consequences.

These are all valid points that make sense, and staff concurs with them.

One point that staff cautions is that, if approved, when a development is planned only for enough parking for a furniture store, and the furniture store closes, no other use, other than a furniture store, could occupy the space unless additional parking is provided either on the site or through a shared parking agreement with adjacent properties. Any future development that uses this minimum number of parking spaces for a furniture store would need to know this at the time of site development.

Staff recommends in favor of the Zoning Ordinance amendment as with the suggested numbering change.

Chair Way asked if there were any questions for staff.

Mr. Finks asked how this would be applied in a situation where there is business that has a mix of those uses, some furniture for sale along with all the other items; perhaps like an Ollie's store.

Mrs. Banks said that would not be considered a furniture store; the sale of furniture would need to be the principal use.

Mr. Finks asked what if it is reversed, a showroom floor for furniture and appliances with a small area for herbal sales.

Mrs. Banks replied the herbal sales is not the principal use, furniture sales is.

Mr. Fletcher said it is just whatever the principal use is, but, sometimes you get into those "what if" conversations that we have all the time. That is why it is not always an easy answer to your question.

Mr. Finks said the other thing that comes to mind is online sales only and they just have a showroom floor. Would they have the same requirement?

Mrs. Banks said yes, if it is just a furniture showroom with online sales it would need to meet this requirement.

Mr. Fletcher said it would also depend on what it is too. They could just be warehousing and not a showroom. But again, it comes down to what is the principal operation of the building.

Mrs. Whitten said the ones that come to mind for me are the rental of furniture.

Mr. Fletcher said this amendment changes that. Many of those types of uses are within shopping centers and, an unusual quirk in our Zoning Ordinance is if you are building a shopping center or strip mall and you do not know your uses at the time of engineered comprehensive site plan review, we apply the general standard. But if you know all the uses at time of submission, then we apply the standard based upon the uses going in. For example, Forbes Crossing, those were shell designed buildings and they took advantage of the ability to have lesser parking. However, that depends on which camp you are in, less parking might be good from an environmental perspective and a mass transportation perspective; not having enough parking might not be good because you are bleeding over onto other people's properties. Often, in Harrisonburg, these new shopping centers end up with all restaurant tenants, which can then be problematic.

Chair Way said I will now open the public hearing and ask the applicant, or the applicant's representative to speak.

Mr. Seth Roderick, Monteverde Engineering and Design Studio, said I am representing the applicant for this request. I want to give you a bit of background on how we framed the language itself and then give you a little anecdotal evidence as to why we are asking for this request.

When we first started to think about how to frame parking for furniture and appliances, the first thing is to perhaps copy from other jurisdictions. So, we looked at a couple of localities to see how they handled it. Harrisonburg is a little unique in that they do not provide a lot of specific uses, there is retail and that retail use covers everything. Many localities break it down completely, by all uses, and then there are a few in between. Those that did break it down and had specific uses for furniture and appliances kind of averaged out in that 1,000 square foot per parking space type of measure. That measure includes the cities of Winchester, Charlottesville, Roanoke, areas that are geographically and somewhat similar in size and scale to Harrisonburg. They all required a blanket statement of one parking space per 1,000 square feet. When speaking with staff we wanted to try and think about that number a bit differently and say that not all furniture stores are 13,000 square foot centers, a lot of them now are trending into smaller spaces of maybe 2,500 square feet for say mattress sales. These smaller spaces may only have one employee working at one time, but they may have a couple of customers in at any one time. So, we thought baseline, we need to ensure they have at least three spaces. Thus, we thought if we required two, plus one for every 1,000 square feet or portion thereof, the minimum number of spaces you would have would be three. That would be one for an employee and a couple for customers.

Now anecdotally, we also wanted to make sure that we were not over reaching and that this was evidenced in our community today. So, we went around town on a Saturday afternoon, during the peak furniture shopping day and most every parking lot was 90% empty. One that really stands out is the Mattress Firm, which is on the corner of University Boulevard and East Market Street, it is the old Blockbuster Video store. That building has about 65 parking spaces; but, Mattress Firm moved in there because of the location. The building itself is about 6,200 square feet and actually has more parking than what is required for retail. When we went to the store, there were only two vehicles parked in the entire lot, both were employees. We went in and asked them if this is typically how your day is, what is your peak and how many customers do you think you have. They responded that they were slammed with two customers in at one time.

So, looking at that same building, if it were built today under the existing ordinance it would require about 31 parking spaces. Under the new ordinance it would require nine. Even on the busiest of days when they have two employees and two customers they are still a little over parked. What that does for these centers that are converting from retail to furniture, they now have spaces they can lease to restaurants or other uses in the shopping center. There is a balancing act when you are converting from one use to another, it is an issue that is there today.

That is a bit of our thought process for this amendment. We believe that this is a very well thought out request and we hope that you do as well. With that I am here to answer any questions you may have, and I appreciate your consideration.

Chair Way asked Mr. Roderick if there were any other types of businesses that he thought maybe should have the same considerations; something apart from furniture and appliances.

Mr. Roderick replied when I drafted the language I was focused on furniture and broadened it out to furniture and appliances just based on other ordinances that I saw. I did not look into what other uses may also be benefitted by having this. But, the answer is yes, there are certainly a lot of other uses that do not require the same parking intensity that is required for retail uses. It may behoove the City to explore those to see if there are other opportunities to reduce the amount of pavement that we have in this area.

Mr. Fletcher said there is no doubt in my mind that our parking regulations are in need of amendment; this body has already given staff that task. Often when we think about reduced parking requirements for particular uses, we think oh, there will be less pavement. I do not want us to think that is what is going to happen, because what ends up happening is when you have parcels that have buildings with less parking, then you end up getting a bigger building with another use that ends up needing more parking on it. I do not want to mislead the group into thinking that if we have less parking requirements we will get more green space; I do not think that is what is going to happen. We are an urban area and what is going to happen is it will be more buildings and we would still end up with just as much parking. It is literally that cultural change of having people use mass transportation and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Chair Way said the public hearing is still open; is there anyone else wanting to speak regarding the ordinance amendment.

Mr. Barry Kelley, Hillcrest Avenue, said I worked on the Comprehensive Plan Land Use & Transportation advisory committee this past year and we discussed just this particular item several times. In my limited research into various localities around the country it seems like we are one of the strictest with regard to standards as far as parking per square foot. I am glad to hear that parking is still on your to do list. It is an economic issue – you get more buildings; but, with more buildings you get more tax revenue. You drive into some of these parking lots around town on a busy Saturday and you have 25% vacancy. It seems absurd that we do not have the highest and best use of all our existing and future real estate. I hope you will vote in favor of this.

Chair Way asked if there was anyone else wanting to speak. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and asked for discussion or a motion.

Mr. Finks said one type of business that I believe would push the limits of something like this is IKEA. If you go to an IKEA on any given Sunday, it is going to be packed. That is the type of business that concerns me. It fits the parameters of the furniture store, but it would definitely break the bank as far as the parking is concerned.

Mrs. Banks said IKEA is probably one of those stores that have their own parking requirements. They know their business and realize parking is a must.

Mr. Finks said it could be something like that. I am just coming up with hypotheticals of something that could come.

Mr. Finnegan said every time I drive past the Valley Mall or Roses I look at all the parking that is available and never full. To Mr. Fletcher's point, I do think we need to overhaul the parking requirements within the Zoning Ordinance. I would like to do everything we can to reduce the parking wherever possible, so this request makes sense to me.

Mr. Colman said my concern regarding this is does it preempt our parking study that we will do when we revise the parking regulations for all the uses.

Mr. Finks asked does it make sense to table this until we can look at all parking, comprehensively?

Mr. Baugh said regarding everything on the list, parking is going to be a huge lift. Parking is not going to be one of those things that we can just find the right model that we can adopt. Parking is going to be a big discussion. I believe it is going to take a long enough time that we do not want to wait if we like this amendment. Parking is not something that we will have knocked out six months from now, it is a huge lift.

Chair Way asked if there were any motions on the request.

Mrs. Fitzgerald moved to recommend approval of the Zoning Ordinance amendment with the suggested change from staff.

Mr. Finnegan seconded the motion.

Chair Way called for a voice vote on the motion.

All voted in favor (7-0) of the motion.

Chair Way said this request will move forward to City Council on November 13, 2018.

Respectfully Submitted,

Alison Banks

Alison Banks
Senior Planner