

Meeting Agenda of the City and Borough of Juneau
Title 49 Committee of the Planning Commission

Tuesday, November 24, 2020
Community Development Department
Virtual & Telephonic Meeting

Members Present: Nathaniel Dye, Erik Pedersen, Joshua Winchell, Travis Arndt, Weston Eiler

Members Absent:

Commissioners Present: Paul Voelckers, Ken Alper

Staff Present: Jill Maclean (CDD Director), Alexandra Pierce (CDD Planning Manager), Irene Gallion (CDD Senior Planner), Laurel Christian (CDD Planner), Joseph Meyers (CDD Planner)

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 12:02 P.M.

II. Approval of Agenda

MOTION: *Mr. Arndt moved to approve the agenda.*

The motion passed with no objection

III. Approval of Minutes

A. Draft Minutes October 29, 2020 Title 49 Committee Meeting

MOTION: *by Mr. Arndt to approve the October 29, 2020 minutes with minor edits made by staff.*

The motion passed with no objection.

IV. Agenda Topics

A. Parking

Ms. Gallion summarized the information provided to the Committee in the memorandum.

Mr. Dye asked if the information was on NOVUS. Ms. Gallion confirmed all information emailed to the Committee was also posted online on NOVUS.

Ms. Gallion explained the opening position of a 75% reduction for commercial development and 90% reduction for residential development within a combined parking district. The goal is to encourage residential development within the downtown geographic area. Ms. Gallion stated that with these reductions there would be no parking waivers for accessory apartments. She further stated a concern is that a developer might initially build as residential to get the reduction, then eventually transition to commercial development. Ms. Gallion

then presented the maps provided, which recommend an expansion to the boundary of the current parking districts. She also discussed parking waivers, noting recommendation is to allow waivers in the parking districts and Fee-in-lieu (FIL) areas. Ms. Gallion pointed to existing bonuses in code that may be criteria for approving a waiver.

Mr. Arndt agreed parking reductions of 90% would encourage residential development, but thought the number might be too high. He questioned how to encourage people to park in the parking garages, because they are over-sold, but not usually full. He asked where the extra cars would go and if staff anticipates people utilizing public transportation. He noted that downtown streets are not typically empty. Mr. Arndt is in favor of a high reduction, but does not think that will work well for the public when there is nowhere to park. He asked for staff's reasoning in proposing the high reductions.

Ms. Gallion replied that yes, 90% is a large reduction. Staff looked at a recent proposed development to see what their parking numbers would look like and asked how they could get to that number. The goal was to have at least the required ADA parking. There was also the idea that downtown residents may not be as interested in having cars.

Mr. Dye asked what the market report is referencing on the eagle rock numbers.

Ms. Gallion replied that the market report was an economic analysis showing what should be built based on the housing market.

Mr. Dye asked what the three categories reflected.

Ms. Gallion stated that the three categories represented the number of dwelling units they were proposing, parking requirements came from code.

Ms. Maclean added that existing buildings don't have parking requirements. The reductions would only apply to new buildings or expansions of existing buildings. She stated there is not a lot of empty land downtown that could be developed, so the high reductions may only apply to select land.

Mr. Dye asked if there was a total square footage buildout number.

Ms. Maclean replied that staff hadn't looked at the exact number of lots that could be built. She noted that there may also be other constraints, like hazard zones and zoning, that may restrict density.

Mr. Voelckers agreed with Mr. Arndt's concerns. Any reductions in parking requirements will incentivize development, but there may be a backlash from their neighborhoods who perceive a parking problem. He added that he doesn't think the parking reduction percentages need to be increased, but parking waivers that provide more flexibility should be considered. Mr. Voelckers feels the needed parking reductions may be based on the housing type, condos versus something like housing first might have very different needs. He added that an analysis of on-street parking availability may also be needed.

Ms. Pierce asked the Committee to keep in mind that these numbers are an opening position for discussion. Staff brainstormed waiver criteria, but didn't add availability of on-street parking, but could. If the reduction percentages are not favorable, staff can look at the waiver criteria in more depth. Staff's two opening points were that parking reduction percentages should be increased and parking waiver criteria needed to be adjusted.

Mr. Arndt liked the idea of using one parking district for the existing PD1, PD2, and FIL. He also liked the inclusion of waivers and distinguishing between minor and major development. Mr. Arndt felt the percentage reductions should be left closer to what they are now; the waiver process may be enough flexibility. The percentage reduction is automatic, so it's certain, but the existing on-street parking demand is a concern.

Mr. Arndt asked if staff could look at the capacity of the parking garages now. If there is capacity, the percentage reductions may be able to be increased. If not, staff may want to leave the percentages as they are.

Mr. Winchell agreed that 90% is too aggressive, if it is automatic. He wondered what percentage other commissioners would be comfortable with.

Mr. Dye agreed that the percentages seemed high. He asked if the parking downtown will be automatically reduced this much, and how that works with other areas of the borough. He asked if all of the numbers out of whack.

Mr. Voelckers added that in the MU district, there is very high development potential; this could be problematic. He thought an automatic percentage reduction downtown would work at a lower number. He likes the idea of waivers for special circumstances. He thought that 75% reduction for residential development may be comfortable and 60% reduction for commercial. Mr. Voelckers questioned number (5) in the ordinance on FIL. He wanted FIL to stay as a separate option.

Ms. Maclean replied that FIL is still a separate option.

Ms. Gallion also clarified that staff did not include items that were not being changed in the ordinance.

Mr. Dye asked if waivers and FIL would be simultaneous.

Ms. Pierce responded that the idea would be someone gets a parking waiver to reduce the number of spaces. The applicant could then pay FIL for their parking requirement. This is currently allowed in code.

Mr. Dye asked what the criteria are for FIL.

Ms. Maclean stated that in the existing ordinance, the Director approves FIL for 5 or less spaces and the Commission approves anything more. The proposed revisions would allow the Director to approve minor development and the Commission to approve major development, rather than the number of spaces.

Ms. Pierce stated that the proposal was for major versus minor, and tools could be used to supplement each other.

Mr. Winchell stated that major development would be reviewed by the Planning Commission. He wondered if the review criteria were enough.

Ms. Maclean added that the processes should be simplified for applicants. Minor development can be decided on without Planning Commission review, and major development can be decided on with Planning Commission review. She clarified that FIL would only be allowed downtown, no geographic changes are being proposed for the FIL boundary. She added that the only MU district is downtown, so that's the only area with no height restriction. There are not many areas with a great height allowed, so it may not be a concern.

Mr. Winchell stated that for minor development, a 90% reduction would be too high. He wondered if a higher reduction in other areas, where land is more plentiful, could be reviewed.

Mr. Voelckers added that 90% reduction borough wide is too high for major or minor development.

Mr. Dye expressed support for the flexibility of the new parking waiver language.

Mr. Pedersen commented on the way the FIL and waivers are set up in the proposal. In the proposed language, for Section for FIL he recommended to remove "waive/waived" from FIL section to be clear that is not waiver. He suggested revising the language to say "requirements could be met via FIL".

Mr. Voelckers agreed with Mr. Pedersen and asked staff to clean up the waiver section. He noted that Item D in the FIL section should be cleaned up, as well, to reflect the process.

Mr. Dye asked if there is a way someone can get a parking waiver and then pay to get the rest via FIL. He added that there is a review criterion for no impact to on-street parking in both sections.

Ms. Maclean replied that there is a high bar to impact public health, safety, and welfare. She's not sure that parking reductions would endanger the public. There are things like sidewalks, crosswalks, public transit, and parking management that can address those issues. Ms. Maclean does not think that the parking in the downtown historic core is the highest and best use of the land downtown.

Mr. Dye responded that recent reconstruction of roads downtown required a reduction of parking for fire apparatus turns. He added that FIL and waivers should be on parallel tracts for review. He asked if someone could get a parking waiver and come back later to get the FIL.

Ms. Maclean added that they should run concurrently. She imagined an applicant coming in with a study showing the spaces needed and then the applicant could pay FIL for what they can't accommodate on-site. This would all be reviewed together.

Ms. Pierce responded that for any land use permit with parking requirements, the applicant must describe how they plan to meet the parking requirement. The applicant must explain their plan to the Commission, so it's not likely to be an after the fact thing.

Mr. Arndt added that major development FIL must go to the Planning Commission. He wondered if the Commission needed to review FIL at all. He said the number of spaces required could go to the Commission, but how someone would meet those numbers (FIL versus on-site) could be an automatic review.

Mr. Voelckers stated FIL is an alternative mechanism in order to meet a parking requirement. However, he asked if it is more complicated than that, and if everyone understood it. He also asked if there are criteria that need to be met, and if it is based on location.

Ms. Maclean replied that she thought FIL would be an incremental approach. At one point, it was brand new and needed a higher bar with a public process. Over time, that can change and evolve. She agreed that an appropriate approach would be one parking district, waivers borough wide, the Commission decides what the appropriate number is, and then you have a set option to pay FIL that does not need to be reviewed by the Planning Commission again.

Mr. Arndt stated that he wanted waivers borough wide with the new language. Automatic percentage reductions would remain downtown within the parking district. He asked if that was the intent.

Ms. Maclean replied that that is the intent; the new criteria would be borough wide.

Mr. Dye asked if staff could add compact parking spaces to the code, and what the dimensions could be. He thought this could help reduce the footprint requirement for parking spaces. He also expressed support for the new direction of waivers. He noted that in the development examples, the percentage reductions couldn't be used, so why have them.

Mr. Voelckers discussed the new parking boundary, stating that he thought the boundary should include MU district and maybe not D18 zones.

Ms. Maclean added the percentage reductions should be kept to recognize that downtown Juneau is historic and pre-dates the automobile. The reductions have value for downtown and they are automatically guaranteed to developers within the parking district. She added that staff wanted to consider expanding to the geographic area of Juneau.

Mr. Arndt agreed with leaving the percentages downtown. He agreed with Ms. Maclean that FIL took an incremental approach and wondered if FIL could be allowed within the entire Borough.

Ms. Maclean replied that FIL works in a downtown core that is walkable. It may not work for other parts of the Borough, but it may work for downtown Douglas. However, FIL is not for automobile-centric areas. Downtown areas are ideal because of on-street parking and parking garages along with the walkable core.

Ms. Pierce added that another consideration for downtown is that the developments have a customer base that is tourism traffic. So, often employee parking needs are the only ones that need to be considered.

Mr. Dye said that there are other tourist attractions outside of downtown, where companies will bus tourists, too. He asked about the geographic area of Juneau and stated that it does not work if the automatic reduction and FIL is only for pre-automobile development.

Ms. Pierce added that bus service oriented businesses could get parking waivers.

Mr. Voelckers agreed that FIL is appropriate downtown, but not in other places; FIL is economically appropriate downtown. Mr. Voelckers believes there are specific economics to building parking downtown that don't apply borough wide.

Mr. Dye asked what more information was needed from the Committee

Ms. Gallion asked if the Committee wanted the 2019 vacancy information for the parking garages.

Mr. Dye replied that the Committee would like to see that information.

Ms. Gallion asked if the Committee had a reduction percentage they thought would work.

Mr. Dye summarized that 90% and 75% reductions are too high. A 60% reduction is adequate unless staff wants to provide additional arguments for the increase. If we go higher than a 60% reduction, then the parking table borough wide should be considered.

Mr. Voelckers supported a 60% parking reduction in a combined district. He said that housing could be reduced additionally, but that may need more conversations. Developers could use parking waivers to get lower requirements.

Ms. Gallion replied that she would rewrite with a 60% reduction.

Mr. Arndt said the vacancy rate could be considered and then the numbers could be reviewed. If there is high vacancy in the parking garages, it might make sense to increase the parking reduction percentage.

Ms. Maclean replied that staff would put this into an ordinance with all of the pieces for review at the next meeting. She asked the Committee to look at what the items could be provided to get a parking waiver.

Ms. Gallion asked if it would be a point system or a list the Commission could consider.

Mr. Arndt stated that a parking study is ideal, because it's based on numbers. He said he wasn't sure that developers should provide bonus point development items to get no parking requirements.

Ms. Gallion replied that a parking study would be favorable to large developments. A small development may not want to make the investment.

Mr. Voelckers spoke in favor of having something that is discretionary, not point based. He agreed that a parking study is useful, and regardless of the size, the applicant should make a case for how many parking spaces they need. He suggested a subjective analysis of the parking requirement.

Mr. Eiler added that the bonus items need further review. He felt some criteria is important, so there is no subjectivity. He wanted to look at the criteria again at the next meeting, and doesn't want the items in code to be management issues.

Ms. Pierce responded that the intent of the criteria was to present a range of options that a developer could provide in order to get a parking waiver. This allows staff to look at different options for justification of a waiver. She added that the subjectivity should be removed to the greatest extent possible. Ms. Pierce asked the Committee if this is what they wanted.

Mr. Dye added that he thought the information should be easy for a small applicant to come up with, and there could be some flexibility. A large traffic study may be required, but in other cases, a property owner could show some kind of data.

Ms. Maclean asked the Committee to look for some criteria language they liked and bring it to the next meeting. She added that parking is difficult and most historic downtowns have no parking requirements.

Mr. Voelckers responded that he agreed with Mr. Dye and that there should be some flexibility that allows the applicant to make a case. He added that the boundary line should follow the zoning districts, MU specifically.

Ms. Gallion asked for written feedback from Committee members by December 11.

Mr. Dye asked if the Committee was in favor of the list of 7 items.

Mr. Arndt was opposed to the items on the list.

Mr. Pedersen was not in favor of most items on the list, because it overcomplicates things, but he is open to the idea.

Mr. Winchell was opposed to item 6, but could come up with alternative options.

Mr. Voelckers and Mr. Dye supported the list as options to make parking reductions more favorable.

V. Committee Member Comments and Questions

The next meeting is set for December 17 at noon

VI. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:33 P.M.