



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE, MAYOR

Office of the Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor

FROM: Monica R. Lamboy, Executive Director *ML*

DATE: September 23, 2010

SUBJECT: An ordinance amending the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to modify the parking requirements in Article 9 for the Large Retail and Service Cluster in the Corridor Commercial Districts (CCD) and Transit Oriented Districts (TOD)

The Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development respectfully requests that you forward the proposed ordinance modifying the parking regulations in the Large Retail and Service Cluster to the Board of Alderman for their review and approval. This ordinance is a follow-up to the recent zoning amendment on Broadway in Winter Hill and East Somerville which created a new use cluster requiring particular attention for large retail uses with 10,000 square feet or more of floorplate per establishment.

BACKGROUND

When the Broadway rezoning ordinance was adopted, it required the same number of parking spaces for a large retail and service cluster that was required for the Medium Retail and Service Cluster (1,500 to 9,999 square feet per establishment) in the TOD and CCD Districts. This was the standard set when the zoning for Union Square was created. Upon further review, prompted by the question and comments raised by Alderman Maryann Heuston at the Land Use Committee meeting, OSPCD staff have reevaluated the parking requirements and now recommend that the parking requirement be changed to 1 space per 400 square feet of net floor area in the CCD districts and 1 space per 500 square feet of net floor area in the TOD districts, essentially doubling the parking requirement for the Large Retail and Service Cluster in these districts. OSPCD also recommends adopting a provision that would allow the Planning Board to grant relief from this standard by special permit in circumstances where a parking analysis indicates that the requirement can be reduced.

The proposed ordinance has been developed to adjust the requirements of Large Retail and Service Cluster uses to be more mindful of the need for adequate parking to serve neighborhood and community needs, without requiring parking that would be so difficult to meet that it would preclude desirable large floorplate retail establishments serving local needs when such uses would be deemed appropriate under the Special Permit provisions of the ordinance.

ANALYSIS

At the request of Alderman Houston at the Land Use Committee meeting on February 9, 2010, OSPCD staff undertook an analysis of parking requirements in other communities. What was found was that these requirements vary widely, depending upon the circumstances and the type of development (urban mixed use vs. suburban single uses) that are anticipated by the community. Nonetheless, generally communities require more parking for large retail and service businesses than the existing requirements in the TOD and CCD districts. Cambridge has parking requirements for retail and services that range from 1 space per 500 square feet in general business districts to 1 space per 700 square feet in denser development districts to 1 space per 1000 square feet in special districts. Lowell requires 1 space per 500 square feet, while Medford requires 1 space per 350 square feet for similar uses.

Based upon this analysis, OSPCD staff recommends establishing a parking requirement that would not create oversized suburban parking lots in our walkable and transit-oriented districts while still ensuring that adequate parking is required for such uses. Setting this requirement at 1 space per 500 square feet in the TOD districts, and one space per 400 square feet in the CCD districts should meet that need for most circumstances. The impact of this change on some store types that could be permitted in the TOD and CCD districts is shown below.

Existing and Proposed Parking Requirements for Typical Uses in the Large Retail and Service Use Cluster					
Use in Cluster	Sample Size (sf)	TOD		CCD	
		Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed
Neighborhood Grocery (Shaws, etc.)	30,000	30	60	38	75
Specialty Grocery (Trader Joe's, Whole Foods)	12,000	12	24	15	30
Neighborhood Pharmacy (CVS, Walgreens)	11,700	12	23	15	29
General Clothing Store	20,000	20	40	25	50
Household Items Store	25,000	25	50	31	63

The current vacant Star Market site on Broadway, a site with a suburban site design in the middle of an urban neighborhood, has a 27,132 square foot former supermarket building on a lot with about 120 parking spaces, for a total of 1 parking space per 226 square feet of floor area. Under the proposed zoning a single retail use in this building would require 68 spaces, which is reasonable given the requirement for new retail in the CCD district to be focused on local neighborhood need and design accommodations for walking and bicycling trips. Therefore, OSPCD staff believes that the proposed change is adequate to ensure that development meet a minimum need for a retail or service establishment, while not encouraging suburban development within the urban neighborhoods that are mapped at TOD and CCD districts.

The ordinance would allow the Planning Board, as Special Permit Granting Authority, to issue a special permit to allow relief from this requirement, provided that the Board determines that parking

needs would be met with a lower standard. This would be reserved for cases where a parking analysis can establish that the development provides adequate parking for the specific uses within the project. This provision is included to ensure that a creative project that puts residential or office uses over a neighborhood supermarket, pharmacy, or other neighborhood serving retail would not be challenged by the parking requirements if they can prove that total on-site parking will be adequate for the project.

RECOMMENDATION

OSPCD recommends approval of the proposed ordinance, amending parking requirements within the Large Retail and Service Cluster in the CCD and TOD zoning districts to require 1 space for every 400 net square feet in the CCD zoning districts and 1 space for every 500 net square feet in the TOD zoning districts and to allow the Planning Board to grant special permit relief from this requirement in cases where a development project will provide adequate parking for all uses based upon a parking analysis.