

**CITY OF LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN
CITY PLAN COMMISSION
REPORT
FEBRUARY 28, 2022**

➤ **AGENDA ITEM: 22-0045 (Tim Acklin)**

AN ORDINANCE to amend Section 115-393(a) of the Code of Ordinances of the City of La Crosse eliminating off-street parking requirements for non-residential uses in commercial zoning districts.

➤ **ROUTING:** J&A 3.1.2022

➤ **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

This ordinance amendment would eliminate all off-street parking requirements for any non-residential use in the Local Business, Commercial, and Community Business zoning districts.

This effort originated with the Neighborhood Revitalization Commission (NRC) after the final report of the “Downtown *Parking Study Update & Analysis of Expanded Areas*” was completed by Rich & Associates Parking Consultants in July 2020. This study provided data on four of the busiest areas of the city that illustrated, even at peak times, they had never reached parking occupancy capacity, even at peak demand. As a result, the NRC wanted to explore eliminating off-street parking for both commercial and multi-family development.

The rationale the NRC considered included:

- Developers would still be able to provide parking. They would just be able to determine how many spaces they want. This ordinance does not prevent parking nor require the elimination of parking. This would allow developers to have greater flexibility on site design. The most requested variance in the design review process is the off-street parking requirement.
- Allows for the highest and best use of what limited land is available for development in the City. Parking is a high cost of development that provides limited tax base. Removing this constraint would allow the developer to create additional tax base through additional units or retail and office space.
- Consistency with City plans. Reducing the dependency on cars and becoming a more sustainable community are goals in the Comprehensive Plan, Strategic Plan for Sustainability, Transportation Vision Memo, and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.
- National and State trends. It is widely recognized that minimum parking requirements hinder cities with unproductive, empty parking spaces that don't add value. They push homes and businesses farther apart, impeded the walkability of our neighborhoods, raise the cost of housing and can place a costly burden on small, local entrepreneurs.

The NRC directed staff to get public input from neighborhood associations, area developers, and landlords on eliminating off-street parking requirements for both commercial and multi-family uses. Staff gathered feedback from eight neighborhood associations, the Apartment Association of the La Crosse Area, and from interviews with local landlords and developers. The feedback gathered showed considerable opposition to an outright elimination of off-

street parking for multi-family developments. There was no opposition to eliminating off-street requirements for commercial uses. In response to this feedback the NRC decided to continue to evaluate off-street parking for multi-family, but push forward with eliminating the requirements for commercial developments.

➤ **GENERAL LOCATION:**

City-wide in the Local Business, Commercial, and Community Business zoning districts.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION OF OTHER BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:**

The Neighborhood Revitalization

➤ **CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:**

Objective 5/Policy Action 2 in the Transportation Plan Element of the Comprehensive Plan recommends evaluating greater flexibility in parking requirements by re-evaluating parking minimums based on use and peak demand, encouraging shared parking opportunities, and addressing parking minimums and maximums.

➤ **PLANNING RECOMMENDATION:**

Surface parking requires large amounts of land area which can greatly affect the look and function of an urban environment. On average, one off-street parking space occupies about 320 square feet, including drive aisles and driveways. Current off-street parking requirements are generally based on peak parking demand in suburban environments, which results in generous and often arbitrary standards. Furthermore, the code requires that parking be provided on the development site. This typically results in buildings surrounded by surface parking, which discourage pedestrian trips between nearby businesses. While parking should be available to businesses and visitors, it can be difficult to strike a balance between providing “adequate” parking without detracting from the characteristics that make the La Crosse unique and attractive. **This item is recommended for approval.**