

ITEM #: 34
DATE: 10-24-23
DEPT. P&H

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: TEXT AMENDMENT FOR LANDSCAPING EXCEPTION RELATED TO ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGERS

BACKGROUND:

The City recently adopted new vehicle charger standards to allow for easier placement of chargers and related equipment on existing developed sites. The standards allow for placement of equipment within existing parking areas and in front yard setbacks. **A modification to these standards is now being proposed to exclude charging equipment from impervious area limitations.** Most commercial and industrial zones include maximum impervious area coverage requirements with a minimum landscape area requirement. All improvements are subject to these limitations based upon the definition of Landscaping within the Zoning Ordinance.

This issue recently came up with Ames Ford as it pursued the addition of a dozen charging stations. The new impervious area totaled approximately 375 square feet, which necessitated removing other paved area to ensure no net increase in impervious coverage and conformance to the minimum landscape requirements. **The concern is that on existing developed sites, the coverage limitations may discourage placement of chargers by either outright restricting their placement or by having extra cost with removal and replacement of existing pavement to accommodate the chargers.**

At the City Council meeting on August 22, 2023, the City Council directed staff to prepare a zoning text amendment to exclude electric vehicle charging infrastructure from landscape area calculations.

TEXT AMENDMENT:

The proposed text amendment will apply only to the electric charging equipment and transformers. The proposed changes are in underline below.

Sec. 29.1317. VEHICLE CHARGERS WITHIN SETBACKS AND PARKING AREAS.

(1) Approval of a Zoning Permit is required prior to the placement of an electric vehicle charger and related equipment on a site. Placement of residential electric vehicle chargers at a single-family and two-family dwelling site is exempted from the Zoning Permit requirement. If additional parking area paving is required for the proposed use, it is subject to the procedures of a Minor Site Development Plan. Vehicle Chargers are subject to conformance with this section, when a standard is not addressed by this section all other zoning standards apply.

(2) Electric Vehicle Charging equipment consisting of charger pedestals and one (1) ancillary cabinet per four (4) charger pedestals is permitted within a setback when located within a commercial parking lot. Transformers are not permitted within the setback.

(3) Charger pedestals and one cabinet per four chargers may be placed within the front yard landscaped area when there is a minimum of 10 feet of clear front yard landscape area between the chargers and related equipment and the front property line. All related charging equipment, including transformers, are exempt from minimum landscape or open space area requirements of the applicable zoning district. The Planning Director may authorize placement within side and rear yard setbacks subject to review of the landscape plan. Placement of the equipment is subject to review of related landscaping for aesthetics and screening. Installation of the chargers and equipment shall not substantially impact or remove healthy existing mature trees within the front yard when feasible alternatives exist.

(4) Placement of vehicle chargers and related equipment may substitute for up to two vehicle parking spaces on a site to meet minimum parking requirements.

(5) Signage for a charger is allowed to be applied to or integrated with the charger casing in addition to other signage allowances for a site to identify the charging stations and provide instructional information. "Applied or integrated with the charger" does not allow for signage greater than the profile of the charger or use of the charger as a support for additional signage." (*Ord. No. 4501, 05-23-23*)

The Planning and Zoning Commission reviewed the proposed text amendment at its October 4 meeting. The Commission voted 7-0 in support of amendment.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve on first reading the proposed text amendment for landscape and open space exceptions for electric vehicle charging equipment.
2. Approve on first reading a modified zoning text amendment.
3. Request additional information from staff.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The original approval process for electric vehicle chargers was designed to add flexibility to encourage siting of these stations while maintaining front yard aesthetic standards. The proposed change exempts this small amount of equipment from landscape percentage requirements to provide additional flexibility. Staff does not believe there will be any noticeable difference in the landscaping quality with this exception. **Therefore, the City Manager recommends the City Council approve Alternative #1.**