



*Caring People
Quality Programs
Exceptional Service*

TO: Mayor and Ames City Council

FROM: Kelly Diekmann, Planning and Housing Director

DATE: December 4, 2020

SUBJECT: Reduce Downtown Parking Requirements for Dwelling Units

City Council received a request from Jerry Nelson asking the City Council to consider eliminating parking requirements for small residential developments in Downtown. (See Attached Letter). Mr. Nelson suggests that loosening parking requirements would facilitate small scale housing developments and rehabilitation of existing buildings to the benefit of the Downtown.

Residential parking is required at a rate of **1 space per unit** in Downtown Services Center (DSC) zoning, the same as the Campustown Services Center (CSC) zoning. The City's Rental Code reflects this same requirement in order to license a dwelling for rental purposes. The current parking rate is less than what is required for other apartment dwellings at a rate of **1 space per bedroom**. **Parking must be located on the same lot or remotely within 300 feet of the site. A remote site must be approved by City Council and available for the user in perpetuity.** This means that the renting of spaces on an as needed basis does not meet this standard.

Staff believes the issue of facilitating small scale residential development through conversions of existing space, or in some cases new buildings, warrants further discussion as to how it relates to our goals for supporting Downtown. **Due to the limited options for redevelopment downtown, its historic status, and the current abundance of public parking, it seems that trying to facilitate smaller mixed-use housing development that would otherwise not be financially feasible could be allowed.** The downside is potentially encouraging undesirable redevelopment of historic sites and the eventual pressure on the public parking system with an intensification of residential uses that do not provide for parking. The applicant requests that up to 18 apartment units be exempt from providing parking.

Staff believes there are multiple approaches to address the issue identified within the letter that could be considered by the City Council. For example:

1. Waive all parking for developments with less than 18 units, or some other number of units, regardless of the number of bedrooms within an apartment.
2. Limit waiver for small apartments that requires no parking for the first two bedrooms of an apartment dwelling, up to 18 dwellings, or some other number of dwelling units.
3. Eliminate the zoning requirement for providing parking, but require proof that parking in the amount of 1 space per dwelling unit has been secured on an annual basis in either a private or public area. This requirement would be enforced with a Rental Housing Letter of Compliance.

This approach could require the City to consider allowing for overnight parking in the Downtown either in municipal parking lots or on-street metered spaces.

4. Require a parking in lieu fee from the developer when parking is not built on site.

If City Council is interested in considering this request, City of Ames Council could choose to put the item on an agenda for discussion as soon as December 22, 2020. At that meeting Council can determine whether to, or how to, proceed with any changes regarding DSC parking for residential uses. If City Council is not interested in pursuing changes at this time, then no further action is needed.

November 6, 2020

RE: Downtown Residential Parking Requirements

Dear Mayor and Council:

The Downtown area and housing options have been a priority of City Councils for at least the past eight years but very little has happened to move the needle. After looking at pursuing a small-scale mixed-use project Downtown, it is apparent that parking regulations are a real impediment to both new projects as well as rehabbing under- or un-utilized, upper-floor units in existing buildings.

The current rule requiring one parking space per unit is not a viable option for a building that currently takes most or all of its lot area. For these properties, it is impossible to meet the requirement onsite without tearing down the building, which is both something that is not a good outcome as well as prohibitively expensive for the small number of parking spaces that would create.

While there are options in the code that allow for remote parking agreements, those spaces are required to be available essentially permanently for the specific use of residential units. The issue at hand is that there is precious little public or private land available for parking in the DSC let alone within the 300' radius required of remote parking as currently required. But even if it were, would we really want to reserve land for surface parking in our urban core in perpetuity?

These issues affect any potential project in the DSC but are especially acute for smaller projects where structured parking either will not fit or be so expensive per space on the site that no project occurs.

The end result is that no residential units will be built at a small scale or only large projects will be possible, simply because of parking. Keep in mind that there are already over 50 units downtown that are grandfathered in with no parking.

We respectfully request that Council refer to staff to put an item on a near-term future agenda that would eliminate the residential parking requirements of one space per unit in the DSC area to a maximum of the number of spaces that would fit on the property if it were a surface parking lot to a maximum of 18 spaces.

The risks of eliminating this requirement can be mitigated with future parking regulation changes and are small in consideration of what may be possible with its adoption.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerry Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jerry Nelson
Onondaga Investments