

COMMISSION ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: ZONING ORDINANCE TEXT AMENDMENT TO EXCLUDE PARKING STRUCTURES FROM DEFINITION OF FLOOR AREA RATIO

BACKGROUND:

A developer seeks relief from the floor area ratio (FAR) limitation as it applies to parking structures for a project he would like to develop on a 4-acre Highway Oriented Commercial (HOC) site on SE 5th Street. The City Council reviewed options for considering changes to FAR standards on April 14, 2015 and directed staff to draft a text amendment excluding parking structures from the definition floor area ratio. The proposed text amendment would apply city wide to all parking structures, not just to those within the HOC zoning district.

The current relevant Zoning Ordinance terms are stated below.

Section 29.201-Definitions

(77) Floor Area, Gross means the sum of the gross horizontal area of floors of a building, including interior balconies and mezzanines. All horizontal dimensions are to be between the exterior faces of walls or from the center line of walls separating 2 buildings.

(78) Floor Area, Net means the total square foot area of all space within the outside line of a wall, including the total area of all floor levels, but excluding porches, garages, or unfinished space in a basement or cellar.

(79) Floor Area Ratio (FAR) means the amount of floor area in relation to the amount of lot area, determined by dividing the gross floor area of all buildings on a lot by the area of that lot.

The proposed text amendment is as follows:

(79) Floor Area Ratio (FAR) means the amount of floor area in relation to the amount of lot area, determined by dividing the gross floor area of all buildings on a lot by the area of that lot. Parking structures are excluded from the calculation of floor area ratio.

FAR is a zoning regulation (development standard) with two purposes. It can be used to limit the intensity of use of a site or to control the massing of the building. FAR can lead to a predictable building design and building size when lots are of the same general size in a zoning district, but the results will vary greatly when there is a large difference in lot sizes. Other related zonings standards to intensity and massing include maximum building coverage, minimum required setbacks, minimum landscaped/open space area, and maximum height limits.

Ames applies FAR as a development standards in multiple zoning districts, as either a minimum of maximum.

<u>Zoning District</u>	<u>Max. FAR</u>
Highway Oriented Commercial (HOC)	0.50
Neighborhood Commercial (NC)	0.70
Community Commercial Node (CCN)	0.75
Community Commercial/Residential Node (CCR)	0.75
Downtown Service Center (DSC)	None*
Campustown Service Center (CSC)	None*
South Lincoln Sub Area (S-SMD) Mixed Use District	0.75
Planned Regional Commercial (PRC)	None
Planned Industrial (PI)	0.35
General Industrial (GI)	None

*CSC and DSC zoning having a minimum FAR of 1.0 to ensure buildings match the historic pattern of the surroundings. An exception process exists to reduce minimum FAR in unique situations.

The 0.5 FAR allowed in the HOC zoning district would generally lead to one and two story buildings, even though taller buildings could be built under the HOC zoning. This is result of the parking ratio and amount of land needed for surface parking in relation to building floor area. A development standard with a 1.0 FAR would relate to more urban setting as it would require full use of site or multi-story buildings. FAR of 1.0 or greater is a common situation along Main Street or in parts of Campustown. Other examples of how FAR translates to building design with standards parking requirements include:

- 1-Story retail commercial development will be typically 0.2 to 0.25 FAR of a site with 100% surface parking.
- 2-Story retail commercial development at 0.5 FAR with primarily surface parking and some structured parking
- 1-Story industrial/professional office building will be 0.3 FAR with 100% surface parking
- 3 to 4-Story industrial/office building of 0.5 FAR with 100% surface parking
- 5 to 7-Story office building of 0.7 FAR with a mix of parking structures and surface parking.

The result of changing the definition as proposed will be to generally incentive taller buildings on a site. The total usable floor area of site will still be controlled by the FAR limitations of the base zoning district. Excepting parking structures will make it easier for a developer to reach maximum floor area limits due to more flexibility in providing parking spaces to serve the intended use.

With the exception to FAR, a parking structure will still be treated as a building and required to conform to other building standards of a zoning district. This means setbacks, building coverage, height, open space, will apply to a parking structure during site plan review. In situations with larger sites, building coverage will be the standard that is most likely to limit the overall size or footprint of buildings on a site. Parking structures are still subject to building coverage limitations even with the proposed exception to FAR.

The City also has additional specific development standards for Parking Decks in Section 29.406 (12) that will apply to new parking structures. This includes design standards for orientation of the parking decks, shielding of cars, and minimum setback requirements in CSC and DSC zoning districts.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. The Planning and Zoning Commission can recommend the City Council adopt an ordinance that includes that excludes parking structures from the definition of Floor Area Ratio.
2. The Planning and Zoning Commission can recommend alternative standards or language to the City Council.
3. The Planning and Zoning Commission can request additional information before making a recommendation to the City Council.
4. The Planning and Zoning Commission can recommend denial of the text amendment to the City Council.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff previously considered alternative approaches for dealing with site specific interests to intensify development. These alternatives included exempting structures from all building development standards, allowing for general exception process to exceed FAR limitations, or all for planned commercial development subject to design review process. The proposed change is most direct approach to dealing with the issue of promoting structured parking in support of development without substantially changing the design requirements of site development plan review process. However, the text change will likely have limited utility in the near term as very few projects include parking structures.

Exempting Parking Structures from the definition does incentivize alternative development styles and probably a fuller use of a site through greater flexibility in providing required parking. Excluding parking structures does not fundamentally alter the intensity of use planned for the base zoning when considering that the amount of usable floor area does not change. **Therefore, it is the recommendation of the Planning and Housing Department that the Planning and Zoning Commission act in accordance with Alternative #1.**

ATTACHMENT A

March 9, 2015

Honorable Mayor & City Council
City of Ames
515 Clark Avenue
Ames, Iowa 50010

RE: Request to Amend the Code of Ordinance Definition of the Floor Area Ratio

Honorable Mayor & City Council:

We are working on development of a Highway-Oriented Commercial (HOC) zoned property in Ames and as part of the project are contemplating the use of covered parking. However, if covered parking is used, then the amount of building development is *reduced* as the covered parking is measured as part of the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for the project. For example; on a 200,000 square foot (s.f.) lot code would allow a 100,000 s.f. commercial building ($100,000/200,000 = \text{FAR of } 0.50$). But, if the building had covered parking, then only a 50,000 square foot building could be constructed *as the 50,000 s.f. of covered parking would count against the FAR of 0.50*. It would seem to be in the best interest of the City to maximize the use of prime commercial lots and allow the full use of a site with covered parking. It is a more efficient use of land resources to promote the use of covered parking and provides more value per acre of building construction.

The pertinent portions of the FAR definitions are found in Code Section 29.201 Definitions as shown below:

(77) Floor Area, Gross means the sum of the gross horizontal area of floors of a building, including interior balconies and mezzanines. All horizontal dimensions are to be between the exterior faces of walls or from the center line of walls separating 2 buildings.

(78) Floor Area, Net means the total square foot area of all space within the outside line of a wall, including the total area of all floor levels, but excluding porches, garages, or unfinished space in a basement or cellar.

(79) Floor Area Ratio (FAR) means the amount of floor area in relation to the amount of lot area, determined by dividing the gross floor area of all buildings on a lot by the area of that lot.

We are not asking for a change to the HOC zoning's FAR limit of 0.50. We do request the definition of the Floor Area Ratio to be changed by changing the "gross floor area" to "net floor area" such that it reads:

79) Floor Area Ratio (FAR) means the amount of floor area in relation to the amount of lot area, determined by dividing the *net* floor area of all buildings on a lot by the area of that lot.

The City's definition of "net floor area" excludes garages from the calculations and would allow the project to move forward. This small (one word) change would allow for the full 100,000 s.f. of building to be constructed as detailed in the example above.

Our due diligence period for purchase of the property is by the end of April. We would like to have the Council move forward with the change expeditiously such that we can be assured the change will be in process before the end of our due diligence period. Thank you for your assistance. Please call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Martin Stern
Cell Phone (515)-779-7301

cc: Kelly Diekmann, Planning & Housing Director
Steve Schainker, City Manager