

PROPOSED SITE PLAN REVIEW BY-LAW SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This proposed site plan review by-law is **intended to infuse smart growth techniques into the Zoning By-Laws** and extend the Planning Board's (Board) authority over commercial and industrial development applications. Major updates include **reducing parking standards** to alleviate large expanses of empty parking lots seen in our commercial and industrial areas and **increasing landscaping standards** to enhance the aesthetics of these same areas.

Currently the Parking Plan Review process, which acts as a limited a site plan review, regulates certain elements of site plans such as the number of parking spaces, drainage, landscaping and lighting. Changes to these standards as well as adding new elements to the review process are proposed.

Sections 10.1 thru 10.5, 10.7 and 10.8 discuss the non-technical elements of the proposed by-law such as purpose, applicability, procedures and appeals, the significant of which are summarized here. All non-residential construction or alterations will be subject to review and approval by the Board. A pre-application review with pertinent department head may occur prior to Board review, which allows these parties the chance to comment. The procedure section outlines the necessary components of a completed application, sets an adequate review period timetable, and grants authority to the Board to approve such plans prior to the issuance of a building permit.

PARKING

The Design Standards of section 10.6 are the heart of this proposed By-Law. The first standard is parking, where significant changes are proposed. Shared parking between different buildings and primary uses on a parcel will now be allowed. Currently each use is required to have its own parking, which can create excessive parking. For those uses that are used at the same time (certain retail establishments) the number of parking spaces could be reduced slightly due to the possibility of consumers frequenting multiple adjacent establishments on one trip. For those uses that have different peak demand times (offices and restaurants), the number of parking spaces could be significantly reduced.

The parking space schedule has been improved considerably by reducing the minimum number of required parking spaces, providing a maximum number of required spaces, and requiring that only the primary land use needs to be accounted for when calculating the required parking spaces. Currently only the minimum number of parking spaces is described, which allows lots to be larger than they typically need to be. However a

maximum parking space regulation can limit excessively sized parking lots which are not filled to capacity most of the time by putting a cap on their sizes.

In addition to shared parking and reduced parking standards, traffic studies may be required for certain developments. If significant traffic will be generated or the potential for a safety concern exists relating to a project, the Board can require a traffic analysis.

LANDSCAPING

The landscaping section proposes other noteworthy changes to the existing design standards. Increased landscaping around an entire site, landscaped islands in a parking lot, and landscaped buffers around dumpsters, air conditioning units and outside storage areas are proposed. The most prominent change to the landscaping requirement is the parking lot shade requirement. This standard will require **parking lots to be shaded by trees**, thus contributing to the aesthetics of a site and decreasing the heat given off by asphalt parking areas.

Added design standards include drive-thru regulations, which specify the number of stacking spaces for different uses, architectural guidelines, which can be expanded upon in the future, and sustainable design incentives that encourage green building and low impact development techniques.

By making sites more 'green', costs for applicants will be reduced as smaller parking areas translates into less asphalt, which is quite costly these days. In addition, **more landscaping and a reduction in the proverbial 'sea of asphalt' will make these sites more attractive** to customers, thereby increasing business. By decreasing parking lot sizes and requiring that they be shaded by trees, the heat generated from the dark surfaces of these areas is also reduced, which is another benefit to the town.

The Planning Board is anticipating to have a public hearing on this proposal and to include it on a Town Meeting warrant in the fall. If you have any questions or comments on this, please feel free to contact John P. Hansen Jr., AICP, Town Planner at jhansen@seekonk-ma.gov or 508.336.2962.