

Amendment to Article 7

Summary

I'm requesting that the Planning and Zoning Commission consider an amendment to Article 7 of the City of Thibodaux Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance to reform the City's minimum off-street motor-vehicle parking requirements and provide greater flexibility in how parking demand is accommodated. The proposed policy change is to eliminate mandatory minimum off-street motor-vehicle parking ratios citywide while retaining appropriate regulations governing parking safety, accessibility, design, drainage, and other legitimate public impacts. This amendment aligns with the [2024 SCPDC Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#) that recommends removing parking minimums. In addition to removing these minimum parking ratios, the proposal would facilitate and encourage shared-parking agreements, allowing for more efficient use of existing and underutilized off-street parking facilities, such as The Foundry on the Bayou's underutilized parking lot as an example.

Goals

The broad goal of this reform is to reduce regulatory incentives for automobile-oriented, low-density development; support more compact and walkable development; improve conditions for walking and bicycling; and reduce unnecessary costs and land requirements that can disproportionately burden small businesses. The current purpose for Article 7, Section 701 for the City of Thibodaux Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance states:

The off-street vehicle parking, bicycle parking and loading regulations of this Ordinance are intended to provide accessible, attractive, secure and well-maintained off-street parking and loading areas, provide the appropriate number of spaces in proportion to the demands of the

proposed use, increase public safety by reducing congestions of public streets, and encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation.

The current stated goal is to not necessarily require *more* parking but instead provide the *appropriate* number of off-street parking spaces based on actual demand. The current fixed city-wide off-street parking ratios are based on square footage alone, and research has shown this is a poor predictor for parking demand. For example, one analysis of restaurant parking data found that floor area explained only approximately 4% of the variation in observed parking demand. Therefore, they conflict with the stated goals above. If the purpose of the ordinance is to provide the appropriate number of spaces in proportion to the demands of the proposed use, then the City's regulations should allow parking supply to respond to actual demand rather than requiring the same minimum ratio for similar uses regardless of location. Businesses and property owners are generally better positioned than a citywide zoning ratio to determine how much off-street parking a particular use requires, and the city is best positioned to manage public curb space and address parking-related impacts on public streets, sidewalks, and other public infrastructure. The city should not require every private development to provide enough off-street parking to eliminate all possible demand for public curb parking. Further, another purpose for Section 701 is to “encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation.” As previously stated, these fixed ratios can require more parking than is needed for a particular use or location, while failing to account for differences in actual demand. In practice, it often causes an oversupply of off-street asphalt parking, creating urban environments that actively discourage alternative modes of transportation such as walking or biking. The current code contradicts the stated purpose. Therefore, I'm proposing this amendment so the stated code can more appropriately reflect the current purpose and broad goals above.

Proposed Amendment

Based on the goals above, the proposed amendment would revise Article 7 of the City of Thibodaux Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. *The amendment would remove minimum off-street motor-vehicle parking ratios but would not eliminate regulations*

governing the design, safety, accessibility, drainage, circulation, or maintenance of parking facilities. Specifically it would:

1. Section 704(A)

- a. Delete Table 7.1 and the provisions requiring a specific number of parking spaces based on land use. The city should allow parking supply to respond to the demands of individual uses and the characteristics of the surrounding area.
- b. Retain design and safety regulations. For example, this amendment isn't proposing to remove regulations for space dimensions, accessibility parking, driveway access, drainage, etc.
- c. Remove language allowing the Zoning Administrator to determine parking requirements for unlisted uses.
- d. Update the language for the section to contain language such as:

Off-street vehicle parking may be provided at the discretion of the property owner or developer. Where parking is provided, it shall comply with the applicable design, accessibility, drainage, landscaping, circulation, and safety requirements of this Article.

2. Section 704(D)

Since parking minimums will be removed, the 125% of the minimum will need to be updated.

3. Section 704(E)

This section currently exists to allow businesses to satisfy the minimum parking ratios. Since the goal of this proposed amendment is to encourage property owners to voluntarily share parking facilities where doing so improves land efficiency, reduces unnecessary pavement, and minimizes stormwater runoff, the proposed amendment to this section would be:

- Remove the 300-foot limit for parking agreements, replacing it with something such as:

Shared parking facilities should be connected to participating uses by a safe, continuous pedestrian route. The Zoning Administrator may consider the quality and safety of the pedestrian connection when evaluating whether a shared parking arrangement serves the intended use.

- Allow for off-street parking facilities to be shared among two or more uses through a voluntary written agreement between the participating property owners.
- Update the language to encourage shared parking agreements where it reduces unnecessary impervious surface, promotes more efficient use of existing parking resources, and supports compact, walkable development.
- Update the language to make sure where shared parking is provided, the parking area is connected to each participating use by a safe and reasonably direct pedestrian route.