



Snohomish County Council

To: Snohomish County Planning Commission

From: Snohomish County Council
Ryan Countryman, Senior Legislative Analyst

Report Date: February 12, 2024

Briefing Date: February 27, 2024

Subject: Staff Report on Proposal to Provide Flexibility Regarding Location of Parking

Introduction

By [Motion 23-541](#), the Snohomish County Council is requesting review and recommendation by the Planning Commission on proposed code amendments to provide flexibility regarding location of parking in subdivisions. County Council staff is providing this staff report to the Planning Commission for a briefing on February 27, 2024. The Planning Commission could potentially hold its public hearing on March 26, 2024.

Background

The proposed ordinance would give developers of new subdivisions the flexibility to have offsite parking. This option for cottage-like parking is already available to other types of development in unincorporated Snohomish County and for subdivisions in some cities. If not on the same lot that it serves, parking would need to be within 300 feet, located on a lot or tract that provides a parking easement and configured in a way that provides safe walking conditions to the building served by the parking.

The idea to provide more flexibility in parking location comes from the “Opening Doors to Home Ownership” housing panel discussions sponsored by County Councilmember Nate Nehring from January 17, 2023, to April 18, 2023. The County Council passed Motion 23-541 referring the proposed amendments to the Planning Commission on January 3, 2024.

Proposed Ordinance

This ordinance would allow subdivisions to have offsite parking under certain conditions.

Ordinance Sections 1 to 3 include findings and conclusions to support the substantive changes in Section 4.

Ordinance Section 4 amends SCC 30.26.020 to add flexibility. Current phrasing in SCC 30.26.020 creates a subtle difference in the location of parking in subdivisions vs other development approved through the SFDU process. This subsection requires that “Parking for single family and multifamily dwellings shall be within 300 feet of and on the same lot or building site with the building it serves.” For subdivisions, code currently requires all parking must be on the lot it serves. Most subdivisions meet this requirement by including a two-car garage as part of each single-family structure or a two-car garage for each duplex unit. Street parking cannot satisfy the requirement to provide two off-street parking spaces. SFDUs do not create new lots; instead, the development is one building site. This means that the parking only needs to be within 300 feet of the building site. Like a subdivision, most SFDUs provide the required two parking spaces per unit in a garage attached to the unit

The proposed changes are solely in SCC 30.26.020(1). These would allow subdivisions to have parking in on tract within 300 feet of the building it serves, thus making the parking arrangements allowed in SFDUs and by some nearby cities possible.

- (1) Parking for single and multifamily dwellings shall be within 300 feet of ~~((and on the same lot or building site with))~~ the building it serves. If the parking is not on the same lot or building site as the building, it shall be on a lot or tract that provides a parking easement and is configured in a way that provides safe walking conditions to the building served by the parking.

There are precedents for subdivisions with some, or all, of their parking on common tracts, most often as part of provisions for cottage subdivisions.

Ordinance Section 5 is a standard severability and savings clause.

Examples of Possible Use

Example 1 – Subdivision in Mukilteo

Woodson Crest Cottages is an 8-lot subdivision approved by the City of Mukilteo and recorded under Auditor File Number 200610195042. The figure below highlights subdivision Tract B. Tract B contain all parking. Some parking is in open parking stalls, and the rest is in two parking garages on the tract.



Figure 1 – Woodson Crest Cottages, Tract B Highlighted (Snohomish County GIS)

Design Differences: By consolidating parking in one location, Woodson Crest has less paving and impervious surface than a typical 8-lot subdivision. No other design differences have been identified.

Clearwater Commons (PFN 2006-131051 LU) consists of sixteen condominium homes. It has ten attached units and six detached. There are 31 parking stalls consolidated in a parking area on the north, and two more parking stalls next to a shop building on the southern developed area. The site is heavily constrained by wetlands and buffers. The zoning is MR.



Figure 2 – Clearwater Commons Layout (Adapted from AFN 201203215002)

Effect of Combining Ordinances. Snohomish County permitted Clearwater Commons under procedures that pre-date the current SFDU process. Parking consolidation met code because it is one development site. The proposed ordinance would allow parking consolidation if this could be a subdivision. However, to be a subdivision, a project like Clearwater Commons would also need passage of the separate proposal related to single family attached dwellings to allow the attached units and reduce lot sizes.

Design Differences. Current codes create at least two potential design differences.

First, an SFDU like Clearwater Commons would not need to provide as much tree canopy as it would as a subdivision (20% tree canopy as an SFDU, 30% as a subdivision per Table 30.25.016(3)). In practice, Clearwater Commons far exceeds these requirements because the vegetation in protected wetlands and buffers would count as canopy.

The second difference relates to number of parking spaces. Guest parking requirements for SFDUs became effective after the application to develop Clearwater Commons. If applied for today as an SFDU, Clearwater Commons would need a total of 36 parking spaces (32 for the units + 4 guest spaces). The applicable requirement for this development was to provide 32 parking spaces overall (Clearwater Commons has 33 spaces). As a subdivision, it would need to provide 32 spaces for the units and an additional space in each driveway; however, that driveway space would not be a requirement if the parking were on a tract as in this example.

Policy Analysis

The proposed increase in parking flexibility seeks to help address housing affordability and need for a broader range of housing types.

In 2021, the Legislature passed Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1220 (ESSB 1220), which among other changes strengthened the Growth Management Act (GMA) Goal 4 related to housing. ESSB 1220 went from “Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population” to “Plan for and accommodate housing affordable to all economic segments of the population”.

In 2023, the Legislature also enacted Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1110 (ESSB 1110), which included a finding that states:

Washington is facing an unprecedented housing crisis for its current population and a lack of housing choices, and is not likely to meet the affordability goals for future populations [...] innovative housing policies will need to be adopted. Increasing housing options that are more affordable to various income levels is critical to achieving the state's housing goals, including those codified by the legislature under chapter 254, Laws of 2021 [ESSB 1220].

Subdivision of homes with cottage-style parking would help diversify the housing stock and promote ownership housing affordable to middle income households.

Snohomish County's General Policy Plan (GPP) contains local policies regarding land use and housing. These include:

Objective HO 1.B – Ensure that a broad range of housing types and affordability levels is available in urban and rural areas.

The proposed amendments reduce regulatory barriers on the development of housing in urban areas, supporting the development of a broad range of housing types and affordability. The development of homes with shared cottage-style parking would provide different housing types and affordability levels in areas with a lack of variety and affordability.

Procedural

Environmental Review

A State Environmental Policy Act Checklist and a threshold determination will be issued prior to County Council consideration.

Notification of State Agencies

Pursuant to RCW 36.70A.106, county staff transmitted of intent to adopt the proposed regulations and standards to the Washington State Department of Commerce on February 6, 2024, which exceeds the requirement to notify Commerce at least 60 days prior to a public hearing held by the County Council.

Action Requested

Council Motion 23-541 requests that Planning Commission hold a public hearing, consider the proposed code amendments, and provide a recommendation to the County Council by May 27, 2024. The Planning Commission can recommend approval of the proposed ordinance with supporting findings of fact as proposed or modified, deny the proposal with findings, or amend the proposal with appropriate findings.

cc: Ken Klein, Executive Director
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