

City of Worcester, Massachusetts



City of Worcester Commercial Corridors Overlay District (CCOD)



*A Summary of the Proposed
Zoning Ordinance and Map Amendment*

UPDATED – June 18, 2014

What is an Overlay District?

An Overlay District is special zoning district that is superimposed on top of the underlying conventional zoning districts. This planning tool allows application of a distinct set of additional development regulations that supplement or supersede the underlying zoning in order to address specific purposes.

What is the extent of the proposed Overlay District?

The Commercial Corridors Overlay District (CCOD) encompasses the downtown area and connecting major commercial corridors of the city, including Main, Chandler, Pleasant, Highland, Shrewsbury, and Grafton Streets. It also includes the Quinsigamond Village area.

The proposed Overlay District would replace the following existing Overlay Districts:

- Arts Overlay District
- Mixed Use Overlay District
- Parking Overlay Districts (Canal District, Chandler Street, Grafton Street, Shrewsbury Street and Quinsigamond Village)

What is the purpose of the Commercial Corridors Overlay District?

The CCOD aims to:

- Promote both redevelopment of existing buildings and new development of consistent and compatible character.
- Encourage a mix of complementary uses.
- Foster the development of high-quality, pedestrian-scale environments through site and building design.

- Reduce the amount of land devoted to parking and utilize parking areas more efficiently.
- Preserve and enhance the historical, cultural, and architectural assets of the city.

What are the specific new regulations proposed that would help achieve this purpose?

➤ **Dimensional Requirements**

Dimensional requirements would be modified in several ways to increase development options and allow development at densities typical of urban, walkable environments.

- **Frontage and Lot Area:** For multifamily residential uses – minimum 40 ft. frontage and no minimum lot area requirement; no minimum frontage requirements in the BG-6 zoning district.
- **Floor to Area Ratio (FAR):** The underlying zoning for most of the areas proposed for the CCOD allows FAR over 2.0. Where this is not currently the case, the maximum FAR would be increased to 2.0 to allow for development of sufficient density to establish highly walkable neighborhoods. Further, FAR restrictions will not apply to mixed-use buildings provided at least one of the uses is residential and a non-residential use is located on the ground floor.
- **Height Limits:** Maximum building heights would remain as currently specified in the underlying zoning, with the exception that buildings up to 50 feet in height would be allowed anywhere within the CCOD.
- **Landscaped Parking Buffers:** Landscaping buffers for parking areas will be reduced to a minimum 3 feet wide with minimum 5-foot x 5-foot tree planting areas in recognition of site and parcel size constraints.

➤ **Urban Design Aspects**

Regulations regarding the placement of buildings, parking areas and other features are updated. Basic design requirements related to building façade and pedestrian access are introduced.

- **Building Front Yard Setback:** Rather than requiring large setbacks from the fronting street, buildings should be aligned along the street consistent with established structures. Minimum setbacks are reduced to 0 to 5 feet, and maximum setbacks of 10 to 15 feet from the street are established.
 - A special permit process is introduced to allow for special circumstances where deeper setbacks are warranted.

Encourages pedestrian-friendly environments:



Prohibits buildings not fronting onto a street:



- Front setback requirements do not apply to minor alternations of existing buildings.
- **Parking Areas:** Parking is to be located to the side or rear of the principal building(s).
- **Pedestrian Access:** A primary pedestrian accessible entrance to the building should face and directly connect to a public street or a public sidewalk.
- **Façades:** Building walls facing the street and/or a sidewalk should have active façades incorporating windows, doors, columns, changes in materials, modulation of the façade, and similar details to add visual interest. Also, buildings taller than 100 feet shall incorporate step backs or façade articulation to limit shading and improve visual appearance.

➤ **Parking Requirements**

Parking requirements are modified to reflect the urban context, where on-street parking and/or public off-street parking is more prevalent and a variety of access options exist, including motor vehicles, buses, bicycling and walking.

- **Parking Subareas:** Parking subareas for the Canal District, Downtown, and Shrewsbury Street are proposed to allow for parking requirements to be tailored to these specific areas.

Minimum Parking Requirements

- Accessory off-street parking will not be required in the Downtown subarea, as is the case today.
- The minimum number of off-street parking spaces required for new construction is modified for the CCOD area, typically requiring between 50 percent and 75 percent of the parking that would be required elsewhere. The minimum parking requirements proposed are in line with those found in similar neighborhoods of other cities in New England and throughout the country.
- Rehabilitation of existing buildings will not require additional parking except for increased areas or change of use (see below).
- Additional provisions are established for change of use or reuse of existing buildings to support commercial uses and encourage redevelopment of existing buildings, particularly those of historical interest.
 - For commercial reuse, existing parking must remain, but additional parking is not required unless the new uses would result in parking demand that is considerably higher than already provided on site. The definition of what constitutes “considerably higher” is established by the ordinance and varies by subarea depending on the characteristics of the neighborhood and availability of public parking.
 - Residential conversions would require parking at the rates established for new construction within the CCOD.
- Additional parking relief is proposed through specified exceptions and adjustments, including:
 - **Mixed-Use:** Parking requirements may be reduced when a mix uses that have different peak periods of use are provided on a site.
 - **Off-site Parking:** Parking may be provided off-site when certain provisions are met.

- Bicycle parking. A portion of motor vehicle parking requirements may be waived when secure bicycle parking is provided.
- Small Lots: Off-street parking requirements for non-residential uses may be waived in cases where a new parking lot would need to be created and the required parking is five (5) or fewer spaces for all uses on the site.

Maximum Parking Limits

- To prevent over-dedication of land to parking areas, the amount of off-street parking provided will not exceed specified maximum limitations. No more than:
 - 1 parking space per 250 square feet GFA for non-residential uses.
 - 2 parking spaces per residential dwelling unit.
 - 1 parking space per 2 rated occupancy for restaurant uses.
- Relief from these Requirements: A Special Permit may be requested to modify maximum number and dimensional requirements for off-street parking.

Other Parking Regulations

- In the Downtown subarea, no new non-accessory surface parking facilities are allowed.
- Exemption for Small Parking Lots: Parking areas with ≤ 16 spaces will not be required to conform to the dimensional requirements for parking spaces and aisle widths however must provide safe vehicular access and circulation to the satisfaction of the Building Commissioner.

Does the CCOD prohibit certain uses?

- All uses otherwise allowed in the underlying zoning district would be allowed except for the following:
 - Auto / Truck refueling stations, body shops, repair, washing etc.
 - Auto / Truck sales, agencies, showrooms with exterior display lots, open lot storage of unregistered vehicles.
 - Open lot storage.
 - Single-Family detached and Two-Family detached dwellings.
- Existing uses will be allowed to remain as pre-existing, non-conforming uses.
- Drive-through uses would only be allowed by Special Permit and with additional regulations:
 - Prohibited from accessing certain pedestrian oriented corridors.
 - Not allowed within 150 feet of residential uses.

Prohibits or adds regulations governing uses that are less compatible with the urban environment of the City's core.



- Shorter drive-through lane requirements than elsewhere, provided that adequate distance from driveway curbcuts and intersections is maintained.

Does the CCOD allow uses in new locations?

- Conversion of existing buildings to residential creative entrepreneur loft uses would be allowed throughout the CCOD (currently prohibited in manufacturing zones).

What is the Approval Process?

- The City Council referred the item to the Planning Board on May 13, 2014.
- The Planning Board held a public hearing on June 4, 2014 and voted to recommend to City Council the adoption of the proposed CCOD Ordinance and Map amendment.
- The City Council will at a future meeting refer the item to the Economic Development Committee for a hearing.
- Following a hearing, Economic Development Committee will forward its recommendation back to the City Council for a final decision.