



STAFF REPORT

AGENDA ITEM NO: STUDY

MEETING DATE: September 3, 2019

To: Honorable Mayor and City Council

Date: September 3, 2019

From: Kevin Gardiner, Community Development Director – (650) 558-7253

Subject: Discussion of Potential Modification of the Downtown Specific Plan and Zoning Ordinance to Allow Limited Ground Floor and Below-Ground Office Uses

RECOMMENDATION

The City Council is asked to discuss whether it wishes to modify the Downtown Specific Plan and Zoning Ordinance to allow limited ground floor and below-ground office uses.

BACKGROUND

At its June meeting, the City Council's Economic Development Subcommittee (consisting of Vice Mayor Beach and Councilmember Keighran) discussed the possibility of allowing office uses at the rear of ground floor commercial spaces within Downtown Burlingame. The meeting included input from commercial brokers and property owners representing a variety of downtown properties (June 12, 2019 Economic Development Subcommittee meeting minutes attached).

The Downtown Specific Plan promotes a vibrant pedestrian-oriented downtown, with ground floor retail, personal service, or restaurant uses required in the Burlingame Avenue and Howard Mixed Use areas. The requirement for ground floor retail and restaurants is integral for promoting vibrancy and pedestrian activity along building frontages and is not proposed to be changed. However, for lots that are especially deep (such as depths greater than 100 feet), retail and services may be viable at the front of the building at the street-front, but may be less viable in the far rear portions of the property. Whereas in years past retailers typically maintained large back-of-house storage facilities situated at the rear of deep parcels, modern retailers rarely have a need for such deep storefronts. The result is that it can be challenging to find a tenant for existing buildings with especially deep depths.

A potential resolution for this issue could be to continue to require retail or services at the front of storefronts in the downtown commercial areas, but allow other uses that would otherwise be restricted to upper floors (such as office uses) to be situated at the rear of the ground floor. Access to the rear space could be through the rear of the building (if an accessible and protected path of travel exists behind the building), or from the front through a dedicated corridor.

DISCUSSION

Should the City Council wish to pursue this strategy, standards would need to be developed for the minimum depth of a storefront. The Downtown Specific Plan has a design guideline that specifies *commercial spaces should have a depth of at least 40 feet to ensure viability for a range of potential commercial tenants* (Section 5.2.5.5). However staff would suggest further research if a required standard is developed, as other retail and planning literature suggests ranges between 35 and 50 feet are appropriate.

Furthermore, there would need to be consideration of parking standards for any such ground floor uses. Currently retail, personal, food establishment, and commercial recreation uses located on the ground floor that are located within the downtown parking sector are exempt from off-street parking requirements (Code Section 25.70.090 (a)). The basis for this exemption originated when the City acquired and built public parking lots in the downtown area by way of assessments (60% of cost) collected from property owners within the Burlingame Avenue Off-street Parking District (created in 1962). The parking requirements for commercial uses are summarized in Table 1 below:

**TABLE 1
COMMERCIAL PARKING REQUIREMENTS**

Use	Parking Requirement
Retail stores	1 space for each 400 sq. ft. of gross floor area
Offices	1 space for each 300 sq. ft. of gross floor area
Health Services	1 space for each 250 sq. ft. of gross floor area
Food Establishments	1 space for each 200 sq. ft. of gross floor area
Commercial Recreation	1 space for each 200 sq. ft. of gross floor area

As such, the parking requirement for offices is more intensive than for retail stores, but less intensive than for food establishments or commercial recreation.

Finally, although it was not specifically discussed in the June Economic Development Subcommittee meeting, consideration of office uses could also be extended to below-grade spaces. Currently within the Burlingame Avenue Commercial (BAC) District, permitted uses of below-grade spaces are the same as those allowed on the ground floor, except for the addition that personal trainer and assessment businesses are also allowed in below-ground spaces. There are only a handful of buildings downtown that include below-ground spaces, but historically those properties have encountered difficulty leasing those spaces to conforming retail or food service tenants. The City Council may want to extend the consideration of office uses to these below-ground spaces given the difficulty in finding tenants for those spaces in the past.

Should the Council wish to allow limited ground floor office uses, then staff requests that the City Council authorize the Planning Commission to work with staff to review and consider allowing office uses at the rear of ground floor commercial spaces as a Conditional Use. In addition, the City Council may also choose to extend the consideration of office uses to include below-ground spaces.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

Exhibit:

- June 12, 2019 Economic Development Subcommittee meeting minutes