



Statement on Proposed Town of Bloomsburg Ordinance
Requiring Off-Street Parking in the Commercial Zoning District

Bloomsburg Town Council is considering an ordinance amending Chapter 27, Part 8 of its Code of Ordinances that would require off-street parking be provided for new building construction, expansion of an existing building, or some changes of use in the downtown Commercial District. While the Chamber and Downtown Bloomsburg Inc. (DBI) support the intent of this change to keep municipal metered spaces and parking lots available for customers and visitors to the downtown, the requirements for non-residential uses would discourage the flexibility of property uses, and deter business growth and development. We request that off-street parking requirements for non-residential uses be excluded. The Chamber and DBI do support off-street parking requirements for new residential construction and uses in the Commercial District. However, additional flexibility should be provided for the location of such parking.

There are already many challenges to developing commercial properties and businesses. Currently, there are three empty lots and the vacant former Moose building on West Main Street. The additional considerations and expenses related to providing off-street parking would only add to the challenges of revitalizing these properties. The following are illustrations on two of the properties based on the proposed ordinance and on the development of one story buildings.

140 West Main (Between the Town Camera building and the Chinese Massage business)

Lot size is approximately 30' x 100' = 3,000 sq. ft.

Parking requirements based on use:

Office building – 15 spaces

Professional or business services – 10 spaces

Retail (assuming ½ of space would be for display) – 6 spaces

Based on a 9' x 18' parking space, providing 10 spaces would require at least 1,620 sq. ft.

Former Moose building

Lot size is approximately 60 x 200 = 12,000 sq. ft.

Parking requirements based on use:

Office building – 60 spaces

Professional or business services - 40 spaces

Retail (assuming ½ of space would be for display) – 24 spaces

Based on a 9' x 18' parking space, providing 40 spaces would require at least 6,480 sq. ft. (The approximate size of the Pine Ave. lot)

Changing the use of existing properties in the downtown would create equally burdensome requirements for redevelopment as per the following illustration:

301 West Main Street (Miller Office Supply Building)

First floor is 5,000 sq. ft.

Parking requirements based on use:

Office building – 25 spaces

Professional or business services – 16/17 spaces

Based on a 9' x 18' parking space, providing 17 spaces would require at least 2,754 sq. ft. (The nearby Hoppes Lot contains 18 spaces.)

Understanding that existing businesses would be grandfathered at their current business sizes, the following are illustrations on how the proposed off-street parking requirements would apply in a change of use situation.

First Columbia Bank – 50 spaces, currently has 36

Derr, Pursel, Luschas & Naparsteck – 10 spaces, currently has none

Bella Luna – 15 spaces, currently has none

Exclusively You – 6 spaces, currently has none

The Downtown Revitalization Plan being coordinated by DBI is being finalized. The Plan is expected to provide recommendations for parking management and encouraging business development. Implementing off-street parking requirements for non-residential uses could undermine the significant Town (\$25,000) and private resources already put into this Plan and discourage business growth in the downtown Commercial District. Bloomsburg would have a competitive disadvantage for commercial development as compared with neighboring communities that do not have such requirements.

Encouraging further residential development in the downtown is also expected to be a part of the Revitalization Plan. While such development is also an important component of a vibrant downtown, previous development has significantly contributed to the demands on public parking. Requiring off-street parking for new residential development is reasonable, but should include greater flexibility as to the location of the parking.

As proposed, off-street parking would need to be located within 300 feet of the residential use, and within the Commercial District. As illustrated, parking consumes a significant amount of space. The requirement that parking be within the Commercial District therefore encourages the demolition of existing buildings for private parking. This would lead to a reduction of available properties for business and residential development in the District, and erosion of the tax base.

The Chamber and DBI therefore request that Council revise the proposed ordinance in collaboration with DBI and the Downtown Revitalization Plan to implement changes that encourage long term, balanced growth in the downtown Commercial District.