CITY OF HARRISONBURG
COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT

409 SOUTH MAIN STREET, HARRISONBURG, VA 22801
OFFICE (540) 432-7700 • FAX (540) 432-7777

October 30, 2026

TO THE MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

SUBJECT: *Consider a request to amend the Zoning Ordinance to amend the definition of "shopping center" and to provide a parking calculation for shopping centers*

EXTRACT FROM THE DRAFT MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON: October 14, 2026

Chair Baugh read the request and asked staff to present.

Ms. Soffel said the proposed Zoning Ordinance (ZO) amendment would amend the definition of "shopping center" in Section 10-3-24 and add "shopping centers" to Section 10-3-25 (17). The intent is to codify a standing interpretation for applying the minimum off-street parking regulations for retail establishments to developments that qualify as a shopping center.

The ZO currently defines a shopping center as follows:

> Commercial development of more than one (1) retail sales or service establishment on a single parcel of common ownership attached by common walls or if located in separate buildings are interconnected by walkways and/or access ways, providing common parking facilities for all establishments, having multiple tenancy of a single or several large common structures, and otherwise present the appearance of one continuous commercial area.

The proposed amendment would revise the definition of "shopping center" to clarify the types of businesses allowed within a shopping center and establish a minimum combined floor area of at least 10,000 square feet. The definition of shopping center is proposed to be amended as follows:

> ***Shopping center:*** ~~Commercial~~ A development of more than one (1) ~~retail sales or service establishment~~ mercantile establishment; personal service establishment; restaurant; office; place of assembly for the purpose of entertainment or education; or house of worship. The uses must be located on a single parcel of common ownership attached by common walls, or if located in separate buildings, are

interconnected by walkways, ~~and/or~~ access ways, or both, providing common parking facilities for all establishments, having multiple tenancy of a single or several large common structures, having a combined floor area of at least 10,000 square feet, and otherwise present the appearance of one continuous commercial area.

The ZO does not currently include a minimum parking requirement for shopping centers. When the uses of a proposed shopping center are unknown at the time of site plan or building permit review, staff has applied the parking requirement for retail stores, sales rooms, and similar mercantile establishments when the shopping center has a combined floor area of at least 10,000 square feet. When the proposed uses are known, parking has been calculated based on the parking requirements for the individual uses. In addition, because uses within a shopping center may change over time, calculating parking based on individual uses could require parking to be recalculated when a new business occupies a tenant space under staff interpretation of the existing definition.

All of the existing developments currently identified as shopping centers have a combined total floor area of more than 10,000 square feet. Existing shopping centers include uses such as, but are not limited to, restaurants, offices, and houses of worship, not just retail sales or service establishments. Although the minimum floor area and range of uses were not included in ZO, staff has consistently applied the shopping center interpretation to these developments. The proposed amendment would codify this longstanding practice without expanding the types of developments currently identified as shopping centers or changing applicable parking ratios.

The proposed amendment would also add the use of "shopping centers" to Section 10-3-25(17), which establishes the parking calculation for retail stores, sales rooms and similar mercantile establishments, as follows:

> (17) Retail stores, sales rooms and similar mercantile establishments, shopping centers, and tobacco, smoke, or vape shops (applicable where no other specific retail standard is set forth): If ten thousand (10,000) square feet or less of gross floor area, one (1) parking space for each two hundred (200) square feet of gross floor area; if over ten thousand (10,000) square feet of gross floor area, one (1) parking space for each two hundred and fifty (250) square feet of gross floor area.

Developments that meet the definition of "shopping center" would have a parking calculation based on one (1) parking space for each 250 square feet of gross floor area.

The amendment would establish a consistent parking calculation for shopping centers and allow changes in tenancy within an existing shopping center without requiring parking to be recalculated. If a shopping center is redeveloped in a manner that no longer meets the definition of a shopping center, the associated parking requirements would be calculated at the time of redevelopment.

Staff recommends approval of the ZO amendment.

Chair Baugh asked if there were any questions for staff.

Commissioner Seitz said I think we discussed this in terms of the proposed Zoning Ordinance as well, but there is no provision for nonconcurrent uses, correct? For instance, a house of worship might only be used on Saturday or Sunday, depending on who is there. Other places may not be open those days. Is there any opportunity to consider a reduction in parking because uses may be nonconcurrent in the space?

Ms. Soffel said the proposed zoning ordinance rewrite would address those parking considerations. We acknowledge that is a concern, but we want to allow the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite to go through the public engagement process and get feedback on those parking matters. For this specific amendment, we are not changing parking calculations.

Ms. Dang said actually, in the proposed Zoning Ordinance update, we have removed provisions about those ratios because we found in practice that people are not using them. There has only been one instance, that I am aware of, on Neff Avenue, where that provision had been used.

Mr. Fletcher said currently, it is Section 10-3-26(b), and there is a table in the [current] zoning ordinance for shared parking. It gives times of the day and different uses. What Ms. Dang is referring to is that we found in practice there were many instances where staff tried to apply it, but it resulted in the 100 percent rule every time when considering different uses at different times of day.

Commissioner Seitz said yes, and I remember discussing that in one of the work sessions. Thank you.

Councilmember Dent said I am curious. We had a definition of shopping center, but where was that used if it was not in the parking requirement?

Ms. Dang said that it was not used in the ordinance. It was just a term that was there. It may have been a relic from something in the past. I do not know the history of how that term came to be in the definitions section.

Councilmember Dent said but now it is useful.

Ms. Dang said yes.

Vice-Chair Porter said I had a question about the 10,000 square feet... Why that number? I am curious where that line of demarcation came from or how that was selected.

Ms. Soffel said (Section 10-3-25) subsection 17, it already has retail stores, sales rooms, and similar mercantile establishments. If it was under 10,000 square feet, it was one space per 200 square feet, and if it was over 10,000 square feet, it would be one space per 250 square feet. As we reviewed the various shopping centers that have been approved, the shopping centers where staff applied this interpretation, have all been over 10,000 square feet.

Vice-Chair Porter said thank you.

Commissioner Kettler said where do the 200 square feet of area per parking spot or 250 square feet per parking space… where do those numbers come from?

Ms. Soffel said those are the parking ratios in the current ordinance.

Commissioner Kettler said do we know where those come from?

Ms. Soffel said I do not know.

Mr. Fletcher said the one per 200 square feet is often found in a lot of different places. It might be stated mathematically in a different way, but the ratios end up being one per 200 square feet, or five per thousand square feet. There are different ways to express it.

Commissioner Kettler said what I am getting at is that a lot of times when I am at any shopping center, there are a lot of empty parking spaces, not as a rule, but in practice every time I have been in a shopping center, there are a lot of empty parking spaces, no matter how busy it is. I am wondering, as common as it is across different municipalities and jurisdictions, whether there is some rational basis for that. There may not be an answer for that right now.

Mr. Fletcher said there probably is, and I will not have an answer right now. I also want to remind everyone that when you see those shopping centers, it does not necessarily mean they are meeting only the minimum. Oftentimes, they are providing much more than the minimum because there is no cap. You would have to know how big the building is, what the use is, and count the parking spaces to determine whether that was because of a government code or a private desire to have that many parking spaces.

Ms. Soffel said in the shopping centers reviewed, all but one had more than the minimum.

Commissioner Jezior said will this change increase the minimum for many of the existing shopping centers if they were built now, or would it decrease it?

Ms. Soffel said if a shopping center were predominantly restaurants, for example, which has a higher minimum, it could see a reduction. But for retail stores, the minimums are based on whether the store is over 10,000 square feet of gross floor area, so it would be the same. It maintains that same ratio.

Commissioner Jezior said okay. So that would be the same unless it was all restaurants.

Commissioner Alsindi said I am not sure how substantial my question is, but from reading the text and the order of shopping center in the text, it is my impression that shopping is more generic. Why does it not come first in the text, when the others are more precise and defined? That is how I see it. Why is it here precisely in this order?

Ms. Soffel said there was no specific order.

Commissioner Alsindi said do you think the order is somehow necessary here? I know it could be secondary or cosmetic.

Ms. Soffel said it could have been first.

Commissioner Alsindi said I see that in the future, shopping will need more definition. That is my prediction. I see the word shopping as encompassing others generally. At this point, it is good, but that is my personal perspective. I can forecast that in the future there will be a need to shape it more and define it more. From the text-writing point of view, I think it would be proper for it to be at the beginning.

Ms. Dang said assuming that the proposed zoning ordinance is adopted in a similar fashion to what staff has proposed, the term shopping center will not exist in that new ordinance either. We have reduced the parking ratios for uses such as restaurants to one per 250 square feet, for example, so it equalizes and staff does not have to define shopping center and have that category. My point is that, if you want to recommend moving the order, the Commission could consider that at this point. If it does not matter, it will only be for a short period of time.

Commissioner Alsindi said as long as there was some back-and-forth discussion, I will be very specific about what pushed me to say what I said. I hope that tobacco, smoke, and vape do not come with shopping. It psychologically incentivizes people to shop. I would not prefer to put the rest with shopping. Put shopping at the beginning, and then maybe it is secondary. It is from a future customer satisfaction and behavior perspective that pushes me to say what I say. Thank you.

Commissioner Kettler said I really like this change. I think it simplifies it, which is the direction we all want to go with a lot of this. I think the question Commissioner Seitz asked about concurrent uses also reflects the need for more flexibility in parking requirements.

Chair Baugh asked if there were any more questions for staff. Hearing none, he opened the public hearing and invited anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request.

Seth Roderick, Monteverde Engineer, said this is a very important code change and a step in the right direction. I know there is a lot more text coming. I want to emphasize the practical matter on our side as we develop properties. Shopping centers are often built with known tenants at the beginning, and that can be reviewed by staff easily as it pertains to individual uses that are segregated out. Sometimes that can have an impact and create more parking if there is a restaurant use mixed in with retail spaces that do not drive a lot traffic. When the project moves forward to construction, sometimes those tenancies drop out or get replaced. Maybe 10, 15, or 20 years later, a lease ends, other leases become available, and a restaurant user wants to backfill a site that was previously retail and now wants to open a restaurant. It is a good space otherwise for a small independent business owner trying to open a sandwich shop, but they do not have enough parking to meet the requirement because everything was based on a retail basis and now there is a restaurant use. This is a practical application. I think it is a worthwhile change. I recommend approval. I appreciate your consideration of this, and I appreciate staff's willingness to tackle an issue that has been present for a while in advance of the full rewrite. We can either put everything off until the full rewrite is done or tackle these issues as they become available. This is a good one. I appreciate it.

Chair Baugh closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Commissioner Jezior said I think it is a good change. I think it simplifies everything for future tenants in shopping centers, and I think it is good.

Councilmember Dent said I appreciate the real-world comment about the complexities that could arise before the simplification. I like it.

Commissioner Seitz said I move to approve the zoning ordinance amendment as presented.

Chair Baugh said we have a motion to approve as presented. Is there a second?

Vice-Chair Porter said second.

Chair Baugh called for a roll call vote.

Commissioner Seitz	Aye
Vice-Chair Porter	Aye
Councilmember Dent	Aye
Commissioner Alsindi	Aye
Commissioner Kettler	Aye
Commissioner Jezior	Aye
Chair Baugh	Aye

The motion to recommend approval of the zoning ordinance amendment passed (7-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on November 10, 2026.

AI, specifically ClerkMinutes and GovAI, was used to assist in the development of this content. All content has been reviewed and approved by human oversight.