



Planning Commission

Drive-Through Restaurants in Olympia: Review of Olympia Municipal Code

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Title

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Recommended Action

Information only. No action requested.

Report

Issue:

Staff briefing on the review of Olympia's current regulations on restaurant drive-throughs to see if an expansion of permitted use in additional commercial zoning districts is appropriate.

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Presenter(s):

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Background and Analysis:

City of Olympia staff has recently begun reviewing the City's municipal code on drive-through restaurants. This project is a response to questions from developers interested in the potential for new drive-through restaurants in a number of zoning districts where they are currently not permitted. The goal of this analysis is to determine whether the expansion of this use to additional commercial zoning districts meets the vision and intent of Olympia's Comprehensive Plan, related plans, and supporting regulations. If so, a proposed code amendment will be brought forward to the Planning Commission for consideration in the future.

Defining Restaurants with Drive-Throughs

Restaurants with drive-through facilities are defined in the basic provisions section of Olympia's Unified Development Code (OMC 18.02) within the definition for "Restaurant":

A use providing preparation and retail sale of food and beverages, including coffee shops, sandwich shops, ice cream parlors, fast food take-out, espresso stands, and similar uses. A restaurant may include licensed "on-site" provision of alcoholic beverages for consumption on

the premises when accessory to such food service. A “drive-in” restaurant is one where all or a significant portion of the consumption takes place or is designed to take place with the patrons remaining in their vehicles while on the premises. A “drive-through” restaurant is one which has one or more drive-through lanes for ordering and dispensing of food and beverages to patrons remaining in their vehicles, for consumption off the premises.

They can be stand-alone kiosks or restaurants which provide both sit-down and drive-through options. In Olympia, some examples of drive-through restaurants are Eastside Big Tom, Starbucks, McDonald’s, and Eagan’s Westside Drive-In.

Current Conditions

As found on Table 6.01 in OMC 18.06.040, restaurants with drive-through facilities are allowed in a limited number of Olympia’s commercial zoning districts (Attachment 1). These zones are:

- For Existing Restaurant Drive-Throughs:
 - Downtown Business (Permitted)
 - General Commercial (Permitted)
 - High Density Corridor-3 (Conditional)
 - High Density Corridor-4 (Permitted)

- For New Restaurant Drive-Throughs:
 - General Commercial (Permitted)
 - High Density Corridor-4 (Permitted)

Use standards on drive-throughs in commercial districts are found in OMC 18.06.060 (Attachment 2).

Note that there are no development or design standards specific to drive-through businesses. They are addressed more generally under OMC 18.06.080 Commercial districts’ development standards (General) and district-specific design guidelines (e.g., OMC 18.130 Commercial Design Criteria High Density Corridor).

Issues to Consider

The drive-through function is, by nature, and auto-oriented service. While offering the benefit of customer convenience, they also have the potential for negative impacts if inappropriately located and/or designed. Some of these concerns may include those related to traffic volume, noise and air pollution, visual impacts of long queues of idling cars, and pedestrian safety and experience.

Specifically relating to Comprehensive Plan goals, the pedestrian experience is an important consideration in determining the location and design of drive-through restaurants. The Comprehensive Plan’s Land Use and Urban Design Chapter notes Olympia’s vision for the future as “a walkable, vibrant city.” With this vision in mind, a number of Olympia’s commercial zoning districts support and foster the development of pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods and deemphasize motorized vehicle use. OMC 18.02 specifically calls out “Pedestrian-Oriented Business” as follows:

A commercial enterprise whose customers commonly arrive at a business on foot, or whose

signage, advertising, window display and entry ways are oriented toward pedestrian traffic. Pedestrian-oriented business may include restaurants, retail shops, personal service businesses, travel services, banks, (except drive-through windows), and similar establishments.

Not all zoning districts prioritize pedestrian-oriented businesses. This project will assess whether drive-through restaurants may be compatible with the intended purpose of some of Olympia's commercial zoning districts. If so, possible development criteria will also be considered that would support an effective response to the range of concerns outlined above.

Compatibility with Intent of Zoning Districts - Preliminary Review

City staff has started a preliminary analysis of the nature and intent of each of Olympia's existing commercial zoning districts as described in OMC 18.06.020(B) Commercial Districts - Purposes (Attachment 3). Based on this review, staff preliminarily recommends that drive-through restaurants would be incompatible uses in a number of zones because of their intent to support and foster the pedestrian experience (e.g., Downtown Business District and Neighborhood Retail) or because non-office commercial service uses are not permitted (Commercial Services - High Density District).

Four commercial zones are being further evaluated to determine if restaurants with drive-through service could be considered compatible with their intent:

- Auto Services District (AS)
- Medical Service District (MS)
- Professional Office/Residential Multifamily District (PO/RM)
- High Density Corridor-3 (HDC-3)

If this analysis indicates that restaurant drive-throughs could be appropriate in one, some, or all of these zones, staff will then focus attention on considering whether and which development criteria would be needed in order to address the pedestrian experience and other concerns raised over potential impacts.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Community support for actions which support the vision of a walkable, vibrant community.

Attachments:

1. Zoning Maps
2. OMC Selections on Drive-Throughs
3. OMC 18.06.020 Commercial Districts