



CITY OF SAN MATEO

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Agenda Report

Agenda Number: 1

Section Name: {{section.name}}

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TO: City Council

FROM: Drew Corbett, City Manager

PREPARED BY: Community Development Department

MEETING DATE: November 15, 2021

SUBJECT:
Auto Repair Establishments – Zoning and Parking Regulations

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide direction to staff on how to proceed with modifications to zoning regulations for auto repair establishments.

BACKGROUND:

Consideration of Zoning Code amendments for auto repair establishments began in 2012 after community concerns were raised about the impacts of auto repair establishments on residential neighborhoods, particularly along S. Claremont Street and Railroad Avenue. The City Council last discussed the zoning regulations for auto repair establishments at its regular meeting of June 4, 2018. At this meeting, Council directed staff to return with proposed amendments to regulations on parking ratios and continue requiring a Special Use Permit (SUP) for outdoor business activity. Recognizing that these businesses are vital to the community, the Council also encouraged staff to explore a parking ratio that results in increased compliance to prevent forcing existing auto repair establishments out of business.

Following the June 4, 2018 City Council meeting, staff prepared an initial draft of potential amendments to specific sections of the municipal code, none of which were brought forward to the City Council for adoption due to staffing shortages and shifting priorities. In February of 2020, staff engaged Urban Planning Partners, Inc. (UPP) as a consultant to resume staff's effort and use staff's prior work as a starting point.

UPP began its analysis by conducting field surveys between February 28, 2020 and March 6, 2020 to examine existing conditions given the amount of time that had passed. Before conducting site visits, UPP sent letters to approximately 160 auto repair establishments throughout the City to provide advanced notice and to indicate the intent to re-initiate this effort. Findings and observations are summarized in a memo by UPP, included as Attachment 1. A more detailed discussion of their findings is also included as an attachment to UPP's summary memo.

A key finding based on UPP's field survey is that less than 20 percent of auto repair establishments observed conform with current zoning requirements for on-site parking. The memo also notes that UPP did not observe any major sidewalk obstructions or businesses' performing work in the right-of-way, which had been cited as a primary concern of residential neighbors in 2012. Staff also conferred with the City's Code Enforcement Division, who noted that complaints on auto-repair businesses have not been raised since 2019.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in April 2020, this initiative was put on hold. At the beginning of this year, staff resumed this code amendment effort and reengaged with UPP to complete the modifications.

DISCUSSION:

Parking Ratio for Auto Repair Businesses

After an updated review of existing field conditions, UPP reviewed best-practices from comparable jurisdictions and the City's current Zoning Code requirements to outline potential code amendments for reducing neighborhood impacts while achieving greater compliance by auto repair businesses. UPP's recommendations, as well as the additional work needed to implement each code amendment, are described in detail in UPP's summary memo in Attachment 1.

One potential code amendment noted in the memo would be to establish a parking requirement based on the total floor area of the building rather than on the number of service bays. One example parking ratio based on floor area would be one parking stall for each 250 square-feet of floor area. The current staff practice has been to apply the parking ratio for "automobile service and gas stations" which requires two parking stalls plus two additional parking stalls for each service bay. In practice, an example 1,500 square-foot auto repair business with three service bays would require a total of eight off-street parking stalls based on the parking ratio for "automobile service and gas stations". Alternatively, if the City adopted a floor area-based parking ratio, this business would be required six off-street parking stalls based on the example parking ratio of one parking stall for each 250 square-feet of floor area.

UPP has found that the current parking requirement for "automobile service and gas stations" falls in the middle of requirements of neighboring jurisdictions (when reviewing the total number of parking spaces required for the average auto repair use business). In order to determine how a new parking ratio would impact compliance of existing auto repair businesses throughout the City, a parking demand study may also be necessary. As noted previously, less than 20 percent of existing businesses observed conform with the current parking ratio used for auto repair establishments.

To account for the number of existing auto repair businesses that do not conform to the "automobile service and gas stations" ratio, UPP has recommended that the City consider establishing special exceptions for businesses that were legally established prior to a certain date. As discussed in UPP's memo, approximately 55 auto repair businesses were established while a less restrictive parking ratio was in effect or while no parking ratio existed at all. A special exception for older auto businesses is likely unnecessary, however, given that the current Zoning Code deems these uses as legal nonconforming. In addition, more businesses will likely come into conformance if the Council directs staff to establish a lower parking ratio.

Other Potential Measures

In addition to potential amendments to parking standards, UPP has recommended other measures to increase parking supply and monitor compliance with existing Zoning Code standards. As noted previously, the Council directed staff in June of 2018 to explore regulations related to outdoor business activity. The Zoning Code currently requires that all uses (including auto repair uses) occur within an enclosed building unless authorized through a Special Use Permit. UPP and staff would recommend continuing enforcement of these Zoning Code requirements by coordinating with the City's Code Enforcement Division when outdoor activity is observed. A second measure to increase supply of parking would be to coordinate with the Public Works Department to physically modify on-street parking configurations to increase parking supply and time-limited parking enforcement on blocks where there is increased parking demand.

REQUESTED DIRECTION:

Given the infrequency of complaints to staff related to auto-repair businesses and the amount of time that has elapsed since the Council last discussed this topic, staff requests the Council's direction on the following questions:

1. Are code amendments related to auto repair uses still a priority?
2. If so, what code amendments and/or measures would the Council recommend studying further? These may include the following:
 - a. Complete a parking study to establish revised parking requirements; and/or
 - b. Engage with Public Works staff to assess restriping and repaving to increase on-street parking supply on blocks where parking is limited and/or there is increased demand.

BUDGET IMPACT:

There is no budgetary impact related to this report. If the Council directs staff to pursue code amendments and/or a parking demand study, cost associated with this work will be funded through the Community Development Department's budget.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:

In accordance with Public Resources Code Section 21065, this discussion is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because the City Council is not taking action at this time.

NOTICE PROVIDED

All meeting noticing requirements were met.

ATTACHMENTS

Att 1 – Urban Planning Partners (UPP) Executive Summary – September 9, 2021

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