

# Memo

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DATE: January 8, 2020

TO: Historic Commission

FROM: Brandon Goldman, Senior Planner

RE: Plaza Space Requirements

ORDINANCE REFERENCE: 18.4.2.040 D. 2 Public Spaces

## **Background**

The Planning Commission discussed the existing requirements for plaza space in the Detail Site Review (DSR) overlay and downtown C-1-D zone on August 27<sup>th</sup> and December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019. On October 15 the Ashland City Council directed staff to further explore the issue of how the existing plaza space requirements could potentially discourage new multi-story development within the downtown, or have the unintended consequence of altering the continuity of the historic pattern of development.

Within the Detail Site Review overlay plaza spaces currently must be incorporated into projects when building square footage is greater than 10,000 square feet. This required plaza space is to be equal to 10% of the building's total gross floor area and must incorporate four out of six listed design elements. This standard applies to large scale commercial developments within specific areas (Detail Site Review overlay) throughout the City including the downtown.

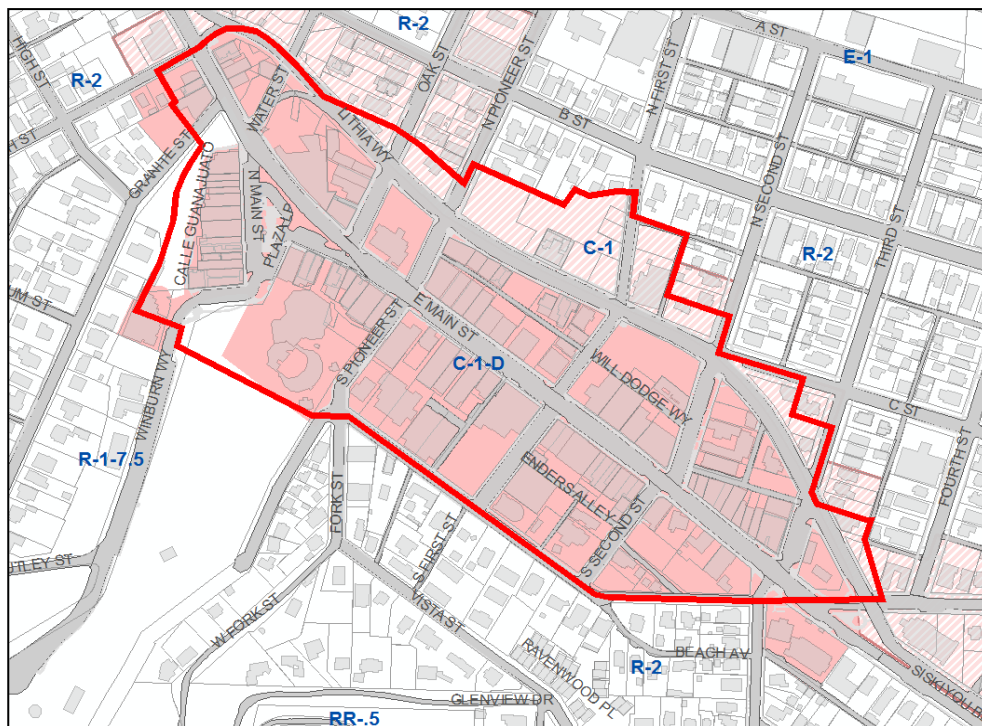
The Planning Commission's discussion at a study session on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019 explored how this "plaza space" standard could be reconsidered in the City's Detail Site Review overlay and discussed specific amendments to consider within the downtown in order to maintain the historic pattern of development. The Planning Commission expressed that the downtown has specific characteristics not present in other commercial areas of the City where the plaza standard applies. As a commercial area listed on the National Register of Historic Places, with considerable pedestrian activity due to its concentration of commercial uses, most historic buildings in the downtown are built up to the sidewalk edge. It was expressed that opportunities for infill and redevelopment within the context of this historic area should develop consistent with the established historic pattern of development to protect the character of the area. Further, a continuous "street-wall" provided by buildings constructed up to their front and side property lines promotes interaction between the commercial activity in the buildings and the people on the street. Additionally, it was noted by Planning Commissioners that plaza spaces developed within the downtown area on individual private properties, as part of meeting site design standard requirements, do not necessarily function to provide the general public with opportunities for relief and respite from the urban fabric. Public open spaces used to create a prominent civic

component within the downtown area are best placed in identified central locations and highly visible focal points and should be open to the public at large.

Consistent with the direction provided by the City Council and Planning Commission, Staff has prepared a draft ordinance amendment for consideration that would result in no longer requiring the plaza space requirement for new buildings, with floor areas of 10,000 or greater, in the downtown area. Additionally, to clarify that such spaces are on private property, and not technically “public”, the terminology in the initial draft ordinance language attached to this memo has been changed to consistently refer to “plaza space”. Although private plaza spaces are seemingly accessible to members of the public these sites are subject to private landowner restrictions, which may cause confusion regarding allowable use and access by the general public.

### **Downtown Design Standards Boundary and C-1- Zones.**

The map below shows both the Downtown Design Standards boundary (bold red line), and the Commercial Downtown, C-1-D, zone (lots with solid filled pink color). Although most of the C-1-D zoned lots fall within the Downtown Design Standards overlay boundary five properties are C-1-D zoned that either bisected, or adjacent to, the boundary line. Additionally, 16 properties on the north side of Lithia way are within Downtown Design Standards Overlay area but are not in the C-1-D zone. By including both designations within the area covered by a proposed amendment to the plaza requirements we can ensure continuity in design elements through application of the ordinance in the entire downtown area. Specifically, by applying a consistent design standard on each side of Lithia Way the development of this area can better respect the traditional rhythmic spacing of historic buildings along E. Main Street.



Existing Downtown Boundary and C-1-D zones



- May function to break the continuity of the historic built environment of shared wall commercial buildings built to the sidewalk edge, with plaza spaces located in front of or to the side of new developments.
- Reduces total gross floor area that can be developed due to the percentage of lot area that must be reserved as plaza space.
- Reduces available ground floor commercial space.
- Potentially creates a disincentive for multi-story construction due to increasing percentage of lot area on the ground floor to be dedicated as plaza space.
- Potential construction cost increases in order to cantilever upper stories over a designated plaza space.
- Potential reduction of upper story floor area due to incorporating a horizontal offset to accommodate the plaza space.
- Challenges re-development through added design constraints.

**Proposed amendment.** The proposed code amendment would remove the plaza space requirement in the downtown area, but it would still apply in other commercially zoned area outside the downtown (A Street, Ashland Street and Siskiyou Boulevard, North Main Street and sections of Hersey Street). Within the downtown area, no longer requiring private plaza spaces with individual large scale developments could have the following effects:

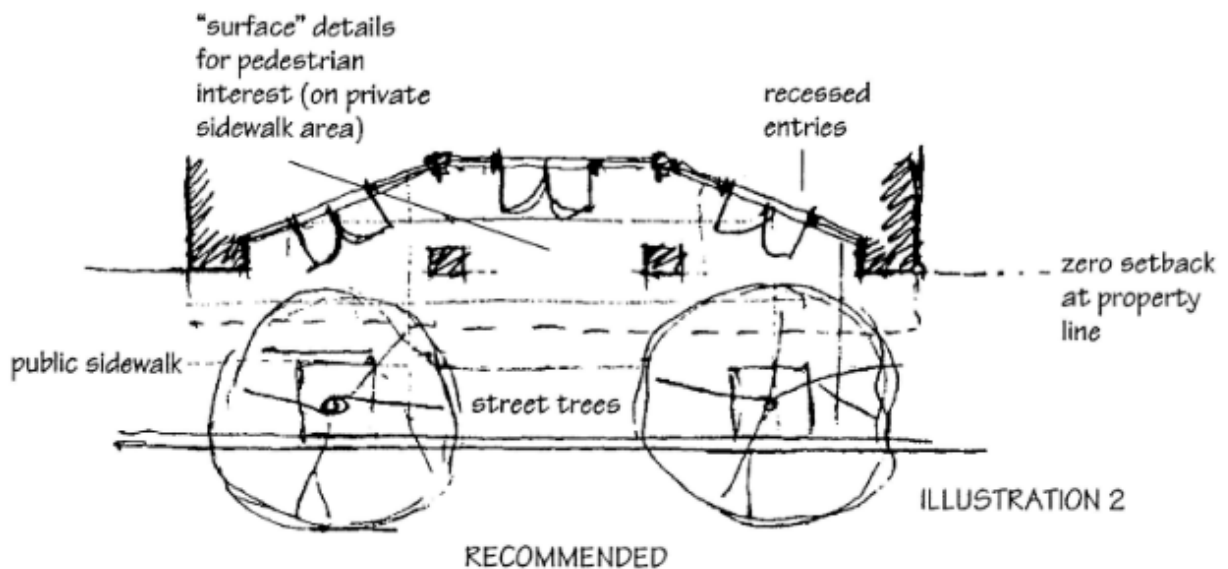
- Private open-spaces will only be provided voluntarily by developers seeking to include outdoor commercial plaza spaces (e.g. outdoor restaurant seating).
- Maintenance of the character and historic pattern of development along East and North Main Street where buildings are built to the sidewalk and to the lot lines on either side.
- Floor area reductions attributable to required plaza space for multi-story developments are eliminated, thus increases potential gross floor area on new or redeveloped buildings.
- Reduces potential constraints to redevelopment and multi-story development.
- Potential increase in the visual mass of buildings as a result of the elimination of ground level offsets in the building façade formerly designed and intended to accommodate plaza spaces.

Staff has received some general questions from the public as to whether the proposed changes to the plaza space requirement would allow for taller buildings in the downtown, increase the maximum size of buildings allowed, impact the central Plaza, or newly require buildings to be built up to the sidewalk's edge. The following bullet points address these concerns:

- The proposed amendment does not change height limits in the downtown area. Those height limits will stay as is, which are: 40-feet maximum height limit; 55-feet maximum height limit when approved through a conditional use permit procedure.
- The proposed amendment does not change the maximum building size within the C-1 and C-1-D zones which is 45,000sq.ft.
- Public open spaces such as the central Plaza, the open space in front of the Black Swan Theatre, Calle Guanajuato, the public pedestrian corridor adjacent to the McGee-

Fortmiller Building (142 East Main Street) extending from East Main Street to the Public Parking Structure, would be unaffected by the proposed amendment. Other public rights-of-way or parks properties within the downtown would also be unaffected by the proposed amendment.

- The existing downtown design standards ([18.4.2.060C.2](#)) currently require that buildings shall maintain a zero setback from the sidewalk or property line, although ground level entries should be recessed from the public right-of-way and have detailing and materials that create a sense of entry. These design standards would be unchanged by the proposed changes regarding plaza space within the downtown area. Figure 18.4.060.C.2 in the Ashland Municipal Code illustrates these requirements:



### Next Steps

The Historic Commission's recommendations regarding the attached draft ordinance will be provided to the Planning Commission and to City Council at public hearings on February 11<sup>th</sup> and March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020 respectively.

### Attachments:

- Draft Ordinance amending Plaza Space Standards
- [Planning Commission Draft Minutes 12/10/2019](#)
- Letters:
  - [Thalden letter](#) dated March 12, 2019
  - [Falkenstein letter](#) dated October 13, 2019
  - [Fields letter](#) dated December 6, 2020