

Council to hold first reading on bid to eliminate parking fee

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PORTSMOUTH — The City Council at tonight's meeting will consider first reading of an effort to eliminate downtown parking requirements for nonresidential uses and to repeal a controversial parking impact fee.

Elimination of the requirements and impact fee is being proposed through an amendment to the city's zoning ordinance relative to off-street parking standards in the downtown overlay district.

As currently written, the zoning ordinance states restaurants must provide one parking space per 100 square feet. Upper-floor uses, residential or nonresidential, require one space per 1,000 square feet. Other ground floor uses, such as retail or office space, have no parking requirements.

If a business owner or developer wants to avoid the parking provision, they can compensate at a rate of \$2,200 per space.

Since it was enacted nearly 15 years ago, the impact fee has brought in more than \$800,000 in revenue for the city. The revenues have been used by the city for a variety of public parking and transit enhancements, such as the lease cost for the Masonic Lot, new meters and the addition to the High-Hanover parking garage.

Despite its added revenue to the city, the impact fee has been cited by many business owners as being a major obstacle to locating downtown.

As proposed, the amendment would eliminate the requirement for businesses to provide off-street parking spaces, change the residential parking requirements to 1.5 parking spaces per dwelling unit, and eliminate the option to make a payment in lieu of providing required off-street parking.

The Planning Board voted unanimously in April to recommend the zoning amendment. The Board of Adjustment has also agreed with the amendment, and over the last few months has granted variances to businesses looking to have the requirements and impact fee waived.

The amendment requires three votes of the council and a public hearing.

If approved, the council will schedule a second reading and public hearing for the next meeting, to be held June 25.

In other business

The council will consider establishing a work session on how to best dispose of the Connie Bean Community Center. The work session is being proposed for 6 p.m. June 25.

Tonight's regular meeting will begin at 7 p.m. in the Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers at City Hall. At 6 p.m., the council will hold a work session to get an update on the city's wastewater treatment upgrade efforts.