

**TOWN OF WASHINGTON**  
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September 15, 2021

To: The Zoning Commission

From: Michelle Gorra, Economic and Community Development Coordinator

RE: Proposed Revisions to the Business Districts  
Public Hearing September 27, 2021

Dear Zoning Commissioners,

Thank you for looking at the Zoning Regulations for the Business Districts. I appreciate your efforts to make the districts more consistent with each other. However, I have a few concerns with the regulations you are proposing. My overarching concern is that some of the changes being proposed would make the districts more restrictive. Our Business Districts are small as it is, and running a successful 21<sup>st</sup> century business in buildings and lots from last century and older is already a challenge.

The first example of the proposed changes being more restrictive is 7.8.1 which changes from the Commission being allow to grant a waiver of Section 3.2 (the use of the entire lot shall be governed by the more restrictive district condition) to “split lots...the commission may issue a special permit for the portion of the lot that is wholly within the B1 district”. The previous language gave the Commission the ability to allow commercial use on the entire lot if such use met with the conditions for the Special Permit. Maintaining the ability to consider each property on its own merits would allow for the Commission to maintain the character of the district while also allowing for limited growth.

The waiver was already allowed in New Preston- 7.8.1 and in Marbledale- 9.5.2. **(9.8.1)** To be consistent and not more restrictive the Commission could allow the same waiver of 3.2 in the Depot-8.8.1 and in Woodville-10.8.1.

Another place the proposed changes are more restrictive is 7.5 and 8.5, Lot Coverage. The proposed language allows the Commission to approve lot coverage “of up to 50 percent”. The previous language allowed the Commission to approve an increase at your discretion. If you look at the Business Districts

of New Preston and The Depot most of the lots that are developed for commercial use are well beyond 50%. Any new business would be at a great disadvantage and would not be allowed to develop in a way that is “both appropriate for Washington and consistent with the historical character of Washington Depot.” I would suggest that the Commission leave 7.5 and 8.5 as they were and include the same language in 9.5 and 10.5 for the Marbledale and Woodville Districts that would allow the Commission the discretion to increase the lot coverage with no maximum.

The new language in 7.6 and 8.6 “the Commission may .... approve a reduction **OF UP TO 50 PERCENT** in the minimum setback” is also more limiting than the previous language which allowed the commission to approve a non-specified reduction. Again, there are many examples of businesses in New Preston and the Depot that are well beyond this new language and any new business would be at a disadvantage. This same new language is carried over into 9.6 and 10.6 and I would suggest that the current language in 7.6 and 8.6 be extended into 9.6 and 10.6 allowing the Commission the discretion to reduce the minimum set backs on a case by case basis.

The change in 7.9.9, 8.9.9, 9.6.9 and 10.9.9 from 25-foot setbacks from non-commercial property to 50 feet is again more restrictive. Many of the lots in New Preston are so small that a 50-foot setback would bring you right into their building.

I am not aware of a problem in the Business Districts the Zoning Commission was trying to solve beyond the desire to make the language more consistent between the Business Districts. It seems that the Commission may have inadvertently proposed changes that were more restrictive than what was already in place.

Since the mills left ages ago, Washington has not been an industrial center. We do however, have shops, restaurants and service businesses that our Town has come to rely on. They are part of the fabric of our community and maintaining and promoting our small Business Districts is essential to our vitality. I hope the Zoning Commission will reconsider the proposed changes to the Business Districts and give the Commission the discretion to allow appropriate development. I would be happy to work with the Commission or any committee thereof to work on revisions to the proposed changes.

Kind Regards,

Michelle Gorra  
Town of Washington  
Economic and Community Development Coordinator