

## **Memorandum**

**To:** Planning Commission

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**Date:** October 21, 2015

**Subject:** **Old Town Historic Core and Leary Way**

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### **MEETING PURPOSE**

- Follow up on Planning Commission discussion regarding Leary Way
- Seek feedback regarding staff proposed alternatives for further consideration for the cross section of Leary Way

### **INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

During review of staff recommended Zoning Code Amendments for the Old Town Historic Core Overlay and Gilman Street, Commissioners identified questions, interests, and concerns as part of the discussion of the staff proposed width of Leary Way's sidewalks. Among these questions and concerns are:

- What is the vision for Downtown and the Old Town Historic Core?
- What were staff's desired outcomes for the cross-section for Leary Way?
- What is the relationship of this proposal to parking and to mobility needs associated with future light rail?
- Is the staff proposed amendment for Leary Way consistent with the Transportation Master Plan?

This memo provides information in preparation for Commission's discussion and feedback at the study session. Attachment A provides a proposed agenda for this study session which notes three areas that are particularly important for Planning Commission discussion and direction: (3) Leary Way on street parking or no on street parking, (4) parcel conditions, and (6) Leary Way sidewalk - existing and proposed alternatives for further consideration as well as (8) wrap-up discussion.

## Vision Overview

The Comprehensive Plan describes the vision for Downtown and Old Town. *Attachment B* is an excerpt of the vision and the following bullets provide a summary:

### Downtown

- An outstanding place to work, shop, live and recreate and a destination for many in Redmond and the region
- Attractive offices, stores, services and residential developments contribute to vibrancy while retaining a comfortable and connected feel
- Many more people live in the Downtown
- Strategic public and private investments have created a true multidimensional urban center with new and expanded public amenities
- It is easy to walk, bicycle, use transit or drive between various portions of the Downtown as well as to the rest of Redmond and the region  
Many visitors walk or take transit to get to destinations or park in a conveniently located garage

### Old Town

- A focus for retail activity that thrives and attracts pedestrians, providing a distinctive selection of stores, restaurants, boutiques and theatres, as well as housing
- New buildings blend with refurbished buildings, retaining the area's historic character

The Zoning Code includes purpose statements that also speak to the vision for Downtown and Old Town. Below is a summary of portions that are particularly relevant to Leary Way and the surrounding land use. *Attachment B* also includes the complete purpose statements.

- Downtown
  - Promote the development of Downtown as an Urban Center, attracting people and businesses by providing an excellent transportation system, diverse economic opportunities, a variety of well-designed and distinctive places to live, and proximity to shopping, recreation and other amenities
  - Provide a pedestrian- and bicycle-oriented environment with “local” streets appropriate for a destination location.
- Old Town
  - The Old Town district is established to be a center of pedestrian-oriented retail activity in the Downtown neighborhood.
  - The regulations shaping development in this district provide for an urban village pattern and rhythm which encourages narrow ground floor storefronts, small blocks, narrow streets with curbside parking, mixed-use residential/office/service buildings, and pedestrian-scale architecture.
  - The pedestrian nature of the area is emphasized through lower parking requirements and plans for creation of parking lots/structure in a few central locations at the edge of these areas.
  - This district provides for a full range of retail uses, eating and entertainment establishments, general and professional services, and residential uses.

**Desired Outcomes for Leary Way Cross Section – Technical Committee Recommendation**

The existing conditions along Leary Way include landmarked buildings, other buildings that are unlikely to redevelop, and some properties that are likely to redevelop. It also includes several businesses with high customer turnover. The existing sidewalk width is 8 to 10 feet. Overall, staff’s goal with regard to the recommended cross section for Leary Way was to balance achievement of the key vision elements such as character, pedestrians, and business/development as shown below. Recognizing the conditions and unique characteristics in this area, this approach is not intended to achieve any one element at the highest level but rather to balance all three elements.

Vision Outcomes	Supporting the Downtown & Old Town Vision
Retain character of Old Town Historic Core	Supporting retention of landmark and other historic buildings and a unique local street
Pedestrians able to walk comfortably	Attracting people Strengthening destination
Facilitate and support business and development	Providing mixture of uses Diverse opportunities Well designed & distinctive places

The initial Technical Committee recommended code included a modification to the required sidewalk width, from 14 feet to 12 feet. Staff believed that a 12 foot sidewalk width would help retain the character of the Old Town Historic Core with the feeling of a local street and opportunity to retain historic buildings, ensure pedestrians could comfortably walk through the area, support business by maintaining on-street parking, and support development by reducing the amount of land that would need to be dedicated for right-of-way.

**On-Street Parking Analysis**

Today, Leary Way provides 19 on-street, two-hour parking spaces and one 15-minute parking space. In past meetings, Commissioners discussed whether the street width occupied by on-street parking might be better used for other purposes (e.g. Additional sidewalk width) and whether parking should be removed based on its effects on vehicular operations.

Following these discussions, staff hired transportation consultants Fehr and Peers to conduct a “pro/con” analysis of on-street parking, drawing on empirical sources and professional best practices as available (see *Attachment C – Advantages and Disadvantages of On-Street Parking*).

As noted in the analysis, the decision as to whether on-street parking is appropriate on a given street involves a tradeoff among different factors. When viewed through the lens of the Old Town vision and the role of Leary Way in the Downtown street system, staff believes that the advantages of on-street parking outweigh its negatives. Staff therefore recommends retaining on-street parking at this time and not undertaking a revision to this portion of the Leary Way cross section in the Zoning Code. The following advantages of on-street parking are particularly relevant in the context of Leary:

- Provides convenient access to businesses;
- Buffers pedestrians from traffic;
- Calms traffic; and
- Boosts street-level vitality.

In addition to the merits noted above, there are practical reasons to retain parking on Leary Way. Parking removal/sidewalk widening would require a costly reconstruction of Leary Way to relocate utilities—a cost that would likely be borne by the City at a time when many other high-priority transportation projects wait for funding.

### **Parcel Conditions**

Leary Way connects SR-520 to Redmond’s Downtown, bisects the Downtown urban center and the Old Town Historic Core, and will ultimately function as a linkage to the Downtown light rail station. The street is unique to the City and to the Downtown in that it features seven of the 16 historic landmarked properties from the Redmond Heritage Resource Register and has a narrow character stemming from its origin over 100 years in the past as a main street through the original business district.

The parcels along Leary Way, in the Historic Core echo the City’s first platting activities by retaining most of their original dimensions. Generally, the parcels measure 40 feet in width along their primary street frontage and either 60 or 120 feet in depth. This size poses some challenges to modern, urban development such as:

- Providing a balance of engaging commercial frontage and vehicular access and on-site parking;
- Accommodating common floor plans that include an internal hallway and residential or office units along both sides of the hallway; and
- Incorporating setbacks and stepbacks that support wide pedestrian walkways as well as historic or traditional Downtown character.

Makers’ 2015 assessment of the City’s urban center design standards noted this condition including the variability and engagement offered for the pedestrian. They suggested for the City’s varying ROW dimensions and unusual corners, strict dimensional standards could be challenging to apply in all cases. They recommend some specific flexibility, based on clear criteria similar to street frontage typologies seen elsewhere such as in Redwood City, CA.

*Attachment D* shows the current parcel dimensions within the Historic Core Overlay.

### **Recent Activity and Future Work**

Commissioners have commented on the relationship between the scope for the Old Town Historic Core and Gilman Street amendment package and other projects. These include ST3 planning and related studies, a Pedestrian System Strategic Plan, future consideration of the City's 2014 parking study, and possibly other studies and projects. *Attachment E* provides a summary of these projects. Additionally, staff is finalizing an update to the Sidewalk Café/Right of Way Use Permit that is intended to apply to annual renewals regarding business use of right of way adjacent to their building.

### **Existing and Proposed Alternatives**

So far, the Technical Committee Report for Old Town Historic Core and Gilman Street includes two alternatives with regard to Leary Way cross section – the initial recommendation for a 12 foot standard for sidewalks and a no-action approach of keep the sidewalk standard at 14 feet (*Attachment F*).

Staff proposes an additional alternative described below for the Commission's discussion and consideration at its October 21 meeting. This alternative would be a performance based standard that:

- Ensures that a through walkway provides for adequate pedestrian mobility;
- Reflects that several buildings will not or are unlikely to redevelop; and
- Identifies the future face of buildings for properties likely to develop.

Staff proposes to include this alternative and pro/con analysis for all 3 alternatives for Commission's continued public hearing and discussion as part of the Old Town Historic Core and Gilman Street amendments.

The three alternatives propose maintaining the existing Leary Way curb and on-street parking. Staff seeks the Commission's discussion and feedback regarding these three alternatives being those to continue for further consideration.

### **Transportation Master Plan Amendment**

All three alternatives also take into account a need to update the Transportation Master Plan (TMP). Commissioner Miller previously noted the cross-reference from Appendix F of the TMP and the Redmond Zoning Code (RZC) for street design standards. This cross reference refers specifically to the 2012 version of the Zoning Code. For clarity, staff proposes removing this date, and for consistency with other standards, staff also proposes moving all portions of street design standards to the RZC, and to include this proposal as part of Commission's continued public hearing and discussion as part of the Old Town Historic Core and Gilman Street amendments.

**PREPARATION FOR OCTOBER 21 STUDY SESSION AND NEXT STEPS**

Staff requests the Commission review the attached items in advance of the October 21, 2015 meeting.

Please contact Kim Dietz or Patrick McGrath regarding prior to the meeting if there are questions or concerns.

**ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Proposed Agenda for Study Session**
- B. Comprehensive Plan Urban Centers Vision and RZC Purpose Statements for Downtown and for the Old Town Zone**
- C. Advantages and Disadvantages of On-Street Parking**
- D. Map of Historic Core Parcels**
- E. Summary of Studies and Other Work Relevant to Leary Way**
- F. Technical Committee Recommendation and Current Code (No Action Alternative)**