

Thurston County Stormwater Solutions

LID Fact Sheet: Parking

Issue

In most communities, surface parking lots are second only to streets in the total amount of impervious area they create. Low-impact development (LID) parking strategies to reduce stormwater runoff include adjusting minimum/maximum parking ratios, using pervious pavements, supporting shared parking facilities, decreasing parking stall and aisle dimensions, and increasing parking lot landscaping requirements.

Why are changes needed?

The amount of parking area around a development is generally tied to its use. For example, under the TCC, a new single-family home is required to have two parking spaces; a new elementary school is required to have one space for every classroom and office; a new retail store is required to provide one space for every 200 square feet of floor area. In general, Thurston County's current rules encourage an excess of parking, and standard parking stall sizes are larger than necessary, when compared with recent national studies on parking demand. In addition, Thurston County specifies only a minimum number of required parking stalls for various uses, rather than a maximum. Reducing these requirements would minimize new impervious surfaces, as would creating incentives for alternative parking arrangements (shared parking, above or underground structures). Additional landscaping requirements would help treat stormwater runoff from parking areas.

What changes are proposed to current regulations?

Some of the proposed changes include:

- Establish maximum parking ratios.
- Reduce standard parking stall size to 9x18 feet from 9x20 feet.
- Keep compact stall size at 7.5x15 feet; give developers the option to have 35% compact stalls.
- Allow the potential to designate 10% of stalls as "oversize" at 9x20 feet.
- Change aisle width to 21 feet from 22 feet.
- Allow more credit for joint and shared parking.
- Require that all commercial, industrial, institutional, and recreational uses that require 25 or more parking spaces provide a minimum of five bicycle parking spaces.
- Require landscaping within parking areas to be used for stormwater treatment.

Parking lots are already hard to maneuver around. Are parking stalls getting any more narrow?

No – the county is not proposing narrower parking stalls; the width for a standard stall would remain nine feet. The draft codes do shrink the length of a standard stall by two feet. This is because Thurston County’s current parking stall size is larger than most other jurisdictions, although its “compact” size is smaller. Thurston County’s parking lot aisle widths also are a foot or so larger than requirements for Olympia and Tumwater, and the draft code would bring the county closer in line with other jurisdictions.

What about parking for compact cars? Larger trucks and vans?

The draft code increases the percentage of stalls that can be designated for compact cars – an increase from 25% to 35%. Developers can also designate up to 10% of stalls as “oversize.” Oversize stalls can be 20 feet long.

What if I have a use that will require less or more parking than required?

No special approval is needed for designs that increase or decrease the number of spaces by 10% above or below the requirement. Modifications greater than 10% but less than 40% can be approved by the Resource Stewardship Department during review. Modifications greater than 40% must be approved by the hearing examiner. The number of spaces can be reduced by demonstrating that sufficient on-street parking or transit options are available, by sharing parking with another user, or by submitting a parking demand study that shows a reduced need for parking. The number of spaces can be increased if parking is contained in a structure, such as a parking garage, that does not increase the total amount of impervious surfaces, or by submitting a parking demand study showing need for more spaces.

Are special surfaces allowed in parking lots, such as pervious asphalt or paving blocks?

Yes. Parking lots would be allowed to be constructed of any approved hard surface, including pervious materials. Specific guidance on allowed pervious pavements will be included in the Drainage Design and Erosion Control Manual.

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