



Memorandum

DATE: September 12, 2023

TO: Chair Ledell and Planning Commission

FROM: Chad Eiken, Director, Community Development Department
Becky Coutinho, Associate Planner, Community Development Department

RE: Proposed Warehouse Code Amendments

At the July 25, 2023 workshop, planning staff provided the Planning Commission with an overview of the moratorium on large warehouses, the purpose and results of the study completed by the City's consultants to help understand key differences between large e-commerce warehouses and (typically smaller) traditional warehouses. Additionally, staff outlined potential development code amendments to address adverse impacts from very large warehouses, as well as measures that can further the City Council's stated climate action policy goals. Planning Commission discussed the potential development code changes, and provided their initial feedback to staff at the workshop.

On August 14, 2023, City Council also held a workshop to review the potential code amendments and provided their initial feedback to staff.

Subsequent to both workshops, planning staff has refined the list of potential code amendments and developed more specific "ordinance-ready" text in anticipation of bringing an ordinance to Planning Commission and City Council for environmental review, public comment, and then public hearings in October.

Key Changes in Applicability of Proposed Standards

As a result of additional analysis by planning staff, several notable changes are proposed to the applicability of development standards to warehouses. Planning staff welcomes input from the Planning Commission in regard to the following areas:

1. Rather than allowing warehouses larger than 250,000 square feet in the IL Light Industrial and IH Heavy Industrial Districts by conditional use permit, staff is proposing to allow such warehouses as a limited use in the IH District only.
2. To stay within the scope of the moratorium and identified concerns with very large warehouses, new special use and development standards (under the limited use provisions) would only apply to warehouses larger than 250,000 square feet (with the exception of minimum parking

requirement and maximum lot coverage). Warehouses smaller than 250,000 square feet would not be subject to additional limitations under the proposed set of code amendments.

3. For ease of tracking and to remove unintended consequences from partially-completed warehouse complexes in the IL District, the new use and development standards would only apply to single buildings of 250,000 square feet in size, as opposed to groups of multiple buildings on one site that have a total building area more than 250,000 square feet.

Proposed Amendments to VMC Title 20

The following amendments to the City’s Land Use and Development Code, VMC Title 20, are proposed to address concerns regarding large warehouse developments that exceed 250,000 square feet in total building area.

1. Amend Use Table VMC 20.440.030-1, Industrial Zoning Districts Use Table

Current Situation: Warehouse/Freight Movement Use is allowed as a limited use in the Light Industrial (IL) District subject to no outdoor storage, and as a permitted use in the Heavy Industrial (IH) District with no limitations. Such use is prohibited in all other zoning districts.

Proposed Change: Make Warehouse/Freight Movement Use 250,000 square feet or larger in a single building prohibited in the IL District (smaller facilities continue as a limited use) and allow warehouses 250,000 square feet or larger as a limited use in the IH District, subject to certain requirements (smaller warehouse facilities continue as a permitted use).

Intended Outcome: Large warehouses would effectively be allowed in the Port of Vancouver or Columbia Business Center where they are more compatible with surrounding uses (and away from residential districts), and would be subject to certain additional development requirements.

Proposed Language (changes shown in red):

USE	OCI	IL	IH	ECX
Warehouse/Freight Movement	X	L/ X ¹²	P/ L ³⁸	X

¹² Warehouse/Freight Movement buildings up to 250,000 square feet of gross floor area on the ground floor of the building ~~Permitted~~ allowed as a limited use, provided all activities, except outdoor storage of materials are wholly contained within building(s); buildings larger than 250,000 square feet of gross floor area on the ground floor of the building are prohibited.

³⁸ Warehouse/Freight Movement uses larger than 250,000 square feet of gross floor area on the ground floor of the building allowed as a limited use, subject to miscellaneous special use standards of VMC 20.895.120.

2. Amend the IH, Heavy Industrial Dimensional Standards at VMC 20.440.040-1 to lower the maximum lot coverage for warehouses to 75%.

Current Situation: The lot coverage standard determines how much area of a property can be occupied by a structure, and is shown as a percentage. The current standard in the IH, Heavy Industrial District is 100%, which means that 100% of the property can be developed for a building, which does not leave any room on-site for parking, loading, or tree planting.

Proposed Change: Reduce the maximum lot coverage standard from 100% to 75% for all warehouse/freight movement uses.

Intended Outcome: Allow for on-site space to plant trees to reduce climate impacts from very large warehouse buildings.

Proposed Language:

STANDARD	OCI	IL	IH
Maximum Lot Coverage	100%	75%	100% <u>/75%⁷</u>

⁷ Warehouse/Freight Distribution uses in buildings over 250,000 square feet of gross floor area on the ground floor shall have a maximum lot coverage of 75%

3. Amend Miscellaneous Special Use Standards VMC 20.895 to add a new section regarding Large Warehouse special standards, as VMC 20.895.120.

Current Situation: There are currently no special use or development standards for large warehouses, which generate significantly more freight movement both day and night, and have potential to contribute to adverse environmental and climate outcomes through fossil fuel consumption for power, heat absorption by building materials, and impervious surfaces. Minimum required parking spaces are calculated at 1 space per 2,000 square feet of building area. The maximum lot coverage (percent of a parcel that is occupied by a building) in the IH district is 100%.

Proposed Change: Warehouses larger than 250,000 square feet would be allowed in the IH, Heavy Industrial District subject to special development standards that prohibit truck traffic along Fruit Valley Road, reduce the minimum parking requirement, reduce the maximum lot coverage, and require certain climate action measures such as: solar-ready roofs (weight load capacity and electrical), EV and truck dock charging outlets, white-colored roofs to reduce heat storage, skylights or clerestory windows to allow natural light, prohibit truck idling, architectural features (such as windows, darker colors,

articulation of façade, etc.) or treed buffer if adjacent to public streets to reduce visual impacts.

Intended Outcome: Reduce impacts from large truck traffic to priority equity areas, reduce visual impacts along public streets, and improve environmental and climate action outcomes.

Proposed Language:

20.895.120 Warehouses Larger than 250,000 Square Feet (NEW)

- A. Defined. The standards in this section apply to warehouse/freight movement buildings larger than 250,000 square feet of gross floor area on the ground floor.
- B. Traffic. Tractor trailers delivering goods to or from warehouses covered by this section shall not travel on Fruit Valley Road.
- C. Visual impact reduction. Warehouses covered by this section located adjacent to a public street or highway shall provide a combination of:
 - 1. Architectural elements such as windows, articulation of the façade, and/or moderately-dark color (e.g. not white or light-colored) walls, and
 - 2. A 25-foot deep landscaped buffer between the building and street or highway consisting of evergreen trees that will reach 30-40 feet in height at maturity.
- D. Climate action measures.
 - 1. An area of the project site equivalent to 20% of the building footprint area shall be planted with trees at a density of at least thirty trees per acre.
 - 2. Building roofs shall be designed and constructed to handle the structural load of solar panels and equipment, and electrical panels and conduit shall be installed to facilitate rooftop solar panels in the future.
 - 3. Skylights and/or clerestory windows shall be provided to facilitate natural light.
 - 4. Roofs shall be white or light colored to reduce heat retention.
 - 5. Truck engine idling is prohibited while parked or loading/unloading.
 - 6. All loading docks shall be outfitted with outlets for charging electric-powered trucks.
 - 7. Electric Vehicle Charging. EV charging stations shall be provided at a minimum of 20% of parking spaces.

4. Amend Table 20.945.070-2 Minimum Off-Street Vehicle Parking Requirements to lower the parking requirement for all warehouse uses.

Current Situation: Warehouses must provide a minimum of one parking space for every 2,000 square feet of building area, typically for employees as opposed to customers. While this rate has not caused any major problems, larger facilities which are increasingly more automated may not need as much parking for employees, so the minimum requirement may inadvertently be resulting in more impervious surface and spaces that will not be used.

Proposed Change: Require that parking spaces be provided for warehouses at a minimum rate of 1.0 space per 5,000 square feet.

Intended Outcome: Reduce the minimum amount of parking and impervious surface that is needed to serve warehouse uses. Warehouse developers would be able to provide more parking if they choose to, but city regulations would not be the reason that more parking spaces are provided than are needed. As an example, a 250,000 square foot building would be required to provide only 50 spaces, as opposed to 125 spaces under current regulations. Reducing the amount of paved surfaces improves storm water and climate outcomes (less heat retention) and creates more space for tree plantings.

Proposed Language:

Table 20.945.070-2 Minimum Off-Street Parking Requirements

Use	Minimum
Warehouse/Freight Movement	1.0/ 2,000-5,000

Next Steps

Following the Planning Commission workshop, staff will prepare an ordinance amending VMC Title 20, incorporating feedback received by the Commission and then will prepare and issue a SEPA Environmental Determination which will assess any significant adverse impacts created by the ordinance if approved. The SEPA determination will be published and made available for public and agency comment.

City Council will hold a workshop on the proposed ordinance on October 2, 2023.

Additional stakeholder outreach is anticipated following the Planning Commission’s workshop.

Staff anticipates being able to bring a draft ordinance to Planning Commission for a public hearing in October, after which a public hearing will be scheduled with the City Council.

The moratorium on large warehouses is scheduled to expire on December 6, 2023.

Staff Contact

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