



Memorandum

DATE: July 31, 2008

TO: Shoreline Planning Commission

FROM: Steven Cohn, Senior Planner

RE: Modifying Permanent Regulations for Regional Business Zone

Over the last several months, there has been a great deal of discussion about the residential densities permitted in the Regional Business zoning district. To provide staff, the Planning Commission, and the Council some time to consider alternative regulations, the Council adopted a moratorium and interim development regulations on May 12, 2008 (Ord. 505) that limits development of residential complexes to a maximum density of 110 units/acre. The RB Moratorium will expire on November 11, 2008. By that date, the City Council will have to either adopt permanent regulations for the RB zone, or extend the moratorium by up to six more months.

The Commission will be considering options to modify the Regional Business zone over the next few months. This meeting is a first step in this discussion. There will likely be a subsequent study session in September for further discussion and development of a Commission recommendation. Under this scenario, it is likely that the Commission would not have its hearing until November. In that eventuality, the staff would advise the City Council to extend the moratorium and interim regulations at least to the end of the year.

BACKGROUND

The Regional Business (RB) zone is the most intense commercial/mixed-use zone in Shoreline. It permits 65-foot buildings (5-6 stories tall) and a wide variety of uses including retail, office, and residential.

Much of the recent discussion has centered on the regulatory language in the Development Code which does not set a maximum density in the RB zone. The density is not "unlimited" as some have suggested; in fact, the density is effectively limited by the parking that is required, and by setbacks and landscaping requirements which serve to reduce the building size envelope.

However, the lack of a specific density number in the RB zone has led some to argue that one be imposed. Staff looked at the likely potential for residential uses in the RB zone a few months ago, and given the market conditions at the time, came up with a likely range of development of 90-120 units per acre – perhaps approaching 140 dwellings per acre if conditions are quite favorable.

Here is a list of recent and proposed developments and their associated densities (i.e., units per acre)

Name of Development	Dwelling Units per Acre
Echo Lake (all units combined)	89
Nikon Building (near Aurora)	100
Market Square (On Aurora, proposed)	138
Arabella, North City (including current and proposed, combined)	139
Ridgecrest Mixed Use Project (proposed)	110

STAFF’S INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT REVISIONS TO THE RB ZONE

At the Council’s May 12 meeting when Council member discussed the moratorium, several members suggested that the Commission consider R-48 as the base density in RB, with a potential to achieve greater density through incentives that provide public benefit.

What should be the base density; can it be exceeded?

1. The revised zone would have a base density of 48 du/acre. All residential developments that contain more than 10 dwellings would be required to have the following:
 - a. recycling space
 - b. bicycle racks
 - c. plug-ins for electric cars

2. Staff’s current thinking is to institute a system of increased density for projects that provide additional public amenities, similar to the regulations adopted for Planned Area 2 zoning in Ridgecrest.

If a developer would like to build to a density greater than 48 du/acre, there would be a requirement to provide the following public amenities:

- To achieve 100 dwellings per acre, provide all of the above plus
 - mixed use
 - no reduction in parking, other than provisions for shared parking
 - underbuilding parking

- To achieve 150 dwellings per acre, provide all of the above plus
 - meet certain “green building” standards (BuiltGreen or LEED certification)
 - Provide affordable housing (level of affordability needs to be developed)

It should be noted that even these “permanent” RB regulations may have a short shelf life for RB-zoned properties in the Town Center Study Area. As staff develops a subarea plan for Town Center, we will also be thinking about development regulations that would implement the plan. This will allow the Commission and public to consider the plan and the regulations together as a package. Building heights and densities, or even the form of regulation (e.g., form-based codes and floor area ratios) might be deemed appropriate for Town Center as a result of the subarea study. The regulations for Town Center may allow for even great density/intensity than the “permanent” RB regulations that you and the Council may be considering over the next few months. However, these changes would only occur after Commission and Council review and adoption.

Should there be additional transition requirements?

Staff considered modifying the transition requirements, but concluded that the current requirements, adopted earlier this year, do a good job of providing transition between single family homes and taller and higher intensity uses. Current regulations include:

- 35 foot maximum building height at the setback line with a 1:2 slope from the top of the 3rd story.
- Cannot have more than 50 ft of façade without a break
- Development abutting SF requires Type 1 landscaping
- Vehicular access to RB, CB or I zones shall be from arterial street. If this is not feasible, developer will implement traffic mitigation measures to mitigate potential cut-thru traffic

Is development of a new “transition zone” an idea worth exploring?

In addition to modifying the current Regional Business zone, staff suggests that the City also consider the creation of a new zone that would be applicable in some situations.

There are some properties that, due to their physical location, site depth, and proximity to other zoning, are appropriate for a less intense zoning than RB, which is the most intense commercial zone in Shoreline. In staff’s view, a more appropriate zone might be something like a “Professional/Residential (PR)” zone. In our thinking this zone would allow ONLY multifamily (at a density that is less than the maximum permitted in RB) and offices. It might be helpful to think about a height limit as well, something in the range of 4-5 stories.

Staff briefly considered using Shoreline’s existing Office zone as a transition zone. The existing Office zone does not work well for transition because it allows the same restaurant and retail uses as the Community Business zone. If the city concludes that a transition zone is worth pursuing, it probably makes more sense to create a new zone rather than modify a current one.

NEXT STEPS

At the next Commission meeting, staff requests that the Commission consider and discuss each of these questions to provide direction to staff for the Commission’s subsequent discussion. If you have questions or comments on the ideas presented in this memo, please contact Steven Cohn prior to the meeting, at 206-801-2511 or scohn@ci.shoreline.wa.us