



**TOWN OF BELMONT  
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

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TO:            Thomas Younger, Town Administrator  
FROM;        The Planning Board  
DATE:        April 9, 2009

RE:            Shared Institutional Parking

Recently, residents questioned the use of a house of worship parking lot by a business that was parking its vehicles on the lot. The Board of Selectmen asked the Planning Board to investigate the types of uses occurring at house of worship and school lots and to provide recommendations that preserve acceptable practices while maintaining residential values and aesthetics.

Parking in Belmont, whether for residential, commercial or institutional uses, has always been difficult. For many years, much of this parking demand was accommodated through the use of parking lots associated with religious or educational institutions. (Of the 19 Houses of Worship in Belmont, 13 have parking lots.) These lots exist and are often empty - religious institutions typically use their lots one or two nights a week and once on the weekend, while educational institutions use theirs during the school year from Monday through Friday from 8 to 4. Throughout Town house of worship and school parking lots are used by employees of nearby businesses, customers, parents, neighbors etc. for drop off and pick up, for day time and over night parking. The use of these lots provides some relief to a very difficult situation.

The use of house of worship and school parking lots, however, is in violation of the Town's Zoning By-Law. While the religious and educational uses are exempt from zoning, the use of these lots is limited to those who are conducting business within that institution.

The Planning Board invited the houses of worship to several meetings to discuss the issue and to develop possible solutions. These meetings were well attended with approximately 10 houses of worship represented. The Chair of the Planning Board also spoke with the Chief of Police, the Director of Community Development and Public School Officials, including the School's Supervisor of Buildings and Facilities, to get their perspective on the use of these parking lots. These officials recognized that these lots provide significant relief to the parking situation and strongly encouraged the continued use of them. The Supervisor explained that the school lots are used pretty extensively by the neighborhood to accommodate overnight parking. The Chief of Police also participated in one of the public meetings.

The outline attached below is the outcome of the meetings with representatives from the houses of worship. The Planning Board will take these points and turn them into a zoning amendment for the Annual Town Meeting. The public hearing for a proposed amendment will be held on Thursday, April 16, 2009.

Outline of policy guidelines to govern non-accessory uses of House of Worship and School parking lots

- I. Uses the Planning Board supports allowing houses of worship and schools to agree to by right (These uses would only be available with explicit permission of the owner.):
  - a. Residential overnight parking of up to the number of parking spaces in the lot for vehicles not considered commercial as defined in the Zoning By-Law.
  - b. Uses by town departments
  - c. Uses for public and private special events
  - d. Parking for employees and/or customers of local businesses of not more than 30 spaces or 50% of the spaces in the lot whichever is greater.
  - e. Any temporary, short term (30 days or less) use
  - f. Any parking for the purpose of pick-up/drop-off for 30 minutes or less
  
- II. Uses the Planning Board feels may require some regulation and/or oversight (Special Permit, including a public hearing before the Planning Board as the granting authority with possible annual review):
  - a. Use by commercial trucks, vans and other heavy vehicles for more than 30 days
  - b. Long term (more than 30 days) regular use (e.g. commuter parking, long term agreement for employee/customer parking) by more than 30 vehicles or more than 50% of spaces in the lot whichever is greater – (Exception: neighborhood overnight accommodation above)
  - c. Potential commercial evening uses (e.g. restaurant valet parking, movie theater parking)
  
- III. Application for any Special Permit required for such uses (II. Above) could be the responsibility of the user or the owner at the discretion of the owner. A written agreement between the parties would be required as part of the documentation for the permit application. Any conditions for such use would be included as part of the Special Permit and agreed to by both parties. The Planning Board would endeavor to render a decision on the same night application is heard.
  
- IV. Questions of payment (or contribution) for use of the lots and implications for taxation or PILOT payments are left to the lot owners and the Board of Selectmen in consultation with the Board of Assessors.