

MEMORANDUM

TO: Roger L. Stancil, Town Manager
FROM: J.B. Culpepper, Planning Director
SUBJECT: Medical Office Land Use Management Ordinance Text Amendment
DATE: October 12, 2009

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memorandum is to request consideration of a Land Use Management Ordinance text amendment creating a new land use category for Medical Office-Type Business.

BACKGROUND

The Town's Land Use Management Ordinance (LUMO) currently provides a definition for "Clinic" land use and a definition for "Office-Type Business." Both uses are generally permitted in the same zoning districts but have different parking requirements. The LUMO does not define a Medical Office land use for practices that have a lesser impact than typical clinics. Our experience indicates that the Office-Type Business definition in the LUMO does not adequately account for the traffic and parking needs of a medical office.

In the fall of 2008, several real estate representatives approached the Economic Development Officer and the Planning Director to request that the Town consider adding Medical Office as a use category in the LUMO. Staff from the Economic Development, Planning and Engineering departments met and agreed that it would be reasonable to provide a new land use definition in the LUMO identifying this type of facility and a change of this nature could add clarity to certain Special Use Permits.

DISCUSSION

There have been a number of inquiries for vacant space by medical office related practices but, due to the limited definition in the LUMO (Clinic), all medical uses currently fall into the same category. Two developers have requested that medical offices, such as dentists and mental health professionals, be considered separately from clinic uses since they have different traffic pattern impacts. We believe this change could be made without having a negative impact on previously approved projects if the Council identifies this medical office use as a subcategory of the Office-Type Business definition. The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) recognizes the distinction between these two uses, as reflected in their definitions:

Clinic: An establishment used for the care, diagnosis, therapy, or counseling of sick, ailing, infirm, or injured persons or non-medical therapy and counseling on an outpatient basis.

Medical-Dental Office Building: a facility that provides diagnoses and outpatient care on a routine basis but is unable to provide prolonged in-house medical and surgical care. This type of facility is generally operated by one or more private physicians or dentists.

The ITE Trip Generation Rates show that a Clinic generates more vehicle trips per 1,000 square feet than a Medical Office (5.18 vs. 3.46), supporting the argument that there is a difference in traffic impacts for these two uses. Since the Council has not authorized Clinic uses in several approved Special Use Permits in Chapel Hill, we believe that adding Medical Office as an additional definition would help capture more office uses in Town.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council direct Town staff to look at this issue and submit a Land Use Management Ordinance Text Amendment for Planning Board and Council consideration.