
STAFF REPORT

Date: August 18, 2026
To: City Council
From: Brad Medrud, Community Development Director



Ordinance No. O2026-016 – Parking Lot Lighting

1. Recommended Action

Adopt Ordinance No. O2026-016, Parking Lot Lighting.

2. Background

The intent of the ordinance is to amend TMC 18.50.060 *Off-street parking areas – Design requirements* of TMC 18.50 *Off-Street Parking* of the Tumwater Municipal Code to address the requirements for the height of parking lot lighting for large multiple building complexes or multiple tenant buildings adjacent to Interstate 5.

Parking lot lighting requirements are addressed in two chapters of TMC Title 18 *Zoning*: TMC 18.40 *Environmental Performance Standards* and TMC 18.50 *Off-Street Parking*.

Parking lot lighting requirements were a part of a complete rewrite of the City's off-street parking standards that were adopted in 1998 by Ordinance No. O97-015 and included both height limits and other requirements such as light shielding and light plan review. The height limits requirements remained in TMC 18.50 *Off-Street Parking* after other lighting requirements such as offsite illumination standards and other limits on site lighting become part of TMC 18.40.035 *Exterior illumination* in TMC 18.40 *Environmental Performance Standards* as part the City's "dark sky" ordinance, Ordinance No. O2009-001, which was adopted in 2009.

Chapter 2 *Commercial, Mixed Use, and Multifamily* of the Citywide Design Guidelines includes additional lighting requirements. Tumwater's current lighting regulations and guidelines are found in the appendix of this staff report.

Ordinance No. O2026-016 is intended to modify the height requirements for parking lot lighting for large multiple building complexes or multiple tenant buildings adjacent to Interstate 5, raising the allowable height of parking lot lights from 24 feet to 37 feet. The ordinance does not make any changes to the offsite illumination standards and other limits on site lighting in 18.40.035 *Exterior illumination* or to the lighting guidelines in Chapter 2 *Commercial, Mixed Use, and Multifamily* of the Citywide Design Guidelines.

3. Public Approval Process

An Environmental Checklist for a non-project action was prepared on June 4, 2026, under the State Environmental Policy Act (Chapter 43.21C RCW), pursuant to Chapter 197-11 WAC, and a Determination of Non-Significance was issued June 12, 2026, with the comment period ending June 26, 2026, and the appeal period ending July 2, 2026.

The ordinance was sent to the Washington State Department of Commerce on June 4, 2026, for their required 60-day review before the proposed text amendments are adopted, in accordance with RCW 36.70A.106.

The Planning Commission received briefing on the proposed amendments on June 23, 2026.

A Notice of Public Hearing for the Planning Commission was issued on June 26, 2026, prior to a public hearing. The notice was posted, published as a press release, distributed to interested individuals and entities that have requested such notices, and published in The Olympian.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the proposed amendments on July 14, 2026. Following the public hearing and deliberations, the Planning Commission recommended that Council consider the proposed amendments.

The General Government Committee reviewed the Planning Commission's recommendation on the proposed amendments on July 15, 2026, and recommended placing the ordinance on the City Council's consent calendar on August 18, 2026.

4. Staff Conclusions

1. The proposed text amendments will need to be consistent with the goals of the Washington State Growth Management Act.

- a. The ordinance will need to be consistent with Goal 4 of the Growth Management Act which states:

Permits. Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.

The ordinance will address the following goal and policy of the Land Use Element:

Goal LU-2 Ensure development occurs in an orderly, effective, and cost-efficient manner to best utilize available land and public services, conserve natural resources, protect and enhance critical areas and open space, address equity and climate change, and reduce sprawl.

Policy LU-2.1 Review and update Tumwater's development review and permitting system on a regular basis for consistency with state law and adopted plans to ensure predictability and to process development permits in a timely and fair manner.

- b. This ordinance will need to be consistent with Goal 11 of the Growth Management Act which states:

Citizen participation and coordination. *Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process, including the participation of vulnerable populations and overburdened communities, and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.*

Adoption of the ordinance will involve the community in the planning process through Planning Commission and City Council meetings to address the following goal of the Comprehensive Plan:

Goal PI-1 Continuously engage with the community and the region.

2. Based on the above review and analysis, staff will need to conclude that the proposed text amendments are consistent with the requirements of the Washington State Growth Management Act and the Tumwater Comprehensive Plan.

Staff conclude that the proposed text amendments are consistent with the requirements of the Washington State Growth Management Act and the Tumwater Comprehensive Plan

5. Effects of the Proposed Amendments

The proposed text amendments would necessitate changes to the Tumwater Municipal Code.

6. Staff Contacts

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Appendix A – Current Lighting Regulations

TMC 18.50 Off-Street Parking – TMC 18.50.060 Off-street parking areas – Design requirements.

[...]

K. Parking lot lighting not exceeding twenty-four feet in height is required to provide safe access for pedestrians unless otherwise specified. All outdoor artificial light sources shall comply with TMC 18.40.035, Exterior illumination.

[...]

TMC 18.40 Environmental Performance Standards – TMC 18.40.035 Exterior illumination.

These regulations apply to outdoor artificial light sources, including lights on the exterior of buildings or other structures, installed underneath canopies, pole-mounted, freestanding and ground lights, as well as nonresidential interior lights.

A. For the purposes of regulating lighting in this section and elsewhere in this title, the following terms shall be defined as stated:

- 1. “Business-zoned property” means any property in the NC neighborhood commercial, CS community services, MU mixed use, GC general commercial, TC town center (TC town center mixed use, professional office, and civic subdistricts), HC historic commercial, GB greenbelt, OS open space, LI light industrial, HI heavy industrial, CBC Capitol Boulevard corridor, BD brewery district, and ARI airport related industry zone districts.*
- 2. “Foot-candle” means a measure of illuminance (or light intensity) on a surface equal to one lumen per square foot.*
- 3. “Fully shielded fixture” means exterior lighting that is shielded or constructed so that all light emitted is projected below a horizontal plane running through the lowest part of the fixture as determined by a photometric test or certified by the manufacturer.*
- 4. “Glare” means an intensity of light that due to the brightness of the light source diminishes the observer’s ability to see, and in extreme cases may cause visual discomfort or momentary blindness.*
- 5. “Light trespass” means the light emanating from one property (measured at the property line) intruding onto an adjacent property or public right-of-way.*
- 6. “Lumen” means a unit of classification used to quantify the amount of light energy produced by a lamp. Lumen output of most lamps is listed on the packaging. For example, a sixty-watt incandescent lamp produces approximately eight hundred fifty lumens while a fifty-five-watt low-pressure sodium lamp produces approximately eight thousand lumens.*
- 7. “Opaque” means not allowing light to pass through; not transparent or translucent.*

8. *“Partially shielded” means the luminaire incorporates a translucent barrier, the “partial shield” around the lamp that allows some light to pass through the barrier while concealing the lamp from the viewer.*

9. *“Residential-zoned property” means any property in the RSR residential/sensitive resource, LDR low density residential, MDR medium density residential, HDR high density residential, and TC town center (TC town center residential subdistrict) zone districts.*

10. *“Translucent” means allowing light to pass, but diffusing it such that the light source cannot be distinguished.*

B. *Exterior Lighting Standards. Exterior artificial light sources shall conform to the following requirements:*

1. *Light fixtures shall be used in a manner such that light is directed downward, and not outward or upward.*

2. *Light fixtures shall be fully shielded.*

a. *Fixtures on business-zoned properties that are mounted to the underside of structures such as canopies, awnings, etc. (such as those found at gas stations, drive-through facilities, service stations, and parking structures) shall be flush mounted to the canopy so that the lens does not protrude below the surface to which it is mounted. In instances where the canopy is not thick enough to accommodate a flush-mount fixture, a fully shielded fixture may be utilized and mounted to the surface.*

3. *Exterior lighting shall not blink, flash, fluctuate, be intermittent, or change color or intensity.*

4. *Illuminated signs and advertising devices shall also comply with provisions of TMC 18.44.080 and 18.44.170. Where conflict occurs, the more stringent standards shall apply.*

5. *Parking lot lighting shall also comply with provisions in TMC 18.50.060. Where conflict occurs, the more stringent standards shall apply.*

6. *Exterior lighting on business-zoned properties shall be turned off at the close of business or 10:00 p.m., whichever is later. However, lighting which is necessary for after business hours work by employees and lighting that is necessary for security systems to function properly may be utilized at any time provided the lighting is the minimum necessary and is turned off when it is no longer needed or being used.*

7. *Light trespass shall comply with the provisions of subsection D of this section.*

8. *Illumination of government flags is allowed provided the light fixtures are equipped with shields and louvers to control the beam spread and to prevent light trespass and glare.*

9. *Low voltage landscape lighting (thirty volts or less) is allowed provided it is partially shielded (upward-oriented spot/flood lights are not allowed) and does not violate the light trespass standards of subsection D of this section. Rope-style lighting of any voltage is also allowed for residential properties provided it meets the light trespass standards of subsection D of this section.*

C. Application Required.

1. A basic lighting plan shall be submitted to the community development department along with building permit applications that involve the installation or replacement of exterior lighting. The basic lighting plan shall include, but not be limited to, descriptions, illustrations, or photos of the types of lighting fixtures to be installed, a statement or description of how the fixtures comply with the regulations, and descriptions or depictions of the locations of the proposed lighting fixtures. The basic lighting plan shall also include statements that the applicant will design their project to comply with the exterior lighting regulations, and the applicant will make any changes necessary to come into compliance with the regulations before their occupancy permit is issued. The basic lighting plan must be signed by the applicant(s) or their authorized agent(s).

2. For nonresidential development proposals that are four thousand square feet or larger, the community development director (or his/her designee) may require a photometric lighting plan instead of the basic lighting plan. The photometric plan, application, and a fee as specified by the most current fee resolution adopted by the Tumwater city council shall be submitted along with a building permit application. The photometric lighting plan must specify how the project lighting, including both freestanding and building-mounted lighting, complies with the applicable requirements of the Tumwater Municipal Code including this chapter. The photometric lighting plan shall also include the requirements listed for the basic lighting plan as shown in subsection (C)(1) of this section. Where requirements overlap or conflict, the more stringent shall apply.

D. Light Trespass. All light fixtures used on a premises shall be installed and maintained to prevent light trespass, measured at the property line of the originating property (light source), that exceeds one-tenth foot-candle illuminating adjacent to residential-zoned property or one-half foot-candle illuminating adjacent to business-zoned property or public rights-of-way.

E. Exceptions. The restrictions on exterior lighting in subsections B, C and D of this section shall not apply to:

1. Light fixtures on structures listed in the Tumwater, or Washington State, or National historic registers (as defined in TMC Chapter 2.62) that are important in defining the overall historic character of the structure or building.

2. Projection equipment for outdoor movie theaters and outdoor movie events.

3. Security floodlights with motion detectors and daytime cutoffs that comply with the light trespass standards of subsection D of this section; provided, that the duration of activation by the motion sensor does not exceed sixty seconds. Light trespass at the property line may be diminished to acceptable levels by using lower wattage bulbs, downward and inward orientation, opaque or translucent shielding, or combinations thereof.

4. Seasonal decorations illuminated no longer than sixty days.

5. Lights on moving vehicles.

6. Sports field lighting.

7. *Navigation lights (such as airports, heliports, or tower lighting required by the Federal Aviation Administration).*
8. *Temporary emergency lighting (such as fire, police, repair workers).*
9. *Traffic control signals and devices.*
10. *Exterior lighting approved by the community development director for temporary or periodic events (e.g., special events, nighttime construction, etc.). Searchlights, lighting displays lasting longer than seven days in any calendar year, and any lighting displays that cause any direct glare into or upon any building other than the building to which the display may be related are all prohibited.*
11. *Light sources lawfully installed prior to the effective date of these regulations.*
12. *Public streetlights are exempt only from the light trespass standards of subsection D of this section.*

Citywide Design Guidelines – Chapter 2: Commercial, Mixed Use, and Multifamily

[...]

2.F. Lighting

2.F.1 Site Lighting

INTENT:

- *To encourage the use of lighting as an integral design component to enhance buildings, landscaping, or other site features.*
- *To increase night sky visibility and to reduce the general illumination of the sky.*
- *To reduce horizontal light glare and vertical light trespass from a development onto adjacent parcels and natural features.*
- *To use lighting in conjunction with other security methods to increase site safety.*
- *To prevent the use of lighting for advertising purposes.*

STANDARDS/GUIDELINES:

2.F.1.1 Site Lighting Levels

- a. *All publicly accessible areas shall be lighted with levels as follows:*
 - (1) *Low or non-pedestrian and vehicular traffic areas - minimum 0.2 foot-candles, maximum 4 foot-candles;*
 - (2) *Moderate or high volume pedestrian areas and building entries - minimum 1 foot-candle, maximum 5 foot-candles, preferred average 2 foot-candles;*
 - (3) *Public parking lots - minimum 1 foot-candle, maximum 4 foot-candles; and*
 - (4) *Gas station pump area - maximum 5 foot-candles.*
- b. *Lighting shall be provided at consistent levels, with an average lighting level to minimum lighting level uniformity ratio no less than 3:1, to create gradual transitions between varying levels of lighting and between lit areas and unlit areas. Highly contrasting pools of light and dark areas shall be avoided.*
- c. *Pedestrian lighting shall have a maximum height of 15 feet.*

Exception: For commercial and industrial uses where outdoor storage of goods and products is the primary method of displaying such goods and products, site lighting levels shall comply with TMC 18.40.035.

2.F.1.2 Light Quality and Shielding

- a. *Parking area lighting fixtures shall be fully shielded; dark sky rated and mounted no more than 20 feet above the ground, with lower fixtures preferable so as to maintain a human scale.*
- b. *Exterior lighting must comply with TMC 18.40.35: Exterior Illumination*

Exception: For commercial and industrial uses where outdoor storage of goods and products is the primary method of displaying such goods and products, site lighting height shall comply with TMC 18.50.

2.F.1.3 Architectural Lighting

- a. *Steady, non-flashing lighting of building features, artwork, and special landscape elements may be allowed, subject to the findings of the Director that the light causes no significant adverse impact.*